

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/justice-department-to-sue-alabama-over-prison-conditions/>

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10.06.16

The United States Department of Justice announced today that it has launched a statewide investigation into unconstitutional conditions and practices in Alabama prisons. The Justice Department's investigation follows a suit filed by EJI that challenges violent and abusive conditions at a state prison in St. Clair County.

EJI applauds the Justice Department's action, which comes amid worsening conditions, violence, and abuse in Alabama prisons. Overcrowding and poor management have created a crisis in the state prison system, where conditions have become so dangerous that in recent months both correctional officers and incarcerated people have resorted to strikes and protests to demand reforms.

EJI has filed several complaints with Justice Department officials in recent years. After investigating and documenting the murder, rape, and torture of Alabama prisoners by correctional officers, EJI sought intervention from state and federal officials and called for accountability and reforms to address rampant corruption, abuse, and unsafe conditions throughout the Alabama prison system.

Violence in state prisons has escalated to unprecedented levels. Sixteen prisoners have been killed in the past two years and hundreds have been stabbed or raped. At Bullock Correctional Facility and Elmore Correctional Facility prisons that house minimum security inmates serving short sentences the violence is particularly acute and is exacerbated by a high level of officer-on-inmate use of force and abuse of power. In the past year, EJI has received scores of calls from parents whose children were killed, sexually assaulted, or stabbed in prison and who report indifference and mistreatment by prison officials.

EJI called on state and federal officials to criminally charge prison guards involved in the 2010 brutal beating [death of Rocrast Mack](#), who was incarcerated at Ventress Correctional Facility in Clayton, Alabama, and federal prosecutors subsequently obtained convictions against several correctional officers in that case. In 2012, EJI filed a complaint with the Justice Department calling for a federal investigation into widespread sexual abuse of women incarcerated at [Tutwiler Prison for Women](#) in Wetumpka, Alabama, by male guards. The federal investigation that followed found that the Alabama Department of Corrections had failed to adequately protect women incarcerated at Tutwiler and demanded that the state implement a series of reforms.

In 2013, EJI filed a [complaint](#) documenting severe physical and sexual abuse and violence perpetrated by correctional officers and officials in three Alabama prisons for men. EJI uncovered widespread physical abuse and misconduct at the Elmore Correctional Facility in Elmore, Alabama, where prisoners have been handcuffed, stripped naked, and then beaten by several guards. EJI also reported that male officers sexually abused male prisoners at Donaldson Correctional Facility in Bessemer, Alabama, and Bibb Correctional Facility in Brent, Alabama.

Most recently, EJI filed a class action lawsuit in federal court on behalf of men incarcerated at [St. Clair Correctional Facility](#) in Springville, Alabama, following the failure of the Alabama Department of Corrections to respond to dangerous conditions and an extraordinarily high rate of violence at St. Clair, including six homicides in the preceding 36 months. EJI's ongoing investigation has revealed a shocking level of serious, chronic violence, including sexual assaults, deadly violence, and daily stabbings.

Alabama is an outlier in its refusal to meaningfully address its prison crisis, and EJI is encouraged that the Justice Department is continuing to challenge the Alabama Department of Corrections to reform unconstitutional prison conditions.

All citizens, even those who are incarcerated, should expect sanitary conditions of habitation that are free of physical harm and sexual abuse, said U.S. Attorney Kenyon R. Brown of the Southern District of Alabama.

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