



NEWS CONFERENCE WEDNESDAY:

Federal Lawsuit on Behalf of California Family Alleges Widespread Neglect and Illegal Treatment of Mentally Ill in the East Baton Rouge Parish Prison

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BATON ROUGE (September 20th, 2017) – The family of a 27-year-old California man who committed suicide earlier this year in the East Baton Rouge Parish Prison (EBRPP) filed a federal civil rights lawsuit Wednesday in the United States District Court for the Middle District of Louisiana. The lawsuit cites, among other things, a “decrepit physical plant, rampant violence, and deliberate indifference to the basic human needs, including medical and mental health care” as the cause of their loved one’s death.

On February 2, 2017, Jonathan Fano was found hanging in his cell and succumbed to his injuries three days later. The cell where he took his own life had previously been identified as a suicide risk by independent experts hired by the city to assess EBRPP’s health care delivery system. In spite of the known risk, EBRPP – under the leadership of Sheriff Sid Gautreaux and Warden Dennis Grimes – continued a policy of using the cells to warehouse EBRPP’s most seriously mentally ill prisoners.

“This community has known for years that its jail is a dangerous and violent place. Jonathan Fano’s mental illness was well known to the jail’s authorities. Because of the Defendants refusal to provide treatment for Mr. Fano’s mental illness, his brief detention in EBRPP was ultimately a death sentence.” Will Claiborne, The Claiborne Firm, co-counsel for the Fano family.

According to his family, Fano spent days prior to his arrest hearing voices, including the ones that told him to exit a Greyhound bus bound from Miami to his home in California. On October 31, 2016, Baton Rouge police arrested Fano in downtown Baton Rouge, naked and “saying him and Titianna (Fake Imaginary person) was cross dressers and trying to find a show to make money.” In spite of his obvious mental health crisis, Fano was admitted into EBRPP and spent 92 of the 94 days he was in EBRPP in solitary confinement. Investigators found that prisoners housed next to Fano heard him crying often during his time in EBRPP.

According to the Complaint, parish and EBRPP officials knew that the jail has no mental health housing unit. The family’s lawyers note that, for years, EBRPP prisoners have died at a rate far higher than the national average. In spite of the high mortality rates, EBRPP officials prepared no mortality reports for the deaths of prisoners at EBRPP and there exists no mortality committee to review deaths of prisoners at EBRPP.

“Sheriff Gautreaux and the parish failed my brother and my family. Jonathan was a smart, kind, gentle soul who struggled with mental illness. If he had been transported to the hospital rather than the jail, if he was provided treatment and medication rather than tortured in solitary confinement, he would be with us today. Jonathan deserved better. I pray that no one detained in EBRPP and their families has to endure the loss that my family and I experienced.” Dolores Zadikian, sister.

Members of Jonathan Fano’s family, their attorneys, and representatives from Promise of Justice Initiative and VOTE-NOLA will be available for interviews on the steps of the courthouse after the suit is filed. The lawsuit follows a recent report from the Promise of Justice Initiative regarding the conditions experienced by protestors held at EBRPP following the death of Alton Sterling. The report can be accessed at the link below.

<http://justicespromise.org/attachments/article/160/PJI%20Baton%20Rouge%20Protest%20Report.pdf>

Copies of the suit and the report will be available to members of the media.

WHAT: News Conference to Announce Federal Civil Rights Lawsuit in Prisoner Death

WHO: Members of the family, Attorneys, and VOTE

WHERE: Russell B. Long Federal Building, 777 Florida Street, Baton Rouge

WHEN: Wednesday, September 20th at 10:30 a.m.

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