Mumia Abu-Jamal Set to Begin Treatment for Hepatitis C in Prison

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After more than two years of legal battles with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, Mumia Abu-Jamal is set to begin hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatment in prison as early as this week, Vibe.com reports.

This marks a major victory for the 62-year-old incarcerated activist and journalist, who sued the state's DOC in 2015 alleging that it had systematically denied him hepatitis C treatment since his diagnosis in 2012. In January, a federal judge ruled in the inmate's favor and ordered the state to provide Abu-Jamal with direct-acting antiviral 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. More than 20 years later, Abu-Jamal maintains his innocence and human rights groups around the world (including Amnesty International) continue to campaign for a new trial and his freedom. After many years on death row, his original death sentence was overturned in 2011 to life without parole.

In addition to potentially saving Abu-Jamal's life, legal advocates say the treatment mandate could help open the doors to a cure for nearly 7,000 other prisoners in Pennsylvania living with the virus over the next few years.

However, Pennsylvania health officials say any medical care mandate following Abu-Jamal's treatment may come at a high price. In previous reports, the state's DOC estimated it would cost nearly $600 million to treat all HCV-positive inmates in the system with next-generation cures — a cost they are likely to fight against paying.

Click here to learn more about the fight to get hepatitis C treatment into U.S. prisons.

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