

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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01.09.09

Morgan County Sheriff Greg Bartlett spent one night in federal custody after evidence showed that inmates in his jail were not being adequately fed, in violation of his agreement to properly care for prisoners.

Alabama allots only \$1.75 per prisoner per day for food. A state law provision allows sheriffs to take home as personal income money not spent on food. Bartlett pocketed \$212,000 over the last three years, while people in his jail went hungry.

Evidence presented in federal court by lawyers for the Atlanta-based Southern Center for Human Rights, which represents the jail inmates, showed that most of the inmates had lost significant weight. Inmates testified they got half an egg, a spoonful of oatmeal and one piece of toast for breakfast most days, and lunch is usually a handful of chips and two sandwiches with barely enough peanut butter to taste.

Similar problems exist in many other counties in Alabama. Sheriffs in some 55 of Alabama's 67 counties pocket as personal income money not spent on food for inmates. The federal judge presiding over the Morgan County case said that this law is almost an invitation to criminality, because sheriffs have a direct pecuniary interest in not feeding inmates.

A court document filed the day after Bartlett's release from federal custody showed that he has promised in the future to use all government funding he receives for jail food to actually feed prisoners.

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