

Chuck Colson Group Criticizes DOJ for Prison Rape Standards

One day after honoring their founder at a memorial service at Washington National Cathedral, Prison Fellowship and Justice Fellowship officials are criticizing the Department of Justice (DOJ) for adopting sub-par standards to eradicate rape in our nation's correctional institutions, something **Chuck Colson** worked tirelessly for during the last decade of his life.

The DOJ on Thursday announced that it is adopting national standards to eliminate the scourge and shameful practice of prison rape—standards that were mandated when Congress passed the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) in 2003. By law, the standards were supposed to have been released no later than June 2010. While grateful that standards were finally adopted and are now in effect, Prison Fellowship and Justice Fellowship argue that the DOJ weakened the standards proposed by the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission in several significant ways. In addition, the department has decided that immigration facilities do not have to comply with the new standards.

“It is outrageous that Attorney General Holder has decided not to require immigration facilities to comply with these standards,” says Justice Fellowship president Pat Nolan, who served on the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission established by Congress. “It was clearly the intent of Congress that every person in confinement in the U.S. would be protected from being raped. Holder’s decision leaves those in Immigration and Customs Enforcement facilities, many of whom are not accused of a crime, at the mercy of sexual predators. Shame on Mr. Holder and Ms. Napolitano for allowing this to occur.”

No one at the Department of Justice will pay a price for being

at least two years late in adopting the prison rape standards, Nolan says, but in the meantime, an estimated 120,000 men, women and teens have been sexually assaulted without the protections earlier adoption of the standards would have provided.

The standards will immediately apply to the Federal Bureau of Prisons. States will have one year to decide if they, too, will adopt them. California, Oregon and Massachusetts have already adopted these new standards.

With the new standards, the DOJ released a PREA-mandated Bureau of Justice Statistics survey that found that nearly 10 percent of former state prisoners reported being sexually victimized during their last incarceration. Other Bureau of Justice Statistics studies have estimated that some 60,000 people are raped while incarcerated each year, including one in eight juveniles in custody and one in 20 adults incarcerated.

"No matter how serious the crime an inmate committed, his or her sentence does not include being raped," says Nolan. "Just one rape is terrible, but it is unconscionable to think that almost 10 percent of inmates are assaulted. This study makes clear that prison officials have to be held accountable to clean up this shameful situation."

Action on issues, such as fighting prison rape, is part of the mission of Justice Fellowship, which works with government officials to reform our failing justice system. Colson founded Justice Fellowship to fix our broken justice system, while he began Prison Fellowship to heal lives broken by crime.

"It is appropriate that the prison rape standards were issued the day after Chuck Colson's memorial service," says Nolan. "Although Chuck would have been as disappointed as I am that the Department of Justice weakened the standards recommended by the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission,

nonetheless, I think he would have been proud that he was part of this effort to stop predatory rapes in prisons. His work on this critical issue was a fitting capstone to his 35 years of improving the lives of prisoners and their families.”