



**For Immediate Release**  
December 6, 2007

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## **MEDICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH CARE INADEQUATE FOR VICTIMS OF PRISON RAPE**

*Commission Calls for Enhanced Recognition and Services to Address  
Sexual Violence Behind Bars*

**New Orleans, LA** – The National Prison Rape Elimination Commission today released the following statement at the conclusion of hearings on preventing and responding to sexual assault in corrections facilities. The panel took extensive testimony on the challenge of providing medical and mental health care to victims of prison rape, the need to address sexual abuse in community-based corrections settings, and the role oversight plays in ensuring reliable systems for reporting incidents of assault and aggression.

“The testimony we heard this week in New Orleans reaffirms that sexual violence behind bars – whether staff-on-inmate or inmate-on-inmate – is a significant national problem.

“More than two million men and women are incarcerated in the United States, and as many as five million more are under the supervision of community corrections programs – one in 31 Americans, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The victims of sexual aggression and assault in detention, like sexual abuse victims anywhere, will deal with its devastating physical and psychological repercussions for the rest of their lives.

“The difficulties those victims face in getting adequate and timely medical and mental health care are deep and disheartening. It is critical that inmates have safe, reliable and responsive ways to report sexual assault and get appropriate care and support services. Unfortunately, such systems are too often absent from corrections facilities and programs at all levels. We learned a great deal about potential models for reporting, for accessing care and for keeping victims safe from reprisals.

“Particular challenges and dangers emerge in probation, parole and other community corrections settings. Chilling testimony about a halfway house officer in New Hampshire who used his exclusive authority over clients to demand sexual favors from over a dozen women – under threat of returning them to prison – underscores the problem. The proactive steps being taken by community corrections leaders throughout the country have given us additional insight into

the ways that our ultimate recommendations can best help them meet their duty to eliminate sexual assault and aggression in these settings.

“Experts emphasize the importance of oversight to ensure safe facilities. Correctional management must place a high priority on reliable internal monitoring and take action where incidents of sexual assault are reported. Such monitoring and reporting of sexual assault is an indispensable element of running a safe facility, but these basic systems are too often absent or ineffective. We heard useful testimony from practitioners on some of the various ways to accomplish this critical function.

“Independent external monitoring of corrections facilities by the governmental and non-governmental actors with oversight obligations and opportunities is also essential. Prison walls keep people in, but they also keep the public out, resulting in a lack of transparency about what’s going on inside. Without these mechanisms, we fail our societal responsibility to protect the human rights and dignity of the vulnerable incarcerated population. External bodies, including the Office of the Inspector General and ombudsman, must have the authorization, power and resources to play their part in ensuring the safety of all. These entities, in addition to the press and non-governmental organizations, foster an environment in which sexual assault is prevented and, when it happens, firmly punished.

“Preventing sexual violence behind bars must be a top priority in every corrections and detention facility in the United States.”

The National Prison Rape Elimination Commission is charged with developing zero-tolerance national standards for enhancing the detection, prevention, reduction and punishment of sexual violence behind bars. This was the Commission’s ninth public event.

The Commissioners are federal district judge Reggie B. Walton, who serves as Chairman; Vice Chairman John A. Kaneb, Chairman of the Board of directors of HP Hood LLC; James Aiken, President of James Aiken & Associates, Inc.; Jamie Fellner, Esq., Senior Counsel of the U.S. Program of Human Rights Watch; Pat Nolan, President of Justice Fellowship; Gus Puryear, Executive Vice President, General Counsel and Secretary of Corrections Corporation of America; Professor Brenda V. Smith, American University, Washington College of Law; and Dr. Cindy Struckman-Johnson, Professor of Psychology at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion.

To learn more about the Commission, and to review the testimony presented in New Orleans, please visit [www.nprec.us](http://www.nprec.us).

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