

Transgender Victory At Vacaville Prison

Transgender activists have won a battle at the California Medical Facility (CMF), the state-prison hospital in Vacaville, without firing a single shot. The Executive Medical Committee of CMF agreed to meet with members of the Ad Hoc Committee for Prison Health Care Reform in March to discuss and review complaints by transgender prisoners at CMF.

The meeting will mark the first time the California Department of Corrections (CDC) has ever agreed to consider the concerns of transgender prisoners.

"We are looking at some time after March 4," said Scott Cozza, coordinator of the ad hoc committee. The CMF decision was the result of a letter sent by the committee to the prison detailing a series of complaints from transgender prisoners about their treatment and medical care at the facility.

The letter charged: both HIV-positive and HIV-negative transgender prisoners are denied hormones, all transgender prisoners are housed in the HIV wing of the prison regardless of serostatus, there are no transgender-specific medical services within the institution to deal with the psychological and physical changes resulting from hormone treatments, transgender prisoners tend to be more harshly disciplined than general-population prisoners, transgender prisoners who have developed breasts are refused permission to wear bras, and no transgender prisoners are allowed to wear makeup or feminine clothing.

"Correctional officers and other staff do not give the treatments that are needed," Cozza said. "There are psychological and biological issues, and there is no recognition of those issues. Some officers also demean and demoralize some of the transgender prisoners."

The most immediate result of the CDC decision to meet with committee members will be a community-wide meeting of transgender activists on March 4 to set up an agenda and decide which activists will actually meet with prison officials.

"This is an unprecedented attempt to...better the conditions of transgender prisoners," said Judy Greenspan of the HIV in Prison Committee of California Prison Focus. "Transgender prisoners are among the most discriminated against and abused prisoners. They represent a population no one wants to deal with. They have little voice and little advocacy...so the meeting on March 4 is an unprecedented attempt to rally the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in support of the demands of the transgender prisoners."

CMF officials confirmed they have agreed to a meeting and are waiting for Cozza and committee members to decide exactly who will be meeting with prison officials. —TK