



P.O. BOX 56157
NEW ORLEANS, LA 70156

MARJORIE R. ESMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

July 9, 2010

OPEN LETTER CONCERNING YOUR RESPONSE ABOUT PRISONERS IN CAGES

Via Fax (985) 809-8285
& U.S. Mail
Sheriff Jack Strain
St. Tam. Parish Sheriff's Office
P.O. Box 908
Covington, LA 70434

Dear Sheriff Strain:

Thank you for your response to our letter today. We stand by the allegations in our letter to you. We are aware that the allegations are serious, and only issued them publicly after a very careful investigation spanning many months. You are aware that we have visited your facility multiple times, and it is disingenuous for you to assert otherwise. We stand by the allegations of the use of degrading short shorts, the prolonged overuse of the cages upon people who are not a threat to themselves or others, and the intermittent failure of staff to allow detainees out to use the bathroom. Your denial of these allegations is understandable, but we continue to stand by the facts contained in our letter.

There is one fact that we agree upon: you are housing human beings in cages that are smaller than the St. Tammany Parish Code authorizes for dogs. The use of these cages that do not allow people to lie down to sleep is inhumane, especially when used on suicidal prisoners. Dr. Inglese testified, on June 22, 2010 in *Advocacy Center et al. v. Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals*, that he is "aware of people in St. Tammany who have been in our little suicide cell for weeks because there is no other safe place in our facility to house that person." The point of our letter was to ask that the \$2 million your office is bound to receive be used to create that "safe place." You have not committed to using any money to eradicate the cages, which your own medical director concedes are not ideal for the care of human beings.

Your letter touts that no one has committed suicide in the cages. Of course not. The danger is not that someone will hang himself in the cages; the danger is that a prisoner housed in another part of the jail will fear the shame and pain of the cages will therefore not report problems. The cages may be effective at preventing suicides *in the cages*, but they also deter prisoners from reporting harm and can lead to suicide in other parts of the jail. In the last year someone hung themselves in an isolation cell at your jail. Michael Marsh, *Prisoner commits suicide*, WBRZ (November 19, 2010) available at: <http://www.wbrz.com/news/prisoner-commits-suicide/>; Jeff Adelson, *Inmate in St. Tammany jail dead in apparent suicide*, Times

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Picayune (November 19, 2010); here:

http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2009/11/death_at_st_tammany_jail_under.html.

We applaud any effort to get assistance for mentally ill people. As you know, we are counsel of record in the litigation challenging the failure of the State to properly fund mental health care. But in addition to relying upon the State for assistance, you have an obligation to take corrective measures yourself. All we ask is that people be housed more humanely than dogs. It is your legal and moral obligation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marjorie Esman', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Marjorie Esman
Executive Director