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Former Springer inmate says guard raped, drugged and retaliated against her

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Aug 17, 2020

Another former inmate of Springer Correctional Center has filed a lawsuit in federal court, claiming she repeatedly was raped by a guard at the state-run women's prison in northeast New Mexico.

The woman — whom *The New Mexican* is not naming because she is alleging sexual assault — says in the complaint filed Monday in U.S. District Court in Albuquerque the guard also drugged her and forced her to perform sexual acts with another inmate while he watched. She also claims prison officials retaliated against her when she reported the alleged abuse.

At least six other women have made similar allegations in the past year. Several of the complaints name the same alleged perpetrators or administrators and claim officials turn a blind eye to rampant abuse in the facility.

“Poor management of the facility ... has dramatically increased the likelihood of sexual assault at [Springer Correctional Center],” according to the lawsuit.

The woman is accusing the Corrections Department, the guard, his supervisor and Warden Marianna Vigil of negligence and civil rights violations, including subjecting her to cruel and unusual punishment. She is seeking an unspecified amount of damages.

The Corrections Department did not respond Monday to an email and phone message seeking comment.

According to state Corrections Department data, allegations of sexual misconduct in the state's prisons increased 473 percent between 2013 and 2018, jumping from 57 reports statewide in 2013 to 327 in 2018.

Corrections spokesman Eric Harrison said earlier this year the spike in allegations of sexual misconduct at Springer were, in part, a result of the state's efforts to make inmates to feel more comfortable reporting harassment.

According to a 2018 report on the Corrections Department's website, the agency also created a new rule in the past few years that makes filing a false [Prison Rape Elimination Act allegation] report “a major charge,” which could result in a loss of good time or other penalties for inmates.

A breakdown of the sexual misconduct investigations in recent years reveals the department deemed the majority of the complaints “unsubstantiated” or “unfounded.”

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