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This is the first in a two-part series. The second part will be published on Wednesday, Oct. 23. From a glance at his background, one might assume that James F. Slattery would have a difficult time convincing any state in America to entrust him with the supervision of its lawbreaking youth. Over the past quarter century, Slattery's for-profit prison enterprises have run afoul of the Justice Department and authorities in New York, Florida, Maryland, Nevada and Texas for alleged offenses ranging from condoning abuse of inmates to plying politicians with undisclosed gifts while seeking to secure state contracts. The Huffington Post uploaded and annotated the documents — including court transcripts, police reports, audits and inspection records — uncovered during this investigation. Hover over the highlighted passages to see the source document behind each fact. [Click here to browse all the documents behind this report »](#)

In 2001, an 18-year-old committed to a Texas boot camp operated by one of Slattery's previous companies, Correctional Services Corp., came down with pneumonia and pleaded to see a doctor as he struggled to breathe. Guards accused the teen of faking it and forced him to do pushups in his own vomit, according to Texas law enforcement reports. After nine days of medical neglect, he died. That same year, auditors in Maryland found that staff at one of Slattery's juvenile facilities coaxed inmates to fight on Saturday mornings as a way to settle disputes from earlier in the week. In recent years, the company has failed to report riots, assaults and claims of sexual abuse at its juvenile prisons in Florida, according to a review of state records and accounts from former employees and inmates. Despite that history, Slattery's current company, Youth Services International, has retained and even expanded its contracts to operate juvenile prisons in several states. The company has capitalized on budgetary strains across the country as governments embrace privatization in pursuit of cost savings. Nearly 40 percent of the nation's juvenile delinquents are today committed to private facilities, according to the most recent federal data from 2011, up from about 33 percent twelve years earlier. Over the past two decades, more than 40,000 boys and girls in 16 states have gone through one of Slattery's prisons, boot camps or detention centers, according to a Huffington Post analysis of juvenile facility data. The private prison industry has long fueled its growth on the proposition that it is a boon to taxpayers, delivering better outcomes at lower costs than state facilities. But significant evidence undermines that argument: the tendency of young people to return to crime once they get out, for example, and long-term contracts that can leave states obligated to fill prison beds. The harsh conditions confronting youth inside YSI's facilities, moreover, show the serious problems that can arise when government hands over social services to private contractors and essentially walks away. Those held at YSI facilities across the country have frequently faced beatings, neglect, sexual abuse and unsanitary food over the past two decades, according to a HuffPost investigation that included interviews with 14 former employees and a review of thousands of pages of state audits, lawsuits, local police reports and probes by state and federal agencies. Out of more than 300 institutions surveyed, a YSI detention center in Georgia had the highest rate of youth alleging sexual assaults in the country, according to a recent report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. In Florida, where private contractors have in recent years taken control of all of the state's 3,300 youth prison beds, YSI now manages more than \$100 million in contracts, about 10 percent of the system. Its facilities have generated conspicuously large numbers of claims that guards have assaulted youth, according to a HuffPost compilation of state reports. A YSI facility in Palm Beach County had the highest rate of reported sexual assaults out of 36 facilities reviewed in Florida, the Bureau of Justice Statistics report found. The state's sweeping privatization of its juvenile incarceration system has produced some of the worst re-offending rates in the nation. More than 40 percent of youth offenders sent to one of Florida's juvenile prisons wind up arrested and convicted of another crime within a year of their release, according to state data. In New York state, where historically no youth offenders have been held in private institutions, 25 percent are convicted again within that timeframe. Slattery and other Youth Services International executives declined interview requests over several months. In an emailed response to written questions, a senior vice president, Jesse Williams, asserted that the company carefully looks after its charges and delivers value to taxpayers. "We are the best operators in the state of Florida, and that is why we continue to have contracts awarded to us," Williams said. "While there have been occasional issues, we are inspected regularly and overwhelmingly receive positive reports." He added that the company has introduced "independent, third-party reviews" of the programs listed in the Bureau of Justice Statistics report and has engaged national experts on prison sexual abuse in an effort to improve conditions. More than a decade has passed since a Florida judge tongue-lashed Correctional Services Corp., Slattery's former company, during a hearing convened to probe widespread complaints of violence at one of its facilities two hours north of Miami. Juvenile

Judge Ron Alvarez was so horrified by the descriptions of that particular institution — a fetid, graffiti-covered jail called the Pahokee Youth Development Center — that he compared it to a “Third World country that is controlled by ... some type of evil power.” In a recent interview, the same judge expressed amazement that Slattery has continued to run facilities in Florida right up to the present day. “I don’t know how the hell they still have business with the state,” Alvarez said. This is how. Federal Bureau of Prisons official Del Matthews, left, with James Slattery at a meeting with community residents in March 1989. (Richard Lee / Newsday)

Forging Connections: A one-time New York City hotelier who began renting out rooms to prisoners in 1989, Slattery has established a dominant perch in the juvenile corrections business through an astute cultivation of political connections and a crafty gaming of the private contracting system. Even as reports of negligence and poor treatment of inmates have piled up, his companies have kept their records clean by habitually pulling out of contracts before the government takes official action, HuffPost found. In Florida, his companies have exploited lax state oversight while leaning on powerful allies inside the government to keep the contracts flowing. Slattery, his wife, Diane, and other executives have been prodigious political rainmakers in Florida, donating more than \$400,000 to state candidates and committees over the last 15 years, according to HuffPost’s review. The recipient of the largest share of those dollars was the Florida Republican Party, which took in more than \$276,000 in that time. Former Florida Senate President Mike Haridopolos, an avid supporter of prison privatization, received more than \$15,000 from company executives during state and federal races. The company has given more in Florida over the past 15 years than the combined donations of Office Depot and Darden Restaurants, Inc., two of the state’s largest Fortune 500 corporations. Among the company’s lobbyists in Tallahassee is Jonathan Costello, who served as legislative affairs director for Republican Florida Gov. Rick Scott in 2011 and 2012. Gary Rutledge, another YSI lobbyist, served on Scott’s inaugural committee after his 2010 victory. “We regularly hire companies that have abysmal track records of performance, but great track records of political campaign contributions,” said Dan Gelber, a former Florida senator and state representative who has been critical of the state’s juvenile justice policies. Williams, the YSI spokesman, said the company is “committed to supporting people who we believe will be effective in a political position, regardless of whether they would have an impact in our industry.” Lobbyists, he added, “can be extremely helpful” in “clarifying to legislators the realities of the operations of juvenile facilities.” A former executive who worked with Slattery for five years in Florida said the company’s success in the state reflected two areas of expertise — relentless cost-cutting and political gamesmanship. “There was always the sense that I was working for a businessman who didn’t understand the system of juvenile justice,” said the former executive, who spoke on condition he not be named. “My mandate was to cut positions, cut programs, look for efficiencies — all the while making sure that the state we were contracting with remained happy. I always felt like there was more priority at the highest level given to managing political relationships than running the core of the business.” Over the years, YSI has brought in seasoned former government bureaucrats who are savvy about the often arcane federal and state processes through which private companies secure contracts to run public facilities. The company’s executive vice president, Woodrow Harper, is a former deputy secretary of the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice — now the company’s primary source of revenue. “It’s everything that’s wrong with politics rolled up in a package,” said Evan Jenne, a former Florida state representative who toured one of YSI’s youth facilities after local public defenders raised concerns. “You’re talking about society failing children. It’s politically motivated, and it’s money-motivated.”

Political Contributions from Private Prison Firms: Youth Services International \$418,110 G4S Youth Services \$28,000 Gulf Coast Youth Services \$7,000 Henry & Rilla White Foundation \$6,850 Eckerd Youth Alternatives \$6,700 Twin Oaks Juvenile Development \$1,600 Universal Health Services \$8,000 VisionQuest \$7,400 ThreeSprings \$1,000 Premier Behavioral Solutions \$2,000 Gateway Community Services \$1,155 Political contributions in the state of Florida since 1998 from contractors who handled residential facilities for the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice. Source: Influence Explorer. Officials at the state Department of Juvenile Justice did not respond to questions about YSI. A department spokeswoman, Meghan Speakes Collins, pointed to overall improvements the state has made in its contract monitoring process, such as conducting more interviews with randomly selected youth to get a better understanding of conditions and analyzing problematic trends such as high staff turnover. “Our primary concern is the health and safety of the youth in our care and we take any allegation of misconduct very seriously,” she wrote in an emailed statement. “We have a comprehensive reporting system in which any incident is thoroughly investigated and corrective action is taken as necessary.” Experts say the continued growth of for-profit prison operators like Youth Services International amounts

to a cautionary tale about the perils of privatization: In a drive to cut costs, Florida has effectively abdicated its responsibility for some of its most troubled children, leaving them in the hands of companies focused solely on the bottom line. “One of the problems with private corrections is that you are trying to squeeze profit margins out of an economic picture that doesn’t allow for very much,” said Bart Lubow, a leading juvenile justice expert who heads the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative. “So you either hire people for minimum wage who are afraid of the environment in which they work, or you don’t feed people properly. There are not a lot of margins.” **Rats in a Maze:** Florida logs reports of serious incidents that occur inside its juvenile prisons, but the state does not maintain a database that allows for the analysis of trends across the system. HuffPost obtained the documents through Florida’s public records law and compiled incident reports logged between 2008 and 2012. According to the data, YSI’s facilities generated a disproportionate share of reports of prison staff allegedly injuring youth offenders by using excessive force. Although YSI oversaw only about 9 percent of the state’s juvenile jail beds during the past five years, the company was responsible for nearly 15 percent of all reported cases of excessive force and injured youths. In 2012, 23 incidents of excessive force were reported at YSI facilities. By comparison, G4S Youth Services — the state’s largest private provider of youth prison beds — generated 21 such reports, despite overseeing nearly three times as many beds.

Among the other key findings from HuffPost’s investigation:

- Staff underreport serious incidents such as major fights and staff assaults in an effort to keep the state in the dark and avoid additional scrutiny – a violation of the company’s contracts as well as Department of Juvenile Justice rules requiring that contracted staff report such incidents to state authorities.
- Though state guidelines prohibit “unnecessarily harsh or indecent treatment,” YSI guards have frequently resorted to violence in confrontations with youth, slapping and choking inmates and sometimes fracturing bones, according to police reports. Former employees told HuffPost that YSI often fails to document such incidents.
- Staff turnover at YSI’s prisons is rampant, leaving inexperienced guards to manage a tough population.
- At YSI facilities, food is often in short supply and frequently undercooked.

Youth interviewed by HuffPost recounted being served bloody, raw chicken and sometimes finding flies inside pre-cooked dishes. In order to get enough food, youth are allowed to gamble through card games and sports bets while trading “picks” — the right to take someone else’s food at the next meal. Former employees recall going without basic supplies such as toilet paper, deodorant and tampons — also violations of department policy. They say they lacked the funds to provide activities for the youth held in YSI’s prisons. “We were kept like rats in a trap, in a maze,” said Angela Phillips, a former shift supervisor at Broward Girls Academy in Pembroke Pines, northwest of Miami. “There was no outlet and no stimulation, so they would just turn on each other, and turn on staff. That’s how it was day in, day out.” The company spokesman, Jesse Williams, dismissed claims that YSI fails to report incidents, saying the company always complies with state guidelines. “Our reporting process is the best in the industry,” he said. He argued that YSI’s employee turnover rate and salaries are in line with the industry average. “The job is a difficult one,” he said. “Despite our best efforts to assess a candidate’s fitness for the position, which include employment and background screening and proper training, we don’t know of their true suitability until they are well into the job.” Local public defenders and groups such as the Southern Poverty Law Center have for years forwarded concerns about YSI facilities to the state, but Florida has done little to investigate allegations of verbal and physical abuse. In the summer of 2012, after the Broward County Public Defender’s Office sent a letter to the Department of Juvenile Justice outlining issues with food and fighting at a different facility, the state inspector handed out a pro-forma questionnaire to about 20 boys there. Last year, the state declined to renew YSI’s contract for that program, a 154-bed facility called Thompson Academy where state officials over the years had documented frequent violence and failures to report serious incidents. But that decision was not due to poor performance, according to a letter the state sent to the company in August 2012. Indeed, this year, the state awarded YSI another contract to manage a facility less than a mile away. “I always think it’s ironic that you can’t get a job as a janitor for the Department of Juvenile Justice — understandably so — if you have any kind of conviction on your record,” said Marie Osborne, the chief juvenile public defender in Miami-Dade County, who has followed YSI for more than a decade. “They’re scrupulous with individual employees, but a corporation can have this corporate rap sheet, and it’s no problem. They can get contracts.” **Timeline:** The rise of James Slattery’s private prison empire: New York City Mayor Ed Koch with the Rev. Jesse Jackson at a press conference at City Hall discussing the plight of the

homeless in the wake of four deaths at the Brooklyn Arms Welfare Hotel. (Misha Erwit / NY Daily News Archive via Getty Images) **Government Pockets:** Before James Slattery came to embody the for-profit corrections business, he built a career in another industry that thrives on high occupancy rates: hotels. A graduate of St. John's University in Queens, N.Y., Slattery worked for the Sheraton Hotel corporation beginning in the 1970s. While working at a hotel in Queens, Slattery became close to his boss's son, Morris Horn. The two joined forces with other investors to start a property management company, buying up older hotels across New York City. But as New York's real estate market dried up in the 1980s amid fears of crime, Slattery and his business partners began searching for more rewarding pursuits. They discovered the growing — and lucrative — world of doing business with the government. With President Ronald Reagan in office, the 1980s marked one of the first major movements toward the privatization of government services. Outsourcing government functions to private companies was widely embraced as a means of seeking taxpayer relief. His administration and some in Congress floated the idea of privatizing U.S. Customs inspections, electrical power utilities and, eventually, the management of federal prison systems. In New York City, property owners learned that if they opened up their buildings to growing numbers of homeless people and families on welfare, they could capture local and federal anti-poverty dollars — a steady stream of revenue. So-called welfare hotels proliferated, becoming de facto warehouses for people grappling with mental illness, drug addiction and extreme poverty. The hotels were among the most squalid buildings in the city, racking up hundreds of code violations. Slattery's company managed a particularly notorious example, the Brooklyn Arms, a once-lavish hotel across from the Brooklyn Academy of Music that had deteriorated into a ramshackle blight on the neighborhood. The property was infested with rodents and cockroaches, and some rooms lacked running water. In 1986, two young men scuffling in a hallway in the Brooklyn Arms fell down a broken elevator shaft and plunged 15 stories to their deaths. A few weeks later, four children who had been left alone at the hotel for hours died in a fire. By 1989, Mayor Ed Koch's administration had succeeded in closing many of the city's crime-ridden welfare hotels, including the Brooklyn Arms. **Slattery's management group soon set its sights on a new pot of government money:** prison halfway houses. Slattery and Horn proposed leasing out floors of their hotels as re-entry housing for newly released federal inmates, taking advantage of a surge in prison populations nationwide. In 1989, one of their hotels, a midtown Manhattan property called LeMarquis, opened some of its rooms to federal inmates. Slattery and Horn called the new company Esmor, Inc. They laid out ambitious expansion goals that included running a variety of facilities that would house federal prisoners, undocumented immigrants and juvenile delinquents. "We saw a significant demand," Slattery told Forbes magazine in 1995, "and limited supply." As federal prison officials awarded Esmor an emergency contract to operate a halfway house in Brooklyn, local community leaders challenged the decision, questioning why the same people who had managed problem-plagued welfare hotels should be given fresh responsibility. "We do not want that group doing anything up here because they are not trustworthy and do not deserve our support," Democratic New York state Sen. Velmanette Montgomery said at a community meeting in 1989, according to Newsday. Less than three years after Esmor opened LeMarquis to former inmates, federal inspectors from the Bureau of Prisons found that parts of the building were turning to ruin. Inspectors documented "low-paid, untrained employees, poor building conditions, from vermin and leaky plumbing to exposed electrical wires and other fire hazards, and inadequate, barely edible food." Federal prison officials were close to canceling the contract in 1992, according to media accounts at the time, but they said conditions at the facility started to improve after frequent inspections. In a federal lawsuit, one LeMarquis employee, Richard Moore, alleged that he had been severely beaten by another employee — at the direction of management — after he reported poor conditions to federal inspectors. In another federal lawsuit, four female inmates asserted that they had been raped and assaulted by Esmor's "resident advocate" — the employee who was supposed to protect inmates by handling their grievances. The female inmates' cases were settled; Moore's case was administratively closed, after he became ill. By the mid-1990s, Esmor had expanded far beyond its New York City origins, winning contracts to manage a boot camp for young boys and adults outside of Forth Worth, Texas, and immigration detention centers in New Jersey and Washington state. As the company grew and sought more contracts, executives hired knowledgeable government insiders. In New York, Esmor added political associates linked to U.S. Rep. Edolphus Towns, a Democrat who represented the Brooklyn district where the company ran one of its first federal halfway houses. Fueling a push into the immigration detention business, Esmor brought on Richard P. Staley, a former acting director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service's central office in Washington, D.C., and added to its board Stuart M. Gerson, a

former U.S. attorney general. At the time, the Justice Department oversaw both the INS and the Bureau of Prisons — two of Esmor's biggest customers. The company also hired James C. Poland, who had worked in the Texas prison system, where Esmor was angling for new contracts. All of these recruits positioned the company for winnings. In 1994, Slattery and his partners cashed in with an initial public offering on the New York Stock Exchange valued at \$5.2 million. Just a year after going public, a riot broke out at Esmor's immigration detention center near Newark International Airport in New Jersey, a holding tank for immigrants caught trying to enter the country illegally. As an organized group of inmates began to assault guards, staff abandoned their posts and fled the jail. An INS official on site ordered the guards to go back in to quell the riot, but they refused. The detainees eventually took over the facility, using pieces of tables and chairs to break through security glass and destroy much of its interior. It took nearly five hours for outside authorities to regain control. In a statement after the riot, Slattery said Esmor was "deeply disturbed and appalled by the apparent conduct" of some employees at the facility. But the company characterized the incident as a "local problem not reflected in any of its operations elsewhere around the country." A subsequent INS investigation found that staff training by Esmor had been abysmal. Guards taunted and humiliated inmates, and Esmor frequently failed to alert the INS about staff turnover issues. According to an INS interview with a facility administrator, Esmor's corporate policy was to "keep INS in the dark as much as possible about any problems or incidents which occurred." Joyce Antila Phipps, an immigration attorney who had several clients at the Newark facility, recalled many complaints about male guards peering into female group showers. The report found that many detainees also refused to board their deportation flights, because Esmor guards hadn't returned their money and valuables. "There was a total lack of training of the staff," Phipps said. "And on top of that, the staff knew they could get away with murder, so they robbed people blind." The INS concluded in its investigation that Esmor's management was marked by "a continuing cycle of contract violations" and a "general failure to follow sound management practices." But the INS did not fine Esmor or cancel its contract to manage the facility. Instead, the agency allowed Esmor to turn that contract into \$6 million in cash, selling it to a rival prison giant, the Corrections Corporation of America. James 'Jim' Slattery, chief executive of Correctional Services Corp., at his offices in Sarasota City Center in May 1997. (Barry McCarthy / Sarasota Herald-Tribune / SILVER IMAGE Photo Agency) **Sunshine State Dysfunction:** Even before his operations in the northeast were tarnished by the detention center uprising, Slattery was looking to move Esmor's headquarters south, to the Gulf Coast of Florida. In 1996, he changed the company's name to Correctional Services Corp. Slattery had already won several contracts to operate youth facilities in the Sunshine State before the immigrant riot, and Florida looked to be a ripe base for expansion. Beginning in the late 1980s, the state had started handing its juvenile inmates to private companies in an effort to cut costs. By the following decade, this business opportunity was growing swiftly. Beset by a run of murders by teenagers that had spooked the public, Florida began intensifying the penalties facing juvenile offenders. The state asked for bids from private companies, anticipating a major buildout of juvenile prisons. In 1995, Slattery won two contracts to operate facilities in Florida. The two new prisons were originally intended to house boys between 14 and 19 who had been criminally convicted as adults. But the state realized it had enough beds for that population already, so the Department of Juvenile Justice began placing some of its delinquent boys in the facilities — youth who were meant to be housed in far less punitive settings. In a news release announcing the groundbreaking for the prisons, Slattery called the new facilities "the future of American corrections." Among the new Correctional Services Corp. prisons was the Pahokee Youth Development Center, which sat in the middle of sugarcane fields in a rural, swampy part of the state northwest of Miami. Local leaders welcomed the economic development opportunities that came with prison construction. Pahokee Mayor Ramon Horta Jr. even joined the company as a project manager. Recruiting qualified local staff was a challenge, however, particularly at the rates the company was offering — \$15,995 per year. The Pahokee facility opened to youth in early 1997. Within months, local judges were hearing complaints about abusive staff, prison-like conditions and food full of maggots, according to recent interviews and state audits and court transcripts from the time. Miami-Dade County Circuit Judge Tom Petersen drove an hour and a half to Pahokee in 1997 and started snapping pictures. As a juvenile judge, he thought he was sending boys to a moderate-risk program with outdoor wilderness activities. What he found was a hardcore prison. "I came back with all those pictures and I raised hell about it," Petersen recalled in an interview. He saw small 12-year-olds confined alongside much stronger 17-year-olds. Boys were served food he called "inedible." That same year, local public defenders asked another judge to move children from Pahokee into a less punitive program. Follow-up reviews by state-contracted auditors confirmed the

operation was dysfunctional. One youth with unpaid prison gambling debts had been so severely beaten by three others that he required surgery to have his spleen removed. In a separate incident, four staff members, including two managers, allowed two boys who had a disagreement to fight for nearly 10 minutes as they stood by and watched. No one reported the incident, and no one took the boys to see a nurse. Sugarcane farmers in that part of Florida burn their crops to make them easier to harvest during the summer and fall, sending rats and mice scurrying from the fields. The reviews said the facility wasn't paying enough for pest control to manage the influx. A special state monitoring report from October 1998 found medical records showing "instances of youth being bitten by spiders and rodents." Monitors from the state also found that Correctional Services Corp. officials were holding youth past their scheduled release dates in an effort to generate more revenue — a serious violation of the company's contract and state law. Judges throughout the state began demanding that Pahokee be closed. During a July 1999 hearing, Palm Beach County Juvenile Judge Ron Alvarez warned that keeping the facility open without improvements courted disaster. "Treatment of these children comes dangerously close to being inhumane," the judge said. "We're dealing with human beings. We're not dealing with an automobile that can wait to be repaired." The state stopped admitting new youth to Pahokee in August 1999, after the facility failed an annual audit. But once again, the state government did not cancel Slattery's contract. The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice instead allowed the company to withdraw from the contract eight months early. In a brief news release at the time, the company said it was closing Pahokee and three other facilities across the country that were "unprofitable" in the most recent quarter. There was no mention of the state's findings. Slattery said the company would continue to review facilities for profitability to ensure the "highest quality services for our contracting agencies and a fair return for our shareholders." Residents of the Charles H. Hickey, Jr. School play basketball behind razor-wire fencing as Maryland Gov. Robert Ehrlich speaks during a press conference in June 2005. The governor announced the closing of the facility in light of an investigation by the Department of Justice that found civil rights violations during Correctional Services Corp.'s tenure. (Matt Houston / AP) **National Troubles:** In the midst of the abuse allegations at Pahokee, Correctional Services Corp. was enjoying robust earnings. By 1999, annual revenues reached more than \$223 million, up from \$99 million three years before. That year, the company acquired a rival, Maryland-based Youth Services International, started by W. James Hindman, the founder and former chairman of Jiffy Lube International, Inc. In addition to five new facilities in Florida, the deal gave the company access to new markets in the mid-Atlantic and the Midwest. With more facilities to run, the problems only intensified. In June 1999, a 16-year-old inmate sexually assaulted a female staff member who was left alone in an unlocked building at the Charles H. Hickey, Jr. School outside of Baltimore, according to state court documents. Problems at Hickey became so dire that the Justice Department initiated an investigation. Its subsequent report, released in 2004, concluded that Hickey staff repeatedly tried to conceal evidence of physical assaults, disclosing only about two-thirds of all incidents. The facility was so inadequately staffed that boys were entering other boys' rooms and assaulting them. The Justice Department found that the conditions violated "the constitutional and federal statutory rights of the youth residents." The report landed less than two weeks after the company's contract ended and the state took over the facility. The company incurred no penalties and the state agreed to implement reforms, but ultimately closed the facility the following year. "These kids were just warehoused," said Stacey Gurian-Sherman, a juvenile justice advocate and former state juvenile justice staffer in Maryland who helped expose some of the problems at Correctional Services Corp. facilities. "The staff is untrained, and they end up working double and triple eight-hour shifts. So the kids get abused at worst, neglected at least, and they come out with many more problems than when they walked in." At a Florida Correctional Services Corp. facility called Cypress Creek, north of Tampa, six juveniles escaped between 2000 and 2001. In 2001, at a youth prison run by the company in Nevada, juvenile inmates rioted and took over the facility. After the disturbance, police in Las Vegas charged two former female guards with having sexual relations with inmates. Both women pleaded guilty. That same year, 18-year-old Bryan Alexander died of pneumonia while confined at a Correctional Services Corp. boot camp outside of Fort Worth, Texas. A report from the Texas Rangers, the state's premier law enforcement unit, laid out a chilling portrait of neglect. Other inmates at the facility had told investigators that they knew something was wrong with Alexander in early January. He had stopped eating, his lips turned purple, and he shivered even while taking hot showers. He begged a nurse and drill instructors to take him to the hospital, but they told him he was faking it, according to the Texas Rangers' report. As Alexander pleaded for help, one drill instructor told him to "go ahead and die already," according to the investigative report. The nurse, Knyvett Reyes, told him to stop

lying about his illness. Other inmates at the facility saw Alexander coughing up blood into trash cans and frequently struggling to breathe, according to the report. A week after he began complaining, staff finally took Alexander to the hospital. He died there two days later. A doctor told the Texas Rangers that Alexander could have survived had staff taken him to get a chest X-ray when he first reported feeling sick. In 2002, a judge found Reyes guilty of negligent homicide. Correctional Services Corp. lost a separate wrongful death lawsuit, and had to pay \$38 million to Alexander's family. By that time, the company's lobbying activities were also coming under scrutiny. In New York, state auditors and prosecutors began probing a Democratic state assemblywoman, Gloria Davis of the Bronx, for allegedly accepting gifts from Correctional Services Corp. as an inducement to help the company win contracts. As Davis ultimately pleaded, the company had for four years supplied its vans to transport her to and from the state capitol in Albany free of charge. In exchange, she helped the company secure contracts to operate halfway houses in New York City. Davis pleaded guilty to accepting bribes in connection with Correctional Services Corp. and a scheme involving a separate non-profit group. She was sentenced to three months in jail and nearly five years' probation, and agreed to never again seek public office. At the time of her 2003 pleading, Correctional Services Corp. no longer had contracts in New York. But an investigation by New York's Temporary State Commission on Lobbying found widespread evidence of earlier undisclosed gifts to state lawmakers, including free rides and dinners. Correctional Services Corp. agreed to a settlement in which the company admitted no wrongdoing but paid a \$300,000 fine for failing to document the gifts. It was then the highest fine ever assessed by the commission, besting a \$250,000 fine doled out to Donald Trump and his business associates for failing to disclose money spent lobbying against new casinos in upstate New York. Destinee Bowers, 19, poses at her home Wednesday, May 29, 2013, in Orlando, Fla. (Chris McGonigal / The Huffington Post) **A Clean Record:** Even as the evidence mounted that Correctional Services Corp. had a tendency to land in trouble, Florida did not hesitate to give the company new contracts. Indeed, as the company pursued a fresh round of contracts in 2003, none of its scrapes with authorities in other states emerged as an issue in Florida's oversight process, according to a review of hundreds of pages of state contracting documents. The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice looks at past performance when choosing contractors, but evaluators rely on companies to self-report their contracting history. In some of the most egregious instances of negligence and failure to report serious incidents, however, Slattery's companies pulled out of their contracts early, rather than wait for the government to take action. In other cases, the contract's end date worked in the company's favor. Executives could then technically say they had never had a contract canceled. Moreover, state officials don't examine a potential contractor's record in other states if the company already has contracts in Florida. Jesse Williams, the spokesman for Slattery's current company, asserted that the state is well aware of past problems. "This is a close-knit industry with a very high volume of reporting and connectivity," he said. Over the last decade, Slattery's company has secured 13 contracts in Florida collectively worth more than \$175 million. In 2005, Slattery sold Correctional Services Corp. to a rival private prison company, the GEO Group Inc. The deal netted him more than \$6.7 million in severance and stock proceeds, according to securities filings. In a complex arrangement, Slattery gave up a portfolio of 14 immigration detention facilities and adult prisons across the country as part of a \$62 million sale, while buying back one division for \$3.75 million: Youth Services International. As this new Slattery venture continued to grow in Florida, the old problems surfaced again. At one of its largest facilities, a program for boys near Fort Lauderdale called Thompson Academy, staff members were quitting in droves, or being fired after violent incidents. Three years into the contract, in 2006, a state review found that 96 percent of the staff had left during the previous year. Eight cases of child abuse by staff were ultimately substantiated that year, according to contract documents. According to HuffPost's review of police reports, internal Department of Juvenile Justice investigations and youth grievance forms obtained through public records requests, Florida facilities run by Youth Services International continue to be plagued by violence, high turnover and unprofessional staff. Youth counselors for YSI — those who work directly with juvenile inmates — earn about \$10.50 an hour, or just under \$22,000 per year, according to contract proposals from 2010. Because of frequent turnover and absences among staff, double shifts are common, adding additional stress to the job, former employees said. One night in July 2012, a juvenile inmate at Thompson Academy was lining up with other boys after taking a shower when he realized that the boxer shorts he had been issued were too big. According to a police report and an interview with the inmate's mother, the boy asked a female staff member if he could have another pair. She said no. So he asked another male counselor. According to the police report, the second counselor turned to the boy, grabbed his shirt and started to choke him. Another male staffer

pulled the counselor off, but he continued to go after the boy. Staff removed the boy and took him to his room while leading the staffer who choked him to another part of the hallway. But after a few minutes, the same counselor charged into the boy's room and tried to choke him again, said the mother, who spoke with staff and her son after the incident. Several other youth had to hold the counselor back. "Why did he still have access to my son 15 minutes later?" asked the boy's mother, who requested that her name not be used in order to protect her son's identity. "Why wasn't he removed immediately?" Her son was unavailable for an interview because he has since been arrested and incarcerated at another YSI facility. During a similar incident in February 2012, a Thompson Academy staff member got into an argument with a 13-year-old boy who wanted to get a folder with schoolwork from another room. The staffer told him no, but the boy disobeyed. According to a therapist and other witnesses mentioned in a police report of the incident, the staff member started choking the boy and picked him up. The therapist said the staff member's actions "were preventing [the boy] from breathing and she feared from [sic] his life." After she screamed at the staff member to let the boy go, he dropped him to the floor, leaving the boy with a bloody nose. **When the Pembroke Pines Police Department called the staffer to follow up, he replied:** "This ain't no big deal," while refusing to answer questions, according to the report. At YSI's Broward Girls Academy, a 30-bed program less than a mile away from Thompson, 18-year-old Destinee Bowers didn't want to go to an evening church service last year. Normally she was permitted to stay in a dayroom, she said, but staff members declined to watch her, instead ordering her to go to church. According to Bowers, when she refused, a staff member tried to pull her out of her bed. She resisted, she said, prompting the staffer to choke her. "I was trying to tell her, 'I can't resist, you've got my arms, you've got my throat,'" Bowers recalled. She said once the staff member released her, she started throwing up. She asked to call the 24-hour abuse hotline that is supposed to be available to youth at all times, according to state law. The staffer told her she had to wait until the facility administrator showed up in the morning. The next day, the administrator told Bowers she was not allowed to call because she had resisted. "We simply don't believe this is true," said Williams, the YSI spokesman. "There are multiple ways for detainees to report abuse." Former staff and youth at the facility recalled fights erupting almost every day. "They'd never try to do anything, they'd never try to help us, to keep our minds occupied," said Bowers, who was in the program from December 2011 to August 2012. "We were always bored, which caused a lot of drama." The weekends were a "free-for-all," said Angela Phillips, a former shift supervisor at Broward Girls. One weekend in the summer of 2012, at a time when staffing was particularly lean, a riot broke out, Phillips said. Girls began yelling and hitting one another. The three staff members on duty intervened, but the violence escalated until staff from another facility arrived. The morning after, there was blood on the floors and ceilings, said one youth who witnessed the fight. Another large fight broke out in the showers last fall, said another former Broward Girls inmate who asked that her name not be used because she is under 18. A lone staff member tried to break up a fight involving nine girls, she said, while another staff member walked away. Williams said there have been incidents between inmates that required staff intervention, but he denied that anything termed a "riot" ever occurred at Broward Girls Academy. In another example of negligence at the facility, staff mistakenly barred the same girl from visiting her mother because administrators confused her with another inmate whose mother had brought cash into the facility during visiting hours — a major violation of contraband policy. Starting last December, a new group of girls was transferred into the facility, after a program in the northern part of the state shut down. Violent fights erupted over turf, the former inmate said. "They were just psychotic," she said. "I was like, 'I've had enough of this, I've been here for 10 months.'" Earlier this year, the juvenile public defender in Palm Beach County, Barbara White, managed to get the inmate transferred out of Broward Girls, citing the chronic violence there, she said in an interview. Yet despite the girl's account, and those of four staff and youth who witnessed the summer 2012 riot in the facility, there are no police reports or Florida Department of Juvenile Justice incident reports describing these events. Bowers and Chelsea Fernandez, 19, who was also at Broward Girls last year, said they remembered YSI staff from nearby Thompson Academy coming over to quell the riot. But they didn't recall any police or state investigation. Phillips, the former shift supervisor, said it was rare for YSI to call in outside authorities lest it trigger greater scrutiny from the state. "They don't want the attention," Phillips said. "In order to keep your contract, you have to make it seem like you were under control." She said the **Broward Girls facility was so frequently short of basic items like toilet paper, laundry detergent, tampons and deodorant that management instructed staff to ration:** on some days, fewer than five squares of toilet paper per girl. "We didn't uplift them in any way," Phillips said of the inmates. "They never felt good about themselves. It just added to the stress level that was in there."

Thompson Academy, the facility for boys, was one of YSI's most troubled institutions until it closed last year as part of what the state called its "Long Range Program Plan" to phase out larger juvenile facilities. It was also one of the most profitable. With 154 beds, the contract was worth \$13 million. From the beginning, escapes, fights and abuse by staff were frequent. In its first two years, Thompson failed numerous state reviews. Yet it remained open for nine years. A 2010 lawsuit from the Southern Poverty Law Center referred to youth who described Thompson Academy as a "frightening and violent place" where juveniles were denied medical care when abused. "Children are choked and slammed head first into concrete walls, their arms and fingers are bent back and twisted to inflict pain for infractions as minor as failing to follow an order to stand up," the lawsuit said. The company settled the lawsuit in 2011; the terms remain confidential. Under the state's contract guidelines, allegations of sexual abuse require immediate reporting to the Department of Juvenile Justice's Central Communications Center. But local police and state authorities did not learn of alleged sexual abuse at the same facility until a boy made his third complaint, according to an internal state investigation and local police reports. A boy who said he was forced to give oral sex to a male guard on three different occasions first reported the abuse in March 2010. In a police report from October of that year, a **Pembroke Pines officer noted**: "This is the third time this victim has alleged sexual abuse." "Absolutely no paperwork exists with the Thompson Academy as to internal investigations on this incident or on allegations that occurred there," the report said. A former employee at Thompson Academy, who asked not to be identified because he still works in the field, said staff were often told not to report physical incidents that were considered minor. "They said we've got to get our contracts," the employee said. "We don't want these points against us."

This is the second in a two-part series.

Youth Services International confronted a potentially expensive situation. It was early 2004, only three months into the private prison company's \$9.5 million contract to run Thompson Academy, a juvenile prison in Florida, and already the facility had become a scene of documented violence and neglect. The Huffington Post uploaded and annotated the documents — including court transcripts, police reports, audits and inspection records — uncovered during this investigation. Hover over the highlighted passages to see the source document behind each fact. Browse the documents behind this report » One guard had fractured an inmate's elbow after the boy refused instructions to throw away a cup, according to incident reports. Another guard had slammed a boy's head into the floor after an argument. The prison was infested with ants and cockroaches, toilets were frequently clogged and children reported finding bugs in their meager portions of food. "From day one, it was hell," said Jerry Blanton, a former monitor with the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, who was then tasked with inspecting Thompson Academy. Conditions appeared so foul and perilous that he told his supervisors that he "emphatically recommended that the facility be closed," according to a memo about the discussions. What happened next speaks to how Youth Services International has managed to forge a lucrative business running private juvenile prisons in Florida and 15 other states even amid mounting evidence of abuse. The company used connections with state officials to complain that Blanton was intimidating staff. Less than a week later, the state removed him as monitor of the facility. Two months after that, he was fired. Thompson remained open, and Youth Services International retained its contract to operate it. In the nine years since, the company has won an additional eight contracts in Florida, bringing 4,100 more youths through its facilities, according to state records. All the while, complaints of abuse and neglect have remained constant. Florida leads the nation in placing state prisons in the hands of private, profit-making companies. In recent years, the state has privatized the entirety of its \$183 million juvenile commitment system — the nation's third-largest, trailing only California and Texas. Florida not only relies on private contractors to self-report escapes and incidents of violence and abuse, but the state's Department of Juvenile Justice routinely awards contracts to private prison operators without scrutinizing their records, a Huffington Post investigation has found. "We thought DJJ was going to be our biggest ally," said Gordon Weekes, the chief juvenile public defender in Broward County, who has for years complained to the state about conditions inside two YSI prisons there. "They turned out to be the ally of the corporations, and the ally of the system." Florida's permissive oversight has allowed Youth Services International to essentially game the system since entering the state more than a decade ago. Despite contractual requirements that the company report serious incidents at its facilities, YSI routinely fails to document problems, sanitizes those reports it does submit and pressures inmates to withhold evidence of mistreatment, according to interviews with 14 former YSI employees. "The state is not doing enough," said Wanda Williams, a former staffer at YSI's Palm Beach Juvenile Correctional Facility, who quit in

2010 after growing disgusted with the violence and squalid conditions she saw inside the prison. "Because if they were, that place should have been shut down by now." Executives at YSI declined requests for interviews made over the last four months. In an emailed response to questions, Senior Vice President Jesse Williams said the company's juvenile prisons are some of the best in Florida. He added that the state's Department of Juvenile Justice rigorously inspects the facilities. "The DJJ has a very meticulous monitoring system," he said. "There are numerous announced and unannounced visits to each facility to check for quality assurance and contract compliance, and we do very well in our reviews." Williams denied that the company fails to report serious incidents to the state. "Our policy is to report everything," he said. "In fact, we communicate to our employees that if there are any doubts about whether it is a reportable incident to go ahead and notify DJJ." Senior officials at the Department of Juvenile Justice declined interview requests. The agency refused to discuss specific details of HuffPost's findings, though a spokeswoman issued a statement asserting the department is committed to ensuring that youth in its system "remain safe and are given every opportunity to thrive." She said contract oversight is one of the agency's top priorities. "With 100 percent of the agency's residential services provided through contractors, the contract selection and renewal process is paramount to our success," said the spokeswoman, Meghan Speakes Collins, in an email. Since 2011, when Republican Gov. Rick Scott took office in Florida, the department has "revamped" its review of contractors, she added, by engaging in deeper statistical analysis of trends such as high staff turnover and the number of altercations between staff and youth.

A Prison Empire Through the Years: For more than a decade, James F. Slattery focused largely on incarcerating adults and undocumented immigrants through his for-profit prison business. In 2005, he sold off the adult division and shifted entirely into the juvenile market.

YEAR 1989, FACILITIES 2, TOTAL BEDS 245, YOUTH BEDS 0. Bed counts are specified by contract and may not reflect the number of prisoners. Sources: Securities and Exchange Commission, Youth Services International website via The Wayback Machine. Former employees say Youth Services International has maintained a pristine image in the state's official accounts in part by massaging the paperwork. Riots often go unreported, meaning law enforcement officers never arrive to investigate or document evidence of problems, these sources say. Staff training sessions tend to be conducted in a perfunctory fashion, with little effect – but they are nearly always well-documented and up to date. "The paperwork was spotless," said Angela Phillips, a former shift supervisor at Broward Girls Academy in Pembroke Pines, northwest of Miami. "But if you go to a facility that has no toilet paper, no laundry detergent, no underwear or bras, it seems like somebody would have raised a red flag."

Annual quality assurance reviews play a major role in determining whether the state renews a juvenile prison contract. Under Florida guidelines, a private juvenile prison that fails this test comes up for review again within six months. A subsequent failure can result in contract termination. Yet these reviews often fail to probe conditions inside facilities, merely assessing whether required policies are in place, not necessarily whether they are followed. When the Department of Juvenile Justice does examine actual conditions, its reviews often rely on surveys of staff and inmates, as opposed to interviews and written testimony. "They rely too much on what the providers tell them, and not enough on what the children tell them," said David Utter, the director of Florida policy at the Southern Poverty Law Center, who has followed the rise of YSI and was involved in a lawsuit alleging abuse at Thompson Academy.

"Quality assurance is looking at contract adherence, whether they're meeting the general terms of the contract, not the goals of the rehabilitation of the youth," explained Weekes, the Broward County public defender. "They do a cursory review of the youth. They look more at whether [the contractors] are record-keeping properly." HuffPost reviewed logs documenting complaints inside state youth prisons recorded between 2008 and 2012. Those logs show that several of the YSI facilities that received positive "quality assurance" reviews also generated an outsize share of staff arrests, youth injuries and allegations of excessive force. Bart Lubow, a juvenile justice expert with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, says such reviews tend to measure contractual compliance rather than what actually happens to youth inside the facilities. "How many people got hurt? Are kids learning anything? Any of the things that a parent would care about, or that a taxpayer ought to care about, are not at the heart of this stuff," he said. According to Speakes Collins, the department spokeswoman, earlier this year the agency began conducting more inspections and more frequent interviews with youth across the system in an effort to pinpoint programs with a high incidence of violence and to discover whether problems are being covered up. Youth Services International became skilled at navigating the state's contracting system in part by hiring the very people who developed it. Woodrow Harper, the company's executive vice president, was a deputy secretary at the Department of Juvenile Justice when the agency was first formed in 1994. The

company's vice president of contract compliance, Dorothy Xanos, also previously worked for the department, helping to develop some of the state's first quality assurance standards. Damon Nunn, who runs YSI's Palm Beach juvenile facility, used to be the state monitor at one of the company's programs in South Florida. State probes of mistreatment claims typically end with inconclusive evidence. Only about a quarter of cases across the state system involving allegations of abuse by staff are ever substantiated, according to a HuffPost tabulation of investigations logged by the inspector general's office at the Department of Juvenile Justice. Many are simply ruled "inconclusive" when staff say one thing and youth say another, despite trends indicating that problems are systemic. At a YSI facility in St. Augustine in 2009, more than 25 separate children accused staff and management at the facility of preventing them from calling the state's abuse hotline, according to an internal investigation by the DJJ. All the cases were found to be inconclusive. Even in state-run facilities, outside authorities found that cases of abuse went undocumented. The U.S. Justice Department's civil rights division noted many concerns about state oversight in an investigation of a violence-ridden state juvenile prison in north Florida two years ago. Federal investigators concluded that problems inside the institution indicated a "failed system of oversight and accountability" across Florida's youth prisons. The state closed the facility before the Justice Department finished its report, citing a lack of funds. In a follow-up letter to the DOJ in January 2012, Gov. Rick Scott challenged the "unsupported suggestion" that problems in Florida's juvenile justice programs were systemic. "Nonetheless, my administration remains committed to review and reform," he wrote. Former Department of Juvenile Justice officials say that because Florida has turned over its youth prison system to contractors like YSI, the state is effectively complicit in allowing problems to fester at private facilities. With a fully outsourced system, there is little incentive to crack down on contractors, former staffers say. "They don't want the providers to look bad, because they don't have anyone else to provide this service," said a former Department of Juvenile Justice executive staffer, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of jeopardizing a continued career in the field. "Bottom line, the state of Florida doesn't want responsibility for these kids." Playground and buildings at the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys in Marianna, Fla., in 1968. (State Archives of Florida / Florida Memory) **Troubled Past:** Such pronouncements have dogged authorities in Florida for decades. In the early 1980s, lawyers with the American Civil Liberties Union began investigating reports of horrendous conditions and mistreatment inside Florida's three "training schools" for juvenile delinquents. One institution on the Florida panhandle, the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys – then among the largest youth jails in the country – had gained a reputation for extraordinary brutality and neglect. In 1983, the ACLU joined with another juvenile rights group to sue the state for its treatment of inmates at Dozier and two other facilities. According to the lawsuit, guards hog-tied children, forcing them to lay on their stomachs on concrete slabs for hours at a time while their hands and feet were bound behind them in shackles and handcuffs. The state rarely screened youth for psychological problems when they arrived, effectively abandoning those who were developmentally disabled or suffering from mental illness. To this day, former Dozier inmates continue to push state law enforcement to investigate the deaths of dozens of inmates that occurred there from the turn of the 20th century through the early 1970s. Forensic anthropologists from the University of South Florida have identified an estimated 50 unmarked graves on the school's site. Under a consent decree in 1987, the state agreed to reforms, including a promise to transition toward smaller facilities with more dedicated treatment plans for the mentally ill and sexually abused. As part of the agreement, the state gave a federal judge and a court-appointed monitor oversight of Florida's entire juvenile justice system. The federal monitor, a nationally recognized juvenile incarceration expert named Paul DeMuro, felt the state wasn't moving quickly enough to adopt reforms. Six years into the agreement he resigned in frustration, concluding in a series of reports that the quality and monitoring of the state's new programs were "sorely suspect." A few months after DeMuro resigned, in early 1994, state juvenile justice officials convinced U.S. District Judge Maurice Paul to release Florida from federal monitoring, arguing that the state had the proper controls in place to effectively treat and rehabilitate the youth under its care. The decision coincided with a rush to construct new youth prisons across the state. Several headline-grabbing murders by Florida teenagers in the early 1990s had sparked fears in the tourism industry, and state politicians began toughening penalties for young offenders. "Some of the top criminologists were basically scaring the hell out of people, saying, 'We've got this wave of new barbarians at the door,'" said Barry Krisberg, a criminal justice expert who is director of research and policy at the University of California, Berkeley's Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy. "It's true that youth crime rates were rising. But they were projecting that this was going to double, triple. It was outrageous." Amid the prison-building boom, James F.

Slattery and his company – then named Correctional Services Corp. – embarked on what would eventually grow into a rewarding business relationship with the state of Florida. Slattery’s company had previously been confined largely to Texas, New York and New Jersey. In 1995, it won three contracts in Florida, and then moved its headquarters to Sarasota, on the Gulf Coast. Problems emerged almost immediately. Juvenile court judges from Miami to West Palm Beach began fielding complaints about fetid conditions, violence and staff abuse at one Correctional Services Corp. facility, the 350-bed Pahokee Youth Development Center. DeMuro, the former federal monitor, was brought in by public defenders in Miami to inspect Pahokee in 1997. He described a “negative sub-culture” where “larger and stronger kids can take advantage of weaker kids.” Staff only contributed to the vile atmosphere, he found. “Staff often curse at youngsters, talk about their family situations,” DeMuro testified in a court hearing about conditions at Pahokee that year. “There is an inappropriate use of force by banging kids against the wall and taking them down.” Jesse Williams, the current company spokesman, acknowledged that Correctional Services Corp. had “some issues that we dealt with effectively 15 years ago.” By 1999, problems at Pahokee had become so dire that Correctional Services Corp. risked losing its contract. Under state law, that termination would have prevented the company from securing a new contract in Florida for at least a year. So the company employed the tactic that has kept its record clean in the eyes of the state: It voluntarily withdrew from the contract several months early, closing the books before damaging reports might be set down for future consideration. Crosses made of metal pipes mark the graves of 32 unidentified bodies in a small, hidden graveyard near the former Dozier School for Boys in Marianna, Fla. (Photo by Emily Michot / Miami Herald / MCT via Getty Images)

Firing the Monitor: That clean record would become a valuable asset four years later, as the Department of Juvenile Justice sought a private contractor to run Thompson Academy, the 112-bed facility for “moderate-risk” boys northwest of Miami. Slattery submitted a proposal, touting his company’s “history of successfully operating juvenile facilities for the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice.” The 60-page proposal noted that the company’s programs were “nationally recognized” for “consistent, high-quality services.” The proposal described other moderate-risk facilities the company had “successfully operated” in other parts of the country, including the 355-bed Charles H. Hickey, Jr. School outside of Baltimore. The proposal neglected to mention that the U.S. Justice Department was in the midst of investigating widespread violence and rampant staff abuse at Hickey that same year. The proposal also avoided mentioning that the company was in the midst of a wrongful death lawsuit in Texas, after an 18-year-old inmate died of pneumonia despite begging to be taken to the hospital. Correctional Services Corp. was not required to disclose any of this history in bidding for business with the state of Florida. According to the Department of Juvenile Justice’s contract scoring process, state officials examine records in other states only when the private operator has no previous contracts in Florida. When the state evaluates current contractors, past performance counts for less than one-fourth of the total score. The bulk of the rating stems from the quality of the contractor’s technical proposal – its plans to staff the facility, for example, and its policies on security, escapes and training. Outside evaluators are instructed not to consider “any other information, other than the information contained in the proposal, including personal experience with provider or staff, news articles, anything heard or said about provider.” “They’re not getting rated on the things that are most important,” said Vanessa Patino Lydia, who has followed Florida’s juvenile justice system as a research director at the National Council on Crime and Delinquency and the Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center, a nonprofit focused on girls in the juvenile justice system. “The points are about: ‘Did you respond to the questions on what you’re going to do?’” The Department of Juvenile Justice asserts that problems with a company’s program in one state do not necessarily raise concerns about its activities in another. “Comparisons between states can be difficult since juvenile justice is administered differently around the country,” said Meghan Speakes Collins, the DJJ spokeswoman. “Additionally, companies often have different management oversight and personnel operating programs in individual states.” The proposal Slattery put forward for Thompson Academy included descriptions of his company’s “expert managers and well-trained staff that are setting the highest standards in our industry.” He won the contract. Soon, the same problems that had emerged at many of his institutions cropped up again, according to HuffPost’s review of state facility reports. In December 2003, a month before Slattery’s firm formally took over Thompson, state monitors noted that the company had yet to fill any of the direct-care staff positions, the guards who work most closely with children. A state review found that the company also had yet to detail its plans for recreation and physical fitness, or arrangements for food services. In February 2004, less than two months into the contract, a boy escaped Thompson with the help of another youth. An investigation by the Department of Juvenile Justice found that “facility policies

did not address escape prevention” and staff had not been properly trained. Furthermore, the company had not notified the state of the escape within 24 hours, as required. Less than 10 days later, a staff member attacked a 15-year-old boy, slamming his head to the floor and punching him, according to incident reports. When the boy complained that he couldn’t breathe, the guard put his hand over the boy’s mouth. The guard was later fired. The following month, a youth counselor slapped an inmate in the face and then head-butted another while saying, “Suck my dick,” according to an incident report filed by the state. The state only learned of the latter incident when a therapist called the abuse hotline. The guard and his supervisor failed to notify state authorities, as required in the company’s contract. The same month, a group of boys handed a letter to one of the state monitors noting “a bad bug problem in our cafeteria,” including in the food. “Staff interviewed stated youth had too small portions of food, the last group fed got less,” read an email from a different monitor, Pamela Stillwell. Jerry Blanton, then the state’s top monitor at Thompson Academy, asked for a special audit team to review the program. The resulting report found the facility to be seriously understaffed and unsanitary, and that staff were dismissive of grievances filed by youths housed there. The average starting salary for youth care workers was \$17,680 and staff turnover was high, according to documents filed with the state. An emergency state review in March found no evidence that staff had been trained in the proper ways to restrain youth. According to an email from a department monitor regarding the March evaluation: “There is nothing in training files for staff – no training plans, no documentation of any training regarding [restraints], CPR and first aid, fire, riot and other emergency situations.” Just as Blanton and others from the state began documenting problems, the facility administrator at Thompson Academy, Jasir Diab, was requesting meetings with Blanton’s superiors at the state Department of Juvenile Justice, according to internal department memos and company correspondence obtained by HuffPost. Diab had previously worked at the company’s troubled Pahokee facility and today serves as corporate regional vice president. A few weeks after the state’s special review of Thompson in 2004, Diab met with DJJ regional director Darryl Olson to discuss concerns he had about Blanton’s behavior, according to department correspondence. In an April 2004 letter to department officials and corporate higher-ups at the company, Diab complained that Blanton had been conducting unannounced visits – allowed under the contract terms – and intimidating staff and demanding documentation from employees who lacked the requisite information. Diab also complained that Blanton encouraged employees to call him with concerns about the program, “thus undermining the management of the facility,” according to a letter the administrator sent to the state. In an interview, Blanton acknowledged that he stuck out within the culture of the Department of Juvenile Justice, sometimes coming off as confrontational where colleagues generally projected an air of collaboration with the private contractors whose programs they inspected. “I dance to my own music,” he said. The usual spirit of cooperation flowed from a basic understanding about the nature of the employment cycle, according to the former department executive staffer who requested anonymity: Many state employees wound up going to work for the same private contractors they regulated. “It was widely known in the department that the relationships you are able to build on the outside are where your next paycheck is coming from,” the former employee said. “It’s your way of guaranteeing yourself work when the next administration comes in.” Blanton did not live by that code. A 66-year-old African-American man from upstate New York in a department dominated by whites, he says he took particular interest in the welfare of the youths housed in Florida’s juvenile prisons, who were overwhelmingly black and Latino. He makes no apologies for confronting his bosses and the private prison companies alike when he found evidence that young people incarcerated under the state’s authority were being neglected or abused. “The purpose of a monitor is to ensure that the mandates set down by the state and the rules in the contract were followed,” he said. “Two things really stood out: Staffing was not adequate, and the kids weren’t eating. Therefore they were not safe.” A week after Diab met with state officials, Blanton’s bosses removed him as the monitor at Thompson Academy. He was fired two months later. In a series of memos before he was fired, Blanton asked his superiors why they took the complaints from the company as fact without also consulting him. “I have some problems with your process,” Blanton wrote. “They are as follows: 1) allegations are made and taken as truth; 2) as a DJJ employee, I was never given the opportunity to meet with my accuser; 3) you did no investigation or verification of the validity of the complaint. How does one manage/supervise people in such a manner?” In the letter calling for Blanton’s termination, his superiors cited the complaints from Diab and a complaint from a different contractor that described Blanton as “confrontational” and “intimidating.” His bosses also cited “apparent attempts at retaliation” after Blanton told them he “should not be underestimated” following his removal from monitoring duties at Thompson. Blanton was also cited for

turning in four facility reports late, and for leaving the office without signing out, according to the termination documents, which Blanton shared with The Huffington Post. Back in the 1990s, Blanton had run a state facility in Palm Beach County, where youth had accused counselors of mistreating them. He was temporarily reassigned as local prosecutors investigated, but the state never brought charges and he was never found to have violated procedures. This history was not mentioned as a reason for his termination, according to state documents. Williams, the current spokesman, confirmed that the company had lodged a formal complaint against Blanton, but added: "It was not the reason he was terminated." He referred other questions to the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice. Speakes Collins, the agency spokeswoman, declined to comment on the issue, asserting that it would be "inappropriate" to discuss matters that happened during a past administration. Less than four months after Blanton was fired, another state review of Thompson confirmed and amplified many of the problems he had documented. Among the "critical" concerns listed in the annual audit: employees had been hired absent the criminal background checks required by state law. A review of incidents involving staff and youth revealed that many had not been reported to the state within the required timeframe. Only two out of 20 reviewed employees had completed required training on child abuse and incident reporting during their first two weeks on the job, as required by the state. The review also found that staff at Thompson badly neglected preparing juveniles for release, in one case failing to notify the state social services agency about the departure of a boy who had previously been in foster care. Over the next two years, the facility continued to receive low marks on annual reviews, including a finding in 2006 that youth who had been placed on suicide watch received minimal counseling. But when the Thompson contract came up for renewal after three years, the state again selected Slattery's company – by then known as Youth Services International – to continue running the facility. Under Florida guidelines, the question of whether to renew a private juvenile prison contract "is at the Department's sole discretion" and "shall be contingent, at a minimum, upon satisfactory performance." In the case of Thompson Academy, the state renewed YSI's deal even though documents showed that 96 percent of staff had left the facility and eight confirmed cases of child abuse had emerged there over the previous year. The company has continued to win other contracts while using its successful proposal for Thompson as a template. The Department of Juvenile Justice maintains that it has improved its contract oversight process by granting fewer renewals. The new system allows more companies to submit proposals once a contract is nearing completion, increasing competition. Speakes Collins declined to say whether YSI would have seen its Thompson contract renewed under the new guidelines. Former YSI employees dismissed the review process as a mere formality. The Department of Juvenile Justice "doesn't care about these kids," said a former manager at two YSI facilities, who asked not be identified because the person still works in the field. "They have cut so many costs and taken away so many tools to help these kids, that it's just a revolving door." The Palm Beach Juvenile Correctional Facility is Youth Services International's largest youth prison in Florida, with 118 beds. (Chris Kirkham / The Huffington Post) **Doctoring documents:** In recent years, some of YSI's facilities have shown improved scores on annual reviews from the state, in some cases scoring so highly that they won exemption from required reviews the following year. But interviews with former YSI staff members reveal that this numeric progress may have little to do with improved conditions. Rather, they said, it likely reflects the company's sophistication in fabricating the necessary paperwork for its annual quality assurance evaluations. Each facility knows when state auditors are scheduled to visit, according to former YSI employees. In the weeks prior to such visits, these sources said, staff work feverishly to prepare documents showing that medical exams, therapy sessions and staff trainings are conducted as required—supplementing and back-dating the files as needed. The quality evaluation process "was a joke," said Angela Phillips, the former Broward Girls Academy shift supervisor. "The paperwork looked great, because someone was going around and spending overtime just to make sure that paperwork was correct. If there was something missing, they would just forge it." Several former employees recalled marathon work sessions in which they sometimes fabricated entire log books to paper over discrepancies in records, or to fill in the gaps when the files lacked required reports. "Just about every area you could look into, they were deficient," said a former medical employee at YSI's Palm Beach Juvenile Correctional Facility. "So they made up documents to make it seem like they weren't." Genesis Williams-Wilkerson, a former case manager at the same prison who left the institution in 2011, said the accuracy of paperwork documenting staff training sessions was particularly questionable. Even if employees missed or showed up late for classes on CPR or proper restraint techniques, managers told them to sign in as if they had attended, she said. "They'd just bring around the paper, and you'd sign it. That way they'd have the papers saying we've done the training,"

she said. "They just worry about the audits. They're not worried about these kids' lives." Jesse Williams, the YSI spokesman, denied claims that paperwork was backdated and fabricated, calling the inspection process "stringent and thorough." But according to former employees, when state officials visited to review facilities, managers would handpick trusted employees and youth to be interviewed. "We would be coached," said Wanda Williams (no relation), a former youth care worker at the Palm Beach prison. "They'd say, 'You better not put anything on this paper that you shouldn't put there.' The state didn't do enough, and they never wanted to talk to us one-on-one." Because the state relies almost entirely on its juvenile jail contractors to self-report major incidents, staffers said the company consistently tried to conceal fights and riots from the state Department of Juvenile Justice as well as state and local authorities. "They don't want any outside company, because they want the program to look like it's running smoothly," said Williams-Wilkerson. "Outside support should be called for a lot of what goes on, but they don't do that." The state maintains a special hotline for juvenile inmates seeking to report mistreatment. But youth who have been inside YSI facilities told HuffPost that those wanting access to the hotline must seek permission from staff — often the same staff they say abused them. Williams, the YSI spokesman, denied that inmates were pressured not to report abuse. "There are multiple ways for detainees to report abuse, such as hotlines directly to the state, reporting to other administrators (anonymously) or simply telling their family members during visitation," he said. Chelsea Fernandez, an inmate at Broward Girls Academy who left the program last year, said she was denied hotline calls despite suffering bruises after being thrown up against a wall and onto the floor by a female staff member. "She kicked me like a dog," Fernandez recalled. She said the next day, during a group therapy session, staff told the girls present not to mention the fight to anyone. To discourage inmates from reporting abuse, staff provided youth with snacks or special privileges, such as being allowed to stay up late, former inmates said. Fernandez recalled that before an inspection by state officials last year, staff promised to throw a party for the girls if they behaved and answered questions as instructed. After state officials left, the whole unit was treated to KFC, she said. Phillips, the former shift supervisor at Broward Girls Academy, said the point of such rewards was clear to all: It was about burying evidence of abundant troubles. "The girls would get pizza or ice cream after there was a riot, or some girls would have a fight and then they would get candy," she said. "Why would you reward them and disregard the fact that they just had a fight? It was so you don't cause a problem, so you can forget about what happened." Chelsea Fernandez, a former inmate at Broward Girls Academy, poses for a photo outside her home in Miami on May 31, 2013. (Chris McGonigal / The Huffington Post)

Encouraging Participation: While Florida looked the other way, the abuse and neglect inside its juvenile prison system drew the attention of federal officials. A U.S. Justice Department report two years ago found horrific conditions at two state-run programs in north Florida. At the Dozier School for Boys — the same jail that landed the state in federal court in the 1980s — investigators found that the Department of Juvenile Justice hired staff members who were abusive and often failed to document fights. Guards choked and slammed boys into the ground without provocation, according to the Justice Department's report. Staff often failed to document these assaults, and made a point of engaging in violent behavior away from the view of security cameras. The central takeaway: problems had been allowed to fester because of "the state's failed system of oversight and accountability." "These problems may well persist without detection or correction in other juvenile facilities operating under the same policies and procedures," the report concluded, urging the state to take "immediate measures" to improve its policies and hire consultants to rework the system. By the time the report came out in December 2011, the state had already closed Dozier, citing budget cuts. Florida Gov. Rick Scott sent a frosty response to Washington, arguing that the issues were "confined to the closed facility" and "do not constitute a sufficient, sound or fair basis for concluding that an entire state agency and its employees are failing to properly administer the juvenile justice system in Florida." In response to questions about whether the state has hired outside consultants to review its juvenile commitment system, as recommended by the Justice Department, a spokeswoman pointed only to Scott's letter. In the push to fully privatize the system and phase out state-run facilities, Florida has continued both to renew YSI's contracts and to award the company new ones. Last year, Florida opted not to extend YSI's contract to oversee Thompson Academy, the facility where Jerry Blanton had blown the whistle and lost his job eight years earlier. In a letter to YSI sent in summer 2012, the state told the company that the contract would end because the DJJ was "moving away from large institutional models" and toward smaller, community-based programs. Still, the letter added, "We strongly encourage your participation" in an upcoming bid for new contracts. In January, the state gave YSI a \$7.3 million, five-year contract to run the new Broward

Youth Treatment Center, a 28-bed program less than a mile away from Thompson. And this summer, YSI won contracts to take over two more state facilities, one in the Tampa area and another in Jacksonville.