



Press Release

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ACLU Asks U.N. To Intervene On Behalf Of Montana Juvenile Prisoner

Teenager With Mental Illness Held In Illegal, Inhumane Conditions In Adult Facility

HELENA, MT – The American Civil Liberties Union and the ACLU of Montana today asked a United Nations Special Rapporteur to intervene on behalf of a mentally ill prisoner, “Robert Doe,” who was placed in solitary confinement in the Montana State Prison when he was 17 and has been subjected to abuse so traumatizing that he has twice attempted to kill himself by biting through his wrist to puncture a vein. The request was made in a letter sent to Manfred Nowak, the Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

“The conditions of Robert’s confinement are so appalling that they flout universally recognized human rights standards, including his absolute right to be free from torture and other inhumane forms of treatment,” said Steven Watt, staff attorney with the ACLU Human Rights Program. “Montana state prison officials are obliged to uphold these standards, which require Robert’s immediate release from solitary confinement and provision of treatment for the remainder of his sentence which will foster his reform, rehabilitation and eventual reintegration back into society.”

Robert was sent to the Montana State Prison in 2008 when he was 16 years old, and has spent nearly half that time in solitary confinement. He has been Tasered, pepper-sprayed, stripped naked in view of other inmates, deprived of human contact and disciplined through tortuous “behavior modification plans” that deny him proper bedding, clothing and recreation. The ACLU of Montana filed a lawsuit in December against the state of Montana and the Montana Department of Corrections over Robert’s illegal, inhumane and degrading treatment. Today’s letter asks that the U.N. Special Rapporteur undertake an immediate review of Robert’s case, advise Montana state prison officials to refrain from subjecting him to inhumane conditions of confinement and treat him in a manner consistent with applicable international human rights laws and standards.

Robert Doe has a history of childhood physical and mental abuse, and has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental illnesses. His incarceration in the Montana State

Prison's Restricted Administrative Segregation Unit began in March 2009 when he was barely 17 years old. He is only allowed outside his cell for five or six hours each week and has been forbidden phone calls or visits with his family. Fellow inmates were so concerned for his well-being that they reached out to the ACLU of Montana for help on his behalf.

"Robert's conditions of confinement are an affront not only to his internationally protected human rights but also Montana's constitutional prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment," said ACLU of Montana Public Policy Director Niki Zupanic. "No human being, let alone a child, should be subjected to this kind of treatment. The state of Montana's first priority should be to provide Robert with proper care for his mental illness, not to punish him for it."

The ACLU's letter to the Special Rapporteur and more on Robert Doe's case can be found at: www.aclumontana.org