

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

M.C. and T.G., on behalf of themselves and all
similarly situated individuals,

Plaintiff,

v.

JEFFERSON COUNTY, NEW YORK, et al.,

Defendants.

Case No. 6:22-cv-00190-DNH-ATB

DECLARATION OF M [REDACTED] S [REDACTED] C [REDACTED]

I, [REDACTED], declare as follows:

1. My name is [REDACTED]. I am fifty-three years old, and I live in Watertown, New York. I was detained at the Jefferson County Jail from January 7 to February 14, 2022. During those five weeks, the jail deprived me of my prescribed treatment for opioid use disorder (“OUD”), causing me to go through horribly painful withdrawal.

2. I have been living with OUD for decades. I was first introduced to opioids when I was just a child. My mother was a nurse who had access to opioid painkillers through her work. I was a rambunctious kid who often got minor injuries from playing around outside, and my mother would sometimes give me opioids to deal with the pain. For example, she once gave me Vicodin when I sprained my ankle. At the time, she didn’t know how dangerous these painkillers could be. I was the baby of the family, and she just didn’t want me to hurt. But I couldn’t forget the euphoric feeling the opioids gave me. After experiencing it a few times, I didn’t feel normal without it.

3. All through my 20s and 30s, I was using Vicodin and Percocet. I convinced myself I wasn't addicted because I had a stable career doing construction work. In 2005, however, a ladder slipped out from under me at work and I fell almost 20 feet. I broke my back in two places and needed multiple surgeries. The doctors prescribed me opioid medication to manage the pain. By the time the prescription ended, I was fully dependent on the opioids.

4. I started using heroin in 2010. By 2014, my addiction to heroin had become severe. I was sometimes using more than 20 bags a day. My OUD almost killed me. More than once, I overdosed and had to be revived with Narcan. But even though I knew the risks, I couldn't stop myself from using because the cravings were overwhelming.

5. I am not the only person in my family who has struggled with substance use. My older brother is also addicted to opioids. And my mother's death was caused in part by substance use.

6. I began medication-based treatment for my opioid addiction in 2014, when I was prescribed Suboxone. Before that, I had tried different kinds of treatment programs that did not use medication, but none of them allowed me to sustain recovery—I always ended up relapsing. By contrast, Suboxone made a difference right away. It was effective at reducing my cravings for heroin and helping me manage my addiction.

7. With the help of consistent Suboxone treatment, I was able to lead a normal life. Even though I was still physically limited by my construction accident, I had the energy to stay on my feet for several hours at a time. That allowed me to do fun activities with my daughter, including hiking and walking the dogs. I could also go to concerts and sports games.

8. In early 2021, I switched my treatment from Suboxone to methadone. My doctors recommended the change because I was going to have surgery, and I would not be able to take Suboxone at the same time as the pain medication I needed for the surgery.

9. Like Suboxone, methadone has really helped in treating my addiction. Once my doctor found my therapeutic dosage of methadone, it has been effective at managing my OUD.

10. I was receiving methadone treatment in the months leading up to my recent detention at the Jefferson County Jail. But I was very worried that I would be prevented from getting my treatment at the jail because it had happened before. From around April to June 2021, I was held for about two months at the Jefferson County Jail. I repeatedly told the jail staff that I was receiving methadone for my opioid addiction and that I needed to continue the treatment. But the jail did not allow me to get my medication. As a result, I suffered through weeks of painful withdrawal.

11. Because of this terrible experience at the jail last year, I tried to make sure the jail would not stop my treatment again this time around. On December 3, 2021, more than a month before my detention was due to start, my lawyers sent a letter requesting that the jail allow me to continue methadone treatment during my detention. The letter explained that interrupting my treatment would be extremely harmful and dangerous.

12. The jail did not grant the request made by my lawyers. The jail said it would deal with my request once I was in custody.

13. But as soon as I was taken into custody on January 7, 2022, the jail cut me off from my methadone treatment, even though I had a prescription for methadone from the Credo Community Center in Watertown. I was not given access to my medication at any point during my five weeks at the jail.

14. Withdrawal symptoms started within a day of my treatment ending. I had heart palpitations, muscle spasms throughout my whole body, severe pain in my neck and upper body, tremors, and anxiety. I experienced scary drug hallucinations. Because of these painful symptoms and the constant craving for opioids I felt, I barely slept. The agony of going through withdrawal like this is impossible to describe to people who have not experienced it.

15. My withdrawal symptoms continued throughout the whole five weeks I was detained.

16. I asked staff at the jail again and again for my medication. I asked during intake and every day from at least January 8 to 12.

17. None of my requests for treatment was granted. Multiple officers made clear to me that the jail was not going to let me receive methadone, no matter what. Officer Towles told me that she didn't care what I was going through and that the jail would not allow methadone. Officer Locy told me, "It's not going to happen." He also brought up P.G., who I know was the only person at the jail who was getting methadone treatment, and said that P.G. got lucky because his lawyers sued the jail. And a nurse also told me, "It's not going to happen" because the jail does not provide methadone.

18. My experience at the Jefferson County Jail was truly awful. The withdrawal was unbearable, and without my treatment all I could feel were the pain and the constant craving for opioids. I was scared—and still am—because each time my treatment is interrupted, and I have to go through this withdrawal, it gets harder and harder to stabilize afterward and get back on the path of recovery. I've already lost many family members and friends to addiction. I don't want to become one of them.

19. Staff of the New York Civil Liberties Union (“NYCLU”) have read this declaration to me verbatim. I declare under penalty of perjury that the contents of this declaration are true and correct, and I have authorized the NYCLU to place my signature on the declaration.

Executed on: February 25, 2022
Watertown, NY

/s/ [REDACTED]