

COOK COUNTY

2 file civil rights suit over jail strip searches

Two people arrested last year in Cook County filed a federal lawsuit against jail officials on Monday, alleging that the jail's strip-search procedures violated their constitutional rights.

Kim Young, 44, a nursing assistant from Wisconsin, alleged that she was subjected to a vaginal swabbing procedure, according to the lawsuit.

Young was arrested on Jan. 13, 2005, because she had failed to appear in court on a traffic ticket, according to the suit.

County Jail officials could not be reached Monday for comment. The suit names Cook County Sheriff Michael Sheahan and other jail and Health Department officials as defendants.

Another plaintiff, Ronald Johnson, 41, of Flossmoor, was arrested on April 18, 2005, for possession of a controlled substance but was acquitted, the suit said.

County jail sued over searches

A federal class action lawsuit was filed Monday challenging Cook County Jail procedures requiring "invasive" and "humiliating" testing of all men and women in jail custody. The lawsuit challenges a requirement that all women in custody must undergo vaginal swabbing and all men held there are subject to cavity searches. "There is no legitimate purpose for subjecting detainees to this procedure. . . . It is used only to humiliate and dehumanize the women detainees," the lawsuit stated. Cook County jail officials hadn't seen the lawsuit Monday. "The policy Cook County Jail has in place is virtually identical to the searches in every prison in America," Cook County Jail spokesman Bill Cunningham said. The lawsuit was filed by two people who underwent the searches, but seeks broader policy changes and punitive and other damages for other inmates as well.