

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/eji-reports-ongoing-problems-sexual-violence-tutwiler-prison-for-women-alabama/>

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EJI reported on continuing problems at Tutwiler Prison for Women on Friday at a meeting of the Alabama Commission on Girls and Women in the Criminal Justice System, which includes state legislators and agency directors.

[EJI filed a complaint in May with the U.S. Justice Department](#) calling for a swift and thorough federal investigation into widespread sexual abuse of women prisoners by male guards at Tutwiler. In interviews with more than 50 women incarcerated at Tutwiler, EJI had uncovered evidence of frequent and severe officer-on-inmate sexual violence. The Department of Justice has now launched a formal investigation into conditions at Tutwiler.

In response to EJI's complaint, officials from the Alabama Department of Corrections publicly announced intentions to invite independent auditors to assess the facility's operations. However, as EJI attorney Charlotte Morrison informed the commission, DOC has made no changes in leadership at the prison.

Holding leadership accountable is one of four practices EJI suggested the commission should adopt. In the face of documented and repeated criminal misconduct and institutional misreporting, Ms. Morrison testified, the legislature should demand substantive changes in the leadership at Tutwiler prison. The continuing and documented incidence of sexual abuse and corroborating statements from facility staff illustrates that the current leadership's response thus far has been wholly inadequate.

EJI also recommended that prison and Department of Corrections officials be required to report incidents of sexual misconduct involving staff to the commission and proposed the immediate creation of specific, mandatory standards for investigating allegations of abuse. The commission should end Tutwiler's practice of putting women into punitive segregation when they reported being victims or witnesses of sexual abuse.

While an independent audit is a positive first step, EJI suggested that independent reporters with authority to make unannounced visits to the prison, tour all areas and review all documents, and conduct confidential interviews with both incarcerated women and facility staff should be employed to oversee adherence to new anti-abuse procedures.

The Commission on Girls and Women in the Criminal Justice System was created by the Alabama Legislature to develop and implement a comprehensive, research-based, best practices model regarding women in prison that ensures their safety and welfare.

Alabama Department of Corrections Commissioner Kim Thomas said he will work to employ the recommendations from EJI, in addition to others from the federal government across Alabama's entire prison system.

Tags:

[Prison Conditions](#)

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

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