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## Federal Panel Questions Sex Abuse At Juvenile Prison

### ***IDOC Staff Testify Before Federal Panel***

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**WASHINGTON, D.C.** -- Indiana Department of Correction officials told a federal panel they are working to correct a pattern of sexual victimization of young inmates at a state juvenile correctional facility.

Department of Correction Commissioner Edwin Buss and his staff testified Thursday before a three-member Department of Justice review panel on prison rape, 6News' Joanna Massee reported.

It comes after a report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that 36 percent of inmates at the Pendleton Juvenile Correctional Facility reported being sexually abused, about three times higher than the national average.

Pendleton Superintendent Linda Commons said she was aware of sexual abuse at the facility, but was shocked by the report.

"Were there children who were being abused either by one another or by staff, and we knew about it? Yes," she said. "What startled me was that our numbers compared to the rest of the country were different."

Correction officials were asked to explain why they thought their employees would engage sexually with juvenile offenders.

"If there's any one particular area where we're failing it's in providing those staff with the training where they can effectively manage and deal with adolescent development," said Division of Youth Services Director Michael Dempsey.

Staff members testified that the facility has made changes since the survey was taken, including requiring additional training, increasing video surveillance and instituting five-minute watch tours.

"I want to say 94 percent of the staff at Pendleton Juvenile has gone through training on offender manipulation and also on sexual misconduct," said Mavis Grady, internal affairs officer at the facility.

The surveys showing widespread abuse were taken in October of 2008. Correction officials testified that the agency's own interviews later found lower rates of sexual victimization.

"We have taken a very aggressive approach towards investigating any and all allegations of sexual misconduct or abuse by staff and juveniles," Buss testified.

Panel members commented on Indiana's progress since the report, and encouraged correction officials to continue making improvements.

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The Pendleton Juvenile Correctional Facility is currently being investigated by the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. The findings related to that investigation have not yet been released.

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