

November 8, 2011

Dear Howard,

While not suggesting the experience was wholly comparable, on 11/3/11 I and the other inmates at the ADTC were subjected to a torrent and barrage of physical and verbal abuse, intimidation, humiliation and degradation that differed only in degree to the purging of the Warsaw ghetto by Nazi SS stormtroopers in WWII and the brutal suppression of the civil rights marchers by Sheriff "Bull" Conners in the 1960s. On that day over 150 corrections officers from the DOC Special Operations Group (SOG) unit and the DOC training center, descended on the ADTC at about 7:00 AM and subjected the inmate population to a reign of terror for the next 16 hours. Sweeping through the entire building, they destroyed thousands of dollars of inmate property, beat and physically abused more than a dozen (perhaps as many as two dozen inmates). Among them were a 75-year-old inmate who just last week returned to the ADTC from hernia surgery; barely able to walk, he didn't move fast enough for SOG and when pushed and told to move quicker, he tried to explain to an officer that he had just had surgery and couldn't walk any faster. He was punched and shoved, and eventually was readmitted to the hospital that night because one of his surgical staples had been pulled out. Another inmate had just had back surgery and when tried to tell that to a SOG officer, he was thrown to the ground and repeatedly kicked in his back.

When the SOG units charged onto our wing, they immediately began cursing and screaming at us, telling us that "we hate you, you're a bunch of motherfucking faggots and tree jumpers, you're nothing but pieces of shit, just give us a reason to beat you down" With dogs barking and straining at the leash they made us bunch up against each other, telling us to get up into each other's asses ("balls to butts, just the way you fucking faggots like it."). At one point, I was called a "fucking piece of shit" while a SOG officer grabbed me by my hair, pulled my head down and attempted to throw me into an inmate standing in front of me. However, because my hair was short, he lost his grip and I was able to catch myself from falling. He then pushed me into the other inmate, yelling at me "you fucking tree jumper, you like sucking little boys' dicks don't you, you fucking faggot."

Behind me, I heard another SOG officer harassing a young gay inmate who presents as very effeminate. The officer grabbed his ID card and asked him his name, which he told the officer. The officer then said, "that's not your name any more. Your name is bitch now, you're now my bitch." He then grabbed the inmate brought him to another SOG officer and told him to tell the officer his name. The inmate said nothing, so the SOG officer grabbed his neck and started to squeeze it until he said "bitch." Then the officer asked him, "Who's bitch are you?" forcing him to answer, "Your bitch." He then walked the inmate from SOG Officer to SOG officer forcing him to repeatedly answer the question, "Who are you?" with "I'm your bitch" eventually leaving the young kid in tears, which they then ridiculed even more.

SOG officers made fun of some inmates genitals during strip searches, and in some cases, refused to let them put on their underwear or socks when getting dressed. Throughout this we were required to interlock our fingers behind our heads, keeping our elbows in tight, and our heads pointed down (this makes it virtually impossible to see what is going on or, more importantly, to identify the officer abusing you). We were forced to maintain that position for nearly an hour. Try it for about five minutes and you'll

see how uncomfortable it becomes, and how much strain it places on your neck. Any attempt to relieve the strain, shift your muscles, or stretch in any way leads to being slapped or punched and being threatened with a beat down if we move a muscle.

Over 200 inmates from another wing, were forced to remain out of doors in the yard from about 4:00 or 4:30 PM to 7:30 to 8:00 PM at night. When they were strip searched, they were not permitted to take their jackets out, and in fact, were not permitted to wear their sweatshirts or khaki shirts. Most spent 3-4 hours in the yard wearing nothing but a t-shirt on a night when the temperature was below 50 degrees.

Another inmate was forced to stand barefoot in dog shit deposited by one of the dogs. Another elderly gentlemen, being forced to run down a steep ramp with his hands behind his head, was pushed when he didn't move fast enough, lost his balance and fell face first into the concrete, unable to get his hands down fast enough to break the fall. He was taken to the infirmary with a bloody face. Inmates were punched in the ribs and kicked in their kidneys. One inmate didn't bend over correctly during a strip search (bending at his knees as is typical for ADTC strip searches as opposed to at the waist as required by SOG), was kicked in the testicles as punishment. When he fell over from the pain, he fell into another SOG officer next to him who used this as a justification to consider himself being attacked and beat the inmate down.

I could go on, page after page with stories that are being reported. On the positive side, the next day as inmates returned to group and told their therapist what happened they became indignant and started to write up the reports of abuse they heard from inmates. Additionally, some regular ADTC officers who witnessed the abuse, couldn't stomach what they saw and to their credit choose to break the "blue wall of silence" and wrote up reports against the SOG officers. On Monday, Administrator Meg Yatauro met with the Inmate Liaison Committee and advised that though she had been asked if she wanted a SOG unit to sweep the building last week, she declined believing such a sweep was unnecessary. She was overruled by the head of SOG and the Commissioner, and first learned of the sweep when she arrived on Thursday. She advised the committee that she was appalled at the conduct of SOG, and the reports she was getting from therapists and from her own officers and told the committee to tell the inmates to file grievances over what they experienced. She claimed that she would protect us from any retaliation, that she wanted everything reported so she could take action through the chain of command.

However, this needs to leave the building. DOC is hypersensitive to the public perception. I need friends and family to write, call or email the commission, Gary Lanigan (Address Department of Corrections, P.O. Box 863, Trenton, NJ 08625; phone number, ~~exterior~~ 609-292-4036 or 609-~~602~~ ; email [Howard please look 'for this on the Internet and insert here]). Personally, I believe email to be the most efficient method with the added virtue of it being easily documented.

Letters should express outrage over the conduct of SOG at the ADTC, noting that this is designed as a treatment center focusing on addressing the psychological problems and traumatic histories of the inmates which lead to their committing sex offenses, noting that recapitulating those histories of personal abuse (many of the inmates here having been physically, emotionally, and sexually abused as children), is countertherapeutic and only increases the risk of recidivism to the extent that it interferes with therapeutic progress and regresses inmates to prior unhealthy psychological

states.

Additionally, I would comment on the homophobic nature of many of the comments as both being a violation of New Jersey's Law Against Discrimination, and various Hate Crime laws, but immoral, indefensible and intolerable in an age where gay and lesbian soldiers are now being allowed to serve openly in the military. Letters can also focus on the clear failure of supervisors to monitor and control officers in their charge. A sample letter/email might be along the following lines.

Dear Mr. Lanigan,

I am a friend and supporter of an inmate at the ADTC who recently contacted me about the institutional shakedown of that facility on November 3, 2011, and the reign of terror and abuse inflicted on this inmate and other inmates in the facility. He reported the use of extreme hate language, including homophobic comments, and the use of physical, verbal, psychological and emotional abuse by members of the Special Operations Groups (SOG). I won't recount the specifics of the allegations made against SOG, as I was told that these have been documented in innumerable grievances and incident reports filed by the inmates, therapy and custody staff of the ADTC. I am writing to express my outrage at these reports and the wholly unprofessional and potentially criminal conduct of SOG. While in general the role of custody staff, including SOG is to ensure security which includes protecting the rights and ensuring the safety of state prisoners, I understand the ADTC has an additional, overarching purpose; to provide psychological treatment to those sentenced there by the courts because their sex offending behavior was found by the courts to be due to a psychological problem. I understand that many ADTC sentenced inmates suffer from severe histories of sexual and physical and emotional abuse as children which may have contributed to their psychological problems leading to their offending behavior. How can SOG justify inflicting the same type of abuse that, in many cases, created the psychological problems leading to the crimes committed by these ADTC inmates. I don't see how the public safety is enhanced by creating greater psychological disturbance and further traumatizing these individuals. I urge your office to take immediate action to ensure that the events of 11/3/11 do not reoccur, that apologies and restitution be afforded the ADTC inmates, and that every effort be made to restore to the ADTC the therapeutic purpose and environment for which it was originally created.

~~Thank you for your attention to this matter.~~

sincerely,

There is a second issue that needs to be addressed as well.
The same day the Administrator told the inmates to write up what happened on the 3rd. she also advised that SOG complained to the ~~Administrator~~ Commissioner about the ADTC Hobby and Music program which permits ADTC inmates to have

keep guitars and keyboards in their housing areas as part of the music program, and to keep art supplies in their housing areas as well to work on art projects (typically, this includes watercolor and acrylic paints, paint brushes, color pencils and pens, crochet yarn and crochet hooks, etc.). Consequently, the commissioner is pushing to prohibit inmates from having these items in their areas, perhaps restricting them to the Art and Music rooms. This was essentially eliminate these programs as neither the Art nor Musica rooms have sufficient physical space or time slots for all the inmates who participate in this program to access it. The reality is that from a therapeutic perspective, these are very important programs. As inmates deal with their personal traumatic histories, the arts provide a form of creative release as they work through the psychological sequelae of their personal histories. Even for myself, this has been an enormously stressful and anxiety-ridden year. One of the key ways I managed this stress was to take up crocheting which I have found to be enormously relaxing and a means of distracting my focus from the stresses and strains of this place. Even on medication I struggled with sleeping and found that spending a couple of hours working on an afghan before going to bed, had an enormously calming effect.

Similarly, playing music on my keyboard is very relaxing and soothing and stress reducing. I know many inmates in here who have become gifted artists and musicians in the time they've been here. Some have composed remarkably insightful songs and lyrics that express the pain and trauma of their childhoods as well as their path to healthier living. The music and artwork is cathartic for many inmates here. In fact, the art program here was instituted when the program was started in 1976 as "art therapy."

SOG's showed its hand when it told all of us how much they hate us. Their reports to the Commissioner sound like sour grapes about the fact that we have these programs here, which they clearly think we don't deserve. So the question is, would DOC rather have ADTC inmates spending time, painting, drawing, playing and writing music, and otherwise engaging in creative pursuits, or watching Jerry Springer, playing cards or dominoes, or other unhealthy lifestyle behaviors that typifies the typical prisoner's day? DOC's excuse will be security concerns. But the reality is that the ADTC is the safest institution in the DOC prison complex. We have fewer disciplinary reports than any other institution. There has never been a riot or mass action of inmates at ADTC. We have the lowest recidivism rate of any state prison (a third of the state-wide average. We have fewer fights here than anywhere else (maybe 3 or 4 times a year a couple of inmates get into a pushing match compared to almost daily fist fights in places like South Woods). The Commissioner's avowed goal is to make ADTC like every other State Prison. Why wouldn't he want to make every other state prison like ADTC. What makes the place work is the therapeutic environment created not just in the weekly therapy groups, but the educational, recreational and artistic programs that give inmates a wide variety of ways to make productive use of their time here.

So I would also ask my friends and family to write, call or email the Commissioner's Office, asking that these art and music hobby programs be preserved so that inmates can make productive use of their time on the housing units, specially in light of the unique mission of this facility and its positive historical record of being a safe facility. I would address this issue a couple of days after addressing the SOG issue above.

Thanks to all of you for your support. Government officials are not

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really used to hearing from the public. If the Commissioner gets 2-30 phones calls, emails or letters from the friends and families of ADTC inmates (I've encouraged other inmates to have their families/friends, call or write the Commissioner), he'll take notice. I also suggest that any communications sent to the Commissioner be copied to the State Senator and Assemblyperson of your district, and/or Senator Nia Gill (who has been proactive about prison reform in the past).

It would be helpful if you copied Howard on anything you send as well and any response you get. Thanks again.