

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/justice-department-sues-alabama-over-unconstitutional-prison-conditions/>

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12.09.20

The U.S. Department of Justice today [filed](#) an unprecedented civil rights complaint against the State of Alabama alleging that the states indifference to the systemic problems in Alabamas prisons for men violates the Constitution.

The Justice Departments intervention not just into a single prison but an entire state prison system is a rare move. Signed by U.S. Attorney General William Barr and filed after more than a year and a half of attempts to negotiate a settlement and pre-empt this kind of unprecedented intervention, the [complaint](#) underscores the seriousness and weight of the allegations.

The department alleges that since April 2019, when it notified Alabamas governor that the states prisoners are housed in unconstitutional conditions, and even throughout the course of multiple rounds of negotiations, Alabama has failed or refused to correct these conditions. Instead, the states prisons have become more overcrowded, homicides have increased, and violence and sexual abuse remains unabated.

The complaint alleges that Alabama prisoners continue daily to endure a high risk of death, physical violence, and sexual abuse and concludes that the United States has determined that constitutional compliance cannot be obtained through voluntary means.

Related Article

Alabama's prison homicide rate is more than 600% greater than the national average.

In a [statement](#) issued today, Alabamas three U.S. Attorneys called for urgency and expressed disappointment that the crisis has been allowed to continue. The results of the investigation into safety and excessive force issues within Alabamas prisons are distressing and continue to require real and immediate attention, said U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Alabama Louis V. Franklin Sr. We hope the filing of this complaint conveys the departments continued commitment to ensuring that the Department of Corrections abides by its constitutional obligations.

I am disappointed that the efforts of both Alabama officials and Department of Justice officials to find appropriate solutions have not resulted in a mutually agreed upon resolution, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Alabama Richard W. Moore stated. Our oath as public officials now requires us to follow the Constitution and to pursue justice in the courts.

EJI has filed multiple complaints with the Justice Department about abusive conditions in state prisons in recent years and also filed suit against [St. Clair Correctional Facility](#) in Springville, Alabama. EJI Senior Attorney Charlotte Morrison stated that the problems surrounding horrific conditions in Alabamas prisons have not been adequately addressed and a much more robust and responsive effort will be needed by the state to achieve compliance with the constitutions requirements.

Tags:

[Alabama](#)

[Prison Conditions](#)

Complaint

Justice Department Files Lawsuit Against the State of Alabama for Unconstitutional Conditions in State's Prisons for Men

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