

# Equal Justice Initiative

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/overcrowded-alabama-prisons-becoming-more-violent/>

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Alabamas prisons house twice as many people as they were designed to hold and the ratio of inmates to correctional officers is the worst of any state in the country. As a result, there is an alarming increase in violent incidents in the states overcrowded prisons.

As *The Birmingham News* recently reported, violence among prisoners was up 40% in 2010-2011 compared to the previous year; assaults leading to serious injury doubled. Three inmates have been killed in Alabama prisons since October 2011.

Actually, the rate of violent assaults in Alabama prisons is likely worse than the official data show. Lawsuits challenging the overcrowding, short staffing, and pervasive violence in Alabama prisons have uncovered evidence that the state underreports attacks on inmates.

For example, the Department of Corrections public reports for 2008-2009 listed only one assault with serious injury at Donaldson Correctional Facility, but internal records showed at least 16 Donaldson inmates were taken to outside hospitals during that time for treatment of serious injuries, including collapsed lungs, vomiting and urinating blood, and loss of sight in one eye.

Crowding and staffing shortages are likely to worsen in the coming year, for which the corrections budget has been cut by \$16 million.

Corrections officials failure to protect inmates from assaultive staff and fellow inmates contributes to the rise in violence. Theyre letting people fight, said EJI director Bryan Stevenson. Theyre not responding in any meaningful way.

Stevenson said society at large has a stake in ensuring that inmates are protected from violence in prison. Most people are going to be released, he said. Torturing, abusing and assaulting people over many years and then releasing them to the public is not a sensible public safety strategy.

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122 Commerce Street Montgomery, AL 36104 [\(334\) 269-1803](tel:(334)269-1803) [\[emailprotected\]](mailto:[emailprotected])

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