



ACLU of Florida and FJI Defend Disabled Man Subjected to Prison Abuse

Partially-paralyzed inmate forced to crawl to and from toilet, was beaten and denied food for suing prison officials

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PENSACOLA - The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Florida and the Florida Justice Institute (FJI) are representing a partially-paralyzed man detained in a Florida prison who is suing for being denied the use of a wheelchair while in his prison cell and has been retaliated against for pursuing legal action against the prison.

Richard Jackson, who suffers from partial paralysis of his lower limbs, cannot walk and must use a wheelchair for mobility. However, the prison officials at Santa Rosa Correctional Institution refused to allow Jackson the use of a wheelchair inside his cell, requiring him to drag himself using his hands and arms in order to navigate between his bed and the toilet, and to enter and exit the cell.

After Jackson filed a lawsuit last April challenging his treatment at the hands of Santa Rosa CI officials, he was transferred to another prison where he was retaliated against for pursuing the lawsuit by being beaten and having his food withheld. Jackson lost approximately 30 pounds in roughly one month. It was because of this retaliation that Jackson reached out to the Florida Justice Institute and the ACLU of Florida for assistance in the defense of his rights and safety.

“People in our prisons should not be subject to inhuman and degrading conditions or be denied medically-necessary accommodations – to do otherwise violates both the goal of rehabilitation and the protections of the Constitution,” stated ACLU of Florida staff attorney Benjamin Stevenson. “How we treat the most vulnerable among us speaks to the very core of who we are. Floridians are better people and we must demand that the prison officials we hire end the abuse that is inconsistent with our values and principles as a society.”

Last week, the ACLU and FJI filed an amended complaint in Mr. Jackson’s lawsuit reflecting their role as attorneys for Mr. Jackson in the case. The modified complaint clarified the legal claims and arguments in Mr. Jackson’s original lawsuit and added the allegations of retaliatory abuse suffered by Mr. Jackson.

“The mistreatment that Mr. Jackson has been subjected to at the hands of prison officials must come to an end,” stated Dante Trevisani of the Florida Justice Institute. “Someone who needs a wheelchair shouldn’t be forced to drag himself across a filthy prison floor to use the toilet, and he shouldn’t be beaten and denied food for trying to challenge that.”



The lawsuit names Secretary of the Florida Department of Corrections Michael Crews, Santa Rosa Correctional Institution Warden Richard Comerford and several prison officials and corrections officers as defendants. The complaint states that the treatment of Mr. Jackson has violated the Americans with Disabilities Act, as well as Mr. Jackson's constitutionally-protected right to petition the government and protection against being subject to cruel and unusual punishment.

A copy of the amendment complaint is available here: <http://aclufl.org/resources/jackson-v-crews-et-al-second-amended-complaint/>

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About the ACLU of Florida

The ACLU of Florida is freedom's watchdog, working daily in the courts, legislatures and communities to defend individual rights and personal freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. For additional information, visit our web site at: www.aclufl.org.

About the Florida Justice Institute

The Florida Justice Institute is a nonprofit public interest law firm that conducts civil rights litigation and advocacy in the areas of prisoners' rights, housing discrimination, disability discrimination, and other areas that impact the lives of Florida's poor and disenfranchised. More information at www.floridajusticeinstitute.org.