



# WITH LEAKED FOOTAGE FROM THE INSIDE, SUNDANCE DOC SHOWS HORRIFYING CONDITIONS IN ALABAMA PRISONS - ASSOCIATED PRESS

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*This image released by the Sundance Institute shows a scene from the documentary "The Alabama Solution" by Andrew Jarecki and Charlotte Kaufman, an official selection of the 2025 Sundance Film Festival.*

Incarcerated men in the [Alabama prison system](#) risked their safety to feed shocking footage of their horrifying living conditions to a pair of documentary filmmakers. The result is "The Alabama Solution," which premiered this week at the [Sundance Film Festival](#) in Park City.

Filmmakers Andrew Jarecki and Charlotte Kaufman became interested in Alabama prisons in 2019. Jarecki, the filmmaker behind "[The Jinx](#)" and "Capturing the Friedmans," and Kaufman first gained access to the restricted grounds through a visit with a chaplain during a revival meeting held in the prison yards. There men pulled them aside and whispered shocking stories about the reality of life inside: forced labor, drugs, violence, intimidation, retaliation and the undisclosed truths behind many prisoner deaths.

The Associated Press has [written extensively](#) about the problems in [the state's prison system](#), including high rates of violence, low staffing, a plummeting parole rate and the use of pandemic funds to build a [new supersized prison](#).

This process eventually led them to incarcerated activists Melvin Ray and Robert Earl Council (also known as "Kinetik Justice") who had for years been trying to expose the horrifying conditions and deep-seated corruption across the system. They helped feed dispatches to the filmmakers with contraband cellphones.

"We're deeply concerned for their safety, and we have been since the first time we met them," said Kaufman. "They've been doing this work for decades and as you see in the film, they've been retaliated against in very extreme ways. But there are lawyers who are ready to do wellness checks and visit them and respond to any sort of retaliation that may come."

On Tuesday at the first showing of the film, she had Council on the phone listening in. They put the microphone up to the cellphone so that Council could speak.

“We thank you all for listening, for being interested,” Council said. “On behalf of the brothers of Alabama, I thank you all.”

Several family members of their incarcerated subjects were also in the audience, including Sandy Ray, [the mother of Steven Davis](#), who died in 2019 at William E. Donaldson Correctional Facility, his face beaten beyond recognition. Prison officials said Davis was killed in self-defense because he didn't put down his weapons. The prisoners tell a vastly different story.

Alleur “Alex” Duran, who spent 12 years in prison in New York, also helped produce the film. Jarecki said they wouldn't have taken on the subject without the expertise of someone who had been incarcerated.

“What you're seeing in this film is going on all over the nation,” Duran said.

Also embedded in the story is Alabama's long history of contracting prisoners to do work at private companies from [Burger King to Best Western](#), an issue that the AP investigated for over two years. The cheap, reliable labor force has generated more than \$250 million for the state since 2000 — money garnished from prisoners' paychecks, the AP wrote in December. Parole numbers have also plummeted in recent years.

“We want to show viewers the truth about a system that has been cloaked in secrecy,” Jarecki said. “We hope the film sparks an effort to allow access for journalists and others so the public can have transparency into how incarcerated citizens are treated and how our tax dollars are being spent. We hope to inspire Alabama's leadership to acknowledge the crisis and to overhaul its prison system and its use of forced labor.”

The film will have a theatrical release before it debuts on HBO sometime this year, but the specific dates and details are still being worked out. And while it is in its early days, the impact, Jarecki said, has already been seen, including in a class action labor lawsuit.