



[Alabama Media Group](#), producers of *The Birmingham News* and AL.com, and the [Center for Investigative Reporting](#) (CIR) announced a collaborative initiative, the Alabama Investigative Journalism Lab, last week. The lab is set to focus on journalism rich in digital storytelling and audience engagement based on [the blog post](#) and [press release](#) on CIR's website on February 27.

[CIR executive director Robert J. Rosenthal](#) will serve as senior adviser for three months. [A post describing the partnership on AL.com last week](#) says the former award-winning reporter and editor will also serve as a contributor to a new fellowship established in the lab.

Among the first topics the lab will be focusing its attention, you ask? **Prisons**. The topic is not one the news organization has necessarily ignored; [it all but predicted a lawsuit or investigation in a January 2012 editorial](#). AL.com has also been working on a series of pieces looking at the effects of the Affordable Care Act on the state of Alabama.

It will be interesting to see the types of collaborative efforts the new partnership will forge here in central Alabama. Two possible local partners that stand out are WIAT (CBS42) and WBRC (Fox 6) due to reports filed by [Kaitlin McCulley](#) and [Beth Shelburne](#) (respectively) in 2012 when the Equal Justice Initiative filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Justice about the [the Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women](#). The subsequent investigation led to [a damning report from the federal agency](#) and [the national publications like \*The New York Times\* asking if it's enough to finally lead to change](#) for the state system.

[WIAT uploaded McCulley's three-part series from 2012 to YouTube](#) in January. Shelburne's [November 2012 follow-up to her original piece from that May](#) is available on the station's website, as is [a follow-up post](#) from last spring. [The Justice for the Women of Tutwiler Prison fan page on Facebook](#) shows some other potential partners for at least a portion of this new effort.

The new initiative is well underway, [as this piece filed by Stan Diel](#) today demonstrates. They are using the hashtag [#alprisons](#) to make it easier to follow via social networks.