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## **ACLU of Montana Files Prison Discrimination Complaint**

### **Native American prisoners' rights violated at Crossroads Correctional Center**

HELENA, MT — The American Civil Liberties Union of Montana filed a discrimination complaint against the state of Montana last week on behalf of Native American prisoners at the Crossroads Correctional Center whose rights were violated through en-masse strip searches, being denied the ability to properly celebrate sweat lodge ceremonies and being retaliated against when they complained about the mistreatment.

John Henry Knows His Gun, Dee Chance White Hip, Darryl Lewis Frost, Jason Jay Chiefstick, Brian Anthony Johnston and 30 John Doe plaintiffs filed the complaint against the State of Montana, the Montana Department of Corrections, Crossroads Correctional Center, Corrections Corporation of America, Montana State Prison Warden Mike Mahoney and Crossroads Warden Sam Law.

"It is important the Native American culture and religion be treated with respect and equality in our prison system," said ACLU of Montana Legal Director Betsy Griffing. "The sweat lodge ceremony is an important part of Native American religion and culture."

Private prison company Corrections Corporation of American operates the Crossroads facility in Shelby, Mont.

Beginning in mid-August 2008, all inmates attending sweat lodge ceremonies were stripped before and after the ceremonies. The strip searches were conducted in the hallway of the recreation area where they could be observed by other inmates, and on at least one occasion in view of prison cameras monitored by female guards.

In addition the complaint alleges guards made racially disparaging remarks during the ceremonies and prison staff refused to supply the cured tobacco and other materials essential to the sweat lodge ceremony. When a prisoner complained about the non-tobacco material provided for the pipe, he was stripped of his position as pipe carrier and later put into solitary confinement when he encouraged other inmates to ask that he be reinstated as pipe carrier.

And while other religious services are offered each week, sweat lodge ceremonies are only available to prisoners every other week, denying them equal access to practice their faith.

"Private prisons must meet the same standards as Montana's state-run prisons," Griffing said. "That means they must respect prisoners' religion and allow them to practice it without harassment or retaliation."