



## **For Immediate Release**

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### **Contacts**

Kara Janssen, Disability Rights Legal Center  
(213) 736-1031 Ext. 7406

Jon Atabek, Atabek & Associates, P.C.  
(213) 394-5953

Carol Strickman and Dorsey Nunn,  
Legal Services for Prisoners with Children  
(415) 255-7036

## **CLASS ACTION CLAIMS CALIFORNIA JAIL ABUSES DISABLED PRISONERS**

*Class action case cites repeated retaliation against detainees and prisoners who speak out about violations of the ADA and other laws*

**Sacramento, CA – May 25, 2016** – A major class action lawsuit filed today details horrific civil rights abuses in a California jail against people with disabilities, as well as cruel retaliation against detainees who make their concerns known.

The federal suit alleges that the Shasta County Jail, in Redding, routinely ignores and fails to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other federal and state laws. As of 2013, approximately 11,000 prisoners are processed through the jail each year. The jail's extensive violations restrict disabled prisoners ability to sleep, use the restroom, shower, worship, recreate, exercise, and move around the facility. The complaint alleges:

“People with mobility disabilities are denied accommodations, provided inadequate accommodations, inappropriately segregated from the general population, placed in 23 hour lock down, excluded from jail programs and services, and subjected to multiple and pervasive physical access barriers throughout the facilities. The result is a system that imposes some of the worst conditions on people with mobility disabilities while at the same time excluding them from the most beneficial programs within the jail. These conditions have dire mental and physical consequences and are in flagrant violation of the law.”

Adding insult to injury, detainees regularly faced retribution for attempting to file a grievance or even to discuss the abuse with an attorney. Plaintiffs were denied needed cancer medication, told grievance forms were better used to “wipe their ass with,” and served tainted food. Other punishments for speaking out include body cavity searches, being locked in solitary confinement, and having their canes taken away or destroyed.

“As an organization of currently and formerly incarcerated people, we are very concerned about the human rights violations against all people in jails and prisons. People do not shed their humanity at booking. We hope this litigation will result in Shasta County properly caring for the people in their custody.” Dorsey Nunn, Executive Director, Legal Services for Prisoners with Children.

Disability Right Legal Center (DRLC) Attorney Kara Janssen explained, “detainees and prisoners with disabilities at the Shasta County Jail are held in truly abhorrent conditions that not only worsen their existing disabilities but also have devastating psychological effects.”

“Everyone deserves dignity,” said Taylor Gooch, co-counsel for the plaintiffs. “We’re seeking to protect that dignity and restore the legally protected rights of persons incarcerated by Shasta County.”

“Solitary confinement is an extreme punishment that can cause serious psychological damage,” added co-counsel Jon Atabek, of Atabek & Associates “When I learned Shasta County Jail was putting disabled people into solitary confinement for being disabled—needing a cane, wheelchair, or walker—I was shocked, and felt compelled to do something. Once we started digging, it became apparent disabled people were an afterthought to the jail, and that discrimination and equal access had never entered the County’s mind. This case can fix that, through injunctions that make sure the Jail follows the law. Law enforcement should follow the law.”

The case is *Jewett et. al. vs. Shasta County Sheriff’s Department et. al.*, Case No. 2:13-cv-0882 in the US District Court, Eastern District of California. Plaintiffs’ counsel is Kecker & Van Nest LLP; Atabek & Associates, P.C.; and the Disability Rights Legal Center. A copy of the complaint is available at [www.drlcenter.org](http://www.drlcenter.org).

### **About Legal Services for Prisoners with Children**

Legal Services for Prisoners with Children (LSPC) organizes communities impacted by the criminal justice system and advocates to release incarcerated people, to restore human and civil rights and to reunify families and communities. LSPC builds public awareness of structural racism in policing, the courts and prison system and advances racial and gender justice in all its work. For more information about LSPC visit [www.prisonerswithchildren.org/](http://www.prisonerswithchildren.org/)

### **About Disability Rights Legal Center**

Founded in 1975, Disability Rights Legal Center (DRLC) is the nation’s oldest national cross-disability advocacy organization. It seeks to protect and to expand the autonomy, liberty and inclusion of people with disabilities. To learn more visit [www.drlcenter.org](http://www.drlcenter.org)

### **About Kecker & Van Nest**

Based in San Francisco, the 80 trial and litigation attorneys of Kecker & Van Nest LLP devote their practice exclusively to complex civil and criminal litigation. The attorneys’ expertise encompass a wide range of substantive areas, including intellectual property, professional liability, class actions, commercial, antitrust, securities and white collar litigation. For more information about Kecker & Van Nest, its attorneys, and its services, visit [www.kvn.com](http://www.kvn.com).

### **Atabek & Associates, P.C.**

Atabek & Associates, P.C. (A&A) was founded in 2011 and handles civil litigation on behalf of businesses and individuals. A&A focuses on business and contract litigation, defense of ADA claims, and personal injury litigation.

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