

Halfway houses in turmoil

More violent offenders flood into state's troubled community corrections system



CHRISTIAN MURDOCK, THE GAZETTE

J.H. (not his real name) was sexually abused by a counselor in 2018 while serving time for his third DUI at the Tooley Hall halfway house in Denver. J.H. is suing GEO Group over sexual assaults he suffered while in a halfway house in Denver from a counselor who worked at the facility. J.H. was forced to perform sexual acts on the counselor or face being sent back to prison. He fled the facility and was sent back to prison for the violation of escaping from the program. The counselor, David Lujan, pleaded guilty last year to resolve charges alleging he sexually assaulted J. H. and two other residents at the halfway house. **Story, Page 21**



COLORADO WATCH
CRIMINAL INJUSTICE

First in a series
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**BY CHRISTOPHER OSHER
AND EVAN WYLOGE**
The Gazette

Colorado's criminal justice reforms are delivering a more violent mix of offenders to the state's troubled community corrections system, filling up local halfway houses already struggling with violence, staff sexual misconduct, rampant drug use and health and safety concerns, a new Gazette investigation shows. The beleaguered system is increasingly failing to rehabilitate offenders, according to state audits, data

and incident reports. The recidivism rate has grown worse. Escapes are rising. Risk assessment, a formal process attached to each offender as they make their way out into the community seeking employment, is lagging.

Instead of fulfilling their role as a safe alternative to prison, the community facilities have become ravaged by drug trafficking so severe that one El Paso County judge reports defendants have begged him for prison instead.

Female prisoners fear conditions inside the halfway houses so much they'd rather stay in prison than shorten their sentences

by transitioning into a halfway house program, the state Corrections Department reported to lawmakers two years ago.

The system's shortcomings persist despite state officials promising five years ago to reform the local network of halfway houses in the wake of a state budget cost-benefit analysis that calculated the state gets little benefit from all the money it spends on halfway house programs.

The study, done after an escapee from an Arapahoe County halfway house shot up the facility with an assault rifle,

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THE GIG IS UP

The gig economy will loom large in Colorado's recovery efforts. **Insights, Page 2**

RAM TOUGH

A lab at Colorado State certifies that N95 masks are up to snuff. **Page 3**