



UPDATE



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District of Columbia Settles Case Involving Wrongful Death of Prisoner

In August 2008, after weeks of negotiations with the D.C. Office of the Attorney General, the Committee and co-counsel settled a wrongful death lawsuit against the District of Columbia on behalf of the family of a prisoner of the D.C. Jail. **The settlement was the largest amount ever offered by the District of Columbia in a wrongful death action involving a prisoner.**

In 2002, the U.S. District Court lifted a 17-year-old court order mandating a population cap at the D.C. Jail, leading the D.C. Department of Corrections to increase the population at the facility from 1,674 to over 2,400, without an increase in staffing or other steps to accommodate the influx of people. In December 2002, during the bloodiest four-day period in the Jail's history, three men were stabbed, two fatally. No corrections officers witnessed the incidents.

In response, in 2003 the D.C. Prisoners' Legal Services Project (now the D.C. Prisoners' Project of the Committee), along with the plaintiffs' firm **Sparks & Silber LLP** and

Covington & Burling LLP, filed a wrongful death action against the District government on behalf of Pearl Beale, mother of the deceased Givon Pendleton, joined by constitutional claims on behalf of Bradley Autman, a veteran and amputee, who survived his stabbing at the Jail two days after Mr. Pendleton's death.

For more than four years, the case was inextricably linked with reform of the D.C. Jail, with plaintiffs' attorneys advocating on a wide range of issues, from security, staffing, and population limits to the naming of a reform-minded Director of the Department of Corrections.

As a result of these efforts and aided by the substantial discovery in the *Beale* case, the Jail population has been dramatically reduced, staffing has been expanded, and overall security has vastly improved.

In November 2007, the Project won an important victory in *Anderson v. Williams*, a companion case to *Beale*. In *Anderson*, the issue was the Mayor's refusal to set a population limit at the D.C. Jail, a mandate imposed by the D.C. Council in the wake of the stabbings of Mr. Pendleton and Mr. Autman.