

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/steven-newell-stabbed-to-death-donaldson-prison-alabama/>

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07.30.12

The stabbing death of 23-year-old Steven Newell at Donaldson Correctional Facility in Bessemer, Alabama, last week underscores the urgent need for immediate and meaningful reforms to address violence and overcrowding in Alabamas prisons.

Calhoun County resident Steven Newell was serving an eight-year sentence for assault and theft when he suffered stab wounds during an early-morning altercation with another inmate. He was pronounced dead at the prison healthcare unit. Mr. Newells sister said her brother was scheduled to be released in February.

Mr. Newell was the fourth person to be killed in an Alabama prison since October. As the [Birmingham News reported in June](#), Jabari Bascomb was stabbed to death at St. Clair on October 15, just three days after his 22nd birthday; John Rutledge was found strangled to death in his cell at St. Clair on April 27; and Jeremy Jones died May 24 after being stabbed at Bibb Correctional Facility in Brent.

Violence among prisoners was up at least 40% in 2010-2011 compared to the previous year. Crowding and staffing shortages, and corrections officers failure to protect inmates from staff and fellow inmates, contribute to the escalating violence.

The Alabama Department of Corrections is looking into Mr. Newells death itself; the Alabama Bureau of Investigation may also investigate.

After correctional officers beat to death handcuffed prisoner [Rocrast Mack](#) at Ventress Correctional Facility in Clayton, Alabama, in August 2010, it took more than a year and a federal investigation before, in March 2012, FBI agents arrested three former guards.

Questions about the safety and security of Alabama prisons are being directed at Alabama corrections officials, who have said very little about this most recent murder. Last month legislators convened a special hearing to inquire about reports of increased violence.

The department recently acknowledged the need for an external audit after EJI reported widespread [sexual violence against women at Tutwiler Prison for Women](#) in Wetumpka, Alabama.

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