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News Release

For Immediate Release

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Prisoners file federal class action lawsuit against Santa Barbara County

(Santa Barbara, CA – December 6, 2017) Five prisoners in the Santa Barbara County Jail filed a federal class action lawsuit today, claiming conditions at the jail do not meet minimum standards under the U.S. Constitution and federal law. According to prisoners, the jail fails to provide basic mental health and medical care, overuses and misuses solitary confinement, discriminates against people with disabilities, and provides inhumane, unsanitary, and unsafe living conditions. The prisoners seek an order from the court requiring Santa Barbara County officials to improve jail conditions to comply with constitutional and statutory standards. Representing the prisoners in the case are Disability Rights California, the Prison Law Office, and King & Spalding, which is handling the matter on a pro bono basis. A copy of the complaint is available at:

<http://www.disabilityrightsca.org/advocacy/Murray-v-CountyofSB/Complaint.pdf>

“This is a system with critical deficiencies that have not been addressed for too long,” said Aaron Fischer, litigation counsel at Disability Rights California. “These issues put people with disabilities at risk of harm every day.”

The lawsuit follows [an investigation led by Disability Rights California](#) into conditions in several of California’s county jail systems. It [issued a public report in 2016](#) detailing concerns about the treatment of prisoners in Santa Barbara County Jail.

In the wake of Disability Rights California’s report, Santa Barbara County and the Sheriff’s Office hired several consultants to conduct assessments of the jail and to recommend improvements. “Sheriff Bill Brown and other county officials have cooperated fully with our investigation,” said Mr. Fischer. “It is our expectation that this cooperation will continue and that our clients will soon see meaningful changes in conditions and treatment at the jail. We share the county’s hope that this case can be resolved as quickly as possible.”

In response to the filing of the lawsuit, Sheriff Brown said, “The Sheriff’s Office takes seriously the treatment of all inmates in our custody, especially the most vulnerable. We take these allegations seriously and remain committed to the proper care and treatment of those under our watch.”

Sheriff Brown also said it is important to understand that efforts to improve conditions at the antiquated Santa Barbara County Jail have been ongoing for many years and have been presented with numerous challenges. He said, “The Board and I have worked collaboratively to arrive at solutions designed to reduce the number of mentally ill inmates currently housed in the main jail. We all recognize the need to improve our county jail system and are committed to working with class counsel and the courts to make improvements.”

Sheriff Brown notes that the jail is 50 years old and its design is inefficient. In addition, AB109 realignment brought a different category of inmate into the jail facility from what the facility was designed to hold.

Sheriff Brown reports that the Sheriff’s Office and the Board of Supervisors have worked diligently for a number of years to address the issues associated with the Main Jail, despite extreme financial challenges the County has faced since 2008. For instance, the Board approved the

construction of a new modern facility located in the north county. That project recently broke ground for construction of a new Northern Branch Jail, scheduled to open in 2019.

The prisoners' complaint states that the new facility will not remedy existing deficiencies at the current jail facility, which the county intends to keep using even after the new facility is opened. "This is a county jail that has clearly been dealing with overcrowding, insufficient staffing, and crumbling infrastructure for years," said Joshua Toll, Pro Bono Partner at King & Spalding, "and it is our hope that this case will lead to significant reforms."

Disability Rights California is a non-profit organization that protects the rights of people with disabilities. Visit disabilityrightsca.org.

The Prison Law Office is a non-profit public interest law firm that protects the rights of people incarcerated in correctional facilities. Visit www.prisonlaw.com.

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