



ACTION UPDATE

APRIL 2018

ON MARCH 19, in Washington, D.C., I spoke at a Senate briefing commemorating the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), the landmark law that turns 15 this year. It was an honor to be part of an event that included so many PREA champions.



At the same time, I felt the absence of the person who fought harder and longer than anyone for this law: Tom Cahill, the former President of JDI. Channeling the anger and pain from a gang rape he endured in a Texas jail in 1968, Tom helped build JDI from a tiny network of volunteers into a powerhouse organization with political clout. Fittingly, Tom was in the Oval Office on the historic occasion of PREA's signing, in September 2003.

Today, Tom is retired and lives in France. He is a friend, and we stay in touch, but rarely see each other. So I was thrilled when he came to California and visited our office in March. Tom marveled at how much JDI has grown, now with offices in Washington, D.C. and Johannesburg as well as Los Angeles.

Showing characteristic humility, Tom deflected credit for PREA, waving off the congratulatory letters from members of Congress that I showed him. But Tom and I do agree on one thing: the crucial role you play, as a JDI supporter. Thank you for standing up for survivors, and for being part of the fight to end prisoner rape.

Lovisa Stannow
Executive Director

JDI Wins Big on Capitol Hill

At a Senate briefing, JDI honors PREA's past — and helps secure funding for its future

AT FIRST GLANCE, Jan Lastocy and John Johnson seem to have little in common. You might even assume they were adversaries. Jan is a prisoner rape survivor and JDI Board member who has spent years fighting to hold corrections officials accountable. John is corrections to the core. He is a Chief at the Miami-Dade Corrections and Rehabilitation Department (MDCR); he's also President of the American Jail Association.

But Jan and John are allies, united in their conviction that rape is not part of the penalty. This unlikely pair took center stage at our March 19 Senate briefing on Capitol Hill. Organized by JDI and Prison Fellowship, the briefing celebrated 15 years of PREA, the 2003 law that stands as one of the most significant human rights victories of our time. In addition to Jan and John, the panelists included Craig

DeRoche, a Senior Vice President at Prison Fellowship; John Kaneb, former Vice-Chair of the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission; and Lovisa Stannow, JDI's Executive Director. Former Congressman Frank Wolf (R-VA) — one of PREA's original sponsors — opened the briefing.

The panelists shared testimony that illuminated PREA's place in history. Jan credited the law with enabling survivors like herself to become powerful agents of change. "We had been marginalized for so long, but PREA elevated the voices of prisoner rape survivors," she told the audience. Jan has seized the advocacy opportunities afforded by the law. Her stature is such that when reporters are looking for someone who really understands the crisis of prisoner rape, Jan is often the first person they call.

In the corrections world, PREA's impact was just as dramatic. John reflected on his

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Longtime PREA champions John Kaneb (center), and John Johnson (right), a Chief at the Miami-Dade Corrections and Rehabilitation Department, spoke alongside JDI's Lovisa Stannow at the Senate briefing on Capitol Hill.

The PREA Audits Are Broken

MOST PRISONS THAT are plagued by sexual abuse have been unsafe for years, if not decades. A challenge for advocates is getting a glimpse inside such facilities — at their policies and practices; at the attitudes of the staff; and at the lives of inmates. The lack of oversight of U.S. prisons allows sexual violence to thrive.

The PREA standards, which were released in 2012, promised to crack open the closed world of corrections. At JDI's insistence — and over the objections of many corrections officials — PREA called for facility audits by an independent monitor. Unfortunately, these audits have not lived up to their potential. When the Department of Justice released a

national database of audit reports in January, it confirmed our worst fears. Scores of dangerous prisons and jails were receiving perfect marks.

A close examination of the Department's database makes it clear where the problem lies. Good auditors do not merely check to see if a facility has written policies; they check to see whether those policies translate into practice. Most auditors, however, disregard this crucial distinction. More alarming still are the auditors who, prior to their supposedly independent assessment, socialize with the officials whose performance they are scrutinizing. Some auditors are so contemptuous of their job that they use the same boilerplate

text over and over in their audit reports. Predictably, these gleaming audits tell a very different story from what we hear from inmates; in the space below, we juxtapose extracts of audit reports with first-person accounts from the people living in those same facilities.

A shoddy audit is not a trivial concern; it's a missed opportunity to save lives. Perpetrators of sexual abuse flourish in environments without robust oversight. To fix the PREA audits, we need Congress to act, to mandate that PREA auditors are held to the highest possible standards and that those who blatantly disregard their responsibilities are decertified and barred from doing any future PREA audits.

WHAT THE AUDITORS ARE SAYING

WHAT THE INMATES ARE SAYING

East Mississippi Correctional Facility

“The interviewed offenders and staff indicated that the facility was a safe place to serve time and work. There were few complaints from the offender population.”

“When I tried to report rape, an officer told me ‘this is prison, stop being gay.’”
Thomas

Elkton Federal Correctional Institution (Federal Prison)

“[Inmates] indicated that staff were responsive to their needs and they felt safe at the facility.”

“I was invalidated and disregarded. No staff took me seriously.”
Tony

Lansing Correctional Facility (KS)

“LCF has numerous ways for offenders to report allegations of abuse or harassment... LCF will take immediate action if they are aware an offender is at substantial risk.”

“When I tried to report, a sergeant made a derogatory remark about me. He said that if I followed through with the report, he would make my life hell.”
Michael

Upstate Correctional Facility (NY)

“Staff is completely knowledgeable of the PREA standards and enforce them to ensure the safety of inmates and staff at UCF.”

“Before the incident happened, one CO told me that he has the perfect bunkie for me. Another said that my bunkie would get me ‘one way or another.’”
James

No One Deserves Sexual Assault. Period.

When judges call for prisoner rape, it puts all of us at risk

THE CONVICTION OF Larry Nassar should have been a landmark moment for the anti-rape movement. Dozens of women who were victimized by the USA Gymnastics doctor shared heart-wrenching testimony during his sentencing. They denounced not only Nassar, but the people and institutions that let him get away with horrific abuse for so long. As Olympian Aly Raisman put it, “If over these many years just one adult listened and had the courage and character to act, this tragedy could have been avoided.”

The lesson from the Nassar trial is that until we tackle rape culture — the victim-blaming, the indifference by law enforcement, the institutional cover-ups — this violence will continue to thrive. But sadly, much of the impact of this trial was nullified by the express wishes of many people that Nassar himself be raped, as frequently and brutally as possible, in prison. The most visible proponent of this warped version of justice was Rosemarie Aquilina, the judge in Nassar’s trial. Aquilina told him that, if she could, she “would allow some or many people to do to him what he did to others.”

In an op-ed for the *Los Angeles Times*, Lovisa Stannow argues that Aquilina’s comments are dangerous and unacceptable. By endorsing Nassar’s rape, Aquilina breathed oxygen into the destructive notion that it is possible to

parse between those who do and do not deserve sexual assault. This is precisely the type of logic that has long been deployed by rape apologists. Cops and prosecutors — and even some of Aquilina’s colleagues on the bench — frequently tell rape survivors that they brought their assault on themselves, because they dressed a certain way, had too much to drink, or didn’t say no loudly enough.

Aquilina failed to see that whether behind bars or in the community, rape dynamics are the same; people in power take advantage of those who are vulnerable, and especially so if they know that they won’t be held accountable. By wishing for Nassar to be assaulted, she ended up promoting rape — the very act she purportedly abhors.

A case like Larry Nassar’s serves as a test of our principles. Sexual abuse in any setting can be stopped, but to end this violence we need a real commitment to safety from the people in charge, whether a prison warden, an Olympics official, or a judge.

We were heartened to hear from so many JDI supporters who were also outraged by Judge Aquilina’s statements. Our movement steadfastly holds the belief that every person, no matter what, deserves to be free from sexual abuse. Thank you, JDI supporters, for being human rights champions.



In a Los Angeles Times op-ed, Lovisa Stannow argues that even people who commit horrific crimes have a right to be safe from sexual abuse.

JDI Wins Big

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own journey from PREA skeptic to one of its most ardent champions. At the briefing he thanked Dr. Allen Beck, the head statistician at the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), for including MDCR on his 2010 list of the nation’s jails with the highest rates of sexual abuse. Many of his peers who were also on “Dr. Beck’s hit list” — to use John’s coinage — refused to believe BJS’s findings. But John used them as a motivator. He reached out to JDI, and together we put in place policies and practices that helped turn the jail around.

The Senate briefing was not only to honor PREA heroes like Jan and John. The panelists also came prepared with a concrete ask: funding for PREA implementation. At the time, Congress was ironing out the details of a spending bill, and PREA’s share of the pot was up in the air. Without robust Congressional support, federal grant programs that have proved so crucial in bringing about culture change at prisons and jails would remain dormant. Even worse, a weak spending commitment would mean that the efforts to patch up the broken PREA auditing system (*see page 2*) might never get off the ground.

Fortunately, Congress heeded our calls. The House of Representatives and Senate both approved spending a record \$15.5 million on PREA. The bill garnered strong support from Democrats and Republicans — thanks in large part to the leadership of Senators John Cornyn (R-TX) and Brian Schatz (D-HI) — proving yet again that stopping sexual abuse in detention is the rare issue on which the two parties agree.

Jan learned about the news shortly after returning home from Washington. She was grateful for Congress’ commitment to protecting every person’s right to be free from rape. She was also deeply appreciative of JDI’s supporters. “This is a huge breakthrough for me, for my fellow advocates, and for prisoners. We couldn’t have done it without JDI’s supporters.”

An Outpouring of Holiday Compassion

JDI supporters from around the world participated in our Words of Hope campaign, changing the lives of prisoners

SINCE THE CAMPAIGN'S first year, in 2010, *Words of Hope* has brought peace and joy to countless men and women who are locked up and feel alone. It has also saved lives. But even by these high standards, last year's holiday season was special. We delivered more than 22,000 messages to prisoner rape survivors nationwide, each one containing a warm greeting for the new year.

When Larry got your holiday wishes, he was in need of more than a simple pick-me-up. He needed a lifeline; 2017 had felt like a nightmare that might never end. Serving time in a dangerous Florida prison, he had been constantly sexually harassed by staff. The previous year, an officer set him up to be raped. By the time the holidays came around, he was deeply depressed. "I was seriously thinking about killing myself," he wrote JDI in a letter.

And then a package arrived from JDI. It was filled with compassionate notes from people on the outside. "I sat back on my bunk and began reading all the messages," Larry wrote. "Halfway through I had to stop, because of the flood of tears streaming down my face from seeing these messages of pure love. Af-

ter I finished reading all the cards, for the first time in over two months I was finally able to get a restful sleep."

For Mike, a survivor in California, it had been years since he last received a holiday card. He was sure no one cared about him — until he heard from JDI's supporters. "I must say I felt deeply touched to know that there are people out there who are genuinely concerned about the fate of all those held in captivity," he told us. "Thank goodness for human decency."

It was not just the words that mattered to survivors, but the great effort and care put into crafting the cards themselves. JDI supporters hosted *Words of Hope* events around the globe, from Los Angeles to Sweden and points in between. "*Words of Hope* is a way for me to show prisoners that despite their isolation they are part of this world and people care about them," said Jennifer, a longtime JDI supporter who organized a card-writing day in her hometown in Pennsylvania. "I believe that every survivor deserves some kindness and compassion. It means a lot to me to be part of this campaign every year and to connect with survivors who need to know that we haven't forgotten them."



These cheerful cards, made by a group of JDI supporters in Virginia, helped incarcerated survivors make it through an especially difficult time of year.



Officials with the Tarrant County, Texas, Sheriff's Department participated in this year's Words of Hope campaign (from left): Chief Deputy Henry Reyes, Chief Deputy Randy Cundiff, Sheriff Bill E. Waybourn, PREA Manager Monica Lugo, and Executive Chief Deputy Raul S. Banasco

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