

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL #HB1476

Independent Oversight and Review Board for Health Care of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities-Establishment

Date: February 29, 2020

From: Lisa Caponiti

To: Chairman Luke Clippinger, Madame Chair Vanessa Atterbeary and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

Re: SUPPORT FOR BILL#HB1476

I am writing in complete support of HB1476. I was incarcerated at MCIW for over three years and saw first-hand the deplorable medical treatment and conditions that the women there had to deal with. From the moment I entered the institution until the day I left, there was absolutely no consistency with the medical treatment I received. My initial intake consisted of a brief medical history including documentation of prescription medications I was currently taking. It took weeks before I received all my daily medications including high blood pressure and diabetes medications. I previously had shingles in my left eye and was being treated at Johns Hopkins (JH) before my incarceration. I was told by my doctor at JH that I needed to continue with my eye drops, while incarcerated, because without the drops I could lose complete vision in my eye. Every time I met with someone on the medical staff, I told them I needed these drops. I had JH send over my medical history also stating I needed these drops. Weeks went by and nothing was done. Finally, I had a melt-down with a nurse and cried because nothing had been done. She took pity on me and finally put through the paperwork to get me to see the optometrist when they came to MCIW. Whenever it was time for me to refill that same prescription it was a constant battle with the staff to approve the paperwork.

Waiting in the line to receive my prescriptions was another catastrophic exercise-in-futility. Many times, I would wait in a long line to finally be seen and then told that my prescriptions were not in and to come back the next day. I would do so the next day and the same thing would happen, no prescription, and was told to try again tomorrow. This was an incredible waste of time and I was without my medication. The staff rarely would call to see if the medications were even ordered. Finally, after refusing to leave the line until something was done, the staff would call and I would find out the meds were never even ordered. Other times when I received my blister packs there would be several pills missing! What happened to my full prescription? I soon found out when one day my prescriptions were not in and I had gone several days without my medication and the staff took pills from someone else's blister pack to give to me!

Getting an appointment for medical care was also a joke. If you had an emergency, you could wait days to see someone. The process of filling out a form and waiting to be called was a next to useless. I had to constantly fill out requests to be seen. I also knew of women who were in need of serious medical attention, suffering from cancer, thyroid issues, etc., that were scheduled to be seen at an off-site hospital. When the day came for their appointment there was no transportation to get them to the hospital. This happened on several occasions. These

were woman who were extremely sick or waiting to get a diagnosis, and transportation wasn't scheduled!! Then they would have to wait several more weeks to get the logistics worked out. The conditions of the woman who are housed on the medical units is appalling. The cells were filthy and no one cleaned them. One woman who was suffering from cancer lived in a cell where vomit was on the floor and she was expected to clean it up...she could barely move.

The mental health area was another area that was atrocious. These poor women were stripped naked and remained that way for their entire stay. They had no access to any sanitary products or soap. When their food arrived, they had no utensils so they had to eat with their hands. Imagine being on your period or just having a bowel movement, using your hands to wipe yourself and then having to eat your food with those same hands that you could not clean with soap and water!! There were also male nurses and male correctional officers who would watch these naked women on the monitoring screens.

When leaving the institution, you are supposed to get medication to take with you. Many times, this does not happen. You are released without any medication to tie you over until you can see a doctor on the outside. I was persistent and sent note after note to the medical staff that I was leaving and I needed my medication and thankfully, it was ready when I left, but I was one of the lucky ones. Many women who are on psychiatric and/or life saving medications are released without these medications.

I could go on and on about the horrendous medical conditions and treatment of incarcerated individuals. Clearly, something needs to be done. An Independent Oversight and Review Board is a must! Please, please, I strongly encourage you to approve this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Caponiti