

# Great Wardens Project

## Women in Corrections

July 13, 2023

# Mission

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The Great Wardens Project provides mentorship and training to develop bold prison leaders and build a corrections culture based on safety and dignity.

# Core Beliefs

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- Wardens and Superintendents have a responsibility to promote safe, secure, and healthy corrections facilities.
- Advocates and prison leaders can work together to reimagine how corrections facilities operate and shape a new generation of committed corrections professionals.

# Tech Check

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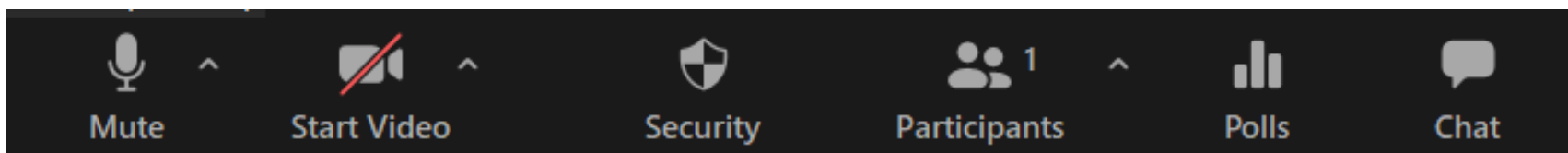
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Video

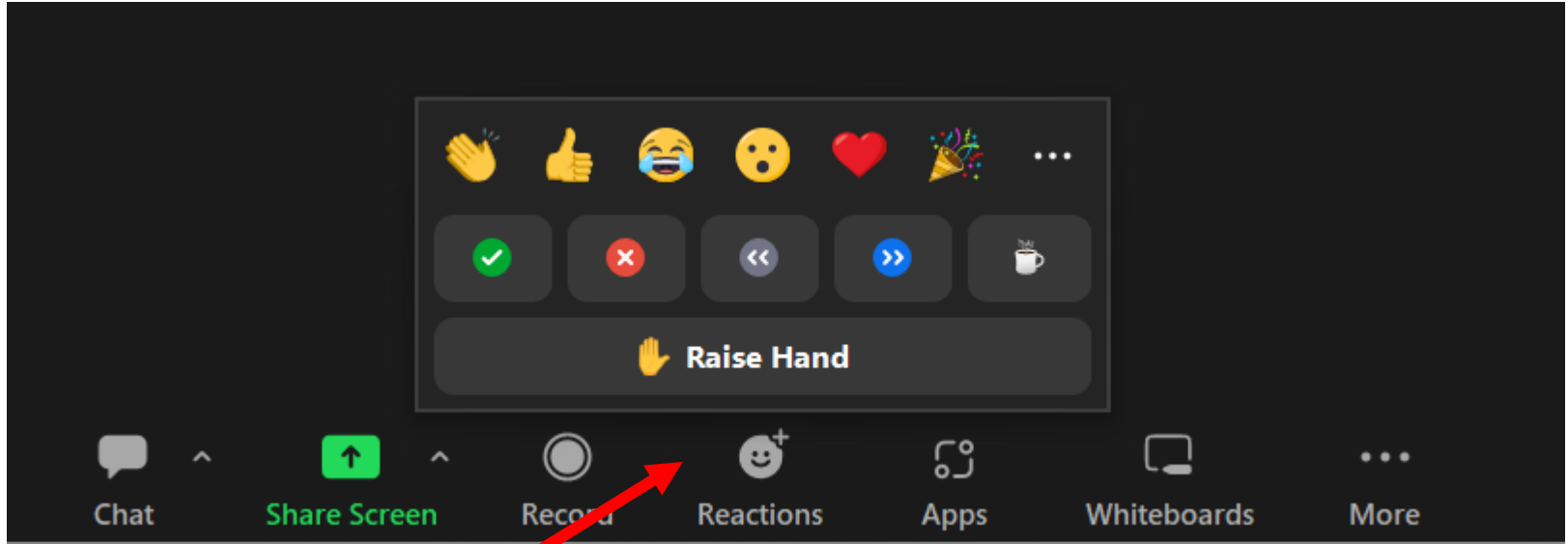


Chat



# Join the Conversation

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# Meet Our Task Force

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# Today's Speakers

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**Deborah Jo Wofford**

Deputy Assistant Secretary,  
Washington State Department of  
Corrections



**Lynn Bissonnette**

Superintendent (ret.)  
Massachusetts Department of  
Corrections

# Today's Speakers

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**Dawn Davison**

Warden (ret.)

California Department of Corrections and  
Rehabilitation



**Jessica Serrano Seipel**

Senior Program Director

Just Detention International

# On the pug scale, how are you feeling today?

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# Considerations

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- No one is a monolith...
- ...but there are common dynamics
- Experiences are informed by a variety of identities beyond gender
- Transgender and gender non-conforming corrections staff exist



# Corrections Needs Women

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**“Every study ever done on this subject says that the introduction of women into male prisons has had an enormously positive effect on the socialization of the prisoners, on the incidence of violence in the prisons and not just violence against women, but against all staff.”<sup>55</sup>**

*Patricia Caruso, Director, Michigan Department of Corrections*

# Jail staff blamed 'cute' female officers for ongoing sexual harassment, lawsuit says – Miami Herald

Jail supervisors **didn't take female corrections officers seriously** when they complained of sexual harassment perpetrated by inmates, according to a federal lawsuit.

Instead, supervising officers said the women should put on their “big girl pants” and deal with inmates exposing themselves and masturbating at them, making sexual threats and degrading comments.

The supervisors are accused of **blaming female officers** who raised concerns about the harassment for “looking cute” and telling them “if you stopped wearing perfume and tight uniforms, and stopped getting your hair done, the inmates would stop masturbating at you,” according to an amended complaint.

“ “ In order to be equal,  
you must excel. ” ”  
- Mary Leftridge Byrd

# Survey Question

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What does it take to be  
successful as a woman in  
corrections?

# National Survey of State Correctional Executives - 2003

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Compared to male wardens, female wardens are:

- ✓ More likely to place greater emphasis on the input and contribution of correctional officers and incarcerated people
- ✓ Less likely to seek support from colleagues in addressing the stresses of their jobs
- ✓ More likely to feel that control of their institutions was slipping through their hands

# Agree or Disagree?

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“No matter how explicit I make my directives, staff always find a way to get around them.”

# How Women in Corrections Cope

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- Modeling behavior of male counterparts
- Hiding or minimizing femininity
- Not seeking input on decisions in order to exude confidence, but also...
- Not being too assertive in order to avoid appearing “bossy”



# Discussion Question

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How have you coped with the challenges of being a woman in corrections?

# Evolution of Corrections

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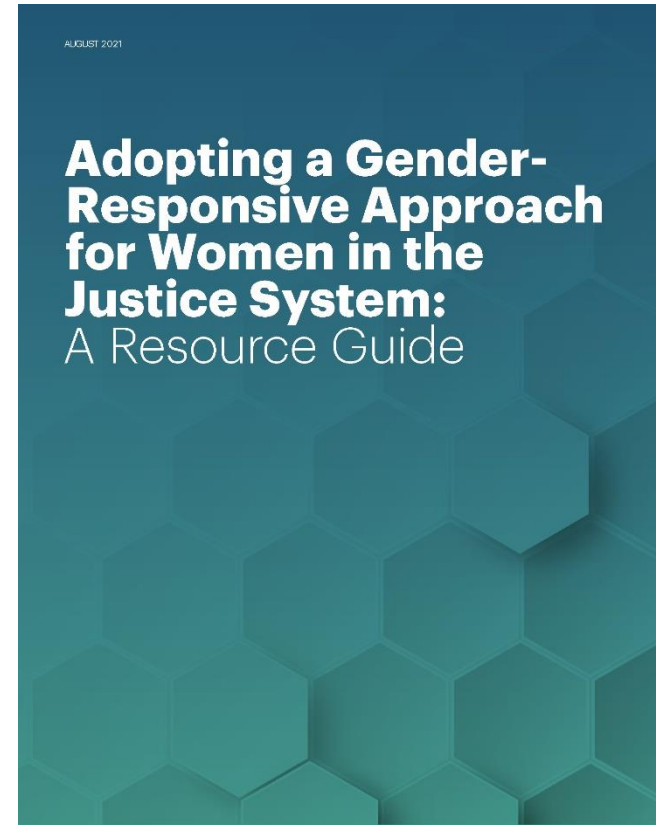
“The needs of women in a correctional setting pose unique challenges for operational practices that may have been **designed without their gender differences in mind.**”

– National Institute of Corrections

# Gender Responsive Approach

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- Promotes trauma-informed practices
- Recognizes different pathways to incarceration
- Considers different needs during incarceration
- Encourages building connections

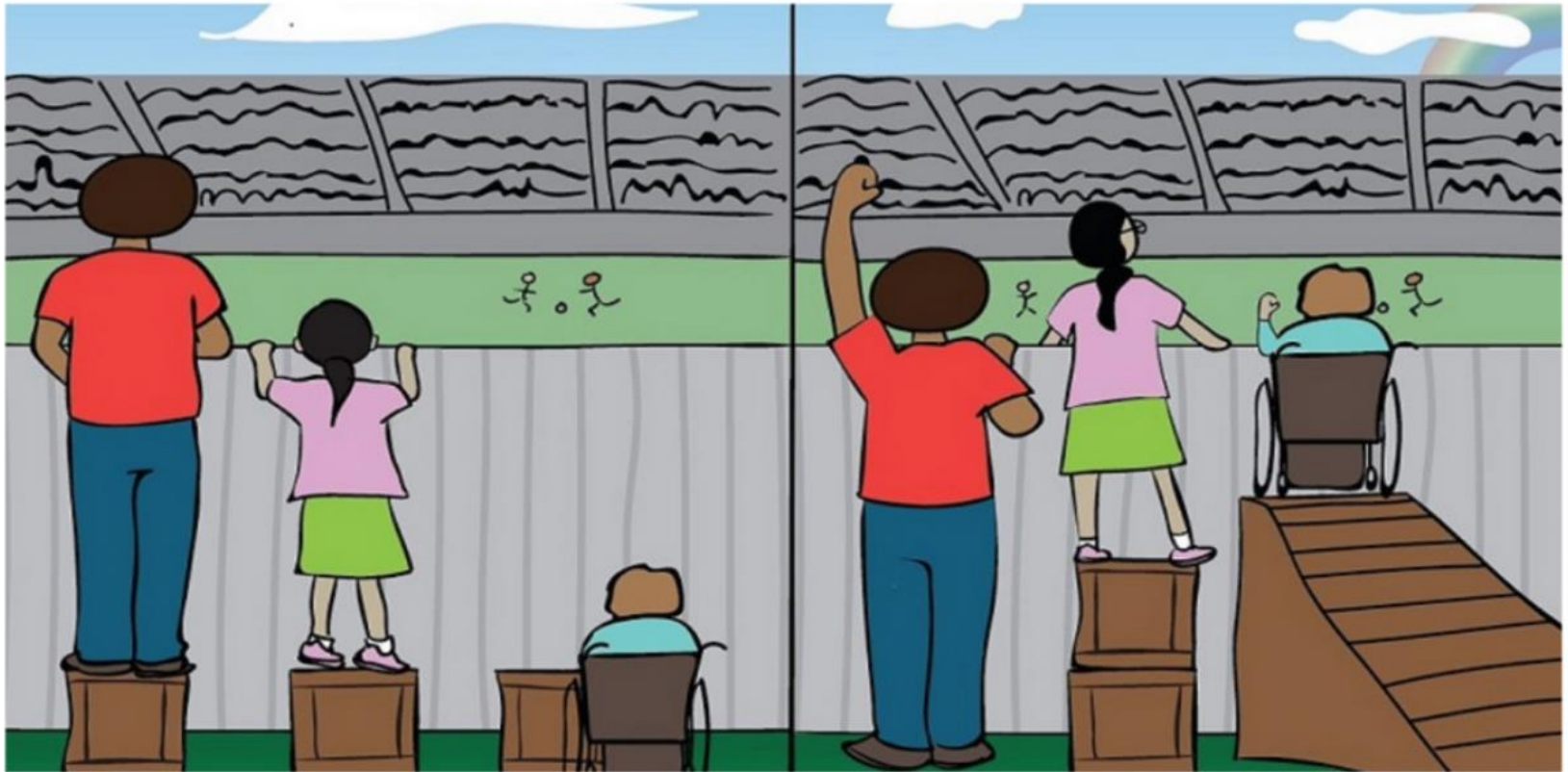


# Gender Responsive Workplace

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- Promotes trauma-informed practices
- Recognizes the unique experiences women in the workplace may face
- Considers different needs during workday
- Encourages building connections





Equality

Equity

# My Sexual Harassers Were Behind Bars. I Was Their Guard. – The Marshall Project

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After a few shifts in Delta, a male officer finally explained to me why the intercom rang so constantly. “They keep buzzing because they’re pleasing themselves to your voice,” he said.

I was dumbfounded. I was educated and had the highest score on the state exam of any cadet at the time. But training didn’t prepare me for that moment.

# Gender-Specific Staff Training

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- Provides a safe place to talk about concerns that female cadets and other newly hired female staff may have
- Offers guidance to female staff on how to respond to those challenges
- Fosters community building and mentorship opportunities for female staff



# The Case for Same-Gender Staff Spaces

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- Research has shown that women learn more and contribute more to discussions in single gender groups
- Allows for frank discussions about the unique challenges women in corrections face



# Survey

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How can women in corrections  
best support each other?

# Resources

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[Association of Women Executives in Corrections](#)

[Women Professionals in Corrections: A Growing Asset, MTC Institute](#)

[Female Wardens: Results from a National Survey of State Correctional Executives](#)

# Get Involved

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For additional information, please visit our website at:  
[greatwardens.org](http://greatwardens.org)

**Direct questions to:** [greatwardens@justdetention.org](mailto:greatwardens@justdetention.org)

## Connect with JDI:

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 [www.twitter.com/justdetention](http://www.twitter.com/justdetention)



# Upcoming Summits

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October 19, 2023

January 18, 2024

April 18, 2024



A short evaluation survey will automatically appear after this meeting!