Respect and Liberation for Transgender Prisoners

by Mychal Concepcion

I’ll never meet the image of a rehabilitated person at CCWF because I choose a male gender identity. (I sarcastically wrote “I choose”. It is to point out the prisons perception, not my reality.) The word rehabilitation is forced down our throats. As a lifer I can NOT parole if I don’t prove I am rehabilitated. In CDCR’s eyes that means a woman should be a woman. Fill women’s roles and obligations while understanding their place. So regardless of my healing and other accomplishments I could be denied [parole] out of pure biases. So rehabilitation is definitely used as a tool of social control.

I used the term “forced feminization” while speaking to an officer to describe her treatment of me. I felt she was harassing me by abusing her power to enforce the dress code. She told me that I was wearing pants that were too big and (god forbid) wearing them too low. She also said, “You’re a woman! You should dress like one!” She made other judgments and assumptions under her collar of authority like: “Still acting the same way as when you got arrested.”; “Aren’t’ you ever going to learn?” I wear bigger clothes to conceal my female biological body and wear my pants low like my male role models. It is part of my male gender identity expression. It is NOT a crime but it became a rules violation write up.

This incident brings up a theme I frequently hear from these officers, that I will NEVER meet the image of a rehabilitated person at CCWF because “I choose” a male gender identity. In their eyes it is a continuation of “bad” behavior, a conscious choice to be defiant. These messages reinforce similar ones I received from others in authority, as I grew up, from family to teachers as well as my peers. The message I internalized was “something is inherently wrong with me” and “I am bad therefore unworthy of love, respect, safety and I deserve neglect, disregard and abuse.” My resulting low self-worth did not bother to tell when my biological father beat me and molested me or when my stepfather abused me emotionally, verbally and raped my virginity and continued to rape me for five years, nor when my mother neglected to prevent it or stop it.... One of the consequences of the overt abuse by my father and stepfather and the passive abuse of my mother is I made I pacts with myself. One is, “No one is going to hurt me again!” Another one is, “I will NOT be weak like her.” So I joined a gang. I used the gang and being a gang member as a way to intimidate others and provoke fear, ensuring safety and personal empowerment. I hurt others in this process which is why I was arrested. My immature and uneducated means to meet my internally inherent needs culminated in taking a life, NOT the fuck-n size of my pants. Or my male gender identity. Today I know this. Today I work unceasingly to make amends. I also pass my work and learning on to my community in here. Yet our maturity and health is negated by “our choice” to be trans male by CCWF staff.

Lawsuit Denounces Assaults at CCWF

On November 9, 2017, a lawsuit was filed against the CDCR by four plaintiffs who are or were incarcerated at CCWF. The plaintiffs all identify as transgender, gender non-conforming (GNC) or queer. The lawsuit denounces two assaults where correctional officers used physical force, sexually harassed, and used homophobic and transphobic insults against the plaintiffs. Medical treatment was not (cont. pg 10)
The Bay Area Transgender Advocacy Group

The Bay Area Transgender Advocacy Group (TAG) is a coalition of advocates from Transgender, Gender Variant, Intersex Justice Project, CCWP, Justice Now, Legal Services for Prisoners with Children, Medina Orthwein LLP, Prison Law Office, the National Lawyers Guild Prisoner Advocacy Project, and others. TAG coordinates individual advocacy for incarcerated trans people and statewide advocacy efforts to support the collective survival and release of incarcerated trans people. TAG members have met with state legislators on issues including discrimination at parole hearings. Legislators on the Senate Rules Committee have the authority to confirm the CA Governor’s appointed commissioners to the Board of Parole Hearings, so TAG advocates for legislators to not confirm anti-trans commissioners. With sustained pressure, discriminatory commissioners will be removed from the Board.

To contact TAG, write c/o CCWP, Attn: Trans Advocacy Group.

Statement from CCWP & TAG

Dear Community,

We are writing with a call for unity between women and transgender people in women’s prisons. CDCR puts labels on us and tries to pit us against each other by race, religion, gender and more. CDCR tries to exploit our trauma, capitalize on our fears, and use division to further control us. We must band together with our transgender friends when they are scapegoated. Our strength is in our common struggle.

There are rumors that transgender men and women are getting excellent transition-related medical care. This is false, fabricated by staff and administrators to turn us against each other. No one in prison is getting good medical care. Trans men and women are also having their medical needs neglected by staff. Surgeries for trans prisoners are now “allowed,” but last year only 4 of the nearly 70 people who were referred for surgery by their medical/mental health provider were approved. Trans people regularly have their hormone treatments messed with. If staff say, “Transgender people are getting better care than you,” do not believe it. When it comes to having medical needs neglected by CDCR, we are all in the same boat.

We have also heard negativity about transgender women. Every woman in prison has been marginalized, degraded, and discriminated against. We are told what to do and how to do it. We are treated like objects, and not as people. We are told we don’t have a right to opinions, beliefs, and individuality. We must learn about each other’s struggles, build solidarity and refuse to harm each other. As a community of women and trans people we must stop cycles of abuse and help each other heal and stop hurting each other—all of us.

Ending the violence of the prison system itself is our common struggle. Strip searches and UA’s are violating and bringing up past trauma. To be denied appropriate clothing robs us of our identity and self-esteem. Sexual harassment and disrespect from staff is part of the daily dehumanization of prison life. Being in prison harms our bodies, our families, and our communities. We must fight this together! People of all genders are pillars of our community and leaders of our movement. As women and transgender people in women’s prisons, let us challenge the system and not each other. Let us celebrate each other’s strength and courage and stay united for our collective liberation!

Sincerely,
Bay Area Transgender Advocacy Group
California Coalition for Women Prisoners

Legal Column

CDCR Policy Changes

April 2015 Norsworthy v. Beard (CA): Michelle Norsworthy, a trans woman held in a CA men’s prison, was denied gender-affirming surgery even though a psychologist had repeatedly concluded that it was medically necessary to treat her gender dysphoria. She was also denied a legal name change. The Federal District Court Judge ruled this a violation of her rights to adequate medical care under the Eighth Amendment. The CDCR released Michelle on parole instead of complying with the court order to provide her with gender-affirming surgery.

August 2015 Quine v. Beard (CA): CDCR reached a settlement with Shiloh Quine, a transgender woman then held in a men’s prison, to move her to a women’s facility and provide medical care, including gender-affirming surgery, determined necessary by several medical and mental health professionals. The state also agreed to change its policies providing trans prisoners with access to clothing and commissary items consistent with their gender identity. [See pg. 10]

October 2015: California became the first state in the country to adopt a policy for trans people in prison to access gender-affirming surgery. The policy sets criteria for transgender people in prison to access care, including a determination of medical necessity by medical and mental health professionals [in accordance with California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 15, Section 3350.1].

April 2017: Amended California Code of Regulations (CCR). Title 15, Division 3, Sections 3000, 3030, 3190, and 3269 regarding state-issued property, authorized personal property, and housing assignments for transgender inmates and inmates having symptoms of gender dysphoria. This ruling enforced the 2015 settlement with Quine after CDCR tried to go back on their agreement to provide trans people with access to gendered items that are available to other men and women in prison— including nightgowns, hair brushes, clips, robes, earrings, and chest binders. This change to CDCR policy and regulation is titled: The Transgender Inmates Authorized Personal Property Schedule.

The court made clear that gender-restricted items must be available to transgender and gender nonconforming people who have some symptoms of gender dysphoria but who do not have an official diagnosis. The new CDCR regulation stipulates that a person be

• allowed to possess the state-issued clothing that corresponds to their gender identities in place of the state-issued clothing that corresponds to their anatomical sexes at designated institutions.
• allowed to possess authorized personal property items as listed on the Transgender Inmates Authorized Personal Property Schedule (4/28/17), which is incorporated by reference and organized in terms of designated male and female institutions.
• housed in designated institutions that are specifically selected to accommodate a wide variety of inmate custody levels and educational, vocational, and rehabilitative needs, and that shall provide continuous training to custody, medical, and mental health staff specifically regarding transgender inmates and inmates having symptoms of gender dysphoria and how to address their needs effectively within the overall inmate population.
• referred to a classification committee for a determination of appropriate housing at a designated institution.

October 2017: SB 310, the Name and Dignity Act, was signed into law by Gov. Brown, allowing transgender prisoners to legally change their name. Trans people in custody can petition the superior court for a legal name and gender marker change. This allows transgender people to have their chosen names respected while incarcerated and eases the re-entry process by ensuring that they have legal documents that match their gender presentation upon release.

Our thanks to Transgender Law Center for much of the information.
**Respect, Recognition and Liberation**

**Respeto, Reconocimiento y Liberación**

**Traducido por Vanessa Sequeira-Garza**

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**E**sta edición del *Fire Inside* se enfoca en la importancia de las luchas por identidad de género, libertad de expresión libres de discriminación y deshumanización. Esta ha sido una larga lucha — de muchas décadas y durante muchas generaciones — para las personas que están dentro de las prisiones y en las comunidades afuera.

Debido a que vivimos en una cultura que insiste en definir a las personas en roles de género estrechamente binarios, estereotipando a todos dentro de estas dos categorías, cualquiera que habite fuera de esta estrechez de “masculino” y “femenino” está destinada a ser juzgado fuertemente, discriminado y frecuentemente reprimido de una manera brutal. Nuestra cultura no reconoce a quienes nacen dentro de cuerpos equivocados o aquellas de nosotros que sentimos que no pertenecemos en la estrechez binaria de categorías y nos consideramos de género no conforme (GNC) o transgénero (trans).

El sistema de injusticia criminal desproporcionadamente controla, castiga y encierra a las personas que viven fuera de las normas de género. Y esta opresión continúa afectando a las personas aun dentro de las prisiones. Las prisiones son un sistema de control social. Cuando se encarcelan a las personas, la administración en las prisiones utilizan el género para manipular y controlarlos, así como utilizar otros tipos de divisiones sociales (raza, clase socioeconómica, estatus migratorio, discapacidad) para abusar y controlar a la gente. Por ejemplo, en vista de la falta de servicios médicos para todos en prisión, la lucha que las personas trans han tenido para la cirugía de resignación de sexo (ver pag. 11) esta siendo manipulada para crear resentimientos dentro de aquellos que no logran atención médica alguna. El Departamento de Corrección y Rehabilitación de California (CDCR por sus siglas en Inglés) ataca el fuego del resentimiento y división, mientras se les niega cirugías a un 94% de las personas trans que las solicitan. El CDCR debería estar haciendo que sus servicios médicos decen tes para todos.

La rehabilitación es utilizada como control social. Mychal Concepcion escribe “Nunca conoceré la imagen de una persona rehabilitada dentro de CCWF porque yo “escojo” la identificación del género masculino” (ver pag. 1) Como te vistas, como caminas, a quien ames o con quien te relacionas, que trabajo haces, son hechos utilizados para identificar y agredir específicamente a las personas trans o GNC tanto dentro como fuera de las prisiones. Las mujeres transgéneros encarceladas son víctimas de altas tasas de asaltos sexuales y abuso por los guardias. Este abuso y discriminación esta siendo manipulado para ponerlos en confrontación unos contra los otros.

Como seguimos adelante como comunidad, desarrollando fortalezas mientras permitimos espacios para escuchar lo que nos podría inquietar, lo que tememos y nuestras preocupaciones? Motivamos a todos leer y apoyar las demandas de acción de clase (class action lawsuits en inglés. Ver pag. 1) contra el CDCR por el ataque brutal en contra de las personas de género no conforme (GNC) dentro de CCWF en noviembre del 2016. Esta demanda fue la primera en denunciar a el CDCR por el abuso sistemático y la violencia en contra gente trans y GNC dentro de las prisiones de mujeres, así como en exigir medidas cautelares y protecciones.

CCWF esta comprometida en apoyar las iniciativas de personas GNC, y trabajamos para ser respetuosas e incluyentes en todos nuestros esfuerzos. Cuando las personas en CCWF cambiaron el nombre a uno de sus grupos de apoyo de “Mujeres con Capacidad de Adaptación” a “Residentes con Capacidad de Adaptación,” fue un enorme gesto de solidaridad y un importante reconocimiento a que no todas las personas en las prisiones de mujeres se identifican como mujeres. Podemos construir comunidades tanto dentro como fuera que invitan y apoyan las diferentes maneras de como se identifica cada persona. Esto incluye apoyando a las personas que están desafiando las horribles discriminaciones trasfóbicas de la Junta de Libertad Condicional (Board of Parole Hearings). Nuestras comunidades son más fuertes cuando cada persona se siente respetada, reconocida y sienten que pueden ser libres de ser quienes quieran ser.

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The criminal injustice system disproportionately controls, punishes and locks up people who live outside gender norms. And this targeted oppression continues to impact people when they are inside. Prison is a system of social control. When people are caged, the prison administration uses gender to manipulate and control people, just as it uses other types of social divisions (race, class, immigration status, disability) to abuse and control people. For example, in a scarcity of decent healthcare for everyone in prison, the struggle that trans people have fought for gender reassignment surgery (see pg. 11) is used to stir resentment among people inside who are being denied needed medical care. The CDCR fans the flames of resentment and division, even while denying surgery to 94% of trans people applying. The real issue is that CDCR should be providing decent healthcare for everyone.

Rehabilitation is used as social control. As Mychal Concepcion writes, “I’ll never meet the image of a rehabilitated person at CCWF because I ‘choose’ a male gender id.” (see pg. 1). How you dress, how you walk, who you love and relate to, what jobs you work, are all used to target trans and GNC people both inside prison and out. Incarcerated trans women face incredibly high rates of sexual assault and abuse by COS. This abuse and discrimination is manipulated to set people up in opposition to each other.

How do we move forward as a community, build our strength and leave room to hear each other’s issues and fears and concerns? We encourage everyone to read about and support the class action lawsuit (see pg. 1) against the CDCR for a brutal assault against GNC people at CCWF in Nov. 2016. This lawsuit is the first to call out the CDCR for systematic abuse and violence against trans and GNC people in the women’s prisons, and to demand injunctive relief and protection.

CCWF is committed to support trans and GNC organizing, and we work to be respectful and inclusive in all of our work. When people at CCWF changed the name of one of their support groups from “Resilient Women” to “Resilient Resident”, it was a strong show of solidarity and important recognition that not everyone in the women’s prisons defines themselves as women. We can build communities both inside and out that are welcoming and supportive of how each person defines themselves. This includes supporting people who are challenging the disgustingly transphobic discrimination of the Board of Parole Hearings. Our communities are stronger when each person feels respected, recognized, and free to be who they are.
A Slap Heard 'Round the World

Ahed Tamimi is a young Palestinian woman who spent her 17th birthday locked behind bars in an Israeli prison. She was arrested on December 19, 2017 in a pre-dawn raid on her family's home by heavily armed occupation soldiers for having slapped an Israeli soldier involved in shooting her younger cousin, 15 year old Mohammed Tamimi, 4 days earlier. Ahed's mother, Nariman Tamimi, had live-streamed a video of Ahed slapping the soldier. The video went viral with people all over the world posting and sharing Ahed's brave refusal to let her home and her village be taken over by soldiers. Mohammed, Ahed and the entire village of Nabi Saleh have been protesting the takeover of their village and their land by illegal Israeli settlements for years.

Days after Ahed's arrest, Nariman went to support her daughter and was arrested by Israeli forces. Mother and daughter are imprisoned together. Ahed is facing 12 charges in military court. Claiming to protect Ahed's right to privacy as a child, the judge closed the first military hearing to the public even though Ahed's lawyer requested that the hearing be open so that the world could see the injustices that children face in Israeli military courts. In March 2018, Ahed received a sentence of 8 months. Ahed is one of approximately 350 Palestinians under 18 imprisoned in Israeli jails. Inspired by Ahed's resistance to violent occupation, thousands around the world have demonstrated in solidarity with the Tamimi family. Ahed's father, Bassim Tamimi, wrote to Ahed on her 17th birthday:

"Here you stand before the world – like days past and days to come – full of truth because you were raised to be honest with yourself and others, and you have learned from our land and history that true freedom comes from having agency. It comes from being willing to challenge fear time and time again. To refuse to give up your dignity."

Ny Nourn is Free!

Since her release from ICE Detention in November 2017 Ny Nourn has been incredibly busy. She is currently in a re-entry program while she searches for her new home in San Francisco. In the past few months, Ny has been taking classes at the local community college. Just recently, she received an acceptance to San Francisco State University where she hopes to pursue a dual degree in Social Work and Psychology. Ny wants to balance work and school equally; she is currently seeking a part time job as well. Ny has received enormous support from the community, particularly from folks at Advancing Justice - Asian Law Caucus and Asian Prisoner Support Committee. She describes how surreal it is that just six months ago, she was fighting deportation. She does not take a single day for granted and finds immense joy in tangible things such as going shopping at the supermarket, enjoying a good burger, exploring Golden Gate Park. Ny wants to send this message to her incarcerated sisters: "You are worthy and you are valuable. We are outside fighting for your release with everything we have. Hang in there. We cannot wait to welcome you home."

Women Demand End to Detention Center Abuse

In September, 2017, 27 women at the West Contra Costa Detention Facility (WCCF) in Richmond, CA --which receives $6 million per year from ICE to run an immigration detention--signed a letter documenting complaints of being locked inside of cells for up to 23 hours without access to bathrooms, forcing them to choose between urinating or defecating into clothes or biohazard plastic bags. Repeated requests to leave their cells were ignored. The women wrote, "the deputies punish us and shut us up in lockdown for whatever they want. They make fun of the fact that whenever they yell everybody runs. I believe they like to feel powerful or they take pleasure in seeing us humiliated." Danny Patricia Menendez told Judge Joseph Park that she would rather be deported than live in there. On October 31, 2017, she was deported to Honduras, while her children remain in Fontana, California.

According to the women at the WCCF, jailers prohibited them from showering, making phone calls, cleaning cells, utilizing classroom learning materials, and accessing adequate medical care. After Ann Henriquez Nula broke her arm, she was offered topical cream, aspirin and a sling and put on an X-ray waitlist. Adriana Diaz did not receive medical attention after disclosing to guards a growing lump near her waistline.

The women shared their conditions and letters with volunteers from Freedom for Immigrants, formerly Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement (CIVIC). This group organized regular visits inside the jail and spread the word to local media outlets. While some conditions have improved since these stories were published in the San Francisco Chronicle, some women interviewed by the Chronicle in October 2017 stated that after speaking out, soap and shampoo were withheld from them and they weren't allowed to brush their teeth after meals. Nancy Mayer wrote, "All this makes me sick. I'm seeing a psychiatrist. I have nightmares. I feel pursued by them (deputies). I know they are watching me all the time."

After mounting pressure from elected officials, the public and the women inside, the California Attorney General announced he would look into allegations in December 2017 and the Contra Costa Sheriff's Office ran an internal investigation. At the end of that review, Sheriff David Livingston claimed that most complaints were unfounded. However, many of the women who wrote the original letter were not interviewed.

On February 15, 2018, ICE terminated a free hotline that detainees used to call CIVIC members and in early March, CIVIC's staff member was barred from visits at the facility claiming that CIVIC violated policies and procedures including talking to media. In response, the ACLU wrote a letter to the Sheriff's Office recognizing these actions as retaliation and a violation of the first amendment. Community members organized a demonstration outside the facility on March 11th where they demanded the hotline and visiting privileges be reinstated.

CCWP stands in solidarity with everyone experiencing abuse by guards and medical neglect at the WCCF. We recognize that the same abuses happen in women's prisons in CA and in cages across the nation. We hear the strong resistance coming from inside detention centers and we support those organizing inside and out, to break down the walls that separate immigrants and prisoners from their dignity, their families and their communities.
You Can’t Bully Me!
By Lisa Strawn

Why do you Bully me?
Is it because I'm smart, funny or because I have red hair?
Is it because I love everyone and you are filled with hate?

Why do you bully me? Maybe because I’m transgender. It didn’t give you the right to physically, mentally, and sexually assault me.

You think you won. But you didn’t.

What you did to me made me try harder each day to not be the victim, but to be strong and structured.

By you being my bully, the times you laughed, whispered, pointed at me and called me hurtful names, made me see that you were a lost person.

What you’ve done hasn’t made me angry at the world.

You helped me to be the most wonderful, kind, respectful woman that I need to be.

So while you bullied me and some still may do, you are the very reason I will never be you.

For you are very sad and alone in your life.

So for anyone that has ever been bullied, and for the 21 transgenders murdered last year and the 18 reported transgender suicides in the U.S., this is for you.

I will live and die knowing that the bully never wins.

You will live your life filled with hate and never know that the lives you’ve taken from this earth were precious.

And I won’t be your victim, I never was.

Because those who have been bullied and are not here live and breathe inside of me.

So the transgender who is smart, funny and has red hair will always be a winner.

Because you can’t bully me.

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Love, Hope, Unity

I always believed correctional facilities are supposed to help, not cause even worse trauma-harm. My partner identifies as a Male Transgender and every day he gets harassed, disrespected, treated like a joke. It hurts my heart. There are times when I feel that awkward feeling when you don’t know what to say to someone who calls him a “her.” It just is sad that people are so ugly in here and we continue to break a person’s dignity.

So a lot of the staff here in this prison do not view my partner being Transgender as acceptable. Which personally affects me because he gets harassed, pick on, talked to crassly, disrespected, laughed at. Imagine how I feel knowing my lover is singled out, sad by this, hurt. It is such a heart wrenching daily situation that I choose to endure because I believe in my partner and love him.

-Ralani Extis

The resilience of the “gender non-conforming” inmates is an example to us all. I have a good friend in here who is in the process of transitioning to male (as well as a niece who is going through the same change) and the prejudices are obvious but the strength of these individuals is just as obvious. Their struggle breaks my heart and warms it at the same time. Their ability to master adversity is inspiring.

-Melinda Jones

Things that resonated with my own experiences were the confusion in most people about whether I was male or female. I too have always felt like I had to act out aggressively to be respected. The part that was deep for me was, “you look more like the mastermind & more aggressive than your co-defendant.” That same thing happened to me.

-Rae Harris

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The Fire Inside

no one stands alone
community to believe that winning freedom is possible. People at CCWF and CIW have redoubled their efforts. The CCWF LWOP support group produced a “Book Project” including the stories of 22 people serving LWOP at CCWF. The support group has held a series of workshops training people inside to write strong advocacy letters to Gov. Brown on behalf of commutation. People inside are so incredibly strong and positive, embracing the philosophy of "each one teach one," reaching out to help all who want to file a petition. Those who have doubts are encouraged by others to find their voice, to be able to advocate for themselves. But in advocating for themselves, they are growing stronger and able to advocate for others. Governor Brown is paying attention to the advocacy of people serving life and LWOP, their families, and other advocates. Help us expand this campaign and keep the pressure on. It's working!
Lawsuit Filed Against Assaults at CCWF (cont. from page 1)
Sara Kendzior, Stacy Rojas, Dolores Canales, and Azadeh Zohrabi speak on a panel about abuse, retaliation and resistance in March 2018. They were provided for their injuries and they were placed in abusive isolation cages where they were subject to further sexual humiliation, and weren’t able to access bathrooms.

Why was a lawsuit filed?
• The plaintiffs all tried to go through the prison’s 602 grievance process to address the assaults. In some cases 602s were blocked from being processed and in other cases the process was exhausted but did not result in relief. The CDCR controls the 602 process and rarely provides substantial relief for grievances.
• Many letters were written by advocates to CCWF’s warden and the CDCR asking that measures be taken to deal with the plaintiffs’ grievances and to hold guards accountable.
• A lawsuit was finally filed because CDCR had done nothing to respond to these requests for relief and change.
• Plaintiffs recognize that the assaults on them are part of a larger pattern of excessive force by guards that impact many other women and trans prisoners. Their hope is that the lawsuit will help prevent such incidents in the future.

What specific changes are the plaintiffs hoping to accomplish with the lawsuit?
The plaintiffs want to win change/injunctive relief in the areas listed below:
• Stop the prison’s targeting of gender non-conformity.
• Hold prison guards and staff accountable when they use excessive force against people in prison. This could include reassignment, suspension, firing and legal prosecution.
• End the use of force, intimidation and other forms of retaliation against people who try to document and report guard misconduct. Protect whistleblowers inside prisons!
• End the use of punitive isolation cages with no access to toilets and no monitoring for health problems.
• Ensure that prisoners who are involved in any physical altercation with guards receive medical care as already mandated (but not implemented) by CDCR policies.
• Ensure the upholding of American with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandated policies and accommodations for incarcerated people with disabilities in all situations.
• Develop a whistle blowing process that is managed by an agency external to the CDCR.

Why does the lawsuit specify that plaintiffs were all transgender, gender non-conforming or queer?
• Many women in prison are sexually violated and harassed. In the past few years there has been an increasing pattern of physical and sexual violence against transgender, gender non-conforming and queer women prisoners at CCWF.
• These incidents represent a backlash against hard-won legal rights for trans people in prison, such as the right to access hormone therapy. They reflect officer resentment about changing cultural norms regarding gender identity.
• The incidents also re-traumatize people who are survivors of sexual violence, homophobia and transphobia before they were incarcerated.
• Winning changes in procedures for trans and GNC people will support everyone who is subject to physical and sexual violence.

How does this lawsuit connect to the growing #MeToo movement?
• #MeToo represents a moment of exploding social awareness in this country about the pervasiveness of sexual harassment and violence by those in power against vulnerable people. Women, trans and GNC people inside prisons are vulnerable, invisible targets of the guards, staff and prison administration who control their lives. They need to be included as part of #MeToo.

How can people support the lawsuit?
• A grassroots campaign, anchored by loved ones and advocates, will educate and mobilize the public to demand an end to abusive and discriminatory behavior behind prison walls.
• The legal team is continuing to collect stories from other prisoners about abusive attacks which could be used as amplifying material or possibly to support a class action lawsuit in the future.
• Contact CCWP for updates and ways to support.

Over 80% of incarcerated women have suffered sexual abuse or violence. When women defend themselves, they often are criminalized and end up in prison. The experience of sexual violence only gets worse inside jails and prison.

#MeToo is very powerful. Sexual abuse should be recognized/acknowledged. Everyone has a right to say what they experienced or witnessed. We need to have respect as women. We should be able to express ourselves so we can make right choices, the choices we want to make. Every woman should be heard, transgender or anything. To be able to stand up to abuse you have to grow, to change yourself from a victim to a survivor and a fighter. When you are able to honestly reflect on your experiences, you begin to change, to think differently about yourself and your situation.

-Jessica M.

I support #MeToo, what I have seen on TV. I have been in situations like that, around nasty old men. No one ever taught us to speak up. All I knew was to try to stay away from them. It didn’t always work. The movement allows us to finally stand up. It takes a strong woman to do that. Hearing others’ stories makes me feel I, too, could speak.

-Claudia Garcia

One would think that nothing like this kind of harassment could happen to women in such high positions.

-Melissa

I understand why people keep quiet about the abuse they suffer. There is a fear of becoming labeled by the good-old-boys network: a whistle-blower or a liar. It’s not fair that women are not heard. Most women do not lie about abuse.

Fear and shame kept me quiet when I was abused. I had sex when what I wanted was love. It made me appear promiscuous. Should I complain, I was afraid my father would kill someone, perhaps me, perhaps the man. Now I know one should not be afraid to speak up.

I know there are other women who, like me, have been used in the worst way. They may feel that all the wrong comes from the other side. The best you can do is trust the best in you, trust your heart. God gave us sense to know what’s right. Don’t ignore it.

There was only one man in my life who didn’t judge me, who supported me in my education, my religion, etc. He encouraged me to get my high school diploma. Sadly, he passed away in March 2017. I will always love him. He was open and honest as a man, a friend and a husband I always wanted. He respected me as a woman and as a human being.

-Rita Marie Lewis

Incarcerated Women Say #MeToo
When I think of the movement #MeToo It leads me to believe, What happened to me, happened to you. Domestic/sexual/institutional violence Are all ways to keep us silenced.

If you only knew how many times I was told to be quiet! Don’t talk about that. No one wants to hear your whining. We’ve all been through that.

I was just a kid when he did what he did. I never expected to be affected after all these years.

I was a baby who had a baby And ended up in prison To be abused again by my alleged protectors. Protect and serve is such a joke! Let’s just call it what it is—— the new Jim Crow

They say this is a man’s world! But we know that’s not true. The earth is our turf, boy Somebody gave birth to you!

I am not here to remain silent These are issues that affect us all And we need to talk about it.

-Alisha Coleman, Program Assistant for CCWP, wrote and recited this poem on the spot at the Oakland women’s March.

Diana Block & Alisha Coleman at the Women’s March in Oakland, CA

The Fire Inside
Locked in a cell surrounded by white
Searching for myself with all my might
Softly the demons call my name
Slowly but surely driving me insane
What they want I don’t have to give
But how do I let go and learn to forgive?

Still in this cell cold as ice
If I do listen, what is the price?
They’re just voices, they mean no harm
Maybe I shouldn’t feel so alarmed
Yet everyday I plead, “Please let me be!”
As I feel them taking control of me.

Stuck in this hell no longer alone
The demons ugly faces have finally shown
They torment and taunt me all night long
I can’t take anymore, I’m too weak to stay strong
This time I’ve failed, I won’t pass the test
I see crimson red as the blade cuts my flesh.

-Gata, CIW

Remembering Jay Ho

Jaylene Rebecca Ho, known as “Jay Ho” committed suicide on October 28, 2017 while being housed in Ad-Seg at CCWF. Jay was a charismatic person! People were drawn to her, for her unique personality, style and ways. She had a heart of Gold! She was always standing up for what she believed was wrong or what was right to inmates and staff alike. She wouldn’t “conform” to anyone else’s ideas or beliefs if it wasn’t what felt right to her. She had a sense of humor that had everyone around her laughing and smiling. She was never afraid to be herself or to show her true feelings. She’d defend the “under-dog” from bullying, and lend a hand or the shirt off her back to someone in need. Jay was and is loved by many people, and she’s greatly missed! She’s changed my life for the better, ever since the day she stole my heart! I miss her each moment of every day, and feel nothing but pain in my soul without her. She was and is the True Love of my life, forever and always! Love you and miss you so much baby!

Love,
Jay’s Wife and Soulmate
Casey Michelle Coglianeese
This incident brings up a theme I frequently hear from violation write up. It is part of my male gender identity and transphobic insults against the plaintiffs. Medical treatment was not provided.

The lawsuit denounces two assaults where correctional officers used physical force, sexually harassed, and continued to rape me for five years, nor when my stepfather and the passive abuse of my mother is depicted. The message I internalized was that I was "bad" behavior, a conscious choice to be defiant. These portrayals are negated by "our choice" to be trans male by CCWF. I believe I will NEVER meet the image of a rehabilitated person at CCWF because "I choose" a male gender identity. In their eyes it is a continuation of my immature and uneducated means to meet my needs and fill women's roles and obligations while understanding rehabilitation is forced down our throats. As a lifer I feel perpetually under her collar of authority like: "Still acting the same as when you got arrested." "Aren't you ever going to learn?" I wear bigger clothes to conceal my female biological body and wear my pants low like my gang member as a way to intimidate others and provoke fear, ensuring safety and personal empowerment. I made pacts with myself. One is, "No one is going to hurt others in this process which is why I was arrested." I also pass my work and learning on to my community in here. Yet our maturity and health were too big and (god forbid) wearing them too low. I used the term "forced feminization" while speaking to an officer to describe her treatment of me. I felt she is harassing me by abusing her power to enforce the law.

We Must always Stand Together, fearless & unified against any intruder who tries to take our lives, our families, or our freedom.

Artist: Annie Morgan

Come work with us!

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CCWP is a grassroots social justice organization, with members inside and outside prison, that challenges the institutional violence imposed on women, transgender people and communities of color by the prison industrial complex (PIC). We see the struggle for racial and gender justice as central to dismantling the PIC, and we prioritize the leadership of the people, families and communities most impacted in building this movement.

Yes, I want to support women prisoners!

☐ Please contact me to volunteer
☐ Enclosed is $25 contribution to help send a newsletter subscription to a woman in prison
☐ Enclosed is my contribution of $ __________

Name: _______________________________
Address: _______________________________
Phone/email: _________________________

Please make checks payable to: CCWP/LSPC, 1540 Market St., Room 490, San Francisco, CA 94102