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To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to discuss several issues regarding multiple inconsistencies which occur within the visitation process at Montana State Prison, as well as the recent time limits and restrictions implemented in the visitation process, causing visitors to be turned away due to it being at full capacity.

While I certainly understand the need for rules and regulations pertaining to the attire and actions of the visiting individuals, the inconsistency of enforcing these rules is the cause of many of the visitors' anger and frustration. I have been denied entrance to visitation on several occasions due to my attire, only to discover others were allowed into the visiting area that should have been turned away for the very same reasons that I had been. On July 15, 2018, I was told the neckline of my shirt was too low and I also needed socks. I left to purchase a T-shirt and socks, yet another visitor was allowed into visitation wearing a thin blue v-neck shirt and her bra was visible though the material. On another occasion I was informed I could not enter with my "Fit Bit" and had to take it to my vehicle before entering, yet when I entered the visitation area I noticed another visitor was allowed to have hers. When I brought it to the attention of the visitation officer, she told me that the fit bit is not allowed and she said they "can't catch everyone". At that point she informed the other visitor she had to remove her fit bit. I have also been denied entrance due to wearing white jeans, which I have worn previously and since then to visitation without issue, and they are not transparent. As a result, I now carry several changes of clothing with me in the event that the current staff will choose to deem my (or another visitor's) attire inappropriate. On August 5, 2018, I was told that my white T-shirt was "see through", and one officers made a derogatory comment regarding the band logo on my shirt, but when I asked what color my bra was, no one could answer because it is, in fact, not transparent (my bra was neon pink and was NOT VISIBLE through the thick white shirt), but rather than argue, I left and changed into one of the other outfits I now carry in my vehicle. On August 12, 2018, I witnessed a woman allowed into visitation wearing "flip-flops" (she did have to go to the store to purchase socks, but removed them once inside the visiting area and wore only flip-flops). The level of inconsistency is extremely frustrating, to say the least, and unfortunately, all power and authority regarding these decisions is deflected to the visitation officer and there is no immediate recourse in the event anyone disagrees with their decision. I did file a formal written complaint with Interim Warden Jim Salmonsens on August 15, 2018 but have gotten no response thus far.

There have also been times when I have had to sit and wait in the visiting room for nearly an hour for staff to “find” my husband. I always give staff his AO number and his unit (B-Bravo unit) upon check-in (both written and verbal). On one occasion, staff called the wrong unit and, in another instance, staff was unable to locate him for an extended period of time and later discovered he was at the infirmary but had no information as to the reason. Meanwhile, I waited for over an hour without any information other than staff letting me know that they were looking for him, and worrying later when I was told he was in the infirmary but had no other information.

In addition, the number of days each week for visiting has been cut from four days, down to just two days (Saturday and Sunday) and as a result, many of us are turned away because visiting rooms are at maximum capacity. I drive from Missoula to visit and very often I am not able to get in and I am told to come back at 4:30 pm and will hopefully be granted access at that time. The visitors who are allowed in at 2:30 pm are asked to leave to make room for others who were turned away, thus allowing only approximately two and one half hour for each visiting session. I personally spend more time driving than I do visiting.

In conclusion, when visiting a loved one at MSP, the visitation process should be a good, positive experience and should reflect some semblance of consistency with the same rules for all, and there should be adequate staff to oversee the visitation rooms and allow for the usual schedule of four days per week to see loved ones.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have regarding this complaint.

Sincerely,

Lynda Jeffries