

AD HOC COMMITTEE FOR PRISON HEALTH CARE REFORM

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ADVOCATES FOR TRANSGENDER PRISONERS CHALLENGE DISCRIMINATION AT VACAVILLE STATE PRISON

January 21 -- Supporters of the rights of transgender prisoners today sent a letter to Warden Ana Olivares of the California Medical Facility-Vacaville challenging the lack of care and treatment of the incarcerated transgender population at that institution. The letter was signed by over 25 organizations and individuals.

The newly formed Ad Hoc Committee for Prison Health Care Reform called for Warden Olivares to investigate the "poor and nonexistent" medical and mental health care for transgendered prisoners at CMF-Vacaville.

According to Scott Cozza, a community advocate and member of the ad hoc committee, CMF-Vacaville does not have a mental health program or a medical clinic that addresses the special needs of the transgendered prisoner.

Claiming that some corrections officers "demean, demoralize, humiliate and discriminate against transgendered prisoners," the ad hoc committee also called for special training for correctional officers and staff on the psycho-social issues of the transgender community.

Judy Greenspan, Director of Catholic Charities' HIV/AIDS in Prison Project, noted that most of the transgender population is automatically housed in the prison's HIV Unit whether they are HIV+ or not. "Transgender prisoners are often the victims of rape and violence within society and within prisons. The fact that they are housed in the HIV Unit unnecessarily puts them at risk for HIV infection," Greenspan stated.

The letter to Warden Olivares also criticized the Vacaville prison for not allowing most transgendered prisoners access to hormonal therapy. "We believe that transgendered prisoners should be allowed to live their lifestyle within the prison and that includes access to hormone treatments and psychosocial support groups," said Karen Shain of the California Coalition for Women Prisoners

"We have asked Warden Olivares to immediately investigate the health care concerns outlined in our letter and to schedule a meeting with concerned members of our ad hoc committee," Cozza added.