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Class Action Settlement Between Sheriff's Department and Inmates with Disabilities in Los Angeles County Jails Moves Forward

(LOS ANGELES) - Today a federal judge granted preliminary approval to a class action settlement between inmates with mobility impairments and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

The ACLU Foundation of Southern California (ACLU SoCal), Disability Rights California, Disability Rights Legal Center (DRLC) and the law firm of Winston & Strawn filed the class action lawsuit, *Johnson v. Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department*, in 2008 on behalf of inmates who were unable to access bathrooms and other facilities in the jails because they had physical disabilities and required special access. The lawsuit alleged the county's failure to provide basic equipment and access, including wheelchairs, violated the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), California and federal statutes, and the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution.

Some plaintiffs described soiling themselves because bathrooms were not accessible to wheelchairs, or falling because toilets were not equipped with grab bars.

The suit has been in mediation for three years. In October, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved a settlement. With the preliminary approval motion, the agreement is now public.

"The suit is groundbreaking because it extends the protections of the ADA to individuals with disabilities in custodial settings," said Kathryn Tucker, executive director of DRLC.

The landmark agreement protects the rights of all inmates who have difficulty walking and must use a wheelchair or crutches. It grants equal access to programs and services such as educational and vocational programs, requires operation of a physical therapy room in Men's Central Jail, requires construction of new accessible housing in Twin Towers Correctional Facility and creates procedures to process inmates' disability-related complaints.

"The Los Angeles Sheriff's Department has come a long way, but this settlement is just the beginning," said Jessica Price, staff attorney at ACLU SoCal. "The agreement provides the plaintiffs a mechanism for court intervention if there are any violations of the terms of the agreement."

The judge's order today grants preliminary approval to the settlement. A hearing on the final approval of the agreement is scheduled for March.

Read the settlement: <https://www.aclusocal.org/cases/johnson-v-lasd/settlement-agreement>

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