

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/justice-department-condemns-excessive-force-by-alabama-prison-guards/>

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07.24.20

Conditions at Alabamas prisons violate the Constitution, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. For the second time in 18 months, the department [notified](#) Alabama Governor Kay Ivey yesterday that it has reasonable cause to believe that incarcerated people are subjected to excessive force at the hands of prison staff.

Federal investigators issued a [report](#) that details dozens of instances of excessive force, which often result in serious injuries and sometimes death. Many of these incidents involve assaults on incarcerated people who are handcuffed and complying with officers directions. Sergeants, lieutenants, or other supervisory staff often were directly involved or witnessed and failed to intervene.

Justice Department

Investigators uncovered a substantial number of times when officers used force against a person who was too afraid to return to his assigned dorm because he owed money to another incarcerated person and feared for his safety. In one instance, a captain shoved a man to the floor after he reported that several people had threatened to stab him. Several officers then punched the man in the back and one officer choked him with a baton.

These uses of force are so commonplace in Alabamas prisons that officers, even supervisors, watch other officers brutally beating prisoners and do not intervene, the report says. In short, in Alabamas prisons, cruel treatment of prisoners by staff is common and de-escalation techniques are regularly ignored.

The report found that officers use force as retribution and for the sole purpose of inflicting pain. After an officer saw a kitchen worker give some leftover chicken to another incarcerated man, the officer ordered the worker to eat all of the leftovers while the officer and a lieutenant watched. When he couldnt finish, the officer slapped him repeatedly.

Related Article

EJI uncovered a pattern of officer-on-prisoner assaults, officer complicity in widespread drug trafficking and extortion, and a growing rate of abuse and violence.

The Justice Department found that supervisors in Alabama prisons often fail to document, investigate, or otherwise address excessive use of force. Officers and supervisors falsify reports and hide injured men in isolation until their wounds heal to avoid being reported.

The report details how the failures of ADOC leadership allow officers to act with impunity. In the culture of violence perpetuated by ADOC, wardens are able to avoid scrutiny of abusive practices. Federal investigators found that ADOC investigators engage in suspect practices, such as starting audio recordings of interviews after theyve already had substantive discussions with witnesses to shape what they say on the recorded portion.

This weeks report follows an April 2019 [report](#) in which the Justice Department found that Alabama routinely violates the constitutional rights of prisoners by failing to protect them from rampant violence and sexual abuse.

Tags:

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