



Control Units in Pennsylvania

On April 8, 1996, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections opened its second S.M.U. (Special Management Unit). The first S.M.U. was opened in April 1992 at S.C.I. Camp Hill, and this S.M.U. was opened at S.C.I. Green, in Green County, Pennsylvania.

Control Units provide long-term punishment (years) in isolation under the guise of administrative custody. They are labeled as "programs" to fraudulently obtain federal funds, but there is not one real program in the S.M.U., unless you can label physical assaults and psychological torture as programs.

Control Units were created to circumvent Pennsylvania's law that prohibits prison officials from using administrative custody as a means of punishment (Title 37 93.11 (b) of the Pennsylvania Code).

In reality, Control Units are political prisons within the regular prisons. Prisoners are locked down, sometimes for years at a time for 24 hrs./day, under extreme deprivations, because of their beliefs/ideas, or for filing grievances or lawsuits, or for writing letters to outside sources about prison conditions.. The conditions in the S.M.U.s are abusive and atrocious, to say the least.

Prisoners are assaulted with impunity and are denied medical care. They are not allowed to purchase or use personal hygiene materials such as deodorant, body soap, body lotion, hair grease, etc., although the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections administrative directives state that all prisoners in this state system, regardless of their classification status, shall be allowed to purchase these items.

Being in the S.M.U. gives you the feeling of being buried alive. Twenty-four hours/day of idleness, mental and physical torture. To insure a mentally deteriorating environment, mentally-ill and emotionally unstable prisoners are placed in the S.M.U. They holler, bang, and kick doors all day and night, making sleep something you get when you can. The noise and the 24 hour light that stays on in the cell, in the ceiling over our beds, are designed to cause sleep deprivation.

Placement in the S.M.U. Control Units is purely arbitrary and selective. The fact that it is racially selective is also beyond dispute. Since opening the first S.M.U. in 1992, there has been no more than 30 white prisoners, and 20 Hispanic prisoners sent to the S.M.U., yet there has been over 250 African-American prisoners sent to S.M.U.s.

The staff here at S.C.I. Green is the same staff that was at S.C.I. Huntingdon and was involved in my being assaulted while in handcuffs on 3-27-92 at S.C.I. Huntingdon, and spitting in my food, and giving me the first fraudulent charge that I was found not guilty of. The warden here was totally involved in that incident. I was sent here because it is at the other end of Pennsylvania and makes it impossible to see my family, and separates me from my support group. I was told by the S.M.U. staff at Camp Hill that I was being sent here because of my articles, and that Warden Price would see that I got nothing here. Well, I have been on Phase Three longer than anyone in the history of the S.M.U. in this state (13 months). WHY? I have been in the S.M.U. 20 months beyond my 90 day sanction, all misconduct free. WHY?

It has long been the practice of the prison system to retaliate against "jailhouse lawyers" and prisoners who speak out about their conditions.

No, the worst of the worst is not in the S.M.U.. unless you are speaking about the predatory staff within the S.M.U. Unit managers are allowed to run an autocratic system, and can be called no less than tyrants.

August 16, 1996: I watched a prisoner that was immobile in a security belt be beat down by a gang of these predators, because they did not like what he said. This is the norm, not the exception. It would take all day to tell you about all the split heads, broken arms, etc.

In this society there is a habit of trying to label the victim as the villain. This way those in power feel justified in abusing you. We see a Rodney King in here every day.

Racism, hate groups, and hate crimes are at an all time high throughout this country. Pennsylvania has the fastest growing membership in white supremacist groups according to the Department of Justice, and Central Pennsylvania has the most. Most of the state prisons are in central Pennsylvania. Prison jobs are like magnets for white supremacists, and Control Units offer a better opportunity to abuse black prisoners with impunity.

Many prisoners in the S.M.U. have lost hope. They have been given disciplinary time, up to 10 years, for doing nothing. The conditions in the S.M.U. are meant to mentally and physically break you down. They strive to make you wholly dependent on them, and strip you of your self-esteem and dignity.

The longer a man sits in the S.M.U., the worse he will get. The anger and bitterness just spread inside like cancer. The loss of human contact creates emotional deterioration. I remember trying to write a love letter, and I couldn't because my emotions are so tied up in my struggle and the anger at what has been done to me.

Here in the S.M.U. at S.C.I. Green, there are 22 prisoners, of which 3 are white, 1 is Hispanic, and 18 are African American. At S.C.I. Camp Hill, there are 125 prisoners of which 112 are African American. The Staff is 100% white, and racist.

The myth that the S.M.U. is for the worst of the worst in the state prison system is the biggest lie of all. Since the opening of the S.M.U. there have been about 14 murders of prisoners in this prison system, allegedly by prisoners. Only one of the prisoners involved or convicted in these cases ever came to the S.M.U. There have been several small riots, etc., and none of those involved came to the S.M.U. Yet there are prisoners in the S.M.U. that came to "The Hole" for talking back to the guard, for verbal threats, for tattooing, and petty things like that. Most of them receive bogus misconducts while serving 30 days in the S.M.U. How do you punish a mentally-ill prisoner, for being mentally ill? You sit him in the S.M.U. for years, physically and mentally abuse him, let him max out on his sentence, and send him back to society, bitter, angry, and still mentally ill.

Major Tillery was sent to the S.M.U. twice with no misconducts. The reason stated is that he has leadership ability and too much respect from other prisoners. He committed no infraction yet he is now being punished and lied about as being the worst of the worst, handcuffed behind his back whenever he is taken anywhere, and treated as if he committed a crime. In reality, his crime was winning the Tillery vs. Owens lawsuit against the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections at Western State Prison.

Then there is myself, Dennis Solo McKeithan. Twice I was sent to the S.M.U. for fraudulent misconducts in retaliation for my articles and civil complaints, etc. In each case I was given a fraudulent assault charge. On December 13, 1992 I was found NOT GUILTY by an all-white jury in Huntingdon, Pa. Four days later I was sent to the S.M.U., where I stayed 29 months, until the A.C.L.U. got involved. On June 30, 1994, I received a hung-jury on a fraudulent assault at S.C.I. Rockview. Again I had an all-white jury in Bellefonte, Pa., and on December 9, 1994 the court ruled I had defended myself from abuse and I was again NOT GUILTY, yet again I am in the S.M.U. I received 90 days disciplinary sanction December 31, 1994, which expired on March 31, 1995, yet I am still in the S.M.U., still being punished under the guise of administrative custody. Only this time, the Warden admitted on September 19, 1996, that he was punishing me for writing letters to outside sources about the S.M.U. His hate for me led him to admit what I have been telling the media and courts all along. I have been misconduct free since the day I was locked down (Dec. 31, 1994); I am the only prisoner in the S.M.U. at S.C.I. Green that was sent here from the S.M.U. at Camp Hill and that never had a misconduct, so why was I sent here? RETALIATION.

On September 3, 1996, all S.M.U. staff recommended me for Phase 2, and for the first time in the history of the S.M.U. a warden turned a prisoner down for Phase 2. Warden Price stated in writing that because of my grievances against staff, and my letters to outside sources, he was keeping me on Phase 3 and in the S.M.U.

So what is the aim of the S.M.U.? To destroy any independent thought and shut down those who are not willing to suffer in silence. You are punished and your family is punished, because of your attitude, not your actions.

As long as no one asks questions, this Hitler-style concentration camp will get worse. The assaults will become murders. When they bring the body bags out, and when they release mentally ill prisoners into society, you will ask "Why?" And the answer will be "Because no one spoke out against the human abuse, and the human destruction, taking place at the hands of tyrants who misuse the system to exercise racism and hate while being paid."

I am asking those of you who can help, or will help, to contact me—Dennis Solo McKeithan—or the following persons about the coalition we are trying to form to stop the mental and physical abuse in the S.M.U. control units at SCI Green and SCI Camp Hill. If we do not stop it now, control units will spread like malignant tumors.

Your help can make a difference. If a lot of people do a little, a few people will not have to do a lot.

For more information, contact

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To complain about the abuse, contact

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