Activist Wins Treatment for Hep C in Prison

June 5, 2017

After more than two years of legal battles with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC), Mumia Abu-Jamal will begin hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatment in prison.

This marks a major victory for the 62-year-old activist and journalist, who sued the state's DOC in 2015, alleging that it had systematically denied him treatment since his hep C diagnosis in 2012. In January, a federal judge ruled in his favor and ordered the state to provide medication as soon as possible.

Abu-Jamal, a former Black Panther Party member, has been incarcerated since 1982, when he was convicted for the death of a Philadelphia police officer and sentenced to death. Abu-Jamal maintains his innocence, and human rights groups continue to campaign for a new trial and his freedom. After many years on death row, his death sentence was overturned in 2011 to life without parole.

Legal advocates say the treatment mandate could help open the doors to a cure for nearly 7,000 other prisoners living with HCV in Pennsylvania.

However, state health officials caution that any medical care mandate may come at a high price. The state's DOC estimates it would cost up to $600 million to treat all HCV-positive inmates in the system with the new cures—a cost they are likely to resist paying.

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