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Department of Justice

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**GEORGIA AGREES WITH JUSTICE DEPARTMENT TO UPGRADE CONDITIONS
AT JUVENILE DETENTION CENTERS**

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- In a cooperative effort to improve juvenile justice and reduce juvenile crime, Attorney General Janet Reno joined Georgia Governor Zell Miller today in signing an agreement upgrading conditions at more than 30 juvenile detention centers across the state.

The agreement ensures that the more than 25,000 youths who pass through the state's juvenile detention centers will receive the medical, mental health, and educational services they need to improve their prospects for a law-abiding and productive return to society.

"I am pleased the state of Georgia acted so quickly in addressing the conditions at these facilities," said Reno. "We must make sure that youngsters entering these facilities come out willing and able to give back to society, rather than eager to get back at it."

The agreement, signed at a ceremony at the Capitol in Atlanta, stems from an investigation that the Justice Department

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began in February, 1997. The investigation was launched after the Department received complaints alleging that youth were held in crowded, unsafe conditions and were not receiving adequate medical, mental health or educational services.

Today's settlement builds on steps already taken by Georgia, and establishes a framework under which the state will develop its own solutions to the problems identified in the investigation, with input from the Justice Department. The state will develop plans relating to specific areas of concern, often with the assistance of outside experts.

The agreement, filed together with a complaint in U.S. District Court in Atlanta, requires the state to:

- improve education and special education by hiring more teachers and a Director of Education who will develop a curriculum for all juvenile facilities;
- improve mental health care, including hiring more staff, implementing a suicide prevention plan, identifying mentally ill youths who need specialized outside placement, and appointing a Director of Mental Health to oversee treatment and care;
- improve medical care, including increasing nursing staff and dental care;
- hire additional Juvenile Corrections Officers to improve security and supervision, and to provide basic training for all staff;
- create an Office of Quality Assurance to audit quality of care throughout the system and to investigate allegations of staff abuse and use of force; and,
- improve oversight of boot camp programs and provide alternatives to boot camps for youths whose physical or mental disability or mental retardation make such boot camps inappropriate.

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The Justice Department's investigation was conducted under the provisions of the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which provide for federal enforcement of youths' constitutional rights in state juvenile justice systems.

"Today's agreement was achieved through the cooperation and swift action of state officials," said Bill Lann Lee, Acting Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. "The agreement ensures the federal rights of juveniles are protected, but reserves for the state basic policy choices regarding juvenile justice."

Justice Department officials toured the facilities in the summer and fall of 1997, and concluded in February that a pattern of federal violations existed throughout the system. It cited a lack of adequate mental health care, overcrowded conditions, abusive disciplinary practices, and inadequate education and medical care in certain areas.

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