

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/churches-opinion-leaders-join-eji-call-for-prison-reform/>

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11.14.14

Editorial boards across the state are responding to EJIs latest findings on conditions in Alabamas prisons by joining EJIs urgent call for change.

On Tuesday, EJI released its [findings](#) that widespread corruption, misconduct, and abusive behavior by correctional officers continues to be a serious problem in Alabama prisons, where reform is hampered by poor leadership and a system-wide lack of transparency and accountability.

Television news leader WSFA aired an editorial on Thursday expressing disgust and frustration with the Alabama Department of Corrections failure to address leadership and accountability problems. Getting Alabama prisons back on track is long overdue, Vice President and General Manager Collin Gaston said on air, and we can no longer turn our heads and pretend we dont have a major problem on our hands as it is obvious that we do.

WSFA specifically endorsed EJIs recommendation that the state establish an independent auditing task force to hold prison officials accountable by reporting directly to the Governor. The editorial called for the task force to have the authority to clean house' if it finds any policies have been violated.

Today, statewide media outlet AL.com condemned state government for dragging its feet on prison reform. The state promises remedies but never delivers, even when the fixes require no money and minimal resources. The strongly worded editorial cautions that EJIs condemnation of system leadership rings like a claxons warning through the general silence coming from the office of the commissioner of the Alabama Department of Corrections. It suggests that a substantial reset of ADOC leadership may be necessary.

EJI says prisoners have been killed by other prisoners in their cells because dilapidated prison doors have locks that can be jimmied. It alleges that guards routinely order young prisoners to commit sex acts. Prisoners beaten by guards are paraded by senior officials as a warning to other inmates. Guards extort money from inmates and their families. EJIs findings reveal that the state is managing snake pits where cruelty is an organized game.

There are too many bad wardens, criminally inclined guards and too much crumbling infrastructure to ignore. AL.com called on the state to act immediately, endorsing EJIs recommendation that independent investigators be empowered to monitor conditions and practices in state prisons. The state should act, it concludes, because [i]ts the right and necessary thing to do.

In addition, the Alabama Baptist Convention passed a resolution this week calling for prison reform in Alabama. Noting that Alabamas prisons are overcrowded and that physical and sexual abuse of inmates has been an ongoing problem, the resolution called on the governor, attorney general, and Alabama Legislature to seek ways to end abuse in Alabama prisons.

We do believe crime merits punishment, but incarcerated criminals need to be treated humanely, said the Rev. Roger Willmore, chairman of the resolutions committee.

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EJI Report on Alabama Prisons

WSFA Editorial

AL.com Editorial

AL.com

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