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## **Incarcerated People, Family Members, Faith Leaders Demand Humane Treatment & Accountability from DOC & South Woods State Prison**

TRENTON and BRIDGETON, NJ – Today, [Faith in New Jersey](#), a part of the [Live Free](#) and [Faith in Action](#) national networks, along with 60 of their faith leaders, community members, and leaders related to those incarcerated at South Woods State Prison simultaneously rallied in front of the Department of Corrections in Trenton and South Woods State Prison in Bridgeton and demanded humane treatment of people incarcerated there, as well as accountability for multiple incidents of reported violence, abuse, and punitive neglect.

“My loved one usually doesn’t complain about his situation behind the wall, but they had to stay in their cells with their own waste for hours at a time. How much can you take when you’re being denied your basic human rights?” **said a Faith in New Jersey leader whose brother is currently incarcerated at South Woods State Prison**, who wishes to remain anonymous, in fear of retaliation.

**James Brown, a Faith in New Jersey leader who was formerly incarcerated at South Woods**, gave his testimony in support of those currently incarcerated. “I’m here because I was in there. I know about the inhumane conditions like cutting the water, or cutting the heat and the air conditioner because the correctional officers had a bad day at home, so they punished us. Why am I here? Because I know about the recruiting of white supremacists. I know about Fight Night in the prison for street food and a carton of cigarettes. I know every rule, regulation and law for human rights in prison is broken.”

In January, South Woods State Prison experienced a water main break that disrupted the facility’s water supply. While officials stated the water was shut off for one day, relatives of those incarcerated there received first-hand reports that they have had inconsistent access to clean water for longer than that. Those incarcerated at South Woods also reported being denied access to Porta Potties and instead had to relieve themselves in plastic bags.

**Faith in New Jersey leaders stood with signs and banners as they listed their demands for the Department of Corrections:**

- 1) We demand that the Special Investigation Department conduct intentional, intensive and deep investigation of violent acts being committed by officers and personnel at South Woods State Prison, resulting in proper accountability for all involved.
- 2) We demand that the DOC, and more specifically, the South Woods State Prison administration, cease and desist from any further complicity in the violation of basic human rights against the people behind their walls.
- 3) We demand immediate access to all previous investigative reports and that all subsequent investigative reports be made accessible to the public within 30 days of the incident.

**Reverend Miles Hoppood of Abiding Presence Lutheran Church and Faith in New Jersey leader said,** “How this is dealt with and how we deal with one another is a matter for every one of our souls. No one will buy their way into heaven with a glass of water. But we will buy ourselves something so much worse when we withhold it from each other.”

Leaders demanded Commissioner Victoria L. Kuhn and South Woods Administrator Keisha Fisher make South Woods the kind of correctional facility that lives up to its mission of “seeking to operate safe and humane correctional facilities through effective treatment of offenders by providing services that promote successful reentry into society.”

**Faith in New Jersey Executive Director Charlene Walker, whose loved ones have also been affected by the carceral system,** gave a message directly to the men incarcerated at South Woods State Prison to show the organization’s commitment to amplifying their voices. “The state may try to disappear you behind those walls, but we still see you. We still love you. We will always make sure you are heard.”

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*Faith in New Jersey is a multi-racial powerbuilding vehicle for faith communities and believers in justice to protect religious liberties and advance an immigration, racial, economic and human justice agenda at the local, state and federal level. Faith in New Jersey’s mission is to develop grassroots community leaders, analyze the policies that shape our communities, and mobilize faith voices and faith voters to effectively act on the prophetic call to build the Beloved Community. Faith in New Jersey is a member of the national Faith in Action and Live Free networks.*