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Report Documents Use of Solitary Confinement and Subculture of Assault at Pine Hills Youth Correctional Facility

A report available today documents the use of solitary confinement at Pine Hills Youth Correctional Facility (Pine Hills) as a matter of policy, as well as a culture of fighting and assaults of youth inmates at the facility. Disability Rights Montana conducted an investigation this summer after a credible allegation from an employee of the facility, and gathered records, conducted interviews, toured the facility and produced this report.

“While there are many positive aspects of the program and staff at Pine Hills, we were surprised to learn solitary confinement is actually provided for in facility policy as a means of behavior management and to meet out punishment,” said Roberta Zenker, staff attorney at DRM who conducted the investigation. “It is a practice that has proven time and again injurious, particularly to developing adolescents. It absolutely must stop.”

A now former employee, Tony Navarro, reported in May of this year that youth were kept in solitary confinement for sometimes months at a time. He also pointed to several assaults upon youth by other youth that went without consequences for the perpetrators, and so tacitly condoned by staff at the facility. Tony Navarro tried to change things internally by bringing these issues to the attention of his supervisors, but got no response. Mr. Navarro is to be commended for following through and reporting these serious allegations so that they can be addressed in order to bring about positive improvements for the youth at Pine Hills.

“I don’t want to get nobody in trouble, I just want to help the kids,” Mr. Navarro stated throughout the investigation. “It’s all about the kids.”

For a copy of the Report, visit www.disabilityrightsmt.org or call (406) 449-2344.