



SCRIPPS HOWLAND

# Rocky Mountain News

December 10, 1994

SATURDAY

## ACLU sues over center's 'cruel' conditions

## ACLU files suit over youth center

Gilliam detention facility termed crowded, dangerous

By Guy Kelly

Rocky Mountain News Staff Writer

The Gilliam Youth Center is a riot waiting to happen, ACLU officials said Friday.

In a suit filed in U.S. District Court, the American Civil Liberties Union said the state-run youth detention center is crowded, dirty and dangerous.

"This is a Third World country situation," Susan L. Burrell of the Youth Law Center said at a news conference Friday.

Jerald Adamek, director of Colorado's Division of Youth Services, acknowledged Gilliam is bursting. He said the state has been trying to improve conditions for years.

The Phillip B. Gilliam Youth Services Center at 2844 Downing St. is designed to hold 78 "residents." But there are usually twice that many in Gilliam, and the population occasionally exceeds 200.

They range in age from 10 to 21. Most are in the state-run facility awaiting trial or court appearances.

Some are serving short sentences. Others are awaiting transfer to institutions that don't have room for them. The result is a mix of misdemeanor offenders and inmates involved in homicides.

Space is so tight that cells designed for one inmate often might hold four.

And with juvenile law now tougher after last year's special legislative session, Gilliam and other youth facilities are going to get more crowded, Adamek said.

The state last year appropriated \$32 million for four new juvenile facilities and expansion of two others, but those won't be ready until 1997, Adamek said.

ACLU director James Joy said the organization sued on behalf of two unnamed juveniles at Gilliam.

Joy said a federal suit is the best way to bring about "a speedy remedy" of the conditions at Gilliam.

The suit alleges that youths are detained under cruel, dangerous and unconstitutional conditions. Some inmates are in locked rooms 20 hours a day.

Denver Public Schools are named in the suit because educational opportunities in Gilliam are inadequate, Joy said.



Ellen Jaskov/Rocky Mountain News

Three youths occupy a room designed for one at the Gilliam Youth Center in Denver. The detention center was built for 78 but often houses twice that many. The ACLU filed suit in federal court Friday to stop the overcrowding, which it calls a dirty, dangerous, "Third World situation." Page 4A