

NY Prisoner Gets Rare \$600K Deal With Gibson Dunn's Help

By Parker Quinlan

Law360 (February 27, 2026, 7:01 PM EST) -- For over five years, Amin Booker was held in solitary confinement inside a New York state prison, confined to a windowless cell at Elmira Correctional Facility for 23 hours a day, missing visits from family.

Booker contested his placement in isolation in a 36-page handwritten lawsuit filed in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. Booker said he was the victim of retaliation for blowing the whistle on mistreatment by corrections officers. Now represented by attorneys at Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP, Booker settled this month with the New York Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, receiving \$600,000 to resolve his claims.

The Office for Pro Se Litigation for the Southern District of New York connected Booker to the Gibson Dunn attorneys, who agreed to take his case pro bono particularly because of the strength of Booker's own complaint.

Justine Goeke, a partner at Gibson Dunn, credited the underlying strength of the lawsuit to Booker, who originally filed his suit in January 2016. Booker's suit managed to survive a motion to dismiss before Gibson Dunn took the case.

"It's not unusual for a pro se plaintiff's case to get kicked or get dismissed because the plaintiff failed to exhaust administrative remedies, or at a later stage because the court found that sovereign immunity applies, or qualified immunity applies, and it's really a great credit to our client that he preserved his claims," Goeke said.

In addition to Goeke, the Gibson Dunn team included associates Marc Aaron Takagaki, Kate Goldberg, Theodore Kristek and Sophie White.

Booker was originally elected in 2015 to the Green Haven Correctional Facility's Incarcerated Liaison Committee. Made up of incarcerated people, these prison-sanctioned committees work with facility administrators to suggest changes and address grievances.

ILCs were first authorized for use following the 1971 riots at Attica Correctional Facility and are currently governed under DOCCS Directive 4002, which requires each prison in the state to establish a committee, a DOCCS spokesperson told Law360 in an email.

The DOCCS spokesperson said that under Directive 4002, prison administrators have discretion to determine who is eligible to serve on the committees, but declined to answer whether the directive has an internal grievance process for prisoners to contest those decisions.

Booker's amended federal lawsuit said that while serving on Green Haven's ILC, he and other members began investigating complaints of officer aggression. The ILC also received reports that the prison's administrator, then-Superintendent Thomas Griffin, was personally directing guards to behave aggressively toward incarcerated people, according to the suit.

Griffin decided to move Booker into administrative segregation at Green Haven, and days later sought to transfer Booker to another prison. Griffin was personal friends with Paul Chappius Jr., Elmira Correctional Facility superintendent at the time, and Booker was moved to Elmira in late April 2015, the lawsuit said. The two administrators claimed that Booker had a history of misbehavior, citing alleged incidents dating back to when he was held at Rikers Island while awaiting trial, according to the suit.

Booker remained in solitary confinement in multiple state prisons for over six years and is currently being held at Shawangunk Correctional Facility in general population. He is eligible for parole in 2037, according to a DOCCS database.

Booker was found guilty of second-degree murder, second-degree attempted murder and first-degree reckless endangerment following a 1997 shooting in Brooklyn, according to an opinion in an unrelated habeas petition he filed in the Eastern District of New York.

Takagaki, one of the Gibson Dunn associates who helped represent Booker, said claims over the use of solitary confinement are not unique in the New York state prison system. DOCCS settled a class action over solitary confinement in 2015. The settlement required the state to pay just over \$62 million to 1,100 incarcerated people across the state.

New York state permanently changed solitary confinement rules in DOCCS facilities with the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement Act, or HALT Act, enacted in March 2022. The law caps the amount of time incarcerated people may be held in solitary to 15 days, with at least seven hours of recreation per day.

Goeke describes Booker's settlement as part of a larger "groundswell" of deals that DOCCS and New York state have cut with incarcerated people held in solitary, saying that once the attorney general's office realized the firm was ready to go to trial, it immediately moved to settle.

"We have a compelling client that speaks clearly about the abuses of the prison system, we already had a finding of liability by a district court judge on one of the claims — I mean, that set the floor," Goeke said. "When we showed the AG's office that we were ready to go, they came to the table with a significant settlement offer."

Booker said in a statement provided to Law360 by his attorney that the settlement is larger than himself, and sends a message to DOCCS that the use of isolation deeply impacts incarcerated people.

"To me, this settlement has various meanings. That I was heard is at the top of my list. Not simply for myself, but for the countless women and men who have suffered the same fate — for decades! For my wife, who suffered alongside me through this injustice," Booker said. "Being voiceless is an agonizing

state of being. The intensity of being silenced by the numerous powers in DOCCS clenched at my spirit and suffocated the spirits of two of my younger neighbors, Josh Morgan and Andre Jones, both of whom took their own lives in the Elmira solitary unit 45 days apart in 2019."

--Editing by Marygrace Anderson.

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