

Testimony of  
**Ms. Linda Bruntmyer**

July 31, 2002

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to testify. My name is Linda Bruntmyer, and I am here today to tell you about my son, Rodney Hulin.

When Rodney was sixteen, he and his brother set a dumpster on fire in an alley in our neighborhood. The authorities decided to make an example of Rodney. Even though only about \$500 in damage was caused by the fire, they sentenced him to eight years in an adult prison. We were frightened for him from the start. At sixteen, Rodney was a small guy, only 5'2 and about 125 pounds. And as a first-time offender, we knew he might be targeted by older, tougher, adult inmates.

Then, our worst nightmares came true. Rodney wrote us a letter telling us he'd been raped. A medical examination had confirmed the rape. A doctor found tears in his rectum and ordered an HIV test, because, he told us, one-third of the prisoners there were HIV positive.

But that was only the beginning. Rodney knew if he went back into the general population, he would be in danger. He wrote to the authorities requesting to be moved to a safer place. He went through all the proper channels, but he was denied.

After the first rape, he was returned to the general population. There, he was repeatedly beaten and forced to perform oral sex and raped. He wrote for help again. In his grievance letter he wrote, "I have been sexually and physically assaulted several times, by several inmates. I am afraid to go to sleep, to shower, and just about everything else. I am afraid that when I am doing these things, I might die at any minute. Please sir, help me."

Still, officials told him that he did not meet "emergency grievance criteria." We all tried to get him to a safe place. I called the warden, trying to figure out what was going on. He said Rodney needed to grow up. He said, "This happens everyday, learn to deal with it. It's no big deal."

We were desperate. Rodney started to violate rules so that he would be put in segregation. After he was finally put in segregation, we had about a ten minute phone conversation. He was crying. He said, "Mom, I'm emotionally and mentally destroyed."

That was the last time I heard his voice. On the night of January 26, 1996, my son hanged himself in his cell. He was seventeen and afraid, and ashamed, and hopeless. He laid in a coma for the next four months before he died.

Sadly, I know that Rodney is not alone. The human rights group Stop Prisoner Rape gets calls and letters everyday from men and women who have survived prisoner rape and from their family members asking them for help, asking them to help them move to a safer place, asking them to help protect their loved ones who are being raped, asking them to explain why there is no one in authority that will step in and say, "No! This is not justice. This is not right."

I strongly support this legislation because it will stop prisons from ignoring pleas for help from people like my son.

We know that what happened to Rodney could have been prevented. There are ways to protect the vulnerable inmates and ways to respond to the needs of prisoners who have been sexually assaulted. Even so, vulnerable prisoners are being sexually brutalized across the country, everyday. Rodney tried to ask for help, and I tried too. But nothing was done.

I am asking please, sirs. Please support this legislation. It is urgently, desperately needed. Rape in prison should no longer be tolerated. It destroys human dignity, it spreads disease, it makes people more angry and violent. It kills.

This is NOT what we mean when we say justice. Rape should not be considered a part of punishment. Rape is always a crime.