

ADX FLORENCE PRISON LEGAL PROJECT

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SUMMARY

On November 30, 1994 the United States Penitentiary Administrative Maximum Facility, known as ADX, opened in Florence, Colorado. The ADX facility consists of several different security units, including a special housing unit, control unit, and "general population" units where prisoners are locked down in their cells 22-23 hours each day. In response to numerous complaints of human rights violations occurring in ADX, the *ADX Florence Prison Legal Project* was founded to investigate prisoner complaints, research factual issues and legal theories, and pursue appropriate litigation and/or other challenges.

THE PROBLEM

The Bureau of Prisons is publicizing ADX as the ultimate solution in corrections for the "worst of the worst" prisoners. The prison, ostensibly was built to replace USP Marion in Illinois, as the highest security prison in the federal system. ADX is the first federal prison specifically designed and constructed to lock down prisoners for administrative purposes.

There are numerous problems with ADX, including environmental toxicity, unnecessarily restrictive classification methods, inadequate medical care for Tuberculosis, a requirement that prisoners work in the UNICOR factory in order to leave ADX and the lock-down of prisoners with psychiatric problems. However, solitary confinement stands out as a primary concern to many prisoners.

In the special housing unit, control units and the "general population" prisoners eat all meals within their cells, shower in their cells, and receive counseling via television in their cells. The cells have a window viewing high walled grounds, and a double door (the inner bars and the outer a sheet of steel) which suppresses sound. Every time prisoners leave their cells they are handcuffed and shackled; prisoners are restrained so often, some find their arms raising when the cuffs are removed.

In their first year of incarceration at ADX, locked-down prisoners are already experiencing the detrimental effects of long-term solitary confinement. In addition, the supposed criteria for transfer out of ADX includes mandatory work for which there are not enough placements.

THE RESPONSE

Activists from organizations such as the Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center Prisoners' Rights Project and the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown have been organizing grassroots efforts against the ADX unit since its planning stages. But legal efforts against the facility have been infrequent and sporadic. Currently, a local group of 10-15 activists, legal workers and lawyers are pursuing a collective effort to mobilize legal resources and institute the *ADX Florence Prison Legal Project*.

THE PROJECT

The *ADX Florence Prison Legal Project* will serve as a working office and base to process mail, investigations, research, strategy, and ultimately, litigation. The Project will function as the legal arm to continuing grassroots political and educational work around ADX.

Participants include attorneys, legal workers and activists: Francisco "Kiko" Martinez, Christie Donner, Chris Jeffers, Michelle Foy, Richard Demarest, Josh MacPhee, Kim Dvorchak, and Ann Roan. The inclusion of law professors, students and others is an ongoing effort.

The Project is currently developing a monitoring effort to visit ADX prisoners and collect data, and the facility has already begun to change its rules regarding attorney visits. The Project filed a Freedom of Information Act request and received a stack of documents from the Bureau of Prisons relating to ADX, but not specifically meeting the terms of our request. The battle over ADX and against the BoP will be fierce, presenting challenges to evaluate on all fronts.

THE NEED FOR SUPPORT

The *ADX Florence Prison Legal Project* needs your financial and advisory support. The Project is seeking individual and organizational endorsements as we pursue fundraising. The Project aims to fund a mailbox, office supplies and a part-time coordinator to establish our work. Your input and support is greatly appreciated at this critical stage in the Project's development. Thank you.

Endorsed by: The Center for Constitutional Rights and the Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center