

NEWS RELEASES

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Husch Blackwell and MacArthur Justice Center Earn Class Certification for Juvenile Offenders

U.S. District Court Judge Nanette Laughrey ruled that a group of Missouri prison inmates were entitled to class-action status in their lawsuit against the Missouri Department of Corrections (MDOC) and its parole board.

Husch Blackwell, in conjunction with the Roderick & Solange MacArthur Justice Center, filed the lawsuit pro bono on behalf of four plaintiffs who were sentenced to life without parole in relation to offenses committed prior to their eighteenth birthdays. The class certification affects roughly 95 people whose constitutional rights as juvenile offenders have been denied by the Missouri Parole Board's systematic disregard for due process and applicable federal and state law, and the failure to provide a meaningful opportunity for release, as required by United States Supreme Court precedent and applicable federal and state law.

The lawsuit was filed May 18, 2017, in the Western District of Missouri Central Division.

“We are pleased with the progress we’ve made thus far in asserting our clients’ constitutional rights,” said Husch Blackwell partner Matt Knepper. “For over a decade, the U.S. Supreme Court has made clear in multiple decisions that children and adults are not to be treated the same by the criminal justice system. Our clients were sentenced to life without parole on a mandatory basis. These sentences are not constitutional or appropriate sentences for juveniles and must be corrected.”

The Husch Blackwell team is led by Matt Knepper, Denyse Jones, and Jordan Ault and includes Sarah Zimmerman, Coty Hopinks-Baul, Theresa Mullineaux, and Barbara Thebeau.