

## Winston & Strawn Files Suit on Behalf of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Inmates

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Winston & Strawn, along with the Equip for Equality and Uptown People's Law Center, and the National Association of the Deaf, filed today a class action lawsuit in federal district court in Chicago on behalf of a group of deaf and hard of hearing inmates. The lawsuit is in response to the systemic discrimination by the Illinois Department of Corrections ("IDOC") and its failure to provide accommodations to deaf and hard of hearing prisoners. Denials of accommodations include the IDOC's refusal to provide American Sign Language interpreters, technological assistance and other alternate forms of communication. Without these accommodations, deaf and hard of hearing prisoners are endangered and deprived of meaningful access to religious services, healthcare, educational and vocational programs, telephones, televisions, library services, disciplinary proceedings, grievances and pre-release programs.

The lawsuit asserts claims under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act, the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, and the 1st, 8th and 14th Amendments of the U.S. Constitution.

The IDOC's failures have forced deaf and hard of hearing prisoners to serve their time largely isolated from, and unable to effectively communicate with, other human beings. These prisoners have even gone hungry and missed out on crucial visitors because they could not hear the announcements to leave their cells. Additionally, the IDOC regularly jeopardizes these prisoners' safety and has not made auditory safety alerts accessible to deaf prisoners so they are unaware of vital warnings — fire alarms, warning shots and orders to lie down to avoid being shot. In addition, without the provision of communication options, deaf prisoners are forced to rely on other inmates to interpret and communicate for them, placing them in constant danger of exploitation.

The lawsuit seeks an order from the court to remedy the IDOC's past violations of federal law and to prevent future violations.

Litigation partner Robert Michels is leading the Winston team, which includes Joe Motto.

Last year Winston & Strawn, along with the Washington Lawyers' Committee, successfully settled a similar case brought on behalf of a group of deaf and hard of hearing inmates at Powhatan Correctional Center in State Farm, Virginia. More details are available [here](#).

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## Related Locations

Chicago

## Related Topics

Deaf Inmates

Hard of Hearing Inmates

## Related Capabilities

Litigation/Trials

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Joseph L. Motto