

## How Detention Facilities Can Stop Sexual Abuse Behind Bars

**W**HEN THE GOVERNMENT takes away someone's freedom, it takes on an absolute responsibility to keep that person safe. Yet U.S. prisons and jails are plagued by sexual violence. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, roughly 200,000 inmates were sexually abused in 2012 alone.

Despite widespread belief to the contrary, detention facilities can end sexual violence within their walls. In May 2012, the Department of Justice released national standards to address this abuse. These landmark standards – mandated by the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) of 2003 – are an important human rights tool that lay out concrete, commonsense steps for detention facilities to keep inmates safe.

Taken as a whole, the PREA standards aim to stimulate corrections culture change, creating prison environments where every report of sexual abuse is taken seriously and every inmate is treated with dignity and respect.

### Key PREA Provisions:

- **Inmate education.** Inmate education plays a crucial role in promoting a safe environment and raising awareness among inmates. The standards, therefore, require facilities to train inmates on their right to be free from sexual abuse, how to report abuse, and how to get help in the aftermath of an assault.
- **Partnerships with local organizations.** Community-based providers have the potential to deliver quality crisis counseling and health services to people who are locked up. Yet historically inmates have not had access to this care. The PREA standards insist that prisons and jails work with outside service providers, paving the way for prisoner rape survivors to get the same level of care as rape survivors in the community.
- **Staff training.** The safest U.S. detention facilities have committed leaders and staff members who are trained on sexual abuse prevention and response. Accordingly, the PREA standards prioritize staff training, with an emphasis on how to protect vulnerable inmates.
- **Safe housing for inmates.** By screening new inmates for known risk factors such as prior sexual abuse, prisons and jails can reduce drastically the incidence of rape. The PREA standards state that all detention facilities must assess an inmate's likelihood for being abused – or for being abusive – before making housing decisions.
- **Protections for transgender inmates.** In nearly all U.S. detention facilities, inmates are housed based on their birth gender – a policy that has left transgender inmates extremely vulnerable to sexual abuse and harassment, as transgender women nearly always are housed in men's facilities. Under the PREA standards, facilities must take into account how best to ensure a transgender inmate's health and safety – and not just genital status – in making housing decisions.
- **Cross-gender pat-down searches and viewing.** A significant number of inmates report being sexually abused or harassed during cross-gender pat-down searches or while showering. The standards ban cross-gender pat-downs of women inmates – but not of male inmates.
- **Zero tolerance.** Detention facilities are often closed, secretive institutions where abuse and harassment flourish, while reporting is discouraged, or even punished. The PREA standards require that every facility develop a written policy affirming its zero tolerance for sexual abuse and harassment.

JUST DETENTION INTERNATIONAL is a health and human rights organization that seeks to end sexual abuse in all forms of detention.

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