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Her family eventually learned about his placement in segregation after another OSP inmate called on Mora-Contreras' behalf.

Additionally, after Mora-Contreras' transfer, family and friends said they were given the runaround when they tried to find out why he was moved to Eastern Oregon.

His close friend and owner of Revolución Coffee House in downtown Portland, Maria Garcia, visited OSP after his transfer, demanding answers that she said she never received.

Mora-Contreras spoke with Street Roots from Two Rivers Correctional Institution. He said he didn't know why he'd been placed in segregation while he was still housed at OSP until after his lawyer submitted an inquiry.

He was under investigation and was kept in solitary confinement for 68 days before, as DOC documents obtained by Street Roots show, he was completely cleared of charges.

"It was horrible," Mora-Contreras said of his long stay in segregation. "Imagine a room about 5 feet wide, 8 feet long, 10 feet high. The only building on the premises that's air conditioned, it's always cold – in the middle of summer. Lights go on at 5 in the morning; lights go off at 10. I was in the cell by myself. Your thoughts run wild. You don't know what's going on; you're disoriented, suicidal thoughts will creep in once in a while, and you're not really getting any answers from anybody. It's a very lonely and cold place."

He lost 20 pounds and the spark in his eye during that time, observed his mother and Garcia.

Before the investigation began in April, Mora-Contreras was reportedly a model inmate. He'd been president of the Latino Club for nine years, and staying out of trouble is a prerequisite for that job. He created his own niche at OSP, photographing inmate weddings and fundraisers and advocating for Hispanic inmates.

His parents and siblings all live in the Portland area, and it was easy for his father to drive his mother to Salem from their home in Hillsboro for frequent visits. But Mora-Contreras' father has a titanium plate in his back that prevents him from being able to make the three-hour trip to Two Rivers without severe pain. He has not seen his son since he's been transferred.

Mora-Contreras' family hired an attorney when they discovered he was under investigation and in isolation.

In a letter sent to OSP Superintendent Jeff Premo, who recently retired, attorney Zachary Stern argued that his client had a record of clean conduct for more than a decade, had never been classified as a gang member, had earned a bed in the honors dorm and successfully ran the Latino Club.

Mora-Contreras was in segregation while corrections staff investigated reports that he was involved with numerous other prisoners in bringing drugs into OSP. His attorney called the investigation "loosely defined" and the allegations, which were ultimately dismissed, "baseless."

"As you can tell from the enclosed documents," he wrote, "the only items Mr. Mora-Contreras is involved in bringing into the institution are local professors and leaders of other non-profits to aid other inmates ... the only 'orchestration' efforts Mr. Mora-Contreras chooses to engage in are fundraisers for charitable causes."

During their visit to OSP in September, DOC director Peters told Mora-Contreras' close friend, Garcia, that she would conduct an investigation into his case.

Mora-Contreras indicated in a letter to an attorney after his transfer, that he believed prison staff was targeting him because he advocates for the rights of Hispanic inmates, who he said are ineligible for certain employment opportunities and programs within the prison system, an accusation DOC denies.

"If you go into a disciplinary segregation unit," Mora-Contreras told Street Roots, "most of the population there is of minority – blacks, Hispanics."

Mora-Contreras, 35, was sentenced to life without parole for hiring someone to kill a man engaged to his younger sister when he was 19 years old, and he had been at OSP since the trial ended when he was 22.

Now, he said, for all he knows, he could spend the rest of his life out at Two Rivers in Eastern Oregon. Out there, he said, opportunities are scarce, he's far from family, and he's surrounded by gang members.

"The jobs are limited out here," he said. "You're out in the middle of the desert, in a unit with 100 other people, isolated from everything else."

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