

**Courier-Gazette / Camden Herald**

## **Advocacy group asks feds to probe state prison**

By Stephen Betts | Mar 23, 2011



The U.S. Department of Justice said it is reviewing a letter that asks for an investigation into possible abuse and inadequate medical care of prisoners in Maine.

The request was filed March 17 by the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition, which refers to itself as a growing coalition of human rights activists from across the state.

The coalition's request for an investigation follows the death of inmates.

One of those cases was the April 24, 2009, death of prisoner Sheldon Weinstein. State police determined in May 2009 that the death was a homicide that resulted from a beating. No one has been charged in the case.

Another was the Nov. 27, 2009, death of Victor Valdez. The coalition claims that inmates contacted the organization eight days prior to Valdez's death, stating he had been carried from his cell to a segregation unit of the prison by guards. Valdez was bleeding profusely, according to the inmates who contacted the coalition. Valdez, who did not speak English, was being sent to segregation for not responding quickly enough to a lockdown command, the coalition stated.

The coalition noted it notified the Maine Department of Corrections that Valdez's life was in danger but that the department responded it was not true.

Valdez's body was cremated without an autopsy being done. The coalition said his family was told that Valdez died of natural causes but had not been told of the events leading up to his death.

"Despite efforts by [the coalition] through Valdez's family, we have been unable thus far to secure his medical records and his computerized mental health records, although both have been readily available to the AG's Office," the coalition stated.

"Having exhausted all avenues of appeal to state officials and through the media, M-PAC appeals to the Justice Department as a final arbiter. There is little doubt that contracted medical services, particularly at Maine State Prison, have been executed in a manner that suggests systematic, wanton, and callous disregard for the pain and suffering of prisoners, particularly diabetics, the

mentally ill, and elderly inmates with a variety of disabilities," the coalition stated in its letter.

Xochitl Hinojosa, a spokeswoman from the U.S. Department of Justice, said the department is reviewing the letter from the coalition but declined any further comment at this time.

A telephone call was made March 22 to the Maine Department of Corrections asking for a comment on the request for a federal Justice Department probe. No response has been received as of the morning of March 23.

Another death not referred to in the letter sent last week to the Justice Department was that of 29-year-old inmate Ryan Allan Calor. Calor was found dead in his cell March 8 at the Bolduc Correctional Facility. The Maine Medical Examiner's Office concluded Calor died of pneumonia.

The division of the Justice Department that received the letter is the Special Litigation Section of the Civil Rights Division. This section investigates civil rights complaints of institutionalized people, conduct of law enforcement agencies, access to reproductive health clinics and places of religious worship, and religious exercise of institutionalized people, according to the Justice Department's website.

<http://knox.villagesoup.com/news/story/advocacy-group-asks-feds-to-probe-state-prison/387796?cid=271784>