

## EXILED IN PURGATORY: CREATING MENTAL ILLNESS IN FLORIDA SUPERMAX FACILITIES

In the Florida State Prisons (FSP) Close Management (CM) — Florida's version of Supermax — prisoners are prohibited from talking to each other. Not about religion, politics, family, nothing. They are not allowed to speak a single word.

Of course, we find ways to have brief exchanges. At our cell doors we can see the prisoners in the cells across from us. We've developed a prison-style sign language. At the back of our cells we have a window which opens and closes. We can whisper to prisoners in the cells next to us. But we have to be very careful. If prison guards catch you using sign language or talking it means trouble.

Trouble can mean a variety of punishments. During the summer — when the heat index is  $110^{\circ}$  — the guards will turn off the air vents to prevent air flow. Because the cells have two large 4 foot fluorescent lights the temp in the cell can go as high as  $115^{\circ}$  when the outside temp is  $90^{\circ}$ . Staff will say: "If you want to talk bitches, talk in the heat." In the winter the staff will turn off the heat. "A cold prisoner is a quiet prisoner", as their saying goes.

Unlucky prisoners may be sprayed with pepper spray without warning. Others are taken to the disciplinary unit where they face physical abuses. Others may be subject to sleep deprivation where prison staff will pound on their windows every 15 minutes to keep them awake for days.

Prison guards walk the unit yelling "shut the fuck up and lay down", "shut the fuck up bitches"! That's every day.

Attached to this essay is a copy of an Inmate Request I wrote requesting the policy be changed. It was denied.

The policy creates mental illness. Prisoners become detached from reality. They become aggressive. They lose communication skills. What communication skills they do retain becomes blunted. Many become so detached they become suicidal. Prisoners attempting suicide at FSP is a regular occurrence.

I notice the effects myself. I catch myself talking to myself. I invent conversations to pass the time, until I realize I've gone from an imaginary friend into retreating into the created world. I look out across the hall to other prisoners pacing in their cells and I see them having animated conversations with themselves, too. It feels like a mental ward.

Florida took away t.v.'s from prisoners in CM. The one thing that gave them some mental stimulation. Prisoners are not permitted arts — such as art paper, markers, pens (for drawings), etc. Prisoners are expected to "shut the fuck up and lay down".

I bought a chess board. I play myself a few times a day. I want to play chess with someone else — but there is no talking. I wish I had someone to play with through the mail. But I don't. So I play with my imaginary friend. And he's not very good at that.

6-2-2014 office

STATE OF FLORIDA  
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Staff  
Replied

**INMATE REQUEST**

Mail Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Team Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

TO:  
(Check One)

Warden  
 Asst. Warden

Classification  
 Security

Medical  
 Mental Health

Dental  
 Other

FROM:	Inmate Name Jacob Barrett	DC Number C07320	Quarters D-1107	Job Assignment N/A	Date July 11 2014
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**REQUEST**

Check here if this is an informal grievance

I would like you to change the policy and practice utilized by staff which prohibits prisoners from talking to each other at their cell windows (the back outside window). Also, the policy and practice which prohibits us from talking in sign language at our cell doors. I would like to have conversation with other prisoners about my religion and legal cases. However, staff tell prisoners "shut the F--k up and lay down" and dont permit the talking. This policy prevents me from Free Speech and Free Exercise of Religion by preventing me from discussing and sharing my faith. I would like authorization to be able to talk out my back window in a normal tone of voice, and to use sign language to other prisoners at my cell front. Please authorize this.

Thank you.

cc: file/attorney

All requests will be handled in one of the following ways: 1) Written Information or 2) Personal Interview. All informal grievances will be responded to in writing.

RECEIVED

DO NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE

RESPONSE

JUL 14 2014  
14-3373  
ESP Grievance Office

DATE RECEIVED: 7-15-14

I AM ACCORDANCE WITH CELL HOUSING RULES - AND INMATES ARE TO CONDUCT THEMSELVES IN A QUIET ORDERLY MANNER AT ALL TIMES.

[The following pertains to informal grievances only:

Based on the above information, your grievance is \_\_\_\_\_ (Returned, Denied, or Approved). If your informal grievance is denied, you have the right to submit a formal grievance in accordance with Chapter 33-103.006, F.A.C.]

Official (Signature):

Date:

7-15-14

Original: Inmate (plus one copy)

CC: Retained by official responding or if the response is to an informal grievance then forward to be placed in inmate's file

This form is also used to file informal grievances in accordance with Rule 33-103.005, Florida Administrative Code.

Informal Grievances and Inmate Requests will be responded to within 10 days, following receipt by the appropriate person.

You may obtain further administrative review of your complaint by obtaining form DC1-303, Request for Administrative Remedy or Appeal, completing the form as required by Rule 33-103.006, F.A.C., attaching a copy of your informal grievance and response, and forwarding your complaint to the warden or assistant warden no later than 15 days after the grievance is responded to. If the 15th day falls on a weekend or holiday, the due date shall be the next regular work day.