



For Immediate Release

May 2, 2016

Contacts

Stuart Seaborn and Rebecca Williford, Disability Rights Advocates
(510) 665-8644

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

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

Settlement Greatly Improves Conditions for People with Physical Disabilities at Santa Rita Jail

Oakland, CA – May 2, 2016 – Disability Rights Advocates (DRA), Disability Rights Legal Center (DRLC), and Legal Services for Prisoners with Children (LSPC) today announced a comprehensive settlement agreement to improve accessibility for people with disabilities who are incarcerated at or visiting Santa Rita Jail (the Jail).

The settlement resolves a lawsuit brought by LSPC and taxpayers Barbara Michel and Laura Magnani all of whom are represented by DRA and DRLC.

The lawsuit alleged that the Jail failed to provide for basic needs of people with disabilities by forcing people with mobility disabilities to live in inaccessible housing units that lacked basic wheelchair accessible facilities, such as toilets, showers, and visiting areas. The lawsuit also alleged that the Jail unnecessarily segregated some individuals with disabilities in its Outpatient Housing Unit because of their disabilities, in some cases denying incarcerated individuals with disabilities access to critical rehabilitative programs, religious services, and recreation activities.

Under the settlement agreement, the County will make major changes to the Jail to dramatically improve access for people with disabilities, including significant physical modifications to provide wheelchair-accessible cells, showers, restrooms, dining facilities, recreation areas, visiting areas, entrances, and healthcare facilities. In addition, the County will provide American Sign Language interpreters if

necessary for effective communication and access to a videophone for people incarcerated who are deaf and/or have hearing loss and use American Sign Language.

The settlement also includes updates to policies, including an updated grievance policy for incarcerated people with disabilities. Additionally, the County will retain an outside expert to evaluate its compliance with access improvements made pursuant to the settlement agreement.

The settlement does not contemplate Jail administrators increasing the number of people they incarcerate.

Carol Strickman of Legal Services for Prisoners with Children commented, “This settlement is an important victory for people with disabilities who are incarcerated at Santa Rita. They have suffered far too long without full access to basic necessities such as toilets, showers and dining areas. Creating accessible visiting space in in the Jail for both prisoners and their visitors will make a tremendous difference in keeping families connected during the difficult times of a loved one's incarceration.”

Attorney Stuart Seaborn of DRA explained, “The County’s commitment to dramatically improving access to its rehabilitative programs and facilities is a positive step towards dignity and humane treatment of people with disabilities at the Jail.”

DRLC Staff Attorney Kara Janssen said, “As advocates for people with disabilities, we are very pleased with this agreement; it provides a model for county jails and we hope these types of improvements will be made in all jails.”

A copy of the settlement agreement is available at www.dralegal.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.

<http://www.prisonerswithchildren.org/>

About Disability Rights Advocates

Disability Rights Advocates (DRA) is a non-profit legal center which, for over twenty years, has specialized in high-impact class action litigation and structured negotiations on behalf of people with all types of disabilities. DRA practices nationally and has offices in Berkeley, California and New York City. <http://www.dralegal.org>

About Disability Rights Legal Center

Founded in 1975, Disability Rights Legal Center (DRLC) is the nation’s oldest national cross-disability advocacy organization, seeking to protect and expand the autonomy, liberty and inclusion of people with disabilities. <https://disabilityrightslegalcenter.org/>

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