

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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St. Clair Prison dorm, William Widmer for The New York Times

In 2014, EJI filed a class action lawsuit against the State of Alabama to challenge the dangerous conditions and an extraordinarily high rate of violence at St. Clair Prison in Springville, Alabama. Today, the problems at St. Clair were highlighted in a [New York Times article](#).

Prison leadership and staff have long tolerated a culture of violence at St. Clair, where daily stabbings and violent assaults are the norm. One inmate describes the prison as virtually ungoverned, with corrections officers disappearing from cellblocks for long periods of time or ignoring the pleas of vulnerable inmates, including those who are wounded or bleeding. Faced with poor management and a disregard for basic safety, St. Clair inmates have increasingly preferred the cramped solitary confinement units typically reserved for punishment to the unceasing violence that permeates general population, according to the *New York Times*. Knives and other dangerous weapons are often considered a necessity for survival.

A dozen current and former officers interviewed for this article echoed the conclusions reported in [EJI's lawsuit](#): the bloodshed at St. Clair is due in part to overcrowding, understaffing and shoddy facilities, but also, and perhaps primarily, to failures of leadership and a culture that tolerated violence.'

In a report submitted in EJI's lawsuit, prison expert Steve Martin concluded that the frequency of assaults resulting in life-threatening injuries is quite simply among the highest I have observed in my 43-year career in corrections. The prison reflected a total breakdown of the necessary basic structures that are required to operate a prison safely, he added in an interview with the *Times*.

EJI has documented hundreds of stabbings, sexual assaults, and homicides at St. Clair. Despite efforts to resolve this through settlement, state officials have continued to [spend millions of dollars](#) on litigation and delayed the implementation of crucial reforms that address overcrowding and the other root causes of rampant violence at the prison.

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