

1 The whole time I was in the boys' side at HYCF I
2 was threatened with violence and rape, touched sexually on
3 various parts of my body, and experienced constant sexual
4 harassment. Except for isolating me, which made my pain and
5 loneliness worse, nobody helped me. I have tried to move on
6 with my life, and I'm currently attending Remington College
7 in Hawaii, where I am working on an Associate's Degree in
8 International Business, but it is quite painful having to
9 relive memories of what happened at HYCF. Please help make
10 youth detention centers safer because the sexual abuse and
11 threats I endured truly made my time there a living hell.

12 CHAIRMAN WALTON: Thank you very much for your
13 testimony. We appreciate the difficulty in making a public
14 statement of that nature, but I'm sure we'll find it very
15 helpful in our deliberations as we fulfill our obligations
16 to Congress and the President. Thank you. We'll hear the
17 next testimony before we ask any questions.

18 MS. HARDIN: Good morning. My name is Chino
19 Hardin; I'm a Youth Organizer at Prison Moratorium Project
20 which is based in New York City, as well as the point person
21 for the Justice for Youth Coalition. I've been in this role
22 for about four years and have traveled throughout the
23 country to raise awareness about the terrible conditions,
24 including sexual abuse, that young people face while locked
25 up.

1 I appreciate the opportunity to address the
2 National Prison Rape Elimination Committee today, and would
3 like to share with you some of the experiences I endured as
4 a very young person in prison, as well as things I witnessed
5 other young women go through. In my youth I was arrested
6 sixteen times and incarcerated on eight different occasions,
7 so I know what goes on inside the walls of juvenile
8 detention facilities all too well.

9 I was incarcerated the first time when I was 13
10 years old way back in 1993 at what was known then as
11 Spofford Juvenile Center in the Bronx. I had gotten into a
12 fight with a boy I knew and ended up spending a little over
13 a month in custody. Spofford was a very scary place,
14 especially at the age I entered into Spofford. I was housed
15 in a unit with all girls, but there was a boys' unit on a
16 different part of the same floor. I immediately noticed
17 that the male corrections officers seemed too nice to the
18 girls and were overly familiar with them and putting their
19 arms around them or touching them on the face, shoulders,
20 waist, and letting the girls touch them. I saw these same
21 corrections officers give the girls candy or extra food, and
22 let them out of their cells when they were supposed to be on
23 lockdown.

24 The correction officers even allowed some of the
25 boys to come over to the same side of the facility as the

1 girls. In some cases, correction officers allowed boys and
2 girls who liked each other to have consensual sexual contact
3 inside the girls' cells. In other cases, it was clear what
4 was happening was not consensual. The corrections officers
5 allowed certain boys to enter the cells of girls that the
6 correction officer deemed were not behaving well. I was
7 aware of this because I often heard girls screaming in fear
8 at 2:00 or 3:00 o'clock in the morning, and all I can see by
9 my cell window were red jump suits running by, and only the
10 boys wore red jump suits. In my one month at Spofford,
11 these -- three different girls told me they were raped by
12 boys who correction officers allowed them to go into their
13 cells. I was terrified and did my best to keep a low
14 profile so I wouldn't become a target.

15 As bad as Spofford was, the scariest thing that
16 ever happened to me in prison was when I was at Bedford
17 Hills Correctional Facility in Westchester, New York, a
18 couple of years later.

19 Now, I want the Committee to imagine you're 15
20 years old and you get locked up for fighting. At the time
21 of your arrest you lie to the cops, you tell them that
22 you're 17 years old instead of 15 because you want to look
23 cool in front of your so-called friends, but you're really
24 only 15, and you don't know what you're in for. Now you're
25 upstate in an adult prison doing a one- to three-year

1 sentence, all because you lied about your age. But no one
2 listens to you when you try to explain that you're only 15
3 and you don't really belong there. You call home when you
4 can, but your grandmother, who's elderly, says she's doing
5 everything she can to get you out of there, but for you she
6 can't move fast enough. There's no inmate classification
7 system in place, so, you're put in a cell in general
8 population with a woman who's about 50 years old and you do
9 your best to figure out how to take care of yourself.

10 The other inmates get wind of how young you are,
11 and plus, even though I'm 26 now, I still get carded, so,
12 imagine me being 15, I looked about 12, it wasn't hard to
13 figure out how old I was. And a woman who's about 32 years
14 old quickly takes you under her wing. She's much bigger
15 than you are, and she also is a leader of a prison crew
16 called the Latin Queens, so almost everyone showed her
17 respect, even the correction officers. You get moved closer
18 to her cell, and she gives you cigarettes and food. She
19 tells you stories about her childhood. She comes to your
20 rescue when you get into a fight with another adult woman.
21 Just when you start to trust her and think she's your
22 friend, she begins to make you feel uncomfortable. She's
23 always touching you, taking a shower every time you take a
24 shower, tries to kiss you. You tell her that you're not
25 attracted to her, but she says she loves you. You tell her

1 that you love her too, just not in that way.

2 Now you want to put some space between you and her
3 because you're feeling scared, but where can you go? You're
4 in prison! You ask the correction officers to move you but
5 they will not do it unless you tell them your life is in
6 danger, and you can't say that because at the time you don't
7 think it is, and you know the absolute worst thing you can
8 be in prison is a snitch. Besides, you don't want to get
9 the person in trouble after she's helped you.

10 Early one morning you go to take a shower and when
11 you're washing your hair, the older woman runs up behind
12 you, punches you in the face, what felt like hard as she
13 can. You're stunned; your nose begins to bleed; she pins
14 you up against the wall and shakes a sawed-off broomstick at
15 you and tells you she's going to take what's hers, meaning
16 she wants to have sex with you in one way or another.
17 You're terrified, and on top of everything else, you're
18 stark naked, dripping wet. So you tell her that she doesn't
19 have to take it this way, that you'll be her girlfriend, but
20 it's obvious that she doesn't believe you, so even though
21 you want to die, you pull her closer, despite your bloody
22 nose, you close your eyes and you kiss her. You're
23 devastated, but at least you keep from being raped. Several
24 months later, you're finally let out of that hell.

25 Between the ages of 16 and 18, approximately 1997

1 to 1999, I was incarcerated seven times, each time at Rikers
2 Island adolescent unit. I witnessed a lot of abuse of girls
3 there. For instance, at times when I showered, I observed
4 the male guards were watching in a manner that made me very
5 uncomfortable and clearly had nothing to do with security
6 safety. I also knew inappropriate things were happening
7 because girls who had no money in the commissary would --
8 I'm sorry. --- girls who had no money in the commissary
9 would suddenly have things that were highly inconvenient in
10 prison, like cigarettes and candy. When I asked the girls
11 where they got those things, they would tell me that the
12 correction officers had given it to them. For example, a
13 girl would say that a correction officer was "her man,"
14 meaning that he was giving her those items in return for
15 sexual favors. Sometimes I even saw girls putting on a show
16 for male correction officers in the shower, rubbing
17 themselves or using soap like a sex toy, while he watched
18 nearby smiling, and obviously sexually aroused.

19 In addition to sexual misconduct and coercion,
20 there were also instances where girls were viciously
21 attacked and forced to have sexual intercourse. One of the
22 lowest points of my life is when a male correction officer
23 at Rikers raped one of my friends there. She came to me and
24 told me immediately what happened and that he had assaulted
25 her in a room that was out of the way from other inmates or

1 correction officers. She was terrified and did not report
2 what happened to her. As a result, she received no medical
3 treatment or counseling. The correction officer knew that
4 this girl was my close friend and in days after the rape I
5 remember looking at him and him smiling at me if he knew
6 that I knew what he had done.

7 Even though a number of years have passed since I
8 was in custody, I still struggle with the memories of the
9 attempted sexual assault against me, the rape of my friend,
10 the male correction officers taking advantage of the girls
11 that they were supposed to be there to protect. To this day
12 I still have trouble sleeping at night. I can't undress in
13 front of other people. I'm very comfortable with sexual
14 intimacy. The only way I have to do -- the only way I have
15 to cope with this sexual violence I witnessed in prison is
16 by throwing myself into activism. By increasing public
17 awareness of what happens to young people behind bars, I
18 feel some small measure of peace within myself, and my
19 counseling is talking to you guys here today.

20 I ask the Commission to take its mission very
21 seriously when it comes to preventing sexual abuse against
22 youth in custody. Please understand that even for someone
23 like me who was able to fend off vicious attacks, the
24 struggle to move on with life, without being consumed by
25 rage, is a difficult one and I must manage it on a daily

1 basis. Something was stolen from me that I cannot get back,
2 and I speak out today to prevent other young people from
3 going through this.

4 And the only last thing I would like to say is
5 that we know prison is a form of punishment, but must it be
6 cruel and unusual?

7 Thank you.

8 CHAIRMAN WALTON: Thank you very much. Questions?

9 COMMISSIONER SMITH: One of the things -- and this
10 is actually -- good morning, first. And thank both of you
11 for your testimony. While I know that it was difficult, it
12 was very helpful and useful to us. One of the things that
13 actually stood out in both of your testimony was the fear of
14 reporting and the failure to report these incidents, and I
15 understand the reasons why those reports didn't happen. But
16 from the point of view of the Commission, what can we do,
17 what kinds of things would you suggest in order to make it
18 safer for people to report and what kinds of mechanisms
19 should be in place for youth to report? Either one of you.

20 MS. HARDIN: Well, I think one of the biggest
21 fears of reporting, you know, attacks, or anything against
22 like a guard -- on the guard, then I'll talk about the
23 inmate level. On the guard level, I mean, who will you be
24 reporting to? Another guard. And we, you know, they stick
25 together; they're not going to stick their neck out and, you