

By Charles Schillinger, Staff Writer
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THE CITIZENS' VOICE

State: Prison review almost complete

The state Department of Corrections is in the process of completing an investigation into the policies and procedures at Lackawanna County Prison, said department spokeswoman Susan Bensinger on Monday.

The Lackawanna County Prison Board sent a formal request to investigate to the department last month following the Aug. 8 assault of inmate Nicholas Pinto, who police said had his head stomped on at least 15 times by another inmate, Michael Simonson, who should not have had access to him.

No date has been set for completing the review, Bensinger said.

In the meantime, Pinto has been moved out of Northeastern Pennsylvania. The federal inmate was moved by the U.S. Marshal Service to Columbia Regional Care Center, a South Carolina detention facility that offers long-term medical care for federal inmates, said his attorney, Patrick M. Rogan, who confirmed Pinto remains in a coma.

The sentencing for Pinto, who pleaded guilty to child pornography, has been postponed by federal Judge Edwin M. Kosik until his medical care provider indicates the inmate is suitable for transportation back to the region, said Marty Pane, the chief deputy U.S. Marshal for the Middle District of Pennsylvania.

Rogan has previously said he intends to file a federal civil lawsuit against Lackawanna County Prison as a result of the beating. Pinto's attorney said Monday a major Philadelphia law firm, Kline & Specter, has agreed to take the lead on filing the lawsuit on behalf of Pinto.

Kline & Specter has won some of the largest-ever compensatory verdicts in the state, including a 2004 Luzerne County verdict awarding \$19.1 million to a woman struck by a van working at a roadside construction site.

Attorney Dominic Guerrini, who will handle Pinto's case, litigated another prison assault case, negotiating a \$4 million settlement after a man was raped and beaten to death in a mental health ward of the Camden County Correctional Facility in Camden, N.J.

Guerrini said it could be several months until a lawsuit is filed.

Meanwhile, county prison Warden Janine Donate said a separate investigation for the Rev. William Pickard, who allegedly pushed a correctional officer while trying to visit Pinto at the hospital, is still under review. The Rev. Pickard has been "temporarily" banned since the investigation began, though incident took place more than a month ago.

The Diocese of Scranton declined to comment on the prison investigation and ban.