



NEW JERSEY LEGISLATURE

LORETTA WEINBERG
MAJORITY LEADER

LINDA GREENSTEIN
CHAIR, LAW AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

January 25, 2021

The Honorable Phil Murphy
Governor of the State of New Jersey
Office of Governor PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Murphy,

We are appalled by the egregious acts reported today by the *Star-Ledger/NJ.com* (January 25, 2021). The article details how allegedly numerous female inmates were beaten by Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women (EMCFW) corrections officers. In one instance, a “transgender woman was allegedly handcuffed in her cell, thrown to the floor and beaten by a group of officers and inmates, according to the woman’s mother, Trimeka Rollins. Three officers stomped on her head while four inmates hit her, Rollins said, based on messages she received from her daughter two days after the incident.”¹

This is not the first report that shows that the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility is out of control, improperly managed, and clearly an abusive danger to the women locked up behind its walls. A recent U.S. Department of Justice report noted numerous instances where the staff of the EMCFW violated the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act, and documented a culture of systemic abuse and a “brotherhood of silence” that protects predatory and malicious offenders. In July 2020, the *Workgroup on Harassment, Sexual Assault and Misogyny in New Jersey Politics* held a publiclistening session and heard from former inmates, who corroborated the U.S. Department of Justice report. Furthermore, these women recounted instances where corrections officers retaliated against prisoners who would make complaints.²

Since 2010, at least eight corrections officers have been fired as a direct result of sexual abuse allegations. Today, we learned that 30 officers, supervisors, and other staff have been placed on administrative leave because of the most recent round of alleged abuses that occurred just two weeks ago. Clearly, the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility lacks proper management and oversight. This is why the Senate Law and Public Safety Committee asked New Jersey Corrections Commissioner Marcus Hicks to testify this past May to respond publicly to the pattern of civil rights abuses detailed by the U.S. Department of Justice. The commissioner refused to appear.

¹ <https://www.nj.com/news/2021/01/dozens-suspended-at-nj-prison-after-officers-are-accused-of-beating-women-inmates.html>

² REPORT OF THE WORKGROUP ON HARASSMENT, SEXUAL ASSAULT AND MISOGYNY IN NEW JERSEY POLITICS (January 2021).

We ask that you immediately place Corrections Commissioner Hicks and the current warden on leave. We also suggest that the Administration immediately increase oversight of the EMCFW and create an independent review board for the facility, including former inmates, to confidentially receive complaints from inmates currently undergoing victimization and share those complaints with the United States Department of Justice as well as the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General for further investigation, as was recommended in the *Report of the Workgroup on Harassment, Sexual Assault and Misogyny in New Jersey Politics*.

By copy of this letter, we are requesting that the U.S. Department of Justice review its April 2020 report, "Investigation of the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women (Union Township, New Jersey)" and perhaps welcome an appropriate outside authority to temporarily take oversight of the running of the prison.

We are asking that your Administration, with New Jersey Attorney General Gurbir Grewal, join in this request to the U.S. Department of Justice.

In addition, we are looking forward to hearing from both you and the Attorney General on your recommendations for what is necessary to protect the women inmates at EMCFW. Hopefully, you will take action within the next two weeks so these women are not subject to these abuses from the very system charged with their care.

Sincerely,



Loretta Weinberg
Senator, District 37



Linda Greenstein
Senator, District 14

CC: Senator Robert Menendez
Senator Cory Booker
U.S. Department of Justice
Congressman Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Congressman Josh Gottheimer
N.J. Attorney General Gurbir Grewal
N.J. DOC Commissioner Marcus Hicks
N.J. Senate President Steve Sweeney
N.J. Senator Linda Greenstein