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Prison Law Office and Bingham McCutchen LLP Sue to End Racially Discriminatory Lockdowns in California's Prisons
Race-based Lockdowns Are Routine and Widespread in CDCR Institutions

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SACRAMENTO, California (April 27, 2011) – The Prison Law Office and Bingham McCutchen LLP filed a class action lawsuit today in federal court here demanding that California prisons stop imposing racially discriminatory lockdowns. A copy of the complaint is available at www.prisonlaw.com.

California's prisons regularly discriminate against prisoners by subjecting entire racial groups to illegal lockdowns. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) freely acknowledges that its policy is to "manage[] inmate populations by ethnicity and subcultures." Thus, it is official CDCR policy that "when there is an incident involving any race, all inmates of that race are locked up."

"It is hard to believe that this kind of blatant discrimination persists in the 21st century, especially since the Supreme Court rejected California's rationale's for racially segregating prisoners more than five years ago," said Rebekah Evenson, staff attorney at the Prison Law Office.

Each year, CDCR imposes more than 350 race-based lockdowns, which last on average more than two months, but are sometimes maintained for years. During the lockdowns, prisoners of the affected race are typically locked in their cells twenty-four hours a day, and are deprived of any outdoor exercise, religious services, visits and even phone calls with family members; all the while, prisoners of other races move freely through their regular activities in the prison.

The complaint alleges that CDCR's lockdown policies violate the 8th and 14th Amendments and exacerbate – rather than ameliorate – racial tension in the prisons.

Plaintiff Robert Mitchell, an African American prisoner at Folsom State Prison, filed his complaint against CDCR officials after he was locked down for more than a year solely because of his race. In the amended complaint filed today, Mr. Mitchell seeks to expand his individual case into a statewide class action challenging CDCR's lockdown policies. He is joined in the complaint by Plaintiffs Alvaro Quezada, Tony Trujillo and Hanif Abdullah, each of whom was locked down at different CDCR prisons based solely on their race.

The Prison Law Office, a non-profit legal organization, has successfully challenged many unlawful conditions of confinement on behalf of California prisoners.

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