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Lawsuit: Mentally Ill Inmates Shackled, Isolated in Cells

A disability rights group is suing Connecticut prison officials on allegations that inmates with mental illness are being physically and psychologically abused at the maximum-security Northern Correctional Institution.

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More

HARTFORD, CONN. (AP) — A disability rights group sued [Connecticut](#) prison officials Thursday on allegations that inmates with mental illness are being physically and psychologically abused at the maximum-security Northern Correctional Institution.

The nonprofit Disability Rights Connecticut says in the federal court lawsuit that the Department of Correction's use of prolonged isolation and in-cell shackling of mentally ill prisoners is cruel and unusual punishment that violates their constitutional rights. The treatment is also illegal discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the suit says.

The Correction Department has a policy to not comment on pending litigation, said agency spokesperson Andrius Banevicius.

Disability Rights Connecticut is seeking a court order prohibiting the department from admitting prisoners with mental illness to the Northern prison in Somers and barring the use of prolonged isolation and in-cell shackling of mentally ill inmates.

“Nobody should be subjected to degrading and inhumane confinement, especially those whose behavior can only be addressed by treatment and

rehabilitation, not humiliation and infliction of mental and physical pain, and disability discrimination,” Deborah Dorfman, the group's executive director, said in a statement.

Tyrone Spence, serving a 15-year sentence for home invasion, robbery and kidnapping, said he was shackled more than 50 times when he was at Northern, often with short chains that made him have to bend or crouch the whole time. He's now at another prison.

“Those years at Northern made me feel like I’d lost my humanity. I don’t want anyone else to have to experience what I’ve been through,” he said in a statement provided by Disability Rights Connecticut.

Prisoner rights advocates also are calling on state lawmakers this year to ban solitary confinement in state prisons and close the Northern prison, where about 70 prisoners are now detained.

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