

The pandemic has affected everyone, but life for those of us on the "inside" has drastically become worse. We deal with living conditions that lack even the basic essentials such as soap and basic sanitation and prison staff that evidences a lack of care or concern. These are topics most often talked about among inmates.

While conditions in prisons are not ideal, for those of us diagnosed with mental health issues like PTSD, and add a pandemic that the BOP was unprepared for, the daily deteriorating conditions only exacerbate the trauma.

Having reached out several times to the psychology staff, I have come to realize that I am alone in this struggle. Each time I have been "shamed" for submitting a request to speak to them. In less than 10 minutes of discussion, the meeting is over. I am told that the psych staff is simply "too busy" to speak to everyone. With no programs being conducted, and no movement outside the individual units taking place, I am left to wonder, what could possibly occupy so much of the staff's time?

I balance my requests with the ultimate fear of speaking out and pushing too hard. Doing so and you risk finding yourself in the SHU - a far worse reality than the current situation. I have no choice but to remain silent and put my "issues on hold."

As the press continues to sensationalize the public's mental health "fallout," due to the pandemic, that spotlight should shine upon the US prison population. We are forgotten and literally left to fend for ourselves. How many lives must be lost before something changes?

Pre-existing and new mental health issues do not stop for COVID-19, despite what the BOP staff continue to tell me. It's not ok, to not be ok, while serving a federal sentence in these times.

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