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LOCAL

## York County to pay \$135K to settle lawsuit alleging inmates' civil rights were violated



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York Dispatch

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The county and officials will pay \$135,000 to the plaintiffs who filed a lawsuit alleging civil rights violations at York County Prison related to the county's employment of a training contractor.

Court records show the case was dismissed on July 22 and that each party would cover the cost of their attorneys. A federal judge already handed down a default judgment against Joseph Garcia and the Corrections Special Application Unit after Garcia failed to appear in court. That portion of the case continues.

An attorney for the plaintiffs described the resolution of the case against the county, the prison and various local officials as a [settlement](#).

The court document, which was obtained through the Right-to-Know law, showed about 30 plaintiffs would receive the settlement money. Attorney Leticia C. Chavez-Freed, who represented the plaintiffs, signed the document on July 31.

The document also shows the plaintiffs are not allowed to make any comments or social media posts about the county, county officials or the lawsuit.

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**Lawsuit:** In the lawsuit, prison inmates alleged that C-SAU representatives forced inmates to strip naked at gunpoint, march into the gymnasium and stand against the wall for hours without access to food or medical care. According to the lawsuit, inmates were also allegedly threatened with a mock execution in which staff were told to "lock, load and take aim" at them.

Alan Denenberg, one of the attorneys representing inmates in the case, said in a written statement that "this settlement brought some resolution to a number of inmates who we believed had their constitutional rights violated."

A court-appointed mediator told Federal District Judge Jennifer Wilson in a [May 21 letter](#) that both parties appeared to settle the matter — at least in principle — following that day's mediation session.

The next steps were for the county's prison board and the Board of Commissioners to agree to the decision, wrote mediator Brian J. Bluth, of the Williamsport-based McCormick Law Firms.

In a filing two days later, Wilson wrote that either party had until July 22 to reinstate the case, in the event the settlement was not finalized.

Bluth also wrote that C-SAU representatives did not attend the May 21 mediation. A motion filed in February by Matthew Clayberger, the lawyer representing the county, asked for the matter be moved to mediation.

Wilson granted the motion to stay and directed the matter to the court's pro bono mediation program.

**Filed in 2021:** Inmates sued the county, prison and C-SAU in December 2021, shortly after York County unanimously approved a two-year, \$252,770 contract for "confidential training" with C-SAU, which has garnered controversy across the country for its conduct.

The county would later agree to end C-SAU's contract months before it was scheduled to expire while still paying the company an additional \$43,500.

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**No-show in court:** A judge issued a [default judgment](#) against C-SAU and Joseph Garcia, its head, in 2022 after the defendants' legal counsel didn't show up in court. Garcia has claimed in the past he was never properly served with the lawsuit. He has not responded to recent requests for comment.

A default judgment means the court has ruled against Garcia and his company due to its failure to respond. However, the award of potential damages won't be decided until after other motions in the case, namely those filed by York County, are resolved.

According to former Allegheny County Jail Warden Orlando Harper, York was one of two Pennsylvania counties that recommended C-SAU in 2021. Allegheny County, however, subsequently barred its prison from contracting with C-SAU over concerns about the program and Garcia.

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