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D.C. INMATES FILE LAWSUIT OVER MAYOR'S REFUSAL TO OBEY THE LAW

For Over 16 Months, Mayor Williams Has Illegally Refused to Comply with the D.C. Jail Improvement Act and Set a Population Limit on the Overcrowded D.C. Jail

WASHINGTON, DC -- (June 29, 2005) – Today, D.C. Prisoners' Legal Services Project and the law firm of Wiley, Rein & Fielding filed suit in D.C. Superior Court on behalf of seven inmates from the D.C. Jail to force Mayor Anthony Williams to comply with the D.C. Jail Improvement Act of 2003. Specifically, in *Garry Anderson, et al. v. Mayor Anthony Williams*, the plaintiffs are asking the Court to order the Mayor to simply obey the law and set a limit on the number of inmates who can be held at the dangerous, overcrowded D.C. Jail.

The Act, passed unanimously by the D.C. Council in July 2003, requires the Mayor to issue a regulation limiting the population at the D.C. Jail, based on a study by an outside consultant hired for this purpose. The consultant, Pulitzer/Bogard Associates, completed its study in April 2004, recommending that the District limit to 2,061 the number of inmates held at the D.C. Jail at any time. Under the Act, the Mayor is required to formally adopt the consultant's figure and establish a population cap, but he has refused to do so for over 16 months. Currently, the population in that facility is approximately 2,400.

For 17 years, the D.C. Jail population was limited by court order to 1,674 inmates. In 2002, when the court lifted its order, the Jail population soared, and some of the worst violence in the Jail's history ensued. In December 2002, after two men were murdered and one was near-fatally stabbed in the overcrowded, understaffed facility, the Council

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passed the D.C. Jail Improvement Act, which re-asserted the Council's oversight of the Jail. The decision to rely on an outside consultant's recommendation was the result of a compromise between the Mayor and the Council, which had intended to set its own population limit.

“The Williams Administration has shown its contempt for the law, and for basic standards of decency, in refusing to comply with the Jail Improvement Act,” noted Philip Fornaci, Executive Director of D.C. Prisoners' Legal Services Project, co-counsel in the lawsuit. “While Mayor Williams has done nothing, inmates at the Jail have been subjected to ever-increasing levels of violence, deteriorating health care delivery, and inhumane conditions that are the result of overcrowded conditions.” As recently as June 14, an inmate was brutally stabbed in the teeming facility.

The filing of the lawsuit coincides with D.C. Council hearings on June 29, co-chaired by Councilmembers Phil Mendelson and David Catania, addressing concerns about the state of medical and mental health services in D.C. jail facilities,. Advocates have noted for years that chronic overcrowding has severely strained medical services, endangering individual inmates as well as the public health. Additionally, forty percent of the Jail's inmates have been identified as having a serious mental illness. The absence of effective jail diversion programs have left hundreds of people with mental illness inappropriately locked up in jail instead of receiving treatment.

Religious and community organizations have shown their support for compliance with the law, circulating petitions among their congregations demanding that the Mayor comply with the Jail Improvement Act. Reverend John Graham, rector of Grace Episcopal Church, noted: “The church has a special obligation to care for those who are incarcerated, and for the families and communities to which virtually everyone now in jail or prison will return. Sometimes the best way to do that is to push our executive leadership to enforce the laws it was elected to enforce.”