

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/second-alabama-prison-guard-pleads-guilty-murder-rocrast-mack/>

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01.23.13

The Justice Department announced last week that Matthew Davidson, a former correctional officer at Ventress Prison in Alabama, pleaded guilty in federal court to civil rights and conspiracy charges arising from the beating death of inmate Rocrast Mack.

Rocrast Mack was serving a sentence for a non-violent drug crime when he was beaten to death by correctional officers at Ventress on August 4, 2010. He was 24 years old. Several officers were fired but no criminal charges were filed.

In August 2011, [EJI sent letters to the Alabama Attorney General and the Justice Department](#) criticizing the states lack of an adequate response and calling on them to immediately pursue criminal prosecution of the correctional officers who brutally beat Mr. Mack to death. In October 2011, the Alabama Attorney General announced that [former correctional lieutenant Michael Anthony Smith was arrested for the murder of Mr. Mack](#).

Federal prosecutors also charged Smith and former corrections officer Joseph Sanders with felony civil rights violations, obstruction of justice-related violations, and false statements violations. That trial will begin on June 10, 2013, in federal court. Former prison guard [Scottie Glenn pleaded guilty to federal civil rights and conspiracy charges](#) in November 2011.

Mr. Davidson admitted that he participated in, and attempted to cover up, the brutal and ultimately fatal assaults of Rocrast Mack, said United States Assistant Attorney General Thomas Perez. In his plea agreement, Mr. Davidson admitted he tackled Rocrast Mack in the prison yard and punched him in the head even though Mr. Mack had not struck him or been aggressive.

Mr. Davidson pleaded guilty to two counts of violating Mr. Macks civil rights and to one count of conspiring with other corrections officers to obstruct justice by covering up the incident. He faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison on the civil rights violations and a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison on the obstruction of justice related violation, but as part of a plea deal, prosecutors agreed not to recommend more than 11 years.

The Justice Department will continue to vigorously prosecute corrections officers who violate the constitutional rights of inmates, and who then use their official position to try to cover up their crimes, said Assistant Attorney General Perez.

EJI Director Bryan Stevenson told the Associated Press he is encouraged, but more needs to be done to investigate complaints about officer-on-inmate violence, rather than dismissing complaints as frivolous.

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The Murder of Rocrast Mack

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