



**PRESS RELEASE  
FOR IMMEDIATE DISTRIBUTION  
May 20, 2015**

**CONTACT:**  
Mercedes Montagnes  
The Promise of Justice Initiative  
504-529-5955

**LAWSUIT FILED AGAINST ANGOLA PRISON AND  
LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND CORRECTIONS  
OVER UNCONSTITUTIONAL AND DEFICIENT MEDICAL CARE**

NEW ORLEANS – Prisoners at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola (Angola) filed a lawsuit today alleging that they needlessly suffer from chronic pain, permanent injury, and preventable sickness and death as a result of prison officials’ failure to provide constitutionally adequate medical care.

The Promise of Justice Initiative (PJI), the law firm Cohen Milstein Sellers & Toll PLLC (Cohen Milstein), the Advocacy Center (AC), and the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Louisiana (ACLU-La) filed a complaint against the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections (DOC) and Angola’s wardens alleging violations of the Cruel and Unusual Punishment clause of the Eighth Amendment and federal disability statutes. The complaint, titled *Lewis et al. v. Cain et al.*, was filed in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Louisiana. In challenging the inadequate medical care, the complaint alleges that the prison’s more than 6,000 prisoners are all at risk of serious harm, while scores of men have already experienced unnecessary injury, suffering and death.

The class action complaint details several problem areas at the prison: delays in evaluation, treatment, and access to specialty care; denial of medically necessary treatments including surgeries, medication, medical devices, and physical therapy; inappropriately managed medications; poor follow-up care; and a lack of qualified staff. The complaint also details the way these medical problems impose hardship on prisoners in other areas such as work duties and housing assignments.

Prisoners report horror story after horror story: a man denied access to a specialist for four years while his throat cancer advanced; a man denied medical attention four times during a stroke, which left him blind and paralyzed; a blind man denied even a cane for 16 years. In many cases, only the specter of legal action spurred the prison to provide long-delayed medical care.

The complaint contends that Angola’s medical care worsened when Earl K. Long Hospital in Baton Rouge, which used to serve prisoners with medical emergencies, was closed during the reorganization of the state’s Charity Hospital System. Even basic screenings and treatments are now being broadly denied.

“The grave systemic deficiencies in the delivery of medical care at Angola lead to appalling outcomes,” said Jeffrey Dubner, Associate at Cohen Milstein. “Preventable illness,

injury and death are not part of a prison sentence, yet Angola officials are pervasively subjecting the men in their custody to these risks.”

The complaint also alleges that disabled prisoners are especially hard-hit by the inadequate delivery of care. Miranda Tait, Managing Attorney for AC, said, “Because prisoners with disabilities generally require stabilizing care and management of chronic conditions, the failure of the prison to deliver adequate care heightens the chance that a prisoner with disabilities will be condemned to increased misery and exacerbated disabilities.”

The investigation into the delivery of medical care at Angola began more than two years ago as a result of multiple prisoners’ reports of grossly inadequate medical care. Attorneys interviewed more than 200 men in connection with this investigation and found scores whose problems echo those of the plaintiffs named in the complaint. The class action seeks an injunction that will bring the prison in line with constitutional standards in the delivery of medical care.

###

*The Promise of Justice Initiative is a private, non-profit organization that advocates for criminal justice reform and abolition of the death penalty on behalf of indigent defendants and prisoners who seek fair and equal treatment under the law.*

*Cohen Milstein Sellers & Toll PLLC has been a pioneer in class action lawsuits on behalf of individuals and small businesses for over 40 years. It has 80 attorneys and offices in Washington, D.C., New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Denver, and Palm Beach Gardens, Florida.*

*The Advocacy Center of Louisiana is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to assisting people with disabilities and seniors in Louisiana to achieve maximum potential and independence. The Advocacy Center of Louisiana employs 50 people statewide who assist people to achieve employment, education, housing, and health care goals.*

*The American Civil Liberties Foundation of Louisiana has been Louisiana’s guardian of liberty since 1956, working daily in courts, legislatures and communities to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties that the Constitution and laws of the United States guarantee everyone in this country.*