**Making Hard Time Harder:**

**Report Outlines Need for Accommodations for Inmates with Disabilities**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**See** [**www.AVIDprisonproject.org**](http://www.AVIDprisonproject.org)

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As many as 31 percent of U.S. inmates in state prisons report having at least one disability. Inmates with disabilities often spend more time in prison, under harsher conditions, than inmates without disabilities. Today, the Amplifying Voices of Inmates with Disabilities (AVID) Prison Project, a project of Disability Rights Washington, released the report *Making Hard Time Harder: Programmatic Accommodations for Inmates with Disabilities Under the Americans with Disabilities Act*. The report outlines lack of accommodations for inmates with disabilities.

“People are sent to prison as punishment, not *for* punishment,” says Mark Stroh, Executive Director of Disability Rights Washington. “In drafting this report, we have found that inmates with disabilities are often neglected and excluded from programs, rehabilitation, and basic medical care, subjecting them to additional forms of punishment solely due to their disability.”

The report includes case examples submitted by protection and advocacy agencies (P&As) engaged in prison work in 21 states. Colorado, Washington, and South Carolina all reported cases in which essential mobility devices, such as wheelchairs and walkers, were taken from inmates. One case resulted in an inmate’s inability to access showers or outside yard for almost two years. Idaho and Illinois reported systemic litigation seeking the provision of video phone services for inmates who are deaf or hard of hearing. Alabama reported inmates with intellectual disabilities could not access medical care in a written request, and were therefore unable to receive needed medical attention, prompting federal litigation.

“Because the focus in prison and jails is often about safety and incarceration, the issues of accommodation and service development are not a high priority,” said National Disability Rights Network Executive Director Curt Decker. “So this is a population that is very vulnerable, and least likely to get the kinds of services they need.”

From individual assistance to large scale federal litigation, these case summaries demonstrate the breadth and depth of work by P&As in prisons, and demonstrate that despite the passage of the ADA over two decades ago, much state prison work remains to be done.

Report recommendations to address this crisis in our nation’s prisons include:

1. Creation of independent corrections ombuds offices at the state level in order to address inmate concerns before they rise to the level of litigation.
2. Systemic accessibility reviews by state departments of corrections to identify both physical and programmatic barriers for inmates with disabilities.
3. Increased federal funding to the protection and advocacy network for corrections based monitoring and advocacy.
4. Increased training for prison ADA coordinators and collaboration between these staff members and the local P&As to address inmate concerns.

The report is available at AVIDprisonproject.org, where original interviews with inmates on disability issues in correctional settings can be accessed.

***About the AVID Prison Project***

AVID is a prison advocacy initiative that focuses on the needs of current and former prisoners with disabilities. The project was developed by Disability Rights Washington and is a collaboration between the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) and Protection and Advocacy agencies (P&As) in Arizona, Colorado, New York, South Carolina, and Washington, with communication assistance from the P&As in Louisiana and Texas.

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