

# Equal Justice Initiative

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/alabama-prison-conditions-unchanged-after-prison-murders/>

## Policy Issue Resources

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04.01.19

Photo from St. Clair claiming to be from a corrections officer.

Prison conditions in Alabama remain largely unchanged despite the murders of four men at St. Clair Correctional Facility in the last seven months. Terry Terrell Pettitway, Rogarius Bray, Terrance Andrews, and Steven Mullins were stabbed to death in separate incidents at the prison in Springville.

Mr. Mullins's homicide reflects a pattern that EJI has documented in court filings since initiating [litigation](#) against St. Clair in 2014. In the days and weeks before his murder, the Alabama Department of Corrections received numerous reports that he was at risk, had been threatened with violence, and could not live safely without protective housing. Rather than place him in a protective unit, prison authorities placed Mr. Mullins in a dorm known for violence and serious assaults, commonly referred to as the hot bay. On February 25, Mr. Mullins reported to ADOC officials that he had been threatened with stabbing and sexual assault and needed immediate assistance from prison officials. No action was taken. Mr. Mullins was stabbed to death the next day.

EJI sued St. Clair over the prison's abandonment of basic correctional protocols, which left incarcerated men exposed to a constant threat of lethal violence. ADOC signed a settlement agreement in federal court in November 2017 that mandated the implementation of reforms to improve the safety of officers and inmates. In June 2018, EJI notified ADOC that it has failed to comply with the agreement and failed to implement reforms.

Since December 2017, St. Clair has experienced three escapes that were caused primarily by mismanagement of the incarcerated population and the failure to follow protocols. A handgun was used in one of the escapes, which is the third time ammunition or firearms have been found at St. Clair since 2015. In the past year at St. Clair, five men have been stabbed to death and dozens of other incarcerated people have been seriously assaulted, raped, and beaten.

Alabama's refusal to meaningfully address its prison crisis has triggered [national censure](#) and federal intervention. State officials' indifference to the [well-documented crisis](#) at Tutwiler Prison for Women led to a Justice Department lawsuit against ADOC in which federal prosecutors alleged that Alabama authorities allowed a sexualized environment to exist at Tutwiler, such that sexual abuse and sexual harassment are constant, and prisoners must sometimes submit to unlawful sexual advances from staff in order to obtain necessities or to avoid punishment.

The extreme mismanagement and lethal violence at [mens prisons across the state](#) also garnered national media attention and prompted the Justice Department to investigate unconstitutional conditions and practices in Alabama prisons statewide.

EJI has asked Alabama's leaders to implement low-cost reforms that could have an immediate impact on conditions of confinement. Experts have recommended a package of reforms, including effective use of video surveillance cameras, implementation of an internal classification system, skilled management, and other basic management systems such as incident tracking systems, quality control, and corrective action review. These could be implemented quickly at low cost and would yield significant improvements in conditions for staff and incarcerated people.

Despite multiple opportunities to do so, state officials have offered the public no excuse or explanation for their failure to implement simple, low-cost reforms in the face of the intensifying crisis in our prisons.

Tags:

[Prison Conditions](#)

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