



1831 K Street
Sacramento, CA 95811
Tel: (916) 504-5800
TTY: (800) 719-5798
Intake Line: (800) 776-5746
Fax: (916) 504-5901
www.disabilityrightsca.org

News Release

For Immediate Release

Contact: Pat McConahay, Communications Director
Disability Rights California
(916) 504-5938
Pat.McConahay@disabilityrightsca.org

Margot Mendelson
Prison Law Office
(510) 280-2621
MMendelson@prisonlaw.com

Prisoners file federal class action lawsuit against Sacramento County

(Sacramento, CA – July 31, 2018) Six prisoners in Sacramento County's jails filed a federal class action lawsuit today, claiming that jail conditions do not meet minimum standards under the U.S. Constitution and federal law. The lawsuit asserts that the County's jails are overcrowded and dangerously understaffed, and that they fail to provide adequate mental health and medical care. The prisoners describe a system defined by extreme and widespread use of solitary confinement, discrimination against people with disabilities, and appalling living conditions. Representing the prisoners in the case are Disability Rights California and the Prison Law Office.

The lawsuit follows a Disability Rights California investigation into conditions in several of California's county jail systems. Disability Rights

California issued a public report detailing concerns about the treatment of Sacramento County Jail prisoners with disabilities.

A copy of the complaint and Disability Rights California's public report are available at: <https://www.disabilityrightsca.org/cases/mays-v-county-of-sacramento>.

In the wake of the DRC report, the County retained nationally renowned experts to evaluate its jail health care and correctional practices, its system for suicide prevention, its treatment of people with disabilities, and its use of solitary confinement. These experts found that Sacramento's County's jails are "dangerously understaffed," "wholly inadequate," and "operate in a state of near perpetual emergency." Those experts' reports have been submitted to the federal court in support of the lawsuit.

"The conditions that people with serious mental health needs and disabilities face inside Sacramento County's jails are beyond the pale," said Aaron Fischer, Litigation Counsel at Disability Rights California. "You don't have to take our word for it. The County's own consultants have condemned the jail system as dangerous, inadequate, and dramatically out of step with contemporary standards."

Sacramento County locks up hundreds of people in solitary confinement, where they spend nearly their entire existence alone in a cell. They may not get outside for fresh air or to see the sun for months at a time. Many are classified as "Total Separation" prisoners, meaning that they are not permitted to have normal contact with any other human beings. At least five people have died by suicide since November 2016 (including three in "Total Separation"), and hundreds more have become suicidal or engaged in acts of self-harm.

Jennifer Bothun, a woman with mental illness and medical needs, has spent several months in "Total Separation" solitary confinement at the jail while she waits for her trial. She arrived at the jail with a deteriorating eye condition. Denied treatment for more than a year now, she has nearly gone blind and suffers extreme pain and dizziness every day. Her experience has been one long, grueling nightmare. "I won't be the same person when I get out," she said.

"Sacramento County is well aware of the serious problems inside its jails," said Margot Mendelson, Staff Attorney at the Prison Law Office. "Our clients are entirely dependent on the jail system for their health care and

basic needs. They are suffering needlessly due to the County's failure to commit the resources to meet its constitutional and legal obligations."

Disability Rights California and the Prison Law Office have successfully litigated class action cases in jails throughout the State regarding conditions of confinement. "It remains our sincere hope that this case can be resolved without the need for costly litigation," said Aaron Fischer. "But we are prepared to seek a remedy in court to end the violation of our clients' rights. Our clients can wait no longer."

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.