



PENNSYLVANIA INSTITUTIONAL LAW PROJECT

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Man Held in Solitary Confinement for Refusing to Cut Off Dreadlocks Sues Lebanon County

PHILADELPHIA, PA – The Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project (PILP) filed a motion for preliminary injunction today on behalf of Eric S. McGill, Jr., a pretrial detainee at Lebanon County Correctional Facility (LCCF) who has been held in solitary confinement for over a year solely because he refuses to cut off his dreadlocks. Lebanon County’s practice of punishing people who refuse to cut their dreadlocks, without allowing for religious exemptions, violates Mr. McGill’s rights under the First and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution and the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA).

In compliance with his Rastafarian faith, Mr. McGill does not cut his hair and has not for several years. Mr. McGill believes that his spirit lives through his dreadlocks and to cut them off would be to lose his strength and essence needed for the afterlife. Lebanon County’s own rules and regulations allow incarcerated people to have long hair if it is tied up or in a single ponytail. Despite Mr. McGill offering to tie his hair up in a ponytail, Lebanon County continues to detain him in solitary confinement.

“Mr. McGill has endured solitary confinement for over a year, conditions internationally recognized as torture, for adhering to his faith and refusing to cut his dreadlocks. This flies in the face of RLUIPA, passed by Congress to ensure that incarcerated people have the same religious liberty as all Americans,” stated Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project Managing Attorney Alexandra Morgan-Kurtz.

Mr. McGill has been in solitary confinement since January 19, 2019. He is only allowed out of his cell for at most one hour per day, five days per week, between midnight and 2:00AM. This is also the only time he is permitted to make calls to his family. These conditions have exacerbated his PTSD and caused him frequent panic attacks and additional psychological trauma. In today’s filing, the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project asked the Court to order Lebanon County to transfer Mr. McGill from solitary confinement to general population.

“Contrary to what Lebanon County prison staff have asserted, dreadlocks do not present a security or cleanliness concern. Dozens of jail and prison systems across the United States permit prisoners to have dreadlocks. Lebanon County’s placement of Mr. McGill in solitary confinement is purely punitive and serves no legitimate purpose,” said Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project staff attorney Matthew A. Feldman. “It is not lost on us or Mr. McGill that Lebanon County is singling out a Black hairstyle and a Black religion for this discriminatory, inhumane, and illegal treatment.”



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The Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project is representing Eric McGill, Jr. in the case *Eric S. McGill, Jr. v. Clements, et al.*, Case No. 19-cv-01712, filed in the United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania.

More information is available at pailp.org/news

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