

USP

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open cuts on their wrist from handcuffs being placed so tight, marks around their chest were a metal chain is placed around them.”

Sprout said most inmates in hard restraints he has interviewed have been placed their for receiving a false incident report of threatening to hurt a cellmate or staff, often

Prison Project points to abuse at USP

Lewisburg Prison Project USP Lewisburg practices are "torture"
BY MAIT FARRAND
Staff writer

LEWISBURG — Allegations of abuse amounting to torture at USP Lewisburg have persisted since new security protocol were imposed in 2009. David Sprout, a paralegal and member of the Lewisburg Prison Project (LPP), said he witnessed evidence of practices which lead to injury during times when he has legally visited the prison.

“I have witnessed multiple men with injuries to their wrist, chest and ankles from being placed in hard restraints,” he said. “They have

connected with refusing a cellmate assignment out of fear for their own safety.

“You’re placed in a cell by yourself. So you are not a threat to other inmate, and you are kept there for hours or days,” Sprout said of the practice. “We consider that tor-

ture.”

Sprout noted that if an inmate assaults staff, it is understandable that they are dealt with accordingly.

However, a practice of double-celling, or housing two inmates in a small cell makes existing problems worse and creates problems of its own. The practice is followed according to mandates from Washington.

“Some of these cells, two men can’t walk in the cell at the same time. That’s how small they are,” Sprout added. “Even if you get along with your cellmate...you are going to have...issues come up.”

Placing an inmate with mental health issues in such a cell could exacerbate such problems.

Though an inmate is allowed to request a different cellmate due to conflicts involving gangs, sexual orientation or other matters, it is not normally done. If an inmate refuses to be cuffed as a cellmate is moved to his cell, it is considered a threat liable to result in hard restraint, being stripped and put in paper clothes.

“That is one of our main issues,” Sprout said. “Sometimes now that winter is coming (officers) will come in and open the window while you are in paper clothes. There is no penological justification.”

Sprout downplayed the LPP’s goals, and noted that they are only asking that the Bureau of Prisons follow its own policies.

“We are not telling them what to do,” he added. “Obviously, they are the experts.”

Actions of some corrections officers also need to come under more careful scrutiny.

“There are racist issues going on in Lewisburg,” Sprout said. “Inmates are taken places where there are no cameras. Inmates are cuffed behind their back and assaulted.”

Sprout conceded that society demands that persons convicted of crimes lose freedoms, but investigation is needed of torture, assault allegations and when officers break the law.

“They should be better than that,” he said. “We believe it has been going on for quite some time. We don’t believe the Bureau of Prisons can investigate themselves.”

The prevailing official attitude, Sprout maintained, was that all officials tell the truth, and all inmates lie.

The institution’s inability to follow its own rules has proven additionally harmful to inmates with mental illnesses. Mental health professionals often interview inmates by talking through the closed door

Of the more than 1,000 inmates listed as held at USP Lewisburg, more than 70 percent are in a Special Management Unit (SMU) or small cells for 23 hours per day. Sprout estimated only 200 to 300 inmates were in a “general population.” Neither figure reflects inmates at the local prison camp.

Treatment of inmates at USP Lewisburg was the topic of an investigative report filed by National Public Radio and The Marshall Project in October.

The report described the restraints imposed on inmates who refuse cellmates. Threats of securing each limb to a concrete slab or bed frame were also made, a practice considered more painful.

The Bureau of Prisons responded by maintaining support of humane treatment of inmates, unpromising ethical conduct among staff and serious investigation of misconduct allegations.

SMUs were instituted, it said, to address inmates who have participated in gang activity, have a history of serious disciplinary infractions or have adversely affected the orderly operation of the facility.

The bureau further claimed that since the start of the SMU program, there has been a downward trend in serious assaults on staff and inmates.

Standard Journal’s requests to visit the prison in Lewisburg have been denied for 13 months now.

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