

## **Coke County Juvenile Justice Center, Bronte, Texas**

October 12, 2007 *KRIS TV*

The delayed discovery of squalid conditions at a privately run Texas Youth Commission jail was "a human failure" and stronger oversight is needed to prevent similar incidents, a key state senator said Friday. "It was very simple that the monitors were not doing their job and there was a human failure," said Sen. John Whitmire, head of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee. "Who's monitoring the monitors?" Whitmire, a Houston Democrat, called a committee hearing about a week after a Coke County juvenile lockup in Bronte operated by The GEO Group, Inc., was closed because of filthy conditions. A Texas Youth Commission ombudsman discovered the conditions, even though the facility had passed previous inspections by TYC monitors. The TYC system was rocked earlier this year by allegations of rampant sexual and other physical abuse against juvenile inmates in the system. The star witness at Friday's hearing on adult and juvenile prison monitoring was Shirley Noble, who told how her son, 43-year-old Idaho inmate Scot Noble Payne, endured months of horrific conditions then slit his own throat at a private Texas prison run by GEO Group. "It seemed there was no end to the degradation he and other prisoners were to endure with substandard facilities," Noble said. Her son died March 4 in a private prison in Spur. Noble questioned why Idaho sent its inmates to Texas and why the Florida-based GEO Group was allowed to keep prisoners in what she described as "degrading and subhuman conditions." "Please, please hold them accountable for all the injuries and misery they have caused," Noble said. A spokesman for GEO Group did not immediately return a telephone call from The Associated Press to respond to comments made at the hearing. TYC Acting Executive Director Dimitria Pope, who took over the youth agency earlier this year, testified that she's putting more monitoring safeguards in place. That includes sending executive staff members out to view the lockups, something she said hadn't been done regularly in the past. "Because of my concerns of what I saw in Coke County, I have implemented a blitz of every facility, either the ones that we operate, that contract, district offices, anything that has TYC affiliated with it," she said, adding that each site will be visited by the end of October. Adan Munoz Jr., executive director of the Texas Commission on Jail Standards, said he has four inspectors do annual inspections of the 267 facilities under his oversight. He defended his agency's practice of giving two- to three-week notices about inspection visits but said recently there have been more surprise inspections. Sen. Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa, D-McAllen, said privatizing prisons is an "easy way out." He said he worries about the state continuing to contract with companies that have a history of abuse. "It's a myth that the private sector does a better job than government" in running prisons, Hinojosa said. "They're there to make a profit and they'll cut corners, and they'll cut back on services and they'll many times look the other way when abuse is taking place." Because of Texas' size and high rate of locking up convicts, the state is in the national spotlight for its dealings with private prison firms, said Sen. Rodney Ellis, D-Houston. "It puts a special burden on us," he said. "If it needs to be improved, improve it, because everybody looks to us." Noble was the panel's final witness. The room hushed as she told the senators her family's emotional tale. Her son, a convicted sex offender, was kept in solitary confinement for months with a wet floor, bloodstained sheets and smelly towels. She said he wrote long, detailed letters to family members in which he said the only way

to escape the prison's harsh conditions was to join his late grandfather in the spirit world. Noble said she begged for psychological help for her son. She said he wasn't supposed to have been given a razor, and she still wonders how he got the one he used to end his life. "After he tried to unsuccessfully slash his wrists and ankles, he knelt in the shower and cut his own throat," she said. "Surely only a person in utter disillusionment and horrifying conditions would bring themselves to this end."

October 12, 2007 *Dallas Morning News*

Three monitors fired by the Texas Youth Commission last week for failing to report filthy and dangerous conditions at a privately run juvenile prison in West Texas had previously worked for the company they oversaw. Two of the quality assurance monitors were hired directly from caseworker positions with The GEO Group Inc. at the Coke County Juvenile Justice Center, according to their job applications. The monitoring unit's supervisor also briefly worked for GEO at the youth prison near Bronte four years before being hired by TYC, records show. A clerk who was fired had previous GEO employment as well. TYC spokesman Jim Hurley said agency executives were unaware of the terminated workers' ties to GEO before The Dallas Morning News filed an open-records request this week. Officials said last week that they were concerned about entanglements between TYC employees and the company they monitored. TYC's inspector general has launched a criminal investigation of operations at the Coke County prison, including the possibility of financial transactions between GEO and TYC employees. GEO's relationship with the fired TYC monitors is a likely topic at a hearing today of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee in Austin. It is intended to examine GEO's operation of youth and adult prisons in Texas. State Sen. John Whitmire, the panel's chairman, was angered to learn from a reporter Thursday that TYC monitors had previously been employed by GEO. "I think it's outrageous," the Houston Democrat said. "It just confirms what many of us suspected – that there was too close a relationship between the TYC employees and GEO employees." He said the committee also would seek answers from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and county jail and juvenile probation officials about their own monitoring of private corrections companies. "Anyone that confines individuals in the state of Texas needs to make certain they know who their monitors are – and that they go behind their monitors and literally monitor their monitors," Mr. Whitmire said. Mr. Hurley said the prior employment with GEO raised questions about whether the monitors had been objective in their evaluations of the facility. "How do you monitor the monitors?" he said. "We need a very good answer to that." For years, quality assurance reports on the Coke County prison had been overwhelmingly positive. Twice, TYC named it contract facility of the year. "You have to worry about conflicts of interest," Mr. Hurley said Thursday. "I'm not saying there is a conflict of interest. But there is a perception." TYC Executive Director Dimitria Pope fired four monitors at the Coke County prison and a clerk last week after she and others toured the facility. It was in such deplorable condition, Ms. Pope said, that she ordered the removal of all 197 inmates. She also fired another employee at the Coke County facility who had not worked for GEO, and two contract care supervisors at TYC's district office in Fort Worth. The head of contract care at TYC's headquarters in Austin resigned. Ms. Pope canceled TYC's \$8 million contract with Florida-based GEO, which had operated the Coke County facility since it opened in 1994. GEO initially tried to reinstate

the contract but, after criticism, said it accepted the decision. The Coke County facility was the state's largest private youth prison. It was the only Texas juvenile facility operated by GEO, one of the nation's biggest private prison contractors. As a result of the problems discovered at Coke County, Ms. Pope ordered a wholesale review of the agency's contract care system. "Who the monitors are and where they come from will be one of the issues that we're going to look at," Mr. Hurley said. TYC employs more than 40 quality assurance specialists and supervisors, according to personnel records provided to The News. Some are stationed at the facilities they monitor, several of which are in remote rural areas. Mr. Hurley shied away from discussing what actions the agency might undertake if it learns that other monitors had previous employment with contractors they inspect. "What we need to do is make sure that first of all, every one of these contracts is being monitored and that it's being monitored correctly," he said. "If the remoteness is a problem, I think that monitoring these contracts accurately will show us that," he said. "We need to have a sort of evidence-based determination." The Coke County prison is in a one-stoplight town about 30 miles north of San Angelo. It was the town's second-largest employer after the school district. One-third of the school district's \$6 million budget is tied to programs at the prison. Two of the fired TYC employees lived in Bronte. Valerie Jones, former supervisor of the monitoring unit, has two children in the Bronte schools. Patti Frazee, her clerk, is married to a member of the Bronte school board. Ms. Jones, who worked for GEO as a chemical-dependency counselor from October 1995 to July 1996, declined to comment Thursday. She was hired by TYC as a quality assurance monitor in spring 2000, records show. Ms. Frazee, reached at her home, said officials of the youth agency never raised any questions about her previous employment with GEO. "There were not very many jobs out here," she said. "Any time you could take a state job, it was a better job for everybody because it paid more money. That's the only reason. It was like a step up from GEO. That's the way everybody viewed it." Ms. Frazee was paid \$17,950 per year working as bookkeeper for GEO. As a clerk for TYC, she earned \$25,035. The two monitors hired directly from GEO, Brian Lutz and David Roberson, earned \$26,800 and \$24,500 per year, respectively. With TYC, Mr. Lutz was paid \$33,945, while Mr. Roberson received \$37,393, agency records show. Several attempts to locate Mr. Lutz for comment were unsuccessful. Mr. Roberson, reached at his home in San Angelo, declined to be interviewed. Lisa Williamson worked as a TYC quality assurance monitor at the Coke County facility from 1998 until 2004. She said she knew Mr. Roberson and Ms. Jones well. She described them as honest, hard-working people devoted to their jobs. "There is not anybody there who I wouldn't trust with my own children," said Ms. Williamson, who now works as a juvenile probation officer in Young County. Ms. Williamson said she had not worked for GEO. But she said she never saw any of her colleagues who had worked for the company ignore any problems. While she and the GEO warden, Brett Bement, frequently tried to tell each other how to do their jobs, Ms. Williamson said, she didn't feel pressured and didn't obey him. "He knew I wasn't a pushover, and he couldn't get by with it. He couldn't have done that with any of us," she said. GEO Group gave money to several state officials' campaigns -- State Rep. Jerry Madden held his annual "How Sweet It Is" dessert party in Plano on Thursday night to raise money for a future campaign. One of the sponsors at the \$2,500 "cherries jubilee" level was to be The GEO Group Inc., a Florida-based corrections company. Until last week, GEO operated the Coke County Juvenile Justice Center near Bronte under contract

with the Texas Youth Commission. In recent years, the company has donated to the campaigns of some legislators who oversee the youth agency. Two of them, Mr. Madden and Sen. John Whitmire, are co-chairmen of the special legislative committee established this year to oversee reforms of TYC in the wake of a sexual abuse scandal at the West Texas State School in Pyote. Mr. Madden, R-Plano, received a total of \$2,500 from GEO's political action committee in 2005 and 2006, according to campaign finance records. Mr. Whitmire, a Houston Democrat, received \$2,000 from the political action committee of Wackenhut Corrections Corp., as GEO was previously known, in 2003 and 2004. Other recipients of GEO or Wackenhut contributions are Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst, who received \$2,500 in 2006, and House Speaker Tom Craddick, R-Midland, who received \$1,000 in 2005, state records show. In addition to Mr. Madden, the chairman of the House Corrections Committee, two other panel members received donations from GEO or Wackenhut. Rep. Delwin Jones, R-Lubbock, received \$250 in 2006. And Pat Haggerty, R-El Paso, received \$500 from the Wackenhut Corrections PAC in 2004. Sylvester Turner, D-Houston, chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Criminal Justice and another member of the Joint Committee on the Operation and Management of the Texas Youth Commission, received \$250 in 2006. Mr. Madden's predecessor as head of the corrections committee, Ray Allen, received \$3,500 in 2003 and 2004 from Wackenhut. He since has left public office and is a lobbyist for GEO. Mr. Madden acknowledged that lobbyists for GEO might attend his fundraiser at the Southfork Hotel on Thursday night. But he said he had told the lobbyists that he did not want a check. "Just right now, I think it would be a bad idea to specifically look for contributions from GEO," he said.

October 6, 2007 *Dallas Morning News*

The Texas Youth Commission is investigating whether its employees had improper ties to GEO Group Inc., the company that ran a West Texas juvenile prison where inmates lived in dangerous and squalid conditions. Acting TYC Executive Director Dimitria Pope said Friday that agency investigators will be checking into the backgrounds of employees to "see if they are connected to GEO in any way." Among the areas of inquiry, she said, is whether anyone in TYC was working as a consultant for GEO. Investigators also will look for any other financial arrangements between TYC workers and GEO, which operated the now-closed Coke County Juvenile Justice Center in Bronte. Any TYC employee found to have ties to GEO will be fired, Ms. Pope said. "I'm saying let's go back to the time this facility just opened. Let's see if there are any interesting financial transactions," she said. "I think if you go back and look, there will be some interesting things to look at." On Friday afternoon, Ms. Pope toured the TYC prison in Mart, which took in the 197 inmates removed from the GEO facility on Tuesday. TYC canceled its \$8 million contract with the company on Monday, citing "deplorable conditions." Ms. Pope, who visited the Coke County prison late last month after a surprise agency inspection, said she saw indications that the relationship between TYC's on-site monitors and GEO was not as separate as it should have been. For example, she said, GEO workers had keys to TYC's office in Bronte. When she entered the office, she said, no agency employee was there, but confidential inmate records remained in plain sight. "Kids' files were laying out on the table," she said. "There was stuff on the fax machine." Ms. Pope said she does not know if any TYC monitors formerly worked for GEO, but she is concerned

about that as well. 'A disgrace' -- TYC has already fired seven employees whose jobs were to monitor the Coke County unit and GEO's contract compliance. TYC's on-site inspectors routinely filed glowing reports on the prison. "They were there," she said of the inspectors. "They [their reports] say absolutely nothing." At a news conference in Austin earlier in the day, Ms. Pope blasted GEO, with whom Texas has done business since 1994. She said it operated a fire trap and that inmates' medical needs were ignored, schooling was "almost nonexistent" and a pattern of "physical and psychological harm" was routinely tolerated. "GEO should be ashamed," she said. "The Coke County Juvenile Justice Center is a disgrace." A TYC audit of the facility described a breakdown on many levels, including safety, hygiene, medical treatment, education and maintenance. Asked if TYC auditors found anyone at the Coke unit who had been doing the job properly, Ms. Pope responded: "I'm saying, 'Hell, no, they weren't.'" "The kids had a stench because they weren't allowed to bathe," she said. "And their teeth? Horrible." During her visit to TYC's prison in Mart, near Waco, Ms. Pope spoke with about 25 inmates from the GEO-run unit. "I notice you have toothpaste in there," she said to one, as the inmates stood at parade rest outside their cells. "I got you here so you can be treated like a human being," Ms. Pope told one 15-year-old inmate. A TYC audit of the GEO facility, released Friday, said inmates did not have access to toothpaste or toothbrushes for days at a time. Filth and disrepair were common throughout the prison, the report said. Only one washer and one dryer were available to serve nearly 200 youth. TYC auditors who visited the prison got so much fecal matter on their shoes they had to wipe their feet on the grass outside, Ms. Pope said. Many pieces of fire safety equipment were either inoperable or missing, the report said. Some emergency exits were closed with locks and chains. "I personally was locked in one of the dorms because the doors didn't work properly," Ms. Pope said. The prison's warden said he was aware of many of the problems pointed out by auditors. "He indicated that corporate did not respond to many of his purchasing needs ...," the audit report said. Dispatching audit teams -- TYC paid GEO \$632,000 a month to operate the prison, the report said. Last year, TYC spent nearly \$17 million of its \$249 million budget on private contractors, according to a Dallas Morning News investigation in July, which revealed problems with the agency's contract facilities. The agency said it was sending audit teams, composed of former members of the state's jail standards commission, to visit every TYC prison and halfway house. "No stone is going to go unturned," Ms. Pope said. "I don't want any more surprises." State Sen. John Whitmire, chairman of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee, said Friday that he would hold legislative hearings on GEO's contracts to run other correctional facilities throughout Texas. "We're preparing ourselves for a thorough review of GEO, and it could easily take us into other private contractors," he said. "But GEO is our focus now as a result of Coke County and their response." He criticized not only the conditions that GEO allowed to exist but also the company's response to the problem. "They tried to cover it. They tried to spin it. They had their lobbyists try to pressure legislators not to listen to TYC," Sen. Whitmire said. "So if that's their attitude, then I question their ability to carry out their contractual requirements in other state facilities." Rep. Jerry Madden, R-Plano, chairman of the House Corrections Committee, said he had no information to suggest financial corruption in the GEO contract but added, "I think that we should let the [inspector general's] investigation go forward and see what they find." Criminal inquiry -- TYC Inspector General Bruce Toney said Wednesday that he had begun a criminal

investigation of the GEO-run youth prison. He requested assistance from the state auditor's office and also advised the Texas Rangers and Texas attorney general's office of his investigation. TYC is "an agency that has had deep internal problems, and they just don't go away overnight," Mr. Madden said. "There should have been a lot of people who had the responsibility of finding out that those things had happened." Ms. Pope expressed anger at critics of TYC's cancellation of the GEO contract. "I will no longer sit here and take the unfair jabs of individuals who are attempting to advance their personal agenda over the welfare of youth," she said. She would not specify about whom she was talking. "I think it speaks for itself," she said. Some local officials in Coke County have said the prison does not deserve to be closed and have said TYC's actions will have a devastating economic impact on Bronte. "Anyone who's rallying behind GEO," Ms. Pope said, "should ... hold their heads in shame."

October 5, 2007 *San Antonio Express-News*

The Texas Youth Commission's chief blasted critics Friday who questioned her handling of problems at a juvenile center shuttered this week, but also admitted a "significant breakdown" in her own agency's oversight. "I will no longer sit back and take the unfair jabs from individuals who are attempting to advance their own particular agenda over the welfare of the youth," said Dimitria Pope, TYC's acting executive director. "Neither money nor power can come over my No. 1 priority, which is our youth." Pope, who made the comments at a news conference she called at TYC's Austin headquarters, refused to name the individual critics she called unfair or inaccurate. Her comments appeared directed, however, at two sources of criticism. One is the elected leadership of the small town of Bronte in West Texas, angered by the loss of 100 jobs when TYC shuttered the Coke County Juvenile Justice Center this week and transferred about 195 young inmates elsewhere. The other is state Rep. Jerry Madden, R-Richardson, chairman of the House Corrections Committee, who said he wonders why TYC only now is learning about alleged squalor and unfit conditions at the youth lockup run by Geo Group Inc. of Boca Raton, Fla. Citing those conditions, Pope fired seven agency "quality assurance" staffers and canceled the agency's \$8 million contract with Geo, which specializes in private prisons. The action threw TYC in the spotlight again after a sex abuse scandal at the agency led to investigations and intense legislative scrutiny last spring. "I am very concerned as to how did this condition arise, how long did it take and why are we just now finding out about it?" Madden said Friday, applauding a criminal investigation under way by TYC's inspector general. "We asked the question at our last hearing, were the kids safer? The answer we got was yes. It appears to me some of them were not," Madden added. Pope complained during her news conference that she was "damned if I did and damned if I didn't" and asserted that the agency should get the respect it needs as it attempts to carry out the mission of keeping confined youths safe. "There was a significant breakdown. That will be totally restructured," she said of the lack of checks and balances for the agency's oversight team. TYC's acting director of quality assurance, Elizabeth Lee, resigned this week but the agency's spokesman Jim Hurley said he didn't know if it was connected to the problems at the Geo-run youth facility. "Geo should be ashamed and anyone who's rallying behind Geo should also hold their head in shame," Pope said. Geo officials, who had said they provided quality services, said Friday they'd make no further comments. Coke County Judge Roy Blair said that he'd been to the Geo-

run youth facility several times, and the Commissioners Court had inspected it every quarter. "I have never noted any, what I would call severe, problems as far as mistreatment or health issues or any significant problems," he said. "The thing has always been relatively clean." Senate Criminal Justice Committee Chairman John Whitmire, D-Houston, opened an investigation of adult private prison contracts with Geo.

October 5, 2007 *Houston Chronicle*

A Houston lawmaker is launching a broad investigation into a private prison contractor after the state closed one of its youth facilities this week, citing filth, poor safety and health violations. Democratic Sen. John Whitmire, chairman of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee, cited the "terrible job" Geo Group Inc. did running the West Texas youth lockup and said Thursday he plans to review adult corrections contracts the state has with the company. Boca Raton, Fla.-based Geo Group, which runs eight adult lockups in Texas, was sued by the Texas Civil Rights Project in 2006 in connection with an alleged rape and suicide of a woman at the Val Verde County Jail. The suit alleged jail guards working for the company have allowed male and female inmates to have sex with each other. The suit was settled earlier this year with a nondisclosure agreement. Geo spokesman Pablo Paez did not return phone calls seeking comment, but earlier stated the company had provided quality services at the TYC facility. On Monday the Texas Youth Commission shuttered the doors of its Coke County Juvenile Justice Center, run by Geo, and moved nearly 200 young offenders to other TYC facilities. "When we saw what a terrible job they were doing at Coke County, TYC had the ability to shut it down and move their youth," Whitmire said. As for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, he wondered, "When we find a failure to properly run a facility, what do they do?" Geo operates four prisons, two shorter term lockups and a halfway house for the adult prison system. Prison spokeswoman Michelle Lyons said the agency hasn't had any "significant ongoing operational issues." Whitmire said he found evidence that a 90-day lockup in Houston run by Geo was out of compliance in 139 of 395 areas in a recent inspection. Lyons said Whitmire is referring to a 2006 audit, and all problems cited have now been cleared up. Geo also supervises state prisoners in leased space in the Jefferson and Newton county jails. TYC spokesman Jim Hurley said the agency's inspector general has opened a criminal investigation into the conditions at the Coke County juvenile facility. Seven TYC employees have been fired, including several who were responsible for on-site monitoring of the Coke facility. This was the only contract Geo had with the Youth Commission. But the agency has contracts with several other providers for various programs throughout the state, including foster homes and a program to teach parenting skills to delinquents who are pregnant.

October 3, 2007 *Dallas Morning News*

Seven Texas Youth Commission employees were fired Wednesday as a state investigation widened at a privately run West Texas juvenile prison where inmates were found living in filth. TYC Inspector General Bruce Toney said Wednesday he has begun a criminal investigation of operations at the Coke County Juvenile Justice Center near Bronte. Mr. Toney said his inquiry could focus on TYC employees and those of GEO Group Inc., which operates the prison. "We are going to follow all leads wherever they take us and as high as they may go both in TYC and the operation of that facility," Mr.

Toney said. Citing "deplorable conditions," TYC this week canceled its contract with GEO to operate the state's largest private juvenile prison. All 197 male inmates were removed on Tuesday. Mr. Toney said he has requested assistance from the state auditor's office and met with the head of the Travis County district attorney's public integrity unit on Wednesday. He said he also advised the Texas Rangers and Texas attorney general's office of his investigation. He sent one of his investigators to the Coke County facility last week. "Our initial response was to go out there and basically take a preliminary look and see what we had out there. We will just look at everything and see what transpires," Mr. Toney said. State Sen. John Whitmire, D-Houston, threatened to hold a public hearing on GEO's operation of the TYC prison. "Certainly that's an option if this goes any further," said Mr. Whitmire, chairman of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee. "If GEO thinks they've been treated unfairly, let's have a public hearing and look at all the photographs and videos [of the Coke County prison] and let the public decide." Mr. Whitmire said he was upset at efforts this week by GEO lobbyists to convince legislators that TYC had treated the company too harshly. "Now enters GEO with their paid lobbyists attempting to put a good face on this," Mr. Whitmire said. "I'm saying the corporation should back off. They've run a very poor facility that probably violates the youths' civil rights. ... Kids were stepping in their own feces. The sheets were such that a cat or dog wouldn't sleep on them." GEO spokesman Pablo Paez said he would not comment on any attempts by the company's lobbyists to sway legislators. Mr. Paez said his company was disappointed in TYC's decision to cancel the contract. "We believe we have provided quality services for the Texas Youth Commission for many years," he said. TYC officials have been unable to explain how the agency's own quality assurance monitors, stationed just outside the prison, not only failed to report substandard conditions but praised the operation. In the monitors' most recent review, in February, the prison was awarded an overall compliance score of 97.7 percent. In that review, monitors also thanked GEO staff for their positive work with TYC youth. "Those who were supposed to be our quality-assurance people out at Bronte will no longer be working for the Texas Youth Commission," agency spokesman Jim Hurley said. He cited an "abysmal failure on their part to not report the deterioration of that facility." Four of the TYC employees who were fired on Wednesday worked as quality assurance monitors at the Coke County facility. A fifth, who worked in TYC's district office in Fort Worth, was an author of the February report. The two other employees also were in contract care management, but Mr. Hurley said he would not disclose their specific job titles or where they worked. TYC identified none of the employees by name. Late last month, several TYC officials – including acting executive director Dimitria Pope – visited the prison and found poor conditions. A report by TYC ombudsman Will Harrell detailed numerous deficiencies. He found inmates who had been placed in solitary confinement for five weeks. They were allowed to leave their cells once a day, in shackles, to take a shower. Mr. Harrell also noted that some bedsheets were dirty and that inmates "complain regularly of discovering insects' in their food. "Children seemed almost desperate to lodge their complaints," Mr. Harrell wrote in his report. Many of his findings were confirmed in a report by Susan Moynahan, the TYC liaison for the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department. Among her discoveries at the Coke unit: Inmates in one dorm did not have a restroom, so they were forced to defecate in plastic bags. Mr. Paez, the GEO spokesman, said he has read the ombudsman's findings. "I have seen the report,"

he said. "I really can't comment on it." State Rep. Jerry Madden, R-Plano, said he will meet today with GEO representatives to discuss the Coke County prison. "I want to hear their side of it." TYC paid GEO \$8 million a year to run the Coke County prison. GEO said it had pre-tax earnings of about \$800,000 a year on the contract. Last year, TYC spent nearly \$17 million of its \$249 million budget doing business with private contractors, including GEO. TYC is putting together a plan to review each contract care program, Mr. Hurley said. "We are working right now on plans to have a physical presence at every contract care program that we are operating to review what is going on and to ensure the monitoring reports that we get are accurate," he said. In July, The Dallas Morning News found numerous problems with TYC's contractor-run facilities. The stories revealed that private contractors housing juvenile inmates in Texas repeatedly have lost contracts or closed operations in other states after investigators uncovered mismanagement, neglect and abuse. Two states closed GEO-operated units because of abuse allegations and inadequate care of inmates. TYC was placed in a state conservatorship this year after a sex abuse scandal and subsequent cover-up were exposed by The News and the Web site of The Texas Observer. Mr. Madden of Plano was one of the authors of legislation this year intended to reform TYC. He noted Wednesday that he had asked TYC officials at a hearing last month if inmates are safer now than they were before the reforms. Officials assured him they are. Now, Mr. Madden said, problems such as those in Coke County have caused him to question TYC's response. "I'm not sure the answer, 'They are safer,' is actually true," he said.

October 3, 2007 *Dallas Morning-News*

The Texas Youth Commission is investigating why juvenile inmates endured squalor and deprivation at a privately run West Texas prison that was repeatedly praised by TYC's own quality-assurance monitors. The agency began busing the 197 male inmates from the Coke County Juvenile Justice Center before dawn Tuesday. Officials also canceled an \$8-million annual contract with operators of the state's largest private juvenile prison, citing "deplorable conditions." The problems found at the prison in Bronte, operated by the GEO Group Inc. of Florida, were described in a report by TYC Ombudsman Will Harrell. "There is a greater sense of fear and intimidation in this facility than perhaps any other I have been to," Mr. Harrell wrote. He also noted that: •Some young inmates were kept in "malodorous and dark" security cells for five weeks. They were allowed to leave, in shackles, only once a day for a shower. •There was an "over-reliance" on the use of pepper spray. •Inmates "complain regularly of discovering insects in their food." TYC announced Tuesday that its inspector general's office, as well as Department of Public Safety troopers, were investigating. TYC spokesman Jim Hurley said other agencies, including the state auditor's office and the attorney general's office, could join the investigation. Asked if TYC suspected financial wrongdoing, Mr. Hurley would say only, "We're concerned about every aspect of the way this facility was run and the contract was administered." The agency "cannot tolerate this kind of situation," he added. "Not only do there need to be financial sanctions, but there need to be other actions taken against people who operate this way." This is only the latest problem to beset TYC, which was placed in state conservatorship this year after a sex abuse scandal and subsequent cover-up were exposed by The Dallas Morning News and the Web site of The Texas Observer. In July, an investigation by The News detailed numerous problems with TYC's contract-

run facilities, including GEO's Coke County prison. The investigation revealed that at least two other states had closed GEO-run facilities because of inadequate care of inmates and abuse allegations. GEO spokesman Pablo Paez said the company was disappointed by TYC's decision, which he said was unexpected. "We had not received any notices or any indication of any significant deficiencies at the facility prior to agency's decision to discontinue the contract," Mr. Paez said. Contractor of the year -- Among other matters at the Bronte facility near San Angelo, state investigators will explore whether inmates were prevented from filing grievances with TYC. "I don't think the phones worked all the time if they wanted to complain," Mr. Hurley said, and "kids weren't let out of their cells" to file complaints. TYC employs four full-time quality-assurance monitors at the Coke County prison. They work in a portable building just outside the facility's secure perimeter. Their jobs were to ensure that GEO was meeting the terms of its contract, the first priority being inmates' health and safety, Mr. Hurley said. "What were they doing? That's what we're asking," Mr. Hurley said of the monitors. "I do imagine that we will be seeing personnel actions taken as a result of this." According to TYC records, the agency's quality-assurance monitors awarded the Coke County facility mostly high scores on planned and unplanned inspections there over the last seven years. In 1999 and again in 2005, TYC named Coke County its "contract facility of the year." Mr. Hurley said monitors conducted their most recent comprehensive review of the facility in late February 2007. Records show few problems were recorded. Coke "achieved an overall compliance score of 97.7 percent with twenty-eight of twenty-nine critical measures passed," the report stated. "Thank you to the Coke County staff and administration for the positive work they do with TYC youth." Monitors did note that one dorm "had an offensive odor" due to a sewer backup. "A number of youth complained that their clothing was not getting clean and that it was returned to them still damp," the report stated. In addition, TYC monitors wrote that the schedule for inmates' showers had been interrupted because of emergencies requiring guards to maintain safety in the dorms. "Administrative staff was made aware of the issue and the need to correct," according to the report. The comprehensive review occurred five months after 19-year-old Robert Schulze, an inmate who had complained that he felt unsafe, hanged himself in his solitary cell. A TYC investigation found a number of missteps that contributed to the young man's suicide, and TYC put the facility on a corrective action plan as a result. 'Prevalence of fear' -- Mr. Harrell, the new TYC ombudsman, said he visited the Coke County facility on Sept. 21 as part of his tour of the agency's West Texas facilities. He found dirty mattresses lying on cell floors and a large infestation of spiders, beetles and crickets crawling around the facility, he said. Inmates told him their sheets and clothes had not been laundered in weeks or months. "Most of what I had seen had to be pre-existing for months if not years," he said in an interview. There was also a "real prevalence of fear" among the inmates, he said. "If I was to be placed in a TYC facility that would be my last pick for sure," he added. Of the schooling available to inmates in security cells, Mr. Harrell wrote in a report on his visit: " 'Education' consists of someone dropping a single sheet of paper through the door slot each day which usually contains a cross work [sic] puzzle, a word game or math problems." Three days after Mr. Harrell's visit, acting TYC Executive Director Dimitria Pope dispatched her new director of juvenile corrections to the Coke County facility. Billy Humphrey, a former adult prison warden, told his boss that the facility was "filthy" and that TYC needed to "take a much deeper look" because

he had a "very uncomfortable feeling," Mr. Hurley said. On Sept. 26, a team of TYC officials made an unannounced visit to Coke. Ms. Pope arrived at the facility last weekend and returned on Monday to Austin, where she met with Alfonso Royal, the governor's liaison to TYC, and Brian Newby, the governor's chief of staff. She then ordered the GEO contract canceled and the youths moved to another TYC prison in Mart, near Waco. "She told us that this needs to happen," said Robert Black, the governor's spokesman. "And we told her if this needed to happen, she needed to do it." Inmates were moved to TYC's McLennan County facility on buses escorted by DPS troopers. TYC made room for the Coke County youth by moving dozens of Mart inmates to other agency facilities, said Scott Medlock, an attorney for the Texas Civil Rights Project. At least two TYC inmates he represents in legal action against the agency were transferred to the Crockett State School in East Texas, he said. TYC transferred the youth without notifying parents, he said. "I've had panicked parents calling me all day, saying, 'I can't find my kid,'" said Mr. Medlock. Problems persist -- State Sen. Juan Hinojosa, D-McAllen, said Tuesday he has been concerned about GEO's performance for years, a point he raised at a legislative hearing in August. "I'm not surprised at what they [TYC officials] found," said Sen. Hinojosa, an author of the 2007 law aimed at reforming TYC. "There are still a lot of problems at TYC that we're trying to clean up." A GEO news release issued Tuesday noted that its TYC contract generated quarterly revenue of about \$2 million and pre-tax quarterly earnings of about \$200,000. Now, the company plans to market the facility to state and federal detention agencies around the country. In the meantime, it expects to lay off most of the 140 employees. City and school district officials in Bronte said Tuesday they had no advance notice of TYC's decision to close the Coke County facility. The mayor and school superintendent blamed the decision on politics. "It is straight from Gov. Perry's office. He wants this facility closed," Mayor Gerald Sandusky said. "He's looking for public image." "This facility does an outstanding job," Mr. Sandusky added. "It couldn't be better."

October 2, 2007 *Dallas Morning News*

Texas Youth Commission officials will pull the 197 TYC inmates out of a West Texas juvenile justice center today and cancel their contract with the company that runs it, citing deplorable conditions at the state's largest privately operated juvenile prison. "The decisive action ... is a clear indication of the positive changes under way at the Texas Youth Commission," Gov. Rick Perry said Monday. "I am deeply disappointed that conditions at the facility have deteriorated to this point, but am confident that today's actions will remedy the situation." The Coke County Juvenile Justice Center in Bronte, operated by the Florida-based GEO Group Inc. since 2003, has a history of abuse and neglect, including a 2006 suicide, allegations of sexual assault that were settled out of court, and the 2004 death of a youth whose medical conditions were ignored. As recently as this spring, the prison realized it had hired a registered sex offender as a guard. An investigation by The Dallas Morning News in July detailed problems at the facility. The coverage also documented problems at GEO facilities in other states. A representative from GEO could not be reached for comment on Monday. In the July article, spokesman Pablo Paez told The News that the company strives to provide high-quality service and always reviews serious incidents to determine "what corrective actions, if any, can be taken." After reports last month of unsanitary conditions at Coke County, acting TYC

Executive Director Dimitria Pope visited the facility last weekend for a surprise audit. On Monday, she ordered that all youth be transferred to other TYC units immediately. "TYC's No. 1 priority is the safety and well being of those youths under our care," Ms. Pope said in a statement. "The unsafe conditions I witnessed at Coke County this weekend are unacceptable. We have zero tolerance for any form of abuse within the system, and those responsible parties will be held accountable." Despite the high-profile cases reported at the Coke County facility – and the fact that at least two other states have closed their GEO facilities over reports of abuse and neglect – GEO and the company's previous owner were allowed to renew their contract in Texas at least seven times. GEO has the highest rate of alleged abuse among all TYC contractors. This is hardly the first time GEO has run into trouble in state juvenile justice systems. The U.S. Justice Department sued the company in 2000, when it was known by a different name, alleging that youth inmates in a Louisiana facility suffered abuse and neglect. All youth were removed from the facility under a settlement. Five years later, Michigan closed its state prison run by GEO after budget problems and a lawsuit over poor inmate care. Until recently, TYC has continued to give GEO high marks, awarding the Coke County outpost its "contract facility of the year" award in 1999 and again in 2005. This despite a history of abuse and neglect at the facility, including: • A 1999 lawsuit filed by former female inmates alleging sexual abuse at the hands of Coke employees. The lawsuits, which involved girls being forced into performing sexual act and dancing naked, were settled out of court. • The death in 2004 of John Rodriguez, whose rashes, open sores and spiking fever were overlooked for months by medical staff. • The hiring – and eventual termination – of a registered sex offender to work as a prison guard. The TYC acknowledged the GEO facility does its own hiring, and wasn't held to the same standards as other non- contract prisons. • The 2006 suicide of Robert Schulze, a 19-year-old inmate who repeatedly threatened to harm himself and lost 23 pounds in two months. Nurses never put Mr. Schulze on suicide watch, and he hanged himself in his cell. Scott Browne, a Beaumont attorney representing Mr. Schulze's family, commended the TYC on Monday for its action. "I would hope that changes like this by TYC would help ensure that no one else would suffer the way Robert Schulze did," Mr. Brown said. "... Hopefully a move like this by TYC will get the attention of anyone who wants to be in the private corrections business."

July 29, 2007 *The Dallas Morning News*

Robert Schulze was scared. He threatened to harm himself unless he was moved to another youth prison location. He lost 23 pounds in two months. Ten days later, he hanged himself from the top bunk of his solitary cell. Texas Youth Commission investigators presented a grim report on the prison's failings to Gov. Rick Perry and other state officials in February. They could have discovered even more disturbing details had they looked beyond Texas' borders. A three-month Dallas Morning News investigation found that private contractors housing juvenile inmates in Texas repeatedly have lost contracts or shuttered operations in other states after investigators uncovered mismanagement, neglect and physical and sexual abuse. In Colorado, a suicide finally prompted state officials to close a private youth prison that investigators said was plagued by violence and sexual abuse. In Arkansas, former employees of a private juvenile facility said inmates were shackled and left naked on the ground in sleeping bags. And in

Michigan, a private contractor was sued for allegedly allowing mentally ill inmates to languish in solitary confinement. Last year, TYC spent nearly \$17 million of its \$249 million budget to do business with these and other private contractors. The agency houses about 450 young inmates with 13 private operators. Legislative reforms passed in the wake of the TYC sex abuse scandal largely overlooked private contractors and focused instead on agency-run prisons. "They are a much under-examined problem in the TYC system," said Scott Medlock, a prisoners' rights attorney for the Texas Civil Rights Project, which has filed a class-action lawsuit against TYC alleging widespread inmate abuse. The News focused its investigation on three private contractors with the largest number of TYC inmates and high numbers of complaints – GEO Group, Cornerstone Programs Corp. and Associated Marine Institutes. Those contractors have been dogged by problems in Texas strikingly similar to what led officials in other states to take action. Such problems include difficulties in attracting qualified employees, high turnover rates and inadequate care for inmates – sometimes with tragic consequences. States that hire contractors with poor performance records "obviously have a very low regard for our children," said Isabelle Zehnder, director of the Coalition Against Institutionalized Child Abuse, a child advocacy organization in Washington state. "They're letting money or circumstances stand above children." But Michele Deitch, an expert on prison privatization at the University of Texas at Austin, said research showed that privatization did not save money and that "private facilities tend to have many more problems in performance, such as higher levels of assaults, escapes, idleness." TYC officials said they were reviewing the agency's policies on contractors but could not comment about changes under consideration. However, just days after detailed questioning by The News, TYC canceled bid requests for new contract facilities. Bidders included contractors currently operating facilities in Texas that had a history of problems in other states. The vetting process -- TYC first turned to contractors in 1974 to relieve overcrowding. Contract care facilities vary from group homes to large prisons, and over the years contractors have come to provide specialized services not available at TYC prisons, such as care for pregnant inmates. TYC's executive director makes the final decision to hire a private contractor after a five-phase review process that includes checks on the contractor's ability to provide adequate medical care and educational and behavioral treatment. Companies with contracts terminated in the last year "for deficiencies in performance" anywhere in the country are ineligible to bid. And, under a new policy enacted in March as the TYC sex abuse scandal unfolded, the agency reserved the right to declare ineligible bidders with canceled contracts in the last three years. "We ask for contracts [canceled] within 36 months, because this provides us with additional information that might be important – [such as] funding, or lack of funding," said Mark Higdon, TYC's business manager for contract programs. "It might not be performance. It might be something else, and we can look at that also." While a contract cancellation would clearly be a red flag for TYC, there are many loopholes through which worrisome contractors can pass. Arkansas officials, for example, let an agreement with Associated Marine Institutes expire after an audit found the contractor had mismanaged its billing and failed to provide proper services to young inmates. Elsewhere, companies have negotiated deals allowing them to withdraw from their contracts, or simply shut down after states have removed youth from their facilities. Neither of these would constitute a terminated contract as defined by Texas. Critics say that TYC requires private contractors

to provide less background information when bidding than it should. For example, TYC does not request major incident reports or disclosure of lawsuits against contractors, nor does it do any independent research. In Florida, by contrast, companies must list and explain any "correctional facility disturbances" – major incidents, such as escapes or deaths – in any of the company's prisons. Such disturbances may be the result of inadequate staffing, poor training or other factors and raise warnings about a company's practices. TYC should require contractors to provide all incident reports, said Ms. Deitch, a lawyer with 20 years' experience in criminal justice policy issues. "It is absolutely important that the contracting agency has this kind of background info," she said. "If problems occur, there can be liability concerns for the state agency, and the costs of dealing with the problems can far exceed any savings from going with a low-cost contractor." Elizabeth Lee, the new acting coordinator for TYC contract care, acknowledged the agency has no "established process for collecting information" on how its contractors performed in other states. The important thing to consider, she said, is what they're doing in Texas "and what we're doing to monitor the care of our kids." Correcting contractors -- TYC regularly reviews contract facilities. It checks program areas, such as staffing and security, at least once a year. It also uses statistical information, such as rates of confirmed mistreatment and the number of escapes, to evaluate operators. TYC quality assurance monitors also make at least two unannounced visits per year. If a facility has significant problems, it is put on a corrective action plan, which outlines improvements and deadlines for them. The Coke County youth prison, for example, was placed on a corrective action plan in February after Robert Schulze's suicide. The plan required Coke to improve staffing and procedures in solitary confinement. Records show that Coke was also placed on a corrective action plan in July 2006 for deficiencies in case management, which includes inmate monitoring and record keeping. Earlier this month, TYC monitors visited WINGS for Life in Marion, just outside San Antonio, which houses female inmates and their babies, to follow up on a corrective action plan necessitated by deficiencies in staff training and documentation. "If a facility fails any critical measure, we have to come back and check it," said Jim Humphrey, the TYC quality assurance supervisor for WINGS. TYC has the authority to fine contractors for problems, but it has never done so in 33 years of outsourcing, officials said. "If it comes to that, we would just stop the contract," said Paula Morelock, who recently retired after 17 years as TYC's contract care coordinator. But it rarely does that. The News could find only a few instances of TYC not renewing contracts because of poor performance. TYC is required to retain contractor records for only a few years, so a full review of the program was not possible. In 2001, TYC terminated its contract with FIRST Program of Texas in Longview after repeated problems. One young woman said that when she was at FIRST, it had chronic staff shortages. "A lot of stuff took place that shouldn't have," said Michelle, a 22-year-old who asked that only her first name be used. "There were lots of problems ... like staff having sex with the youth there and improper restraints and lack of supervision." In 2004, TYC removed its youth from the Hemphill County Juvenile Facility, then run by Correctional Services Corp., a former state contractor, because of "grave concerns for the safety of youth." The move followed a December 2003 complaint signed by about 30 inmates. Still, an agency review conducted shortly after the letter was sent gave the facility "above average" scores on all performance measures. The facility was later placed on a corrective action plan. A

February 2004 update from TYC staff to Ms. Morelock said: "Although they have not completed all items, the team does believe that youth are safe and that the program is stable." But staffing shortages followed, and in June 2004, TYC removed its youth from the facility. "We feel like we do a lot of good monitoring and do our very best to ensure that the youth receive quality services," Ms. Morelock said. When contracts expire, TYC determines whether the facility met the terms of its agreement. The contractor completes a renewal packet, and then youth commission officials visit the facility to determine whether to extend the contract for another two years. More often than not, Ms. Morelock said, contracts are renewed. Critics say that TYC needs to change its policy and open the process to outside bidders each time a contract comes up for renewal. A question of oversight -- TYC already has come under fire for lax employment guidelines that allowed contractors to hire convicted felons or even sex offenders. A Texas state auditor report in March urged TYC to ban contractors from hiring employees with convictions and to require background checks of applicants. Even with background checks, some workers with criminal records have slipped through. A registered sex offender employed by the GEO-run Coke County Juvenile Justice Center was fired in March. Ms. Morelock said the facility told TYC that it ran a background check on the worker, but his criminal records did not turn up. GEO said the correctional officer's prior record was not uncovered because juvenile records in Texas are sealed. [See [dallasnews.com](http://dallasnews.com) for further GEO comment.] The Texas Juvenile Probation Commission, which licenses county facilities, found the Garza County Regional Juvenile Center in Post out of compliance last year because it failed to do criminal background checks on employees before they were hired. In a unique arrangement, TYC contracts with the county, which in turn hired a private operator, Colorado-based Cornerstone Programs, to run the Garza facility. TYC relied on the county to vet the contractor's background, Ms. Morelock said. A Garza County official said he did not know what, if any, backgrounding of Cornerstone had been done. It's impossible to know whether other employees of private contract facilities have criminal records because, unlike workers at state-run facilities, their names are not public information. "The fact that [these] facilities are private simply adds one more layer of opaqueness to the process," said Ms. Deitch, the UT adjunct professor. A few of the TYC legislative reforms will carry over to private operators. Their guards' training hours must match that of TYC employees, their younger inmates must be separated from older ones, and contractors must now conduct fingerprint background checks on all employees and volunteers in contact with youth. "Some of the contractors were already doing that [fingerprinting], but just as a safeguard we're putting it in the contract that they all have to do it now," said the TYC's Ms. Lee. TYC officials say the most valuable part of the agency's monitoring is staff visits to facilities. "They're looking at grievances, they're talking to kids, they're talking to staff and they're reviewing incident reports," Ms. Lee said. In general, though, TYC relies heavily on its contractors to police themselves. Contractors are required to forward inmate abuse allegations, although agency monitors have raised concerns that not all make it to TYC. Contractors also must report serious incidents to local law enforcement, but TYC reviews found facilities that failed to do so. Critics of privatized juvenile care think more state oversight is necessary. "Child welfare and juvenile justice systems have both a legal and moral obligation to protect kids from harm, which means they have a responsibility to exercise due diligence when it comes to placing youths in certain types of facilities," said Dr. Ronald Davidson, a university

psychologist frequently hired by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services to review juvenile care. "Whether we look at this situation in terms of public policy or simple morality, the question we have to ask is whether our society ought to be in the business of funding gulags for children."

July 29, 2007 *The Dallas Morning News*

The Coke County Juvenile Justice Center, run by the GEO Group Inc., is Texas' largest private juvenile prison and has had the highest rate of alleged abuse among TYC's contractors over the last seven years. The Florida-based GEO has renewed, extended or renegotiated its contract with the Texas Youth Commission at least seven times since it first won the contract to run the Coke facility in June 1994. During that time, at least two other states have closed their GEO-run juvenile facilities because of inadequate care of inmates and abuse allegations. The U.S. Justice Department sued the company in 2000, when it was known as Wackenhut Corrections Corp., alleging that juveniles at the company's Louisiana facility were subjected to excessive abuse and neglect. Wackenhut agreed to a settlement that provided for sweeping changes to Louisiana's juvenile justice system and required the company to move all juveniles from its facility. The former security chief pleaded guilty in 2001 to beating a 17-year-old handcuffed inmate with a mop handle. In October 2005, Michigan closed the state's private youth prison run by GEO after an advocacy group sued the prison over inadequate inmate care. Budget shortfalls also played into the prison's closure. Tom Masseau, director of government and media relations for Michigan Protection and Advocacy Service Inc., said his watchdog group found juvenile inmates who needed special education but were not receiving it and inmates who were not receiving appropriate mental health care. The prison also managed problem juveniles by putting them in solitary confinement, he said. Mr. Masseau said his group tried to work with GEO and the state before filing a lawsuit, but the problems remained unsolved and inmates faced reprisals. "The youth would report back that they were retaliated against for meeting with us," Mr. Masseau said. "We said enough is enough." The group's lawsuit against the state is pending, but GEO was dropped as a defendant because it closed the facility and left the state. GEO sued the state for alleged wrongful termination of the lease agreement, which is also pending. TYC accolades -- In 1999, TYC named GEO's Coke County operation its "contract facility of the year." The same year, former female inmates filed several federal civil rights lawsuits alleging they were sexually abused by Coke employees. (TYC had moved all girls from the facility a year earlier.) The lawsuits -- which eventually resulted in confidential settlements -- were filed four years after TYC confirmed allegations that some staff members coerced girls into performing sexual acts or dancing naked, according to a court document and a report by Michele Deitch, a prison privatization expert at the University of Texas, and others. "Given GEO's track record generally and the general record of these for-profit private prison companies, I have serious concerns about them running any correctional institutions ... especially when such egregious wrongdoing was going on," Scott Medlock, an attorney at the Texas Civil Rights Project, said. The Coke County facility routinely hired unqualified workers, said Isela Gutierrez, juvenile justice initiative director at the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition. Former Coke County guard John Christman, who now lives in New York, said he witnessed that problem firsthand. He worked there for nearly a year and said he initially loved it. But he eventually grew

frustrated with the company's poor hiring standards and staff shortages. The company met its guard-to-inmate ratios by making employees work extra shifts, he said. "I was working five, six days a week, 12-hour days, overtime," Mr. Christman said. "It's hard to get people to go into that line of work." He quit his post but returned about 18 months later, in 2001, after he heard that working conditions had improved. Unfortunately, he said, not much had changed and he left shortly thereafter. TYC again named Coke County contract facility of the year in 2005. And, during the past seven years, TYC quality-assurance monitors have awarded it mostly good scores on planned and unplanned inspections there. But some recent problems were reported: During an unscheduled visit in April, a TYC monitor discovered that a staff member had falsified an accusation against an inmate. The young man was put in solitary confinement on April 16. Two days later – on the morning of the unannounced visit – his paperwork already noted that he'd committed an infraction that would extend his stay in solitary confinement. "This was alarming because it was only 9:30 a.m. and the incident had not occurred yet," the monitor reported. The TYC monitor notified the warden, who released the inmate from solitary and told the security director "that writing incident reports prior to the incident was not allowed," the report said. Suicide inquiry -- TYC's investigation into Robert Schulze's suicide offers a bleak picture of the facility. "Robert's cries for help – to be assigned to a dorm where he felt safe or to be transferred to Gainesville State School – were never adequately addressed," a February 2007 report noted. A guard promptly turned in Robert's note in which he threatened to harm himself unless his dorm assignment was changed. Robert then asked to go to solitary confinement because he felt unsafe, but he was not put on suicide watch. He stayed in solitary confinement for nine days, refusing to return to his dorm because of safety concerns. His case manager made only one documented visit with him during that period. He was not given prescribed medication during his time at Coke and lost 23 pounds in two months. No one checked his food intake. None of that was brought to the doctor's attention, and a medical review was never conducted, the TYC investigation revealed. The nursing staff also "failed to discover three original prescriptions for antidepressants and a mood stabilizer that had been prescribed by a consulting psychiatrist ... on July 28," TYC later reported. Eight days before Robert hanged himself on Sept. 28, 2006, "he filed a TYC complaint form stating that he makes self-referrals to ... [solitary confinement] to get away from harm and people who threaten him," TYC said in its report. It's not clear anyone saw the complaint before his death. "The form got lost in a stack of mail on the TYC staff member's desk," the investigative report said. TYC's investigation found that Coke County's solitary cell unit had only one staffer on the floor – in violation of the required two guards – at the time of the hanging. The one guard on duty failed to make contact with each inmate every 10 minutes, as required. For more than an hour, no one checked on the despondent inmate. After Robert's dinner tray arrived, it sat for 28 minutes before the guard took it to his cell and discovered him unresponsive. The guard was disciplined with training and five days of unpaid suspension. TYC put the facility on a corrective action plan, which required it to improve the deficiencies that contributed to Robert's death. GEO spokesman Pablo Paez said the company strives to provide high-quality service and conducts thorough reviews after any serious incident to determine "what corrective actions, if any, can be taken." An attorney for the family of the 19-year-old said they had no comment.

March 12, 2007 *The Monitor*

Two detainees of a Texas Youth Commission contract prison in West Texas are missing. The boys, ages 17 and 18, were both non-violent offenders. One is serving time in the high-security facility for burglary of a vehicle; the other for violating conditions of parole, said Jim Hurley, TYC spokesman. They are missing from the Coke County Juvenile Justice Center in Bronte, which is run by GEO Inc. At about 3 a.m. Monday a vent fell from a ceiling dorm, prompting guards to conduct a bed count, Hurley said. They discovered four youth were missing, but two were later found, he said. Hurley said TYC would not release the names or description of the missing youth because they were not considered to be a danger to the public. It is possible the youth are still inside the facility because there is so far no indication the razor-wire fence that surrounds the Coke County center was breached, Hurley said. Monday's discovery at the 200-bed facility is another in a long line of problems at the TYC. The agency that runs the Evins Regional Juvenile Center in Edinburg was placed governor-appointed management in February among a sex scandal and wide reports of youth abuse.

March 10, 2007 *KRIS TV*

A convicted sex offender who was fired this week from his job at a West Texas youth prison said he told his employer of his background when he applied for the job. David Andrew Lewis, 23, was fired from the Texas Youth Commission's Coke County Juvenile Justice Center when state investigators discovered he was a convicted sex offender. State leaders dispatched law enforcement officials to all 22 commission facilities and its headquarters this week to investigate claims of sexual abuse of inmates by employees. Lewis was fired by the GEO Group, a Florida-based private company that runs the all-male facility in Bronte, about 30 miles northeast of San Angelo. Lewis said Thursday that he showed a sex offender registration card to his prospective employers when he was being interviewed for a job as a correctional officer in August 2006. "They said to wait for the background check to go through," Lewis said, adding that he also presented other paperwork related to his offense. Lewis was 15 when he was convicted in 1999 of indecency by exposure with a 5-year-old girl, according to a Texas Department of Public Safety Web site listing sex offenders. He is required to register annually as a sex offender. Pablo Paez, director of corporate relations for the GEO Group, said the company conducts background checks on new hires and re-runs the checks annually. The Texas Department of Public Safety checks off on the company's employees, he said. "In this particular case, we conducted a background check through DPS and received clearance from DPS," Paez said. The Texas Department of Public Safety, which does not make public the records of juvenile offenders, referred a call for comment to Gov. Rick Perry's office. Perry spokesman Ted Royer said the case highlights why the special master and new executive director "are going to completely rewrite the playbook" for how the agency operates. "Having sex offenders guard prisoners is totally unacceptable, and if an agency contract prohibits the hiring of registered sex offenders then that needs to be enforced," Royer told The Associated Press on Friday. "There needs to be a clear delineation of consequences if a contractor goes against those rules." State officials have said Lewis' case demonstrated that private prison operators don't always check their employees' juvenile records. Texas Youth Commission spokesman Tim Savoy said the

agency's contracts with the private operators prohibit hiring registered sex offenders, but the agency doesn't "have any control over who they hire."

March 7, 2007 *San Antonio Express-News*

Law enforcement officers who earlier this week moved into the Texas Youth Commission facilities to protect inmates from sex predators on Wednesday discovered a registered sex offender working as a correctional officer in a halfway house for juveniles. The sex offender had been allowed to stay on the job despite an alert that had been sent months ago to TYC administrators in Austin. David Andrew Lewis, 23, was discovered by investigators sent to TYC's 22 facilities after reports of sex abuse stunned lawmakers. Lewis was employed at the Coke County Juvenile Justice Center, a juvenile halfway house 30 miles from San Angelo run by the Geo Group, a private prison company. TYC's acting executive director, Ed Owens, said a facility staff member had months ago warned agency officials in Austin of Lewis' sex offender status, but was rebuffed. The tipster "was told he was a company employee and that the company needed to deal with their employee," Owens said, adding that the incident was yet another illustration of the systemic failures plaguing TYC. Owens said once he learned of Lewis' background Wednesday, he called the Geo Group and they suspended him. It was not clear if the Geo Group had learned months earlier of Lewis' sex offender status. No one in its Florida headquarters could immediately be reached for comment Wednesday evening. Owens said that there was no evidence Lewis acted inappropriately with any juveniles. Lewis was 15 when he was forced to register for 13 sexual indecency acts against a 5-year-old girl. His case is posted on the Texas Department of Public Safety web site of registered sex offenders. With that history, it remained a mystery how Lewis could have been hired to work with juveniles in the first place. Criminal background checks are required for all TYC employees and those hired by private contractors to work with TYC juveniles.