

Department of Justice
Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, May 22, 2013

Justice Department Finds Unconstitutional Conditions of Confinement at Escambia County, Fla. Jail

Today, the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division issued a letter detailing the findings of its investigation into conditions of confinement at Escambia County Jail, a jail located in northwest Florida, housing roughly 1,300 prisoners. The department found that, although the jail under the leadership of Sheriff David Morgan has recently implemented a series of meaningful reforms, conditions at the jail still routinely violate the constitutional rights of prisoners.

Specifically, the department concluded that known systemic deficiencies at the facility, stemming mainly from staffing shortages, continue to subject prisoners to excessive risk of assault by other prisoners and to inadequate mental health care. Additionally, the department found that until recently, the jail had an informal policy and practice of designating some of its housing units as only for African-American prisoners. By segregating some of its prisoners on the basis of race, the jail not only stigmatized and discriminated against many of its African-American prisoners, it also fanned combustible racial tensions within the jail.

"We commend Sheriff Morgan for his willingness to work aggressively to remedy many of the problems brought to his attention during the course of our investigation," said Roy L. Austin Jr., Deputy Assistant Attorney General of the Civil Rights Division. "We hope to work cooperatively with the Sheriff and the County to address and remedy the remaining unconstitutional conditions of confinement at Escambia Jail."

The department conducted this investigation pursuant to its authority under the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA) to enforce constitutional mandates. The department's investigation was broad based and included a review of practices relating to the level of security at the jail, the adequacy of medical and mental health services, and sanitation/environmental conditions.

Under its CRIPA authority, in addition to investigating the conditions of confinement at correctional facilities, the department has also investigated conditions at psychiatric hospitals, nursing homes, residential facilities serving persons with developmental disabilities, and juvenile correctional facilities. CRIPA's focus is on systemic deficiencies rather than on the misconduct of individuals. Please visit www.justice.gov/crt to learn more about CRIPA and other laws enforced by the Department's Civil Rights Division

The investigation was conducted by Special Litigation Counsel Avner Shapiro and Senior Trial Attorney David Deutsch of the Civil Rights Division's Special Litigation Section. The findings letter will be available on the Department's Web site at www.justice.gov/crt.