

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Investigation Finds Jailers Abused Woman with Disabilities System Fails to Defend Inmates with Mental Illness

Helena, November, 10, 2008: As the designated protection and advocacy system for people with disabilities in Montana, Disability Rights Montana is releasing information on a report of abuse and neglect against a person with disability in a Missoula jail.

One of Disability Rights Montana's (DRM) functions is to advocate for people with disabilities who are held in facilities, which includes detention centers, and to investigate allegations of abuse and neglect. In July 2006, DRM staff learned that "Adele," (called "Adele" in this report to protect her identity) a woman with mental illness and developmental delays, arrived at Montana State Hospital with seven distinct, deep bruises on her arms and body. DRM started an investigation to determine how Adele received the bruises.

We learned that Adele was brought to St. Patrick Hospital in Missoula for help with her medication. A dispute took place with hospital security. Missoula City Police were called and they transported Adele to the Missoula County Detention Center.

This report details the events that took place while Adele was in custody at the Detention Center. During the 18 hours she was held, Adele was shackled, restrained in a chair, later placed in a locked cell, shot seven times with a pepperball gun, again placed in a restraint chair where she sat for 44 minutes without the chance to be decontaminated.

DRM investigated and found that detention center staff members violated their policies, mistreated and abused Adele, lacked appropriate oversight, and are in need of training to respond appropriately to people with mental illness and developmental delays.

Adele has since filed a lawsuit against Missoula County Sheriff's Department and Sheriff Mike McMeekin who is responsible for the Missoula County Detention Center. DRM report's purpose is to shed light on what happened to Adele, and to bring about much-needed changes to include appropriate training to officers and additional oversight to the jail.

The public is invited to view the 22-page report at: www.disabilityrightsmt.org or by clicking here.

Disability Rights Montana is the civil rights Protection & Advocacy System for Montana. Our mission is to protect and advocate for the human, legal and civil rights of Montanans with disabilities while advancing dignity, equality and self-determination.