

Name: Pedro Gonzalez-Torres
Title:
Organization or Agency:
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Testimony:

This is part two of my testimony:

That is why I keep asking the same question: How did this whole thing get started?

I did not wait until after someone got hurt to ask for help. I asked for help before anything happened. I reported the problem. I tried to de-escalate the situation. I warned staff that violence was likely to occur.

The Department of Correction had every opportunity to prevent what happened. Instead, my warnings were ignored until the situation became violent.

That is why I ask this Committee to look at what happened before the fight, not just what happened after it. If an inmate repeatedly asks for help, reports safety concerns, and tries to prevent violence before it happens, those warnings should not be ignored. If they are ignored, then the Department of Correction must also be willing to examine its own responsibility for the outcome.

This Is a Systemic Problem

There is only one explanation for why the Department of Correction does not take its own mission statement of securing the safety and security of inmates, staff, and the public seriously.

I believe DOC promotes violence.

In the 26 years I have been incarcerated, all I have ever heard from officers and supervisors when an inmate comes to them with concerns about the person they are living with is that if they want to move, the only way is to fight.

That is promoting violence.

When someone comes forward and says they are afraid, the answer should never be to wait until somebody gets hurt.

Two years ago at MacDougall Correctional Institution, an inmate complained to DOC about problems with his cellmate. DOC did nothing. The result was that one inmate died in O-Pod and was left on top of a table. That tragedy should have changed everything.

Instead, I found myself in the same position.

I warned staff. I reported the problem. I asked for help.
I tried to de-escalate the situation before anyone got hurt.

Nothing was done.

I did not wait until after someone got hurt to ask for help. I asked for help before anything happened.

When a person goes to court and is remanded to the Department of Correction, DOC becomes responsible for that person's safety. They become that person's guardian.

So if I go to DOC because I fear for my safety, and I tell them violence is likely to happen, and nothing is done until somebody gets hurt, then who is really responsible?

That is the question I believe this Committee needs to answer.

Look, nobody is perfect. But when you sign up to do a job, don't do it just because you need a paycheck. Do it to the best of your ability. When you provide a service to society, other people's lives are also on the line.

If someone chooses a career as a correctional officer or any position within the Department of Correction, that responsibility goes far beyond supervising inmates. You are responsible for the safety of other human beings.

There are much bigger problems inside the Department of Correction than food or recreation. Those problems need to be fixed first. The safety of every person inside these facilities depends on it.

There Must Be Accountability.

There is another problem inside the Department of Correction that needs to be addressed.

Inmate requests are rarely answered. I believe one reason for that is because staff do not want inmates to have proof that something was not being done, that someone complained about an issue, or that staff failed to respond. Everyone passes the buck to the next person, and nobody wants to admit that their coworkers, or the system as a whole, are not doing their jobs.

DOC says it wants change, but I do not see enough people doing what is necessary to create change.

We also have no counselor. There are long periods when nobody is available to answer requests or help resolve problems. It feels like we have been left to fend for ourselves and hope for the best.

When I need help contacting the kitchen about a diet tray, reaching out to an attorney, or resolving another issue, there is often nobody available to help. But when it is time to take an inmate to segregation, staff suddenly know how to do their jobs.

The law library on the tablets also needs to be restored.

Everything in that law library was already public information. It allowed inmates to research the law, understand their cases, and advocate for themselves. Now I am defending myself against criminal charges, and one of the few legal resources we had has been taken away.

Programs are another example.

If someone has a long sentence, they are often told they do not need programming because they still have

many years left to serve. Then, if that same person later overturns their case or appears before the Parole Board, one of the first questions they are asked is,

"What have you been doing all these years?"

If they answer, "I have been writing requests," they are expected to prove it. How can they prove it when nobody answers them?

People continue coming in and out of prison because not enough people care enough to take the system seriously or make sure inmates are being provided the tools they need to prepare themselves for returning home.

One simple solution would be to place the inmate request system and the grievance system on the tablets.

Every request would be documented. Every response would be documented.

Without documentation, there is no accountability. Without accountability, nothing changes.

Closing

My name is Pedro Gonzalez-Torres, #307314. Everything I have shared in this testimony is true to the best of my knowledge and belief. I am not asking this Committee to look only at what happened to me. I am asking you to look at why it happened.

Please ask how it started.

Please ask who knew there was a problem. Please ask what could have been done before violence occurred.

If this Committee truly wants to prevent violence inside our prisons, then please do not begin with the fight. Begin with the Genesis. Ask how it started. Ask what could have been done before anyone got hurt.

That is where accountability begins. That is where prevention begins.

Thank you for your time, your consideration, and for giving me a voice.

God bless you all.

Pedro Gonzalez-Torres