

## HIV + WOMEN PRISONERS

### *Solidarity Statement from Chowchilla*

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Warm greetings to the wonderful people who have taken out time to help us with our struggle. The struggles of the HIV/AIDS incarcerated women at the Central California women's Facility are many and hard. This prison is a fraud! The public thinks we are children in Chowchilla, just having a gang of fun! The public relations official here, Tobe Wong says that HIV+ women prisoners expect a luxury hotel. Wrong! We, the women of Chowchilla, are struggling day by day just for what everyone else outside the gate-to-hell takes for granted. LIFE!

The conditions here are a nightmare! We are treated as subhumans - the officers (not all, but most) talk to us as if we were dogs. The medical treatment is the biggest joke around. The food is not edible and our mail is tampered with day in and day out. The grievance system is a farce. These are only a few of the horrors of Chowchilla.

Remember the saying, "In order to be a good politician, you have to be a good liar". Sterling O'Ran, the so-called ombudsman of the California Department of Corrections should run for governor. The man lies with a smile! Mr. O'Ran visited Chowchilla and made an outrageous number of empty promises, none of which have come true.

The prison gets \$22,000 a year to house one non-HIV infected prisoner. It costs about three times that amount to incarcerate prisoners with HIV and AIDS. Yet, prisoners have to pay for their teeth, glasses, cold medication! Where is all the money going? The pay for slave labour here starts at \$.08 per hour and may go as high as \$.15 for work that would cost the state millions of dollars if they hired someone from the outside. The system is getting rich while we suffer.

Yes, Chowchilla is a medical hell hole. There's no doubt about that. We need better medical care, high nutritional diets and a caring, compassionate AIDS doctor. We need early release for all prisoners with AIDS and other terminal illnesses.

The beginning of this year brought tears, smiles, and laughter to the incarcerated women at Chowchilla. Betty Jo Ross was released to her loving mother. It took the efforts of all the incarcerated women here and the outcry, letters and public pressure from the outside. You have our deepest gratitude for all the support you have given to this fight.

The release of Betty Jo Ross was a huge battle to be won. But the war is not over. We hope that you will continue to support us in the days ahead as we fight together for quality health care and a better life for women prisoners.

January 29, 1994