Connecticut Inmate Files Federal Lawsuit Over Hepatitis C Treatment

This is the latest in a long line of cases alleging state prison systems are unfairly warehousing treatment.

July 24, 2018 By Casey Halter

An inmate in Connecticut is the latest in a long line of U.S. prisoners to file a federal lawsuit alleging the state is failing to provide lifesaving hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatment to incarcerated people living with the virus, the Associated Press reports.

Filed last week in a federal U.S. District Court on behalf of 48-year-old inmate Robert Barfield, the lawsuit asserts that between 16 and 41 percent of prison inmates in Connecticut are thought to be living with the virus. It also claims that the state has systematically been refusing to test, treat or care for the majority of inmates living with the virus, despite constitutional requirements that U.S. prisoners receive proper medical care. The case is now seeking class action status for all inmates living with the virus in an attempt to change the state's treatment policies.

For its part, the Connecticut attorney general's office says it will be responding to the lawsuit in court. Meanwhile, the state's Department of Correction, which recently took control of the inmate health system from the University of Connecticut, says one of its priorities moving forward will be to spend more money on hepatitis C treatment.

While it's unclear how the Connecticut prison lawsuit will turn out in court, similar HCV-related cases in Missouri, Massachusetts and South Carolina have succeeded in expanding prisoners' access to HCV treatment.

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