

Department of Justice
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Justice Department Announces Statewide Investigation into Conditions in Alabama's Prisons for Men

The Justice Department announced today that it has opened a statewide investigation into the conditions in Alabama's prisons for men. The investigation will focus on whether prisoners are adequately protected from physical harm and sexual abuse at the hands of other prisoners; whether prisoners are adequately protected from use of excessive force and staff sexual abuse by correctional officers; and whether the prisons provide sanitary, secure and safe living conditions.

"The Constitution requires that prisons provide humane conditions of confinement," said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Vanita Gupta, head of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "We hope to work cooperatively with the state of Alabama in conducting our inquiry and ensuring that the state's facilities keep prisoners safe from harm."

"Our obligation is to protect the civil rights of all citizens, including those who are incarcerated," said U.S. Attorney Joyce White Vance of the Northern District of Alabama. "This investigation provides us with an opportunity to work collaboratively with the state of Alabama to assess current conditions and ensure constitutionally sufficient conditions exist for all prisoners."

"The vulnerability of a prisoner makes it even more important that basic hygiene and safe accommodations are afforded the inmates," said U.S. Attorney George L. Beck Jr. of the Middle District of Alabama.

"I am very pleased to have my office join the Northern and Middle Districts of Alabama as well as the Civil Rights Division in opening an investigation into the Alabama prison system," said U.S. Attorney Kenyen R. Brown of the Southern District of Alabama. "All citizens, even those who are incarcerated, should expect sanitary conditions of habitation that are free of physical harm and sexual abuse."

The department has not reached any conclusions regarding the allegations in this matter. The investigation will be conducted under the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA). Under CRIPA, the department has the authority to investigate violations of prisoners' constitutional rights that result from a "pattern or practice of resistance to the full enjoyment of such rights." The department has conducted CRIPA investigations of many correctional systems, and where violations have been found, the resulting settlement agreements have led to important reforms.

The Civil Rights Division's Special Litigation Section and the U.S. Attorney's Offices for the Northern, Middle and Southern Districts of Alabama are conducting this investigation. Individuals with relevant information are encouraged to contact the department via phone at (205) 244-2001 or by email at usaaln.civilrights@usdoj.gov (link sends e-mail).