



Immigration detainee allegedly choked by G4S guard demands public inquiry

Man filmed by undercover BBC Panorama reporter at Brook House near Gatwick launches legal action against Home Office

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An immigration detainee who was filmed apparently being choked by a G4S guard has launched legal action demanding a public inquiry into his and others' treatment at the hands of the Home Office and G4S.

The man, who was locked up in Brook House immigration removal centre near Gatwick earlier this year, was filmed by an undercover BBC Panorama reporter being allegedly choked and verbally abused by an officer kneeling over him. A G4S guard was recorded boasting that he had hit the man's head against a table and bent back his fingers.

Lawyers for the man allege that he was subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment, and conduct "possibly sufficiently severe to cross the threshold of torture".

He is one of eight detainees bringing legal cases against the Home Office and demanding a public inquiry into the apparent mistreatment caught on camera.

They are calling for an investigation into what they claim are systemic failures of the Home Office, G4S and NHS England, which commissions healthcare at Brook House, and asking whether the contracting out to private companies such as G4S is lawful, safe and humane, and whether staff monitoring and restraint procedures are adequate.

Toufique Hossain of solicitors Duncan Lewis, who is representing the man, said: “Detainees have come forward with distressing accounts of ill-treatment there. They live in fear. We are calling for an independent inquiry.

“When people are ill treated – in this country, within the government’s detention estate – in a way that breaches fundamental rights that are absolute in character, urgent and radical steps must be taken. We will press for this in the courts.”

Three G4S staff have been dismissed and seven suspended pending further investigations following the BBC programme.

The two legal teams bringing cases against the Home Office have given the home secretary, Amber Rudd, until Tuesday to confirm that she will establish a public inquiry. If Rudd declines to do this, they will proceed with a judicial review in the high court against her.

A letter before action sent to Rudd by Sue Willman, a solicitor at Deighton Peirce Glynn, highlighted the cases of seven Brook House detainees who expressed concerns about the treatment they received there. Willman has expressed broader concerns based on the Panorama programme, which include:

- Assaults and inappropriate use of restraint by G4S

- Derogatory and humiliating language used by G4S guards towards detainees

- Inadequate medical care

- Failure to protect detainees, especially those under 18, who are not supposed to be detained in adult detention centres.

“It is clear that the current regulatory system has failed,” she said. “An investigation of this magnitude ... can only be carried out properly through a public inquiry.” Willman wants to see the Home Office and G4S investigated in a public inquiry.

The immigration detention charities Bail for Immigration Detainees, Medical Justice and Detention Action have backed the calls for a public inquiry and expressed concerns about the BBC disclosures.

Mishka, a member of Freed Voices, a group of former immigration detainees, said: “We demand full criminal prosecutions against the offending G4S employees. Ignorance is not an excuse any more. We want to see some real change.”

A Sussex police spokesman said: “The investigation [into the incidents shown on Panorama] is at a very early stage and no arrests or interviews under caution have yet taken place.”

A G4S spokeswoman said an independent investigation was planned into Panorama’s findings and an internal investigation was continuing into the conduct of staff members shown in the programme.

Additional safeguards were being put in place to protect detainees, the spokeswoman said, including extending the use of body-worn cameras to de-escalate potentially violent situations, appointing whistleblowing guardians on each wing of the centre to encourage staff to raise concerns, and increasing the frequency of random searches to detect drugs.

G4S was approached for further comment.

The immigration minister, Brandon Lewis, said: “The Panorama footage was extremely disturbing and I have been clear that the sort of behaviour on display is utterly unacceptable.”

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