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Allegation of sexual assault of prisoner with disability spurs renewed independent investigation.

ALASKA – In October of 2010, the Disability Law Center of Alaska (DLC) launched an investigation into the Department of Corrections Anchorage Correctional Complex facility to determine whether abuse and/or neglect of an inmate with a development disability has occurred and whether the other inmates alleged to have been assaulted have disabilities. The investigation was set in motion immediately on the heels of the Anchorage Daily News story on October 27, 2010 which reported the federal indictment of a prisoner for the alleged sexual assault of three inmates. After the investigation was initiated DLC was requested by the U.S. Attorney's Office to hold off investigating until the criminal prosecution was complete.

Today DLC learned that the criminal prosecution is complete and the offender accused of sexual assault was found guilty of assaulting three inmates. The conviction, however does not address the conditions and circumstances in the Anchorage Correctional Complex that may have placed vulnerable inmates with this offender. "This type of allegation raises issues concerning the identification of prisoners with disabilities," says DLC Staff Attorney, Meg Allison Zaletel. "Our immediate concern is that prisoners with disabilities are safe and not placed in harmful situations." A 2008 study by the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority revealed that 42% of inmates in Alaska prisons are individuals with mental illness or cognitive impairments.

The Disability Law Center of Alaska is the State's protection and advocacy organization. As such, DLC is mandated under federal law to investigate reports of abuse and/or neglect against individuals with disabilities. In that capacity, DLC has notified the Department of Corrections that it has initiated an investigation. The Disability Law Center anticipates the cooperation of the Department of Corrections in producing the requested information in a timely manner and looks forward to a full investigation to determine whether these individuals have been subject to abuse or neglect.

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