

# Third former Daggett County jail inmate files lawsuit over abuse, torture



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A third former inmate at the Daggett County jail filed suit in federal court Wednesday claiming that he was repeatedly [shocked with stun guns and subjected to dog attacks](#) by a guard at the remote facility in the state's least populated county.

Joshua Asay, 27, joined [former inmates Dustin Law Porter, 37, and Steven Drollette, 48,](#) in an ACLU civil-rights lawsuit against Daggett County, the Utah Department of

Corrections, and former supervisors and guards at the jail. The 80-inmate facility was closed by state officials in February 2017 after an initial investigation showed widespread violations and abuses by jail staff.

A fourth inmate, Joshua Reed Olsen, 29, also said he was tortured at the jail by former guard Joshua Cox but has retained separate counsel.

Cox, 28, is now on probation after serving a four-month sentence on his guilty plea to three felonies, including aggravated assault. Four other men accused by Utah Attorney General Sean Reyes of criminal misconduct in the case, including former Daggett County Sheriff Jerry Jorgensen, received lesser sentences.

At the heart of the ACLU action is the Utah Department of Corrections' controversial Inmate Placement Program (IPP), in which the state farms out about 20 percent of its inmates to often remote county jails. Critics contend the Daggett County case illustrates that the state is unable to properly supervise and control what happens in the remote outposts.

"If Department of Corrections officials do not institute policy changes designed to protect the health and safety of state prisoners housed in county jails," the Asay lawsuit contends, "there will continue to be an unacceptably high risk of harm to state prisoners at those jails."

Asay, interviewed by telephone Wednesday in Boise where he works as a radio tower technician, said he has been an inmate in state prisons and six county jails, mostly on drug-related charges.

"Some are better than others," Asay said. "But these little county jails like Daggett have people who are not qualified to do their jobs."

Supporters of the IPP program contend it is an effective way of channeling tax dollars to less developed areas of the state. Before it was closed, Daggett's jail generated 30 percent of the county government's revenue.

Asay is the youngest and most slightly built of four inmates who came forward to be interviewed by Utah Investigative Journalism Project reporters about the jailhouse abuses. Other inmates, including one who only witnessed the abuses, said Asay often was bullied by the 6-foot 2-inch, 240-pound Cox.

The ACLU lawsuit contends that "on many occasions, Deputy Cox singled out Mr. Asay for humiliation, including calling him a 'bitch' and frequently denigrated him in front of other prisoners." On one occasion, Asay said Cox unholstered his handgun and threatened him with it, holding the gun close to the inmate's face.

Despite the seriousness of the charges, Loni Deland, attorney for Cox, had characterized the actions in the jail as "fun and games" born out of the mutual boredom felt by inmates and guards.

Reyes, however, said the episodes represented a ["reprehensible miscarriage of justice."](#)

According to a heavily redacted investigations report obtained by The Tribune through a public records request, at least one employee at the jail objected to what was going on. One jail employee whose name was redacted told state investigators on March 6, 2017, that he had “concerns” about management of the jail and showed them documents of formal complaints he had made.

The employee said he found it difficult to get along with some supervisors because he was not one of the “frat boys.”

In addition to charges of physical abuse, the lawsuit alleges that the Corrections Department systematically deprived Asay of prescribed medications related to his long-standing mental-health issues.

In contrast to the tiny jail in Daggett County, the lawsuit states, the state prison at Draper “has an entire wing for people suffering mental illness.”

The investigators claimed that a formal probe was launched Jan. 10, 2017, after Jorgensen forwarded Corrections a letter from a former inmate detailing the abuses. Investigators also confirmed that they had received an “identical letter” from the same inmate that was sent to an LDS volunteer counselor in the jail and forwarded by church attorneys but did not give a date when this contact was made.

However, Steven Drollette, the inmate who wrote those letters, said they were not identical and that he sent the one to Jorgensen in December and only sent a letter to Mormon church volunteer Jerry Steglich several weeks later after he did not hear back from Jorgensen.

Drollette contends it was the LDS intervention — not the action of the county sheriff — that sparked the investigation and subsequent criminal charges.

*Rone Tempest is a former Los Angeles Times reporter who produced this story through a partnership of the Utah Investigative Journalism Project and The Salt Lake Tribune.*