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## **BRAIN-INJURED MAN RECEIVES \$4 MILLION SETTLEMENT FROM STATE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS**

SEATTLE, WA -- A 26-year-old man who suffers permanent brain damage and physical impairments from a severe beating by his cellmate at the Washington Corrections Center (Shelton) has received a \$4.0 million settlement from the Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC). This is thought to be one of the largest settlements in state history for an inmate injured in prison. According to his attorney, Mark Shepherd, Ryan Alwine was dragged from his bunk by his new cellmate and beaten brutally in the early hours of September 7, 2006. As Alwine lay helpless on a cement cell floor, his attacker repeatedly stomped on Alwine's head for several minutes as corrections officers looked on.

The savage beating caused multiple facial fractures, multiple deep lacerations to Alwine's head and face and severe traumatic brain injury. He was in a coma for about four months and was unable to eat, drink, swallow, or breathe on his own. He has endured numerous surgeries and has suffered from, among other things, seizures and spasticity.

"Ryan has struggled courageously over the past three years to regain some ability to function. Sadly, this preventable trauma has left him with substantial permanent physical and cognitive deficits," said Shepherd after the settlement agreement was finalized by the court.

Alwine was an inmate at Shelton, just weeks away from completing his sentence. Shepherd said he had been a model inmate and was a gentle man.

The night of the beating, DOC placed a new cellmate, Eddie Hopkins, in with Alwine. Hopkins had a long history of mental illness, violence, and instability. He had been isolated in maximum security custody in another facility for much of the previous two years and placed in Western State Hospital earlier in 2006 due to repeated threats or attacks against other inmates or corrections officers. He committed eleven major infractions in the seven weeks just before being placed in Western State in January. Written assessments by DOC determined that Hopkins "needs to be housed separately

(more)

from more vulnerable offenders,” and that “He cannot be safely housed with another offender.”

According to Shepherd, “When Hopkins was transferred to Shelton, DOC personnel either failed to obtain or ignored his history of mental illness and violence. They also did not act on an internal email distributed hours before the attack urging that Hopkins be evaluated as soon as possible to determine his mental status and fitness for housing in the general prison population.”

In February 2006, a Shelton superintendent issued a written directive requiring that a transferred inmate be placed alone in a single cell rather than housed with a cellmate if empty cells were available. Empty cells were available the night corrections personnel placed Hopkins in a small cell with Alwine.

“DOC failed to adopt or follow even simple procedures to identify and isolate a demonstrably violent inmate. The Department put people at great risk. Ignoring their own directive resulted in this tragic assault on a vulnerable person like Ryan Alwine,” said Shepherd.

Since the Alwine incident, DOC has adopted new policies and procedures intended to reduce the number of similar violent events. Shepherd said the settlement funds will help Alwine obtain needed medical treatment, equipment and therapy as he tries to regain a semblance of a normal life. “This settlement gives Ryan some measure of hope, help, and a more promising future during his struggle to recover from a preventable tragedy.” Alwine currently lives with his mother in Cowlitz County, WA.

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