

Calvin Johnson: He and Hanson earn an A.

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**Lions' final grades (it's not pretty)** SPORTS, 1D, 10D



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ON GUARD FOR 177 YEARS

**Sunday Free Press**

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**SPECIAL REPORT CHAPTER 1**

**For years,** human rights groups warned that male guards were sexually assaulting female inmates in Michigan prisons. For years, those warnings went unheeded. **Now,** state taxpayers may pay the price. More than 500 women are suing. They stand to collect \$50 million so far, with more trials to come. This is their story.

First of five parts

By JEFF SEIDEL  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Toni Bunton heard the guard coming down the hallway. He wore cheap cologne, and his breath smelled like cigarettes.

He scuffed his boots against the floor and opened the door to her cell in Scott Correctional Facility, a women's prison in Plymouth Township.

"Come here," he ordered. The guard pulled Bunton into a bathroom. She wore jogging pants, a T-shirt and socks.

She was the guard's prized possession, a pretty young thing, as he said, "just the way I like 'em," — short and cute with brown hair, brown eyes and porcelain skin.

"Shhh!" he demanded. He yanked down her underwear and pushed her against the sink.

"No!" she screamed in her head. "No, please, no!" But she was scared to death, and the words wouldn't come out. "I'm choking, please, stop, I'm going to die," she thought.

And he raped her. Bunton said nothing. It would become the theme of her life, a way to survive the next 16 years in prison.

When he was done, he stepped back. "Shhh!" he said, with his finger to his lips. He smiled and left. Bunton stood there, numb, her pants at her ankles.

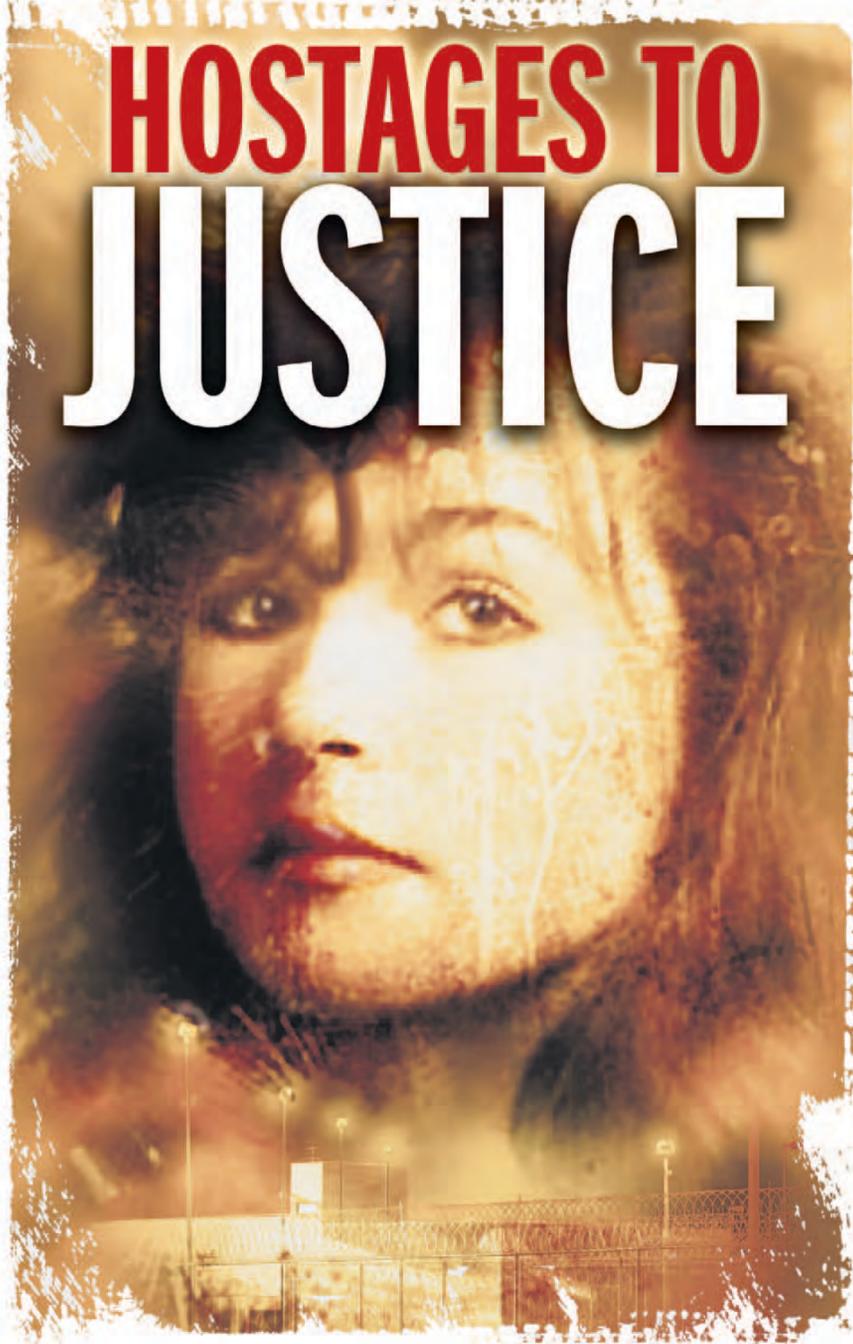


Photo illustration by RICK NEASE/Detroit Free Press

**"People don't know what goes on inside prison. I want people to know this is going on in your backyard, and you might not care because it might not affect you, but you should care. This is not really about sexual harassment. This is about civil rights, basic fundamental rights of human beings."**

— TONI BUNTON, convicted for her role in a 1991 drug shooting and, she says, subjected to sexual assaults at Scott Correctional Facility in Plymouth.

She was 19. Bunton said she was raped seven more times by prison guards between 1993 and 1996. She is among more than 500 women who say they were sexually assaulted by guards at several Michigan prisons in the 1990s as officials ignored or dismissed warnings by human rights groups that male guards were preying on female

inmates. A class-action lawsuit against the Michigan Department of Corrections has already yielded verdicts reaching an estimated \$50 million, when interest and fees are included. And that's only for the first 18 women. With most yet to testify, and lawyers for the

See JUSTICE, 8A

**Coming this week**

**Monday:** The trial begins with everything at stake.

**Tuesday:** Breaking the silence.

**Wednesday:** A jury surprise.

**Thursday:** A new life?

**At freep.com**

- Read a Human Rights Watch report on Michigan prison abuses.
- Join the discussions.

**Waivers free students to study online, off-campus**

State steps up role in Web-based high school education

By LORI HIGGINS  
FREE PRESS EDUCATION WRITER

Eleven Michigan school districts and one charter school can now allow students to take more courses — and in some cases all of their classes — online and off-campus, moves that could further cement the state's reputation as a leader in online education.

Michigan already broke new ground in 2006 by becoming the first state in the nation to require students take an online class or have an online educational experience in order to graduate.

Just in November, the Center for Digital Education ranked Michigan second, behind

Florida, for online education.

Two metro Detroit districts — Waterford and Avondale — are among the handful moving farther ahead, winning approval from the Michigan Department of Education to allow larger numbers of students to take online courses wherever they want.

At least two dozen of the state's 552 districts and 230 charter schools have applied for the waivers from rules that require students be in a school building for nearly 1,100 hours each school year. Students also are currently limited by state law to taking only two online courses outside a school building during a semester.

"That would be so much easier," Kayla Jacques, 18, of Waterford said of the chance to take online courses from the

See WAIVERS, 10A

**Gaza braces for a long, deadly fight**

United Nations urges cease-fire

By DION NISSENBAUM  
MCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS

JERUSALEM — Israeli tanks and soldiers punched into the Hamas-led Gaza Strip on Saturday night as the nation's eight-day-old military campaign to destabilize the hard-line Islamist rulers moved into a more volatile phase.

Backed by Apache helicopters, warships and artillery batteries, the Israeli forces moved into northern Gaza in an attempt to seize control of fields and orchards along the border that Palestinian militants used to fire crude rockets into southern Israel.

Residents hiding in their homes in northern Gaza said Palestinian militants lying in wait quickly confronted Israeli soldiers. Palestinians in the area reported intense fire-fights taking place but there was no immediate word on fighters killed on either side.

The ground offensive sets the stage for a deadly showdown that could significantly shake up Middle East political dynamics by either cowering hard-line Hamas ideologues into moderating their views or propelling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into a deadly new spiral of violence.

See GAZA, 6A

Go to freep.com for continuing coverage.



THE AUTO SHOW  
**Sales slump won't put brakes on media interest**  
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**GANNETT**  
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# CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

“I’m a Christian, but I’ll never forgive. There is no way in hell that I’ll ever forgive her.”

**AYMAN KAJI**, who was permanently injured in the 1991 drug shooting that sent Toni Bunton to prison. His twin brother, Omar, 19, was killed.



“I feel horrible. I deserve to be punished, and you know, I have spent half of my life thinking about the (Kaji) family. ... I am so sorry.”

**TONI BUNTON**, at left in 1991 when she was 17. She drove the getaway car for three teens who planned a drug sale that ended with the shooting of Ayman Kaji and his brother, Omar. Jose Burgos, then 16, is serving a life sentence for murder.

## JUSTICE | Female inmates speak out on sexual assaults

From Page 1A

state insisting they have no intention of settling, Michigan’s beleaguered taxpayers could face hundreds of millions of dollars in damages.

“A prison is not supposed to turn you back out to society with more harm than when you came in,” said Deborah LaBelle, an Ann Arbor civil rights lawyer who led a team that sued on behalf of the women. “No one, no one in this country, no one in a civilized society is sentenced to be raped and assaulted in prison.”

### The state’s defense: Why didn’t they speak up?

It wasn’t just the rapes. Many women said they were routinely molested by guards who took advantage of rules that required them to meet a daily quota of pat-down searches for weapons, drugs or other contraband.

Inmates said guards ran their hands over the women’s legs, buttocks and breasts under the guise of security. When it became clear the guards wouldn’t be punished, some grew so brazen that they fondled women in front of other inmates and guards, or openly masturbated in the prison yard, according to trial testimony.

It is against the law for guards to have sexual contact with prisoners, even if there is consent. Some guards convinced women to submit to ongoing sexual relations in return for “protecting” them from fellow guards.

For years, Bunton kept quiet. She was afraid to speak up. She was a prisoner, after all, a convicted felon, afraid the allegations would not be taken seriously. Afraid of retaliation.

But after years of delay, the case involving the first 10 women, including Bunton, reached a courtroom last winter.

The state had a simple defense: These women are prisoners, and prisoners lie; if something did happen, it was the act of a few rogue guards; and if something did happen, the women didn’t report it. So how could the Department of Corrections prevent what it didn’t know was happening? The state said it thoroughly investigated any allegations it knew about and the claims of abuse were exaggerated.

“To say the department just sat back and did nothing, just let everybody run the place is just totally false,” Allan Soros, an assistant attorney general, said at the first trial.

Nonetheless, a series of human rights reports throughout the 1990s said sexual assaults on female inmates were rampant and corrections officials tolerated the climate.

Since then, the state says it has made changes. They include refined work rules to prevent sexual misconduct or harassment by guards, tougher legal penalties for guards who have sexual contact with inmates and a policy to refer allegations to the Michigan State Police, as well as Corrections Department internal affairs, for investigation.

### No matter their pasts, listen to their stories

LaBelle said the legal action, at its heart, was about human rights. About women coming out of the shadows and getting a chance to tell their stories.

Bunton and the other women who testified are no saints. The group includes convicted murderers, thieves and drug dealers.

But Bunton, now 35, says it’s important to listen to all of them, no matter their past.

“People don’t know what goes on inside prison,” Bunton said. “I think a lot of people don’t care, unless it directly affects them. I want people to know this is going on in your backyard, and you might not care because it might not affect you, but you should care. This is not really about sexual harassment. This is about civil rights,



REGINA H. BOONE/Detroit Free Press

### A VOICE FOR FEMALE INMATES

Deborah LaBelle, an Ann Arbor lawyer who led a team that sued on behalf of the women, says, “No one ... is sentenced to be raped.”

basic fundamental rights of human beings.”

### June 10, 1991: A favor turns to murder

Bunton knew the guys as Pook and Timbo and Poodle, friends of her cousin, all of them teens in Detroit. They were planning to sell marijuana, and the deal was set, but they needed a ride, according to Bunton. One of the guys said: Let’s steal a car.

Bunton said: Oh, no, I’ll take you.

At the time, she said, it didn’t sound monumental or deadly, a trip that would ruin the lives of nearly all involved.

“I know it’s stupid now,” Bunton said recently. “I think it is really stupid ... but at 17, uh, I didn’t see the harm in it.”

Bunton had a clean record, no history of drug involvement. According to records from the case, she dropped off the teens at a gas station on Livernois in southwest Detroit.

“Just drive around the block and come back,” she said she was told.

She was in a white Mustang, and was halfway around the block when

she heard gunshots.

She began driving faster and ended up going down a dead-end street. Bunton turned the car around and, now, the teens were running toward her — Pook and Timbo and Poodle — and they were waving guns. She said later she had no idea they had guns. They jumped into her car, screaming and shouting, saying they had “popped” somebody.

The two buyers had been shot.

Police found Omar Kaji, 19, dead from a single gunshot wound to his head. He was slumped at the wheel of a Monte Carlo. He had a 9-mm automatic pistol.

His twin, Ayman, was shot several times. He was lying by the passenger door.

Later, police would suggest, it was a setup — by both sides. The buyers didn’t have money to make a deal. All they had was a wad of blank paper, wrapped with a \$20 bill. The sellers, meanwhile, didn’t have any pot.

Ayman Kaji admitted that he and his brother planned to steal the marijuana.

He identified one of the teens with Bunton that night, Jose Burgos, 16, as

the shooter.

“He got in the car and just started shooting,” Kaji said. Kaji remains paralyzed from the neck down.

### A murder conviction, and a harsh sentence

Bunton said she dropped the teens off and went home.

The next day, police took her to police headquarters for questioning.

After signing a statement detailing her role, Bunton thought she was going home. She said she didn’t know that, even though she didn’t pull the trigger, she could be held just as culpable as the teen who did.

Burgos was convicted of first-degree murder and is serving life in prison. The other two teens never went to trial.

Kaji was wheeled into court at Bunton’s sentencing. He spoke in a whisper, and the emotional scene tugged on the heart of Judge Clarice Jobs. Three years later, in a 1994 newspaper interview about her retirement from Detroit Recorder’s Court, Jobs singled out the case as an example of the endless violence she

### How this series was reported

This narrative is based on interviews, hundreds of court documents, including transcripts and videotapes obtained through the state Freedom of Information Act, and an unpublished memoir Toni Bunton wrote in prison. The Department of Corrections declined to allow the Free Press to tour Scott Correctional Facility.

saw from the bench and admitted that she was so moved that she later cried.

Bunton was convicted of second-degree murder, armed robbery and assault with intent to murder. She was sentenced to 25 to 50 years, a term that some legal experts now say appeared excessive, given her role.

Kaji does not share that view. He insists Bunton must have known that his brother was going to be shot.

He said he has no sympathy for what Bunton went through in prison.

“I’m a Christian, but I’ll never forgive,” he said. “There is no way in hell that I’ll ever forgive her.”

For her part, Bunton has accepted responsibility for the tragedy, even as she insists she was only the getaway driver.

“I feel horrible,” she says now. “I deserve to be punished, and you know, I have spent half of my life thinking about the (Kaji) family. ... I am so sorry.”

### Inmate No. 221034, for the rest of her life

Bunton wore a flowery dress, the same clothing she wore in court, when she was shipped to Huron Valley Correctional Facility in Ypsilanti in December 1991.

At the intake area, she was given five white bras and nine pairs of white cotton underwear. “Your number will be 221034,” a guard said. “Remember it because you will have this number till you die.”

Another guard told Bunton to read Psalm 23.

“This is the Valley of Death, baby girl,” Bunton recalled the guard as saying. “All you have to do is read that verse, and God will carry you through all the way.”

Just a few hours after arriving, Bunton met a woman returning to prison.

“Girl, I can’t wait for shift change,” the woman told her. “My man’s gonna flip when he sees me here.”

“Your man?”

“Yeah, my man.”

She meant her sex partner at Huron Valley. A guard.

### Welcome to Scott: The nightmare begins

Bunton stayed for six months before she was transferred to Scott Correctional Facility in Plymouth Township in the summer of 1992.

On one of her first nights at Scott, she woke up from a loud voice outside her door.

“Damn, girl, you wanna hurt a brother,” a guard said.

Bunton tiptoed to the door. She looked out the window and saw a prisoner performing oral sex on a guard.

This was Bunton’s new home, a facility she described as wild, with few rules and almost no physical boundaries between the guards and inmates.

At 4 foot 11, Bunton was small and meek when she entered prison.

One day, she was taking a shower, and one of the male guards pulled back the curtain.

“I’m naked,” Bunton said, scrambling to cover her body.

“Oh, hush,” the guard said. “I got a wife at home, I know what it all looks like.”

### Search policy becomes an excuse for sexual contact

At Scott, as in every Michigan prison at the time, every guard was required to pat down five prisoners every shift for weapons, food, drugs, whatever. It didn’t matter which prisoners they picked. Some officers did it the proper way, quickly and with professionalism. But others exploited this directive, picking out the pretty women to search, the ones who were

See next page

## State has a \$50-million bill; more possible

The State of Michigan has already incurred roughly \$50 million in damages (when interest and fees are estimated) after 18 female inmates testified in 2008 that they were raped or fondled by male guards, attacks that juries found state prison officials had failed to stop.

Hundreds of other inmates are awaiting their day in court in the class-action suit.

After a three-week trial last January, a jury awarded the first 10 inmates more than \$15 million, which rises to more than \$35 million with interest and fees, the women’s law-

yers contend. Toni Bunton (\$3.45 million), like the others, has not yet been paid as the state appeals. A hearing on that appeal is set for Jan. 13.

On Nov. 12, a second jury awarded eight former female prisoners \$8.45 million for rapes and sexual harassment in the 1990s by guards at Crane Correctional Facility in Coldwater. Interest and fees in that case could elevate damages to about \$20 million, according to lawyer Deborah LaBelle. Prison officials counter that interest and attorney fees will be significantly lower.

A third trial, involving 10 inmates at the now-closed Wayne Correctional Facility, has not been set.

A spokesman for the Department of Corrections said the department expects to prevail on appeal and taxpayers will pay nothing. The state contends Washtenaw County Circuit Judge Timothy Connors made mistakes at trial ranging from allowing testimony regarding some incidents in which the state argues the statute of limitations had expired to not allowing certain defense testimony.

By Jeff Seidel

## ALL TOO FAMILIAR

### Sexual Abuse of Women in U.S. State Prisons

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... rape, sexual assault or abuse, criminal sexual contact, and other misconduct by corrections staff are continuing and serious problems within the women's prisons in Michigan have been tolerated over the years at both the institutional and departmental levels.

... the threat of retaliation pervades the prison environment in Michigan. Such retaliation can function as punishment for having reported misconduct or as a means of coercing prisoners to acquiesce to unwanted sexual relations ...



Read the Human Rights Watch report on Michigan prison abuses at [freep.com](http://freep.com).

Corrections officers have used the frisks and pat-searches to exercise undue power and control over incarcerated women. When ordered to submit to a frisk or pat-search, a woman must comply or risk disciplinary action.

## ABUSE WARNINGS IN 1990s

The Michigan Women's Commission, a state agency, reported in 1993 an alarming level of sexual abuse and harassment by state prison guards.

In 1995, the U.S. Department of Justice found "pervasive" sexual abuse of female prisoners in Michigan, including a finding, in a letter to then-Gov. John Engler, that "nearly every woman ... interviewed reported various sexually aggressive acts of guards."

In 1996, Human Rights Watch released a report (excerpts above) documenting rapes and a "highly sexualized and excessively hostile" environment in Michigan prisons. It was clear, the

group found, that the state had done little to protect the women from retaliation.

The state has adopted changes since then. Among them: refined work rules to prevent sexual misconduct or harassment by guards; tougher legal penalties for guards who have sexual contact with inmates; the removal of male guards from female housing units; a policy requiring female guards to pat down women prisoners; and a policy to refer allegations of sexual abuse to the Michigan State Police, as well Corrections Department internal affairs, for investigation.

### From previous page

young and had long sentences.

Bunton said she was a daily target. "The officers would come and feel us up whenever they wanted," she said. A guard "would cup the breast. He would rub his hands down your stomach and around your thighs and buttocks, legs.

"All the way up your thighs, to the end."

State prison officials would claim later they had no idea that some guards abused the search policies by sexually assaulting the women. They said they properly trained officers and had written policies against improper behavior. The rules have changed since. Men are not assigned to housing units and are not allowed to pat down women.

But the Michigan Women's Commission reported in 1993 there was an alarming level of sexual abuse and harassment by state prison guards.

In 1995, the U.S. Department of Justice found "pervasive" sexual abuse in Michigan women's prisons.

In 1996, Human Rights Watch released a report documenting sexual harassment, sexual abuse and privacy violations by guards and other employees in Michigan prisons.

The report, based on interviews with prisoners and prison rights advocates, cited rapes by guards in a "highly sexualized and excessively hostile" environment.

"Rather than seeking to end such abuse, the Michigan Department of Corrections has consistently refused to acknowledge that there is a problem of sexual misconduct in its women's prisons."

### Handed from 1 guard to the next as others watch

The brazen nature of that abuse was laid bare one day, when Bunton was stopped in the recreation yard by a guard.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Eighteen," she replied.

"Umm, just the way I like 'em, young and fresh.

"Give me a shakedown," he said.

She lifted her arms, standing in a group of prisoners, according to what she wrote in her prison journal. The guard rubbed his hands down her neck, across her back and around to her chest. He caressed her breasts. He rubbed her stomach. He squeezed her buttocks, rubbing up and down her thighs.

His hand brushed against her pelvic bone, as he pulled himself closer to her. Another officer watched. "That's the way you do it," the second officer said.

The first officer started the pat-down again. "Yeah, let me show y'all how it's done properly," the second officer said.

Bunton said she wanted to scream, but she was too afraid.

The second officer took his turn with Bunton. He rubbed her neck, then her back. He moved around to her breasts and the officers egged each other on. The other prisoners cheered and applauded.

"Aww, you got it down, rookie," the first guard laughed.



PATRICIA BECK/Detroit Free Press

### SCOTT CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

Toni Bunton, an inmate at the women's prison in Plymouth Township, is one of many women who say they were sexually assaulted.

"All yard units report to segregation," a voice said over the speakers. The crowd dispersed. Bunton rushed back to her cell.

### Other inmates' stories show pattern of abuse

Bunton's account echoed the abuse testimony of other women at the civil trial last year in front of Judge Timothy Connors.

Jennifer Pruitt, who was serving life in prison for murder, entered Scott at age 17. Days after arriving, a guard forced her to perform oral sex. "You'll get better," the officer said.

Michele Bazzetta, sent to Scott after being convicted of second-degree murder, said an officer frequently took her to an isolated place. "He had a bald head and he wanted me to rub his head at the same time that I had my hand on his penis," she said. Amy Black, who also entered pris-



Jennifer Pruitt in 2007



Michele Bazzetta in 2005



Amy Black in 2006

on at 17, had sex with a guard two or three times a week over several years.

"He promised he would treat me right and make sure none of the other officers were bothering me," said Black, serving life for murder. "He promised to make sure I was safe."

She ended the relationship when she found out that he was having sex with another prisoner, who she had heard had a sexually transmitted disease.

"For him, I think it was about sex,"

Black said. "For me, it was about staying alive."

### 'Make it your garden, where you can grow'

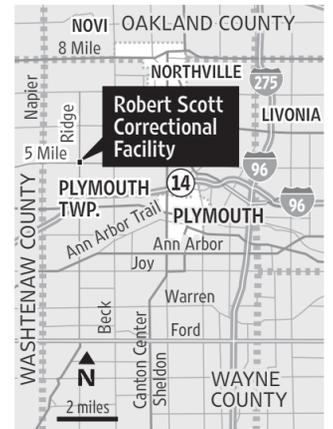
Bunton learned to keep her mouth shut. The guards controlled everything: when she ate, when she slept, when she went to the bathroom, when she spoke.

Each time she was raped, each time she was groped, Bunton buried the pain deep inside.

Dr. Frank Ochberg, a psychologist who examined Bunton in prison, later told jurors she had been "systemically, overtly degraded" by the assaults, the "humanity just beaten out of her."

"I call them battle scars because they never go away," Bunton said. "Being a prisoner is the lowest you can be in life. Being a female prisoner is so much worse."

She tried to hide in her cell, read-



Detroit Free Press

ing and thinking and praying. She kept her mouth shut.

"There was someone very close to me, who told me a long time ago, 'Scott Correctional Facility is a very bad place,' " Bunton said. "But it is up to you to find the good in the place. So you can look around in that very bad place and you can make it your garden, where you can grow, no matter what is going on around you. It's up to you to remove yourself from the bad and only concentrate on the good."

"So that's what I did. I made that place my garden. I grew."

### Education builds up the courage to tell her story

Bunton, a high school dropout, focused on her education, earning associate's and bachelor's degrees in business administration and a master's degree from a correspondence program.

She earned vocational certificates in food management, computers and graphic arts.

She became a yoga teacher and fitness trainer. "Every time I accomplished something, I felt better about myself," she said.

She grew stronger. She gained confidence and found her voice.

Toni Bunton, inmate No. 221034, was learning to stand up for herself.

After suffering in silence, she took a gamble. She summoned the courage to join a lawsuit against the Michigan Department of Corrections. She decided to speak up and tell her story, hoping it would force some changes, hoping that it would end the attacks.

LaBelle, the Ann Arbor attorney who specializes in women's prison issues, had been working for years on sexual abuse issues before coming across Bunton.

Believing the problem was growing and the state was doing nothing to stop it, LaBelle filed a lawsuit in 1996 on behalf of female inmates.

The case would eventually involve more than 500 prisoners, including Bunton.

After years of sexual brutality, Bunton found there were people — strangers, even — willing to fight with her: civil rights lawyers and law students at the University of Michigan.

They would push for her voice to be heard in court. They would fight for her freedom.

Contact JEFF SEIDEL at 313-223-4558 or [jseidel@freepress.com](mailto:jseidel@freepress.com).

**MONDAY WAKE-UP**



SEBASTIAN SCHEINER/Associated Press

Israeli troops cut swaths through the Gaza Strip on Sunday in their offensive against Hamas militants.

**Troops go deep into Gaza City**

Thousands of Israeli troops, backed by tanks and helicopter gunships, surrounded Gaza City and fought militants at close range Sunday.

NATION & WORLD, 6A

**From the street to art galleries**



MARCIN SZCZEPANSKI/Detroit Free Press

The artwork of Freddie Harris, who lives in an apartment now.

Freddie Harris, who has survived 30 years of homelessness, has gone from sleeping under a bridge to exhibiting and selling his artwork.

JEFF GERRITT, 10A

**THE BREAK ROOM**

**Just how tight is tight enough?**

In these rough economic times, people are looking to tighten their belts. How much, however, is subject to a lot of interpretation.

MICHAEL ROSENBERG, 2A

**TO-DO LIST**

**The Russians are coming!**

The ballet comes to town with performances by three Russian companies:

■ **"CINDERELLA,"** Friday at 8 p.m., by the Moscow Festival Ballet at the Ford Community and Performing Arts Center, Dearborn, 313-943-2354

■ **"DON QUIXOTE,"** Saturday at 8 p.m., by the Russian Classical Ballet Theater at the Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts, Detroit, 313-887-8500

■ **"SWAN LAKE,"** Saturday at 3 p.m., by the Russian National Ballet Theater at the Macomb Center for the Performing Arts, Clinton Township, 586-286-2222

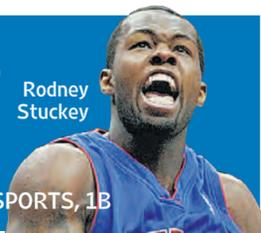
**THE LAST WORD**

The bad thing about a long weekend following New Year's Day? A lot of those resolutions were probably history by Saturday night.

**WHAT CURSE?**

Pistons finally get season's 1st Sunday win **SPORTS, 1B**

Rodney Stuckey



DREW SHARP, 1B

**Millen's mea culpa on NBC doesn't cut it**

ON GUARD FOR 177 YEARS

**Detroit Free Press**

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MONDAY

JAN. 5, 2009

METRO FINAL

**SPECIAL REPORT | HOSTAGES TO JUSTICE**

**Attorney: Nobody looked or listened**

**CHAPTER 2:** As lawyer faces making a case that state officials ignored prison sex abuse, she and an inmate struggle to overcome fears



MANDI WRIGHT/Detroit Free Press

Attorney Deborah LaBelle argues Dec. 30 that officials disregarded the safety of female prisoners like Toni Bunton, top. Bunton is among 500 women claiming in a lawsuit that sex abuse by male guards was ignored. The state says it didn't know of any problem.

*Second of five parts*

By **JEFF SEIDEL**  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Last January, one day before her civil lawsuit went to trial, Toni Bunton sat on the top bunk in her prison cell at Scott Correctional Facility, a place she had lived almost half her life.

The place where she said she was raped, over and over, by prison guards.

She cried and prayed and wrestled with old doubts that swirled through her head.

Should she stand up in court and tell the world what happened to her? Should she risk her freedom at a time when she was seeking to have her 25- to 50-year sentence commuted? Or should she keep her mouth shut, once more, and hope that her silence was the key to getting out?

She felt trapped. Once a meek teenager who had silently endured assaults by male guards, Bunton had grown into a confident and respected member of the prison population at Scott, on the border of Northville and Plymouth townships. Even

so, she was a convict. With no physical evidence to support her, would jurors believe she had been raped? Would they even care? Bunton was among 500 women who claimed in a lawsuit that prison officials had willfully ignored years of sexual abuse by male guards.

Now, at 34, Bunton was among the first 10 prisoners to reach a courtroom.

"Some people are telling her to lay low, keep your head down until you get out," Dick Soble, one of the lawyers in the prisoners' suit, said of Bunton's fears.

Would the lawsuit help her pitch for commutation or kill it? Even on the eve of her court testimony, the old doubts resurfaced.

The following morning, Jan. 15, Deborah LaBelle woke in a panic, worried about what she would say in her opening statement.

For several days, LaBelle had tried to find the right words, forming thoughts and writing ideas on paper, but she couldn't get it right. She feared her statement was flat, lacking the passion she felt for a case that had consumed her for 12 years.

See **PRISONERS, 8A**

**The story so far**

Toni Bunton landed in a Michigan prison after being convicted for participating in a drug deal that led to a murder. She and other female inmates say they became victims there, helpless to defend themselves against male guards' sexual advances.

Read Sunday's story at [freep.com](http://freep.com).

**Coming up**

**Tuesday:** Bunton's searing rape testimony.

**Wednesday:** A jury surprise.

**Thursday:** A new life?

**At freep.com**

Read a Human Rights Watch report on Michigan prison abuses.

Join the discussions.



LAWRENCE JACKSON/Associated Press

President-elect Barack Obama left his Chicago home for Washington on Sunday.

**Obama's transition is full of challenges**

*First up is economy, then there's his cabinet*

By **PHILIP ELLIOTT**  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANDREWS AIR FORCE BASE — President-elect Barack Obama landed in metropolitan Washington on Sunday evening, setting up the final march toward his Jan. 20 inauguration.

Obama landed hours after his pick for commerce secretary, New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, took his name out of the running amid a federal grand jury investigation into government contracts. Obama faces other challenges in the coming days, including meetings with congressional leaders today to promote an economic plan.

But as he prepared to leave his hometown of Chicago, he preferred to keep talk personal.

"I've got to tell you, I choked up a little bit leaving my house today," he told reporters aboard a government 757 plane typically used by vice presidents and first ladies. It was his first

See **OBAMA, 4A**

Check [freep.com](http://freep.com) for latest updates. 50 win tickets to inauguration. 4A Richardson bows out of cabinet job. 6A

**Financial wiz keeps Oakland out of the red**

By **JOHN WISELY**  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

When the economy still was humming along in 2005, Bob Daddow was troubled by a bar graph showing property tax assessments in Oakland County.

They continued to rise, but the growth rate had slowed three years in a row, and foreclosures were threatening to turn them negative, reducing money for county government. As Oakland County's chief money man, he urged spending restraint and later ordered monthly reports to track home sale prices.

Last fall, when the data showed his fears were coming to pass, the county froze hiring, engineered the retirement of 150 employees and gave department heads orders to cut their budgets. The

See **OAKLAND, 8A**

**Students, staff rally to end culture of violence at Detroit's Ford High**

By **CHASTITY PRATT DAWSEY**  
FREE PRESS EDUCATION WRITER

At Ford High School in Detroit, students and staff members see the school year in two parts: the month before 16-year-old Christopher Walker was gunned down outside the school and the 2½ months since.

Before the Oct. 16 murder — the first at a Michigan school in eight years — fights occurred almost daily, gunshots were fired in the parking lot at least once, volleyball play-

ers got into a fight with a teammate's family members and rival gangs vied for respect.

There are fewer brawls now because no one wants to die like Walker did — in a hail of gunfire that witnesses and police said resulted from a fight in the halls.

Some Detroiters — police, politicians, pastors and program leaders — have begun putting up a fight to turn around the perception of the school and make it feel safe.

See **SCHOOL, 9A**



November photo by MANDI WRIGHT/Detroit Free Press

Volunteers such as Pastor Maurice Hardwick, center, and Roshawn Harris, right, monitor halls at Ford High School in Detroit, connecting with students such as Demetrius Jones.

40788 11000 5  
50¢ Wayne, Oakland & Macomb counties  
75¢ Elsewhere

**SCATTERED CLOUDS**  
Seasonably chilly, but sun will brighten the day.  
Chuck Gaidica's forecast, 11A

31 | 20  
HIGH | LOW



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“Had the wardens and directors looked, they would have seen. Had they read, they would have known. Had they listened, they would have heard.”

Ann Arbor lawyer **DEBORAH LABELLE**, below, telling jurors about reports on sex abuse in Michigan prisons



REGINA H. BOONE/Detroit Free Press

## PRISONERS | For women and lawyer, a lot is at stake as the rape trial begins

From Page 1A

LaBelle handles civil rights cases from her Ann Arbor office, many involving female inmates. It was while meeting with inmates on visitation and education issues that LaBelle began to hear complaints of sexual abuse. Over the years, as the prison case grew and became more complex, she added likeminded attorneys in private practice.



May photo by SUSAN TUSA/Detroit Free Press

After an 11-hour process, 10 jurors have been selected to hear the trial in Judge Timothy Connors' courtroom. Potential jurors were dismissed because of sexual abuse or the belief that prisoners deserve whatever they get.

### The chance to speak up

As she prepared for trial, LaBelle knew she had to set the right tone from the start, there was so much at stake. She felt pressure to honor these women, who had waited so long to tell their stories.

So she scribbled on a legal pad, writing and rearranging her notes. As she walked down the sidewalk to the Washtenaw County Courthouse, she was still writing.

Dressed in a simple black dress and coat, intended to convey her serious and somber message, LaBelle continued to scribble as lawyers and spectators filed into the courtroom.

The Department of Corrections had fought the case for years, arguing variously that the statute of limitations had expired on the women's claims; that it should not be considered a class-action; that the hundreds of women in the suit should have their trials held separately; that prisoners don't have the same rights as normal citizens. The appeals went all the way to the Michigan Supreme Court.

Five days earlier, Allan Soros, an assistant state attorney general representing the prison system, filed a motion seeking 10 separate trials for the women. Judge Timothy Connors denied the motion.

LaBelle finished writing as the court was called into session for opening statements. She faced the jury and cleared her throat.

“OK,” she said. “Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.”

Behind her, against the wall, the 10 women sat in chairs, dressed in civilian clothing — pink sweaters, blouses, dress pants — the kind of clothing seen at a PTA meeting. Seven of the women, including Bunton, were still prisoners. They had changed from their prison garb at the courthouse.

“We’ve all been waiting for this trial for a very long time,” LaBelle told jurors.

Her voice was calm. Her mind was racing, trying to find the right balance of emotion. She wanted to scream out loud about how the guards preyed on the pretty ones, the ones who were small and weak, the ones who had been abused as children; how the women had to see the guards every day, yet couldn't report what happened to them, couldn't say no and couldn't fight because guards had all the

### How this series was reported

This narrative is based on interviews, hundreds of court documents — including transcripts and videotapes obtained through the state Freedom of Information Act — and an unpublished memoir Toni Bunton wrote in prison.

The Department of Corrections declined to allow the Free Press to tour Scott Correctional Facility.

power.

But the suit wasn't against the guards. They didn't create the system. They didn't have money to pay for damages.

Instead, this lawsuit was filed against the Department of Corrections, former DOC Director Kenneth McGinnis and former Scott Correctional Warden Joan Yukins.

To win, it would not be enough for LaBelle to show the guards had abused the women. LaBelle and her legal team had to convince jurors that prison officials knew about the abuse and did nothing to stop it.

### The 1st hurdle: Jury selection

All of the women said they were touched inappropriately — some, several times a day — as the guards filled a daily pat-down quota. LaBelle contended that this constant touching emboldened some guards to sexually molest the prisoners.

On the other side of the room, the 10 jury members listened closely. Normally, in a civil trial, six jurors are used and five are needed for a verdict, but Connors said that the trial would last so long that he would lose a few. He kept 10, just in case.

Jury selection took 11 hours. Several potential jurors said prisoners deserved whatever they got, even though it is a crime for a guard to have sexual contact with a prisoner. Others were dismissed because they said they themselves were sexually abused.

### The case against the state

“I want to start with a little history and context,” LaBelle told the jury. “Historically, in Michigan ... women used to be supervised in their cells and in their living units and in their showers and in their bathrooms by women. That is the way it was.”

But that changed in 1986,

### Reports warned of problems in prisons

The Michigan Women's Commission, a state agency, reported in 1993 that there was an alarming level of sexual abuse and harassment by state prison guards.

In 1995, the U.S. Department of Justice found pervasive sexual abuse of female prisoners in Michigan. A letter to then-Gov. John Engler said that “nearly every woman ... interviewed reported various sexually aggressive acts of guards.”

In 1996, Human Rights Watch released a report documenting rapes and a “highly sexualized and excessively hostile” environment in Michigan prisons. It was

clear, the group found, that the state had done little to protect the women from retaliation.

The state has adopted changes since then. Among them: refined work rules to prevent sexual misconduct or harassment by guards; tougher legal penalties for guards who have sexual contact with inmates; the removal of male guards from female housing units; a policy requiring female guards to pat down female prisoners, and a policy to refer allegations of sexual abuse to the Michigan State Police, as well as to the Corrections Department internal affairs, for investigation.



Read the Human Rights Watch report on Michigan prison abuses at [freep.com](http://freep.com).

when the DOC assigned men to work closer with female inmates.

LaBelle glanced at her notes, but spoke from memory. She looked into the eyes of the jurors to make sure they were listening, to see whether they were engaged.

“You will hear that these guards — not all of them — certainly not all of them — these male guards went further,” LaBelle said. “They sexually assaulted these 10 women. After the gropings, after the viewing, after the watching, then they assaulted them. They assaulted them over a period of years.”

“Michigan, you will hear, invited men into the women's prison unit areas without training, without restriction and without precautions for these women's safety.”

LaBelle told jurors how prison officials had ignored years of warnings.

The Michigan Women's Commission, a governor-appointed group, reported in 1993 an alarming level of sexual abuse and sexual harassment by prison guards. Two years later, the U.S. Department of Justice called it “pervasive.” One year after that, Human Rights Watch, the international watchdog group, released a report that said there was a “highly sexualized and excessively hostile” environment.

“Had the wardens and directors looked, they would have seen,” LaBelle said. “Had they read, they would have known. Had they listened, they would have heard.”

After 47 minutes, she was



December photo by PATRICIA BECK/Detroit Free Press

Deputy Oakland County Executive Bob Daddow, left, confers with his boss, County Executive L. Brooks Patterson. Daddow serves as an envoy on contentious issues like the Cobo Center expansion.

## OAKLAND | Deputy exec dodges the budget pitfalls

From Page 1A

county budget is balanced through 2010, and Daddow and others are working on 2011.

“He was way ahead of everybody else on the declining revenue,” said Louis Schimmel, a retired financial manager who supervised the receiverships of Ecorse and Hamtramck. “He’s a hard-nosed finance guy.”

Daddow's critics are less complimentary to the man who has been a chief architect of Oakland County's AAA bond rating and gatekeeper of the public dollar, working beside Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson for 16 years. But even his critics acknowledge his smarts. While Patterson is a household name in metro Detroit, Daddow has been his unheralded yet reliable deputy, serving as Patterson's envoy on contentious issues, like the finances of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department and the Cobo Center expansion talks.

When the Cobo discussions began, Patterson assigned Daddow to examine the financial details. Daddow wrote a 38-page paper questioning costs for everything from pensions and health care for Cobo retirees and litigation to hundreds of millions in deferred building maintenance that will drive up costs for any regional group taking it over.

“But nobody wants to talk about that,” Daddow said.

### Playing defense

Daddow, 57, of Oakland Township is a former partner in the accounting firm of Ernst & Young and is known for his mastery of government finance and his blunt demeanor. He wears bulletproof-thick eyeglasses and has the skin to match.

The Southfield native's leisure reading includes local government financial statements.

Daddow analyzes the reports, gauges their impact on Oakland County and summarizes them in pithy e-mails to Patterson and other officials. He's not bothered by his penny-pincher reputation.

“I sometimes don't get invited to meetings,” he said. “A lot of people don't like the way the message is delivered, but the message gets delivered.”

Often Daddow's message can be summed up in a single word: “No.”

Expand Cobo without full financial details? No.

Hire more employees? No.

Wait to make budget cuts? No.

Daddow insists that Patterson sets county policy while he and others carry it out. But does he ever say no to Patterson?

“All the time,” Patterson said. “I hired him to play defense.”

Daddow spent years going over the books of cities — rich and poor — spotting trouble in odd places. When the Detroit Pistons played at the Silverdome in the 1980s, Daddow was auditing Pontiac's books and found a contract required the city to keep the floor temperature at 72 degrees for games. Problem was, the Silverdome roof is more than 200 feet above the floor and hot air rises.

“They lost a fortune on the heat bill,” Daddow said.

Other accountants say Daddow is well-respected in their circles, in part for his willingness to voice unpopular views. He's not a yes-man, and he doesn't sugarcoat things. Oakland County routinely wins national awards for excellence in financial reporting.

“I think it's a real strategic asset to have someone of his background and training and raw intellect,” said Frank Audia, a partner with Plante & Moran who heads the firm's government auditing practice.

Patterson met Daddow in

### Meet Bob Daddow

**Title:** Deputy Oakland County executive

**Residence:** Oakland Township

**Age:** 57

**Salary:** \$142,537

**Education:** Bachelor's and master's degrees in accounting from Central Michigan University. Southfield High School graduate.

1992 when a deputy, Doug Williams, recommended him for the finance post in Patterson's incoming administration.

“I had breakfast with him, and I hired him halfway through the scrambled eggs,” Patterson said. “After talking to him, I just put down my fork and said, ‘You've got the job if you want it.’”

Daddow remembers the meeting, too, though he recalls Patterson missed an appointment. “He stood me up,” Daddow said.

When they did finally meet, they hit it off immediately.

Daddow's reputation preceded him with county employees.

“We'd heard all these things about him and how he never smiles,” said Laurie Van Pelt, the county's director of management and budget. “But he's actually wonderful to work for.”

Van Pelt said that while she was completing a project several years ago, she stayed at the office until 10:30 p.m.

“He drove by and saw my car in the lot and came in and told me to go home,” Van Pelt said.

### A voice for privatizing

Patterson's administration, with Daddow's urging, has privatized the county nursing home, food service in the jail, the bump shop that repairs county cars and other functions. It's a governing approach advocated by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a free-market think tank in Midland, with which Daddow has long been associated.

“He and the Mackinac folks would privatize everything they can get their hands on,” said County Commissioner David Coulter, D-Ferndale. “I think it's all the small-government, no-regulation philosophy that has just been repudiated at the national level.”

Daddow counters that the moves save the county millions annually and provide better services.

When Daddow was named liaison to an outside group, Coulter quipped: “Are we going to put money in the budget for charm school?”

“He's smart as hell,” Coulter said. “But sometimes Bob likes to flood you with information to try to make you feel less than smart.”

Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano, who is spearheading the latest Cobo talks, said Daddow is a good accountant, but not necessarily a great negotiator.

“From a philosophical standpoint, we like to hear people who won't just tell us how we can't do something, but how we can,” Ficano said. “It's one thing to say no, but it's another skill level to get to the yes.”

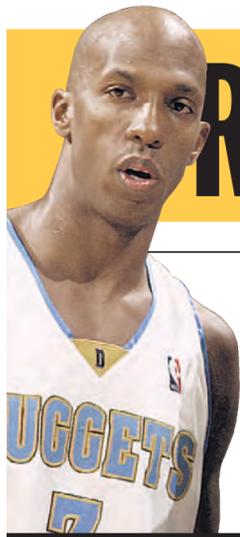
Patterson said Daddow can intimidate, but his advice has been invaluable.

During those early Cobo talks, Daddow demanded detailed financial information on Cobo, which he never received. Patterson suspects that was because two former Cobo directors, who have since pleaded guilty, were taking kickbacks from a contractor.

“Bob would have spotted that in a New York minute,” Patterson said.

Contact **JOHN WISELY** at 248-351-3696 or [jwisely@freepress.com](mailto:jwisely@freepress.com).

Contact **JEFF SEIDEL** at 313-223-4558 or [jseidel@freepress.com](mailto:jseidel@freepress.com).



# ROAD TEST

CAN PISTONS SHOW SWAGGER OUT WEST?  
BILLUPS AWAITS IN DENVER, 1D



# Abraham gets 4 to 20 for drugs

LOCAL NEWS, 3A

ON GUARD FOR 177 YEARS

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# Native son

Mt. Clemens-born new archbishop comes home to economic, ideological challenges



Bishop Allen Vigneron at Blessed Sacrament Cathedral in Detroit on Monday. The Mt. Clemens native is to become Detroit's new archbishop, replacing Cardinal Adam Maida, on Jan. 28.

SUSAN TUSA/Detroit Free Press

By NIRAJ WARIKOO AND PATRICIA MONTEMURRI  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

As Archbishop-elect Allen Vigneron prepares to move back from California to take over one of the biggest Catholic dioceses in the United States, he faces challenges that might make his tenure a difficult one.

The Archdiocese of Detroit — where he grew up and was educated — faces a crumbling economy coupled with demographic changes that have shrunk the Catholic Church's presence in southeastern Michigan.

Appointed Monday by Pope Benedict XVI, Vigneron, 60, also must tread the ideological divides of the region's 1.4 million Catholics by making sure he adheres to traditional church doctrine while not alienating a Catholic population that doesn't always hew to the faith's teachings. The racial and

religious makeup of the region — which has sizable African-American and Muslim communities — is another challenge.

But supporters say he's more than up to the task, an intellectual who knows how to work effectively in real life across ethnic boundaries.

"He's a brilliant man, extraordinarily capable," said Cardinal Edmund Szoka, who led the Detroit archdiocese through the 1980s and appointed Vigneron as dean of Sacred Heart in 1988.

Catholics will eagerly watch where Vigneron takes the church as it faces problems with people leaving the faith as they grow older. His past may offer a hint, say observers. While president of Sacred Heart Major Seminary in the 1990s, he pushed the Catholic center toward a more conservative direction. Traditionalists hope he will maintain

See ARCHBISHOP, 9A

## Challenges he'll face

- Shrinking number of priests, parishes, schools
  - Raising money in a poor local economy that has reduced tithes
  - Serving the urban and inner-ring parishes as people increasingly move outward
  - Dialogue with Muslims
  - Decreasing the number of Catholics who leave
- SPECIAL COVERAGE, 9A**
- Get to know Vigneron.
  - Maida's long era recalled.

Video at [freep.com](http://freep.com): The archbishop is introduced.

## Gaza warfare takes a toll

NATION & WORLD, 8A | OPINION, LETTERS, 10A

# Obama's plan holds promise for Michigan

Tax cuts, unemployment in package

By TODD SPANGLER  
FREE PRESS WASHINGTON STAFF

WASHINGTON — With Michigan and the nation struggling to touch bottom in the deepening economic crisis, President-elect Barack Obama returned to the Capitol on Monday with a proposed program of accelerated tax cuts for individuals and businesses built on the back of his campaign promises.

Still on the drawing board are many details, such as whether a sweeping economic reform — expected to cost as much as \$775 billion — includes not only tax cuts and money for infrastructure projects but other items that would be particularly helpful in hard-hit Michigan, where a 9.6% jobless rate led the nation in November.

More aid for the state, plus an expansion of unemployment benefits and COBRA, the federal program that lets workers hold onto their health insurance for a time after losing their jobs, are among the points being considered that could be of particular help in Michigan.



GERALD HERBERT/Associated Press

President-elect Barack Obama wants Congress to act quickly on an economic stimulus plan to put money in people's pockets.

Tax cuts are welcome, too. "I think it's a critical piece of help for Michigan," said Mark Schauer, a Battle Creek Democrat who will be officially seated today as the congressman from the state's 7th District. "That's direct assistance to people who have been hurt by

See OBAMA, 12A

## HOSTAGES TO JUSTICE | IN LOCAL NEWS, PAGE 3A

# A PRISONER TELLS ALL

In today's article on the sexual abuse of female inmates by Michigan prison guards, inmate Toni Bunton reduces a courtroom to tears as she recounts how she was raped repeatedly by male guards at the Scott Correctional Facility.

Turn inside to read the third part of our five-part series. Go to [freep.com](http://freep.com) to see video of Bunton's testimony and read the series to date.



## Cash-starved GM to part with a trove of rare cars

By TIM HIGGINS  
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

General Motors' cash problems could give car buffs the rare opportunity to buy some of GM's most unique vehicles at auction next week, giving gearheads an extraordinary chance to own some of Detroit's history.

The auction is part of an effort



General Motors Corp.

to raise cash for the struggling automaker but also done to manage GM's fleet of historic and unique vehicles. GM's Heritage Center in Sterling Heights has about 200 of the automaker's 1,000 historic or special vehicles on display.

More than 200 of the center's vehicles will be put up for sale at the Barrett-Jackson Auction in Scottsdale, Ariz.

**\$5.4 billion for GM: Treasury set to release 2nd loan. 5A**

Tom Freiman, manager of the Heritage Center, estimated the sales could generate less than \$5 million. The auction will run from Sunday through Jan. 18 and include hundreds of

See AUCTION, 5A

About 200 vehicles from a fleet of historic and unique vehicles will go up for auction next week. This Buick Blackhawk will be one of them.

## '08 sales versus '07



Source: Free Press research  
Detroit Free Press

## Economic meltdown, credit freeze make '08 a car sales year to forget

With a global economic collapse ensnaring the housing, credit and financial markets, millions of U.S. consumers who would normally buy a new car and truck decided to save their money last year.

That made 2008 the worst year for new car and truck sales since 1992.

In final numbers reported Monday, Detroit's automakers, who spent the last few months of the year counting their pennies and being grilled by Congress about their leadership, relevance, mistakes and fuel economy, fared the worst.

Last year marked the first year that Detroit's automakers sold less than half — 48.2% — of all the new cars and trucks

bought in America, a number that includes both retail and fleet sales. In 2007, Detroit's automakers sold 52% of all new vehicles.

Automakers are pinning their hopes for a mild recovery on President-elect Barack Obama, who has been talking about a stimulus package to help restore consumer confidence.

"There is going to be a lot excitement and change, and people like change," Mike DiGiovanni, General Motors Corp.'s executive director of global market and industry analysis, said Monday.

By Brent Shavelly  
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**AFTERNOON SNOW IS LIKELY**  
Shovels stay out all week.  
Chuck Gaidica forecast, 11A

32 HIGH 27 LOW



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ROCHELLE RILEY

## The war on violence needs troops

The staff and supporters of Ford High School in Detroit are to be commended for their increased efforts to reduce violence at the school, site of the first killing at a Michigan school in eight years.

Since an October shooting that left a young man dead, the school and community leaders have recruited a force of pastors and others to help make the school safer. But the efforts cannot start and stop there.

As a matter of fact, we can't start with children that old.

If we don't get to certain young black men sooner, by the time those kids get to high school, it's too late.

### More boys killing boys

Many are boys beyond risk, boys who passed at-risk in grade school, boys whose lives are unimaginable and who learned to solve problems with violence way before ninth grade.

These boys get lost in reports that Detroit had its lowest homicide rate in 40 years because their crimes are increasing. They get lost when the FBI reports an overall murder drop. A recent Northeastern University study found that black teens are killing one another more often than seven years ago.

Forty percent more black males between 14 and 17 were killed in gun crimes in 2007 than in 2000, the study showed; 38% more young men in that age group fatally shot someone in 2007 than in 2000.

In Detroit, most of the 345 homicides reported across the city last year were committed by black males. (The police department declined to provide a breakdown by age.)

"When a high-profile crime occurs, the community gets outraged and finds innovative ways to reduce crime," said department spokesman James Tate. "But, unfortunately, the crimes that don't get attention happen at a higher rate, and we need to be outraged by each and every violent crime."

"You can't rely on the schools to take care of your children," he said. "You can't rely on the police to take care of your children. A lot of these young men have lost something or missed something at home, and they're trying to find that special thing in the streets. Unfortunately, what meets them is violence."

### This is a call to action

So while the staff at Ford High must be commended, Detroit needs more. It needs a league of saints to fight the tide of violence that's rising among our young.

We must get to these boys before they become statistics, before they contribute to statistics, before they've made choices that will get them killed or jailed by the time they're 16.

If we help them early, then — and only then — can we change the path that those young men — and some women — choose.

We have to catch them before they're abused, pushed, threatened, frustrated or sick enough to be ready to kill.

These are our children, our city's children.

If we don't help them before we're afraid of them, we have no one to blame but ourselves.

Contact ROCHELLE RILEY at 313-222-4473 or rriley99@freepress.com.

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## SPECIAL REPORT | HOSTAGES TO JUSTICE

# A prisoner tells her terrible story

**CHAPTER 3:** Despite fear and shame, Toni Bunton describes 8 rapes in a suit against the state for not protecting inmates from guards



RICK NEASE/Detroit Free Press

Prison inmate Toni Bunton testifies in an Ann Arbor courtroom about suffering years of sexual abuse and intimidation by guards at Scott Correctional Facility.

### Third of five parts

By JEFF SEIDEL  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Toni Bunton sat in the witness chair with her arms folded across her chest. She wore black pants and a lavender V-neck sweater over a white turtleneck. Her hair was parted down the middle and fell down her back. After 16 years in prison, she had learned to cut her own hair by looking in a mirror.

It was the third week of January last year, in a courtroom in Ann Arbor. Bunton was the first of 10 prisoners to testify in a civil lawsuit against the Michigan Department of Corrections. They were among more than 500 female prisoners who said they were repeatedly raped and molested by male guards.

Dick Soble, one of the lawyers for the women, asked Bunton about the crime that landed her in prison. She

described a drug deal that had turned into a murder. She didn't pull the trigger, but she drove the getaway car, she admitted. She made no excuses.

"I deserved to be punished," Bunton told the jury.

Soble pivoted to the allegations in the suit, and the first time she was assaulted. "It was winter of '93," she said, so softly it was hard to hear.

Judge Timothy Connors asked her to speak up.

"He took me in there and, like, he was kissing me," Bunton said of her rape by a guard in a prison bathroom at Scott Correctional Facility when she was 19. She motioned to her neck and chest, as if trying to scrape away the memory. "He pulled my jogging pants down. My butt was against the sink. And he penetrated me."

She said she did not report the incident to prison officials because she

See JUSTICE, 5A

### The story so far

Toni Bunton goes to prison for her role in a drug deal that ends in murder. She and other female inmates say they were raped and molested by male guards. The women file suit, claiming that state prison officials ignored warnings of abuse by the guards. Now, a jury gets to hear their testimony.

### Coming up

**Wednesday:** Jurors shock a veteran trial judge.

**Thursday:** A new life?

### At freep.com

■ Watch video clips of opening statements at trial and Toni Bunton's emotional testimony.

■ Read Sunday and Monday's stories at [freep.com](http://freep.com).

■ Read a Human Rights Watch report on Michigan prison abuses.

■ Join the discussions.



CARLOS OSORIO/Associated Press

Nathaniel Abraham was given a sentence of 4 to 20 years Monday on a drug charge.

## Abraham lectured at drug hearing

'Quit it,' judge tells him before sentencing

### OAKLAND COUNTY

By L.L. BRASIER  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Nathaniel Abraham appeared sullen at times, at one point near tears, as he apologized in Oakland Circuit Court for his recent drug-dealing conviction, pledging — once again — to turn his life around before a judge sentenced him to 4 to 20 years in prison.

"I let myself down," he told the judge as he stood shackled before a packed courtroom, with TV cameras whirring. "I want a fair chance to prove myself again."

However, Oakland County Circuit Judge Daniel O'Brien was clearly skeptical and miffed, noting that Abraham had violated his tether agreement while awaiting trial on the drug charges and had piled up several violations while in the Oakland County Jail — including one outburst that got him a 48-hour lockdown. Abraham also had promised to turn his life around when he was released in 2007 after spending his teen years in a juvenile detention facility for a second-degree murder conviction.

O'Brien chastised him for squandering his opportunities.

See ABRAHAM, 7A

## Rules for new medical pot program draw complaints

### STATEWIDE

By MEGHA SATYANARAYANA  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The draft rules for the state's medical marijuana program treat users as criminals and put undue responsibility on law enforcement, say those who spoke at the only public hearing on the topic Monday in Lansing.

More than 100 people gathered to voice concerns about regulations drawn by the Michigan Department of Community Health, which will oversee the program starting April 4.

Among the issues raised were possible constitutional and privacy violations, as well as what some advocates say is a too-narrow definition of "public place," where medical marijuana use would still be illegal.

"We are responsible, law-abiding adults. We want a sensible, workable medical marijuana program," said Greg Francisco, executive director of the Michigan Medical Marijuana Association (MMA).

See MARIJUANA, 7A

## Beatty is to be sentenced and sent off to jail today

Christine Beatty, once one of the most powerful people in Detroit, is scheduled to enter jail today for her role in the text message scandal that brought down her boss, former Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick.

Wayne County Circuit Judge Timothy Kenny is to sentence Beatty to 120 days in jail on two counts of obstruction of justice. Beatty, Kilpatrick's top aide and lover, admitted that she lied under oath in a 2007 police whistle-blower case.

Her plea deal also calls for her to pay \$100,000 restitution and serve 5 years of probation.

Kilpatrick also is serving a 120-day sentence after pleading guilty for lying in the whistle-blower case that ended in an \$8.4-million settlement.

By Joe Swickard



Christine Beatty

Go to [freep.com](http://freep.com) for live coverage of the sentencing, which is to begin at 9 a.m.

### MORE COUNTY NEWS ON 4A >>

#### WASHTENAW COUNTY ANN ARBOR

### Accessible seating at U-M Big House a hit

In its first football season since a legal battle over wheelchair-accessible seats was settled, the University of Michigan is reporting that nearly all such seats were sold at Michigan Stadium.

In each of U-M's seven home games, 74% to 89% of the available wheelchair-accessible seats were sold, according to a letter late last month from U-M's general counsel, Gloria Hage, to the U.S. Department of Justice and attorney Richard Bernstein.

Bernstein filed a lawsuit on behalf of the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans in 2007, asking for more wheelchair-accessible seating as part of the ongoing renovation at the Big House. The Department of Justice eventually got involved.

A settlement last year calls for 329 accessible seats, with 329 companion seats, by the 2010 season; so far, there are 184 available pairs in the stadium.

"I felt this was part of prison life. I didn't know any different. Nobody sat me down and told me. ... I felt it was part of the punishment."

**TONI BUNTON**, an inmate at Scott Correctional Facility in Plymouth, testifying about being raped and sexually abused by prison guards. She is one of 500 women who are suing the State of Michigan for knowing about the abuse and not protecting them.



REGINA H. BOONE/Detroit Free Press

The attorneys representing the prisoners — Michael Pitt, left, Richard Soble, center, and Deborah LaBelle — discuss their case against the State of Michigan. Lead attorney LaBelle first brought suit on behalf of the women in 1996.

# JUSTICE | A prisoner fights fear and shame to testify about being raped

From Page 3A

feared retaliation from the guard or others.

"He said he would make my life miserable," she said.

Bunton slumped. The other women wiped away tears.

### I blamed myself

Bunton testified she was raped eight times in prison. She described each attack in as much detail as she could remember.

By the time she talked about the third rape, her voice was quivering. She was crouched on the witness stand, ducking her head, her arms wrapped tight and her right hand covering most of her face.

"He came in there and started feelin' all over me," she told the jury, before describing the rape itself.

Allan Soros, an assistant attorney general representing the prison system, sat at the defense table, his hands folded, his eyes locked on Bunton.

Bunton took a deep breath. She faced the jury but didn't focus on anyone.

"Do you want to take a minute, Toni?" Soble asked.

"No, I want to hurry up and get this over with," she said, her voice breaking.

Each rape lasted about 5 to 10 minutes, she estimated.

One time an officer "came into the room and he was on his knees at the door asking me if he could give me oral sex." Bunton said she started crying and he left. Another time, an officer climbed on top of her, while she was sleeping in her cell.

Lawyers for the women knew they had to make jurors see their clients as human beings, not as prisoners making claims for money.

As Bunton testified, several people in the courtroom wiped tears from their eyes.

"I was away from my family, 18 years old," she said of entering prison. "I had never been around people like that. I just don't think I was sophisticated enough to deal with the types of people that I had to deal with."

"I felt this was part of prison life. I didn't know any different. Nobody sat me down and told me."

She cried. "I felt it was part of the punishment. I blamed myself."

She stopped and held her head, crying.

### Faint hopes

Bunton told the jury that she is worried about the future.

## Reports warned of problems in prisons

The Michigan Women's Commission, a state agency, reported in 1993 on an alarming level of sexual abuse and harassment by prison guards.

In 1995, the U.S. Department of Justice found pervasive sexual abuse of female prisoners in Michigan. A letter to then-Gov. John Engler said that "nearly every woman ... interviewed reported various sexually aggressive acts of guards."

In 1996, Human Rights Watch released a report documenting rapes and a "highly sexualized and excessively hostile" environment in Michigan prisons. It was clear, the group found, that the state had done little to protect

the women from retaliation.

The state has adopted changes since then. Among them: refined work rules to prevent sexual misconduct or harassment by guards; tougher legal penalties for guards who have sexual contact with inmates; the removal of male guards from female housing units; a policy requiring female guards to pat down female prisoners, and a policy to refer allegations of sexual abuse to the Michigan State Police, as well as to prison internal affairs, for investigation.

Read the Human Rights Watch report on Michigan prison abuses at [freep.com](http://freep.com).

## How this series was reported

This narrative is based on interviews, hundreds of court documents — including transcripts and videotapes obtained through the state Freedom of Information Act — and an unpublished memoir Toni Bunton wrote in prison.

The Department of Corrections declined to allow the Free Press to tour the Robert Scott Correctional Facility.

perly trained in how to deal with female prisoners.

Soros then attacked the credibility of different witnesses and the outside reports citing abuse by male guards. The researchers, he said, didn't directly investigate the women's claims and instead simply repeated their allegations.

The state, he said, had improved the way it investigated abuse and trained guards.

"To say the department just sat back and did nothing, just let everybody run the place, is just totally false," Soros said.

Sexual misconduct, he said, is everywhere in society. It's in homes and offices, schools and churches. But he said the level of abuse at Scott was "unfairly characterized in this trial." Though Soros had presented no evidence to refute the women's testimony, he argued that the sexual abuse was not as rampant as the women and experts suggested.

"A big part of this trial is common sense," Soros told jurors. How could prison officials take action to prevent sexual assaults when so many of these women never reported being assaulted? "How can Warden Yukins take any action to help any of these plaintiffs when they are not telling her what their problem is? Then, they turn around and sue her."

### It's outrageous

Soble, the women's lawyer, had the last word.

"What you heard in this courtroom today is what women have heard every single day of their lives in prison," he said. "They are liars. They are cheaters. They can't be believed. They are sluts. They are drug addicts. And they are prisoners. ... it's outrageous." "Even today, in this court, with the overwhelming evidence, what they are telling you is: There is no problem."

Contact **JEFF SEIDEL** at 313-223-4558 or [jseidel@freepress.com](mailto:jseidel@freepress.com).

# Treasury to give GM second loan of \$5.4 billion Jan. 16

By **JUSTIN HYDE**  
FREE PRESS WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Treasury said Monday it will grant General Motors Corp. a second loan totaling \$5.4 billion on Jan. 16 as part of the \$13.4-billion rescue of the ailing automaker.

The second loan, following the \$4-billion loan issued last week, was disclosed in an update on the Treasury's spending of money from the \$700-billion financial industry bailout.

Chrysler LLC won its \$4-billion loan last week as well.

With the GM and Chrysler aid plans, and the \$6-billion infusion into GMAC, the Treasury cannot lend the additional \$4 billion it pledged to GM without tapping the second half of the bailout fund, something Congress has vowed to block until after the Obama administration takes office.

The rest of the first \$350 billion has been pledged to shore up banks and financial institutions such as insurer AIG.

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Photos from General Motors Corp.

Desperate times call for desperate measures, so GM is parting with this Popemobile blessed by Pope John Paul II.

# AUCTION | GM selling off prized collectibles for cash

From Page 1A

rare and valuable vehicles.

"We're trying to get the collection to the right size," Freeman said. "At the end of the day, I think we're going to end up with a better mix of heritage vehicles."

The vehicles for sale include cars done to serve as pace cars in races or made for car shows, including high-performance vehicles made for the annual Specialty Equipment Market Association show. GM declined to give a complete list of vehicles to be auctioned, saying it is still being determined. But they include:

- A white 1998 Cadillac Brougham convertible made for Pope John Paul II to use. The vehicle has a step-up, throne-like chair and platform that rises and falls by hydraulic lift. It was blessed by the pope "but deemed unsafe by the security team," according to the auction house's Web site.
- A 1925 House Car. It's an early version of a camper made before RVs became commercially available. It has mahogany trim and maple floors and is built on a Chevrolet 1-ton chassis. No mention of fuel economy.
- The Buick Blackhawk, a hand-built vehicle made to celebrate Buick's 100-year anniversary in 2003, according to the auction house.

- The 1967 GTO used in the action movie "XXX."

## The auction starts Sunday in Arizona

The Barrett-Jackson Auction Co., one of the premier venues for valuable and rare cars, will hold its 2009 Collector Car Event from Sunday through Jan. 18 in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Last year's auction resulted in more than \$88 million in sales and was attended by 280,000 people, according to the company. The Speed Channel broadcast 39 hours of live auction coverage.

Three cars sold for at least \$1 million, the company said.

■ For more information, go to [www.barrett-jackson.com](http://www.barrett-jackson.com).

Contact **TIM HIGGINS** at 313-222-8784 or [thiggins@freepress.com](mailto:thiggins@freepress.com).

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# LOCAL NEWS

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www.freep.com **Detroit Free Press**



**BRIAN DICKERSON**

## More than one way to sell a seat

If Chicago politicians have taught us anything, it's that there's a right way to sell a U.S. Senate seat and a wrong way.

Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich unwittingly demonstrated the wrong way when federal prosecutors published intercepted phone conversations in which he appeared to be soliciting bids for the Senate seat vacated by President-elect Barack Obama.

When state legislators responded by launching impeachment proceedings, Blago defiantly appointed ex-state Attorney General Roland Burris. Now Burris is showing his clumsy mentor how a sophisticated Chicago pol shakes down the federal government without risking indictment.

Pundits and politicians outside Chicago have roundly castigated Burris for failing to appreciate that anything associated with Blagojevich is now fatally infectious.

If he had any self-respect, they say, Burris would have rejected his benefactor's appointment — presumably leaving that prize to a hack of lesser ethical discernment.

### Laying the groundwork

But Burris — who, if he did anything untoward to win Blago's approval, had the good sense to do it outside the FBI's earshot — insists he has nothing to be ashamed of.

Whatever others may have been prepared to offer for Obama's seat, Burris points out, there is no evidence that he himself promised Blago anything.

Or, as they say in his native city: The feds got nuttin' on the guy.

So when veteran and freshman senators reported to the Capitol for duty Tuesday, so did Burris, notwithstanding abundant assurances that Democratic senators had no intention whatsoever of recognizing him as Obama's legitimate successor.

After introducing himself as "the junior senator for the State of Illinois," Burris pledged to press the legitimacy of his appointment in court if the Senate fails to seat him.

"I'm certainly not looking for drama," he told reporters in a Capitol Hill appearance that upstaged the swearing in of dozens of less-controversial rookie lawmakers.

### Flip this seat

But drama — and the Senate's distaste for it — are precisely what Burris is counting on.

Many senators have vowed publicly to not seat Burris; they'll likely refer his appointment to an investigating committee to buy time while impeachment proceedings against Blagojevich progress.

But Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid knows the federal courts could ultimately order them to relent — and he's already signaled his interest in a compromise that averts a clash with the judicial branch.

Burris' challenge is to negotiate the best possible consolation prize while publicly maintaining that nothing less than Obama's seat will do. In the words of his less-discreet benefactor, Burris has got this thing, and it's bleeping golden, and he's not just giving it up for bleeping nothing.

Still, don't expect him to solicit offers overtly, much less name his price explicitly. Isn't that how Blagojevich got into so much trouble?

Now the blundering Blago is dead meat. Long live transactional politics!

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## SPECIAL REPORT | HOSTAGES TO JUSTICE

# The jury delivers surprising verdict

**CHAPTER 4:** A nervous Toni Bunton stands in disbelief as she and other female inmates are awarded \$15.4 million in sexual assaults case



As the jury foreman moved down the list of plaintiffs, reading off the verdicts, all decided in favor of the inmates, the women cried and hugged, wiping tears away.

### Fourth of five parts

By **JEFF SEIDEL**  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The courtroom door swung open. The trial was over. A jury of four men and six women had reached a verdict in the lawsuit by 10 female inmates who claimed Michigan prison officials did nothing to prevent rapes and assaults by male guards.

"All rise!" the bailiff said loudly. On the other side of the courtroom, behind a row of lawyers, inmate Toni Bunton clutched her chest.

Her stomach churned. Would the jury believe her testimony that she was raped eight times and groped on a daily basis by the men who guarded her at Scott Correctional Facility? Would anyone care?

"Members of the jury, have you reached a verdict?" Ann Arbor

Judge Timothy Connors asked, folding his hands.

The jury foreman stood to deliver the news.

### 1 verdict at a time

The 10 women stood behind their lawyers, holding hands.

The first prisoner was awarded \$335,000.

"This is a very good award, for this case," Dick Soble, one of the lawyers for the women, thought to himself.

The foreman moved down the list of plaintiffs, reading off the verdicts, all decided in favor of the women, awarding damages that ranged from hundreds of thousands of dollars to several million.

The women cried and hugged and passed around a box of tissues, wip-

See **JUSTICE**, 5B

Photo illustration by **RICK NEASE**/Detroit Free Press

### The story so far

Toni Bunton goes to prison for her role in a drug deal that ends in murder. She and other female inmates file suit against the Michigan prison system, claiming officials ignored evidence of rape and molestations by male guards. In searing testimony, Bunton and others recount their assaults to a jury.

### Coming up

**Thursday:** Will Toni Bunton win her improbable bid for freedom?

### At freep.com

■ Watch video clips of lawyers' arguments and Toni Bunton's emotional testimony.

■ Read the first three parts of this series at [freep.com](http://freep.com)

■ Read a Human Rights Watch report on Michigan prison abuses.

■ Join the discussions.



KIMBERLY P. MITCHELL/Detroit Free Press

Roy Gross, 49, of Taylor is a business agent for the Teamsters.

# Train ride to Obama history

*Teamster from Taylor is among 40 on trip*

By **KATHLEEN GRAY**  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Roy Gross knows the 120-mile train ride from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C., on Jan. 17 will be so much more than just a way to get to the presidential inauguration.

"It's just going to be the beginning," said the 49-year-old Taylor resident. "We'll look at it as the definite moment in time when things began to change."

Gross, a business agent for the Teamsters, will be one of 40 everyday Americans who are to join President-elect Barack Obama and his family for a one-day whistle-stop train ride to a four-day whirlwind of inaugural activities in Washington.

The tour is to include public events in cities that hold essential spots in America's history: Philadelphia, Baltimore and the nation's capital, where Obama will be inaugurated Jan. 20.

The 40 people asked to hop on the train are representative of the nation's diversity, including Gross, a single dad of a college-age daughter and former truck driver who has seen many of his friends and coworkers lose their jobs; Kansas City, Mo., social workers Jim and Alicia Girardeau, and Cleveland community activist Liza Hazirjian.

See **TRAIN**, 6B

# Garbage pickup, foreclosures are hot issues at mayoral debate

### DETROIT

By **ZLATI MEYER**  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A standing-room-only crowd of more than 250 people gathered at the Northwest Activities Center on Meyers Road in Detroit for the local advocacy group Call 'Em Out's mayoral forum Tuesday night.

Candidates fielded questions on a variety of issues, including retaining ownership of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, abolishing the city's \$300 garbage pickup fee, restoring bulk trash pickup, foreclosures and reestablishing the residency requirement for city workers.

The candidates who participated in the event were Donald Bradley, Stanley Christmas, Freman Hendrix, Coleman Young II, Warren Evans, Duane Montgomery, Sharon McPhail, Nicholas Hood III, Jerroll Sanders and Joseph Holt.

"This forum is about the people's issues," organizer Agnes Hitchcock

See **FORUM**, 6B

## COUNTY NEWS CONTINUES ON 2B >>

### OAKLAND COUNTY SOUTHFIELD

#### Jewish groups to gather in support of Israel

Jewish groups in southeast Michigan plan to hold a gathering Thursday at Shaarey Zedek synagogue in Southfield in support of Israel's military campaign to stop hostile rocket fire from neighboring Gaza.

The 7:30 p.m. program is to feature speeches by Consul General of Israel Gershon Kedar from Chicago; the American Jewish Committee's Bloomfield Hills chapter President Ken Gold, and the Rev. Ken Flowers, pastor of Detroit's Greater New Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church.

## Shi'ite Muslims mourn and celebrate 7th-Century martyr

### DEARBORN

By **NIRAJ WARIKOO**  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Heads down, their foreheads cradled in their hands, the crowd in a banquet hall listened to a Muslim speaker telling the story of Imam Hussain, the grandson of Islam's prophet.

Dressed in black as a symbol of mourning, some wept inside the Dearborn center Sunday night as they recalled a man vital to Shi'ite Muslims in metro Detroit and around the world.

Known as Ashura, the 10 days of mourning end today with special

prayers and ceremonies held in Shi'ite mosques across metro Detroit. Although they are a minority among Muslims, Shi'ites make up a higher percentage among local Muslims, and in recent years Ashura ceremonies here have gotten more popular and elaborate.

"It's about the struggle of a man who would not compromise his principles and morals," said Rashid Baydoun, 23, of Dearborn Heights. "Ashura is very important to me because it reminds me not to stand for oppression."

The story of Ashura centers on the 7th-Century battlefield deaths of

See **ASHURA**, 2B

We the members of the jury <sup>and</sup> as <sup>representatives</sup> citizen of Michigan would like to express ~~our~~ extreme regret & apologies for what you've been through.

REGINA H. BOONE/Detroit Free Press

After awarding 10 female prisoners more than \$15 million in damages, a woman on the jury asked to read this statement. It marked the first time anyone had apologized to the women. Ann Arbor Judge Timothy Connors said he had never heard of a jury making such a statement to a plaintiff. Pointing at the jury, inmate Toni Bunton said, "I know you guys care."

**WHY WOMEN DID NOT REPORT ABUSE EARLIER**

Michigan prison officials argue that female prisoners had several ways to report sexual abuse: They could file a grievance, notify the warden, tell counselors or others. So why did so many women wait until a lawsuit was filed before accusing male guards of sexual assault? The women, and rights groups, cited many factors in the 1980s and 1990s that they said discouraged women from speaking up: ■ Under former rules, the women were forced to tell the person they were accusing of their intent to file a grievance. ■ Guards retaliated against some accusers. This included physical or verbal attacks, excessive searches or trumped up disciplinary tickets, which could make it harder to get out of prison early. ■ Employees accused of sexual abuse were sometimes assigned to investigate themselves, even leading the investigation in some cases. ■ Prison officials assumed an inmate's accusation, by itself, was not credible — even in some cases where an inmate passed a polygraph. An employee's word was presumed credible. ■ When a prisoner made an allegation, she was sent to segregation, ostensibly for her safety. However, for some women, this forced them to miss educational classes and programs.

**How this series was reported**  
This narrative is based on interviews, hundreds of court documents — including transcripts and videotapes obtained through the state Freedom of Information Act — and an unpublished memoir Toni Bunton wrote in prison. The Department of Corrections declined to allow the Free Press to tour the Robert Scott Correctional Facility.

**LOCAL DEATHS**

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**JUSTICE | Jury awards \$15.4 million to inmates in assaults case**

From Page 1B

ing tears from their eyes. Finally, it was Bunton's turn. Bunton, who had served more than 16 years of a 25- to 50-year sentence for her role in a drug deal that ended in murder, stood, rocking side to side. "Was plaintiff subject to unwelcome sexual conduct or communication?" the jury foreman read from the form. "Yes," the foreman replied. "Do you independently find, based on the evidence in this case, that the defendants had notice of a sexually hostile prison environment?" the foreman asked. "Yes." This was key. It meant that the three defendants — the Department of Corrections, former DOC Director Kenneth McGinnis and former warden Joan Yukins — knew there was a problem at Scott and failed to do something to stop the abuse. Then, the foreman announced the damages. Bunton was awarded \$3.45 million. Bunton kept rocking, now in disbelief. She couldn't hear what the foreman said next. Her heart was pounding so hard, and everybody was crying so loudly, all she could hear was her own heartbeat, thumping in her ears. She watched one of her lawyers write down the number and stared at all the zeroes.

**'Thank you for believing in us'**  
In total, the women were awarded \$15.4 million. With attorney fees and interest, because the case was delayed for so many years, the total climbs to \$40 million, according to Deborah LaBelle, the lead lawyer for the women.

But there was more. Something unusual and unexpected. A woman on the jury asked to read a statement. "We the members of the jury," she began, "as representatives of the citizens of Michigan, would like to express our extreme regret and apologies for what you have been through." The 28-word statement marked the first time anyone had apologized to the women. "Thank you," Connors said. In 17 years as a trial judge, Connors had never heard of a jury making such a statement to a plaintiff. "I understand the plaintiffs would like to make a statement to you," Connors told the jury. Bunton stepped forward. "Thank you," she said softly. "You know, for so many years, we felt like no one cared, and our lawyers cared and they believed in us, but we felt they were just a few. Even now, today, when I go back to the prison, I don't have somebody to check on me." Pointing at the jury, Bunton said, "I know you guys care." "It's so hard for us. We are scared. Even now, I'm scared. But I feel strong today, because of you. I thank you for believing in us."

"All rise," the bailiff said. The next group of female inmates went to trial last October, resulting in yet another multimillion-dollar verdict. With more than 500 women in the class action, these cases could go on for years, with ma-



Photo illustration by RICK NEASE/Detroit Free Press

Allan Soros, an assistant attorney general representing the prison system, sits at the defense table, his eyes locked on Bunton. In the sexual assaults lawsuit by 10 female inmates, Bunton was awarded \$3.45 million.

ny of the same witnesses, the same experts, the same lawyers. If other juries issue similar verdicts, damages could add up to hundreds of millions in state taxpayer dollars. Bunton, on paper anyway, was now a millionaire. But she was still a convict, inmate No. 221034. And no jury award would change that. When the court session ended, seven of the 10 women were returned to Scott Correctional Facility just as they had left. In belly chains.

**More fears**  
After the verdict, everything changed. In some respects, prison life became more difficult for the women in the suit. Bunton felt like she was living under a spotlight, as if everybody was watching — other prisoners and the guards. Some inmates asked Bunton for money. They didn't realize she had not received a penny because the verdict is under appeal. "Right now," Burton told them, "all I have is an apology." She was afraid of being given a misconduct ticket by a guard. She didn't want to screw up her next goal: to get her 25- to 50-year prison term commuted.

**Facing the parole board**  
Five days after the verdict, Bunton learned that she was granted a commutation hearing, set for March. If she could convince the state parole board she deserved to get out early, the board would recommend her release to Gov. Jennifer Granholm. Bunton's case was presented by Bridget McCormack, an associate dean at the University of Michigan law school. "I wanted the parole board to get a picture of how unique Toni is," McCormack said. "I wanted them to know the person she became, despite the circumstances."

Bunton's lawsuit never came up before the parole board. Instead, an assistant attorney general grilled Bunton about the shooting that landed her in prison, going through the crime moment by moment. At every step, the parole board was trying to find inconsistencies. They were testing her truthfulness. Whether she

was a danger to the public. Whether she was taking responsibility for her role as getaway driver in a drug shooting that left one teen dead, another paralyzed. Or just making excuses. "I was found guilty by a jury," Bunton told the board. "I accept that, and I accept the aiding and abetting theory and all of those other things. And I am not trying to minimize my role, either. This is a horrible crime."

Bunton told the parole board she plans to work with young girls and show them there is another way, so "they don't make the same mistakes I made." Bunton said she has come to terms with the fact that she is a convicted murderer, and she hopes to be forgiven by the family of the victims. She said she thinks about the victims every day of her life. No witness spoke in opposition to Bunton's release. Ayman Kaji, who was shot during the crime and remains paralyzed from the neck down, had told state prison officials he wanted to be alerted if Bunton ever came up for parole, but he hadn't updated his contact information after moving, according to prison officials.

**Supporters eager to speak**  
During the hearing, Bunton said that if she got out of prison, she planned to go to college to study criminal justice or journalism or go to law school. She received three degrees in prison, but she thought the professors might have taken it easy on inmates, and the degrees didn't mean as much outside. "If you release me, I will do good and I will deal with whatever I deal with out there," she said. "I know it's hard." McCormack asked several people to speak on Bunton's behalf, including friends, relatives, professors, even author and spiritualist Marianne Williamson. Carolyn Kraus, a professor at U-M Dearborn who taught Bunton a course on memoir writing, told the parole board that there are so many people rooting for Bunton, there would be a competition to hire her. "From the first day in the memoir class, she was sitting in the front row, and every time I asked a question, her hand

went up," Kraus said. "She writes about her life without self-pity," Kraus continued. "She writes about others with insight and empathy."

**Signs of sympathy**  
At any given time, there are about 50,000 prisoners in Michigan prisons. Commutations are rare. During Bunton's time in prison from 1991 until the commutation hearing last March, only 52 prisoner sentences had been commuted. Charles Schettler Jr., representing the state Attorney General's Office, told Bunton he was surprised at the severity of her sentence. "Quite frankly, I have seen people who have committed second-degree murder who have had a much more active part in the second-degree murder than you get a shorter sentence. I can't deny it; this is a very long sentence."

Barbara Sampson, chairwoman of the Michigan Parole Board, said Bunton's excellent prison record indicated she has learned to make good choices. The more Sampson talked, the more it sounded as if Bunton had a chance to get out. "Don't forget the hard nights," she said. "Don't forget the tough days. Don't forget not liking the food. Don't forget having to ask permission to go to the bathroom. Don't take anything for granted."

**Freedom in the balance**  
After the hearing, Bunton's lawyers heard rumors that the board voted overwhelmingly to recommend clemency. But months passed, with no word. Her lawyers started to fear bad news. "Time went on, I felt more pessimistic," McCormack said. "It's a hard thing for the governor to do." Toni Bunton's mother tried to keep her daughter's spirits up by visiting her at prison. She spoke to her daughter every day by phone. In July, the lawyers started hearing more rumors. Granholm was about to make a decision about Bunton's bid for commutation. Bunton was on edge, wanting to know. One way or the other.

Contact **JEFF SEIDEL** at 313-223-4558 or [jseidel@freepress.com](mailto:jseidel@freepress.com).

**The inmates**

Eighteen women have gone to trial, claiming they were sexually abused at two Michigan prisons in the 1990s. Two juries awarded the women damages that totaled in the millions. The Free Press is naming those inmates who gave permission to be identified. The paper otherwise does not generally name people who allege sexual assault.

**First trial**

**Jennifer Pruitt** (b. 1975)  
Entered prison: Nov. 15, 1993 at age 18  
Offense: Murder, 1st degree homicide — murder, 2nd degree  
Jury award: \$3,600,000

**Toni Bunton** (b. 1973)  
Entered prison: Dec. 6, 1991 at age 18  
Offense: Homicide — murder, 2nd degree, assault with intent to do great bodily harm less murder  
Jury award: \$3,450,000

**Amy Black** (b. 1974)  
Entered prison: July 3, 1991 at age 17  
Offense: Homicide — murder 1st degree-premeditated  
Jury award: \$2,500,000

**Inmate** (b. 1967)  
Entered prison: Feb. 7, 1990 at age 22  
Offense: Homicide — felony murder  
Jury award: \$1,200,000

**Michele Bazzetta** (b. 1962)  
Entered prison: Nov. 29, 1989 at age 27  
Offense: Homicide — murder, 2nd degree  
Jury award: \$1,025,000

**Inmate** (b. 1964)  
Entered prison: May 24, 1994 at age 20  
Offense: Murder, 1st degree  
Jury award: \$1,115,000

**Inmate** (b. 1955)  
Entered prison: July 27, 1982 at age 27  
Date Paroled: March 4, 2008  
Offense: Controlled substance-possess Narcotic/Cocaine less than 25 grams. Checks without account or without sufficient funds. Theft of credit cards, retail fraud — 1st degree  
Jury award: \$885,000

**Inmate** (b. 1974)  
Entered prison: May 2, 1995 at age 21  
Offense: Not available  
Jury award: \$850,000

**Inmate** (b. 1969)  
Entered prison: Oct. 25, 1988 at age 19  
Date Paroled: Sept. 18, 2007  
Offense: Home invasion — 1st degree, 2nd degree  
Jury award: \$500,000

**Inmate** (b. 1971)  
Entered prison: June 26, 1992 at age 21  
Offense: Not available  
Jury award: \$335,000

**Second trial**

**Inmate** (b. 1977)  
Offense: Not available  
Jury award: \$2,400,000

**Inmate** (b. 1976)  
Offense: Identity theft, robbery unarmed, financial transaction device-stealing/retaining without consent  
Escape — prison  
Date paroled: July 23, 2008  
Jury award: \$2,000,000

**Inmate** (b. 1964)  
Offense: Not available  
Jury award: \$1,100,000

**Inmate** (b. 1962)  
Offense: Stolen property — receiving and concealing — motor vehicle larceny in a building  
Date paroled: Oct. 30, 2007  
Jury award: \$850,000

**Inmate** (b. 1977)  
Offense: Not available  
Jury award: \$600,000

**Inmate** (b. 1958)  
Offense: Forgery, controlled substance — possess Narcotic/Cocaine less than 25 grams, larceny in a building, embezzlement.  
Discharge date: June 28, 2006  
Jury award: \$550,000

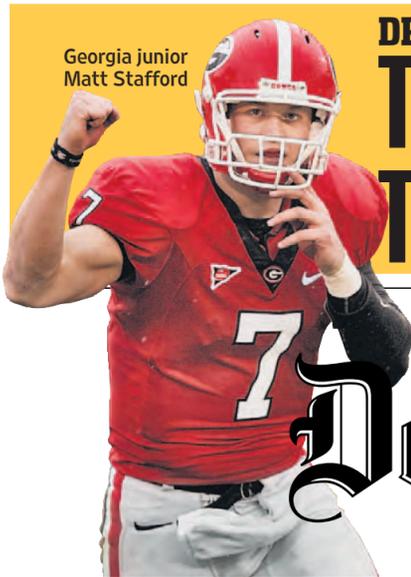
**Inmate** (b. 1963)  
Offense: Not available  
Jury award: \$475,000

**Inmate** (b. 1958)  
Offense: Not available  
Jury award: \$475,000

Source: Lawyer for female inmates Detroit Free Press

**Time line of inmate lawsuit**

**March 27, 1996:** Lawsuit is filed against state Department of Corrections alleging that officials ignored the sexual abuse of female inmates by male guards. Eventually, 500 female prisoners joined the suit, including Toni Bunton.  
**Feb. 1, 2008:** Jury awards first group of 10 prisoners more than \$15 million for abuse at Scott Correctional Facility; award is more than doubled when interest and fees are added.  
**Nov. 12, 2008:** Jury awards eight former inmates \$8.45 million for rapes and sexual harassment by guards at Crane Correctional Facility in Coldwater.  
**Tuesday:** An appeals court is to hold oral arguments on verdict in first trial.



**DREW SHARP, 1G:**  
**TOP QB NOT AFRAID**  
**TO BE LIONS' PICK**

**9** **PLAY, INSERTED**  
**ways to**  
**have fun**  
**in '09 for.**



ON GUARD FOR 177 YEARS

**Detroit Free Press**

WWW.FREEP.COM **THURSDAY** JAN. 8, 2009 METRO FINAL

**Michigan**  
**plant to**  
**power**  
**hybrids**

*Plan for batteries, jobs boost for state*

By JUSTIN HYDE  
 AND JOHN GALLAGHER  
 FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITERS

In a welcome sign for Michigan's beleaguered auto industry that also promises alternative-energy jobs for the state, a Massachusetts research firm leading work on new batteries for electric vehicles on Wednesday announced plans to build a factory in southeast Michigan.

A123 Systems said the plant will be the first of several nationwide that could eventually employ a total of 14,000 people and supply batteries for 5 million hybrid vehicles or 500,000 plug-in hybrids by 2013. The company said it will spend \$2.3 billion on the factories and has applied for \$1.8 billion in federal loans under the \$25 billion advanced technology program Congress funded last year.

The workers who get jobs at the battery factory will notice an atmosphere that is much different from the one they are used to at traditional Michigan auto assembly plants. Advanced battery plants elsewhere look more like a silicon-chip factory, with workers dressed in lab coats tracking

See **BATTERY, 6A**

■ Battery venture hailed as a breakthrough. 6A

**MORE INSIDE**



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/Associated Press

President-elect Barack Obama met all the living chief execs Wednesday, including the Bushes.

**OBAMA JOINS EXES**

**Presidents,**  
**plus 1 to be**  
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**SHIFT OF POWER**

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**top court?**  
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■ Bush to let Obama toughen fuel rules, 1D

**SPECIAL REPORT | HOSTAGES TO JUSTICE**

**AFTER 16 YEARS,**  
**SUDDENLY FREE**

**CHAPTER 5:** Toni Bunton's sentence is commuted, and she leaves the prison where she and other inmates were sexually abused



Photos by REGINA H. BOONE/Detroit Free Press

Toni Bunton, 35, of Detroit hugs her uncle on the September day she was released from Scott Correctional Center, after serving more than 16 years in prison.

*Fifth of five parts*

By JEFF SEIDEL  
 FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

On just another day in July, Toni Bunton was walking down the hall at Scott Correctional Facility when she was stopped.

"Oh, there you are," Warden Heidi Washington said to the prisoner. "Come with me."

Bunton was confused and worried. She followed Washington and two deputy wardens, as she was instructed.

"Did something happen?" Bunton thought. "Did I do something wrong?"

They went into a counselor's office, and the door closed.

"Gov. Jennifer Granholm," the warden said, "signed your commutation yesterday."

After surviving more than 16 years behind bars for murder, after testifying in a lawsuit that put a spotlight on the sexual abuse of female inmates in Michigan prisons, after being awarded more than \$3 million in damages, Bunton was going home.

She looked at Washington — who became warden after Bunton's years of abuse — and was surprised to see emotion.

"Her eyes welled up," Bunton said. "I could see around her mouth, it was trembling. She was trying to hold her emotions



Bunton was inmate No. 221034, a label she once expected to carry for the rest of her life. She has bad dreams about going back to prison.

back. She's a professional woman."

Bunton had deep respect for Washington, for her work to improve Scott. And she recalls what Washington said next: "Don't tell anyone. People might get jealous or harm you. If anyone does anything to you, you have to let me know immediately."

But it was too late. Bunton was smiling so hard that the secret was out.

"All the girls in the unit, all the inmates, were up against the glass. They were jumping up and down. They knew I had been waiting to find out. They knew it was good news because of the expression on my face."

Washington let her make several phone calls. "I'm coming home," Bunton told her

See **JUSTICE, 8A**

**Story recap**

Toni Bunton goes to prison for her role in a drug deal that ends in murder. She and other female inmates win millions of dollars at trial after convincing jurors that state prison officials ignored years of rapes and molestations by male guards. As the state appeals, hundreds of other female inmates await their day in court.

**At freep.com**

■ Watch video of Toni Bunton's post-prison life.

■ Watch video of Bunton's emotional testimony and lawyer arguments.

■ Read the first four parts of this series at [freep.com](http://freep.com).

**Survivors still furious at Bunton**  
**STORY, 8A**

**Arts fall**  
**victim**  
**to auto**  
**troubles**

*GM Foundation yanks funding to DSO, opera*

By MARK STRYKER  
 FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A decision by the General Motors Foundation to sharply cut back on its multimillion-dollar sponsorship of metro Detroit's top cultural institutions puts Michigan's nonprofit community on notice that it stands to lose millions in philanthropic dollars as the auto industry fights for its life.

GM has already notified about a dozen arts and cultural groups, including the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Music Hall, the Michigan Opera Theatre and the Detroit Institute of Arts, not to expect any annual support from the company in 2009.

That loss of more than \$1 million — confirmed by GM Foundation Chairman Rod Gillum — is another blow to the cultural treasures and could mean more program cuts and red ink.

Even more ominous for Michigan is that GM's cuts to the arts might be only the first notes of a glum symphony.

See **GM, 5A**

■ State jobless rate to rise, report says. 1D

**Wyandotte band**  
**won't be 'Chiefs'**  
**at inauguration**

Wyandotte's Roosevelt High School marching band, known as the Marching Chiefs since the 1950s, will drop the American Indian moniker on Jan. 20.

When they perform at President-elect Barack Obama's inaugural parade, the band members, the only high school musicians from Michigan playing, will be called the Roosevelt High School Marching Band. Patches will be sewn over the Indian logos on the band uniform sleeves and the band's Marching Chiefs banner will be retired for the day.



RASHAUN RUCKER/Free Press  
 Roosevelt High's logo is to be sewn over for Inauguration Day.

The band is covering up for the day in response to a letter from Harvey Gunderson, president of Religious Americans Against Indian Nicknames and Logos, who protested the nickname of The Chiefs.

"We just don't want to bring any negative publicity," said Mark D'Angelo, the band's director.

The Wyandot tribe of the Huron Indians settled along the Detroit River in the early 1700s in an area now bounded by Oak Street and Eureka Avenue. The tribe, led by Chief Walks-in-the-Water, lived in the area until 1818.

By Kathleen Gray

40788 11000  
 50¢ Wayne, Oakland & Macomb counties 75¢ Elsewhere

**BLUSTERY; CHANCE OF LIGHT SNOW**  
 Heavier snow Friday.  
 Chuck Gaidica's forecast, 6B

**31 | 22**  
 HIGH | LOW



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NO ACTION PLANNED AGAINST MEN

# Attorney general not investigating guards

*Inmates have to file criminal complaints*

By JEFF SEIDEL  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Though 10 women testified last January that they were sexually abused and, in some cases, raped in the 1990s by guards at Scott Correctional Facility, the Michigan Attorney General's Office says it has no plans currently to investigate the men.

Matt Friendewey, a spokesman for the Attorney General, said Wednesday the women's testimony is not enough. The women, many of them still incarcerated, must come forward and register a criminal complaint.

An official with the state Department of Corrections said the department only learned the names of many of the guards cited by the women when the case went to trial last January. That made it difficult to investigate misconduct among the guards, the majority of whom no longer work at the prison.

Deborah LaBelle, the lead lawyer for the women, said she was stunned that "neither the Department of Corrections nor the Attorney General's office, who is the head prosecutor in the state, believes they have an obligation to report or pursue criminal acts that occurred in a state facility."

"Some of these guards still work for them and have even received promotions," LaBelle continued. "There was testimony on the record about that."

There is no statute of limitations for the crimes of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, which includes rape.

The state Attorney General's Office handles prosecution of prison guards in Wayne County, where Scott is located.

Allan Soros, an assistant attorney general assigned to the prison system, defended the state at the trial last January. Though Soros heard the women's allegations firsthand, Friendewey said Soros does not handle prosecutions and is therefore not obligated to report what he heard to the assistant attorney general who does prosecute guards.

"Frankly, it would probably be inappropriate for those two" assistant attorney generals "to discuss a case unless it was in an official manner,"

Friendewey said. "That's the unique aspect of this office. You put up a fire wall."

Only one of the 10 female prisoners in the first civil trial ever filed a complaint with the Department of Corrections. In testimony, the women said they were afraid of retribution if they came forward and feared their complaints would not be taken seriously.

"The difficulty is, since none of these were reported, some of them not until they were on the stand, they weren't investigated," said Russ Marlan, a spokesman for the Department of Corrections. He said the department takes all allegations seriously. "We take swift action. If they are sustained, they are fired and referred for criminal prosecution."

Marlan questioned why the women

did not name the guards as defendants in the lawsuit.

"After all these years, this trial is coming about and they are finally getting their day in court, and the women are going to speak, and why wouldn't you put 100 or 200 named defendants on the case?" he asked.

LaBelle responded that the "reason the case is against the Department of Corrections, the director and the wardens is because they are the ones whose job it is to run a clean facility."

They are the ones, she said, "who failed at their jobs. It wasn't rogue guards. It was a culture of abuse, and we were suing the people responsible for the system."

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## Judge wants settlements; state expects appeals win

By JEFF SEIDEL  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

After jury verdicts totalling nearly \$24 million — and more trials on the way — the judge overseeing a lawsuit by 500 female inmates against Michigan's prison system is urging both sides to settle.

On Monday, Washtenaw County Circuit Judge Timothy Connors ordered what is known as alternative dispute resolution in a bid to end more than a decade of court battles.

"We are entering our thirteenth year of litigation," the judge noted. After two large verdicts (awards that could reach \$50 million with interest and fees), Connors said he fears the case "presents a significant future expense" if it continues.

Lawyers for the state, who have already appealed one verdict, did not sound optimistic that a deal could be reached.

The Attorney General's Office has said settlement talks would be "an exercise in futility" until after its appeal, which it says it expects to win. Among the state's arguments is that the suit was mistakenly heard as a class action and that many of the claims were too old to be heard.

On Feb. 1, a jury hearing the claims of 10 inmates awarded the women \$15.4 million. An appeals court hearing in that case is set for Tuesday.

A second jury heard the testimony of eight more inmates and awarded that group \$8.45 million in November.

Ken Powell, a jury member at the second trial, urged state lawyers to settle.

Powell, a professor of aerospace engineering at the University of Michigan, wrote he didn't want the case to "drag on for years and put an even larger financial burden on the state than a settlement would cost."

"I found the case quite disturbing, on several levels," Powell wrote. "What happened is a terrible blot on the reputation of the State of Michigan."

### A family's grief

Toni Bunton was thrilled to be released from prison in September. But the family who suffered from her crime is furious that Gov. Jennifer Granholm commuted her sentence.

Family members were upset that they didn't know about Bunton's commutation hearing last March.

"I'm a Christian, but I'll never forgive her," Ayman Kaji said. "There's no way in hell that I'll ever forgive her."

Kaji was 19 when he was paralyzed from the neck down after being shot during a 1991 drug deal. Kaji's twin brother, Omar, was killed. Bunton was the gunman's getaway driver.

Ayman Kaji said he had no sympathy for the suffering Bunton endured in prison.

Prison officials said Kaji was on a list to be contacted if Bunton was ever up for release. But they said Kaji had moved without updating his contact information.



REGINA H. BOONE/Detroit Free Press

Toni Bunton, 35, of Detroit plays with a family dog in September on the day she was released from Scott Correctional Facility. She had served more than 16 years for driving the getaway car in a drug shooting. In January 2008, she was awarded \$3.45 million in a suit against the State of Michigan for not protecting her and other inmates from guards.

## JUSTICE | A second chance comes after 16 years

From Page 1A

mother.

And her mom started screaming. "What if they change their mind?" Bunton wondered Sept. 4, the morning of her release. She was afraid something would go wrong. But she gave her toiletries to her roommate and said good-bye to friends.

Hours later, she walked out of Scott — a place where she was raped and left standing in a bathroom with her underwear at her ankles; where she endured seven more rapes in silence and shame; a place where she had somehow found a voice to speak for herself and other women subjected to daily indignities at the hands of guards.

Bunton left the building that morning wearing black slacks and a white blouse, an outfit she bought from the JCPenney catalog. She carried a small box with her few possessions.

Bunton was greeted by her mother and brother, aunt and uncle and a friend, who hugged and kissed her.

Her family gave her a Louis Vuitton purse with several items, including a new cell phone.

"This is a phone?" Bunton asked, holding up something that seemed impossibly small.

She climbed into her uncle's SUV for



Bunton speaks to a group of University of Michigan law students, telling them about her incarceration and urging them to fight for their clients.

her first car ride since she was 17.

There was a caravan from the prison to her uncle's home. Bunton was the last one to get out of the car. She walked tentatively from the vehicle, across the grass, to the spacious home and was overwhelmed by the trees. "There are no trees in prison," she said.

She posed for pictures, a tourist in

her new life.

### Challenges and prayers

The last few months have been a blur for Bunton.

She was confirmed in the Catholic Church.

She got a driver's license.

She campaigned for President-elect

Barack Obama, carrying around paperwork to enlist new voters.

She got a job and went to work every day and paid her taxes and her bills — she loves paying her bills because it makes her feel normal.

"I want God to use me for a purpose greater than myself," Bunton said. "It's a Dr. Martin Luther King quote, and it's one of my favorite quotes. And it's something I've always prayed for. I'm hoping someone will give me an opportunity to work hard for them."

She was accepted into college, where she will start work on a master's degree. She learned to send text messages.

She went to Lansing and met with several senators, lobbying for Second Chance legislation that would give the parole board an opportunity to review the files of juvenile offenders sentenced to life in prison.

She spoke to a group of law students, telling them her story, urging them to fight for their clients, trying to get them to realize the power they held as lawyers.

She voted for the first time in her life. She searched the Internet, trying to find money to start a program for at-risk teens — because she still hasn't received a penny from the \$3.45-million

See next page

### WHY THE WOMEN DIDN'T TELL

Michigan prison officials argue that female prisoners had several ways to report sexual abuse: They could file a grievance, notify the warden, tell counselors or others.

So why did so many women wait until a lawsuit was filed before accusing male guards of sexual assault? The women, and rights groups, cited many factors in the 1980s and 1990s that they said discouraged women from speaking up:

■ Under former rules, the women had to tell the person

they were accusing of their intent to file a grievance.

■ Guards retaliated against some accusers. This included physical or verbal attacks, excessive searches or trumped-up disciplinary tickets, which could make it harder to get out of prison early.

■ Employees accused of sexual abuse were sometimes assigned to investigate themselves, even leading the investigation in some cases.

■ Prison officials assumed an inmate's accusation, by itself, was not credible — even in some cases where an inmate passed a polygraph. An employee's word was presumed credible.

■ When a prisoner made an allegation, she was sent to segregation, ostensibly for her safety. However, for some women, this forced them to miss educational classes and programs.



**NEW CLOTHES:** Toni Bunton, 35, of Detroit shops in a local mall Oct. 4. It was the first time she has been in some of those stores since she was a teenager.



**NEW LOOK:** One of the first things Bunton did upon being released on Sept. 4 from Scott Correctional Facility was to get her hair styled. She was accepted into college and is to start work on a master's degree.

# Finding a brand new life

Ex-inmate leaves behind the pain, shame of rapes and turns to the future



**NEW JOB:** Bunton got a job and went to work every day and paid her taxes and her bills. She loves paying her bills because it makes her feel normal. She still hasn't received a penny from the \$3.45-million jury award she won last year as part of a class action against Michigan's prison system. With the case under appeal, there is no guarantee that she ever will.



**NEW LIFE:** Bunton shows off a "Live for Love" T-shirt. She says it reflects her thoughts about the future. She spoke to a group of law students in Saline on Oct. 1, telling them her story, urging them to fight for their clients, trying to get them to realize the power they held as lawyers. "I want God to use me for a purpose greater than myself," she said. "It's a Dr. Martin Luther King quote, and it's one of my favorite quotes."

Photos by REGINA H. BOONE/Detroit Free Press

**From previous page**  
jury award she won last year as part of a class-action suit against Michigan's prison system. With the case under appeal, there is no guarantee that she ever will.  
She sent a thank-you card to Granholm, promising to make her proud, promising to become somebody, promising not to waste this opportunity, and she included pictures and an update on what she has done.

**Growing self-confidence**  
She continues to evolve, week

by week. At work, she no longer asks permission to go to the bathroom. She is getting more confident doing things on her own. After shopping and a trip to a salon, she looks more elegant. But she still doesn't feel comfortable, and she certainly doesn't feel safe.  
She thinks about the women still in prison, and she prays for them. Bunton will be on parole for 48 months. She must live by a list of rules, including this: She can't have any contact with felons, which means she can't go back to Scott to visit friends.  
She thinks about the victims

of her crime, and she prays for them. Bunton was the getaway driver in a drug deal that ended with one teen killed, his brother paralyzed.  
"I can't directly help them or change it, but I can try to help other people, so they don't find themselves in the same situation that I found myself in," Bunton said. "I want them to have peace. It's not about me and my feelings. It's about them. I pray that God somehow blesses them."

**Tormented by memories**  
Bunton is struggling, still suffering, with the guilt of being in-

involved in the crime, with the pain of the sexual abuse. In prison, so many women had suffered the same way — whether it was inappropriate pat-downs or the verbal abuse or the sexual harassment or the rapes. They didn't have to explain it. They had lived it together.  
On the other side of the barbed wire, Bunton feels alone and cut off.  
She is tormented by memories of the guards. She said she is afraid of them, afraid they will track her down, afraid they will continue to hurt her.  
"I had a dream that the officer

was coming in the house, with a flashlight, coming to get me to take me back to prison," Bunton said. "I must have been crying very loudly because my mom woke up. She said she heard me crying."  
At night, she said, she asks God to keep her safe. She asks for peace.  
"Let your armor of love protect me, and please take the fear away from me."  
"Protect me," she prays, "and let me sleep."

Contact JEFF SEIDEL at 313-223-4558 or [jseidel@freepress.com](mailto:jseidel@freepress.com).

**How this series was reported**

This narrative is based on interviews, hundreds of court documents — including transcripts and videotapes obtained through the state Freedom of Information Act — and an unpublished memoir Toni Bunton wrote in prison.  
The Department of Corrections declined to allow the Free Press to tour the Robert Scott Correctional Facility.