

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/alabama-prisons-humanitarian-crisis/>

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04.12.19

Photo sent to WBRC

[Findings](#) issued by the United States Department of Justice documenting the extraordinary rise in violence and sexual assaults in Alabama's prisons over the last five years leave no doubt that there is a humanitarian crisis in our states prisons. [Photographs](#) are now appearing in local and [national media](#) that provide a window into violence that state officials have long shielded from public view.

WBRC News [reported](#) yesterday about the horrific conditions at St. Clair Correctional Facility in Springville, Alabama, based on more than 2500 photographs that were delivered to the station on a jump drive in an envelope with no return address. Reporter Beth Shelburne showed the photographs to two former St. Clair correctional officers who both confirmed their authenticity.

WBRC reported that the photos give us an unprecedented and visceral window into what we've been reporting for years, but have never actually seen. The report continues:

Alabama prisons are a slaughterhouse, where rape, stabbings, murder and extortion happen around the clock, as confirmed in the recent Department of Justice investigation.

In the wake of the Justice Department's [letter to Alabama Governor Kay Ivey](#), law enforcement leaders across Alabama have called on state officials to act with urgency. Richard Moore, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Alabama, said in a [statement](#) that the findings indicate a flagrant disregard for the constitutional ban on cruel and unusual punishments.

The failure to respect the rule of law by providing humane treatment for inmates in Alabama prisons is a poor reflection on those of us who live and work in Alabama, Mr. Moore said. We are better than this. We do not need to tarry very long assessing blame, but rather commit to righting this wrong and spare our State further embarrassment.

Jay Town, U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Alabama, agreed. This massive undertaking alleges constitutional troubles in the Alabama Department of Corrections which are serious, systemic, and in need of fundamental and comprehensive change, he said in a [statement](#).

The Justice Department's letter details 25 immediate reform measures that Alabama must prioritize to reign in this violence and drug trafficking. The remedies mirror those sought in EJI's [lawsuit](#) about conditions at St. Clair and would address the root causes of prison violence: management deficiencies, inadequate investigations, the absence of internal classification systems for housing prisoners, severe staffing shortages, the absence of rehabilitative programming, the failure to intervene in drug trafficking, and the failure to treat a drug epidemic that is out of control.

EJI believes that Alabama must act with a sense of urgency to implement the Justice Department's recommendations, none of which requires or can be meaningfully addressed with new prison construction.

Tags:

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