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Groundbreaking Lawsuit Challenges Forced Farm Labor at Angola

Lawsuit brought by advocacy groups PJI and Rights Behind Bars alleges violations of the Eighth, Thirteenth Amendments and the Americans with Disabilities Act

On Saturday, September 16, the [Promise of Justice Initiative](#) and [Rights Behind Bars](#) filed a lawsuit against the Louisiana Department of Corrections and Prison Enterprises challenging the harsh and unconstitutional conditions of forced agricultural labor at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, or Angola.

“Louisiana’s evolution from mass enslavement to mass incarceration is undeniable,” said **Lydia Wright**, PJI Associate Director of Civil Litigation. “Angola’s fields were once cultivated by enslaved people. Today, the State forces incarcerated men—primarily Black men—to plant and pick plantation crops by hand, without safety equipment and in extreme heat and humidity. The State extracts this labor by threatening incarcerated men with serious harm, including disciplinary confinement, if they protest the unsafe work conditions or fail to meet arbitrary efficiency quotas. This is cruel and unusual.”

The lawsuit was filed in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Louisiana on behalf of nonprofit organization **Voice of the Experienced (VOTE)** and four men who are currently incarcerated at Angola. The individual plaintiffs seek to represent all people forced to work the so-called “Farm Line.” The lawsuit includes two proposed subclasses: one for individuals with disabilities, and another for people who were convicted by non-unanimous juries.

PJI and RBB have also asked the U.S. Department of Justice investigate the DOC’s operation of the Farm Line in a manner that discriminates against people with disabilities. This includes the DOC’s practice of forcing people with serious disabilities and health conditions to work the Farm Line in extreme heat and humidity.

“Forced labor cannot continue in Louisiana, particularly the type of forced labor that people at Angola are subjected to, which is intended to harm,” said **Oren Nimni**, Litigation Director for Rights Behind Bars. “The intolerable and obviously dangerous conditions of the Farm Line subject everyone at Angola to an unacceptable risk of physical and psychological harm and the risk is even greater for individuals with disabilities.”

“The Farm Line is unambiguously coercive and exploitative,” said **Samantha Kennedy**, PJI Executive Director. “It’s beyond time for Louisiana to end this degrading and unconstitutional practice.”

The complaint in *VOTE, et al. v. LeBlanc, et al.*, 3:23-cv-1204-BAJ-EWD (M.D. La) can be [found here](#).

The DOJ complaint can be [found here](#).

Learn more about PJI’s End Plantation Prisons work at <https://labor.promiseofjustice.org>.