

NAACP NEWARK, NJ BRANCH

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

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February 25, 2021

AN OPEN LETTER FROM NAACP NEWARK NJ

RE: Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women (EMCFW) - Recent Developments

As members of the New Jersey community, we should be ashamed we have allowed inhumane, horrific behavior and acts of heinous misconduct to escalate to front page news, without facilitating viable solutions for women inmates at the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women (EMCFW).

First, it is vitally important that New Jersey fully understands the history of this awful place, with its stained reputation of inexcusable and appalling treatment towards women for at least 30 years. It is just being fully revealed to the general population because of modern technology and women inmates voicing their pain, regarding the despicable and horrendous treatment they endure on a 24/7 daily basis. Now the entire state and country are aware.

For almost a half century, some EMCFW staff/personnel have callously entertained themselves by mistreating, disrespecting and blatantly attacking these women without consequence, reprimand or little corrective action. Even more discouraging is the lack of written reports or Op-Ed articles by any NJ Elected Public Official to address the problems of alleged misconduct demanding change to the NJDOC until three years ago and most recently three weeks ago.

During testimonies in 2018 and 2020, Chairwoman, NJ Senator Linda Greenstein and the NJ Senate Law & Public Safety Committee heard allegations about unethical and unlawful behavior by staff/personnel from former inmates and the negligence of inadequate operations by the New Jersey Department of Correction's (NJDOC) Union Leadership.

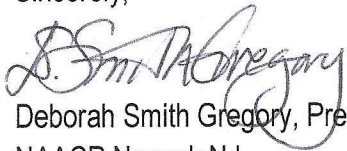
NJDOC has had numerous Commissioners to head this prison throughout these decades of alleged abuse. To address inmate complaints, the establishment of an Ombudsperson Office was created in 1972 renamed in 2005 to the Office of the Public Advocate and then reconfigured back to Ombudsperson Office in 2010 before being transferred from the Corrections Department to the Office of the Governor "in but not of" the Department of the Treasury. The question is, with a budget of \$784,000 and eight full time employees as of 2010, how has this office addressed an insidious, ingrained culture of abuse by NJDOC staff/personnel? Now Edna Mahan Prison has come back into public view and while NJ lawmakers are clamoring for the resignation of the current commissioner, clearly the issue is not the position but the long-standing practices fueled with an attitude of entitlement by the staff and personnel within the walls of Edna Mahan.

The NAACP Newark NJ urges the NJDOC to create a more robust and vigorous oversight department as the current oversight department-the Office of Corrections Ombudsperson has not been visible or effective during this debacle. According to their 2020 Annual Report, there is no mention of matters involving acts of misconduct that violates the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), which is quite astounding since we've heard testimony that women inmates have been getting raped at that prison for decades! Their laissez-faire attitude is unacceptable and their NJ State Budget allocation should be intensively examined immediately by lawmakers.

In our continuous correspondence with the U.S. Department of Justice Team an unfavorable DOJ report surfaced in April 2020 which warranted an investigation and in our recent NJ Advance Media Op-Ed article (June 9, 2020), NAACP Newark, NJ recommends drastic changes within the internal structure by establishing a more accountable approach to solutions.

Lastly, we say it is not solely a question of commissioner leadership, but a plethora of complex internal problems. If we are looking to end the atrocities, we must change the culture. The Corrections Department must first acknowledge the issue instead of giving empty glowing reports and the EMCFW Management Staff Personnel, must immediately be compelled to make changes, pending immediate employment sanctions. Regardless of the convicted crime that placed them in prison, the inmates at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women deserve to be treated with humanity.

Sincerely,



Deborah Smith Gregory, President
NAACP Newark NJ



Rick Robinson, Chairman
Newark and NJSCNAACP
Criminal Justice Committees

Cc:

Hon Phil Murphy, Governor of NJ
Hon. Sheila Oliver, Lt. Governor of NJ
Dr. Deborah Cornavaca, Chief of Staff for Governor Murphy
Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.; NJ Department of Corrections Commissioner
Richard T. Smith, NJ State Conference NAACP President
Sen. Stephen M. Sweeney, Senate President
Asm. Craig J. Coughlin, Assembly Speaker
Sen. Linda R. Greenstein, Law and Public Safety Committee Chairperson
Asm. Adam Taliaferro, Law and Public Safety Committee Chairperson
Sen. Ronald Rice Sr. NJ Black Legislative Caucus Chairperson
Reva Foster, NJ Black Issues Convention Chairperson
Ryan Haygood Esq. NJ Institute for Social Justice Executive Director
Lawrence Hamm, People's Organization for Progress Chairman
Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson
Michael E. Champion, Esq. (USANJ)-DOJ Chief of Civil Rights Unit
NJ Advance Media