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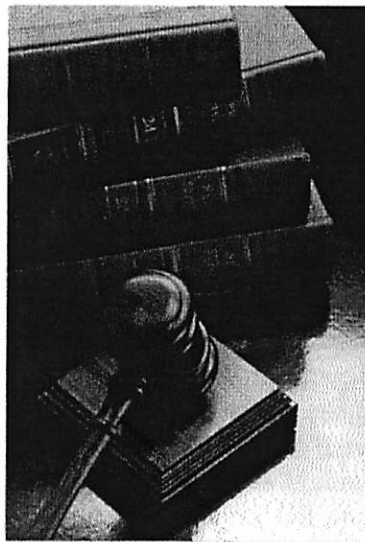
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Mercer County Pays \$175,000 to a Deaf Man For Failure to Provide Interpreters and TDD During A Five Day Incarceration

Submitted by Clara Smit, Esq.

Mercer County has agreed to pay \$175,000 to a deaf man who was incarcerated in their detention center and appeared before their court without an interpreter in 1994, ending a nine year old nightmare for plaintiff Ronald Chisolm. Mercer County has also agreed to enter into an agreement to provide injunctive relief for all future deaf inmates incarcerated in their facility.



On September 10, 1994 Mr. Chisolm was returning from a restaurant with a friend and driving in Princeton when his vehicle was stopped by local police and he was handcuffed and arrested. As Mr. Chisolm is deaf and communicates primarily in American Sign Language, he had no idea what he was being arrested for as he began a five day horrific ordeal in the Mercer County Detention Center. His friend who was hearing rushed to try

to explain to him in the little sign language that he knew what the police were saying; that there was an open bench warrant for Ron. He thought they meant a "warranty" and did not understand what was being done. Bewildered and frantic with worry, Ron was taken to the Detention Center. Despite his requests and his friend's requests for an interpreter and a TDD (telecommunication device for the deaf), none was provided and Mr. Chisolm was placed in solitary confinement in a solid four walled cell with just a small rectangular opening for food trays for the next four days. His only contact with the outside world was with the

intake officers who classified him incorrectly as a vagrant (Ron Chisolm had lived in Plainsboro for four years and had been a United States Postal Worker for thirteen years at that point and no criminal record) and a nurse who noted he was a suicide risk as he cried and flailed his arms trying to communicate and make himself understood. The incorrect classification and inability to communicate with him led to his being classified as a higher security risk who was then not placed into general population.

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