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Aug 25th, 2010



Posted by [David Shapiro, National Prison Project](#) at 11:51am

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## IN COLORADO, A NEW BREED OF DEGRADING SEARCH IN PRISONS

The ACLU and ACLU of Colorado this week called upon the Colorado Department of Corrections to abandon a new policy that subjects prisoners to degrading body searches. According to press reports and letters sent to the ACLU by prisoners at the Denver Women's Correctional Facility (DWCF), prisoners now must hold open labia as correctional officers, sometimes using a flashlight, sometimes position their faces only inches away from a prisoner's genitals, conduct an inspection. Reports even indicate that some prisoners have been forced to pull back the skin of their clitorises. These searches occur even when the guards have no particular reason to suspect concealment of contraband — correctional officers search prisoners' body cavities on a frequent basis, after work assignments and visits from friends and family. Guards apparently have threatened prisoners who resist with pepper spray.

One prisoner describes the new procedure as follows in a letter to the ACLU:

The lift is treated differently by officers, but generally involves spreading your legs and parting your outer labia so an officer can do a visual inspection of your genitals. I have had to perform this procedure simply standing; from a sitting position with my legs spread eagle and having a flashlight shined at my genitals; from a standing position with a foot perched on a toilet and an officer's face inches from my genitals; in front of multiple officers and once in front of an officer and two Life Safety trainees....

High rates of prior sexual abuse among women prisoners no doubt compound the suffering inflicted by the new procedure. According to one prisoner at DWCF:

Being a survivor of sexual trauma the new labia-lift procedure encouraged my post-traumatic stress disorder. I had periodic flashback

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.... I have also witnessed women literally crying when they were subject to the labia lift...

Aside from the suffering and humiliation they inflict upon prisoners, the search unnecessary. They occur without any particular reason to suspect that a prison attempting to conceal contraband. On top of that, the new requirement that pr hold open their labia adds little to existing procedures that already required in searches designed to uncover any contraband. One prisoner describes the diffe between the old and new policies as follows:

T]he "proper" search (*before the labia lift came about*) is as follows: Remove all clothes, as an officer searches the seams/pockets/waistband and stand completely naked. Open the mouth; sweep fingers around tongue and along gum line. Fold forward ears while turning the head to expose behind them. Run fingers through hair, removing any ties or combs and if needed, bend over to shake long hair. Lift arms and if breasts are large, lift breasts. Turn around; lift each foot, wiggling toes. Turn your back to the officer, bend over, squat, and grab buttocks while coughing. The *addition* of the "labia lift" is to stand or sit, facing the officer, while spreading the labia open wide.

In short, the new requirement that prisoners hold open their labia adds little to search procedure — other than additional humiliation and suffering for DWCF prisoners. It's time for the Department of Corrections to abandon the new poli



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**1 RESPONSE TO "IN COLORADO, A NEW BREED OF DEGRADING SEARCHES IN PRISONS"**

1. *Anonymous* Says:

Aug 26th, 2010 at 12:12pm

Actually, the policy is not new and it is not just in Colorado prisons. It is the policy in federal prisons.



Name Anonymous

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