

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Last week, former Tallahassee, Alabama, assistant police chief Chris Miles pleaded guilty to beating a suspect during an interrogation and then lying about it to an FBI agent.

Miles pleaded guilty to one count of deprivation of rights, two counts of false statements, and one count of possession with intent to distribute for abusing his position as assistant police chief to steal 16 pounds of marijuana and then sell it to a known drug dealer.

During the plea hearing in federal court in Montgomery, Alabama, Miles admitted that in April 2013, he beat a man who was serving a sentence at Tallahassee Jail during an interrogation about uncharged crimes he suspected the man of having committed. He struck the man multiple times across the face and head.

The defendant intentionally violated a man's fundamental civil rights and threatened to weaken the public's confidence in our criminal justice system when he decided to beat a suspect into a confession, and to further engage in narcotics trafficking, said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Vanita Gupta, head of the Civil Rights Division. His blatant criminal conduct undermines the dedicated efforts of the vast majority of law enforcement officers who serve honorably. The Justice Department will continue to protect the rights of all individuals, including those in custody, to be free from such abuse and criminal conduct.

Miles will be sentenced at a later date. He faces up to 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for the deprivation of rights count.

EJI has found that poor management, noncompliance with protocols and procedures, and corruption are perpetuating a culture of abuse and violence in Alabama's jails and prisons.

Holding prison and law enforcement officials accountable for abusing incarcerated people is critical to changing that culture and addressing these urgent problems. A former prison guard was convicted in federal court of fatally beating inmate Rocrast Mack at Ventress Correctional Facility in Clayton, Alabama, after EJI called on the Justice Department to investigate Mr. Mack's death. EJI's investigation into widespread sexual abuse of women prisoners at Tutwiler Prison for Women in Wetumpka, Alabama, also led to a federal investigation and mandated reforms. EJI has also reported severe physical and sexual abuse by correctional officers and officials at three men's prisons in Alabama, and recently filed a federal lawsuit challenging dangerous conditions at St. Clair Correctional Facility in Springville, Alabama.

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122 Commerce Street Montgomery, AL 36104 [\(334\) 269-1803](tel:334-269-1803) [\[emailprotected\]](mailto:info@eji.org)

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