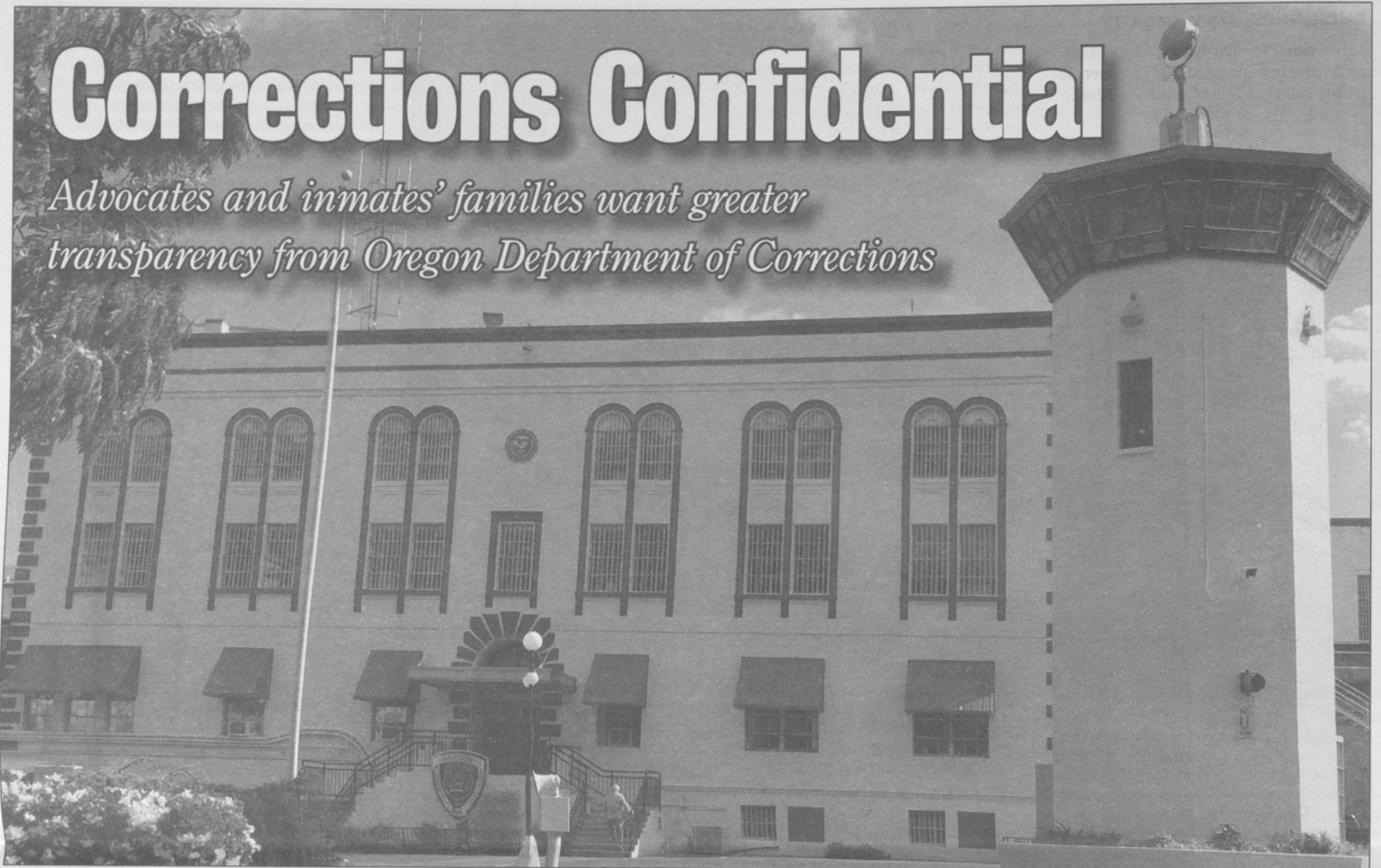


# Corrections Confidential

*Advocates and inmates' families want greater transparency from Oregon Department of Corrections*



Oregon State Penitentiary is a maximum-security prison in Salem, operated by the Oregon Department of Corrections.

STREET ROOTS PHOTO

**BY EMILY GREEN**  
STAFF WRITER

Local civil rights groups are asking Oregon Department of Corrections for increased transparency and an audit of disciplinary actions taken against inmates. They're also demanding reforms to the way it transfers inmates between its facilities and answers to questions about the transfer of a specific inmate in August.

On Sept. 19, representatives from ACLU of Oregon, Voz Hispana Cambio Comunitario and Don't Shoot Portland, as a part of the Black Lives Matter movement, met with state corrections director Colette Peters and several other DOC staff at Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem.

They brought with them letters signed by roughly 100 Portland-area community members and local civil rights and religious leaders, asking for a revision of the state corrections department's disciplinary and transfer policies and, specifically, how they are applied to African-American and Latino inmates.

"We have anecdotal reports from folks that are incarcerated that these policies are being applied disproportionately to certain communities of black and brown people," said Mat dos Santos, ACLU of Oregon's legal director.

Additionally, he said ACLU of Oregon has "concerns about the transparency of DOC's disciplinary policies and the transparency about policies relating to transfers."

When inmates are transferred to facilities

far from their communities, it creates barriers to visitation.

According to research compiled by Prison Policy Initiative, just 31 percent of people in America's state prisons receive a visit from a loved one in a typical month, though a "breadth of research" shows maintaining contact with family and receiving visitors are among the best ways to keep prisoners from reoffending after their release.

Francisco Lopez, political director of Voz Hispana Cambio Comunitario, said his organization also believes transfer policies and disciplinary actions disproportionately affect inmates of color based on phone calls his office receives from their families.

He echoed dos Santos' concerns regarding DOC's lack of transparency around DOC handling of inmates, saying it causes confusion and hardships for their loved ones on the outside, especially when an inmate is transferred to a prison far from where they live.

Lopez said he and the other activists asked Peters for an audit "of the department and an audit of issues that are arising there in terms of communities of color — especially African Americans and Latinos."

They believe an audit would confirm their suspicions that these inmates are treated more harshly than white inmates, and they

hope having that evidence would pave the way for reforms within DOC.

In their letter, the activists also requested increased services for African-American and Latino inmates and their families.

Voz Hispana and Don't Shoot Portland also asked Peters for the return of Oregon State Penitentiary's Latino Club president, inmate Rafael Mora-Contreras, whom they said was transferred to Two

**"We have anecdotal reports from folks that are incarcerated that these policies are being applied disproportionately to certain communities of black and brown people."**

**MAT DOS SANTOS,**  
LEGAL DIRECTOR, ACLU OF OREGON

Rivers Correctional Institution in Umatilla earlier this year with no explanation given to his friends and family.

A DOC spokesperson told Street Roots she could not access any information regarding Mora-Contreras' transfer.

Letters and documents provided to Street Roots by supporters of Mora-Contreras raise questions about correctional staff's treatment of prisoners of different ethnicities within the walls of Oregon's correctional institutions, but an analysis that would either back up or disprove these claims does not exist.

Lopez walked away from the meeting hopeful, saying the response from Peters was "very positive."

Peters issued the following statement in an email response to Street Roots' inquiry regarding her recent meeting with the activists in Salem: "It was a valuable

meeting. I always appreciate it when the community brings issues and concerns forward, and I look forward to the collaboration between DOC, Voz Hispana Cambio Comunitario, and Don't Shoot Portland."

DOC spokesperson Betty Bernt said in the same email response that Peters and DOC have agreed to look into the issues brought forward in the letter; however, no decisions or actions have yet been decided. She wrote, "We will take all input into consideration as we move forward."

In response to an inquiry about data on disciplinary policies, Bernt wrote, "We do not have any existing reports that speak to disciplinary policies being applied disproportionately to any ethnic group."

The civil rights groups have not yet received a formal response from DOC in regard to their requests, but are scheduled to meet with DOC again on Oct. 25.

Mora-Contreras' mother, Elpidia Mora, told Street Roots with the help of a translator that she has trouble communicating with DOC because she does not speak English. When her son was placed in solitary confinement for more than two months between April and June of this year, the effect on her family was devastating.

She became tearful as she recalled the first 15 days her son was in solitary confinement. She said she knew something was wrong because he stopped calling, but she had no idea what it was.

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