

JDI IN THE NEWS - 2010

Michael A. Jones *A Culture of LGBT Prison Rape, Change.org, Gay Rights Blog, April 23, 2010*

Imagine being a 28-year-old female transgender inmate in a Texas prison. Because of prison rules, you're actually taken to an all-male prison, and you're thrown into general population. In order to avoid getting beat up you have to surround yourself with a gang of prisoners, who in exchange for keeping you safe demand that you help them hold contraband, wash laundry, cook, and lie down and "let them" have sex with you whenever they want.

Things get so bad that in order to get out of general population, you find yourself misbehaving, so that guards will throw you in solitary confinement.

Talk about a nightmare scenario. Yet as Just Detention International (JDI) points out, this story is one among hundreds when it comes to the subject of LGBT rape and sexual assault in prison. And Texas, where this particular transgender inmate was housed, is facing a widespread culture of LGBT rape inside its penitentiary system.

A 2007 study by the federal government plotted the worst prisons in the country for rape and sexual assault. Of the top ten, guess how many were located in Texas?

Five. Or in other words, half of the top-ten prisons in the country renowned for being epicenters of prison rape and sexual assault are in the Lone Star state. And as JDI concludes, this is particularly troubling for LGBT inmates, who are much more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted inside the criminal justice system.

How many more stories, like the transgender inmate's described above, have to come to light before authorities act on this epidemic?

Maybe the problem doesn't lie with Texas, but rather with the Department of Justice, which is currently reviewing standards on dealing with rape in prisons as part of the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003. Attorney General Eric Holder is about to decide whether to issue a set of clear standards for prisons when it comes to preventing sexual assault and rape within the criminal justice system.

But some prison administrators are balking at the idea that they need to address rape within prison, saying that it would be too expensive. Don't let these administrators have the last word. Send Attorney General Eric Holder a message now, letting him know that prison rape is a huge problem, especially for LGBT inmates.



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3325 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 340 Los Angeles, CA 90010 [P](#) 213.384.1400 [F](#) 213.384.1411 [E](#) info@justdetention.org
1025 Vermont Avenue NW, Third Floor Washington, DC 20005 [P](#) 202.580.6971 [F](#) 202.580.6949

RAPE IS NOT PART OF THE PENALTY