

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Seward Prison Strips, Holds Prisoners Naked for Hours**

*Ombudsman investigation confirms allegations that prisoners were ordered to remove clothing, transported naked through the institution, and placed in cells without clothes for up to 12 hours*

**Juneau, Alaska** — (Ombudsman Complaint A2013-1560) On August 16, 2013, an inmate in Bravo Module of Spring Creek Correctional Center in Seward broke off a shower head, resulting in water flooding the module. According to Spring Creek staff, the other Bravo Mod inmates yelled encouragement and agitated for the inmate to resist officers and destroy the shower. Maintenance staff eventually shut off the water and Department of Corrections staff extracted the inmate from the shower.

Shortly after that inmate's removal, correctional officers removed each of the remaining 12 inmates in Bravo Mod from their cells, ordered them to strip their clothes, searched them for contraband, attached them to a cuff retainer restraint, and moved them naked to different cells in Charlie Mod. The inmates were placed in new cells, where they remained, naked, for up to 12 hours. The inmates did not receive a mattress or blanket until the following day.

After a lengthy investigation, the Ombudsman found that these actions were contrary to federal and state law, as well as DOC policy. DOC also failed to follow policies regarding discipline and inmate grievances related to this incident.

The Bravo Mod inmates had been involved in a demonstration that involved destruction of the Juliet Mod at Spring Creek about 10 days before this incident. Deposition statements of Spring Creek staff involved in the incident reflect that the orders to strip the inmates, restrain them, and then leave them naked in new cells were meant to punish the inmates for the earlier demonstration rather than to address an issue of facility or inmate security.

When some Bravo Mod inmates filed grievances about the August 16 incident, Spring Creek assigned the investigation and resolution of the grievances to the same lieutenant who had ordered the actions that night. DOC policy requires that inmate grievances accepted for investigation must be assigned to ***“an objective staff member that is not involved in the subject of the grievance*** to investigate the grievance and issue a recommendation.” [Emphasis added.]

The Department of Corrections did not dispute any of the Ombudsman's findings. The Ombudsman recommended that DOC review and revise its policies and procedures concerning the use of restraining devices and update agency regulations regarding body cavity searches. The Ombudsman also recommended that DOC adopt a department-wide policy for recording

corrections staff interactions with inmates, including the potential use of body cameras, which has become common practice for many law enforcement agencies.

The Ombudsman closed the investigation as **justified** and **partially rectified** based on DOC's concurrence with the investigation findings and acceptance of two of the four Ombudsman Recommendations. Read the executive summary of the investigation at <http://ombud.alaska.gov/>.

The Ombudsman recognizes that DOC is responsible for a population of individuals who are often violent, non-compliant, obstructive, and otherwise difficult to manage. The Ombudsman also recognizes that nearly half of the Alaskans in DOC custody experience a disability that impairs their cognitive and behavioral functioning. DOC has policies and standards in place to preserve the safety of DOC staff and inmates, and to maintain the integrity of DOC facilities. These do not, and should not, allow for humiliation and degradation of people in custody.

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*The Alaska State Ombudsman investigates citizen's complaints about state agencies. Our role is to ensure that state government serves the people of Alaska fairly and effectively.*