

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/false-prison-escape-report-highlights-alabama-prison-management-problems/>

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03.13.20

On March 10 at 4:09 am, the Alabama Department of Corrections issued a public alert announcing that Steve Murphy, a prisoner serving a life sentence for murder, had escaped and been at large for hours. News of the escape was broadcast widely by local and national media, including AL.com, WBRC, and the Associated Press. At 7:51 am, ADOC announced that Mr. Murphy had been recaptured.

The corrections department later acknowledged that this entire story was false and that Mr. Murphy had made no attempt to escape.

AP, AL.com, and other news outlets updated their coverage to reflect that Mr. Murphy had never left the prison and repeated ADOC's claim that the alert was issued in compliance with protocol and out of an abundance of caution. But media have not reported on how ADOC was unable to locate Mr. Murphy in the prison for nearly eight hours even though he was not hiding.

The failures in oversight implicated in Mr. Murphy's reported escape point to the perilous state of Alabama's prisons. The closure of Holman Correctional Facility in Atmore, Alabama, and reassignment of its population has intensified these management problems.

In early March, after ADOC announced that it was decommissioning Holman and transferring all incarcerated men not under a death sentence to other facilities, Steve Murphy and other men were transferred from Holman to St. Clair Correctional Facility in Springville, Alabama.

Related Case

EJI filed a class action lawsuit in federal court on behalf of men incarcerated at St. Clair in Springville, Alabama.

St. Clair has experienced three escapes since December 2017. Two of the men escaped using firearms. Six men were stabbed to death last year, broken door locks are a chronic problem, and hundreds of knives have been found in the prison.

ADOC officials are defending multiple lawsuits alleging that years of poor management, a culture of violence, and indifference to basic security lapses like broken locks have created dangerous conditions for staff, incarcerated people, and the public and have led to an extraordinarily [high rate of violence](#).

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