

NYS BOARD OF CORRECTION

MAY 8 '07 AM 10:12

Members of the Board of Correction  
New York City Board of Correction  
51 Chambers Street, Room 923  
New York, NY 10007

Re: Proposed Amendments to the Minimum Standards

Dear Chairwoman Simmons and Mr. Wolf:

My name is Eurice Jackson. I was incarcerated in Rikers Island for a year and Valhalla for 6 months for non-violent crimes. While in Valhalla, the Westchester County jail, I had few problems with the system. It was a brand new facility at the time and well run. I believe that the only solution at Rikers Island is to fire all of the employees and start over. It is a horrible facility. Not all jails have to be horrible since Westchester County wasn't.

During my time at Rikers, I lived in a dorm. I do not remember the exact number of people in the dorm, but it was cluttered and crowded and I always felt scared. The room is fashioned in a bed-locker-bed-locker pattern. The biggest problem with this arrangement is that violent and non-violent criminals were all put in the dorms together. This causes non-violent criminals to become violent in order to protect themselves. Inmates would use sharp pieces of the metal lockers as weapons against other inmates. The guards claimed to be controlling this problem with shakedowns, but these only occurred once or twice a week.

The proposal for higher phone surveillance is simply a way to get legalized what the Department of Corrections is already doing. They are currently tapping phone calls, although I do not feel that any of mine were personally tapped. In my experience, other inmates were alerted to the tapping of their calls only by a clicking noise at regular intervals. Surveillance causes bits of conversation between inmates and their family members to be taken out of context. This in turn raises unwarranted suspicions that cause unfairly high level security checks of both the prisoners and their family members who come to visit.

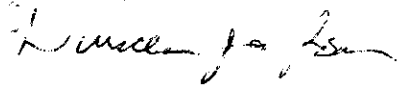
The Corrections Officers at Rikers have no compassion whatsoever. They provoke the inmates in order to justify the outright use of violence. In addition, they have the power of the pen. They are in complete control of messing up your life because they

can write anything they want to in their reports. When you come into a facility like Rikers, you are already labeled.

There are several suggestions for positive proposals that I would like to make. First of all, when inmates are released, I believe the city should set up housing for them. People need to be able to come home to homes when they get out, not be forced to move into shelters. Additionally, prisoners are given unhealthy food products in the "goodies" stores which hype them up and encourage them to be violent. There are no concerns for the health issues of the inmates. For example, a prisoner with diabetes has few options and no dietary regulations implemented by the staff to help him control his condition.

Finally, I do not believe that daily comforts, such as smoking cigarettes, should be taken away. Everyone at these facilities is very stressed out. To tell a stressed out smoker that he cannot have his cigarettes is encouraging violence and mental unbalance.

Sincerely,



Eurice Jackson

Interviewed by Kimberly Garoon, Cardozo School of Law.