

ACLU, inmates at Weber Co. Jail continue to ask for early releases after COVID-19 outbreak

ABC4

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OGDEN, Utah (ABC4 News) – There are 120 positive cases in the Weber County Jail. 414 tests have been administered and there 565 total inmates, as of Thursday, in the prison. ABC4 spoke to an inmate who says he has yet to be tested for the virus.

“They haven’t tested... several sections,” said Paris Thornton.

Paris Thornton is a federal inmate booked at Weber County Jail on a petty violation, for a probation violation. He says he struggles with mental health and substance abuse. He says he hasn’t been tested yet and fears he will contract COVID-19 due to negligence from jail staff.

“These people are like, well you’re probably going to get it anyway, we’re probably all going to get it,” said Thornton.

On July 10, federal public defenders filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court against a Weber County Sheriff, U.S. Marshal for the District of Utah and the Director of the U.S. Marshal Service.

“The County Attorney has said, that they have been reviewing people for early release, we don’t know the status of that,” said Sara Wolovick of the ACLU.

“Nobody is really getting rid of anybody, as soon as a body leaves, they’re replaced,” said Thornton.

The petition asks for non-violent inmates to be released early and for more health measures in the jail.

“We don’t feel safe in here because it’s not the cleanest place to be and there is no social distancing,” said Thornton.

The petition claims, ‘respondents are aware of the grave dangers posed by COVID-19 and have failed to implement measures to comply with their constitutional obligations to those in their custody.’

When we previously spoke to Joshua Marigoni, the spokesperson for the jail, he said the prison was separating inmates the best it could to prevent further spread of the virus.

“The County Attorney’s office failed to preemptively work to identify people for early release and as a result, the jail did not have enough space to quarantine people separately,” said Wolovick.

Marigoni told ABC4 News in a previous interview, “any jail setting social distancing is difficult to do, because of the constraints of the building itself and the detention setting.”

“We’re like cattle, we’re like livestock, man, whatever happens, happens,” said Thornton.

Early releases for non-violent inmates are something that should have happened before the outbreak at the jail, according to Wolovick.

“The county attorney needs to be working with the jail, to identify people for early release, and the jail needs to be working with federal agencies, to get federal inmates released early,” said Wolovick.

“I mean they’ve isolated these guys, but the only thing that separates us from these sick individuals is a fire door,” said Thornton.

Marigoni says the jail isn’t taking transfers from the U.S. Marshal Services, and not taking out-of-state inmates anymore, unless it’s on a judges order.

“My fear, in all honesty, is dying in here,” said Thornton.

