



October 30, 2006

Theresa C. Lantz
Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Correction
24 Wolcott Hill Road
Wethersfield, CT 06109

Dear Commissioner Lantz:

We are deeply troubled by the recently released Human Rights Watch report titled "Cruel and Degrading: The Use of Dogs for Cell Extractions in U.S. Prisons." The report identified Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, South Dakota and Utah as the only five states that authorize the use of dogs for cell extractions; it identified Connecticut and Iowa as the only two states that actually currently used dogs for cell extractions. As soon as the Human Rights Watch report was released, Iowa announced that, effective immediately, it was ceasing the use of dogs for cell extractions. Therefore, Connecticut's Department of Correction has now attained the dubious distinction of being the sole remaining corrections system in the nation to continue the practice of using dogs for cell extractions.

As the Human Rights Watch report notes, the use of a fierce animal to control an imprisoned person is inherently degrading, and there is a pervasive view among corrections professionals that the use of dogs for cell extractions is neither necessary nor appropriate since there are always better and equally effective alternatives. As the report also notes, using dogs for cell extractions results in unnecessary injury to prisoners. One Connecticut prisoner quoted in the report described permanent damage from a dog bite that severed multiple nerves in his hand. Another described an incident in which he was kneeling against the wall in his cell with his hands up when he was attacked and bitten in the back by a dog that had been brought into the cell to subdue his cell mate.

We strongly believe that it is in the interest not only of the people of Connecticut but also of the Department of Correction to reject a practice that has been so widely rejected by corrections professionals throughout the nation. We agree with The Hartford Courant's October 15 editorial that "[this] cruel practice brings to mind the graphic photos of snarling dogs used to control inmates at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq," and that "using unmuzzled dogs to terrify uncooperative inmates in Connecticut and pry them out of their prison cells is a policy that should be put to sleep."

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We hope that it will not require litigation to persuade the Connecticut Department of Correction to join the ranks of the other departments of corrections in the United States by immediately halting this cruel and barbaric practice. We would appreciate it if you would let us know the Department's intentions. We would be glad to meet with you to discuss this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Vann', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Roger C. Vann, Executive Director
ACLU of Connecticut

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Renee C. Redman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Renee C. Redman, Legal Director
ACLU of Connecticut

Margaret Winter, Associate Director
National Prisoner Project of the ACLU
Washington, D.C.