

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/alabama-prison-crisis-claims-another-life-second-homicide-in-three-weeks/>

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09.21.18

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

Yesterday, Rogarius Bray was fatally stabbed at St. Clair Correctional Facility in Springville, Alabama.

This is the second homicide at St. Clair in less than three weeks. On September 2, Terry Pettiway was stabbed and killed outside the same housing unit. It is the third homicide at the facility in the past seven months. On February 9, 25-year-old Travis Wilson was stabbed to death at St. Clair.

Mr. Bray is the ninth incarcerated person murdered in an Alabama prison in the past year.

Dramatic understaffing and poor management has created an extraordinarily high rate of violence and mortality in the states prisons. Nowhere is this more evident than at St. Clair Correctional Facility, where delays in implementing remedial measures and the failure to institute corrective action has led to an escalating crisis and has routinized stabbings, sexual assaults, and homicides.

Per capita, Alabamas rate of just over 34 homicides per 100,000 people incarcerated is more than 600 percent greater than the national average, and more than five times greater than the rate Alabama itself saw from 2001 to 2014. Many of those homicides have occurred at St. Clair, which has had more homicides in 2018 alone than the rest of Alabamas maximum security prisons have had in the last three years combined. In 2018, the homicide rate at St. Clair is set to exceed 300 homicides per 100,000 incarcerated people.

In addition to the highest homicide rate in the country, the mortality rate has skyrocketed even as the overall prison population in Alabama decreases. The mortality rate in Alabamas prisons has more than doubled over the past 10 years. Between 2008 and 2014, Alabamas prison population shrank by 2 percent (from 25,303 to 24,816) while the mortality rate in Alabama prisons nearly doubled (from 241 deaths to over 447 deaths per 100,000 incarcerated people). These trends continued in 2017, as the prison population fell 14 percent (to 21,213), even as deaths rose to over 565 per 100,000 incarcerated people.

As a result of the staffing crisis, there is often no officer presence in the housing units. Mr. Bray was killed in a unit where men with higher management needs are assigned (often referred to as a hot bay unit), but as a result of the staffing crisis, officers rarely enter the dorm and no programming or management is provided, creating an extraordinarily dangerous environment for the men housed in the unit. Similar hot bay units exist at other prisons, including Bibb Correctional Facility and Ventress Correctional Facility, where four of the homicides in the past year occurred.

EJI alleged in a [lawsuit](#) filed in 2014 that St. Clair is one of the most dangerous prisons in the nation. Homicides, sexual assaults, stabbings, and robberies occur on a daily basis, and the majority of these incidents involve incarcerated people in unauthorized areas.

EJIs lawsuit was filed after the Alabama Department of Corrections failed to address dangerous conditions and the extraordinarily high rate of violence at St. Clair, including six homicides in the preceding 36 months. EJIs investigation revealed a shocking level of serious and chronic violence, including sexual assaults, deadly violence, and daily stabbings. Correctional staff and incarcerated people consistently reported that a majority of the population is armed for protection, officers do not feel safe entering dorms and living areas, and stabbings are a daily occurrence.

EJI believes that the recent homicides demonstrate the need for immediate intervention.

Yesterday, Rogarius Bray was fatally stabbed at St. Clair Correctional Facility the second homicide in three weeks.

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