

OPENING STATEMENT OF BRIANE MOORE

BEFORE THE HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE (HSGAC)
PERMANENT SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATIONS (PSI)

HEARING ON SEXUAL ABUSE IN FEDERAL PRISONS
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I. Introduction

I was glad to hear that this Committee is investigating sexual abuse in the Bureau of Prisons. I am nervous to be here today. I am not an activist or someone who would seek out an opportunity to use my voice like I am today. This is an incredibly difficult and personal topic for me. Speaking about sexual abuse is hard in most situations and even harder in such a public setting. But despite my nerves I am here today because I believe this is an opportunity for me to use my voice to help others. I am out of prison now, but I know other people are still there. I am speaking today in the hopes that telling you my experience will help protect the women inside now, who are vulnerable. If speaking to you today can spare other women from abuse, I am willing to do that. That is why I am here today.

I grew up in a loving home with a grandmother who supported me and loved me. When I was 17, I had my daughter. I made the wrong choice to sell drugs. I wanted to make money to support myself and my daughter. For that, I went to prison. I accept that I made the wrong choices. I was sentenced to 10 years in federal prison.

II. My Experience as a Woman in Prison with No Control or Power

In prison, I was far from my family. This was hard. Family is the loving center of my life. I accepted that I had to improve myself, do my time, and make it back home to my family. I saw that prison broke so many other people, and I was determined not to let it break me. Most people do not fully understand what it is like to be in prison. Life in prison means living under total control. The prison guards have complete power. They tell you when you can sleep, when you can eat, and where you can go. I did not have control over which prison I was sent to and ended up being placed so far from my family. After my sentencing, I was initially placed at FCI Aliceville in Alabama. About two years later—despite having made a request to be transferred closer to home—I was instead transferred to FCP Alderson in West Virginia. Before FCI Aliceville and FCP Alderson were around 12 hours away from my family which made it very difficult for them to visit. Not being able to see my daughter and grandmother was devastating. But I doubled down on my determination, I followed all the rules and had a record of good behavior. I took all the programming opportunities that were available to me to better myself and in the hopes that eventually my request to be transferred to a prison closer to my family would be granted. Being granted a transfer to a prison closer to home does not always happen and the BOP officials have discretion to grant or deny a transfer request.

III. My Experience in a Culture of Systemic Sexual Abuse

At FCP Alderson, a captain began targeting me. The captain took me to places within Alderson that were private—where no one could catch him and where there were no cameras and there, he would abuse me. He was a captain with total control over me. Once, a building officer ordered me to go to the captain’s office. There was a secretary’s office within the captain’s office. When I arrived, there was no secretary. The captain closed the door and raped me. On another occasion, the captain himself ordered that I come to his office. I had no choice but to obey. We always had to follow orders in prison. Most importantly, I knew the captain could interfere with my transfer and prevent me from being closer to my family—closer to my daughter. The captain also knew that I was aware that I was powerless and was aware that he could interfere with my transfer to be closer to my family and my daughter. He then explicitly reminded me of his control. In the office, he told me that he knew I wanted a transfer to another prison. He said, “The paperwork goes through me.” He threatened me that if I resisted, he would interfere with my transfer. Other times, he sexually assaulted me in isolated areas of the prison.

It is hard to fully explain how this felt. The captain who already had complete control over my day-to-day life was now enforcing that control over my body and using my desire to see my child to threaten me to stay silent. The captain made it clear that if I wanted a transfer, I had to accept the abuse. I was faced with the choice of accepting the abuse and having an opportunity to be closer to my family or speaking up and facing retaliation that would likely put me further away from my family. I felt powerless. The abuse continued. My transfer request did not go through. I only escaped the abuse when FCI Pekin—a prison for women close to home in Illinois—reopened. When they asked for volunteers, I jumped on the opportunity to save myself. I left FCP Alderson in December 2017. But before I left, the captain raped me a final time. When I was in FCP Alderson, the captain raped me a total of 5 times.

Before he started sexually abusing me, he raped other women in prison. And during the time that he was abusing me, he was also abusing several other women. We were not protected. I had no power to stop the abuse. The captain had total power over me, and he knew that. He knew I had no control and could not say no. The captain made sure I knew that and made sure I knew he could make things worse for me. Even before his threat, I knew that if I reported him, I could be placed in solitary or shipped out to another prison even further away from my family. The prison system calls this “protection” because it separates us from the abuser. But it is punishment. It is retaliation. I saw it happen to other women in prison, and I knew that I would be punished unless and I endured sexual abuse. I had to **not** help myself to help myself. After an investigation began, the captain resigned and was prosecuted. He pled guilty.

IV. The Effects of Sexual Abuse and Fear of Retaliation Changed My Life

When the captain was sentenced, I wrote a victim-impact statement, which is attached as **Exhibit 1**. After the abuse, I could not sleep a full night for months. I had reoccurring nightmares

that played over and over like a broken record in my head. I woke up in cold sweats. I would wake up crying after nightmares that the captain was trying to kill me for reporting the abuse. I isolated myself from others. I had to seek mental health treatment because I developed PTSD. I let the judge know that I was still suffering. The captain abused his authority and power. Today, I want you to know that I am still suffering. I left Alderson in December 2017. I am here today, 5 years later, and I want you to know that I am still suffering. This changed the course of my life forever. I am a different person physically and emotionally because of this. I am still in mental health treatment. I lost trust in the system. I have learned more and more about how guards in federal prison sexually abuse women. I am not alone. This is hard, but I am speaking today in hopes that you will help the women still in prison today and in the future. The captain was abusive, but he was also a product of the federal prison system that allowed him to abuse his power and authority. These awful things happen in a system that enables and protects abusers and retaliates against victims, who are powerless against the abuse.

V. Conclusion

When I received a 10-year prison sentence for a drug offense as a young mother, I knew prison would be tough. I accepted that I would be punished for my crime. It was not easy doing time. I was sentenced and put in prison for the choices I made. I was not sentenced to being raped and abused while in prison. This should not have happened to me. Speaking about this is not easy, but I am not powerless anymore. The day I started to heal was the day that I could talk about what happened to me without being afraid.