

Homosexuality In Prison

by Jeremy Pinson

I recently read an excellent article in Prison Legal News about the plight of a sexual abuse survivor from the Colorado state prison system. It got me to thinking about inmate and staff attitudes towards homosexuality in High security federal prisons.

Largely the spread of homophobia in federal prisons is due to proliferation of prison gangs that tend to view homosexuality as a sign of weakness and vulnerability. Prison gangs are very strict regarding homosexuality and white supremacist groups tend to assault or extort homosexuals as a means of bolstering their reputations as tough.

In my experience most inmates could care less about someone's sexuality but in an environment where your every move is scrutinized and judged by the most predatory inmates, even the most liberal inmate converts to a fervent homophobe.

Sadly many prison officials are willfully ignorant to the plight of homosexuals who are often indeed victimized by gangs and other predators that roam prison yards. What is most disturbing about federal prison officials is their catch and release practices regarding

the perpetrators of inmate on inmate violence. A violent inmate who assaults staff will likely be segregated in harsh confinement for years. But the inmate who assaults another inmate will likely face no greater punishment than a few months segregation before being released into general population.

Similarly the Justice Department will prosecute even a minor assault on staff but rarely bothers to prosecute even the most egregious inmate assaults.

In a culture of such hate, bigotry, violence and indifference the homosexual suffers more than most and this truly saddens me. It is an injustice that renders prison sentences for these people much more harsh and terrifying than for any other type of offender.

I'm not equipped to do much about this except speak honestly about it even if few others incarcerated in prisons or employed in prisons have the courage to be so candid. If there is any one thing I have identified as being fuel to the fires of injustice is the unwillingness of inmates and prison officials to begin dialogue on what are very serious issues. Prisoners are sent here as punishment, not for punishment. And by no means should the punishment become worse because of a person's sexuality which is no more a choice than is gender or race.