

October 22, 2024

Caitlin Robertson, Ph.D., Director  
Washington Office of Corrections Ombuds  
2700 Evergreen Parkway  
NW Olympia, WA 98505



FOUNDATION  
AGAINST  
INTOLERANCE  
& RACISM

*Sent via email*

**Re: Housing Policy Concerns at the Washington Corrections Center for Women**

Dear Director Robertson:

We are writing on behalf of the Foundation Against Intolerance & Racism (FAIR), a nonpartisan organization dedicated to advancing civil rights and liberties rooted in our common humanity. Since July, we have worked with several inmates at the Washington Corrections Center for Women (WCCW) who have significant concerns about the policy of allowing male inmates to be housed within the facility. To date, we are on notice of more than 35 female inmates who have filed Resolution Request forms to formally grieve their concerns on this issue.

In alignment with your Office's mission of providing "opportunities for people impacted by incarceration to raise issues and resolve conflicts," and working "to reduce harm in the Washington corrections system by negotiating outcomes, recommending positive change, and reporting individual and systemic concerns," we feel you are uniquely positioned to help bring relief to many incarcerated individuals in Washington. To that end, we respectfully request that your office form a task force to gather and evaluate feedback from inmates currently incarcerated at WCCW regarding the policy that allows male inmates to be housed within the facility. The safety of all inmates is critical, and the policy of allowing males to be housed with females imposes a discriminatory burden on the females.

As you know, the biological differences between males and females are well-known and well-documented. On average, males are physically larger and stronger than females, which can create an imbalance in physical power dynamics. Further, males' primary sex characteristics (including a penis and testicles) enables males to inflict sexual violence on females in a distinctly traumatic manner, and can impregnate females forcing females to bear a uniquely female medical burden. Housing female inmates with male inmates who possess these physical advantages inherently makes the females vulnerable to physical and emotional abuse.

Moreover, statistics indicate that a significant proportion of female inmates have experienced sexual abuse by males prior to their incarceration. According to a report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, approximately 57% of female state prisoners have a history of past physical or sexual abuse. These prevalent life experiences make the female inmate population especially vulnerable, both physically and emotionally, when required to share housing with male inmates.

Given these concerns, it is imperative to involve the affected individuals directly. Forming a task force to collect and consider feedback from the female inmates at WCCW would provide invaluable insights into the impact of this policy on their safety and well-being. This initiative would not only empower the inmates by giving them a voice but also help in developing informed policies that prioritize their rights and protection.

We further recommend that the Office of Corrections create a formal report based on the findings of this task force. This report should include recommendations for policy changes to be submitted to the Washington Department of Corrections. Such a proactive approach would demonstrate a commitment to upholding the safety and dignity of all inmates under the state's care.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I am confident that, under your leadership, the Office of Corrections can take meaningful steps to address these concerns and enhance the well-being of the incarcerated females at WCCW.

Sincerely,

*Leigh Ann O'Neill*

Leigh Ann O'Neill  
Director of Legal Advocacy, FAIR

*Candice Jackson*

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Network Attorney, FAIR