



For Immediate Release
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Center for Justice and Accountability and the New York Civil Liberties Union Petition Court for Order to Investigate and Sanction Gitmo Psychologist

CJA and NYCLU Demand that the N.Y. State Office of Professional Discipline be Required to Investigate the Conduct of Dr. John Francis Leso, Who Violated Professional Standards When he Designed and Participated in the Abusive Interrogation Program at Guantánamo

New York, NY – The Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA) and the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) have filed a petition in New York State Court asking the Court to order the New York Office of Professional Discipline (OPD) to perform its duty to investigate a complaint of professional misconduct against Dr. John Francis Leso, who, as asserted in the complaint, violated professional standards when he designed and participated in the abusive interrogation program at Guantánamo.

In July 2010, CJA filed the professional misconduct complaint with OPD calling for an investigation of Dr. Leso for his role in abusive interrogation and torture, and for revocation of his psychologist's license on that basis. The case was filed on behalf of Dr. Steven Reisner, a New York psychologist, teacher, trauma expert and recent recipient of the Beacon Award by the New York State Psychological Association for his work against torture. OPD declined to investigate because it claimed it did not have jurisdiction.

In the petition, filed last week, CJA asks the Court to invalidate OPD's denial and to direct the OPD to initiate and complete the investigation of the allegations of professional misconduct advanced in CJA's original complaint, which can be found here: <http://cja.org/section.php?id=441>. CJA argues "The duty to investigate allegations of professional misconduct is mandatory under the New York Education Law and under State rules and regulations. The Complaint against Dr. Leso alleges and documents multiple instances of professional misconduct, thereby imposing a mandatory obligation upon the OPD to investigate."

According to CJA's complaint, Dr. Leso, a major in the U.S. Army, led the first team of mental health professionals tasked with supporting interrogation operations at the U.S. detention camp at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The complaint alleges that Dr. Leso violated professional standards for New York psychologists when he recommended a series of escalating physically and psychologically abusive interrogation tactics to be used on detainees, personally supervised interrogations where his tactics were used, and actually participated in the application of these tactics. Many of the techniques and conditions that Dr. Leso is accused of having helped put in place were applied to men and boys held at Guantánamo and eventually to detainees held in U.S. custody in Iraq and Afghanistan. Neither Dr. Leso nor any other U.S. official involved has ever been held accountable for the cruel treatment of detainees at Guantánamo.

The lawsuit does not, at this juncture, ask the court to address the questions of whether the allegations about Dr. Leso's conduct are true or whether he should be sanctioned if the allegations are proved to be

true. At issue in this case is whether the Office of Professional Discipline erroneously refused to investigate the allegations and consider disciplinary measures.

Petitioner Dr. Steven Reisner is Senior Faculty and Supervisor at the International Trauma Studies Program in New York City. Dr. Reisner comes from a family of Holocaust survivors. His mother lost her entire family at the hands of doctors who determined who was to live and who was to die upon arrival at the Auschwitz concentration camp. Dr. Reisner described why he decided to file the complaint against Dr. Leso:

“Psychologists and medical professionals must be held to the highest ethical standards. The involvement of medical professionals in the torture of detainees at Guantánamo it is just the latest example of medical ethics corrupted and subverted by those who would seek to harm instead of to heal. By refusing to even investigate the actions of Dr. Leso, the State of New York has indicated that it will immunize medical professionals who violate the most fundamental precepts upon which good medicine is practiced, including the bedrock principle that a doctor shall do no harm.” Reisner continued, “I believe that granting blanket immunity from investigation to medical professionals who design, justify and inflict pain and abuse is contrary to our core common values, professional medical principles, and New York law.”

The Board of Psychology and the Office of Professions are responsible for licensing and regulating the conduct of New York psychologists. Dr. Leso has never faced a criminal or civil trial for his actions, and his license remains in good standing.

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About NYCLU

The NYCLU is one of the nation's foremost defenders of civil liberties and civil rights. Founded in 1951 as the New York affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union, it is a not-for-profit, nonpartisan organization with eight chapters and regional offices and nearly 50,000 members across the state. Its mission is to defend and promote the fundamental principles and values embodied in the Bill of Rights, the U.S. Constitution, and the New York Constitution. Among the most fundamental principles are those protecting human dignity and the rule of law.

About the Center for Justice and Accountability

CJA is a San Francisco-based human rights organization dedicated to ending torture and other severe human rights abuses around the world and advancing the rights of survivors to seek truth, justice and redress. CJA uses litigation to hold perpetrators individually accountable for human rights abuses, develop human rights law, and advance the rule of law in countries transitioning from periods of abuse.