

Settlement in HIV Prison Lawsuit

Honesty Bishop spent six years in solitary confinement.

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A settlement in an HIV discrimination lawsuit against the Missouri Department of Corrections will result in updates to the prison system's policy regarding solitary confinement. The case was brought on behalf of Honesty Bishop, a Black transgender woman living with HIV who was held in solitary confinement from 2015 to 2021 after she was allegedly attacked by a cellmate.

According to the lawsuit and reporting by The Marshall Project and the Midwest Newsroom, Bishop was sexually assaulted by a cellmate while at the Jefferson City Correctional Center, a men's prison. She took HIV medication regularly and therefore maintained an undetectable viral load, making it impossible for her to transmit HIV (a fact referred to as Undetectable Equals Untransmittable, or U=U). Nonetheless, as a matter of policy, the Missouri prison system categorized her as a sexually active person with HIV and required that she be kept in solitary confinement.

The lawsuit was filed in 2023 while Bishop was released on parole. Unfortunately, she took her own life in 2024. She was 34.

"My sister, Honesty, was a fighter who never gave up," said Latasha Monroe, Bishop's sister and personal representative for the Estate of Honesty Jade Bishop, in a statement by Lambda Legal, the MacArthur Justice Center and law firm Shook, Hardy & Bacon, which filed the case on Bishop's behalf.

Monroe added that her sister "endured years of cruel treatment because of her HIV status, but she never stopped believing that things could change. This settlement honors her memory and ensures that others won't have to suffer what Honesty went through. Her courage in speaking out has created lasting changes."