

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/eji-demands-criminal-charges-for-alabama-prison-guards-in-beating-death-rocrast-mack/>

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08.08.11

Today, EJI is calling for the immediate criminal prosecution of Alabama correctional officers who brutally beat a 24-year-old man to death one year ago. In letters sent to Barbour County District Attorney Ben Reeves and Attorney General Luther Strange, EJI asks the State of Alabama to initiate criminal prosecution against the officers who murdered Rocrast Mack at Ventress Correctional Facility in Clayton, Alabama. A similar letter was sent today to the U.S. Department of Justice asking that federal charges be filed against those responsible for the crime.

The abuse of power by prison guards that Mr. Macks murder reveals is deeply disturbing as is the absence of any criminal accountability for the extraordinary misconduct by prison officials evident in this case, says Bryan Stevenson, Executive Director of EJI, in a letter to state prosecutors.

On August 4, 2010, several correctional officers at Ventress Correctional Facility in Clayton, Alabama beat to death Rocrast Mack. Mr. Mack was serving a sentence for a non-violent drug crime when he was confronted by a correctional officer who accused him of looking at her inappropriately. As Alabama Department of Corrections officials later confirmed, Officer Melissa Brown initiated the assault by hitting Mr. Mack in the face. Witnesses report that after Officer Brown struck Mr. Mack a second time, Mr. Mack hit the officer back, which prompted several prison guards to enter the dorm and brutally beat Mr. Mack until he was limp and lifeless. Another correctional officer was threatened by guards when he tried to stop the beating. One officer announced during the beating that he intended to kill Mr. Mack.

An autopsy report officially determined the cause of Mr. Macks death to be homicide and described the brutal injuries to Mr. Macks body as unusually severe.

In January, an Alabama Bureau of Investigation inquiry reportedly found that officers engaged in criminal conduct, abused their authority, used unauthorized physical force and provided false information about the incident. Several officers were fired by the Department of Corrections or resigned. Alabama correctional officials initially misreported the crime, stating that Mr. Mack died after an altercation when correctional officers intervened to stop an ongoing assault.

EJI completed an investigation into the incident after interviewing witnesses to the murder, including many prisoners who assert that the prison remains dangerous and volatile.

The Barbour County District Attorney, the Alabama Attorney General and U.S. Department of Justice all have received complaints but one year after the murder no criminal charges have been filed.

The lack of response from law enforcement to Mr. Macks death has compromised security in Alabamas prisons and created serious concerns about enforcing laws against criminal misconduct by correctional officers, stated Mr. Stevenson in letters to state and federal officials.

Family members of Mr. Mack filed a civil suit against the Alabama Department of Corrections that settled out of court earlier this year. The Mack family joins EJI in calling for criminal prosecution of the officers and is extremely disappointed that no charges have yet been filed.

We continue to grieve Rocrasts death and dont understand why no one has been brought to justice for this terrible crime, said Larry Mack, the father of the victim.

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The Murder of Rocrast Mack

EJI Press Release Calling for Prosecution of Guards Who Killed Rocrast Mack

EJI's Letter to Attorney General Eric Holder

EJI's Letter to Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange

EJI's Letter to Barbour County District Attorney Ben Reeves

Birmingham News

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