



## NEW REPORT FINDS DETERIORATING CONDITIONS FOR OREGON’S INCARCERATED WOMEN SINCE PUBLICATION OF CRITICAL INDEPENDENT REVIEW

March 29, 2024

PORTLAND, Ore. – Many people incarcerated at the women’s prison, Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF), report conditions at the prison have gotten worse since the publication of a damning independent assessment last August. The Gender Informed Practices Assessment (GIPA) was funded by the Oregon legislature and conducted by a team of independent experts from out of state to audit the functioning and effectiveness of Coffee Creek. Across 12 domains, the assessors found extremely concerning conditions and widespread dysfunction, causing considerable harm to people incarcerated there. People in custody have shared their experiences post-GIPA with the Oregon Justice Resource Center (OJRC) which is publishing those accounts as the second volume of its series on problems at CCCF called “**Death by a Thousand Cuts.**”

The first volume of “**Death by a Thousand Cuts**” was published in July 2023, just before the GIPA was released. OJRC had noted the frequency with which people at CCCF were describing worsened conditions since the pandemic and the many ways in which life had not improved much despite the lifting of COVID restrictions and decided to bring those accounts to public attention through the creation of the “**Death by a Thousand Cuts**” series. Since then, OJRC has continued to hear additional concerning stories of poor conditions at CCCF and has received reports of increased retaliation, mistreatment, and frustration on the part of people incarcerated there in the wake of the release of the GIPA in August 2023.

Responding to the GIPA, Governor Kotek acknowledged that it was “sobering” and directed the Oregon Department of Corrections to take steps to improve the situation in the short-term as well as convening an advisory panel to discuss and implement recommendations. Despite the rhetoric from the governor’s office and the flurry of activity and debate around Coffee Creek, that has not yet translated to improvements “on the ground” for incarcerated people. In fact, as volume two of “**Death by a Thousand Cuts**” describes, in some respects, things have gotten worse due to the backlash from staff opposed to GIPA-related change against people in custody.

Volume Two of “**Death by a Thousand Cuts**” builds on the insights from the first volume to continue to offer a sense of what people incarcerated at CCCF are enduring. Particular concerns highlighted in volume two include:

- Some staff reacting badly to the GIPA and proposed changes that stem from it by being harsher in their treatment of Adults in Custody (AICs).
- AICs who shared information with the GIPA assessors being called “rats” and “informants” and images of rats appearing in an office and on the walls of a hallway.
- Changes that have been made so far being superficial or tokenistic and not related to the most serious and pressing concerns expressed by people in custody.
- Further deterioration in the physical condition of CCCF such as water leaks, mold, and a dilapidated roof as well as chronic issues with plumbing, HVAC, and water.
- Insufficient, inedible, and spoiled food being served to AICs.
- Rampant sexual abuse, sexual assault, and sexual harassment leading to Coffee Creek being described by one AIC as “a human sex trafficking warehouse.”
- A lack of services for survivors of abuse and traumatizing/re-traumatizing practices in use such as strip-searches.
- The use of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) to investigate or punish people in custody for non-sexual displays of affection or consensual same-sex romantic relationships with other AICs.
- Staff treating AICs in a demeaning way and verbally abusing them.
- Retaliation against people in custody and a lack of accountability for staff misconduct.
- A punitive approach to dealing with AICs over minor infractions.
- Severely inadequate physical and mental healthcare.
- Frequent lockdowns due to staff shortages such as over the holidays at the end of 2023 or during the January ice storm in 2024.
- Continued restrictions on AICs contact with their loved ones.
- Lack of programming.
- Barriers to accessing the courts and finding help with legal matters.

“Some incarcerated Oregonians were hopeful when the GIPA was released that it would result in meaningful positive change in the harmful conditions they endure in prison,” said Sarah Bieri, Staff Attorney with the Women’s Justice Project of the OJRC and author of the “Death by a Thousand Cuts” series. “Steps such as the creation of an AIC council on GIPA to allow people to bring forward their concerns and have input into decisions were welcomed by some but regarded skeptically by others who were dubious much would change. Unfortunately, it looks like the skeptics were right.”

“Oregon’s leaders must wake up to the call-to-action that the GIPA and reports such as our ‘**Death by a Thousand Cuts**’ series represent,” said Alice Lundell, Director of Communication for the OJRC. “The need for a profound shift in Oregon’s treatment of incarcerated people is absolutely clear and it will only happen when those in positions of power demand it. It’s disgraceful to hear that some staff are retaliating against people in custody due to those same staff’s mistreatment of AICs being exposed. There have been so

many lawsuits over the years and so many well-founded reports of the harmful nature of Coffee Creek: when is Governor Kotek going to take charge of the situation?”

“It’s been more than 200 days since the GIPA was released and Governor Kotek has not yet apologized to those who have been and are currently incarcerated at CCCF,” said Julia Yoshimoto, Director of OJRC’s Women’s Justice Project. “Governor Kotek, at minimum, must apologize for how people have been treated and are still being treated at CCCF, and, importantly, make the commitment that responding to the GIPA will be a priority for her administration in the 2025 legislative session. Our updated report affirms Governor Kotek must play an active and leading role in advancing actual changes at CCCF and oversight of ODOC.”

The GIPA provided an opportunity for the state to finally address the longstanding crisis of dire conditions at Coffee Creek. Unfortunately, reports from AICs indicate that the flurry of activity around CCCF in response to the GIPA has not resulted in meaningful changes to address the harm to people incarcerated there. It is not too late for that change to come and it must happen soon.

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