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## Philly law firm to take lead in possible prison assault case

A major Philadelphia law firm said it will take the lead on filing a federal civil lawsuit on behalf of Nicholas Pinto, an inmate beaten nearly to death on Aug. 8 at Lackawanna County Prison.

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. The firm has handled other prison assault cases, 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.

No federal civil lawsuit has been filed as of today, though the attorney for Mr. Pinto and his family, Patrick M. Rogan has said there will be one.

The full press release announcing the firm's involvement follows:

A noted Philadelphia law firm with a record of successfully litigating major civil rights cases has agreed to take up the cause of an inmate who was viciously beaten at the Lackawanna County Prison, where prison guards allegedly ignored - and even encouraged - a series of assaults on the prisoner.

Nicholas Pinto, 29, remains in a coma after an Aug. 8 incident in which a fellow inmate punched him to the ground and then stomped on his head 15 times, according to news media reports citing a witness to the beating.

The law firm handling the federal civil suit, Kline & Specter, P.C., has won a number of highly publicized civil rights cases against government entities, including one involving a prison inmate who was beaten to death in Camden, N.J.

"Prison inmates have a basic, constitutional right to be safe from harm at the hands of fellow inmates or prison officials," said Dominic Guerrini, one of the Kline & Specter attorneys handling the Pinto case. "This senseless beating was entirely preventable and we intend to hold county and prison officials accountable for the consequences of their actions."

Pinto was awaiting sentencing after pleading guilty to child pornography charges. Since his lockup in 2008, he was made the victim of repeated beatings and rapes, according to news stories, including an Associated Press account that quoted Pinto's diary and witnesses that said

Pinto was taunted and roughed up by guards, in some instances forced to stand naked in his cell for hours.

On one occasion, according to the article, dangerous inmates were released into a common area with Pinto and told over a loudspeaker to "go get 'em, boys." It said officials ignored warnings from the prison chaplain that Pinto was in grave danger. The AP noted critics of the prison have cited a pattern of guards targeting inmates they dislike.

Pinto was supposed to have been held in protective custody. He was returning to his cell from a recreation area when he was attacked. According to one media account, one guard was on the phone and another outside the prison at his car when the assault occurred.

In 2007, Kline & Specter handled a similar prison case, negotiating a \$4 million settlement in the case of a 65-year-old man who was raped and beaten to death in the mental health ward of the Camden County Correctional Facility. That case was litigated by Tom Kline and Dominic Guerrini.

Shanin Specter and Guerrini will handle the Pinto case along with co-counsel Patrick M. Rogan of Scranton.

In a 2006 civil rights case, Guerrini obtained an \$8.3 million verdict on behalf of a woman who was sexually assaulted by two Philadelphia Police Officers in the back of their squad car. In another case, Specter sued the City of Philadelphia after a man and his infant son were killed by a speeding police car as they stood on a street corner. That civil rights case resulted not only in a \$2.5 million settlement but also reforms by the police department to improve police driver training, deter reckless driving and heighten safety.