



**For Immediate Release**

**Justice and Unity in the Southern Tier (JUST)**

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**Contacts: Andrew Pragacz, 651-747-6316, Rozann Greco 607-348-3868**

**Emails: [ajrpragacz@gmail.com](mailto:ajrpragacz@gmail.com), [rozanngreco@gmail.com](mailto:rozanngreco@gmail.com)**

An astonishing lawsuit was filed today by Josh Cotter of [Legal Services of Central New York](#) against the Broome County Sheriff, jail officials, and food service provider Trinity Services. The inflammatory charge? The reinstatement of forced slave labor.

The details are straightforward: the Sheriff, correctional officers, and Trinity have been illegally forcing innocent persons incarcerated in the jail to work, under threat of tortuous punishments, grueling shifts, without pay, and without days off.

The [lawsuit complaint](#) follows a single person's experience. After being arrested and put in the jail, he was asked to work in the kitchen, under the supervision of Trinity staff and a correctional officer, and was assured Sheriff Akshar would be paying him. After working hundreds of hours without any pay in sight, and suffering short food shortages due to extended work hours, he continued to work fearing the punishment of solitary and potentially loss of good time served. He finally refused to work one morning when at 5 am. he was awakened again and told to report to work duty for the third time on his day off. He refused. Previous threats became concrete: he was abruptly removed from his housing unit and put in solitary ("keeplock"). Members of JUST's jail visiting program have heard similar stories from other persons in the jail.

Both the United States and New York constitutions explicitly permit slavery for those convicted of a crime. This does NOT apply here, for the complainant, like over 70% of everyone else in the jail, was unconvicted, awaiting trial. It is very simple: Broome County under Sheriff Akshar has reinstated slavery and stands in violation of state laws against the enslavement of free persons, forced and unpaid labor, harmful and unlawful coercion, and employee-employer labor laws.

We expect the courts will rule, as they have done so many times recently, against the Sheriff and the County, and award back wages to all these unpaid workers at prevailing county rates, and accordingly impose compensatory, punitive, and legal fee damages. Legal Services of Central New York are to be commended for revealing these atrocities.

We would go further and ask County and State officials, including the Attorney General, Comptroller and our elected representatives, to provide independent oversight of the jail and its operations as they are empowered to do under state laws.

Finally, there are two bills underway in the State Assembly and Senate that would assist here. *The No Slavery in NY Act* ([S.225/A.3412](#)) would start the long process of changing the state constitution to end slavery for all incarcerated persons. Seven states have recently changed their constitutions to fully end slavery and it's time for New York State to do so. *The Fairness and Opportunity for Incarcerated Workers Act* ([S6747/A7452](#)) would rectify labor conditions and pay (but needs amendment to apply to persons laboring in jails as well as in state prisons). More information is available from the [13th Forward Coalition](#) which is agitating for their passage.