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BREAKING

# Nonprofit files lawsuit seeks to end 'abuse' of mentally ill inmates at Somers 'supermax' prison

By Alex Wood  
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Feb 4, 2021



The organization charged with protecting the rights of disabled people in Connecticut today filed a federal lawsuit against the state Correction Department and two of its officials seeking orders to prevent what it calls the “deliberate abuse” of mentally ill prisoners at the “supermax” Northern Correctional Institution in Somers.

The lawsuit, filed by Disability Rights Connecticut Inc., a private nonprofit organization authorized by law to represent Connecticut's disabled population, asks the court to declare that "prolonged isolation" of mentally ill prisoners is cruel and unusual punishment prohibited by the U.S. Constitution.

Supermax prisons like Northern are used primarily for solitary confinement of prisoners who have caused disruptions at other prisoners or are members of gangs.

The suit focuses particularly on in-cell shackling of prisoners, in which the inmate's wrists and legs are locked in metal cuffs, then held together with "a heavy metal tether chain."



"Prisoners are routinely left shackled and chained for 24 hours, and sometimes for days at a time, far longer than justified by any genuine threat to safety or security," the lawsuit alleges, adding that they are served food in foam-plastic cups, without utensils.

"Many prisoners are unable to even lift a cup to their mouth because of the shortness of the tether chain; in these instances, the only way for them to consume the contents of the cup is to dump it out on the bed or floor and eat like a dog," the suit says. It adds that the chains are sometimes so short that prisoners are unable to wipe themselves after using the toilet.

The Correction Department's policy is "not to comment on active litigation," department spokesman Andrius Banevicius said today in an email to a reporter seeking comment about the lawsuit.

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## Alex Wood

Alex covers Glastonbury, as well as Hartford Superior Court, the federal courts, and the appellate courts, and handles freedom-of-information cases. Alex joined the JI in September 1985. He graduated from Brown University, and enjoys bicycle riding.