



**CENTRO LEGAL  
DE LA RAZA**



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### ***As Trial Begins for Former FCI Dublin Official, Community Groups Demand Support and Sanctuary for Survivors of Prison Staff Sexual Abuse***

**OAKLAND, CA** – The trial of former prison guard John Bellhouse begins this morning at the federal district courthouse in downtown Oakland, California. Bellhouse is charged with sexually assaulting multiple incarcerated women in his custody. He was one of five former FCI Dublin officials indicted in 2021—the other four officials, including the former warden and chaplain, have already been convicted of sexual abuse. As Bellhouse’s long-awaited trial starts, survivors and their supporters are calling on federal authorities to center and meet the needs of those directly impacted by prison staff sexual abuse.

Members of the Dublin Prison Solidarity Coalition, a partnership of people currently and formerly incarcerated at FCI Dublin and community organizations, have spoken with over 120 people who suffered staff abuse and retaliation at the prison, many of whom have contributed to the federal criminal investigation. While many advocates welcome public accountability, survivors are clear that the prosecution of a handful of bad actors will not address the deep, systemic issues that perpetuate a culture of abuse at the prison, and will not keep survivors safe or help them to heal. **The Coalition has [urged federal prosecutors and the Department of Justice](#) to better support survivors, including through release from custody, protection from deportation, and access to robust mental healthcare.**

“Though survivors have taken unimaginable risks to report abuse and assist the criminal investigation, [many remain incarcerated](#) in the custody of the very agency responsible for their abuse; [indefinitely detained by ICE](#) and facing permanent separation from their families; and suffering the impacts of trauma without adequate resources and mental health support. Survivors made these criminal cases possible, and they deserve better,” emphasized Erin Neff, member of the California Coalition for Women Prisoners.

The Coalition [has called for sanctuary for noncitizen survivors of abuse](#). FCI Dublin staff targeted noncitizen women for abuse, and federal investigators have relied on the testimony of dozens of noncitizen victims and witnesses. However, the agencies involved in the prosecutions

– including the U.S. Attorney’s Office, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Office of the Inspector General – have repeatedly refused to help survivors secure victim-based immigration relief or otherwise shield them from deportation. As a result, *at least 11 women who were sexually assaulted by FCI Dublin guards have already been deported, and at least 26 are currently facing deportation – including women who testified against former warden Garcia at trial in December, and who are set to testify against Bellhouse at his upcoming trial.*

“The Department of Justice is failing FCI Dublin survivors. Federal prosecutors and investigators can and must sign visa certifications and request protection from deportation for noncitizens who suffered abuse and retaliation at the hands of federal government employees,” said Deyci Carrillo Lopez, an advocate with Centro Legal de la Raza.

[Cristal](#), who suffered and reported abuse by multiple former FCI Dublin guards, and is now in immigration detention and facing deportation, stated: “The guards targeted us because they knew we weren’t citizens, and assumed we would be deported and they would get away with it. I survived the guards’ abuse and threats. After I spoke up, I survived the constant harassment and retaliation. Now I’ve survived seven months in ICE detention. I don’t know how much more they can expect me to survive. All we are asking for is a chance to return to our communities and reunite with our kids and heal from everything they put us through.”

The Coalition has been [calling for sweeping changes at FCI Dublin](#) as the best way to promote true institutional accountability and ensure that such harms are not perpetrated in the future. “Prosecutions of individual actors who perpetrated sexual abuse will not remedy the unimaginable harm that people at FCI Dublin suffered, or seriously change the system that facilitated that harm,” added Amaris Montes, an attorney at Rights Behind Bars.

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Formed in 2021, the Dublin Prison Solidarity Coalition is a partnership of people currently and formerly at FCI Dublin and their supporters. Coalition members include the [ACLU of Northern California](#), the [California Coalition for Women Prisoners](#), the [California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice](#), [Centro Legal de la Raza](#), [Dolores Street Community Services](#), and [Rights Behind Bars](#).