

Alexander Youth Services Center, Alexander, Arkansas

June 19, 2007 *The Morning News*

A new report identifying problems in the special education program at the former Alexander Youth Services Center -- some of which were previously identified in a 2005 study -- drew frustrated comments Monday from legislative panels that oversee the state's youth lockups. "It seems we're planning ourselves to death but we're not getting anything accomplished," said state Rep. Bobby Pierce, D-Sheridan, during a joint meeting of the House and Senate committees on children and youth. In a report released this month, the state Education Department cites about 50 practices at the facility, now known as the Arkansas Juvenile Assessment and Treatment Center, that don't comply with state and federal regulations under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The department has directed the Division of Youth Services to develop a plan of action for correcting the problems. Sen. Sue Madison, D-Fayetteville, said that on visits to the facility in Saline County she has been "extremely unimpressed" with the educational practices she saw, which she said seemed to consist of youths playing on a computer. "Do we have any way of determining if they're really learning something, or if we're just letting a computer baby-sit them?" she asked. The House chairwoman, Rep. Linda Chesterfield, D-Little Rock, said a lack of sufficient information gathering is one of the problems highlighted in the report. Chesterfield said scrutiny is needed for the educational services the state provides to all youth in custody, not only those in need of special education. Scott Tanner, ombudsman coordinator for the state Public Defender Commission, testified that the Division of Youth Services has had chronic problems with its education system at least since 2000, the year he became an ombudsman. Education services at the facility are provided by Group 4 Securicor, the private company that took over operation of the facility in January. The state fired the facility's previous operator, Cornell Companies, in November after a state investigation found evidence that psychotropic drugs may have been administered improperly to some youths as a restraint. The facility also was investigated in 2005, after 17-year-old Lakeisha Brown died from a blood clot in her lungs two days after complaining to staff that she felt ill. Cornell was ordered to revamp some of its policies as a result of that investigation. Madison asked Monday whether it would be more appropriate for the education of youth in custody to be undertaken by the state rather than a private company. Education Department attorney Scott Smith said he did not believe it would. Trying to incorporate students in custody into the state's public education system would require compliance with numerous state and federal mandates that currently are waived, he said. "The reason I ask is, there's something wrong with the picture in my mind when you have state agencies firmly committed to a free public education, and then we turn around and hire a private company to deliver that," Madison said. "I just have a hard time thinking that that's a good idea." Steve Jones, a former state representative who recently became deputy director of the Department of Health and Human Services, told the committee the Division of Youth Services is working on a plan to correct the problems. Rep. Dawn Creekmore, D-Hensley, noted that the division developed a plan of action previously, after a 2005 report cited problems with the facility's educational system. "It's time to quit putting plans of action on paper and time to bring something to the table, take some action, physical action, for improvement. These children are still here, and we're just letting them down continuously, year after year after

year," she said. "It is children that the state Department of Education is all about, and it is children that DYS is all about," Chesterfield said. "Somewhere the bureaucratic -- we're not going to use the alliterative -- the bureaucratic stuff, if you will, has got to be overcome for the children." Jones assured the committees the division would achieve real results.

January 11, 2007 *Arkansas News Bureau*

The state Department of Health and Human Services has agreed to enter into a short-term contract with a company to operate the troubled Alexander Juvenile Correctional Facility in Saline County, agency officials said Wednesday. The agency has signed a \$4.5 million contract with G4S Youth Services in Richmond, Va., a division of the British-based Group 4 Securicor, for the company to operate the facility from Jan. 21 through June 30, DHHS spokeswoman Julie Munsell said. The contract is pending approval by the Department of Finance and Administration. At the end of the six-month period, the state will have the option of renewing the contract for an additional year, Munsell said. Munsell said no bids were taken because the agreement was reached under emergency procedures. The agency considered the situation an emergency because of safety and welfare concerns for the 143 youths at the facility, she said. The state fired Cornell Companies, the Pennsylvania-based company that previously ran the facility, in November after a state investigation indicated psychotropic drugs may have been administered improperly to some youths to restrain them. Munsell said Cornell is still at the site, but the state has been in charge since Nov. 3.

November 5, 2006 *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*

An advocacy group that has been monitoring Alexander Youth Services Center for months said Saturday that Arkansas isn't meeting the mental health, education and special education needs of the children at the troubled facility as required by the U. S. Department of Justice and state law. Problems at the center are systemic, said Dana McClain, a senior attorney with the Disability Rights Center, a federally funded Little Rock nonprofit that assists disabled Arkansans. "We don't think this is rehabilitation, and state law says it is supposed to be [for youthful offenders]. I think it's punishment," she said. "I feel like these children are being set up to go to adult prison." At some point, she said, the youthful offenders at the lockup will get out, "and you hope when they do they've got a better shot at being productive members of society." A draft copy of the group's lengthy report detailing "failures" at the center in Saline County was given to the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette on Saturday — a day after the state unexpectedly ended its contract with Cornell Cos. Inc., a Houston company that ran the center for the past five years. An internal investigation found that employees were "inappropriately" drugging youthful offenders with psychotropic drugs to control bad behavior. The state was paying Cornell about \$ 10 million annually. News about the forced medications, sometimes given without a doctor's order, prompted some legislators and others to renew calls Friday to shut down the state's largest lockup for youthful offenders. The Disability Rights Center report, which outlines about 50 problems, is expected to be released publicly later this week. McClain said her group will meet with the Department of Health and Human Services on Monday to discuss the findings. Monitors for Disability Rights have been making unannounced visits, as allowed by federal statute, to the center at least

three times a month since March. “Under the contract these are things Cornell was responsible for providing,” McClain said. “I hope [Health and Human Services] doesn’t just address that one issue [about the medication]. This is a good time to do more because they are starting anew.” The agency has been responsive so far, McClain noted. Cornell, however, didn’t address some of the major concerns that McClain said she repeatedly talked to company employees about. Julie Munsell, Health and Human Services spokesman, said her agency has received a copy of the report but she declined to comment about the details until it is published and officials meet with the group’s representatives. Health and Human Services is the umbrella agency over the Youth Services Division, which now operates the youth lockup. In general, Munsell said, the state has made many strides since entering into a settlement agreement with the Department of Justice in March 2003 after a federal investigation found civil rights violations in the delivery of mental-health care, education, fire safety and freedom of religious expression at the center. Still, more work is needed, particularly with the center’s education system, she acknowledged. “We do still struggle with education issues at Alexander, and we’ve been working with the Department of Education to improve those issues,” she said. “We will always strive to get to an ideal setting, but it will take us time to get there.” The Justice Department hasn’t visited the center since January. Over the years, the youths at the Alexander center have complained that employees kicked, slapped and even threatened them with death. Others killed themselves. One boy, known for days to be suicidal, was able to hang himself a few years ago with a bedsheet. An investigation later found that his guard didn’t check on him. Another boy hanged himself in the same cell just a few months later — just as the state hired Cornell to take over the facility and fix its problems. And last year, a 17-year-old girl at the center died of blood clots in her lungs. She complained to nurses and supervisors that she was ill, but they didn’t believe her, even as she lay dying, according to a subsequent investigation. Munsell said her agency plans to work with the Disability Rights Center to address the group’s concerns. The Department of Justice couldn’t be reached for comment Saturday. During visits to the lockup, McClain said monitors found: Youths watching Harry Potter movies during science class on more than one occasion. A student sleeping on his keyboard, even though a teacher was sitting at a desk in the same classroom. No teacher-led reading program, even though at least 50 percent of the youthful offenders at the center have difficulties reading, and in some cases, can’t read at all. (An ombudsman who regularly visits the center said the youths are supposed to use a computer-based reading program at their own pace, but he has seen no evidence that such a system has.

November 4, 2006 *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*

Arkansas terminated its contract with Cornell Cos. Inc. to run the troubled Alexander Youth Services Center on Friday after learning that employees were drugging youths to control unruly behavior — in many cases without doctors’ orders, in violation of facility policy and against the children’s wills. A preliminary investigation found that from Sept. 1 to Oct. 15, nurses at the center gave 63 injections of anti-psychotic drugs that have a sedative effect, including Thorazine, to 25 children in the center’s custody. “There is an appropriate circumstance under which you can give a chemical restraint,” said Julie Munsell, spokesman for the state Department of Health and Human Services. “Our concern is that in many of these cases, they appear not to have been appropriate.” The

internal investigation into the use of chemical restraints triggered a series of events: The Health and Human Services Department placed three Alexander employees on administrative leave, the state Board of Nursing was notified, and Gov. Mike Huckabee ordered a review of Cornell's policies as well as an Arkansas State Police investigation into what happened. State police investigators are working through the weekend so that they can give Huckabee a preliminary report Monday. Munsell said her agency gave state police its investigative file, which is a foot thick. "Although we hired a nationally reputable contractor to provide services, this appears to be a second major breakdown in the facility's medical system, and we are no longer confident in the management at the Alexander campus," Health and Human Services Director John Selig said Friday afternoon. Last year, investigators with the Health and Human Services Department uncovered widespread problems with the medical system at Alexander after 17-year-old inmate Keisha Brown died from blood clots to her lungs. Brown had repeatedly complained that she was ill but some nurses and supervisors at the center did not believe her — even in the last minutes of her life. "Some of us have had concerns with the contract ever since the incident of Keisha Brown's death," said Sen. Sue Madison, D-Fayetteville. "We were concerned that her medical care was not what it should have been." After Keisha's death, Sen. Terry Smith, D-Hot Springs, urged the Health and Human Services Department to end its contract with Cornell and blasted state officials for not better monitoring the for-profit company. Upon learning about the state's decision Friday night, Smith said, "I told you so. "Apparently this company is not on top of things, and the state employees [who] are over this are not on top of things. No one is checking on anybody, and this is what happened. It's just terrible." In a five-page summary, Health and Human Services Department internal investigators outlined several policy violations and other findings from the 45-day review: Evidence of "falsifying" doctors' orders on at least two occasions to show that the child should receive injections "as needed." The original orders did not include that option. Evidence from video surveillance tapes and interviews with the children that some of the inmates were given the injections against their will. Policy allows youths to refuse the injections so long as it is not an emergency situation in which the child may endanger himself or others. Physician order sheets for some of the children that did not include orders for the injections. Eleven incidents during which the doctor gave a verbal order to use the medication but never signed any documents, which is required. No evidence that orders for use of "PRN medications," which means give as needed, were reviewed annually as required. No evidence that a second physician reviewed orders for forced injections as required. No evidence that an independent psychiatrist reviewed the orders for forced injections, as required to ensure the children's right to due process. Evidence that employees did not properly document the use of the injections. The lack of documentation made it harder for investigators to piece together exactly what happened during those 45 days, Munsell said. Over the years, the inmates at Alexander have complained that employees kicked, slapped and even threatened them with death. Others killed themselves while there. One boy, known for days to be suicidal, was able to hang himself with a bed sheet because his guard didn't check on him. Another boy hanged himself in the same cell just a few months later — just as the state hired Cornell Cos. Inc. to take over the facility and fix problems there. In 2002, the U. S. Department of Justice found that dozens of problems remained. Most

have since been resolved. The center also is used as an intake facility for all children who come into the state detention system.

December 29, 2005 *Benton Courier*

A report on the escape of two 17-year-old prisoners in the state youth lockup at Alexander says guards sleeping on the job was one of the reasons the boys were able to break free. The report also says someone inside the facility may have known of the escape plans. Four staff members have been fired from the facility run by the private Cornell Companies. The 12-page report by the state Division of Youth Services says staff members lied about a head count and that a number of guards were asleep when the two escaped. In the short time before Bryant police caught Villegas and Lamberth, the two allegedly burglarized and vandalized Zion Lutheran Church in the Avilla community. The teenagers allegedly stole \$140 and took off in the church's van. The report says one of the boys admitted taking a key from the staff desk and unlocking the door to their dorm a week before the escape. The report said the boys got over razor wire by putting a bath mat over it. State Department of Health and Human Services spokeswoman Julie Munsell said the agency is addressing the problems outlined in the report. "It does show them walking past the staff member who was not moving at the time which indicates perhaps that employee was asleep and, according to interviews with clients, that's what happened at the time," Munsell said. "We had multiple system failures; that's what we really want to address," Munsell said. Munsell said one worker falsified a log "because she did not know how long the youth had been gone. ... She was nervous about the outcome of that." "It is very disconcerting. I think that you have employees exhibiting gross negligence on the job, which is why the expectation is that you take aggressive action," Munsell said.

December 10, 2005 *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*

Two 17-year-old boys face adult prison time, and a private corrections company suspended five employees without pay after an early Friday morning escape from the Alexander Youth Services Center near Bryant. Police said they tracked Benjamin Lamberth and Rusty Villegas as they attempted to flee toward Lamberth's home in Cherokee Village by intercepting cell phone calls, nabbing them about nine hours later in a stolen church van near Cave City. Lamberth and Villegas asked to go to the bathroom, then reportedly bolted through an emergency exit door at Alexander about 1 a. m. They scaled the perimeter fence, draping a shower mat over the razor wire, said Julie Munsell, spokesman for the Department of Human Services. The emergency exit door should have been locked, she said, guessing that the boys had a key. "This was not something spontaneous. They had been planning this for several weeks," she said. Apparently, the teenagers opened the doors without touching a bar that would have triggered a security alarm, she said. Bryant police were not notified until 4 a. m., when the boys were found missing during a routine check. The three hours it took for center officials to realize the boys had escaped will be the subject of an internal investigation. Several security checks should have been made during that period, Munsell said. The state reached a legal agreement with the U. S. Department of Justice in 2003 to eliminate deficits in training and unsafe conditions at the youth lockup. Some minor education and health record issues remain to be resolved before the state can be released from federal supervision,

Munsell said Friday. In April 2005, 17-year-old LaKeisha Brown died of blood clots to her lungs while at the center. State and company investigations found lapses in care and violations of state and facility policy in her treatment. A programs supervisor and nursing manager resigned and three employees were disciplined.

October 26, 2005 *Record Times*

LaKeisha Brown likely had been suffering from blood clots in her lungs for at least two days and possibly as long as two weeks before she collapsed at the Alexander Youth Services Center and then died on April 9, the state medical examiner said Tuesday. A preliminary autopsy report released soon after 17-year-old "Keisha" died listed the cause of death as blood clots from her legs that traveled to her lungs. Last week, her mother, Juana Michelle Brown, gave the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette a copy of the final autopsy report, which she had just received. Autopsies are not public records in Arkansas. Dr. Charles Kokes, the state medical examiner, explained aspects of the final report in an interview Tuesday. "I think if she somehow had been diagnosed in the days prior to her death, it's possible she could have survived," Kokes said, but added that a pulmonary thromboembolism - the medical term for a blood clot in the lungs - can be difficult to detect. Keisha's medical records show that both nurses and some facility managers believed she was faking sickness for attention at the time of her death. An investigation this summer by the state Board of Nursing found that nurses at Alexander did not provide the teenage inmate with adequate medical care in the days before her death and violated facility policy and state nursing laws. Another investigation by the state Youth Services Division found that senior management "was negligent" because it did not ensure systems were in place to provide Keisha the medical care she needed. Because of Keisha's death, the Youth Services Division of the state Department of Health and Human Services uncovered widespread problems with the medical system at the state's largest lockup for youthful offenders, the head of the Youth Services Division told state legislators this summer. The problems, Kenneth Hales explained, have been or are being corrected. For one, the state, which has contracted with the private company Cornell Cos. Inc. to run Alexander, has begun auditing medical files of youths at the facility to ensure they are receiving proper care. Before Keisha's death, the state only audited the company to make sure it was meeting contractual obligations in operating the facility. This summer, Cornell fired two contract nurses, the center's nurse manager and its program supervisor, who also is the second-in-command at the Alexander center, Jane Miller, director of behavioral health services for Cornell, has said. Three other employees were disciplined, and more than a dozen quit. Cornell has apologized for Keisha's death but maintains it is not at fault.

October 22, 2005 *Arkansas News*

The company that operates Alexander Youth Services Center has revamped many of its medical policies in response to the death of a teenager at the center earlier this year, a company representative said Friday. Testifying before the Arkansas Legislative Council, the employee of Cornell Companies Inc. said more nurses were hired and "sick call" rules for youth housed at the facility were changed following the April death of 17-year-old Lakeisha Brown. A state investigation found nurses at the 349-bed juvenile detention center may not have immediately responded to Brown's health complaints. The cause of

Brown's death was a blood clot in her lungs. An investigation by Cornell found no direct link between Brown's death and inaction by Cornell personnel. Four employees resigned and one was fired after the incident. According to Cornell's corrective action plan, no nurses employed at Alexander at the time of Brown's death are still working at the center.

August 11, 2005 *AP*

The death of a 17-year-old at the Alexander Youth Services Center in April, and the investigation that resulted, uncovered widespread problems at the facility, a state official says. Kenneth Hales, director of the Division of Youth Services in the state Department of Human Services, told state legislators Wednesday that "systematic weaknesses" turned up when officials took a close look at the circumstances of LaKeisha Brown's April 7 death, after she had collapsed at the youth lockup from a blood clot in her lungs. "It was not just LaKeisha," Hales said. Investigations showed that staff members violated the policies of the facility, operated under contract by Cornell Companies Inc. of Houston, as well as DHS regulations and state regulations for nurses. Julie Munsell, a spokesman for the agency, said DHS had regularly audited the Alexander center to confirm that Cornell was meeting its contractual obligations. But she said those auditors were not trained to evaluate the medical procedures and policies being used by the company. "That is something that we have had to ask for some additional assistance to evaluate, because our auditors are not clinicians," Munsell said. "The audit is just not designed to do that." Hales told the Legislature's Joint Performance Review Committee that a review of procedures showed that, when an inmate reported being sick, "it was difficult to tell what the response to that sick call was." "When the nurses examined a youth, you couldn't tell what they saw or what they concluded to do following that examination," he said. The investigations also found that nurses at the facility lacked supervision, were poorly trained and weren't given good instruction on what their supervisors expected of them, Hales said.

August 3, 2005 *AP*

Two top managers lost their jobs at a state youth lockup where a teenager died and three other employees received reprimands, according to the private firm that runs the facility. Houston-based Cornell Cos. Inc. also said Tuesday that, in response to the April death of 17-year-old LaKeisha Brown, it had put in place an action plan that includes better orientation and training procedures for all staff and an organizational chart with clearly defined lines of authority. DHS spokesman Julie Munsell said Tuesday evening that Cornell officials had informed the agency that program director Joann McCoy and nurse manager Polly King were no longer employed at the Alexander center. She said the officials did not say whether the two were fired or resigned. Additionally, three employees received written reprimands: licensed practical nurses Holly Clark and Kim Clough and an unnamed member of the facility's clerical staff, Munsell said. The company found more than a dozen problems with Brown's care. Among them were: The center's top managers did not adequately review Brown's care after her death and nurses inadequately responded to her when she collapsed repeatedly and complained of shortness of breath and exhaustion in the days and hours before her death.

July 28, 2005 *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*

Disciplinary action expected against some employees at Alexander Youth Services Center for the way they handled 17-year-old LaKeisha Brown has been delayed, a spokesman for a private company that runs the youth lockup facility for the state said Wednesday. Cornell Cos. Inc. spokesman Lisa Tauser had said Tuesday that a team of company employees were meeting that night to implement personnel changes recommended after the Houston-based company investigated the April 9 death of "Keisha." In a report released Tuesday, a team of Cornell employees suggested the company suspend nurses who responded to or cared for Keisha when she collapsed repeatedly and complained of shortness of breath and exhaustion in the last days and hours of her life. A preliminary autopsy report shows that Keisha died of blood clots to the lungs. The team also said "senior management" should be held "strictly accountable" for failing to ensure the necessary systems were in place so that Keisha would receive the proper medical care. An unidentified clerical employee also should be "disciplined" and placed under stricter supervision for making a decision about Keisha's care without calling a doctor or nurse, the report shows. Cornell's investigation found more than a dozen problems with her care. The team noted that the facility's top managers did not adequately review Keisha's care after her death and that nurses "inadequately" addressed Keisha's medical concerns. Her records show that the nurses did not believe she was really sick and did not call a doctor until she was unconscious. Keisha had been at Alexander, the state's largest juvenile lockup, for nearly two years after being adjudicated for drug possession, rape and inciting a riot. Last week, the State Board of Nursing released a report saying that six nurses at the center violated state nursing regulations in the way they dealt with Keisha. The board now is conducting additional investigations to determine discipline for each nurse.

July 27, 2005 *Arkansas Democrat*

Senior management at Alexander Youth Services Center should be "held accountable" for failing to ensure 17-year-old LaKeisha Brown received the proper care before she died, and nurses there should be suspended for inadequately addressing her needs, a private company that runs the facility for the state has decided. A clerical employee working in the facility's medical unit also should be "disciplined" and placed under stricter supervision for making a decision about the care Keisha received without consulting a doctor or nurse, according to a Cornell Cos. Inc. report released by the Department of Human Services on Tuesday evening. Facility Director Bob McCracken, a Cornell employee, did not return a message for comment Tuesday. The recommendation to dole out punishment is part of a twopage report detailing the investigation Cornell conducted last month of its own operations after Keisha died April 9 of a suspected blood clot to the lungs. Cornell's investigation comes after critical investigations by the state Division of Youth Services and the Arkansas State Board of Nursing, both of which found that employees and nurses broke protocol in the way they handled Keisha. Cornell's investigation, conducted by a team of employees of the Houston-based company, found more than a dozen problems with her care. The team noted that the facility's top managers did not adequately review Keisha's care after her death. The Cornell investigation also found that nurses at the facility "inadequately" responded to Keisha's needs when she collapsed repeatedly and complained of shortness of breath and

exhaustion in the days and hours before her death. Keisha's medical records show that the nurses did not believe she was really sick and did not call a doctor until she was unconscious. Keisha had been at Alexander, the state's largest juvenile lock-up, for nearly two years after being adjudicated for drug possession, rape and inciting a riot. The report also states that the facility's ability to handle medical emergencies at the time was "inadequate or nonexistent," that "senior management" was negligent when it failed to ensure all systems were in place to provide Keisha with the care she needed and that nurses were more focused on dealing with Keisha's complaints internally than evaluating her medical condition. The Nursing Board investigated the actions of nurses at the facility. Last week, the board released a report saying that six nurses at the center violated state nursing regulations in the way they dealt with Keisha. The Nursing Board is now conducting additional investigations to determine what discipline each nurse will receive and whether they will be able to keep their licenses. State legislators also have been critical of the company. In the past two months, they have called for additional investigations into Keisha's death, leading to the Nursing Board report. Other legislators suggested that the state find another company to oversee the Alexander center, but no such action has been taken.

July 25, 2005 Arkansas Democrat

Now that we know that workers at Alexander Youth Services Center broke the rules, what are we going to do about it?

Someone in a position of real power and authority ought to be asking this question, because breaking rules is serious business, you know. Break enough of them, or at least the wrong ones, and somebody could get hurt or even die.

Which, of course, somebody did. Her name was LaKeisha Brown. She was 17. The official cause was blood clots in her lungs, but just between us, I believe she was ignored to death. The state Board of Nursing has completed its inquiry and found that a state law and several regulations were violated by some of Keisha's purported caretakers.

Altogether, four staff nurses and two contract nurses were identified as being involved in one or more of the infractions. In case you missed reporter Amy Upshaw's comprehensive report, found in Thursday's editions, here are the highlights of the board's inquiry. No evidence has been found that the registered nurses on duty when Brown repeatedly collapsed before succumbing were supervising the licensed practical nurses on the scene. Three of the workers who assessed Keisha's condition and made decisions about her (lack of) medical care were LPNs, not RNs as required. Five workers knowingly or consistently failed to accurately or intelligibly report or document Keisha's condition. Five staffers failed to notify the designated physician of Keisha's worsening condition over the course of three days. Now that this inquiry is over, what's next?

According to Upshaw's report, the nursing board now plans to investigate each nurse's particular involvement in the case with an eye toward considering whether to take some action against them. Isn't that special? OK, so due process is the path we follow in these parts, and it's better to take things one step at a time rather than jump the gun. But a 17-year-old girl is dead and someone needs to answer for that. Clearly, state law enforcement officials, who also investigated this "sudden" death that was several days in coming, have closed the books on it and no prosecutors have been heard from.

Apparently, continued investigation by the nursing board is the only avenue still open.

State Sen. Shane Broadway, one of the handful of lawmakers who have expressed shock and outrage at Keisha's death, the details of which were first publicized by Upshaw, understands that there are two points of concern here. The first, obviously, is the death of one person. The second is the quality of the care given to others still in her circumstances, i.e., consigned against their will to the juvenile detention facility at Alexander. "You're talking about a lot of children's lives," Broadway said last week. "The quality of care is very important. It's important that we treat each child even though they have many difficulties. They're still in state custody, and they are our responsibility." I suppose technically they are in state custody. Practically speaking, they are in the custody of people who work for a private company that operates Alexander under a contract with the state. And the private company, Cornell Companies Inc., of Houston, Texas, doesn't seem too exercised about the situation. Oh, they say that they're "very sorry" about Keisha's death, of course, and that "corrections and revisions" are being made to policies and procedures, but so far the company honchos have made no decisions concerning personnel. I'm very sorry Keisha is dead, too. I'm very sorry every time someone confined at Alexander dies. What I want to know is when someone in authority is going to do something about it. Apparently there is no such person at this time, so it's up to us, the voting public, to find someone. It'll take time-the next election is more than a year away-but if we start with the next prosecutorial, legislative or gubernatorial candidate we meet, if we ask that person what he or she intends to do to make Alexander fit for human habitation, and if we keep asking this of candidates, we'll get it cleaned up. Frankly, I don't hold out much hope. I've been writing about that hell hole for almost a quarter-century, so my main consolation today is that I won't be around long enough to do it for a quarter-century more. But hope dies hard. There must be someone somewhere who expects more for tackling the Alexander problem than a cush ride on a fast track to higher office.

July 21, 2005 *Arkansas Democrat*

The state Board of Nursing has found that the way six nurses at the state's largest juvenile lockup handled 17-year-old LaKeisha Brown as she fell ill and died violated a state nursing law and several regulations, according to a report released Wednesday afternoon. The Nursing Board, which was asked by state officials to investigate how the nurses dealt with Brown, now plans to investigate each nurse's involvement in her care at Alexander Youth Services Center and could discipline them or revoke their licenses, said Deborah Jones, assistant director of nursing practices for the state.

As of Wednesday evening, all six nurses still were working at the Alexander center, said Lisa Tauser, a spokesman for Cornell Cos. Inc., the Houston-based private company that runs the lockup as a contractor for the state. The company still is trying to decide whether any of the nurses or other employees should be punished regarding the April 9 death. Meanwhile, the Arkansas Medical Society, which was asked to review pediatrician Robert Choate's involvement in Brown's care, said it was not "possible" to do so because the nurses failed to tell Choate about her worsening condition on April 7, 8 or 9. Choate could not be reached Wednesday for comment. Among the Nursing Board's findings: There's no evidence that the registered nurses on duty when Brown repeatedly collapsed before her death "supervised" the licensed practical nurses, who have less training and are required by the Arkansas Nurse Practice Act to work under RNs, physicians or other

more qualified medical professionals. Five nurses violated facility policy and the Board of Nursing rules and regulations for "knowingly or consistently failing to accurately or intelligibly report or document a patient's symptoms, responses, progress, medications and/or treatment." Five nurses violated center policy and Nursing Board rules and showed "unprofessional conduct" by failing to notify Choate of Brown's condition. A Youth Services Division internal investigation into her death found evidence that facility employees violated several policies in the days and hours before her death. On the day Brown died, for example, a supervisor dismissed an employee's request to call an ambulance, and nurses did not call a doctor until Brown was unconscious.

June 18, 2005 *AP*

A Houston-based company responsible for managing the Alexander Youth Services Center has apologized for the death of a female teenage inmate who died while in Arkansas custody. "On behalf of my company and all of the employees at Alexander, we're sorry," said Jane Miller, director of behavioral health services for Cornell Cos. Inc. "There's nothing more horrible than a child dying in our care." LaKeisha Brown, 17, died from a blood clot that traveled to her lungs on April 9. The girl was to be released May 1. An internal investigation by the Arkansas Department of Human Service's youth division suggested that medical personnel and others at the center may not have responded properly to the girl's repeated complaints about her health condition.

June 16, 2005 *AP*

The state fired a prison guard for having sex with an inmate. Now, the man has been hired by state- and county-run youth lockups. John Berry, 40, monitors children part-time at the Alexander Youth Services Center, which the state runs through a private contractor, and full-time at the juvenile detention center in Pine Bluff, a Jefferson County facility. Berry has denied allegations from an internal affairs investigation that he had sex with an inmate at the Tucker maximum security prison. The 16-year Department of Correction employee rose to the rank of sergeant before he was fired in October 2002. Alexander Youth Services director Bob McCracken was surprised when asked Wednesday by the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette newspaper about Berry's rehiring Wednesday. He said a criminal background check, a child-molestation registry check and reference checks were conducted on Berry and turned up nothing.

June 16, 2005 *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*

State legislators Wednesday were critical of Alexander Youth Services Center employees responsible for 17-year-old LaKeisha Brown on the day she died and said her death should be investigated further. "No one was satisfied with the results of the investigation so far," Sen. Sue Madison, D- Fayetteville, said of the Youth Services Division internal investigation into the case. "I think we are going to be monitoring Alexander a lot more closely." The Youth Services Division investigation found credible evidence that employees violated several policies in the days and hours before "Keisha" died. Specifically, the investigator found that a supervisor dismissed an employee's request to call an ambulance for Keisha and that nurses did not call a doctor for Keisha when they should have. But no one has been disciplined in connection with her death. The private company that runs the Alexander lockup, Cornell Cos. Inc., has been asked by the state to

better train employees and to ensure that better documentation is kept in regard to medical concerns and treatment. "Why hasn't someone been terminated?" Madison asked after a joint meeting of the Senate Committee on Children and Youth and the House interim Committee on Aging and Legislative Affairs. "The nurse just turned a deaf ear to this because she was tired of her." Madison said neither Cornell nor the Youth Services Division provided her with the internal investigation or detailed information about Keisha's death. Instead, she found details from reading the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette. Keisha, who had lived at the lockup for youthful offenders for nearly two years, collapsed at least three times and complained of tiredness during the two days before her April 9 death, records show. However, nurses said nothing was wrong with her. On the day she died, Keisha could barely walk or get out of bed, according to records. She had lost color in her lips and complained of being cold, having difficulty breathing and of being tired. Again, the nurse said everything was fine. A preliminary autopsy report shows that Keisha died of a blood clot in her lungs. As legislators peppered Hales and McCracken with questions, Sen. Terry Smith, D-Hot Springs, interrupted the meeting so the two officials could speak to a committee down the hall that was reviewing Cornell's contract. "From one oil pan to another," Smith told Hales and McCracken. As he walked to the other meeting, Smith said he wants to end Cornell's contract with the state because of the way Keisha was treated. "What happened was totally unprofessional. They didn't follow their own protocols," he said. "[Keisha] wasn't sent down there with a death sentence. Madison also said Scott Tanner, a juvenile-services ombudsman with the state Public Defender Commission, could have done more to help Keisha. "It seems to me that your office was created to prevent this kind of incident," she said. "Something doesn't seem to be working here."

April 16, 2005 Arkansas Democrat Gazette

A day after Lakeisha Brown collapsed at the Alexander Youth Services Center and died, her mother, Juana, found a white envelope with penciled script on the dresser at the family's home in Luxora. The return address: Keisha Brown, Alexander, Ark. Keisha, as she was known to her family, had written the letter to her maternal grandmother, Elizabeth "Granny Pooh" Brown, on Feb. 19. At the time, "Granny Pooh" clung to life on round-the-clock oxygen in a hospital. So Juana kept the letter but didn't open it, respecting the bond her mother and daughter shared. But now she had to know what her only daughter had written. "Hey Granny Pooh," Keisha begins, drawing a smiley face next to the salutation. Three lines in, the letter turns somber. "Things are getting a little shaky for me. I plan on hanging in there though.... I been sick a lot lately. These nurses suck here. My back hurts a lot. When I breathe a certain way it hurts in my left rib. They tell me I'm not hurting but I stay strong anyhow." Forty-nine days later, on April 9, 17-year-old Keisha Brown died at Southwest Regional Medical Center in Little Rock from a blood clot that traveled to her lungs, according to a preliminary cause of death released Friday by Pulaski County Coroner Mark Malcolm. Elizabeth and Juana Brown wonder whether Keisha received the medical care she needed during her two-year stint at Alexander, the state's largest juvenile jail. Scott Tanner, a juvenile services ombudsman with the state Public Defender Commission, said Keisha complained to him within the last nine months that she wasn't receiving proper treatment for the irregular periods. Nurses monitored Keisha, Tanner said, but it took two months to get center medical staff to send her to a

gynecologist. The U.S. Department of Justice criticized the Alexander unit in a November 2002 report for violations of several civil rights, including the right to religious freedom, mental health treatment, educational services and a safe environment. State officials signed a settlement with the Justice Department in March 2003 agreeing to correct problems found. In addition, the Youth Services Division conducted an internal review Oct. 4 that found several problems, including a delay in responding to medical needs. The youth lockup is operated by a private company called Cornell Cos. Inc.

June 5, 2003 *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*

Four teenagers who escaped from the state's largest youth lockup face from 10 years to life in prison if convicted of felony kidnapping counts filed against them Wednesday. The four youths — three age 17 and one age 15 — are accused of locking a worker at the Alexander Youth Services Center inside a cell during the April 10 escape. The April escape was the second since Cornell took over the Bryant facility in September 2001. The first happened the evening of March 16, 2002, when authorities said two 16-year-olds broke away from a group of inmates and ran from the facility.

April 11, 2003 *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*

Four inmates at the state's largest youth lockup escaped early Thursday morning after threatening a guard, stealing her car and driving it through the facility's front gate, authorities said. Two of the four teenage boys who escaped from Alexander Youth Services Center were caught several hours later. Authorities, however, believe the remaining escapees, ages 17 and 15, had a gun and could be dangerous. Alexander has had a history of problems managing the state's youthful offenders. In 2001, two teenagers killed themselves only a few months apart. Since spring 2002, the U.S. Department of Justice has been investigating possible violations of inmates' civil rights at the lockup. In March the Youth Services Division, Cornell and the Justice Department agreed to a court settlement that required improvements in education, mental health care and fire safety. Thursday's escape was the second in just over a year. When two 16-year-olds escaped March 16, 2002, neighbors of the lockup complained they had not been notified. The teenagers scaled the fence and were found early the next morning.

February 14, 2003 Associated Press

Failure to deal properly with allegations of abuse of two teen-age boys at the state's largest youth lockup have resulted in the dismissal of four workers. The three life-skills workers and a treatment supervisor at the Alexander Youth Services Center were fired last month after a Department of Human Services investigator looked into the matter. The boys, 16 and 17 years old, were reportedly taken from the facility's main campus to the high risk offender unit Dec. 16 after they had misbehaved. The two boys said that, once there, they were put in a small room with about seven other inmates who threatened them, and one of the two reported being hit, though no marks were found. A report issued this week also said that the boys said the other youngsters in the high-risk unit threatened to sodomize them with a broom handle. DHS investigator Gary Staggs found "credible evidence" that two members of the Alexander center's supervisory staff failed to report the allegations or failed to ensure that they were reported.

November 23, 2003 *Associated Press*

A counselor at a youth lockup who resigned after questions arose about her qualifications has been charged with making up credentials. Carolyn Skaggs was a counselor at the Alexander Youth Services Center, but resigned after officials found out she didn't have a counseling license, as she had claimed. Cornell Companies Inc. of Houston runs the youth lockup under a contract with the Youth Services Division of the state Department of Human Services. The Saline County prosecutor's office filed a misdemeanor charge against Skaggs last week. The Alexander lockup has been plagued by problems. The Justice Department is investigating the center after a series of problems in recent years, state officials said.

October 3, 2002 *Go Memphis*

The Justice Department is investigating the state's Alexander Youth Services Center after a series of problems at the facility, a state official said Wednesday. Doyle Herndon, director of the Division of Youth Services of the state Department of Human Services, told a legislative committee Wednesday the agency is enacting new policies to quell concerns about the Alexander facility and to offer incarcerated youth more rehabilitative programs. Herndon said Justice Department officials began the investigation after visiting the Alexander facility in June. Justice Department spokesman Casey Stavropoulos said the investigation would fall under the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act and is meant to "see if there's a pattern or practice of misconduct." In October, a state investigation concluded that Cornell Companies Inc. of Houston, which runs the Alexander center under a DYS contract, failed to supervise inmates at risk of suicide while the staff conducted a meeting.

September 25, 2002 *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*

A woman hired in July to supervise counseling at the state's largest youth lockup saw about 15 youths and testified in one court hearing before officials say they learned her credentials were fake. Carolyn Skaggs resigned Aug. 20 after an employee at Alexander Youth Services Center questioned whether she was licensed, as she claimed and even provided a wallet-sized license card as proof, said Bob McCracken, director of the facility.

February 21, 2002 *Associated Press*

The state Department of Human Services could lose access to all state and federal education dollars if the agency does not quickly correct deficiencies in special education and mental health services for youths in state custody, legislators heard Thursday. State Department of Education monitors planned to inspect special education services at the Alexander unit Friday after giving youth services official 30 days on Jan. 28 to correct educational shortcomings that included \$100,000 in missing textbook and educational equipment. "When our staff visited, we had children not in classes, no textbooks and limited numbers of teachers," Marcia Harding, the Education Department's special education director, told a joint meeting of legislative Joint Performance Review subcommittees. She said conditions are worse now than four years ago, when the DHS' Division of Youth Services began employing private contractors to provide education services at Alexander, the state's biggest juvenile facility.

February 2, 2002 *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*

Two guards at the Alexander Youth Services Center were suspended Friday pending an investigation into their conduct during a fight among detainees. Three boys beat up a fourth Wednesday night in the bathroom of the facility's serious offender unit -- called the Juvenile Upward Mobility Program -- while two of the facility's staff stood by, according to police reports. Joe Quinn, spokesman for the Arkansas Department of Human Services, said the allegation that guards failed to intervene is "a tremendously serious situation."

October 31, 2001 Associated Press

A state investigation has concluded that the private firm that runs the juvenile lockup at Alexander failed to supervise inmates at risk of suicide while the staff conducted a meeting. A 15-year-old boy had hanged himself on Sept. 15. That death came after a 16-year-old died last May in the same cell and by the same method, while a guard was supposed to have been watching him. On Oct. 19, staff at the facility run by Houston-based Cornell Co. had a two-hour meeting, and left the at-risk youths without someone watching, according to a report by the Division of Youth Services, which is an arm of the state Department of Human Services. "We are tremendously frustrated that we are once again discussing an issue like this with Cornell," DHS spokesman Joe Quinn said Tuesday.