

# The Salt Lake Tribune

Former Daggett County jail inmates tortured by police say they hope their lawsuit will bring change to how prisoners are treated

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Link: <https://www.sltrib.com/news/2018/05/16/former-daggett-county-jail-inmates-tortured-with-police-dogs-and-tasers-sue-saying-they-hope-a-lawsuit-will-bring-change-to-how-prisoners-are-treated/>

*This story was produced by the Utah Investigative Journalism Project in partnership with The Salt Lake Tribune.*

In a case that challenges the Utah Department of Corrections policy of farming out 20 percent of its inmates to remote county jails, the American Civil Liberties Union on Wednesday filed a federal civil rights lawsuit on behalf of two inmates who were repeatedly abused by a “violent and sadistic” guard in Daggett County.

“What happened at Daggett County reinforces how important it is for the Department of Corrections to maintain and rigorously enforce meaningful standards for health and safety at all county jails where state inmates are confined,” said John Mejia, legal director for the ACLU in Utah.



“Paying your debt to society does not mean your jailers can shock you with a Taser and attack you with dogs only to later call it ‘fun and games,’” Mejia said.

The two inmate-plaintiffs, Dustin Porter, 37, and Steven Drollette, 48, were among eight men state investigators said were shot with stun guns and subjected to K-9 dog attacks by guards between May 2015 and February 2017, when the state ordered the jail closed and all 80 inmates transferred to other facilities.

The suit seeks unspecified damages and a jury trial.

Named as defendants in the lawsuit are Daggett County; interim Department of Corrections Director Mike Haddon; DOC caseworker Jeffrey Toone; former and current Daggett County

Sheriffs Jerry Jorgensen and Erik Bailey; four former sheriff's deputies; and 20 "John Does" who worked at the jail and may have known of the abuses.

When he announced [criminal misconduct charges](#) against Jorgensen and four of his deputies a year ago, Utah Attorney General Sean Reyes said the actions of "at least one defendant constitute unbelievably inhumane conduct and a reprehensible miscarriage of justice and the actions of all the defendants are inexcusable."

All five defendants in the criminal case pleaded guilty to charges ranging from aggravated assault to official misconduct. However, only [former deputy Joshua Cox, 28, was sentenced to jail](#), and is on probation after serving four months. He blamed his actions on a "poisonous" atmosphere at the Daggett County jail.



*(Al Hartmann | Tribune file photo) Deputy Joshua Cox appears in 3rd District Court in Park City on July 17, 2017, before Judge Kent Holmberg. He along with former Daggett County Sheriff Jerry Jorgensen and former jail commander Lt. Benjamin Lail are up on charges connected to the abuse of jail inmates at the Daggett County jail.*

The ex-sheriff was charged with misdemeanor official misconduct, and his plea was held in abeyance — meaning the charge will be dismissed after six months if he pays a \$500 court fee and does not commit new crimes.

District Court in Park City on July 17, 2017, before Judge Kent Holmberg on charges connected to the abuse of jail inmates at the Daggett County jail. A third person charged at far left is Deputy Joshua Cox.

Previous reporting by the Utah Investigative Journalism Project in partnership with The Salt Lake Tribune showed that [the case may have never come to light without intervention by representatives of the Mormon church](#).

In December 2016, Drollette wrote a letter to the sheriff detailing some of the abuses, which Jorgensen said he immediately forwarded to the Corrections Department. After receiving no response from the state, Drollette sent a similar letter to Jerry Steglich, a former county commissioner who served as a volunteer LDS counselor at the jail. Steglich said he discussed the letter with his stake president in Lyman, Wyo., who then forwarded it to church officials in Salt Lake City.

LDS spokesman Eric Hawkins confirmed the account and said attorneys representing the faith contacted both the state A.G.'s Office and Corrections. It was only after this call that Corrections investigators swept into Daggett County.

Interviewed in his log home in Manila, Steglich, 64, said when he was first contacted about the abuse allegations, the state investigator was hostile, "like I was the one who was causing all the problems."

"My view is that if the state of Utah had been doing their job, this never would have happened," Steglich said. "They are supposed to do check-in and do interviews with the inmates and the guards on a regular basis.

In interviews with a reporter for the Utah Investigative Journalism Project, both Porter and Drollette said they were shot twice with a stun gun by Cox and also subjected to terrifying attacks by K-9 dogs under his command.

After one dog bit him on the back of the leg, Drollette said he asked Cox for medical attention. He said Cox told him not to worry, ["that dog's cleaner than you are."](#)

In a statement Wednesday, Porter said, "The state and the county need to answer for what they did to me and the others.... I hope that this lawsuit will bring real change to the way that state prisoners are treated in county jails."



*Former Daggett County Jail inmate Dustin Law Porter.*

At the center of the lawsuit is Corrections' Inmate Placement Program (IPP). Under the program about 20 percent of the state's inmates are assigned to 21 county jails, often in rural parts of the state where the sparse population makes it difficult to hire experienced officers. Proponents of the program praise it as a way of channeling public money to less developed areas of the state. Critics describe it as opaque and difficult to maintain consistent standards. Daggett is the state's least populated county with only 1,000 residents, many of them seasonal. The jail program had been critical to the local economy, accounting for more than 30 percent of the county's revenue.

*Tribune reporter Jessica Miller contributed to this report.*

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