

Aug 22, 2018 splcenter.org

Court allows claims to move forward against private prison company that profits from forced labor of detained immigrants

A federal court has ruled that a private prison company can be held liable for forcing detained immigrants to work for as little as \$1 a day to clean, cook, and maintain an immigration prison it operates in Georgia. The ruling follows a class action lawsuit the SPLC filed in April against CoreCivic, Inc., which runs the Stewart Detention Center in Lumpkin, Georgia. CoreCivic is under contract with Stewart County, Georgia, to house people detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The ruling allows the plaintiffs' claims against CoreCivic to move forward because the company can now be held liable for violating anti-trafficking laws and reaping unjust economic gains by doing so. "The court's decision shows that CoreCivic is not above the law in the treatment of people in its care," said Meredith Stewart, senior attorney for the SPLC. "We will now have the opportunity to show how CoreCivic's practice of forcing the immigrants detained at Stewart to work for nearly free by depriving them of basic necessities, and threatening solitary confinement for refusing to work, violates federal anti-trafficking laws, and leads to an unjust financial windfall for the private prison company." Detained immigrants at Stewart Detention Center who refuse to work are threatened with solitary confinement and the loss of access to basic necessities, like food, clothing, products for personal hygiene, and phone calls to loved ones, in violation of federal anti-trafficking laws, according to the lawsuit. The "Dollar-a-Day" program creates a lucrative profit scenario for CoreCivic: Detained immigrants are forced to purchase basic necessities from CoreCivic's commissary, and the primary way to fund their purchases is to participate in the work program that is necessary for the operation of the facility. These jobs include providing basic functions at the facility like cooking and cleaning, work for which CoreCivic would otherwise have to hire and pay outside employees. Similar lawsuits have been filed in California, Washington, Colorado and Texas, challenging private prison companies' work practices. The SPLC filed the lawsuit against CoreCivic in conjunction with the Law Office of R. Andrew Free, Project South, and Burns Charest LLP. The Southeast Immigrant Freedom Initiative (SIFI) is a project of the SPLC that enlists and trains volunteer lawyers to provide free legal representation to detained immigrants facing deportation proceedings in the Southeast.