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February 3, 2023

The Honorable Kristen Clarke
Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Division
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Re: Investigation into Alvin S. Glenn Detention Center

Dear Ms. Clarke,

Strom Law Firm currently represents numerous individuals who have suffered subhuman unsanitary conditions, violent attacks, and medical neglect in violation of their civil rights while being housed at Alvin S. Glenn Detention Center (ASGDC), which is located in Columbia, SC and is operated by the Richland County government. At least three individuals have died at ASGDC in the past year. We have filed a complaint, attached to this letter, in federal court on behalf of one of these individuals, Lason Butler. More lawsuits on behalf of other individuals we represent are forthcoming. Please let this letter serve as our formal request for the Civil Rights Division to investigate ASGDC and its operator, Richland County.

The Death of Lason Butler

Lason Butler was arrested for taking his cousin's car without permission and for traffic violations on January 31, 2022. Upon intake at ASGDC, he was noted to be exhibiting some erratic behavior but was said to be cooperative, responsive, and able to give information. He was placed in the ASGDC Special Housing Unit (SHU) to monitor his mental health. Butler's family had filed a missing person's report prior to learning his location. On February 2, 2022, Butler's mother contacted the director of mental health at ASGDC. She answered questions for the director pertaining to her son's mental health history. She then contacted the director of the jail to ask why Butler had still not been permitted to make a phone call. She was told they would get back to her. She waited for several days with no return call from ASGDC, and still no call from her son.

On February 8, 2022, medical records indicate Butler was noted to be exhibiting psychotic behavior and a mental health consult was ordered. He was reported to be barking like a dog, playing with feces in the unflushed toilet, and that his cell was unsanitary and littered with torn up paper drink cartons. The notes for the next couple of days indicate Butler was repeatedly found naked (at one point face down) and either barely responsive or nonresponsive on the floor of his cell when providers made rounds. He was noted to be weak enough he could not hold his head up.

On February 10, 2022, Butler's family came to the jail and demanded to see Butler. They were told by the ASGDC security director that Butler was in no shape to see them, that he was unresponsive, and that all they could do was to pray for him. More calls to ASGDC by the family resulted in a conversation with the night shift supervisor, who told them Butler was "fine".

On February 11, 2022, Butler was referred to mental health at 11:17 AM. He was noted at 2:44 PM to have "refused" his medication. Just five (5) minutes later at 2:49 PM, providers recommended he be placed on "constant watch" because he "has not consumed any food." At 3:15 PM, the records indicate he was officially placed on watch and it was determined he would be moved from a top tier cell to a bottom one near the desk to allow for close monitoring.

On this same date, Butler's family again came to the jail and were met by the ASGDC director just outside the front door to the facility. He told them he had just seen Butler and that he was noncompliant and that everything he was asked he answered "NO" but that he was eating. The director informed the family that Butler did not meet the criteria to be moved to an outside medical facility.

At 5:15 PM, Butler was finally moved from cell #52 on the top level to cell #10 on the bottom level. The records indicate that Butler was already so ill by the time they got around to moving him that he was unable to move and had to be loaded onto a stretcher to be carried out of his cell. Butler was dropped while being carried down the steps and did not move at all. The guards stood around talking for a while and eventually picked him back up and placed him in the watch cell where he was examined by medical staff again.

Butler's medical records indicate that inside Cell #52, where he had spent the last 12 days, his toilet was still unflushed, it was a mess of torn food containers and paper drink cartons, and it was "unclear" if he had been drinking or eating anything. Other inmates have reported that the water was off in his cell, and others. It was also reported that Butler was heard throughout the night begging for someone to help him, including crying out for someone to get the rats to leave him alone.

Medical staff indicated they were concerned about Butler's condition, specifically that he needed to be sent for treatment. Two providers went to the SHU, but a corrections officer refused to let them into Butler's cell to check his vitals because he was the only officer working in the SHU. He told them he thought Butler was faking it anyway. The providers determined Butler should be sent out for treatment. However, one of the officers on duty decided that they would not send him anywhere and would just watch him.

Butler was found dead the next morning in his cell. This cell also had no running water. Further, Butler's body was covered in rat bites. His cause of death was determined to be dehydration, and records indicate he lost 15% of his body weight in the 12 days he was detained at ASGDC.

Other Issues at ASGDC

The issues with ASGDC's understaffing and staff conduct are further demonstrated in the cases of an additional five individuals represented by Strom Law Firm. Each of these clients was attacked in the jail, sometimes with prison-made or contraband weapons, while inmates have been let out to roam without adequate supervision in their dorms. They have suffered gruesome injuries, including stab wounds, fractures, and significant emotional trauma, requiring days of hospitalization or treatment. A common theme among these cases is the inappropriate conduct of the detention center staff. In some of our cases, detention center staff wholly failed to intervene, allowing our clients to be attacked until their attackers concluded their assault. Some of our clients have even alleged that the detention center staff participated in or facilitated these attacks by allowing individuals with ill intent to access their cells or enter the showers alone with them. Conduct like this demonstrates that simply "bolstering" the staff at ASGDC is not the solution, as the culture at ASGDC is one of apathy and malfeasance.

Recently, on January 18, 2023, a TikTok video filmed by inmates at ASGDC demonstrated the unsanitary conditions at the detention center. In the video, multiple individuals could be seen occupying the same cell, which was filthy, had holes in the wall and floor, and lacked a working toilet or running water. Perhaps equally disturbing, the video demonstrates the ease with which individuals are obtaining and using contraband, such as cellphones, within the detention center.

Compounding these issues is that, in addition to facilitating, participating in, or failing to intervene in such attacks, ASGDC staff routinely show a deliberate indifference to serious medical needs, and a complete failure to provide individuals with appropriate medical care and treatment for illness and injury. After being attacked, several of our clients were left without any type of medical care while others were left bleeding out while they waited for an ambulance. Additionally, several of our clients were left in unsanitary cells for extended periods of time despite the presence of untreated open wounds or other serious physical trauma.

Detainees at ASGDC are routinely not provided with the most basic necessities required under state and federal law, including running water, adequate medical care, bathing opportunities, or clean clothing and bedding. Again, the wholesale failure to provide these individuals with their basic human needs does not suggest that the appropriate solution is to simply "bolster" detention center staffing. Rather, this conduct reveals an ingrained culture of violating civil rights of detainees at ASGDC. And Richland County, despite knowing of these issues, has done nothing to address them. The reasons for this overarching issue of the subhuman conditions and level of treatment must be identified and rectified once and for all if such problems are to be eliminated.

Based on the forgoing, we are asking that the Civil Rights Division open an investigation into Alvin S. Glenn Detention Center and Richland County for the inhumane conditions in which

it houses detainees, as well as the violence and medical neglect they inflict or allow to be inflicted on such persons. If you have any questions or concerns about the issues raised in our letter, please do not hesitate to reach out to us at (803) 252-4800.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bakari T. Sellers", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Bakari T. Sellers
Attorney at Law

BTS/ceq

Enclosures: As stated

cc: The Honorable Merrick Garland
The Honorable Vanita Gupta
The Honorable Adair Ford Boroughs