

# New Jersey Herald

## County settles suit over jail inmate beating



New Jersey Herald File Photo - Keogh Dwyer Correctional Facility

**By Lori Comstock** New Jersey Herald

Posted: Sep. 29, 2017 12:05 am

A settlement has been reached between the county and a former Sussex County jail inmate who filed a lawsuit alleging he was severely beaten by three other inmates in an attack arranged by a corrections officer. The victim was left to sit in his own blood and was refused medical treatment for 12 hours, according to a lawsuit filed on April 20, 2015.

Details of the settlement have not yet been released pending its execution, according to sources.

The lawsuit was filed in state Superior Court in Newton by Sparta attorney Jeffrey Patti on behalf of Robert Woodruff, of Vernon. It named various officials in their individual and official capacities as defendants, including Sheriff Mike Strada, then-Undersheriff Homer Wanamaker, the then-jail warden -- who was not named in the suit -- and other corrections officers and inmates.

Strada; Freeholder Director Carl Lazzaro; John Williams, who represented Woodruff during his burglary case and is now county counsel; and Gregory Poff, county administrator, declined comment on Thursday.

The lawsuit states that Woodruff, who was sentenced in March 2013 to a four-year state prison term after pleading guilty to his involvement in a rash of burglaries in Highland Lakes during the summer of 2012, had been incarcerated at the Keogh-Dwyer Correctional Facility -- allegedly against orders of and unbeknownst to a Sussex County judge -- and had been the victim of a "hit" arranged by then-Sussex County Corrections Officer Leslie Port.

Port, the lawsuit states, was one of the victims of Woodruff's burglaries.

The lawsuit states a judge had issued a writ to lodge Woodruff in the Warren County jail until his sentencing due to the fact that Port was a victim of Woodruff's crime. Woodruff was lodged in Warren County up to and even after his sentencing, but was transported to the Sussex County jail on April 30, 2013, for "processing and housing despite the fact a court had ordered (Woodruff) to be lodged in the Warren County jail," according to the lawsuit.

The lawsuit claims that the named defendants arranged for Woodruff to be taken to Keogh-Dwyer from Warren County.

Lodged in the Sussex County jail on the fifth floor, cell 516, the lawsuit states, the defendants left Woodruff alone in his cell with the door open.

It is then alleged that three inmates -- "purposefully arranged" by said defendants -- entered the cell and "immediately commenced to inflict a savage beating on (Woodruff), causing severe and permanent injuries and causing great pain and suffering."

The following morning, Woodruff was taken to a dentist where he required surgical sutures, and later that afternoon, the New Jersey Department of Corrections picked him up for transport.

Patti cites the Constitution of the State of New Jersey and state statutes in the lawsuit, specifically a prohibition against "cruel and unusual punishment" and the use of unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain against prisoners, pre-trial detainees and inmates.

"As a direct and proximate result of the actions of Defendants, (Woodruff) will endure and has endured severe pain and suffering, severe emotional trauma, humiliation and embarrassment and will in the future require medical treatment," the suit states.

Although Patti told the New Jersey Herald on Thursday that he was not at liberty to discuss the details of the settlement, he did state, "As far as I'm concerned, heads are rolling over this."

In the lawsuit, Woodruff was seeking compensatory and punitive damages as well as attorney's fees and "such other relief" as the court deemed appropriate.

Lori Comstock can also be reached on Twitter: @LoriComstockNJH, on Facebook: [www.Facebook.com/LoriComstockNJH](http://www.Facebook.com/LoriComstockNJH) or by phone: 973-383-1194.