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NYC Settles Suit Filed on Behalf of Transgender Woman Raped While Held in All-Male Jail on Rikers Island

Rodriguez was placed in Rikers Island's all-male Anna M. Kross Center in April 2018 while being held for pretrial detention—despite the fact that she presented as a woman and that some corrections employees expressed surprise that she would be placed in that particular facility.

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Civil Rights



Andrew Denney

The New York City government will pay \$1.4 million as part of a settlement agreement brokered with the estate of Alyssa Rodriguez, a transgender woman who in 2018 was sexually assaulted twice while being held on Rikers Island in a facility for male detainees.

According to court papers, Rodriguez was placed in Rikers Island's all-male Anna M. Kross Center in April 2018 while being held for pretrial detention—despite the fact that she presented as a woman and that some corrections employees expressed surprise that she would be placed in that particular facility, where she was housed in an open sleeping area with male detainees.

While there, both fellow inmates and corrections officers allegedly subjected Rodriguez to relentless harassment. Then a male detainee sexually assaulted Rodriguez in the shower.

Rodriguez was sent to Bellevue Hospital to get treatment for her injuries.

But after she was discharged, the New York City Department of Correction placed her back in the same facility over the objections of her lawyers, according to court papers. Four days later, she was sexually assaulted again in her holding cell by a male detainee.

"I was raped two times and I will never forget the loneliness, pain, destruction. This has changed my life," Rodriguez wrote in an account of her horrific experience that the Prisoner Justice Project submitted to the city's Board of Correction.

Rodriguez sued the city, alleging that the treatment she was subjected to is part of a pattern by the city of failing to protect transgender people in its custody. Rodriguez died in the course of the litigation from unrelated health complications, according to a news release from law firm Cuti Hecker Wang, which represents Rodriguez's estate and the Bronx Public Administrator.

"No transgender person in New York City custody should suffer the horrors that our client endured," Alexander Goldenberg of Cuti Hecker Wang said in the news release. "We are privileged to have been able to fight for Ms. Rodriguez in the way that she wanted—standing up for her rights and making sure that New York City understands there are consequences for its failure to protect transgender people in custody."

As part of the settlement agreement, the plaintiff agreed to release the city from liability in the matter, court documents show.

"This settlement was in the best interests of the city," a city Law Department spokesman told the Law Journal.

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