

## Prison Abuse: Michigan Prison Scandal

‘In January 2008, in a Michigan courtroom, a jury, in a gesture considered extremely rare in American Courtroom procedure... had the courage and the compassion to offer an apology on Behalf of the State of Michigan to 10 Michigan women prisoners, for the years and years of rape, torture, tyranny, and retaliation these women were forced to endure in Michigan prisons.

Each member of the jury stood before the women in open court and publicly apologized to them for the abuse they endured while incarcerated. The guilty prison administrators had already left the courtroom and were not present when the jury did what these defendants refused to do: “apologize for the harm inflicted”.

This 2008 landmark case eventually resulted in a July 2009 settlement against the Department of Corrections for the State of Michigan (DOC) wherein they agreed to pay \$100 million dollars as compensation to end 13 years of litigation with about 500 current and former female inmates in Michigan’s prison system who alleged that the male officers raped, sexually assaulted and harassed them and had engaged in a widespread practice of cross gender pat downs, touching, privacy violations and systemic and aggressive retaliation imposed on those women.

For years, rights groups warned that male guards were sexually assaulting female inmates in Michigan prisons... and for years, those warnings went unheeded.

The Detroit News found in their own investigation that Michigan lawmakers and prison officials regularly interfered and blocked investigations of sexual abuse in women’s prisons, stifled inmate complaints and stripped away the rights of assaulted prisoners to sue for damages.

The problem was compounded by the low priority given to the prosecution of guards charged with sexually abusing prisoners... And that the responsibility for doing so was increasingly left to the Attorney General's Office....which was the very same agency fighting the lawsuits against the department by women victimized by these same guards.

Legislators took away inmates' right to sue under Michigan's Civil Rights Act in 1999. That year, they also changed the law to require prisoners to prove lasting physical injury from an assault to obtain damages in court. "By stripping imprisoned women of this basic civil right... the state emboldened sexual predators who were attracted to prison work."

In the United States, sexual abuse by guards in women’s prisons is so notorious and widespread that it has been described as “an institutionalized component of punishment behind prison walls.””