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Outrageous abuse of disabled inmates

Lawsuit accuses the Sheriff's Department Los Angeles County of alleged abuse within their prisons, but this time against prisoners with physical

Andrea Carrion | 11/8/2011, 9:54 pm



Christian Reyes, age 21, left the Central Jail in Los Angeles County a year ago, but do not forget the abuse that accused, was in by the guards. | Andrea Carrion

Having spent two and a half days in his own urine and unable to leave the wheelchair.

Just remember the first time Christian Kings who lived in the Inmate Reception Center in the County Jail in Los Angeles, after he was arrested by the authorities. But this would only be a prelude to the coming months that he lived behind bars.

A year after his release, Reyes has decided the terrible conditions, he said, in which many inmates with physical disabilities in the prison system in Los Angeles County, which is administered by the County Sheriff's Department (LASD).

His testimony complaint situations only expect to see in fiction novels. Reyes is not the only one who is raising his voice.

For months, the LASD and its prisons are against the wall from a series of complaints and reports that have come to light and exaggerated abuse accuse the guards towards the prisoners. But to date had not said anything about the most vulnerable area of the prison, the inmates of that due to their physical disabilities should use a wheelchair, a walker or crutches.

The problems apparently are taking with this population are so serious that three nonprofit organizations and a law firm, supported by seven plaintiffs, all men who claim that they lived close to the situation, filed a lawsuit against the LASD, the head of LASD, Lee Baca, and against the County of Los Angeles.

This happened in 2007, presenting new demands in June 2010. To date no action has been taken despite the seriousness of the allegations.

Jessica Price, attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), told TODAY that the entity, together with Disabilities Rights California, Disabilities Rights Legal Center and Winston and Sprawn study are responsible for bringing the case.

"We receive numerous letters and phone calls from relatives of inmates who complain about how they were being treated their loved ones in prison. They said they were being denied basic needs such as wheelchairs or access to a basin when they arrived at the jail. It was quite alarming allegations and our office began to communicate with the county on these issues and it is surprising that recently came to light," said Price.

The complainants

On January 23, 2008, Christian Reyes was shot in the back and one in the torso while riding a skateboard a few blocks from his house. After spending several days in the hospital and rehab to regain some body functions, such as walking, the son of Honduran Angeleno age 21 he returned home and even with points in his wounds, was arrested on suspicion of attempted murder.

"The process of bringing the station to the Inmate Reception Center of the jail took a long time and I needed that I put a catheter to urinate. I asked for help to the guards and told me to go to a bathroom. I explained that this was not the way I did, they told me I would bring a catheter and never did. To avoid urinating, I moved from side to side in my chair to relieve the pressure, I felt my bladder would explode," said Reyes. "Until I could not stand and urinate on himself. My diaper was soaked and other inmates helped me get another pants because by telling the guards that he was all wet, I replied 'What can I do?' "Said Christian, who then quietly said that in addition to beat the urine also earned him the gut and defecated.

Once in jail, Reyes was sent to the frame 8100, an area reserved for inmates who use wheelchairs. There he spent the first few months in solitary confinement until an altercation with the authorities gave him a ticket to discipline module or "the hole", so nicknamed for being an isolated and without access to sunlight.

"They sent me seven months to the next hole while we were talking in line. The guards claimed that I was

resisting and they punished me. The worst was that the hole that I was sent for the general population, or had no bars or facilities for people using wheelchairs. It was very difficult to go to the bathroom, I had to use my arms to help me and walked with disinfectants packages, "said Reyes.

In the lawsuit, several of the plaintiffs who were assigned to the area inicialmente 8100, complain of having been reassigned to the area 7000, for inmates with crutches or walker, or even the general population area, an area in which there allowed the use of wheelchairs.

Gonzalez, who is still awaiting trial in the Central Prison for Men, said some of the worst experiences you've had since I was admitted in October 2009, they have to do with health care received in prison.

His left leg has almost no mobility and suffers from serious circulation problems after a shot affect your nerves and arteries. Before being arrested, a doctor had prescribed a wheelchair and a hose to prevent a stroke. Gonzalez stated that the jail was disgnóstico other.

He said a prison doctor sent him to the 7000 module, which does not allow wheelchairs and where the beds are not raised to help with the circulation of the legs. Gonzalez says the guards threatened to punish him if he refused to leave his wheelchair.

A month in the area of walkers and crutches caused several falls in the bathroom and that his leg was inflamed to the point to get home. This so impressed the judge that he had to sign an order for Gonzalez to reallocate the 8100 area and also be given a special stockings to prevent clots.

Gonzalez said that when he arrived at the jail, they wore special half, but the guards threw her on one occasion when they did an inspection of his cell.

In addition to Joe Gonzalez, plaintiffs make this complaint are Donald Peterson, Michael Curfman, Andre Butler, Columbus Grigsby, Derrick White and Peter Johnson. The latter, who entered prison in 2007, has paraplegia and its main outstanding charges have been eight hours on their own excrement for lack of access to a bathroom with wheelchair facilities in the Inmate Reception Center. It also accused have been assigned to a cell where it is difficult to use the toilet as the handle bars were broken.

Other affidavits do nothing but inflame the situation. One is that of Johnny Gonzalez-no relation to Joe Gonzalez, who said in February 2009, despite needing a wheelchair, was sent to the area 7000. There he was assigned a cell for four people and as the two beds were already taken down, had to sleep on the floor because he could not climb to the top bunk.

Photogallery

Disabled inmates accused of abuse of authority



Sheriff: "We are investigating"

For the Sheriff's Department Los Angeles County (LASD), such accusations have become a recurring theme and usually reply, when the press asks a reaction, "we are investigating."

With respect to this lawsuit and responding to claims made by the people interviewed for this story, Commander James Hellmold, the LASD, explained to TODAY some functions and policies in the treatment of prison inmates with physical disabilities.

The prison system in Los Angeles County has more than 15 000 inmates in eight locations. Of this total, an average of 100 inmates are assigned to the wheelchair area (8100) and another 100 are assigned to the area for walkers and crutches (7000). The number of guards and civilian workers in jail is 2 000.

According to ACLU, 70% of inmates in county jails have not received a sentence, that is, there are many who end up being found innocent, as with Christian Reyes.

Hellmold said that the prison has a medical team in different areas for prisoners with disabilities and which module to which each inmate is assigned depends on the criteria of these medical professionals, operating either in jail or at local hospitals.

"We have doctors determine who needs a chair and who does not. Not all prisoners are in accordance with the decision of the doctors and that is why our complaints. But it is important to note that some people say having a disability just because they want to be in an individual cell or want to be in the medical area," said Hellmold. "Now, I'm not saying that this is the case of people that are in contact, but it happens very often. Some claim to have a physical disability, some even pretend to have mental problems or who are gay to be assigned to that area. There are all kinds of situations only to be assigned to the area they want, so we need to use much common sense to be fair and to maintain a safe environment," he said, adding that last year the LASD was cut by 128 million dollars your budget.

Hellmold would not go into details or speak specifically about the allegations set forth in this report, it said, the LASD is conducting an investigation based on allegations made by the ACLU related to alleged excessive force against prisoners.

"Overall we have a standard use of force, we want the guards to follow these guidelines and if they do not, will be disciplined. We have had numerous cases, 30 cases of people who have been fired or punished for excessive use of force against prisoners. The LASD is dealing with this situation, but it is important to note that the guards are constantly attacked by the inmates and the best thing for us is to respond and be professional," said Hellmold.

The 30 cases referred to occurred in all prisons and between prisoners in the general population. As for the disabled, who are referred to as ADA (Americans With Disabilities Act / Americans with Disabilities Act) - have very few cases of excessive use of force. "It's very strange," he said.

However, both Reyes and Gonzalez and Johnson said they were beaten or had witnessed physical abuse and ridicule against prisoners in wheelchairs from the guards.

The lawsuit demands that these alleged abuses are completed and that the defendants are not arbitrarily reassigned to other areas, but there are other points. Are asked to ensure that facilities have appropriate

access for people with disabilities who have access to programs and access to equal opportunities in the general population to be part of the same benefits that are correctly identified when inmates need to be installed in the field of wheelchairs, crutches or walker. Finally, the demand requires complaints processes more efficient ADA inmates accused be ignored because many asking for help.

Shawna Parks, legal director of the Disabilities Rights Legal Center organization has been in charge of this case since its inception. She has worked as a lawyer in this field since 1999.

"This is the most outrageous I've seen in my years of working on disability rights," said Parks on TODAY. "And what worries me most are the inconsistencies, as the case of an inmate who removed his wheel chair and medicine in the county and state prison when he became a doctor put him on permanent seat."

The next court date is March 20, 2012, but is expected to reach an agreement before to avoid the thousands of dollars involved in this process.

"We're not asking for money or damages, but an order to improve prison conditions for the disabled," said ACLU attorney, Jessica Price.

Mothers 'classes should give humanity'

Prisoners with disabilities who have reported abuse and neglect by the authorities of the prison system in Los Angeles County are not the only victims in this case pending in court since 2007.

The mothers of these people have long complained of mistreatment, according to them, their children constantly accuse the slightest reason.

"Josephine" fictitious name of the mother of one of the inmates who testified in the lawsuit, it is still dry their tears when they repeated the stories TODAY tells his son of 24 years in prison from 2009.

"My child is terrified in there, not by fellow inmates but the guards themselves, for their attitude," she said. "I was once told of an attack against a fellow guards handicapped in wheelchairs. He must wear a colostomy bag to store their feces. My son saw when he golperaron of nowhere and the beating they gave him, he blew up the bag and the guy swimming around your needs, pulled over, "said" Josefina "without back tears. "The boy asked my son to testify that he saw the guard hit him, but my son said he wanted to get into trouble because the police told him 'What about your saw?' and my son had to say 'I did not see anything.' He felt bad to see the boy lying in his own excrement and can not do anything. "

"Adela," the mother of another former inmate with a disability who did not give her name in this story for fear of reprisals against his son, said the beating he gave his son broke his finger, among other abuses.

"Before my son was a happy boy, not afraid of anything, but inside everything changed, I could not say anything because if I beat him and when he returned home from nightmares screaming 'Do not hit me, I did nothing'. It was hard for me, "recalled" Adela. " "I complained all the time, 'I'm going to complain until I die,' I said. One of them once told me 'You're doing' and I said 'My son is legally disabled. " Classes of humanity should give these people believe that having a gun, a stick or a uniform and have God in their hands. When asked why they treat them well, I said, 'Because they are criminals'. I know it's not Disneyland, but they have their rights. "