

## Lang v. Washington County, Alabama Press Release

February 10, 2022

Inmates of the Washington County, Alabama, jail have filed a class action [lawsuit](#) to address the oppressive and inhumane conditions of the jail, which have placed the detainees there at serious risk of harm or death. The inmates are represented by the Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program and private counsel.

The federal lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Alabama, details how detainees are subject to abjectly inhumane treatment. The deteriorated conditions within the jail have resulted in dangerous, life-threatening events, including:

- A detainee attempted to hang himself with a telephone cord in the jail dayroom. Despite calls for help, no staff responded for over five minutes. Other detainees pulled the phone cord off the detainee who was attempting suicide. By the time staff arrived, the detainee was unconscious and had urinated and defecated on himself. As another detainee described it, when the detainee tried to hang himself, jail staff “just kind of let him do it.”
- A detainee who suffers from a preexisting medical condition depends on medication to prevent frequent catatonic episodes. While detained with no access to his medication, he often has episodes that leave him unable to speak, move or eat. No jail staff have made an effort to intervene.
- A detainee who suffers from PTSD following his service in the Iraq War has made multiple requests for psychiatric treatment while he has been in the jail. Each one of his repeated requests have been denied.

Chronic overcrowding in Washington County results in high tension throughout the jail which often culminates in violence. Fights and stabbings are commonplace. When violence erupts, jail staff delay intervention and often arrive with so few staff as to be unable to intervene effectively.

The lawsuit further details the cruel and inhumane practice of “medical bonds,” which is the jail’s absurd alternative to providing detainees with adequate medical care. A series of [ProPublica](#) articles from 2019 described the practice in depth, including how detainees who are facing severe medical events will be forced to sign liability release forms instead of receiving care. If detainees lack insurance or another means to pay, the jail ignores their issue to avoid paying.

The lawsuit seeks to ameliorate the unconstitutional conditions in the jail, including discrimination against detainees with disabilities, which have persisted for more than 20 years.

For further information, please contact Shandra Monterastelli or Henry Brewster. Ms. Monterastelli can be reached via phone at (205) 348-4436 or by email at [smonterastelli@adap.ua.edu](mailto:smonterastelli@adap.ua.edu). Mr. Brewster can be reached via phone at (251) 338-0630 or by email at [hbrewster@brewsterlaw.net](mailto:hbrewster@brewsterlaw.net).