



## EXCLUSIVE: IDOC talks Rasho v John Baldwin Settlement Agreement

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Tuesday, July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (WICS) — The Illinois Department of Corrections is undergoing major policy changes following a lawsuit that's lingered in the courts for years. In May, the agency reached an agreement requiring it to better accommodate mentally ill offenders. The Ashoor Rasho v John Baldwin lawsuit produced a settlement agreement altering how the IDOC provides treatment to mentally ill offenders.

Nine years ago, an inmate at the Pontiac Correctional Center sued the Department of Corrections for not properly administering mental health services. A settlement was reached requiring the department to revamp its mental health treatment. It's something Director John Baldwin admits is long overdue.

"Nobody in corrections was ready 15 to 20 years ago to become their state's mental health system," said IDOC Director John Baldwin.

He now claims the department is taking steps towards meeting that demand. Numbers show about 25 percent of IDOC's total inmate population is on the active mental health case load, and that number is growing.

"We need a place for them to get back on stable medical treatment," said Baldwin.

Moving forward, all 25 correctional facilities across Illinois will enhance treatment to mentally ill offenders, and more than 500 staffers statewide will be hired. Director Baldwin says those numbers will mainly consist of psychologists, counselors and social workers.

IDOC is now partnering with the National Alliance on Mental Illness on working to make sure staff members are better prepared.

"We will be teaching a lot of skills to our staff that will enable them to interact more positively with the offenders," said Baldwin.

At this point, more than half of the staff have already been trained and the others will complete training by year end. Baldwin admits, in years past, his staff weren't trained to interact with mentally ill offenders at all. In fact, he says this new training isn't sitting so well with some of his staffers, but it's not optional.

“As community resources decrease, the community health resources decrease. What we start to do is see an increase in the mental health population within corrections,” said Dr. Melvin Hinton, IDOC director of mental health services.

Mentally ill offenders in need of separate housing will also have that option. The agency provides inpatient treatment at residential treatment units (RTU). The agreement requires four new RTU's statewide. One of them is at the Logan Correctional Center, a maximum security prison in Lincoln, Illinois for women.

"Prison was never meant to be the hospital. Unfortunately, in some cases, that's our reality. We have to step up and treat those folks," said Dr. Hinton.

The department has already started implementing some of these policy changes, but there's no timeline on when the entire program will be complete. It all depends on when and if the General Assembly passes a full budget deal funding these changes.

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