
PRESS RELEASE

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FAMILIES ASSERT CLAIMS AGAINST IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND WELFARE FOR PERVASIVE ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF PERSONS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AT SOUTHWEST IDAHO TREATMENT CENTER

Boise, Idaho - Today the families of victims living at the Southwest Idaho Treatment Center (SWITC) asserted claims against the State of Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. Residents of SWITC have for years endured abuse, neglect, and ineffective and deficient services. SWITC is required to help people with developmental disabilities in crisis situations stabilize and transition back to the community, friends and family. Instead, it failed to provide proper transition services, promoted a culture of rampant abuse and neglect, including at least one death, and demonstrated a refusal to effect change and protect our vulnerable citizens. The families of victims have demanded to meet with State officials to address the years of abuse and develop a meaningful model for change. If the State does not promptly agree to take appropriate action, the families will pursue a federal class action lawsuit to force change and hold the State and responsible individuals accountable for their abuse.

“The State of Idaho has mismanaged the SWITC program for years, which has allowed unprecedented rampant abuse, neglect, injury and death of vulnerable adults and children, in violation of the civil rights of people with developmental disabilities,” said Shamus O’Meara, counsel for the families and shareholder with the law firm of O’Meara, Leer, Wagner and Kohl, P.A., in Minneapolis. Co-Counsel Char Quade, Founder of CK Quade Law, PLLC in Boise, stated “We must no longer tolerate the State’s mistreatment of individuals with developmental disabilities. Justice demands immediate and meaningful change.”



Drew Rinehart

Jamie Foruria, sister of Drew Rinehart, stated “The death of my brother at SWITC is a devastating loss to our family. Had Drew received appropriate care, treatment and services from SWITC staff and management, he would still be with us. The State needs to account for what happened to Drew and for the injuries to so many others, and commit to meaningful change to allow residents to heal and productively move back into their communities.”



Brandon Buchanan

Erika Dreyer, mother of Brandon Buchanan, stated, “This is about doing what is right to protect our loved ones from senseless abuse and injury, and ensuring they receive critical services needed for successful transition back into the community.” She added, “the State staff repeatedly placed Brandon in situations where he became injured, resulting in serious head injuries and scars. No one reported these incidents to Child Protective Services and our son continued to suffer at the hands of SWITC staff.”

The families assert their claims on behalf of their loved ones and on behalf of all victims that suffered abuse and neglect while residing at SWITC. Their class action claims follow the comprehensive investigative reports published by DisAbility Rights Idaho and the State Legislature of Idaho Office of Performance Evaluations.

DRI’s report, entitled *No Safe Place to Call Home, A Report on the Cycle of Abuse, Neglect and Injury at the Southwest Idaho Treatment Center* (October 29, 2018), found in part that “SWITC has consistently failed to offer the treatment, services and protections that it is by law obligated to provide those in its care,” resulting in “woefully inadequate response to acts of abuse and neglect, [that has] created a cycle of abuse, neglect, and injury, affecting every person at the facility from the moment they are admitted until their discharge or, in some cases, death.” Shockingly, DRI found that SWITC and DHW refused to accept responsibility, and “chose to blame the residents” of SWITC for the abuse and neglect the State allowed to happen.

OPE’s Southwest Idaho Treatment Center Report, published in January 2019, reported in part that Idaho “lacks a coherent vision for services to individuals with intellectual disabilities who are in crisis,” and that SWITC’s “management does not have an effective approach to solving problems.” OPE found that many in clinical leadership roles “described themselves as ‘winging it,’ having received minimal training from peers or predecessors.”

These claims seek relief for violations of federal civil and constitutional rights involving people with developmental disabilities who have resided at SWITC. The families seek systemic and institutional change in the function, operation and management of SWITC. The State must ensure that no further abuse or neglect will occur, that treatment programs are developed and implemented that meet the needs of residents, consistent with state and federal law and designed to assist residents with a prompt and orderly return to the community, staff are properly qualified and trained, and that there are severe consequences for violations. The claims will also seek damages, attorneys’ fees and related costs.

For more information, please contact

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