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U.S. Department of Justice Review of Juvenile Corrections Programs Complete; State Implementing Plans to Address Education and Mental Health Issues

(Pierre) - A recently completed U.S. Department of Justice review of juvenile corrections programs at the Custer Youth Corrections Center (CYCC) found no systemic constitutional or statutory violations in the areas of overall juvenile justice management, use of force or provision of medical care.

The Department of Justice review did issue findings in the areas of education and mental health services and provided technical assistance to the state. Governor M. Michael Rounds directed the Department of Corrections (DOC) to implement plans to address those issues.

Corrections Secretary Tim Reisch advised that the plans went into effect this week. "We've contracted for additional special education services, increased classroom time for youth in the Intake Center, developed vocational program options for girls, improved telepsychiatry services and ensured that youth awaiting transfer continue to receive needed mental health services," said Reisch.

Governor Rounds states that he is "committed to providing the best atmosphere and programs possible for the children placed in juvenile corrections programs."

In late 1999, the U.S. Department of Justice began reviewing the CYCC facility under the Civil Rights of Incarcerated Persons Act (CRIPA) based on allegations of excessive force and improper medical treatment. Department of Justice staff and consultants also toured the CYCC programs last summer, interviewed youth and staff and reviewed policies and procedures, incident reports and mental health, medical and educational records.

The review concluded that CYCC is "a well run facility with staff that appear to care for the welfare of the residents and an administration that seems committed to providing the best atmosphere and programs possible."

Doug Herrmann, Director of Juvenile Services in South Dakota, says that Judy Preston, the lead attorney for the Department of Justice, indicated this "to be the most positive outcome of any investigation she had participated in over 11 years."

