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Center for Constitutional Rights files suit over “social isolation” experiments in prisons; prisoners keep arriving

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Four more prisoners have been moved to secretive prison units known as Communication Management Units, or CMUs, Democracy Now! reports. CMUs are the subject of a lawsuit filed by the Center for Constitutional Rights

The Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) has filed a federal suit ([Aref, et al. v. Holder, et al, pdf](#)) challenging social isolation policies at two experimental isolation units in the federal prison system, one in Terre Haute, Indiana, and the other in Marion, Illinois.

The CCR says two-thirds of the 60 to 70 prisoners assigned to the "Communications Management Units" or CMUs are Muslims and political prisoners. Muslims represent just 6 percent of the general federal prison population, according to CCR, which makes their assignment to the CMUs disproportionately high.

Related: [4 Prisoners in Holy Land Case Moved to Secretive, Restrictive CMUs \(Democracy Now! April 30, 2010\)](#)

CMUs also house individuals with unpopular political views, such as [animal rights and environmental activists](#) and prisoners who have been active in organizing prisoners' rights, participated in lawful social justice movements, organized worship sessions, or filed grievances based on mistreatment or conditions of confinement.

The suit, filed in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia in late March, charges that the Federal Bureau of Prisons secretly created CMUs in 2006 and 2007 without public knowledge to isolate and segregate certain prisoners in the federal prison system, a violation of constitutional rights, including the right to due process.

It wasn't until three years after creating the CMUs (and a change in administration) that the prison bureau allowed public scrutiny of, and comment on, the program.

Under the program, CMU prisoners are denied any physical contact with family members and are forbidden from hugging, touching or embracing their children, spouses or loved ones during visits, and have more severe restrictions on speaking with other prisoners, making phone calls and are barred from taking part in education or work programs within the prison.

CCR claims the added restrictions are made on prisoners "in retaliation for their protected religious beliefs, unpopular political views, or lawful advocacy challenging rights violations in prison."

"Our clients' experiences clearly demonstrate the abusive and arbitrary nature of the CMUs," said CCR staff attorney Alexis Agathocleous.

Five CMU prisoners and two of their spouses have joined the lawsuit as plaintiffs.

"I haven't been able to hug my husband, or even hold his hand, for two years," said Jenny Synan, the spouse of a CMU prisoner and a plaintiff in the lawsuit. "This proposed rule does not explain how prohibiting a husband from holding his wife's hand or keeping a father from hugging his daughter, is necessary for prison security."

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