July 15, 2014

Day Pitney Pro Bono Attorneys Win Transfer for Prison Inmate Held in Solitary Confinement for Years

(NEW YORK, July 15, 2014) --?A team of Day Pitney pro bono attorneys recently obtained a transfer for Jerome Riddick, a Connecticut prison inmate who had been held in solitary confinement for years.

Mr. Riddick has suffered from profound mental illness since childhood. In 2008 he was arrested and charged with a non-violent drug offense, and was placed in the Garner Correctional Institution in Newtown, Connecticut's principal prison for the mentally ill. Garner officials discontinued some of the mental health medications that Mr. Riddick had been taking before he was imprisoned, and his behavior deteriorated. Prison officials punished him for his outbursts with increasing severity, ultimately transferring him to Connecticut's "Supermax" prison, the Northern Correctional Institution. Northern officials placed him in "administrative segregation," a form of punishment that includes twenty-three hours a day of solitary confinement.

Mr. Riddick hand-wrote a civil rights lawsuit on lined paper, contending that his conditions of confinement violated the Eighth Amendment. By the time Day Pitney learned of his plight in 2013, he had been held in solitary confinement for nearly five years. The firm volunteered to take his case on a pro bono basis, and it assembled a team composed of litigators Tom Farrish, Jeffrey Mueller and Ben Nissim. The team traveled to Northern several times, often meeting Mr. Riddick in rooms that had pepper spray in the air. After working up his case, the team entered into negotiations with the Department of Correction and was able to obtain his transfer out of solitary confinement at the "Supermax" prison and back to Garner, where he will receive a comprehensive psychiatric workup.

"This was a very tough situation and we are glad to have helped get it fixed," says Farrish. "Prison officials have a very difficult job, and I don't envy the decisions they have to make on a daily basis. But anytime a mentally ill non-violent offender spends nearly five years in solitary, something has probably broken down somewhere. We're very happy to see Mr. Riddick placed in a better situation in Garner."

Farrish adds that success came quicker than expected because the Department of Correction and the Attorney General's office were exceptionally cooperative. "The Department of course did not agree with the premises of Mr. Riddick's suit, but they acknowledged that it was a regrettable situation and worked hard to come up with a good resolution." Farrish notes that a high-level Department official?- Dr. Craig Burns, the Director of Psychiatry?-- took a personal interest in Mr. Riddick's case, even traveling to Bridgeport to attend a settlement conference with United States Magistrate Judge William I. Garfinkel. "Without the personal involvement of Dr. Burns and Assistant Attorneys General Terry O'Neill and Tom Davis, it would have taken months or years to resolve Mr. Riddick's situation."

Mr. Riddick's case adds to a growing list of inmate civil rights cases that have been successfully resolved by Day Pitney pro bono attorneys. In 2013 Farrish and his fellow Day Pitney litigator Bryan Orticelli successfully represented Vance Solman, an inmate at the MacDougall-Walker Correctional Institution in Suffield, in a constitutional claim against prison officials.

About Day Pitney

Day Pitney LLP is a full-service law firm with approximately 300 attorneys in New Jersey, Connecticut, New York, Boston and Washington, DC. The firm offers clients strong corporate and litigation practices, with experience on behalf of large national and international corporations as well as emerging- and middle-market companies and individuals.

Key Contacts



Jeffrey P. Mueller

Partner

New Haven, CT | (860) 275-0164

New York, NY | (212) 297-5800

jmueller@daypitney.com