

Public Dollars Defending Prison Violence:

What \$68 Million Bought Alabama—
and What It Could Have Built Instead

APRIL 2026

NO 
MORE.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2020, the Alabama Department of Corrections (ADOC) has spent **at least \$68 million** in taxpayer dollars on legal defense and settlements tied to violence, neglect, and preventable harm inside state prisons, while protecting abusive officers instead of firing them. This brief documents this spending and presents concrete alternatives that would have made Alabamians healthier, safer, and more secure.

Under the current system, people in state custody have been abused, tortured, sent to hospitals with life-threatening injuries, and even brutally murdered. Steven Davis, whose story is central to *The Alabama Solution*, was taken to the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) in critical condition, then pronounced dead, after being repeatedly beaten by correctional officer Lt. Roderick Gadson.

Getting rid of abusive, corrupt officers like Lt. Roderick Gadson doesn't have to cost Alabama millions of dollars.

Time and time again in Alabama, taxpayer funds have been used to defend a system that enables murders, waste, abuse, and corruption, rather than to prevent them. All the while, killer officers like Gadson have been promoted – in his case, twice. The current spending pattern prioritizes defense and damage control. It treats violence, neglect, and failure inside the prison system as a normal outcome to be defended rather than conditions to be corrected.

That same \$68 million could have delivered measurable, statewide benefits that make Alabamians healthier, safer, and more secure. For example, we could have paid for:

- **~3,000 substance use treatment placements**, reducing cycles of incarceration and crisis
- **>1,100 correctional officers for one year**, addressing staffing shortages the state itself has cited as a driver of unsafe conditions and ensuring that capacity or resource constraints are not part of the problem
- **>200 full medical degrees from UAB**, expanding the state's healthcare workforce for decades
- **~8,500 people receiving a full year of comprehensive mental health care**, including therapy, psychiatry, and case management, reducing crises, suicide risk, and E.R. use
- **68 city-years* of violence interruption and reentry programs**, reducing harm before it occurs (*funding one AL city for 68 years or 68 AL cities for one year)
- **~7,000 people housed post-release**, strengthening reentry and reducing recidivism
- **>13,000 teachers to be supported with retention and classroom funding**, stabilizing K–12 classrooms across Alabama at a time when education funds have been reallocated for prison construction

Taxpayer funds have been used to defend the system that produced these negative outcomes, and that waste continues to this day.

WHAT THE STATE HAS SPENT

Since 2020, ADOC has spent **at least \$68 million*** in taxpayer dollars on:

- Legal defense in class action litigation, **including more than \$45M+ to a single law firm with ties to the administration**
- Settlements and defense of prison officers in multiple lawsuits
- Claims involving excessive force, failure to protect, sexual assault, and suicide

**This figure includes expenditures from both the state's general fund and the general liability trust fund. It is a dynamic total that continues to rise as new claims are filed and resolved.*



WHAT \$68M COULD HAVE BOUGHT AND BUILT INSTEAD

1. SUBSTANCE USE TREATMENT CAPACITY

Assumption: ~\$25,000 per residential treatment placement (annual, all-in)
\$68 million could fund **2,720 treatment placements**

Practical effect: Thousands of individuals would receive care that reduces relapse, lowers re-arrest rates, and prevents crises that escalate into violence or hospitalization. This is direct prevention and urgently needed given that Alabama ranks 48th in access to addiction treatment. Rehabilitative programs inside ADOC are just as scarce with fewer than five percent of the prison population graduating from treatment programs in 2024, down from 20 percent in 2010.

2. SAFE STAFFING INSIDE FACILITIES

Assumption: ~\$60,000 per correctional officer (includes both salary and benefits)
\$68 million could fund **~1,133 new officers for one year**, or **~225 new officers sustained for five years**

Practical effect: Adequate staffing reduces use-of-force incidents, improves supervision, and stabilizes conditions. State officials have repeatedly cited staffing shortages as a core driver of unsafe facilities. ADOC has struggled to recruit and retain officers due to working conditions, safety concerns, and institutional culture. But those constraints are shaped by the same conditions this spending reflects. Investment at this scale could support not only hiring, but retention strategies, safer working environments, training, and oversight structures that make these roles viable to fill and sustain. Instead, tens of millions have been spent defending the consequences of violence, including cases where officers inflicted serious harm or killed people in state custody.

3. PHYSICIANS TRAINED TO SERVE ALABAMA COMMUNITIES AND STRENGTHEN PUBLIC HEALTH

Benchmark: UAB Heersink School of Medicine

Assumption: ~\$311,577 total cost of attendance per student (four years, in-state, includes tuition and all anticipated living costs)

\$68 million could fund **~218 full medical degrees**

Practical effect: More than 200 physicians entering a state with persistent provider shortages, particularly in rural counties. This expands access to primary care, trauma care, and mental health services for decades.

Connection to current spending: People harmed in state custody are transported to hospitals for emergency care. Public dollars have been used to defend the conduct that sends people there, while underinvesting in the workforce that keeps communities healthy.

This extends beyond harm incurred inside facilities. ADOC assumes responsibility for individuals entering custody with untreated or under-treated health conditions. In many cases, inadequate or delayed care inside the system worsens those conditions, leading to preventable medical crises and costly emergency interventions. Investment in physician training and access to care – both in communities and within correctional settings – would reduce these downstream costs by addressing health needs earlier and more effectively.

4. COMMUNITY-BASED MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Assumption: ~\$8,000 per person per year for comprehensive outpatient care (therapy, psychiatry, and case management)

\$68 million could fund **~8,500 people receiving a full year of care**

Practical effect: Sustained, wraparound care reduces psychiatric crises, suicide risk, and emergency room utilization. It also stabilizes individuals during reentry and lowers repeat contact with the criminal legal system.

Connection to current spending and current crisis: Alabama is currently spending tens of millions responding to the consequences of crises inside its prison system, including hospitalization, litigation, and settlements tied to injury and death. Redirecting resources toward community-based mental health care reduces both the human toll and the fiscal burden by preventing those crises from occurring in the first place.

A significant portion of people in Alabama's prison system are living with untreated or under-treated mental health conditions. Inside facilities, that unmet need contributes to behavioral crises, use-of-force incidents, self-harm, and deaths in custody. Outside facilities, lack of access to care increases the likelihood of arrest and re-incarceration. Investment at this scale reduces pressure on prisons by addressing mental health needs *before they escalate into incarceration or violence, and by supporting stability after release.*

5. VIOLENCE INTERRUPTION AND REENTRY PROGRAMS

Assumption: ~\$1 million per city per year for a staffed, evidence-based model
\$68 million could fund **68 city-years* of programming, or ~13 cities for five consecutive years** (*funding one AL city for 68 years or 68 AL cities for one year)

Practical effect: Sustained local investment reduces shootings, assaults, and returns to prison, instead shifting resources toward prevention and community-led solutions.



6. TRANSITIONAL HOUSING AND REENTRY STABILIZATION

Assumption: ~\$10,000 per person for housing and wraparound support

\$68 million could fund **6,800 people with approximately 5–8 months of housing, food, and reentry support**

Practical effect: Stable housing is one of the strongest predictors of successful reentry. At approximately \$10,000 per person, this level of investment provides roughly **5–8 months of housing, food, and basic support** in places like Birmingham—covering the highest-risk period immediately after release. This reduces homelessness, improves health outcomes, and lowers recidivism by stabilizing individuals before crises lead to re-incarceration or emergency system use.

CASE SPOTLIGHT: FROM ASSAULT TO DEATH

Steven Davis, whose story is featured in the documentary film ***The Alabama Solution***, was beaten by correctional officer **Lt. Roderick Gadson**, taken to UAB in critical condition, and died from those injuries. This was a brutal killing carried out inside a State facility. His case reflects a broader pattern: people in state custody are subjected to violence severe enough to require emergency medical care, and in some cases, it is fatal.

We know taxpayers' dollars have been used to defend the system that allowed that killing to occur – all as officers like Gadson have been defended and promoted. Public funds are covering the legal exposure created by violence inside state custody, including cases where officers inflict life-ending harm. **In 19 excessive force lawsuits** filed against Gadson, the state has spent **nearly one million dollars for his legal defense and in paid settlements to plaintiffs.**

Those same dollars could and should have been used to reduce the conditions that make that violence possible.



The Guardian

Print/Digital News 12/09/2025

He was called one of the most violent prison guards in America. He got promoted

Ed Pilkington



POLICY DIRECTION

Alabama has a clear choice in how it uses public funds tied to its prison system:

- 1. Continue allocating resources to legal defense and settlements tied to violence, including cases involving serious injury and death*
- 2. Reallocate those funds toward accountability, safety, and the conditions that prevent harm from occurring in the first place.*

It should choose the latter.

IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS INCLUDE:

- **Terminate and prosecute officers who commit violence**, including Lt. Roderick Gadson and others with documented histories of abuse
- **Ensure independent accountability mechanisms** with real authority to investigate, discipline, and refer cases for prosecution when harm or death occurs in state custody
- **Mandate system-wide transparency around use-of-force incidents**, including public reporting and timely disclosure of serious injuries and deaths
- **Enforce staffing standards and allocate resources** so capacity constraints are not used to justify unsafe or lethal conditions
- **Expand access to treatment, mental health care, and reentry support**, reducing the likelihood of harm both inside facilities and after release
- **Invest in community-based violence prevention and housing stabilization**, addressing root causes rather than managing consequences

These actions align spending with outcomes that benefit the public rather than absorbing the costs of failure after harm occurs.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Since 2020 alone, \$68 million has already been spent defending violence, neglect, and preventable harm in Alabama's prison system. That number is increasing every day we fail to act.

The same level of investment can be directed toward safer facilities, healthier communities, and a more stable workforce.

The question is not whether the state will spend these dollars; it is whether those dollars will continue to cause harm or begin to reduce it.



**NO
MORE.**

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