

Testimony to end strip searches and solitary for juveniles, from David Boehnke, Twin Cities Incarcerated Workers Organizing committee

Senators, it's good to be back to support this important bill to end strip searches and solitary confinement for juveniles, which I hope will be a step towards doing the same for adults.

It's taken me a long time to understand the importance of abuse and sexual violence. I was raised with the idea that family members, adults, and government employees are safe to be around.

Yet, I've learned. By supporting a friend after a sexual assault. From the personal experiences of partners, and close friends. And over this last year, I had 5 women report sexual assault by staff at Shakopee prison, the first in solitary confinement, conveniently in the only room without a camera.

I've been taught again and again -- that by any measure, strip searches are sexual assault, and solitary confinement is abuse.

Responding to these assaults taught me more things:

1. A three decades long history of harassment, intimidation, abuse, and impunity, at Shakopee prison, attached.
2. The 3 year refusal of the Department of Corrections to use an expensive airport-style body scanner purchased to stop such institutionalized sexual assaults within Shakopee prison. This scanner is still hardly used, despite intense ongoing concern from the Taskforce on Incarcerated Women and Girls.
3. Finally, it taught me about something very important called the sexual assault to prison pipeline. How it is well documented that being sexually assaulted, including by staff or peers in juvenile institutions, is a key factor that often sends children on the path to prison.

If we are against sexual assault and abuse we must be against them, anywhere.

I have direct reports from women in Shakopee of being strip searched while unconscious on their way to an ambulance, or coming home from the hospital after pregnancy or surgery.

Of guards bragging about strip searching women and receiving no discipline for complaints, and hopefully you all know of guards being fired for covering up sexual assault on prison grounds and being returned through union arbitration. This is the status quo today.

I ask you to read the testimony about what being strip searched is like, from a woman at Shakopee, attached.

Finally, I pray that you draw a hard line against this state sanctioned violence, and the abuse it empowers -- directly contributing to the trauma, crime, and incarceration devastating our communities.

Thank you.