2 female inmates sue Oregon prison officials, indicted officer over alleged sex abuse

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Two inmates are suing the Oregon Department of Corrections, top prison officials and several corrections officers for more than $10 million, accusing officials of allowing a sexually predatory employee to target and sexually abuse the two women.

The two civil rights lawsuits were filed in July and August in federal court. The two inmates named in the lawsuits spoke to the Statesman Journal in early 2020 following the arrest of Richard Alberts II, a 31-year-old corrections officer, on drug trafficking charges.

He faces trial in September for allegedly trafficking meth and heroin into the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville.

The inmates said the drug trafficking was only a fraction of what took place at Oregon's only women's prison.

They said Alberts smuggled in a cell phone to inmates, brought in meth and heroin and sexually assaulted them on multiple occasions over the course of several months.

One inmate also detailed several other instances of sexual abuse involving different other officers.

**Sex, lies and cellphones:** Reports of misconduct at Coffee Creek women’s prison persist

Due to the power dynamics, inmates cannot legally consent to sexual contact with a corrections officer or other prison staff.

Multiple Oregon corrections officers have been convicted of custodial sexual misconduct for groping, having sex with and assaulting inmates.

Each scandal results in new promises of cutting down misconduct and closing gaps in security by prison officials but new accounts of sexual abuse continue to persist.

A spokeswoman for the Oregon Department of Corrections declined to comment on the allegations made in the lawsuits, citing their policy of not comment on active or pending litigation.

**Sex abuse cases date back years**

The lawsuits are the latest among dozens of staff misconduct cases to surface in recent years at the Coffee Creek prison despite a reported "zero-tolerance policy" for sexual abuse.

The two inmates involved in the lawsuits are serving lengthy for their roles in separate, unrelated murders.

Both women gave accounts of being preyed upon and sexually abused by Alberts.

But the lawsuits also name several prison staff and other corrections officers, some of whom have been placed on administrative leave or fired.

They're also suing top state prison leaders, including corrections director Colette Peters, CCCF Superintendent Paula Myers and Prison Rape Elimination Act coordinator Ericka Sage.

The women were "sexually assaulted, harassed and used by correctional officers," said their attorney Ginger Mooney in the two $5 million lawsuits.

Furthermore, prison leaders failed to properly train and supervise staff and failed to protect the inmates from physical harm and abuse, she said.
Prison officials failed to recognize and respond to obvious signs Alberts was grooming female prisoners. Mooney said in the complaint. He had a pattern of sexual predation which was known to many staff, including other officers on the unit, security staff and management.

She also said the prison did not provide the legally mandated Prison Rape Elimination Act counseling to inmates following the alleged abuse.

One woman recounted multiple instances of sexual abuse starting in 2015, when she said she coerced into a sexual relationship with the now-convicted, ex-officer Edgar Mickles.

'You're not the only one': Former Coffee Creek inmates allege 'widespread' sex abuse, rape

Mickles was convicted in 2017 of custodial sexual misconduct involving another inmate.

The highly-predatory nature of corrections officers like Mickles was brushed off and ignored by prison management, according to the lawsuit.

The trauma caused by the abuse led the inmate to experience depression and attempt suicide multiple times.

When the inmate, a Black woman, encountered Alberts in 2018, she said he called her the "n-word" and repeatedly said he wanted to clear his unit of Black people.

She said Alberts regularly had her "keep jigs" — keep watch — while he sexually abused her friend and fellow inmate. He allegedly threatened her with physical violence and soon began sexually abusing her, too.

The other inmate told the Statesman Journal that during a sexual encounter in a prison closet, Alberts allegedly asked the other female inmate keeping lookout to join them in a threesome and, using his position of power as a corrections officer, got her to perform oral sex.

**Indictment brings details to light**

For months last summer, prison officials refused to provide any information to the Statesman Journal regarding the allegations and investigations against Alberts.

The latest indictment alleges that Alberts and a co-defendant, Joseph Lucio Jimenez, 27, of Gresham, and others used cell phones to traffic drugs inside the prison.

Jimenez pleaded guilty to conspiracy to distribute controlled substances and is scheduled to be sentenced to two years in prison on Sept. 16.

Alberts was placed on a leave of absence on June 6, the same day inmates told the Statesman Journal there was a lockdown and some of them were placed in segregation.

At the same time, the female inmate named in the lawsuit said she was placed in isolation with no windows or clocks and denied meals and showers for days at a time.

She said officials withheld her mail for 18 weeks and threatened to move her to an out-of-state prison away from her family and children if she did not cooperate with investigators.

She also said officers would taunt her by singing altered lyrics to the song "It Wasn't Me" by reggae musician Shaggy and would talk about her and other inmates being pregnant with Alberts' child.

The isolation and threats, she said, left her in a deep depression.

"I tried to kill myself," she said. "They continued to threaten me. ... They didn't care."

According to the lawsuit, she was revived, hospitalized and the goodbye letters to her family were confiscated.

She still worried about being sent out-of-state in retaliation for talking to the Statesman Journal and coming forward about the abuse.
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Alberts began working at the women's prison in 2017 — the same year she entered DOC custody as a 22-year-old.

"(She) presented as the perfect target for a sexual predator: she was young, had been previously sexually abused, suffered significant trauma as a child and was facing a lifetime in prison," Mooney said in the lawsuit.

Alberts allegedly read her mail and worked for months to "groom" her into his victim.

He passed her notes and asked her to flash her breasts when he walked by her cell.

In October 2018, he brought her a cell phone to use on his days off.

Soon, he let her keep the phone all the time. She posted on Snapchat and messaged her friends. Screenshots of messages and photos corroborate this timeline.

Meanwhile, Alberts delved into her institutional and medical files, indicated by his knowledge that she had struggled with substance abuse, according to the lawsuit.

In early 2019, she said Alberts took her into the staff bathroom. While another corrections officer kept watch, she gave him oral sex.

She said the corrections officer who stood guard still works at the prison but was recently transferred to the men's side.

Eventually, she claimed a plan unfolded to have Alberts bring meth and heroin into the prison.

"He wanted a certain amount for it and said we could keep the rest," she said. "That went on for six months."

An investigation began in the spring of 2019 when prison staff reported Alberts might be having sexual relations with inmates.

That eventually led to a drug trafficking investigation by the FBI.

The FBI and U.S. Attorney’s Office in Oregon were unable to confirm or deny whether an additional investigation has been opened into allegations of sexual contact Alberts may have had with the inmates.

After speaking with the Statesman Journal, both of the inmates were transferred out of Coffee Creek to rural jails.

Alberts remained employed with the prison on unpaid leave.

**Suit claims pattern of abuse tolerated**

Albert's behavior did not take place in a vacuum, according to the lawsuit.

His actions occurred in a highly sexualized environment where correctional officers are allowed to make unchecked, sexually charged and derogatory comments about female inmates' appearances, Mooney said in the complaint.

And he allegedly openly targeted his victims. His actions were clear and blatant to those around him, according to the lawsuits. He regularly groped her through her cell cuff port.

Yet his obvious actions were not stopped by prison leaders and officers, the suit claims.

**Previous coverage**: Coffee Creek corrections officer accused of trafficking drugs inside women’s prison

According to the lawsuit, another corrections officer was caught violating the "rule of three" after Alberts arranged to have him meet the inmate for sex. But the incident was never reported. The officer named in the lawsuit has since been placed on a leave of absence but has not yet faced criminal charges.

Both inmates were formally punished for alleged racketeering, contraband, drug possession, distribution and possession of an electronic device. They were placed in segregation, denied visits and fined.

"(She) was inappropriately sanctioned for the actions of a correctional officer — a correctional officer who forced plaintiff to engage in criminal activity or face physical, sexual and emotional harm," Mooney said in the lawsuit.
The abuse and treatment of the victims after the discovery of the abuse violated the women's Eighth Amendment right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment, their right to be protected from abuse while incarcerated, and subjected them to invasive exams even after scans proved they were not hiding contraband in their bodies.

They also accused prison officials of not adhering to PREA standards and of refusing to provide adequate mental health treatment to the women after the abuse.

According to the lawsuit, this abuse and violation of their constitutional rights left them isolated, helpless and disregarded.

For questions, comments and news tips, email reporter Whitney Woodworth at umwoodworth@statesmanjournal.com, call 503-910-6616 or follow on Twitter @umwoodworth