



Department of Justice

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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT SUES MICHIGAN OVER CONDITIONS AT WOMEN'S PRISONS

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The Justice Department today filed suit against the state of Michigan to ensure that female inmates at the state's women's prisons are protected from rapes and sexual assaults by prison guards and staff.

The Department today also brought a similar action against Arizona over conditions at its state-run women's prisons.

The Michigan lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Detroit, alleges that inmates at the Scott and Crane correctional facilities have been subjected to sexual misconduct, unlawful invasions of privacy, and have received inadequate medical and mental health care.

"No one should be exposed to the risk of sexual assault under any circumstances," said Isabelle Katz Pinzler, Acting Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights.

The suit was brought under the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA), enacted in 1980 to protect the rights of people housed in state and local government institutions, including prisons. Under the law, the Justice

(MORE)

U.S. v. Michigan



PC-MI-008-005

Department has the authority to investigate institutions to ensure that conditions at the facilities meet constitutional standards.

The Department began looking at the Michigan prisons, which together house more than 1,200 inmates, in June 1994 after receiving complaints about alleged misconduct by staff. The state refused to allow the Department access to the prisons to conduct an investigation, and has failed to negotiate with the Department to resolve the allegations.

"As in all cases, we had hoped to resolve this matter short of litigation," added Pinzler.

The suit seeks a court order requiring the state to:

- protect women inmates from rapes, sexual assaults, and other improper sexual contact by staff;
- ensure that inmates and staff do not engage in sexual relations;
- ensure that women inmates are not viewed in a prurient manner when showering, changing, and using the toilet facilities;
- provide inmates with adequate medical care, including access to care for serious needs; and,
- provide adequate mental health care.

In March of 1995, the Department issued a letter detailing its findings of sexual misconduct and proposed remedies.

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