

Former Correctional Officer Sentenced to 63 Months for Sexual Abuse of Two Female Inmates

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A former federal correctional officer was sentenced today to 63 months in prison, followed by five years of supervised release, and a \$25,000 special assessment for his sexually abusive conduct against two female victims who were serving prison sentences at Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) Dublin. The sentence was handed down by U.S. District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers.

John Bellhouse, 40, formerly of Pleasanton, California, was initially charged with sexual abuse of an inmate on Feb. 17, 2022. A federal grand jury issued a superseding indictment on Sept. 29, 2022, charging Bellhouse with two counts of sexual abuse of a ward and three counts of abusive sexual contact that occurred between December 2019 and December 2020. A jury convicted Bellhouse of all counts.

"John Bellhouse exploited his position of trust at the Federal Bureau of Prisons by sexually abusing multiple women in his custody – and today he has been held to account," said Deputy Attorney General Lisa O. Monaco. "The sentence of imprisonment imposed today is the latest example of the Justice Department's continuing work to address the egregious misconduct that took place at FCI Dublin and prioritize the eradication of sexual assault from our prison system."

"While today's sentencing cannot undo the horrific abuse that Bellhouse's victims endured, it sends a clear message that BOP employees who abuse inmates in their custody and care will be brought to justice. Our investigation of sexual abuse at FCI Dublin remains ongoing, and we will continue to aggressively pursue justice for victims of sexual abuse at the hands of BOP employees," said Inspector General Michael E. Horowitz.

"The horrendous sexual abuse committed by convicted offender John Bellhouse is cruel and despicable," said FBI Deputy Director Paul Abbate. "As a federal corrections officer, Bellhouse sexually abused inmates under his care and attempted to cover-up his crimes.

These violations are inexcusable breaches of the trust and authority granted to government officials. This sentencing is a reminder that the FBI and our partners will relentlessly pursue those who physically harm others and hold them accountable.”

“This conduct was a disturbing deviation from the expectations and requirements of all federal correctional officers,” said U.S. Attorney Ismail J. Ramsey for the Northern District of California. “Bellhouse violated his oath and abused the power given to him, all to victimize the people he was supposed to protect. This sentence makes clear that the sexual abuse of inmates by guards will not be tolerated.”

Bellhouse was employed as a correctional officer at the FCI Dublin, California, an all-female low security federal correctional institution. Trial evidence showed that, beginning December 2019 through October 2020, Bellhouse sexually abused and committed abusive sexual contact against a victim incarcerated and serving a prison sentence at FCI Dublin under Bellhouse’s custodial, supervisory, and disciplinary authority. Bellhouse engaged in oral sex with the victim in the prison Safety Warehouse and Safety Office and touched the victim’s vagina and breasts in the prison Safety Office.

Evidence presented at trial also demonstrated Bellhouse committed abusive sexual contact against a second victim between October and December of 2020. Trial evidence showed that the acts occurred in the Safety Office at the FCI Dublin Camp.

The trial evidence further showed that Bellhouse sexually abused another inmate in 2020 and 2021 when he reached through a window in her cell and grabbed her breast, and on another occasion put his finger in her vagina without her consent while she was in her cell after showering.

In a memorandum filed in connection with Bellhouse’s sentencing, the government provided additional information regarding Bellhouse’s criminal conduct while he was a correctional officer. In the memorandum, the government argued that in addition to the three women who testified at trial about Bellhouse’s sexual abuse of them, Bellhouse also abused other women. Further, the government’s memorandum describes how Bellhouse used his ability to access everyday items such as Starbucks coffee, yarn, jewelry, and cleaning supplies, to get his victims both to acquiesce in the abuse and to keep them quiet about his conduct. For example, according to the memorandum, Bellhouse would provide items to coax compliance with his demands. Because these items were considered contraband at FCI Dublin, mere possession of them exposed inmates to potential punishments such as solitary confinement and loss of good time credits.

Bellhouse was convicted of two counts of sexual abuse of a ward and three counts of abusive sexual conduct. Bellhouse must surrender by Feb. 2, 2024. His restitution hearing is set for Feb. 1, 2024, at 2 p.m. ET / 5 p.m. ET.

The Justice Department's Office of Inspector General and the FBI investigated the case.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Molly Priedeman and Andrew Paulson for the Northern District of California prosecuted the case, with the assistance of Madeline Wachs, Sara Slattery, Leeya Kekona, and Kay Konopaske.