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Harvard Law School

Ohio Residents Challenge Board's Failure to Discipline Guantánamo Psychologist

Contact: Deborah Popowski at dpopowski@law.harvard.edu, 617-496-9247.

April 13, 2011, Columbus, OH—A group of four Ohio residents filed papers in state court today to compel the Ohio State Psychology Board to take action against [Dr. Larry James](#), a local psychologist who oversaw abusive interrogations at the prison in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

The group previously filed a 50-page [complaint](#) against Dr. James before the Board in July 2010, alleging that he had violated eighteen provisions of state statutes and Board rules during and after his time as Chief Psychologist at Guantánamo. This January, the Board responded to that sizable complaint with a cursory letter stating in relevant part, “[i]t has been determined that we are unable to proceed to formal action in this matter.” The Board offered no explanation for its decision.

Dr. James remains Dean of the School of Professional Psychology at Wright State University in Dayton. The Board licensed him to practice in Ohio in 2008.

“The Board disregarded ample and credible evidence that an Ohio psychology dean had overseen torture,” said Dr. Trudy Bond, a Toledo-based psychologist and one of the four complainants. *“When the ethics watchdog apparently finds it appropriate to dismiss a complaint like this without conducting a proper investigation, or even justifying the decision, it shows that our system is broken.”*

The complaint presented overwhelming evidence that as the senior intelligence psychologist at Guantánamo Bay, Dr. James would have overseen abusive interrogations and designed policy to exploit the psychological weaknesses of detainees. During his tenure at the detention center, boys and men were systematically abused. Techniques included rape and death threats; forced nudity; sleep deprivation; extreme isolation; short-shackling into stress positions; and physical assault.

The complaint also documents a series of public admissions made by Dr. James, most notably in his 2008 memoir, which, on their face, constitute professional misconduct.

The [group of Ohio residents](#)—a psychologist, a veteran, a minister, and a mental health advocate—worked with Toledo attorney Terry Lodge and the [International Human Rights Clinic](#) at Harvard Law School to submit the complaint to the Board last year. Troubled by the Board’s inaction, they filed a petition today for a writ of mandamus in the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas.

The petitioners asked the court to compel the Board to follow its own rules and the law of the state by proceeding to formal action against Larry James. Formal action can mean a hearing or a voluntary agreement imposing sanctions on the psychologist.

“The Board’s job is to protect the public from psychologists who practice unethically,” said Deborah Popowski, an attorney with the International Human Rights Clinic. *“The Board has shown that it hasn’t been up to the task, so it’s time for the courts to step in.”*

About the International Human Rights Clinic: Harvard Law School’s International Human Rights Clinic is a center for scholarship and advocacy on human rights. Each year, the Clinic undertakes dozens of human rights projects, focusing on fact-finding investigations, litigation, legal and policy analysis, and reporting for international oversight bodies. The Clinic is staffed by faculty and fellows at Harvard Law School, and works with students to address human rights concerns across the globe, including in Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America.