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Bipartisan Prison Rape Commission Releases Draft Standards for Helping Corrections Facilities Achieve Zero-Tolerance

Launches Public Comment Period Seeking Feedback from Corrections Officials, Prisoners

Washington, DC – The bipartisan National Prison Rape Elimination Commission (“the Commission”) today released the first set of draft standards for the reduction of prison rape and launched a public comment period seeking input from corrections leaders and staff, law enforcement, health and public health professionals, prisoners and detainees, and the interested public.

Recognizing that abuse should not be part of any prison sentence, the Commission developed the draft standards as a step towards final recommended standards required by the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 to help agencies in their day-to-day work to achieve zero-tolerance of sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse in U.S. corrections facilities violates basic human rights of incarcerated men and women, their chances of successful reentry into the community and the government’s obligation to provide safe and humane conditions. According to a 2007 Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) report, 4.5 percent of inmates surveyed reported an incident of sexual victimization, either inmate-on-inmate or staff on-inmate, in the preceding year. Given the current U.S. prison population, that statistic suggests that more than 70,000 prisoners were victims of sexual violence in one year alone.

“The Commission has worked hard to prepare these draft standards, with the help of hundreds of dedicated experts and stakeholders,” said Judge Reggie B. Walton, U.S. District Court Judge for the District of Columbia and chairman of the Commission. “The final standards will have a significant impact on the safety of facilities across the nation, so we encourage feedback during this public comment period that will help us make the standards as strong and effective as possible.”

The Commission’s draft standards for Adult Prisons, Jails, and Facilities Holding Immigration Detainees were made available today, with a 60-day public comment period from May 5 to July 7. Additional draft standards concerning Lockups, Juvenile Facilities, and Community Corrections Facilities will be released in June with a separate public comment period. Pursuant to the Commission’s congressional mandate, the standards relate to a range of issues relevant to addressing the problem of prison rape, including training, inmate classification, reporting of incidents, investigation and resolution of complaints, preservation of evidence, medical and mental health care for victims, and data collection.

“Through what has been a long and thorough process, we’ve sought to identify and evaluate the best strategies for preventing sexual abuse in confinement settings and for improving response efforts,” said John A. Kaneb, Chairman of the Board of Directors of HP Hood LLC and Vice-chairman of the Commission. “This public comment period will assist us as we further refine those promising strategies.”

“With millions incarcerated and hundreds of thousands of men and women released to their communities each year, this is an issue that affects us all.” said Commissioner Pat Nolan, President of Justice Fellowship, the public-policy arm of Prison Fellowship Ministries. “These standards will hold officials accountable for stopping prison rape. And that’s a change that’s long overdue.”

Commissioner Jamie Fellner, an attorney and Senior Counsel of the United States Program of Human Rights Watch, agreed. “Our charge is to develop zero-tolerance national standards on how to detect, prevent, and punish acts of sexual violence behind bars,” she said. “Ultimately, these standards will make America’s correctional facilities not only safer for inmates but for staff as well.”

Since its creation by the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003, the Commission has held numerous public and private meetings and sought the views of a broad range of sources, including corrections administrators and staff, law enforcement, medical providers and experts, prison rape survivors and their families, advocates, academics, and the currently incarcerated.

After the public comment periods, the Commission will review the feedback and determine how best to incorporate it into the final standards. These standards will be presented to the President, Congress, and the U.S. Attorney General, along with the Commission’s final report and recommendations on how to make ending sexual assault a top priority in every correctional and detention facility. Within a year, the Attorney General will use the report and recommended standards as a basis for the promulgation of national standards to establish zero-tolerance of sexual abuse in confinement facilities.

For more information about the Commission and its work, or to download a copy of the draft standards and provide comments, please visit www.nprec.us.

The Commissioners are the Honorable Reggie B. Walton, who serves as Chairman, Vice Chairman John A. Kaneb, James E. Aiken, Jamie Fellner, Pat Nolan, Gus Puryear, Brenda V. Smith, and Cindy Struckman-Johnson.

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