

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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03.05.14

The unconstitutional conditions at Tutwiler Prison for Women in Wetumpka, Alabama, continue to generate national news this week. The *New York Times* featured the story of Monica Washington, who was raped by a prison guard, in reporting on the ongoing problems at Tutwiler and throughout the Alabama Department of Corrections.

Despite a [United States Department of Justice report in January](#) revealing that corrections officers have raped, beaten, and harassed women at Tutwiler for nearly two decades, women who remain imprisoned at Tutwiler say that meaningful changes are not being implemented.

Monica Washington was raped by a prison guard and gave birth to a daughter three years ago. State officials decided to charge the guard, Rodney Arbuthnot, with custodial sexual misconduct rather than a more serious crime and he served only six months in jail.

In a telephone interview from Tutwiler, Ms. Washington told the *Times* that prisoners are still fearful and that conditions remain bad. Right now, for me personally, its still the same as far as the officers, she said. Its like an act of Congress to get the things you need just to live. Its inhumane for inmates to be here, period.

Its a primitive, very backward prison system, said Larry F. Wood, a clinical psychologist who spent two months working at Tutwiler in 2012. Ive worked in prisons for most of 30 years, and Ive never seen anything like this.

The Justice Departments investigation began after [EJI filed a complaint](#) with the Department calling for a swift and thorough federal investigation into widespread sexual abuse of women prisoners by male guards at Tutwiler. It is just a culture of deprivation and abuse, not just at Tutwiler but in institutions across Alabama, said Charlotte Morrison, a senior lawyer at EJI.

The federal investigation revealed that prison staff have raped, sodomized, fondled, and exposed themselves to prisoners; coerced prisoners to engage in oral sex; engaged in voyeurism, watching women while they shower and use the toilet; and subject women to a daily barrage of sexually explicit verbal abuse.

The Attorney General set out reforms that state officials must take to avoid a federal lawsuit. The deadline for implementing those reforms is this Friday, March 7.

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122 Commerce Street Montgomery, AL 36104 [\(334\) 269-1803](tel:(334)269-1803) [\[emailprotected\]](mailto:)

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