

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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A federal grand jury returned an indictment yesterday charging four Alabama Department of Corrections officers with federal civil rights and obstruction of justice offenses. The charges were filed just five days after the Justice Department released a [report](#) detailing systemic violence against incarcerated people by Alabama correctional officers.

The indictment alleges that Sergeant Keith Finch and corrections officers Jordan Thomas and Kevin Blaylock used excessive force and violently abused a prisoner who ran out of his cell in the Bibb Correctional Facility in Brent, Alabama, on September 12, 2018. After two officers took the man to the ground, federal prosecutors [said](#), he curled up in a fetal position and was surrounded by multiple officers. Finch, Thomas, and Blaylock then kicked the prisoner and hit him multiple times with their batons. As a result of this unjustified use of force, the man sustained bodily injury. Thomas and his supervisor, Sergeant Orlanda Walker, then obstructed justice by filing false reports that claimed all force ceased once the prisoner was on the ground.

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On Friday, the Justice Department notified Alabama officials that it has reasonable cause to believe that incarcerated people are subjected to excessive force at the hands of prison staff.

The Justice Department [said](#) in a statement that Finch, Thomas, and Blaylock are facing civil rights charges that carry a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison. Thomas and Walker are charged with obstruction of justice and face up to 20 years in prison. The officers also face a maximum of three years of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000.

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