

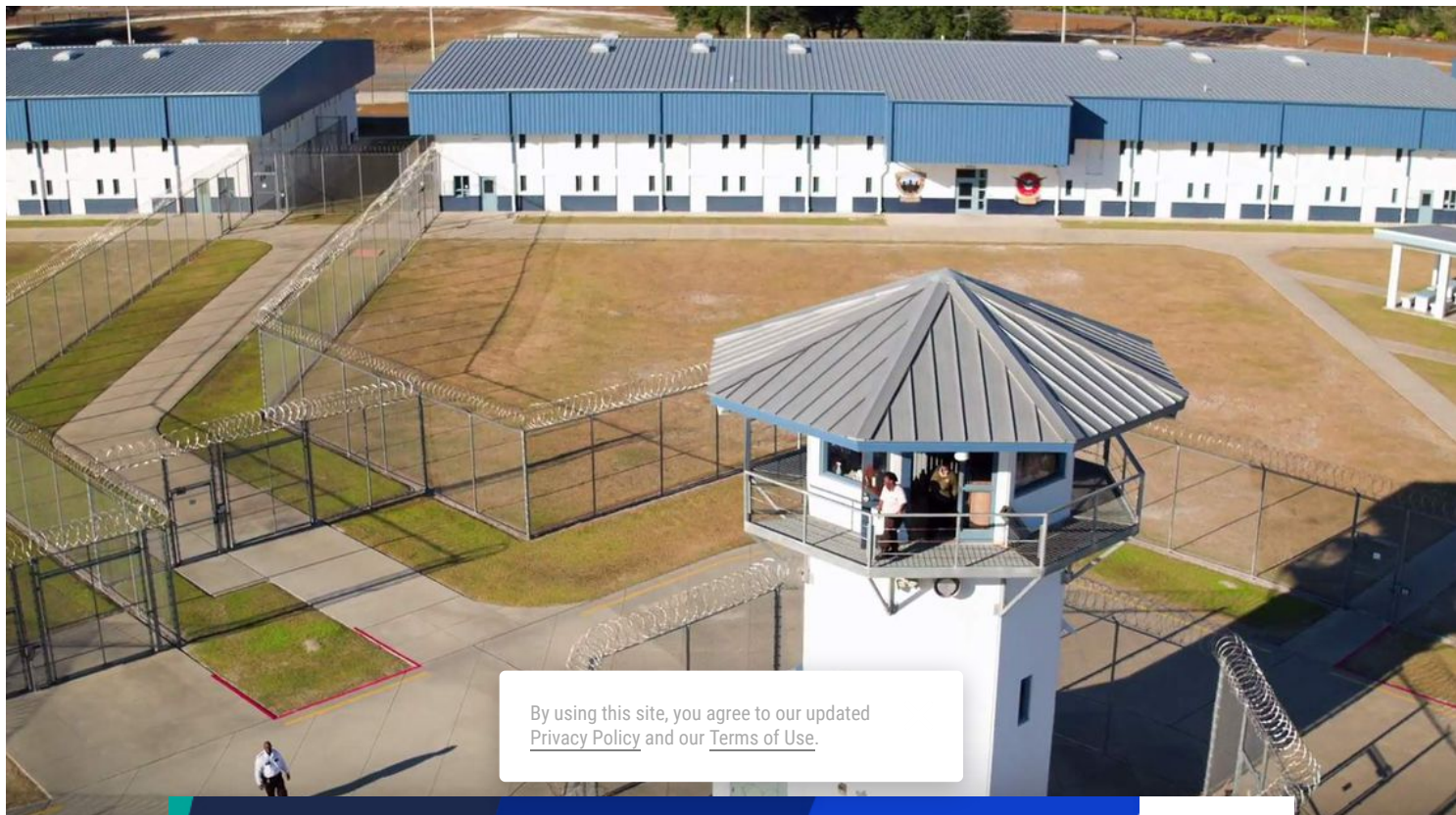
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Florida prisons are miserable. They're even worse for transgender inmates.

Florida state prisons, miserable places to begin with, can be worse still for the 300 or so individuals who are transgender.



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multiple prisons she's lived in since her 2012 incarceration for kidnapping.

Gang members in particular have been hostile at each facility where she has been incarcerated, many refusing to be housed anywhere near her.


Evans said the stark choice presented is go to your housing assignment and risk getting shanked or refuse and be put into confinement — a highly restrictive form of prison housing.

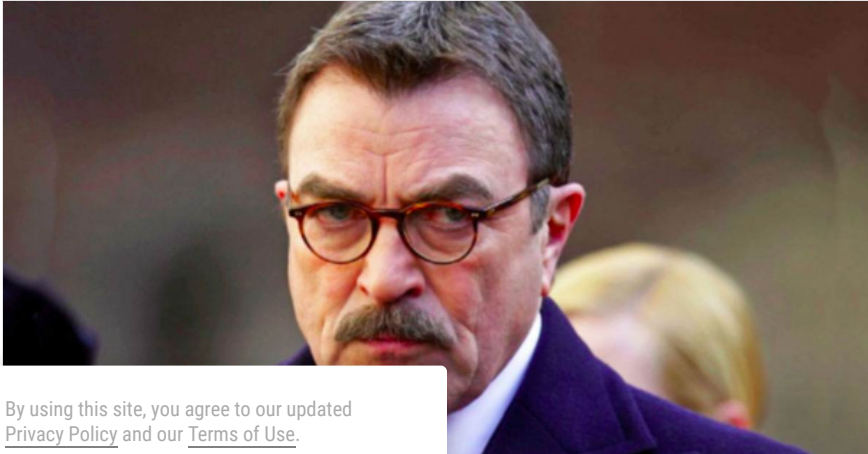
“Where are we gonna go?” she said.



Kylee Evans' prison mugshot. She is listed as Kyle. [Florida Department of Corrections]

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Kylee Evans, born Kyle, with her mother, Julie Sebastian. [[Special to the Miami Herald]]

Once, Evans tried to cut her arm with her inmate ID card to trigger a psychological emergency to avoid close contact with a member of the Latin Kings who she said was threatening her.

Staff has been equally unsubtle.

When Evans complained about a correctional officer, she said the staffer went around calling her a snitch — not something any inmate wants to be called. As soon as Evans got to a new prison, where she didn't know anyone yet, an inmate attacked her. She and her mother are certain that the guard arranged to have her targeted. At other facilities, the inmate said she's been beaten by corrections officers or doused with noxious chemicals.

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When they come into the prison system, inmates go through a process called reception. They are evaluated to determine their medical and emotional needs, and their criminal histories, and various other characteristics, including sexual orientation. It is the time when transgender inmates are identified as such, which can impact their assignment in the broader system.

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Inmates are also identified as one of various levels of “predator” or “prey,” based on the likelihood that they might be the victim of a sexual assault. Evans said she was not identified as transgender at reception, forcing her to file grievances to have her identity acknowledged.


Although it might seem that transgender inmates would tend to be identified as prey, Michelle Glady, spokeswoman for the prison system, said sexual identity is but one of many factors, and that it is not outlandish that a transgender inmate could be viewed as a predator. Inmates who are experiencing security issues for any reason can take it up with their classification officer at the prison level, she said.

While the department does not have a policy of grouping transgender inmates together, it would not be unusual for inmates with similar characteristics to be assigned to a prison or unit equipped to meet those needs, Glady added.

In Florida prisons and in other prison systems, inmates are housed based on their gender at birth.

Evans and her mother, Julie Sebastian, have been outspoken about her treatment inside the system. Evans has filed multiple grievances about her treatment and her mother has often called up the prisons or main office in Tallahassee to ensure Evans is safe. It has made both of them unpopular, Sebastian said.

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At Lake Butler, a reception center prison, a corrections officer saw Evans wearing homemade mascara, took a cup full of water and threw it on her face, the inmate said.

“I don’t give a damn how tight your pants are or how many swinging d---- you suck but you will not walk around my f----- pound with makeup on your face,” he told her, according to Evans.

Academic studies have shown that transgender inmates face a greater risk of assault, including sexual assault, than the general prison population — from staff as well as the inmate population.

The federal Prison Rape Elimination Act, passed in 2003, is supposed to help prisons track and eliminate such abuse.

Rodrigo Heng-Lehtinen, the deputy executive director of policy and action at the National Center for Transgender Equality, said PREA’s effectiveness depends on the attitudes instilled by prison leadership.

“If you just have the bad luck of having a warden who’s disengaged, or you have an individual corrections officer on your floor who has it out for trans people... you’re going to be subjected to so much more harassment and so much more violence.”

Heng-Lehtinen, the transgender son of former Republican lawmakers Dexter Lehtinen and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, added that “a lot of people who work in jails and prisons are still not familiar enough with our community, and they don’t really understand all the nuances like a transgender person will understand,” he said.

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Reiyn Keohane, a transgender woman who had started hormone therapy before her arrest and placement in custody, was not allowed to continue the treatments in custody.

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When somebody’s gender identity and their biological sex do not agree it is a condition known as gender dysphoria. Hormone therapy is medically necessary,

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Glady said the FDC does not have a policy of denying inmates hormone treatment. She said it is a prison physician's job to decide what is medically necessary.

In a letter about her alleged mistreatment, Keohane wrote "I have gladly suffered all these things and more so that those who come after me will never have to."

It was her case that got Evans to start documenting everything on paper — just in case.

Inmates who are openly gay can face similar hostility.

A mother whose son is at Hamilton Work Camp, who declined to be identified out of fear her son will face retaliation, said her son, who is gay but not transgender, has had to go days without taking a shower because gang members won't let him shower with them.

"There's a whole other set of rules that apply to gay people in there," she said.

On one of his first days on a compound, he said a gang member approached him and asked if he was gay. The woman said her son can't hide who he is — he's baby-faced and has a distinct voice.

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He said yes, and they told him what the rules are. Along with avoiding showers, he can't talk to gang members, or even sit near them or their beds.

"As long as you keep that fa--ot s--t to yourself, you'll be okay," she said he was told.

But the stress is taking a torturous toll on her son, she said. He's turned inward, rarely calling her, and is too afraid to speak out to corrections officers for fear of reprisal.

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As for Evans, her only chance to visit her son was at DeSoto Correctional Institution, a facility close to her home in Bradenton where she has been allowed some freedom to socially transition. There she can wear her makeup and grow her hair a little longer and stay with another LGBTQ inmate.

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the problem.

“Administration is not taking this seriously,” she said. “With the LGBTQ community, they literally laugh in your face.”

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