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**FEDERAL COURT ENTERS RULING THAT CONDITIONS AT DAVID WADE
CORRECTIONAL CENTER IN HOMER, LOUISIANA ARE UNCONSTITUTIONAL AND
VIOLATE THE ADA**

United States District Court Judge Elizabeth Foote entered a ruling on November 1, 2022, finding that conditions on the South Compound of David Wade Correctional Center, a Louisiana state prison near Homer, Louisiana, violated the rights of the men who are incarcerated there.

The Federal Court determined that conditions on the South Compound were so severe that they violated the Eighth Amendment rights of hundreds of men housed in solitary confinement. The court also found systematic deficiencies regarding the prison's mental health system and that prison officials violated the Americans with Disabilities Act.

In its opinion, the court determined that prisoners housed in solitary confinement cells on the South Compound were "stripped of virtually all personal belongings and deprived of meaningful human contact and mental stimulation for indefinite, but often lengthy, periods." The evidence showed that some prisoners were housed under these conditions for years at a time. The court also found that a disproportionate number of the men housed in solitary confinement had a mental illness and that the South Compound served "as a depository for the mentally ill" under conditions that "cause those inmates even more pain and suffering, including the worsening of their mental illness."



The court also recounted the evidence regarding David Wade’s use of strip cell status—an unusually cruel punishment where men are stripped of their clothing and not allowed property or recreation time. The court found that the prison’s use of strip cell status “serves to inflict mental and physical torture.”

The court also found systemic deficiencies in the prison’s provision of mental health screening, evaluation, and treatment – including unqualified staff, understaffing, inadequate treatment, and inaccurate medical records. The court also found that the prison’s suicide prevention program was constitutionally inadequate and punitive.

The court found that the evidence presented at trial did not sufficiently support the plaintiffs’ First Amendment claims that prison officials had interfered with inmates’ legal mail.

The full opinion is available here: <https://disabilityrightsla.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Wade-Correctional-Decision.pdf>

The court’s findings come in response to a February 2018 lawsuit filed by several men challenging the prolonged use of solitary confinement at David Wade. The men were joined in their suit by Disability Rights Louisiana (“DRLA”), the state protection and advocacy (“P&A”) organization. In their lawsuit, the men recounted stark and abusive conditions, including people with serious mental illness being housed for years on end in cells with virtually no mental health care. When confined to cells for 23 or 24 hours per day, men with serious mental illness deteriorated to a point of screaming, talking to themselves and self-mutilation. In January 2022, the court heard four weeks of testimony and took evidence from the men, prison staff, and expert witnesses.

"This victory on behalf of hundreds of men at David Wade is the result of six years of work by our clients who are incarcerated there, who refused to give up their rights, or the hope that things can be different," said Melanie Bray, DRLA Assistant Legal Director and lead counsel. "When people with mental illness are sent to the state prison as punishment for a crime, the state has an obligation to provide baseline mental health care. The proof in this case showed



that there was virtually no mental health care at DWCC, and that men there are suffering greatly as a result of the state's indifference."

In January 2023, Judge Foote will begin a three-week trial to evaluate what court orders need to be put in place to redress the constitutionally deficient conditions.

The lawsuit has been primarily litigated by attorneys from Disability Rights Louisiana and cooperating counsel from the ACLU of Louisiana, with support from lawyers with the Promise of Justice Initiative and the law firms of Adams & Reese and Cohen Milstein.

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