The whole time I was in the boys' side at HYCF I was threatened with violence and rape, touched sexually on various parts of my body, and experienced constant sexual harassment. Except for isolating me, which made my pain and loneliness worse, nobody helped me. I have tried to move on with my life, and I'm currently attending Remington College in Hawaii, where I am working on an Associate's Degree in International Business, but it is quite painful having to relive memories of what happened at HYCF. Please help make youth detention centers safer because the sexual abuse and threats I endured truly made my time there a living hell.

CHAIRMAN WALTON: Thank you very much for your testimony. We appreciate the difficulty in making a public statement of that nature, but I'm sure we'll find it very helpful in our deliberations as we fulfill our obligations to Congress and the President. Thank you. We'll hear the next testimony before we ask any questions.

MS. HARDIN: Good morning. My name is Chino Hardin; I'm a Youth Organizer at Prison Moratorium Project which is based in New York City, as well as the point person for the Justice for Youth Coalition. I've been in this role for about four years and have traveled throughout the country to raise awareness about the terrible conditions, including sexual abuse, that young people face while locked up.
I appreciate the opportunity to address the National Prison Rape Elimination Committee today, and would like to share with you some of the experiences I endured as a very young person in prison, as well as things I witnessed other young women go through. In my youth I was arrested sixteen times and incarcerated on eight different occasions, so I know what goes on inside the walls of juvenile detention facilities all too well.

I was incarcerated the first time when I was 13 years old way back in 1993 at what was known then as Spofford Juvenile Center in the Bronx. I had gotten into a fight with a boy I knew and ended up spending a little over a month in custody. Spofford was a very scary place, especially at the age I entered into Spofford. I was housed in a unit with all girls, but there was a boys' unit on a different part of the same floor. I immediately noticed that the male corrections officers seemed too nice to the girls and were overly familiar with them and putting their arms around them or touching them on the face, shoulders, waist, and letting the girls touch them. I saw these same corrections officers give the girls candy or extra food, and let them out of their cells when they were supposed to be on lockdown.

The correction officers even allowed some of the boys to come over to the same side of the facility as the
girls. In some cases, correction officers allowed boys and girls who liked each other to have consensual sexual contact inside the girls' cells. In other cases, it was clear what was happening was not consensual. The corrections officers allowed certain boys to enter the cells of girls that the correction officer deemed were not behaving well. I was aware of this because I often heard girls screaming in fear at 2:00 or 3:00 o'clock in the morning, and all I can see by my cell window were red jump suits running by, and only the boys wore red jump suits. In my one month at Spofford, these -- three different girls told me they were raped by boys who correction officers allowed them to go into their cells. I was terrified and did my best to keep a low profile so I wouldn't become a target.

As bad as Spofford was, the scariest thing that ever happened to me in prison was when I was at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in Westchester, New York, a couple of years later.

Now, I want the Committee to imagine you're 15 years old and you get locked up for fighting. At the time of your arrest you lie to the cops, you tell them that you're 17 years old instead of 15 because you want to look cool in front of your so-called friends, but you're really only 15, and you don't know what you're in for. Now you're upstate in an adult prison doing a one- to three-year
sentence, all because you lied about your age. But no one listens to you when you try to explain that you're only 15 and you don't really belong there. You call home when you can, but your grandmother, who's elderly, says she's doing everything she can to get you out of there, but for you she can't move fast enough. There's no inmate classification system in place, so, you're put in a cell in general population with a woman who's about 50 years old and you do your best to figure out how to take care of yourself.

The other inmates get wind of how young you are, and plus, even though I'm 26 now, I still get carded, so, imagine me being 15, I looked about 12, it wasn't hard to figure out how old I was. And a woman who's about 32 years old quickly takes you under her wing. She's much bigger than you are, and she also is a leader of a prison crew called the Latin Queens, so almost everyone showed her respect, even the correction officers. You get moved closer to her cell, and she gives you cigarettes and food. She tells you stories about her childhood. She comes to your rescue when you get into a fight with another adult woman. Just when you start to trust her and think she's your friend, she begins to make you feel uncomfortable. She's always touching you, taking a shower every time you take a shower, tries to kiss you. You tell her that you're not attracted to her, but she says she loves you. You tell her
that you love her too, just not in that way.

Now you want to put some space between you and her because you're feeling scared, but where can you go? You're in prison! You ask the correction officers to move you but they will not do it unless you tell them your life is in danger, and you can't say that because at the time you don't think it is, and you know the absolute worst thing you can be in prison is a snitch. Besides, you don't want to get the person in trouble after she's helped you.

Early one morning you go to take a shower and when you're washing your hair, the older woman runs up behind you, punches you in the face, what felt like hard as she can. You're stunned; your nose begins to bleed; she pins you up against the wall and shakes a sawed-off broomstick at you and tells you she's going to take what's hers, meaning she wants to have sex with you in one way or another. You're terrified, and on top of everything else, you're stark naked, dripping wet. So you tell her that she doesn't have to take it this way, that you'll be her girlfriend, but it's obvious that she doesn't believe you, so even though you want to die, you pull her closer, despite your bloody nose, you close your eyes and you kiss her. You're devastated, but at least you keep from being raped. Several months later, you're finally let out of that hell.

Between the ages of 16 and 18, approximately 1997
to 1999, I was incarcerated seven times, each time at Rikers Island adolescent unit. I witnessed a lot of abuse of girls there. For instance, at times when I showered, I observed the male guards were watching in a manner that made me very uncomfortable and clearly had nothing to do with security safety. I also knew inappropriate things were happening because girls who had no money in the commissary would -- I'm sorry. --- girls who had no money in the commissary would suddenly have things that were highly inconvenient in prison, like cigarettes and candy. When I asked the girls where they got those things, they would tell me that the correction officers had given it to them. For example, a girl would say that a correction officer was "her man," meaning that he was giving her those items in return for sexual favors. Sometimes I even saw girls putting on a show for male correction officers in the shower, rubbing themselves or using soap like a sex toy, while he watched nearby smiling, and obviously sexually aroused.

In addition to sexual misconduct and coercion, there were also instances where girls were viciously attacked and forced to have sexual intercourse. One of the lowest points of my life is when a male correction officer at Rikers raped one of my friends there. She came to me and told me immediately what happened and that he had assaulted her in a room that was out of the way from other inmates or
correction officers. She was terrified and did not report what happened to her. As a result, she received no medical treatment or counseling. The correction officer knew that this girl was my close friend and in days after the rape I remember looking at him and him smiling at me if he knew that I knew what he had done.

Even though a number of years have passed since I was in custody, I still struggle with the memories of the attempted sexual assault against me, the rape of my friend, the male correction officers taking advantage of the girls that they were supposed to be there to protect. To this day I still have trouble sleeping at night. I can't undress in front of other people. I'm very comfortable with sexual intimacy. The only way I have to do -- the only way I have to cope with this sexual violence I witnessed in prison is by throwing myself into activism. By increasing public awareness of what happens to young people behind bars, I feel some small measure of peace within myself, and my counseling is talking to you guys here today.

I ask the Commission to take its mission very seriously when it comes to preventing sexual abuse against youth in custody. Please understand that even for someone like me who was able to fend off vicious attacks, the struggle to move on with life, without being consumed by rage, is a difficult one and I must manage it on a daily
basis. Something was stolen from me that I cannot get back, and I speak out today to prevent other young people from going through this.

        And the only last thing I would like to say is that we know prison is a form of punishment, but must it be cruel and unusual?

        Thank you.

        CHAIRMAN WALTON: Thank you very much. Questions?

        COMMISSIONER SMITH: One of the things -- and this is actually -- good morning, first. And thank both of you for your testimony. While I know that it was difficult, it was very helpful and useful to us. One of the things that actually stood out in both of your testimony was the fear of reporting and the failure to report these incidents, and I understand the reasons why those reports didn't happen. But from the point of view of the Commission, what can we do, what kinds of things would you suggest in order to make it safer for people to report and what kinds of mechanisms should be in place for youth to report? Either one of you.

        MS. HARDIN: Well, I think one of the biggest fears of reporting, you know, attacks, or anything against like a guard -- on the guard, then I'll talk about the inmate level. On the guard level, I mean, who will you be reporting to? Another guard. And we, you know, they stick together; they're not going to stick their neck out and, you