"In 2017, Harold Clarke, the Director of the Department of Corrections for the state of Virginia, appeared on the Charlottesville news station stating that the institutions in this state were five-hundred officers short than what is necessary to maintain order within the prisons.

Five-hundred officers! That is a fascical amount! It makes one curious to know the reason for such a shortage. Is there a quandary within Virginia's Department of Corrections? There must be something we are unaware of...

I have currently been incarcerated for thirteen years now, twelve spent here in Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women. I have witnessed more officers come and go than I can count! The turnover rate for this

institution alone is aberrantly high! At one time I was able to differentiate between the shifts. Now there are so many new faces that you can never be sure of whom you may encounter, or their temperament. Sad to have to be fearful of the way you may be treated or if you will receive a disciplinary charge for someone's personal vendetta! In the past we had a crew of steady, reputable officers that treated us like the human beings that we still are, incarcerated or not.

Because of our status, we could not be treated quite as equals. But, these good people had a livelihood to maintain which required them to still perform their job duties. Fraternization has always been frowned upon. However, what decent human being would consider a concerned officer fraternizing by

having a conversation with an offender who may be having a tough day? At least they cared enough to take the time out to listen. That was then, and much more than what I am able to say now in regards to the staff members this facility currently employs.

Once again, the need to maintain their livelihood is understood, as well as job performance being a must. But where is the compassion? No, they are not here to pacify us, or to feel sorry for us. Every one of us is responsible for our own incarceration. We must be held accountable and punished for our crimes. But, only to a certain extent I feel. The idea is supposedly to rehabilitate us. However, such is not the case at all for this institution!

We are verbally assaulted on a daily basis. There is no level of

professionalism among staff members. When is it acceptable for an authoritative figure to use profanity when speaking to us? And when did it become acceptable to be blatantly called a "bitch," by an authoritative figure? Is this what they deem "rehabilitation?" And when we respond in like manner, a disciplinary offense charge is written for "vulgar and insolate language" toward a staff member. Is this fair?

Prior to our incarceration, many of us were victims of abuse. Whether it was physical, verbal, or emotional, it was abuse nonetheless. Having been a victim myself, I know firsthand the devastating scars it can leave on a person's mental state of mind. It is traumatizing and some never overcome the damage sustained as a result of it.

Must we continue to endure

the very thing that possibly led to our incarceration in the first place? Many of us were only defending ourselves against our abusers and it resulted in a bad situation. What happened to self-defense? Do we not have that right? Who wants to be beaten, whether it occured once, or it had become everyday life for them? What about us? Is this fair? How can this aid in the "rehabilitation" process?

Another conundrum for domestic violence victims, is the use of excessive force by male staff members. I am unsure of the ratio of female to male staff members. However, I have never witnessed any excessive force from a female staff member. It would possibly be an equal struggle though; one female restraining another. However, not all women have the same weight,

height, etc., so it is possible. But, there is absolutely no reason a male should use that amount of force to restrain a female! Naturally, the average male's body frame is larger than that of a female. It is highly unnecessary to exert that amount of force!

I have personally witnessed an offender who was attempting to exit the chow hall in order to avoid a fight, and was grabbed by a male staff member and slammed violently from table to table all because she tried to shake herself from the officer's grasp. That was a natural reaction to being grabbed from behind with your arms twisted for no apparent reason. I would have reacted in the very same manner. Even though many of those whom continue to use excessive force are still employed in this facility, that one incident was so horrific that, that Sergeant was forced into early

retirement. So you can only imagine the severity of that episode!

As I was in the chow hall just last week, a fight between three women broke out. They were all restrained, though one did resist. She was slammed on the concrete floor so hard that I was certain she was unconscious. The sound of her head hitting the floor nearly brought me to tears; and it bothered me for the rest of the day. It sounded as if her skull exploded at the point of impact! That is a sound I will never forget! I was surprised that no blood was shed. This poor young lady may possibly have suffered a head injury as a result of this excessive force, this brutality!

There have been instances where offenders have suffered severe injuries at the hands of these brutes! One young lady received a broken collar bone which has yet to be surgically

repaired to rectify the damage. Another young lady lost one of her front teeth from being slammed face down. This is simply fallacious, and to me, unjustifiable! Personally, it makes me question the mental stability of a few of them. Are they too abusers of women? What would be the reason or desire to handle a woman in that fashion? Is it simply an ego boost to showcase power? Whatever the case, it is repulsive!

I wish more of us would unite and fight for the respect we deserve whether we are offenders or not. We are still mothers, daughters, aunts, and sisters. What if it were their mother, daughter, aunt, or sister? They all should take a moment to pause before speaking or acting. Would behavior change, or persist without a second thought about those they love?"

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