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### **Report: Private prison health care provider falling short**

TOPEKA, Kan. — The company that provides health care for Kansas and Idaho prison inmates frequently did not meet standards of care required by its contract with the state, according to an analysis of hundreds of pages of data. The Kansas City Star reported Corizon Health's performance documents from July 2015 to December 2018 showed inmates regularly didn't see a medical professional even after complaining several times about the same ailments. It also showed almost 20 percent of the 10,000 inmates in Kansas prisons are on psychotropic medications but many prisons didn't report hours worked by psychiatrists for several months. In the same three years, the state fined Corizon \$1 million in performance-based penalties, and another \$6.4 million for not meeting staffing requirements, particularly for psychiatrists. Corizon, the nation's largest for-profit medical provider for prisons and jails, has faced issues in other states. In December, Idaho's state Board of Correction voted to extend its \$46 million-plus-a-year contract with Corizon for two years, but the board also voted to immediately launch a process to take the contract out to bid at the end of the two-year extension, The Idaho Press-Tribune reported. Idaho has faced multiple lawsuits and court orders over inmate health care. The mother of one inmate, Marques Davis, alleges in a lawsuit filed against Corizon that her son's complaints about headaches and muscle weakness were ignored for months while he was held at the Hutchinson Correctional Facility. Davis eventually died of a fungal infection in his brain that was undetected by prison medical staff. "It's showing a clear and consistent pattern of delaying, postponing or not providing necessary medical treatment," said Leland Dempsey, the lawyer for Davis' mother, Shemaine Walker. "That's what this is showing (and) that's what our whole lawsuit is about." A federal judge in Oregon in December approved a \$10 million judgment against Corizon and other defendants, settling a lawsuit brought by the parents of a 26-year-old woman who died pleading for medical help while detoxing from heroin in an Oregon jail. Kansas is one of the only states in the country that requires an independent third party to observe its inmate health care contractor. As part of the contract with the Tennessee-based Corizon, a team from the University of Kansas Medical Center provides monthly reviews of a sample of health care records at Kansas' prisons. Kansas pays Corizon about \$70 million to \$80 million a year, depending on the prison population. Jeanny Sharp, a spokeswoman for the corrections department, said the agency levies fines whenever Corizon falls below 90 percent compliance in a month. "I would hope the people of Kansas and their representatives would have a strong interest in whether that \$70 million (a year) is being well spent and whether they were getting their money's worth," said Eric Balaban, a senior staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union's National Prison Project. Balaban said Corizon is writing off the fines as the cost of doing business in Kansas without doing anything meaningful to improve its care. Corizon spokeswoman Eve Hutcherson said in an email that the company stands by the care it provides in Kansas. She noted during the last five years no court rulings or settlements related to patient care have gone against the company or the Kansas Department of Corrections. She said she couldn't comment on the Davis case but "we will defend our care strongly in court." Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly's administration audited Corizon's 2018 performance after she took office and found several problems. Keith Bradshaw, the head of the corrections department's finance division, told lawmakers in February that the administration was tentatively planning to extend the contract one more year, and then re-bid it if Corizon's performance doesn't improve.