

**INTERVIEWER:** So as I mentioned, tonight, the Twin Cities Incarcerated Workers organizing committee is holding a rally in support of an inmate at Shakopee Women's Prison. They say the inmate was sexually assaulted by a corrections officer in the prison back in April. The group has a list of demands to keep Shakopee Prison safe for incarcerated people.

Joining me now with more is David Boehnke. We'll also talk to the Department of Corrections Commissioner Paul Schnell. David is on the line. He knows the inmate who was allegedly assaulted. He's also a member of the Twin Cities Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee. David, are you with me?

**DAVID** Yeah. Thank you for having me.

**BOEHNKE:**

**INTERVIEWER:** Thanks for being here. What do you know about the alleged assault that happened in April?

**DAVID** Yeah. So I got a call from my friend Angela Jackson saying that she was taken to solitary confinement. She was in  
**BOEHNKE:** handcuffs and that she was sexually assaulted in handcuffs by a guard. So that's what I know. We also-- she recorded testimony that we have distributed to the press and also the public at [tinyurl.com/justiceforangela](https://tinyurl.com/justiceforangela). So yeah, that's what we know, that she was sexually assaulted in solitary confinement in handcuffs.

**INTERVIEWER:** And do you know what may have been a complaint officially filed with the Department of Corrections? Do you know what's been going on when it comes to the investigation?

**DAVID** Yes. So she reported it to mental health on April 15th, two days after the assault. And the DOC has talked to her.  
**BOEHNKE:** Unfortunately, multiple weeks later, she had to have a friend complain because the guard who had assaulted her was seeing her in the cafeteria every single day. And to this day and to this point, they have not released the video footage, nor have they fired the officer who perpetrated the assault.

**INTERVIEWER:** Can you tell me what are the demands you're making of the Shakopee Prison in response to this alleged assault?

**DAVID** Yeah. So I mean, really what we need to understand is we have a system that responds to abuse with abuse. And  
**BOEHNKE:** that's a really crazy situation. I think something we don't totally realize. In this case, Angela is being retaliated against for reporting.

She's not being placed on a job assignment, which means she can only leave her cell for, at most, one hour a day. That denies her support and access to loved ones. Not only that, we have a system where when people do report things, they get retaliated against by guards, including being taken to solitary confinement and sexually abused.

We also have a thing that I think is really important to understand, which people are starting to call the sexual assault to prison pipeline, which is to understand that most women in prison, in fact, the vast majority and nearly all Native women in Minnesota prisons were sexually assaulted prior to their incarceration. And that was the driving factor in how they ended up in prison in the first place. So we have a system where people are sexually assaulted and not supported. And then they're put in abusive situations with no accountability where they can be revictimized and are revictimized on a regular basis.

**INTERVIEWER:** And to this point, as you're talking about sexual assault, I see your list of demands includes stopping daily strip searches. Instead, you're suggesting using body scanners. Can you tell me more about that?

**DAVID BOEHNKE:** Yeah. So there is a task force on incarcerated women and girls. And people on that legislative task force, over a number of years, got the Department of Corrections to a big fight to purchase with taxpayer money airport-style body scanners. So that instead of being strip searched, the women in Shakopee Prison-- again, who are overwhelmingly survivors of sexual violence-- would not have to be sexually violated through daily strip searches. And that's been in the facility now for multiple years.

And the Department of Corrections has refused to use that body scanner just by having purchased it. And so that's, I think, a very good example of institutional sexual violence happening within Shakopee Prison. So it's not only guards. And it's not only the institution allowing guards to behave with impunity, but it's also setting up policies and practices or failing to use things that would reduce harm and reduce trauma and instead choosing not to do that.

**INTERVIEWER:** I see that the organizing committee has created a timeline regarding abuse at the Shakopee Prison. Some of the cases mentioned are alleged. They were never investigated. Some of the other cases mentioned in this timeline were investigated, and the suspected officer was fired or reassigned. What are you asking the commissioner of corrections to do with this information?

**DAVID BOEHNKE:** Well, so what we want commissioner? Schnell and the public to understand is that this is history and an ongoing problem. This is not a one-time thing. This is not a bad apple. This is an ongoing problem.

And so first of all, of course, we need the guard fired. Because if you don't draw a line in the sand and say, hey, physical or sexual abuse on your job is OK, well, I mean, that's unacceptable. So that needs to be the first step.

And then the second step is we need to understand that because the overwhelming majority of women in Shakopee Prison are victims of sexual violence prior to incarceration, that we need to change how we think about incarceration, that we can't keep abusive practices like daily strip searches, like putting people who are suicidal naked in wet cells, like humiliating people on a daily basis, and abusing people. These are not things that help people heal, that help people come back to our society in a place where they can succeed. And it's simply abuse on abuse. And that's not acceptable in a society.

**INTERVIEWER:** David, any indication that Scott County will prosecute this corrections officer?

**DAVID BOEHNKE:** So we have not heard from Scott County that they're going to prosecute. So far, they have said they're not going to. They have failed, however, to release the video, just like the Department of Corrections has failed to release the video. And we see this in other cases with police officers and government employees where government officials like Paul Schnell-- and he was also formerly a police officer and a spokesman for police. Unfortunately, they cover up misconduct by government officials.

And so this really needs to be addressed. And it really needs to be addressed on a systemic basis where, when people speak out, they're supported. And so that the prison system is changed, so we don't have to keep having this whole long decades-long history of abuse over the next decades.

**INTERVIEWER:** David Boehnke, appreciate your time. Thank you so much.

**DAVID** Yeah. Appreciate you.

**BOEHNKE:**

**INTERVIEWER:** David Boehnke is a member of the Twin Cities Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee. Joining us right now is the department-- the actual commissioner of the Department of Corrections Paul Schnell. You heard his name mentioned when I was talking to Mr. Boehnke. Commissioner Schnell, welcome.

**PAUL SCHNELL:** Hello. Good afternoon.

**INTERVIEWER:** What do you know about this complaint?

**PAUL SCHNELL:** Well, we are aware of it. We know that a preliminary investigation was done. I personally looked into it after becoming aware of it through some social media posts and, ultimately, directed that some additional investigation followup be done. But I am aware that law enforcement was called in.

And I think really what Mr. Boehnke doesn't do is he doesn't clearly understand the law and due process and the fact that investigations have to occur when things like this happen. And we take these allegations incredibly seriously. They're troubling. And we address them. And I think there is a history of addressing these sorts of problems when they come up.

**INTERVIEWER:** Let me ask you about the history of sexual abuse and assault at Shakopee Women's Prison. I understand there were four officers fired a couple of years ago at Shakopee in the aftermath of a female inmate sexual assault allegations. Two guards were reinstated. What are your concerns with problem guards at the prison?

**PAUL SCHNELL:** So we do have-- there are collective bargaining. There are rights that people have. There are hearings, arbitration hearings. And what we took action, we believe, was necessary and appropriate. And arbitrator deemed that, in two cases, it was not. We did not have adequate level of proof to sustain termination. And the best we can do then is to manage that in accordance with our policies and procedures and the rule of law. And I think that's what we have done.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you think there may be other assaults that are going unreported at the prison?

**PAUL SCHNELL:** You know, I think here's what we do know. We-- I don't know what we don't know. But we know that there are processes and procedures, even outside the Department of Corrections, for things to be reported. For instance, Minnesota has an ombudsman office for people that are correctionally involved. And there are also ways that a person who would be victimized could reach out to victim advocacy in the community. And those possibilities exist. And we're not hearing of additional other additional reports.

**INTERVIEWER:** You know, let's talk a little bit about what Mr. Boehnke mentioned. And it is true that many women in the prison are prior sexual assault victims. What can be done about practices like solitary confinement, strip searches that really can further traumatize inmates who are victims of past assaults?

**PAUL SCHNELL:** And we are definitely concerned about trauma and retraumatizing people. It's something that I think we have to be mindful about if we want people to come out better. At the same time, I want to just correct that people are not subjected to daily unclothed body searches. That's just not the reality or victims of harassment on a day to day basis, as was described.

I would say that we do have new technology that one that has been implemented at Shakopee. It is new. We have a small number of people that are trained to use these body scanners, which are similar to the what the airport uses but a little bit more advanced. Because it detects-- can detect contraband that is not just on the person but actually maybe inside of a person. So there is some level of concern we have to have around the radiation emissions that happen and how frequently somebody undergoes those types of searches. But ultimately, we want to use those as much as possible to maximize or minimize, rather, the potential exposure or trauma around an unclothed body search, which is completely understandable.

**INTERVIEWER:** So there are body scanners? They are being used?

**PAUL SCHNELL:** We have one right now in the system. And that is at Shakopee, as I said, new technology. We have others in order for other facilities across the state that we simply have not received yet. But the use of this technology is something that we want to advance across the system.

**INTERVIEWER:** This group is asking that you release video footage they believe you may have of this alleged assault. Do you have video?

**PAUL SCHNELL:** Whatever video we have related to this investigation, we will release when that investigation is completed. I anticipate that will be relatively soon. And we will release that video.

I would also just say that fixed camera video, which is really what the prisons currently have, has profound and deep limitations. We don't cover every area within a facility. And so I am not going to speak to things active to this investigation. But there may not even be video covering the interaction that has been alleged here.

One of the things that we have proposed and we are strong advocates of and we just pushed in the last legislative process, which, as you know, did not result in ultimately a lot of action, especially on this public safety front, we wanted body cameras for our staff. Because we think it's a way that not only protects the folks who are incarcerated. But it protects the staff.

And this has been seen in law enforcement across the nation. And we think it's really appropriate and something that should happen here to ensure levels of accountability for everyone in these types of encounters. And it's something that we will continue to push and pursue because we think it's in the best interest of all.

**INTERVIEWER:** What have been your past interactions with the group making the allegations and the demands, the Twin Cities Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee? Are you willing to sit down with them?

**PAUL SCHNELL:** We have multiple times. There have been things that they have proposed that we have actually implemented. We want to. We'll talk to anybody about anything. I was a bit surprised that, in this particular case, we found out about it through a social media post without anybody reaching out directly. And so our ability to more directly and immediately jump on that was impacted. And that's disturbing and something that I hope, in the future, we want to be able to get on concerns as opposed to finding out or reading about them in media.

**INTERVIEWER:** I believe the inmate in question, though, did make a report according to what we heard and was retaliated against. Is that what you're understanding too?

**PAUL SCHNELL:** So retaliation was not something I had heard about. I think what we had heard about was that a report had been made, information had been received about this. Staff did ultimately check into it. There was a preliminary investigation. And law enforcement-- outside law enforcement was brought in. And they conduct their own investigation, which ultimately gets sent off to the local county for review and consideration of charges.

**INTERVIEWER:** Officer in question still on the job?

**PAUL SCHNELL:** Yes. He's in a different job assignment, so not in a place of contact with folks. But he remains on the job during this investigation, absolutely.

**INTERVIEWER:** Say, a final question, corrections officers, like other law enforcement facing staffing shortages, does that impact some of the procedures or how an allegation of sexual assault is handled or just general numbers in the prison to try to curtail some of this alleged activity?

**PAUL SCHNELL:** Well, I mean, certainly, we do face, as almost every workplace does, challenges around staffing. But always, that will never impact the seriousness with which we take these types of allegations. We will act to protect the people that are in our custody, first and foremost, and then conduct a thorough and complete investigation. And based on that investigation, take actions.

**INTERVIEWER:** All right. Commissioner Schnell, thank you for your time.

**PAUL SCHNELL:** Thank you. Have a good day.

**INTERVIEWER:** You too. Department of Corrections commissioner is Paul Schnell. We also were talking with David Boehnke. David is with the group the Twin Cities Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee.