

CRIME

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

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An inmate at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility says that for months a corrections officer brought drugs into the prison for her to sell, smuggled her a cell phone and had sex with her and another female inmate on two occasions.

The accusations are the latest among dozens of staff misconduct cases to surface in recent years at Oregon's only women's prison.

The man at the center of the most recent accusations — 31-year-old Richard S. Alberts II — faces trial in February on federal drug trafficking charges for allegedly smuggling meth and heroin into Coffee Creek.

An investigation began last spring when prison staff reported Alberts might be having **sexual** relations with inmates. That investigation was reportedly dropped, and the inmates were later placed in isolation for refusing to cooperate.

But it led to a drug trafficking investigation by the FBI.

Sex abuse and misconduct cases, including about 10 active lawsuits against the state, have plagued the Wilsonville prison since it opened in 2001 and through seven superintendent changes.

The allegations and convictions have ranged from rape and **sexual** assault to drug smuggling and **sexual** contact — contact that an inmate can't legally consent to because of the power dynamics of being incarcerated.

The accusations run counter to promises made by Oregon Department of Corrections officials to crack down on staff misconduct, adhere to standards to stop **sexual** contact and eliminate gaps in surveillance.

In the latest case, the woman reached out to the Statesman Journal about the alleged misconduct at Coffee Creek.

She said Alberts seemed to smuggle in drugs and cell phones with ease and found locations out of range of prison cameras to engage in **sexual** contact.

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

The woman is not being identified because she fears retaliation, saying she was one of the inmates placed in months-long isolation in June after police began investigating Alberts.

The Statesman Journal spoke with multiple relatives and inmates at Coffee Creek about her account. They confirmed the lockdown that ensued after Alberts was investigated, the contact that occurred on the cell phone and that she disclosed having **sexual** contact with Alberts.

The inmate also was able to provide photographs taken inside the prison and text messages sent on the smuggled phone.

She said during a **sexual** encounter in a prison closet, Alberts allegedly asked another female inmate keeping lookout to join them in a threesome and, using his position of power as a corrections officer, got the second inmate to perform oral sex.

"That was wrong," the first female inmate told the Statesman Journal. "It never should have happened."

Both women are serving time for their roles in separate, unrelated murders. She said they later disclosed the **sexual** contact with Alberts to officials and agreed to cooperate in the investigation.

Alberts' attorney did not respond to multiple requests for comment. Efforts to contact Alberts via social media were unsuccessful.

Prison officials clampdown

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

A Hillsboro attorney representing multiple female Coffee Creek inmates reported in June — around the same time Alberts was placed on leave — that prison officials were blocking inmates from contacting attorneys unless they had existing cases.

After sending the Department of Corrections a letter threatening to involve the attorney general and governor, lawyer Michelle Burrows was able to contact her clients.

She described the prison as a "cesspool" where victims are punished and abusers are enabled.

During this same time, the inmate who spoke with the Statesman Journal said her contact with the outside world became nonexistent after Alberts was placed on leave. She couldn't make calls to family or talk to other inmates.

"Some staff told me that something this big has never happened in the 18 years that Coffee Creek has been open," the inmate said.

But she said investigators interviewing her seemed unsure whether Alberts would face charges connected to the **sexual** misconduct, despite having explicit photos he sent her, records of their correspondence and video footage.

She said it is ironic that she and her fellow inmate are being punished for something they couldn't legally consent to while Alberts evades prosecution for the **sexual** contact.

"They are trying to cover this up," she said. "We don't want this swept under the rug."

Retaliation alleged, 170 days isolation

In 2019, about 10 current and former inmates filed a lawsuit against the prison, claiming officials turned a blind eye to systemic abuse and misconduct.

Burrows, the attorney representing inmates who accused a prison nurse of **sexual** abuse, said Coffee Creek prison officials have an obstructive attitude.

"Each new investigation brings much publicity, some investigations and sometimes prosecution," Burrows wrote in a lawsuit involving the prison nurse.

"Each new investigation brings public promises and assurances by ODOC that the problems are only isolated to single bad actors and that the prison system cannot control or manage this situation adequately," she wrote.

The lawsuits recount more than a dozen allegations of rape, **sexual** assault and **sexual** misconduct by staff.

Sex abuse: Another lawsuit has been filed against Coffee Creek women's prison

After a series of scandals involving corrections officers and kitchen staff at Coffee Creek, Oregon in 2005 became one of the last states to enact a custodial **sexual** abuse law. Because of the position of power prison employees hold over inmates, the law states an inmate cannot consent to **sexual** contact behind bars.

Another lawsuit filed in 2019 alleges a prison kitchen manager of groping and having **sexual** contact with multiple inmates.

Multiple criminal charges have been filed over the years, accusing various corrections officers and prison staff of **sexually** abusing inmates, coercing them to have sex in exchange for drugs and smuggling drugs inside the prison.

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.

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 woman said she was placed in isolation with no windows or clocks for 170 days, 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.

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

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

She still worries about being sent out-of-state in retaliation for talking to the Statesman Journal and coming forward about the misconduct at Coffee Creek.

Her fears seemed to come to fruition on Jan. 16 when she and the other inmate involved with Alberts were abruptly transferred to separate jail facilities in Marion and Grant counties. Prison officials declined to comment on the reason for the transfers and whether the women were being sent out-of-state.

The first inmate said she had believed she was in a relationship with Alberts. Looking back, she said she sees how he abused his power over her.

She claimed he made racist remarks about the other inmate involved in the closet encounter. She said he wrote her a few letters while she was in isolation and would talk to her family members, saying, "Tell her I love her and miss her."

But he seemed to stop caring after a while.

"He just wanted to make sure I'd stay quiet, which I did for so long because I was punished for it every day," she said. "He knew what he was doing was wrong."

Report of drugs, sex, smuggled phones

Alberts began working at the women's prison in 2017 — the same year she entered DOC custody.

She recounted the following:

The inmate and Alberts joked and flirted. Sometimes he would sneak her extra candy. Over time, they began sharing more about their lives. He said he was married with a young daughter, but insisted his marriage was crumbling.

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. They'd talk and chat every day. Alberts would charge the phone during his next shift.

He'd regularly pull her into a closet.

"Pretty much every night, we'd kiss goodbye," she said.

He would boss her around and tell her not to spend too much time with other females, expressing concern that she would develop **sexual** relationships with them, too.

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.

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."

After she had a "dirty" urinalysis for drugs, she said Alberts told her he worked to get rid of the test. It was during the same time, she said, that he met with her in a closet to have sex. Her friend stood guard, but he eventually asked her to join them.

A rule that an inmate can't be left alone with a single staff member is touted by prison officials as part of their policy for preventing **sexual** abuse, but wasn't always enforced, she said. Cameras weren't in the closet and bathroom.

The woman said a Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) investigation was launched in spring 2019. She and the other inmate denied any **sexual** contact, and she said the investigation was closed due to a lack of evidence.

"They just asked me if it was happening and of course I said no," she said.

She said she later found out investigators had video evidence of her, the other inmate and Alberts going into the closet.

Prosecutors, prison officials mum

The drug trafficking case was investigated by the FBI, Oregon State Police, and Oregon Department of Corrections Office of Inspector General, and is being prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Oregon.

After a months-long investigation, federal prosecutors have not indicated whether Alberts will face charges for custodial **sexual** misconduct. A spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's Office said they could neither confirm nor deny the existence of additional investigations into Alberts.

Alberts case: Corrections officer accused of trafficking drugs inside women's prison

Officials with the FBI declined to comment due to Alberts being under indictment. They referred questions to the U.S. Attorney's Office.

After the indictment in December, Alberts was released pending a jury trial, which is scheduled for Feb. 25 before U.S. District Court Judge Michael Simon. He was ordered to

have no contact with any inmates.

Alberts remains employed with the DOC on unpaid leave.

When contacted by the Statesman Journal, prison officials declined to comment on the allegations, citing the active investigation and pending litigation.

"The Oregon Department of Corrections maintains a stringent code of ethics which requires all employees to be honest, to be truthful, and to obey the law," spokeswoman Betty Bernt said.

Spokeswoman Jennifer Black said in 2019, there were 24 allegations of **sexual** abuse and 22 allegations of **sexual** harassment at Coffee Creek.

She referred all questions on the specific allegations — that a PREA investigation was launched and closed, the claims of retaliation and that other corrections officers were involved — to the FBI.

Requests to have state Corrections Director Colette Peters comment directly on the allegations were not granted.

For questions, comments and news tips, email reporter Whitney Woodworth at wmwoodwort@statesmanjournal.com, call 503-399-6884 or follow on Twitter [@wmwoodworth](https://twitter.com/wmwoodworth)