

**Statement of A.A.
Orleans Parish Prison
October 2008 – April 2009**

First, I would like to thank the Review Panel for listening to my story about how I was raped and abused at Orleans Parish Prison (OPP) in New Orleans, Louisiana. I can't be with you today because I'm an inmate at the Eastern Mississippi Correctional Facility (EMCF) in Meridian, Mississippi. But I'm very happy that you're hearing my story anyway.

When I was arrested in 2008 in New Orleans, I was on a 72-hour pass from the Harrison County Work Center in Mississippi. I was in New Orleans spending time with my boyfriend. Because I didn't return to the Work Center within 72-hours, I was considered an escapee and arrested on October 31, 2008. I went to the Central Lock-up at the OPP's House of Detention. I was thirty years old at the time.

In January 2009, I was moved from Central Lock-up to the general population at the OPP's House of Detention (HOD). Before assigning me to the general population, the facility officials didn't do a screening process. For instance, no one asked me if I was gay. No one asked me if I had ever been sexually assaulted before, either. The fact is that I had been – prior to my incarceration. Because I was afraid for my safety, I told them I was gay and that I wanted to be put on a tier for gay men. I knew they had one because I had heard of it when I had been in OPP a few years before. When they said they didn't have that tier anymore, I asked if I could just stay in Central Lock-Up. They said no and that I had to go to general population.

They put me in an overcrowded cell that should have been used for ten inmates maximum, but had fifteen or sixteen in it when I got there. The other inmates were all between eighteen and twenty-one years old. From the moment I arrived, they were sizing me up. They asked me whether I was gay. I was scared to lie to them so I said "yes." I didn't have a bed so I took a mat to lay on. I was so depressed and exhausted that I put it on the floor next to the cell bars and took a nap.

I woke up all of a sudden when some of my cellmates threw a chest of ice on me that was kept in the cell for drinks. One of the inmates told me to give him a blow job. This man was very scary, and I felt extremely afraid. I called for help, but there were no guards around and no one responded to my screams. At first, I refused to do what the inmate was telling me to do, but then he grabbed me by my hair and kicked me while another inmate held a knife to my back. I decided that I had better do what he wanted in order to save my life—I was already bleeding from the knife.

Later that night, several of these inmates tied me down to the frame of a bed in the cell with strips of a blue towel. I tried to fight them off at first, but a large inmate choked me until I passed out. When I came to, I was choked again. There were at least a dozen inmates around who saw what was happening. Three of the men said they wanted me to give them oral sex, but they were afraid that I would bite them, so they masturbated onto

me instead. This nightmare only ended when an inmate kicked me off the bed I was tied to because he wanted to go to sleep.

During my assault, there were no guards around. I quickly realized that the guards at OPP did not do rounds of the tiers on a regular basis, so there was no one to protect me. The only guard who ever came to the tier would bring food for all the guys on the tier. He would leave it for an older inmate, who was considered the tier 'rep,' to hand out to the other inmates. The guard would take the elevator to the tier, take a few steps to the tier rep's cell to drop off the food, and then turn around and leave. And there were no cameras around, so the attacks weren't recorded or seen by guards in another part of the jail. And on top of that, I've heard that OPP lost track of inmates pretty regularly because they don't count them.

The morning after that first night at OPP, I couldn't go to the showers so I washed up as best I could using the small sink in the cell. I tried to be friendly to the other inmates just so I could try to keep from being attacked again. But, I was on the lookout for an officer who I could ask for help. The whole day passed and I never had a chance to talk to a guard or any other staff member.

As the next night came, I was really anxious. I had not been able to speak with any jail officials, and I was so afraid that my cellmates would attack me again. That night, three of the inmates—all large men— anally raped me. With no one to help me, I laid down on the floor, bleeding from my injuries, and terrified about what would happen next. My cellmates continued to orally and anally gang-rape me in the whole time I was at OPP—sometimes in the cell, but often in the showers.

It happened so many times I lost count. Many times, I had to give oral sex to several men at once. When they anally raped me, they would stuff a rag in my mouth and hold me down or tie me to the bed. They also tried to shove a broom handle inside my rectum. On one occasion, some of them wrapped me in toilet paper and set me on fire before peeing on me to put the fire out. The guys who raped me laughed at me while they did this stuff. The attacks—and the constant fear that I could be raped again at any moment—had me feeling so angry, ashamed and alone.

While I was at OPP, I tried on many instances to request help from the people running the jail. I turned in at least six grievances, being careful to complain only about the sexual assaults - nothing else. My lawyer had told me that this would increase the chances that OPP would help me. Sometimes, I tried to give the grievance forms to the guards, but couldn't. Either because the guard wouldn't accept it or because I was too afraid of my cellmates seeing what I was doing to go through with it. I remember one time when I tried to give a grievance to a guard who I had not seen before, and he said to me, "a faggot raped in prison - imagine that!" I also tried filling out a grievance form and giving it to another inmate who was a jailhouse lawyer. He promised to file it on my behalf. But, I never heard anything back from anyone at the jail from that grievance or any of the others I turned in.

In addition, my attorney and I requested that I be placed in protective custody, but the jail denied the request. I was never moved to safer housing during the time I was at OPP. I also sent a letter to the Special Operations Division of OPP complaining about the abuse - - and sent a copy to the Department of Justice -- but I never received a response from either of those letters either. As far as I know, my pleas for help were never investigated and no record was kept of the assaults. I reached out to various other organizations and government agencies for help, but the only responses I ever received were from the ACLU and Just Detention International.

I also turned in requests for medical help to the guards two or three times a week from February to April of 2009, because I was afraid I would get an STD from the rapes. I must have filed over twenty-five slips asking for medical help. I never got a response.

I was badly injured from the attacks. I had anal tearing and bleeding, my hair was singed, and there was bruising around my neck from being choked. During one of the rapes, the inmates who attacked me even broke my right index finger! Despite my serious injuries, which I reported in my grievances, I never had a rape kit, and I didn't get any medical care or mental health counseling. Instead, I had to manage on my own without any help from OPP.

The only time I saw a doctor at OPP was by accident. I usually avoided the rec yard due to my fear of the gangs that hung out there. But one day towards the end of my time at OPP, I decided to go to the yard with a friend who was also gay. On the way, we passed by the medical office, and I asked to go in and see the doctor on duty. After waiting for two hours, I met with the doctor and told him about the sexual assaults. The doctor did blood work on me, including tests for Hepatitis C and HIV. But he didn't do a rape kit. Following the tests, the doctor told me that I had herpes, which he thinks I got from the rapes. The doctor told me that he couldn't do anything about the rapes and beatings, because that was a security issue, not a medical one.

There was no one I could talk with to help me with how I was feeling emotionally. I don't think OPP had a chaplain or counselor, and there were no religious services or any other type of support that I could find. I spent my days, like the other inmates, watching the televisions that were up on the walls along the hallways outside the cellblocks, thinking about what would happen to me when I got back to my housing area and the fact that I couldn't do anything about it. I would say without a doubt that the whole time I was at OPP, I had to deal with all this stuff on my own. Not one person there tried to help me in any way.

While I was at OPP, I also saw other guys who were raped – I would say between five and seven. One time, some of the guys in my cell forced an inmate from Texas to give them oral sex. He fought back and threatened to bite them so they left him alone. I think one reason they backed off of him was because he was straight. Another time, there was a really violent attack on a transgender woman who got to OPP around Mardi Gras in March of 2009. She refused to have sex with the other inmates and fought back, but in

the end she was raped and beaten so badly that she had to be taken to the hospital. I never saw her again after that.

Eventually I was taken to Old Parish, another OPP facility, because the House of Detention had to be treated for infestation - there were rats there the size of cats. Many of the people on my tier were taken with me to Old Parish. That place was not as overcrowded, and it was a little easier to turn in a complaint form to a guard without being watched by the other inmates. But I still didn't get any help while I was there in coping with the sexual assaults.

When I was released from OPP at the end of April 2009, I felt messed up; what I went through there really turned my life upside down. As a result, I would say I keep to myself more; I don't joke around much or have as many friends as I used to. I feel afraid and nervous or paranoid all the time. I take a few different prescribed psychiatric drugs, but I really don't think I am ever going to get over this.

I think that what I went through and what I saw happening to some of the other people at OPP could have been prevented if OPP had done something to keep inmates like me — guys who are gay or who are going to be targeted by other inmates — safe. Not only did the guards at OPP sit by and do nothing while I was being raped on a regular basis, they made it even worse by not helping me in any way when I complained and not providing me with basic health care after the rapes. I feel as if I was treated as less than human at OPP. It has taken so much since then just to begin to feel a little bit like myself. I have gotten some counseling at EMCF, which has helped some, and my mother tries to be very supportive.

A lot of other people like me went through this type of nightmare at OPP — being raped while I was just supposed to be there doing some time for skipping out on that 72-hour pass. I am asking you to do whatever you can to hold OPP responsible for what I and the other people who were victimized went through. Please make sure no one else has to suffer like this. It doesn't matter what crime someone may have done, no one deserves this.

Thank you.