

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/prison-homicide-is-2nd-in-two-weeks-and-23rd-since-alabama-prisons-declared-unconstitutional/>

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10.21.20

Another prisoner has been killed in an Alabama prison. Edwin Wells, a 29-year old Black man from Autauga County, died after he was reportedly stabbed on October 10 in a dormitory at Easterling Correctional Facility in Clio, Alabama. According to multiple reports received by EJI, no officers were present in the dormitory at the time of the assault.

Mr. Wells is the second Alabama prisoner [killed](#) in less than two weeks, and the 18th killed in the past 12 months. He is also the 23rd person murdered while in state custody in the 18 months since the U.S. Department of Justice [notified](#) state officials in April 2019 that the Alabama prison systems failure to protect incarcerated people from rampant violence and sexual abuse violates the Eighth Amendment.

Easterling was built in 1990 and is one of the newest facilities in the Alabama prison system. As of August 2020, it housed 1,174 prisoners, with the majority in open-bay dormitories that hold up to 200 people each. Easterling is also one of the Alabama Department of Corrections most understaffed prisons, with fewer than 20% of its authorized correctional officer positions filled, according to the most recent public data.

The lack of officer supervision at the time of Mr. Wells assault is consistent with dozens of reports received by EJI over the past month indicating that the hundreds of men in many open-bay dormitories are left unmonitored for extended periods, with no cameras in housing areas and officers only entering the units to count. The Justice Department [found](#) a strong pattern of evidence of deficient supervision based on records of hundreds of grave injuries to prisoners that were inflicted out of the sight of ADOC correctional officers.

Under these conditions, many incarcerated people request to be placed in solitary confinement for their own safety. The lack of space in those units means that most are turned away unless they commit serious disciplinary infractions, such as possession or use of a weapon. Combined with the lack of supervision, these systemic factors have sustained a years-long rise in prison violence in Alabama that is unparalleled in the U.S.

According to EJI's analysis, at least 33 out of 56 Alabama prisoner homicides over the past five years have been due to stabbings, while hundreds more incarcerated people have been hospitalized with life-threatening stabbing injuries. EJI's investigation indicates that approximately half of the fatal stabbings occurred in housing areas with no officer or camera supervision.

Tags:

[Prison Conditions](#)

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

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