



Abuse at New Jersey's Women Prison Must End

A Statement from New Jersey Prison Justice Watch Coalition

January 27, 2021

Earlier this month, three women in the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility in Clinton, NJ were physically assaulted and beaten resulting in fractured arms and eye sockets, black and swollen-shut eyes and lacerations across their faces. According to eyewitnesses, officers repeatedly 'stomped' on their bodies and left them in what one witness called the Administrative Segregation unit without immediately transferring them to the facility's Infirmary for full examination and treatment. Numerous accounts indicate that officers were told by recently transferred Acting Administrator St. Paul to suit up and show them how it is done at Northern State Prison. New Jersey Prison Justice Watch condemns these actions finding this behavior egregious, deliberately cruel and inhumane, and demands immediate and long term action.

This incident is but one in a continuum of physical and mental abuse in prisons around the state of New Jersey with Edna Mahan in particular embedded with a culture of violent control. In 2016 there were hearings that led to a DOJ conclusion that the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJ DOC) failed to keep women held in Edna Mahan safe from ongoing sexual abuse by five Correctional Offices and one civilian employee. We maintain this incident is yet another failure by the New Jersey Department of Corrections to protect women from physical and mental violence and demand that accountability for these actions be pursued and long term remedies begin.

Members of the NJ PJW coalition have written letters, marched for the release of those inside, partnered with legislators to mitigate physical abuse and we are grateful for their unwavering support in our fight against the inhumane treatment of people inside the wall. A staunch supporter, Assemblywoman Yvonne Lopez (D-Middlesex) writes that "Stories like these only serve to demonstrate the need for comprehensive change in our correctional facilities to ensure the basic human rights of inmates are not ignored. Abuse has no place in New Jersey's correctional facilities nor any correctional facility, period."¹ In a letter to Governor Murphy, Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg (D-Bergen) and Senate Law and Public Safety Committee Chair Linda Greenstein (D-Middlesex/Mercer), writes that the "Edna Mahan Correctional Facility is out of control, improperly managed, and clearly an abusive danger to the

¹<https://www.facebook.com/yvonne.lopez.988>

²<https://files.constantcontact.com/5fec8eef701/8cd3b84d-c647-4a9a-b3b4-95881e846644.pdf>

³<https://www.facebook.com/yvonne.lopez.988>

women locked up behind its walls.”² ASW Lopez correctly points out that “we have a tool to address these issues, however, for change to occur they must be implemented. It is obvious that the provisions of the bill have yet to be implemented”³. This tool is the Dignity for Incarcerated Primary Caretaker Parents Act (P.L. 2019, c. 288.) otherwise known as the Dignity Act. Immediate implementation and adherence to the intent of the Act is imperative in order to begin the restoration of human dignity to women trapped inside Edna Mahan.

We join our compassionate, resolute legislators in their demands for the immediate removal of DOC Commissioner Marcus Hicks along with those involved in the execution and obfuscation of the heinous acts at Edna Mahan. Further, we are calling for the formation of a Board of Inquiry dedicated to the oversight of Edna Mahan with an independent review board. This is not only important for the women’s prison but all New Jersey prisons. As we at New Jersey Prison Justice Watch advocate for an elimination of the brutality inflicted on those inside, we note the efforts of the Attorney General Gurbir Grewal as he begins to implement a policy for state, county and local law enforcement agencies to insure that force is used as the very last line of defense in situations of conflict. It is time to extend this policy to Correctional Police Officers within the NJ DOC.

New Jersey Prison Justice Watch calls on government, faith communities and civil society organizations to redouble their efforts to hold the New Jersey Department of Corrections accountable and transparent in order to reduce the levels of violence that those who are behind the wall are exposed to. They are citizens of New Jersey, members of the New Jersey family and must be protected from those who inflict violence with impunity.

All of Us or None// AFSC Prison Watch Program//American Reentry Initiative// The Campaign to End Jim Crow, Trenton & Princeton//Community Legal & Advocacy Project//Emmett’s Place// Faith In New Jersey//F.O.R.T.E.//Health Professionals and Allied Employees of NJ//The Integrated Justice Alliance//The Latino Action Network//Middlesex County Community Reentry Coalition//NAACP Metuchen Edison Piscataway Branch//The New Jersey Parents Caucus//New Jersey Institute for Social Justice//The People’s Organization for Progress//Reimagining Justice, Inc//Salvation and Social Justice Coalition//The Scarlet F-From Felon to Freedom//Solidarity 22//Students for Prison Education and Reform, Princeton University// UU FaithAction NJ//Women Who Never Give Up