



**TESTIMONY OF:**

**Brittany Cooper**  
**Jail Services Social Work Intern**  
***BROOKLYN DEFENDER SERVICES***

**Presented Before:**

**The New York City Board of Correction**  
**Special Hearing on Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment Minimum Standards in**  
**Correctional Facilities**

**April 23, 2019**

My name is Brittany Cooper and I am a Social Work Intern at Brooklyn Defender Services in the Jail Services Unit. For the past seven months, I have visited clients in New York City Jails, to respond to their various safety, medical, and mental health concerns. Recently, one of the most pressing issues that our clients face is related to PREA standards, specifically regarding housing based on one's gender identity. As a result of this issue, our clients have endured various forms of mistreatment in the jails.

This BDS client, who I will refer to as Ms. T, was placed in a male facility despite identifying as a transgender woman, and she was never informed of the THU at the time of intake. When she did learn of the unit, through word-of-mouth, she immediately inquired about it with DOC staff only to be told it would be worse. Ms. T used that information, trusting the officer's judgment, and decided to stay in the male facility.

The following is her testimony, describing her experience sleeping in a male facility as a transgender woman:

*I would like for my pronouns to be honored no matter what facility I'm in. When a person comes to CO's with concerns of harm, I should be taken seriously; not laughed at, not sent to protective custody. Defusing the situation should come first. We should get the same respect as [any other woman].*

*When it comes to clothing, we should be able to get correct sized undergarments, like every other female. We should also get feminine hygiene products such as shampoo, conditioner, suppositories, preparation H, animas, and cream for rashes. Also, my medical needs should be taken seriously. I would like to talk to doctors that understand*

*my concerns in regards to body changes and hormone therapy. There should be a hormone specialist and they should be accessible no matter where a Transgendered person is housed.*

*The requirements to work should not be “straight male”. I am a human being willing to work the same as the next man. I should not hear remarks like “you are not on the corner” or “it’s a privilege to work don’t take it for granted” just because I would like to work. And when I do work, I should not be harassed by others and forced to quit. I know I am here because I did something bad. I know my rights and wrongs, but these are the basics of treatment for someone like me.*

Based on Ms. T’s testimony, one can see that housing consistent with an individual’s gender identity is important to the safety of our transgender and gender non-conforming people. BDS asks that the Board take into consideration the consequences of not properly housing an incarcerated person by their gender identity. We encourage the Board to visit and speak with people detained and sentenced in our City jails, those with direct personal experiences, in order to improve the housing placement process for transgender and gender non-conforming people.

Thank you.