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NEW YORK

# New York state prison guards sexually assaulted female inmates, says lawsuit

By **CHELSIA ROSE MARCIUS**  
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Correction officers from four New York State prisons sexually assaulted five incarcerated women — and covered up their crimes with the help of their colleagues, says a lawsuit in Manhattan Federal Court.

“They had a system of warning each other if a supervisor was approaching and created a climate of fear and intimidation against any woman who complained about sexual attention from an officer,” says the suit.

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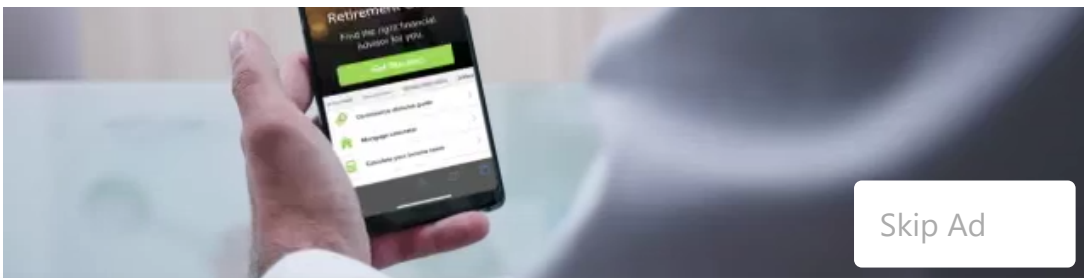
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Prison system investigators also looked the other way, says the suit filed Friday by lawyer Zachary Margulis-Ohnuma on behalf of five anonymous women.

“Rather than investigate officers’ sexual abuse of female inmates ... [Corrections Department] investigators blamed the victims and coerced them into making statements, threatening punishment against those who remain silent and discrediting many of those who spoke up,” the suit says.

“As rapes and sexual assaults of female inmates continued with alarming frequency, the defendants...(disciplined) individual staff members only when their sexual abuse of inmates became too egregious and notorious to ignore,” says the complaint.

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A spokesperson for the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision declined comment.

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The officers accused in the state work in the Bedford Hills and Taconic correctional facilities, which are across the street from each other in Westchester County; the Albion Correctional Facility in upstate Orleans County, and the Lakeview Shock Incarceration Correctional Facility in far western New York.

The suit names Corrections Department Commissioner Anthony Annucci, Associate Commissioner Jason Effman and 18 other officers, superintendents and investigators.

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The abuse outlined in the suit dates to 2015 with Officer Rasheen Smalls, who is accused of striking up inappropriate conversations with a woman incarcerated at Bedford Hills.

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Smalls began slipping notes under the woman's cell door — and eventually, he raped her in a utility closet, the lawsuit says.

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Smalls instructed the woman to meet him again and again — and on at least one occasion, he gave her water bottles filled with vodka to drink, the suit says.

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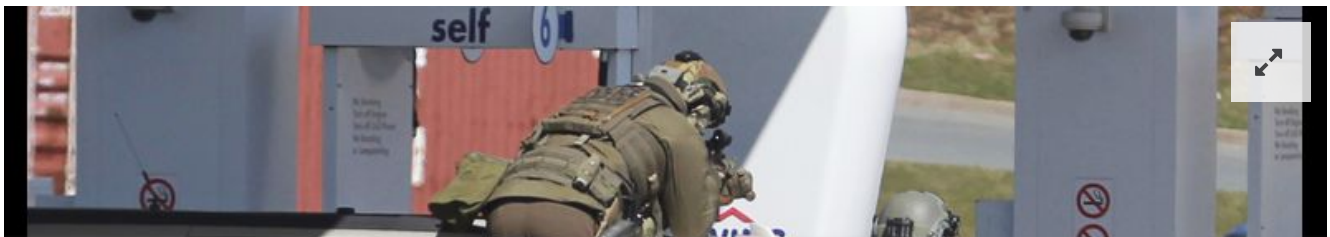
“Smalls was not afraid of being caught by a supervisor because correction officers routinely and predictably radioed each other to warn the unit officers that a supervisor was coming,” the suit charges.

The complaint also named Jason Castonguay, who allegedly raped a female inmate in the laundry room at Albion in 2019, and Pedro Norde, who is accused of raping another woman more than 20 times at Taconic in 2018, infecting her with herpes.

Others named in the suit are were friends James Beam and Matthew Antolini, accused of raping two female inmates in 2017 at Lakeview, and David Stupnick, who is accused of illegal sexual conduct with an incarcerated woman for two years — even after the Corrections Department became aware of the abuse.

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(Tim Krochak/AP)

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Chelsia Rose Marcus is the criminal justice reporter at the New York Daily News. She is also the author of *Wild Escape: The Prison Break from Dannemora and the Manhunt that Captured America*. When she's not out reporting, Chelsia teaches aspiring journalists at New York University.

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