

Name: Pedro Gonzalez-Torres
Title:
Organization or Agency:
Topic: Meeting Date Not Listed
NA

Testimony:

Good afternoon members of the Correction Advisory Committee,

My name is Pedro Gonzalez-Torres, #307314. I am 43 years old, and I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony. I am submitting it in two parts because the whole thing wouldn't fit in one online submission.

This is part one.

Before I tell you what happened to me, I want to ask this Committee one question that I believe has been ignored throughout this entire matter: How did this whole thing get started?

The Webster Dictionary defines Genesis as "the origin or coming into being of something."

That is where I believe this Committee should begin. Before focusing only on the outcome, we must first ask what role the Department of Correction bears for its own actions and its own inaction.

DOC staff were put on notice that if certain events took place, there would be a problem.

Following the death of an incarcerated person in O-Pod at MacDougall Correctional Institution, where staff were aware of problems involving people living together, DOC implemented new policies that were supposed to prevent tragedies like that from happening again. Those policies were intended to address situations where staff knew there were serious problems with people who could not safely coexist.

Yet in my case, despite repeated warnings, those lessons were ignored.

I repeatedly told staff there was a problem. I repeatedly tried to prevent violence before anyone got hurt.

Instead of intervening, DOC staff allowed the situation to continue until it became violent.

From where I stood, it felt as though everyone already knew where this situation was headed but chose to let it happen instead of preventing it.

That is why I ask this Committee not to focus only on what happened after the violence.

Please ask how this whole thing got started. Ask who knew there was a problem. Ask who had the authority to prevent it.

Ask what responsibility the Department of Correction bears when staff are warned that violence is likely to occur, yet nothing is done.

Those are the questions I ask you to consider as you read my testimony.

My Story

My name is Pedro Gonzalez-Torres, #307314. I am 43 years old, and I am finishing my special parole. I am also defending myself against a police report filed by Officer Joshua Viera while I was housed at Osborn Correctional Institution alleging that I assaulted him. I did not assault Officer Viera, nor have I ever assaulted a correctional officer in the 26 years I have been incarcerated.

It all started when another inmate wanted to go to another part of the facility without the consent of the block officer. The day before was Halloween, and nobody was getting commissary that week. This individual woke up the rest of the barbers and falsely claimed that work call had been called so we would all leave the housing unit together and travel out of place as a group, hoping everyone would get away with it.

I was asleep. When I looked at the clock, I saw it was already 9:30 a.m., even though work call is always at 8:00 a.m. I asked him to leave my door because something did not seem right. He insisted work call had been announced, so I got up, brushed my teeth, and walked out of my cell.

The block officer immediately asked me where I was going. I told him I was reporting to work. He informed me that work call for the barbers had never been called, so I immediately returned to my cell.

Later, the officer walked by and told me that the barbershop was going to be down three barbers because the other barbers had gone out of place without permission. I then heard Block Officer Hoja ask those individuals whether they had gone to commissary, and they admitted that they had. The officer informed them that they were all fired.

It is important to understand that when you are assigned to a workers' block, you are expected to remain disciplinary-ticket free. If you receive a disciplinary ticket, you are generally removed from that housing unit and lose your work assignment.

The same person who had tried to involve me then asked the officer why I was not in trouble. The officer responded that I had never been out of place. After that, I asked him never to put me in that position again because I knew it was going to create problems between us.

Repeated Warnings Were Ignored.

The inmate who tried to get me in trouble did not stop after that day. He continued to antagonize me for weeks. Even after receiving a disciplinary infraction, he was allowed to keep his job and remain in the workers' block.

I did what I was supposed to do.

I tried to de-escalate the situation by bringing it to the attention of the Unit Manager and Captain. I told them what had been happening, and I was told they would handle it. They never did.

The situation became even worse when the facility windows were being repaired and all the workers had to be moved from one housing unit to another. The plan was to move all the barbers together, all the hallway workers together, and so on.

The inmate I had been having problems with was my last option to be housed with.

Because I had already reported the issues, I again brought them to the attention of DOC staff in an effort to de-escalate the situation. Once again, I was told it would be handled.

On the day of the move, I asked who I would be moving in with, and I was told it would be the same inmate I had been having problems with.

Again, I tried to de-escalate the situation.

I told officers and staff that I feared for my safety. I told them that this inmate had been telling me not to say anything and that once we were locked in the cell together, we were going to settle it by fighting. I warned staff that if they did nothing, they would be responsible for my safety and the safety of the other inmate.

Lieutenant Vanessa Ruff's response was that they would simply, "pretend like we never had this conversation."

A situation that could have been avoided and prevented turned into a fight.

On top of that, Officer Joshua Viera claimed that I assaulted him when I never did. I also have proof that I was adjudicated by the Department of Correction and found not guilty of assaulting the officer or committing any wrongdoing related to that allegation. Even after DOC found me not guilty, Officer Viera still pursued criminal charges against me.

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