

**MCLU Files Suit Over “Cruel and Unusual” Punishment  
York County Jail Putting Lives of Inmates At Risk**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Portland- The Maine Civil Liberties Union sued officials at the York County Jail today on behalf of three inmates who were subjected to cruel and unusual punishment as defined by the United States Constitution. In November 2006, the inmates were forced to clean-up a biohazard site without proper safety equipment or training while participating in a jail work program. One inmate contracted hepatitis from the exposure. The jail had proper safety equipment on site but did not make it available to inmates doing dangerous work.

“York County Jail’s behavior was inexcusable,” said Zachary Heiden, Staff Attorney for the MCLU Foundation. “We have laws in this country to protect people from this sort of treatment.”

The MCLU’s complaint on behalf of the inmates cites a violation of the Eighth Amendment to the United States Constitution. That amendment forbids “cruel and unusual punishments” of inmates in jail and prison, and it requires jail officials to provide humane conditions of confinement. Under this amendment, jail officials must ensure that inmates receive adequate food, shelter, and medical care. Jail officials must also take steps to guarantee the safety of inmates. York County Jail failed to meet that requirement.

“Inmates give up their liberty when they go to jail, but they shouldn’t have to give up their human dignity,” said Shenna Bellows, Executive Director of the MCLU. “If we want inmates to act like human beings when they are released from jail, we should start by treating them like human beings when they are in jail.”

The MCLU’s clients were all model prisoners—a qualification for participation in the work program. They have since completed their sentences and been released from the jail. The case, *Luciano et al., v. Vitiello et al.*, was filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Portland.

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