

Statement from A Transgender Woman Prisoner in California

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I am a transgender woman serving a life sentence at California Medical Facility (CMF). I have remained disciplinary free and programmed in an exceptional manner for almost a quarter of a century, and for the past eight years, I have been a participant and member of the Pastoral Care Services. My work with the dying inmate patients here at CMF is my one and only love and purpose in life, and it is not uncommon for me to work from sixteen to twenty-four hours a day. I have written this statement because, in my experience, there are serious safety problems for transgender persons in prison, particularly those prisoners, who like myself, have received hormonal therapy and have developed breasts. We live under constant threat of either physical and/or sexual assault by other inmates living in the same dormitory. Unfortunately, custodial staff and administration have taken no measures to protect us from these abuses.

As for my own personal experience, the trouble first began in 2001 with repeated nighttime visitors wanting me to go into the dormitory bathroom and take care of their personal needs. To protect myself, I arranged my work schedule so that I was working as many 1st watches as possible. But this was only a temporary solution. Once back in the dormitory during the night, I again started to have nighttime visitors seeking sexual favors. Due to my refusing to provide sex to some of the most religious individuals residing at CMF at that time, I was jumped one afternoon when I walked into the dormitory bathroom. When this attack was reported to staff, I ended up being moved from dormitory 13 to dormitory 2, where similar problems started to arise the very same day I moved in. Only this time I was not stupid enough to report the incidents since I would have been sent to Administrative Segregation (Ad. Seg.).

There were many times where after working sixteen or more hours in one day, I would return home to my housing unit, get into bed and fall dead asleep only to be awake some hours later to find someone fondling my breasts or their hands inside my underwear smearing grease around my anal cavity so as to help facilitate anal intercourse. This was done without any encouragement or invitation on my part. There were other times when I awoke after feeling something brushing up against my lips and face only to realize upon waking that what was brushing up against my face was a man's fully erect penis attempting to enter my mouth.

For me the "straw that broke the camel's back" as far as I was concerned was an incident that occurred one evening after I had worked over twenty-two hours. When I finally returned back to my dormitory, I fell into a deep sleep. When I awoke the next morning, I found that during the night my underwear had been removed and my anal cavity was wet and greasy, clearly indicating that someone had had sex with me during the night while I had been asleep.

It should be emphasized that even with the continued sexual assaults that I was being subjected to on a daily basis, I still DID NOT feel safe in talking to any free staff due to my being victimized twice- first as an assault victim and second as being the person that had caused the trouble. I did not want any additional drama that may have caused my removal from the main-line resulting in the loss of my job with Pastoral Care Services.

Regrettably, most of the abuse and attacks go unreported by transgender prisoners to custody or clinical staff for fear of being placed in Ad. Seg., supposedly for their own protection. They may also be labeled a liar or viewed as attempting to manipulate staff. The prisoners themselves will regard the transgender person as a “snitch” or informant (if she gives up the names of her attackers), a dangerous title that always follows her to her new dormitory. The result is that not only do transgender people in prison not receive counseling or treatment to assist them in dealing with these traumas, they are actually punished by correctional staff for reporting abuses.

The choices of transgender persons in prison are few, if any. They were either in lockup for their own safety, or put up with the mistreatment and hopefully be able to continue programming without being infected with any sexually transmitted disease. I hope my personal experiences will shed light on this desperate issue, because it is my sincere belief that if something is not done, transgender people in California’s prisons will continue to be seriously harmed, raped, infected with HIV/AIDS and/or Hepatitis C, or killed.



Incidence of Sexual Assault in CA detention facilities: 2005-2006

Reliable studies on the incidence of sexual violence in U.S. detention facilities are scarce. According to the best available research, one in five male inmates faces sexual assault behind bars. While rates of sexual abuse at women’s prisons vary widely, at the worst facilities as many as one in four women prisoners are victimized.

Pursuant to the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), adopted in 2003, the U.S. government has begun to track the incidence of sexual assaults by staff and inmates. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) released its second annual findings in July 2005, based solely on administrative records of reported incidents. The agency found that there were 6,241 allegations of sexual assault reported at adult prisons and jails in 2005, of which 885 allegations were substantiated. While direct surveys of inmates are also part of the BJS’s mandate to determine the incidence and effects of prisoner rape, this research is still in progress and expected in 2007. BJS and other researchers agree that cases reported to facilities do not represent the full scope of the problem, due to underreporting caused by fear, stigma, and a “code of silence” in prisons.

Every week, Stop Prisoner Rape (SPR) is contacted by an average of 10 survivors of sexual assault behind bars, the vast majority of whom write letters while still incarcerated. Since 2002, SPR has received letters from 620 different survivors describing sexual assault that occurred in detention in all 50 U.S. states. Of these, 15 percent have come from inmates in California. SPR’s database of letters does not permit statistical conclusions about prevalence, but it does provide rare, first-person insight from survivors of horrifying sexual abuse.

The following figures are based upon the letters that SPR has received from California inmates since 2005

Total number of CA survivors who have written to SPR since 2005 (CDCR Facilities).....	43
Male Survivors.....	25
Female Survivors	11
Transgender Survivors	7
Survivors who identify as LGBT	12
Survivors abused by other inmate/s	37
Survivors abused by corrections officers.....	6
Survivors abused by police officers.....	1
Survivors abused by cellmate	9
Survivors abused by more than one person	12
Survivors abused multiple times.....	15
Survivors who report that c/o’s knew of attack/s, but did not respond.....	15
Survivors who reported the assaults	20
Number of reports that were investigated.....	6
Survivors who reported that the abuser was disciplined.....	1
Survivors involuntarily placed in segregation	8
Survivors who were refused medical care after assaults	7