

Hello my name is Melissa Andrews. I want to thank you for having me here today to listen to what I have to say about the conditions at Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women from 2008 to 2010. Let me tell you a little bit of my background. I am a 37 year old mother of two boys ages 16 and 18. I live in Fredericksburg VA and currently work as a Office Administrator as well as take classes to finish my Bachelors degree that I started while I was incarcerated. My ultimate goal is to finish my Masters and get a counseling certificate that will enable me to help others that have a similar background to mine. I was incarcerated in 2002 for multiple charges of possession, larceny, a violation of probation, and a no weapon robbery. I was sentenced to 9 years and 2 months. I did 8 and a half years because of the good time I earned. I spent 14 months in the Rappahannock Regional Jail in Stafford VA then went to Fluvanna in 2003 for 14 months then was shipped to the Virginia Correctional Center for Women in Goochland and returned again to Fluvanna in November of 2007 until my release in July of 2010. I am only here today in the hope that the things I say will enlighten the panel and maybe make a difference in the long run to the people that are still incarcerated. I was under the supervision of three different wardens and two different majors during my stay in the correctional system. During my stay at Fluvanna the first time, which was 2003 to 2004, the Warden had an open door policy and was seen often on the compound and interacted a lot with the inmates.

The major was rarely if ever seen. The warden answered questions, asked questions and was willing to hear whatever inmates or her officers had to say. However, there was still A LOT of sexual relations between officers and inmates. I have never heard of or seen a violent sexual exchange between officers and inmates because it is more of an exchange of services between the two. Women would allow these officers to have sexual relations with them because they were lonely, wanted a better job, wanted more privileges, wanted less consequences for infractions, or just for something to do. I am not sure you realize the self esteem of incarcerated women and what it does to them to get attention that will give them an advantage over everyone else, give them better self esteem, or lessen the consequences of their delinquent actions inside. However, I saw MANY of my fellow inmates and a few of my roommates over time that had sexual relations with officers and what it did to them. When I was at Fluvanna the first time, I had a good friend that worked in the infirmary area and would go out to "work" during the day and night and have sex with the officer in an office or closet that held supplies in the medical building. The officer she was having sex with still works for DOC. My friend and I would talk about the workers that were having sex with the sergeants and lieutenants in the building. That was in 2003 and 2004. Many times these inmates would get special privileges like 30 hours a week for work whether they worked or not and leniency on any

tickets they received. There were a few times during my 8 and a half years that I was asked suggestive things by an officer or an officer made unwanted and not asked for advances of some sort. In the medical building there were many places without cameras at the time and even places without cameras when I left in 2010. There were and are still sexual practices between inmates and officers that take place in those places. I was then shipped to VCCW in 2004 under the supervision of the current warden of Fluvanna. She was very personable. She listened to inmates and responded to their needs. However, things happened there too. I was sexually assaulted by another inmate who was my roommate and fought her off of me in 2006. I went to three different authorities, one was even the assistant warden, nothing was done until 4 days later when we both got put in segregation not because of her assault but because I claimed sexual assault, she denied it and I admitted to hitting her to get her off of me because she was choking me. There was no real investigation. An officer came to ask me questions but I was never sent to medical to be checked I was just sent to segregation. I was not offered any counseling services because they did not bother to even really investigate. They did not take any pictures because they could not see any visible marks after 4 days of not listening to me. Their form of investigation is to question an inmate and that is all. The policy is the same at Fluvanna now and has always been that way. If someone tells of any

acts committed to them by an inmate it is not taken seriously unless there are physical marks to prove the allegations and even then there is scarce help. When an inmate accuses an officer of an indecent act the inmate is immediately put in to segregation and an officer comes to talk to them. But there are no medical services or mental services offered for them. Most investigations end up with the officers moved to another building and the inmate eventually released from segregation. So, they may not have to live in the building they work but they still have to see them and deal with any repercussions from other friends of that officer or the officer himself. Needless to say, that in and of itself, told me to NEVER tell any authority anything because it did not do any good. In fact, I was punished for protecting myself. I went back to Fluvanna in November of 2007. At that time there was no major. The warden at that time would not allow any communication with her at all about anything. You could not speak to her on the yard. She did not respond to inquiries. And she changed everything she could possibly change, she believed and said to officers many times, that if she took anything and everything from us including our humanity maybe we would not return to prison. Once the new major came it got even worse. He went from wing to wing in each building and told us "you bitches think you have been living in Kindercare I am not your former major and things are going to change." From that point on there were policies implemented by the major and institutional investigator,

which is ironic and unfair because the two men who seemingly hated women were in charge of making the very policies that women were complaining about. Then they would investigate the complaints inmates made about the policies and the women would be stigmatized or thrown into segregation. How do you think we would feel to have to complain or make an accusation against the very people making the policies? Do you think women felt comfortable? Most women felt targeted and alone with no where to turn. They took away all makeup, inmates had to cut their hair above the collar of their shirts and if they did not they were refused religious classes, vocational classes, GED classes, families were even turned away from visitation and graduations because the warden was standing there watching inmates come in and choosing inmates hair that was styled wrong or too long. The major issued a ban on hugging and holding hands anywhere on the compound with anyone including religious functions. Inmates were not allowed to hold hands or hug religious volunteers or each other during any services. You could not even do these things during prayer. Inmates were not even allowed to hug the Chaplain anytime. Out of all the people you should be able to have a hug from shouldn't it be the comfort of a Chaplain? Now isn't that a violation of religious freedom AND just inhumane?? In segregation, there was a policy put in place to use a dog collar on unruly inmates. They were already shackled and handcuffed. Did they really need a dog collar

and leash? The major was very derogatory towards all inmates and even officers. There was a huge turnover in officers when the new major came because they were saying that they could not work for him because he was asking them to treat us wrongly and do things they did not believe in. They also could not deal with how he ruled them. But there were also other officers that got even more abusive because they were modeling the new majors attitude and behavior towards us. Let me explain the set up at Fluvanna a little. There are no bathrooms in the cells at Fluvanna so during shakedowns which are a week at a time, there would be one officer working in the bubble controlling about 200 cell doors. They would let one person out at a time; even roommates had to wait for their roommate to come back before they could go to the restroom. Sometimes there were up to at least three to four hours before your door would get opened. There were women using the bathroom in plastic bags, cups, and bowls in their rooms. If you used the bathroom on yourself because of the long wait, the major had you put in segregation until he personally approved your removal. I experienced this personally. The major started the week or so before our shake down in March of 2008. It was around that time that he started the policy of one person out at a time for the bathroom. I and a few other inmates peed on ourselves and got sent to segregation because it took over three hours to let us out to use the bathroom. On shakedowns after that I learned that I could

barely drink anything for 5 days because I would not be let out and may go to segregation again. It is not just shakedowns. There is a list at night for the bathrooms as well and you can wait up to an hour or longer then to be let out to use the bathroom. These things are still going on now. I know this because I still write to about 10 inmates at Fluvanna on a weekly basis. The major's office is still in watch command which is in the same building and place as the old major's office. There have been some cameras added to that area. However, there are still closets, bathrooms, and the strip room right outside the major's office door without windows or cameras. In 2008, I had a roommate who was having sex with an officer in the bathroom in the bubble area of the building. The set up of a building is 4 wings with about 60 cells on two floors in a circular building with the administrative offices and control booth in the middle or vestibule area. In that area there is a bathroom and supply closet with no windows. There were officers and inmates that had sex in that area, even after all the PREA cameras were installed. The cameras do not record all areas at all times. They show them to people looking but do not necessarily record those areas. There was also segregation of gay inmates, especially ones that looked like little boys or butch. The major, warden, institutional investigator and unit manager of building 5 believed that if they put all the butch women in the same wing that it would stop inmate relationships. Instead it just created more chaos. The butch

women were sent to eat first or last only getting sometimes 2 or 3 hours between meals. They were refused recreation, locked down, refused classes, repeatedly stigmatized, and sent to segregation or the segregated living unit (SLU) for minor offenses or no offenses at all. Eventually inmates started to write outside people and complained enough that they had to change what they were doing and when the news hit the paper they split up that wing within days. They moved a bunch of feminine females in there and some of the butches out to cover themselves. Once the new warden came from VCCW to FCCW things began to change. I was told by a few officers that the new warden put the new major in his place and told him that she was running things and would do things the way she wanted. The hair policy changed back to the DOC standard, shoulder length hair. The makeup and feminine hygiene items were allowed to be purchased again. There was recreation every day of the week two times a day, when they used to be lucky to get one day a week. The new warden had a meeting with every inmate in all buildings, which really impressed me. She told us that she was going to do things her way but that the inmates needed to earn the extras she was willing to provide. She said she would be changing things and if anyone needed to talk to her to contact her by way of inmate mail system and she would respond. The new warden also said that she would like to use all female officers in the wings and the male officers outside the wings. However, that has not happened because



there is not enough female staff to do it. The overall morale of the institution has changed and does change with every warden and every major. Even though the warden has done away with some of the policies of the former warden and current major there are still policies that have not been changed. The issues of sexual contact between inmates and officers with inmates still exist. My friends tell me of these issues when I write to them still. The dog collar is still used on inmates in segregation even though they are already handcuffed and shackled. The bathroom issue is still an issue there and if you happen to not be able to hold your urine you will still go to segregation. After all that I have said, I would like to say that I have no personal grievances against anyone in DOC for any personal reasons. I am here today because I am a former inmate and I believe that EVERY ONE does have to pay for their crimes but we live in the United States and everyone deserves to be treated humanely. Thank you for letting me speak.