



## ACTION UPDATE

MAY 2016

JDI HAS NEVER SHIED AWAY from a challenge. It was once unthinkable that Congress would pass a law to stop prisoner rape, but we fought for one anyway. Nor did it seem likely that we would be able to get into and help turn around troubled prisons and jails. But our fearlessness has paid off: Congress passed the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), and today we are working side-by-side with corrections officials at dozens of facilities across the country.



Georgia is a good example. We have just launched a project there, with the state prison system. There is much work to be done in Georgia's prisons; the state is currently dealing

with a federal investigation into conditions in its facilities.

Yet, after a recent visit, I left Georgia feeling optimistic. The state's PREA Coordinator recognizes that JDI's expertise can help make their prisons safer. During a visit to one of the prisons, the warden stopped to say a kind word to every prisoner we passed. It's a small thing, but it reveals a deeper commitment to seeing prisoners as people deserving of rights, not just as inmates with a number.

We still have plenty of work left to do, in Georgia and in prisons everywhere. With your support, we will keep fighting until we end prisoner rape, once and for all.

Lovisa Stannow  
Executive Director

## We're Back on Capitol Hill

*More than a decade after the Prison Rape Elimination Act passed, JDI is again working with Congress to end sexual abuse*

SINCE IT BECAME LAW IN 2003, PREA has been a powerful tool for making our prisons and jails safer, more transparent, and more accountable. But the law's passage was also significant because it showed that JDI — backed by a movement of supporters, like you — could make real and lasting change happen through legislation.

Today, JDI and our allies are spearheading another effort in Congress to protect prisoners' human rights. Working with elected officials in both the House and the Senate, JDI helped craft a proposal to improve

PREA through a new bill, the Justice For All Act (JFAA) reauthorization. As of this writing, the bill is awaiting votes in each Chamber's Judiciary Committee; our goal is to get it on the President's desk by October 2016.

JFAA calls for a few basic yet vital improvements to PREA. Most notably, the bill sets a firm deadline for states seeking to fully implement the law. "Until now, governors have not been subjected to a final deadline for implementing all of PREA," explained Lovisa Stannow, JDI's Executive Director. "Instead, governors have been able to kick the can down the road by assuring the Attorney

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*The Justice For All Act will set a firm deadline for states to comply fully with PREA. If the Act passes, states like Wisconsin, where the person above is being held, will have to adopt all of PREA's groundbreaking provisions within three years.*

# Taking PREA to the Next Level

*Virginia and JDI team up to make the state's prisons a standard-bearer for prisoner safety*

**F**IVE YEARS AGO, members of the Review Panel on Prison Rape toured Fluvanna, a women's facility in Virginia. A federal government report had recently ranked Fluvanna among the nation's worst prisons; the Panel's task was to find out what had gone wrong. During the visit, they heard first-hand from prisoners who had been sexually abused by an officer. A number of women told the Panel that they would not dare make an official report, lest they get sent to "the hole." As one prisoner put it, "If you dial the PREA number, it's a ticket to SEG," referring to solitary confinement.

But thanks to the state's partnership with JDI, Virginia's prisons are safer today. With funding from a federal grant, JDI and the Virginia Department of Corrections (VA DOC) have trained key corrections staff on sexual abuse prevention and put in place better, stronger practices.

The impact of this work is being felt throughout the state's prison system. Staff increasingly treat inmates with more respect and care. "We've made a real effort to gain

the trust of offenders, and it's paying off," explained Statewide PREA Coordinator Rose Durbin. "Offenders are more comfortable telling staff if they have a problem or don't feel safe, because they know that speaking out won't get them put in restricted housing."

These pivotal reforms show that Virginia is serious about PREA. But Durbin and other leaders at the agency have set their sights even higher, aiming to go beyond what is required of them. Staff regularly check in with inmates to make sure that they know how to report, and to remind them that they have an absolute right to be free of sexual abuse. And VA DOC will soon launch a peer inmate education program — JDI's tried and tested model for teaching prisoners about staying safe — in all of its prisons.

"The state's corrections leaders are not doing this work just because it's law, or because it will help them check all the boxes on an audit," said Cynthia Totten, Senior Program Director at JDI. "Instead, they are looking to use PREA as a springboard for deeper and more meaningful culture change — and it's working."



*JDI is working inside detention facilities nationwide to put in place practices that keep prisoners safe from sexual violence.*

## We're Back on Capitol Hill

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General that they are working to come into full compliance with the law. This bill will fix that fundamental flaw."

JFAA also calls for states to share information publicly about what they are doing to make their prisons safe. If the bill passes, governors will have to show that their efforts to prevent and address sexual violence are working, and, if they aren't, explain why.

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The bill also creates a federal online clearinghouse of all PREA audits. Currently, audit results are published only on an agency's website — or sometimes not published at all — making it hard to get a big-picture view of PREA's impact. "Once the Department of Justice posts all PREA audits in one place, it will become possible to track and compare the progress of prisons and jails, and to recognize those states that are doing the work, and to hold those that aren't accountable. This clearinghouse will be a hugely important tool for advocates, journalists, prisoners — anyone who wants to know what's happening inside," said Stannow.

Like PREA, JFAA enjoys strong bipartisan support — proving yet again that ending prisoner rape is the rare issue that unites Democrats and Republicans. JDI salutes the elected leaders who championed JFAA's proposed changes to PREA: John Cornyn, Patrick Leahy, Dick Durbin, and Kelly Ayotte in the Senate, and Representatives Ted Poe and Jim Costa in the House.

# JDI's Words of Hope Sends Light to Incarcerated Survivors



*Every holiday season, JDI supporters — including Survivor Council members, like Joe Booth (left) — gather to write Words of Hope messages to incarcerated survivors.*

**J**DI SUPPORTERS did something truly heroic over the holidays. Through JDI's *Words of Hope* campaign, you wrote more than 10,000 heartfelt greetings to prisoner rape survivors across the country.

Your compassion did more than briefly lift the spirits of a survivor. You restored that person's connection to the outside world, reminding them that they are cared for and that they matter.

The power of your messages is apparent in the responses we have received from survivors, like Samuel. Held in a Massachusetts prison, Samuel has been sexually abused by other inmates and by staff. Last year, he mustered up the courage to report the abuse. But instead of helping Samuel, staff spread rumors about him on the yard, as punishment for "snitching."

By the time the holidays came, Samuel had hit rock bottom. The ongoing harassment crushed his self-esteem and left him feeling isolated. Then, one day in December, he received a package with your cards. "Just going through each card slowly gave me a warmth I had not felt in many years," he wrote to JDI. "I cannot even start to describe what it makes me feel to see that

there are so many people who are kind enough to take a moment to brighten my normally dark and lonely holiday. I am truly happy that you and supporters throughout the world are there for me."

Samuel is just one of hundreds of survivors who were uplifted by your compassion. Robert in South Carolina wrote us to say, "I was almost in tears while reading the short notes from everyone. The holidays are always a hard time for me, not just as a sexual assault survivor, but being in prison so far from my family makes the holidays that much more difficult. The energy I felt coming off those cards left me speechless for a bit (not to mention giving me goose pimples). I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

William, a survivor in Missouri, was also deeply moved by your compassion. He told us, "The cards you sent were the only thoughts from others that I received for Christmas. I had my fingers crossed that I'd hear from at least one of the 7.5 billion people in the world. Had it not been for those cards, I'd have felt counted among the living dead."

Your *Words of Hope* changed the lives of so many survivors behind bars. Thank you, once again, for your outpouring of kindness this holiday season!

## Abusive Staff Rarely Held to Account in Juvenile Detention

**A**FTER DARRYL WAS RAPED by a group of staff and other boys at a California youth facility, he knew it would be difficult, even dangerous, to report the assault. After all, one of the boys had warned him not to speak out. But Darryl was desperate to make sure he wouldn't be abused again, so he gathered the strength to tell a senior official.

Appallingly, the official did nothing to help him. As Darryl explained in a letter to JDI, the officer laughed in his face, before telling him, "So what? Who is going to believe you?"

The depressing truth is that the officer was right: youth in custody who report sexual abuse are rarely believed. According to a recent Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) report, the vast majority of sexual misconduct allegations in youth detention facilities are not deemed credible by the facilities' investigators. A facility is especially likely to dismiss a report against staff, as opposed to another youth.

The BJS report also reveals the juvenile justice system's utter failure to deal appropriately with known staff perpetrators. Barely half of all abusive staff face legal action; even worse, 1 in 12 were allowed to remain on the job, giving them ongoing access to more potential victims.

These findings are even more grim when you consider that official allegations are just a drop in the bucket. In a 2013 BJS survey of youth in custody, a staggering one in ten youth said that they were sexually abused in the prior 12 months of their detention. Most of these youth choose to keep quiet and, with little chance at getting justice, it is easy to understand why.

Darryl, and all youth in custody, have the absolute right to be safe from sexual assault. And if they are assaulted, their perpetrators should be brought to justice, so that no one else has to suffer the same fate.

## JDI Highlights the Horrors of Solitary Confinement

**I**MAGINE GOING TO THE POLICE to report having your wallet stolen, your car vandalized, or worse. Now imagine that, instead of helping you, the police send you to live alone for a month in a small, filthy room.

The idea of being punished in this way, after you've been victimized, is horrifying. But this is exactly what happens to many people in prison when they dare to report sexual abuse. At precisely the moment that survivors need the most support, prison officials regularly place them in solitary confinement, which is well known to be harmful to their mental health.

We believe — and we think you agree — that survivors deserve better. In April, JDI honored Sexual Assault Awareness Month by sharing testimonies on our website from prisoner rape survivors who have spent time in solitary confinement.

Gregory, a prisoner in Illinois, knows all too well the horrors of solitary. Gregory spent

38 days in isolation, under conditions that no person should ever have to endure. Here's how he described his isolation cell in a recent letter to JDI:

The officer put me in a cell without any lights. The sink was clogged, with nasty water that had soap scum in it. The walls of the cell were smeared with feces. The ventilation system blew dust into the cell because it had not been cleaned in years. Whenever the toilet flushed in the neighboring cell, raw sewage would flow into mine.

Gregory was sent to solitary as punishment for reporting an officer who sexually abused him. Sadly, this is a common form of retaliation behind bars and, understandably, many survivors stay quiet to avoid facing weeks — or longer — in isolation.

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You can read Gregory's story, and others like his, at [www.justdetention.org/surviving-solitary](http://www.justdetention.org/surviving-solitary)

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## An Emerging Leader in the Effort to Protect Detained LGBT Youth

**I**N 2016, a local judge in Mobile County, Alabama, defied the Supreme Court by refusing to issue wedding licenses to same-sex couples. The judge's ruling made national news, and the county's reputation took a hit. But officials at the local youth detention facility are showing that, in some ways, Mobile County is well ahead of the curve on LGBT rights.

With JDI's help, Mobile and neighboring Baldwin County are taking crucial steps to protect LGBT youth in their care. "LGBT youth in detention are very vulnerable to abuse, but it is possible for staff to build a culture that values everyone's safety," said JDI Program Director Rob Woronoff, who recently co-facilitated a training in Mobile with JDI's partners at The Moss Group and

the PREA Resource Center. "County officials wanted to gain the expertise to build a healthy environment for these young people. And, showing true leadership, they asked for help."

With management setting the right tone, staff have embraced new approaches for working with LGBT youth, and especially kids who are transgender. Officers are more attuned to respectful communications, making sure to learn the preferred pronouns for transgender young people. "There really isn't a great mystery to making LGBT youth in detention feel safe," explained Woronoff. "It just takes commitment, a bit of compassion, and strong leaders. Thankfully, the youth detention officials we worked with in Mobile and Baldwin counties seemed to have these qualities in spades."

## A Pivotal Step for Transgender Rights

**T**HANKS TO JDI'S ADVOCACY — which our supporters helped make possible — the Department of Justice has issued sorely needed instructions on how to help protect transgender prisoners.

The Department's new guidance clarifies that, in order to comply with standards to prevent and respond to sexual abuse in detention, facilities cannot house transgender prisoners based on their anatomy alone. Instead, a facility must factor in a transgender person's gender identity and their own view of where they will be safest.

Virtually all U.S. prisons and jails currently base their housing decisions on a person's anatomy and nothing else. This practice has left almost all transgender women extremely vulnerable to sexual abuse, as they have automatically been housed in men's facilities. JDI has long advocated for prisons and jails to take seriously a transgender person's own views on their housing and to respect a person's identity regardless of their anatomy. The Department of Justice's new guidance brings us closer to achieving this goal.

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