



May 24, 2019

Eric S. Dreiband  
Assistant Attorney General  
Civil Rights Division  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

William Lamar  
U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Mississippi  
Ethridge Building  
900 Jefferson Ave.  
Oxford, Miss. 38655

Dear Messrs. Dreiband and Lamar:

In response to the mounting evidence of unsafe conditions, violence, weapons, and understaffing at Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman (Parchman), we urge you to open an investigation, pursuant to the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA), to determine whether the conditions present in the institution violate the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The families of those incarcerated, and the taxpayers who subsidize this institution, deserve to know if the state is violating its constitutional obligations and endangering the lives of the individuals in its custody.

In addition to publicly reported information about the conditions at Parchman, we have received disturbing letters and pictures from individuals incarcerated there. We have seen pictures of individuals who have been physically abused and cells flooded by rainwater. Individuals housed in flooded cells are expected to sweep the water into a drain, while continuing to live in spaces covered by black mold. These conditions of confinement seem similar to if not worse than those deemed unconstitutional by the Civil Rights Division and U.S. Attorneys for Alabama in their April 2, 2019, report on Alabama's state prisons for men.

We do not claim to know the full scope of problems at Parchman and other institutions in Mississippi, but we have received numerous complaints over the past several years and have seen news stories suggesting that the problems are not isolated or anecdotal, but rather, systemic. We have confidence that a thorough investigation, as was conducted in Alabama, will determine whether the state is living up to its constitutional obligations.

We wish to call your attention to an additional factor that is often neglected in discussions about prison conditions and understaffing. When prisons are understaffed and conditions became



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unsafe, facilities are frequently locked down. Parchman, for example, has been on lockdown for several months. During lockdown, all in-person visits are canceled. Families are not allowed to have personal contact with their incarcerated loved ones for long periods of time. These lengthy absences can be especially difficult on spouses and children. These periods of separation also undermine public safety, as research shows that maintaining strong family ties helps to reduce recidivism. Thus, everyone is affected when unsafe prison conditions lead to lengthy lockdowns.

For all of these reasons, we urge you to immediately commence an investigation into the conditions at Parchman and other Mississippi prisons, as warranted.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "KAR".

Kevin A. Ring  
President