

CBS 4 - South Florida's Source for Breaking News, Weather, and Sports: The Forgotten Floor, Part 2

Advertisement



Top Stories

[Save](#) | [E-mail](#) | [Print](#)

Sep 20, 2006 8:21 am US/Eastern

The Forgotten Floor, Part 2

A CBS4 I-team Investigation

Shocking Conditions Revealed At Miami-Dade's Jail

Concerned About Mentally Ill Inmates? Click Here To Help



Michele Gillen
Reporting

[Read more of The Forgotten Floor](#)

PAGE 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | [How You Can Help](#)

Amid screams of a man who thinks he is Batman, the men on Floor 9, barefoot and shivering, stripped and naked, all suffering from mental illnesses pace in frigid air pumped into cells sealed with Plexiglas.

From one inmate, a statement which seemed to capture the situation. "You can't treat human beings this way," he said.

But at the Miami-Dade detention center, that treatment is the norm. Bodies are strewn across the floors of cells designed to hold one inmate. In the most dreaded cell, the wrists and ankles of suicidal inmates are shackled to a gurney.

"Look back at the 1700's, people with mental diseases were thrown into jails and prisons. They were not given heat, they don't need heat, they are mentally ill," said Pete Earley, an award winning author and former reporter for the Washington Post. "Now zoom forward to 2006. Miami; the 9th floor. People are kept naked in cells. They don't need heat. They don't mind the cold. They are being treated the same way as they were in the 1700's. My god now can this be possible?"

In 2004, Early spent a year documenting conditions at the Miami-Dade pre-trial detention center.

"I found Miami's jail to be horrific," he said. "It was really like stepping back into medieval times."

The CBS4 I-Team investigation found it had grown worse over time.

"Unfortunately we are reverting back to how we treated people back in the 16th and 17th hundreds. It is terrible. It is morally incomprehensible," said Dr. Joseph Portier, the facility's chief psychiatrist.

But Portier says there is no place else to send the patients, and Judge Steve Leifman agrees.

"We basically have closed all the state hospitals in this country," he said, "and we have transferred people from state hospitals to jails."

Judge Leifman been credited with Herculean efforts to keep the mentally ill who commit minor crimes out of jail and in treatment. But dollars for treatment have dried up, and so record numbers of mentally ill inmates are warehoused here.

"They are just trying to keep the lid on so it doesn't explode up here," said Leifman. "When you get four or five people with serious mental illness in a small cell, 24 hours, seven days a week, it is going to explode."

"Every second of the day you are behind these doors. They feed us through this hole," one inmate told the I-Team.

"We've stripped their dignity away from them," said Kate Hale, Director of the Mental Health Association of Miami-Dade County.

"If we had this kind of care and treatment in the Dade County animal shelter, people would be up in arms, if they could see how inmates are living in that jail on the psych wards, if they could see that, and respond the same way they respond to kittens and puppies, then things begin to change but nobody wants to look."

Incredibly, these scandalous conditions have long been documented. Just last year a Miami Dade county grand jury report investigating the ninth floor likened it to scenes from the movie, "One Flew over the Cuckoos Nest."

26 years ago, the federal government sued local authorities demanding an end to overcrowding at the Pre-Trial Detention Center, and the county signed a consent decree committing to improving conditions and building a new facility.

In 1985 Rene Turolla, president of the Citizen Crime Commission launched her own investigation into warehousing of the mentally ill at the detention center. 21 years later, believes things have changed, for the worse. "There are more people in the jail today than when I even wrote this report," she said. "I cannot believe it, I am so shocked, really, I am so shocked. " In fact, nearly all the problems the inmates told the I-Team about have been documented for years.

Read more of The Forgotten Floor

PAGE 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | How You Can Help

(© MMVI, CBS Broadcasting Inc. All Rights Reserved.)

From Our Partners

Real Estate: How much is your home worth?

SPONSORED LINKS

Get listed here

FL Mortgage Rates Near 40-Yr Lows

\$400K loan for \$1,287/mo. Think you pay too much? See new payment!
LowerMyBills.com

IRS Tax Problem?

We negotiate with the IRS for you. Over 450 locations nationwide.
www.JKHarris.com

Mortgage Rates at 3.0% - Save Thousands

\$150,000 loan for \$391/month - refinance, home equity and purchase.
low.rate.home.loan.leadsteps.com

Get Fast Refinance Solutions for Miami

Get control over your mortgage. It's free and secure. No credit check.
www.quotematch.com

Miami Scottrade Office

\$7 trades, local offices, personal brokers, fast executions.
www.scottrade.com

"When outsiders do come here and see this it is very shocking," Urbistondo said, "that they are being treated this way, but this is what we have and it's how its been going on for 25 years" -- Michael Urbistondo, Corrections Officer.



Mentally ill inmates at the Miami-Dade jail lying on the floor, as multiple inmates are placed in a cell designed for a single person.





Inmates in the mentally-ill ward at the Miami-Dade attempt to drink water from a toilet, after claiming there was no water in their cell.

CBS



Inmate speaking about brutal conditions at Miami-Dade's cells for the mentally ill, talking through a grate in his door.

CBS



The Miami-Dade Pre-Trial Detention Facility, where mentally ill inmates are held.

CBS

-
- [Advertise](#)
 - [Terms of Service](#)
 - [Privacy Policy](#)
 - [EEO Report](#)
 - [Parent's Guide to TV Ratings](#)
 - [CBS Television Stations Digital Media](#)
 - [Site Map](#)

© MMVI, CBS Television Stations Inc. All Rights Reserved.
