

TALKING POINTS FOR VOLUNTEERS COLLECTING SIGNATURES

1. Dozens of people with disabilities are currently being tortured with painful electric shocks at an institution in Canton Massachusetts called the Judge Rotenberg Center. The electric shocks cause horrendous pain through electrodes attached to people's arms, legs, stomachs, fingertips, or the soles of their feet.
2. The shocks are delivered by remote control to adults and children as young as nine years old. They are subjected to sudden, painful, repeated shocks for such harmless behaviors as failing to maintain a neat appearance, stopping work for more than ten seconds, interrupting, whispering, not answering staff quickly enough, making more than 5 vocalizations in an hour, slouching ... the list goes on and on. Residents at this facility live a life of constant terror. Every day we delay making this illegal in Massachusetts is a day of terror for innocent people.
3. This is shock used as punishment — it is intended to be unbearably painful. This is not about Electroconvulsive Therapy or ECT. ECT is a medical treatment most commonly used in patients with severe major depression or bipolar disorder that has not responded to other treatments. ECT involves a brief electrical stimulation of the brain while the patient is under anesthesia.
4. The device that delivers the shock was developed and is manufactured by the center. It is used nowhere else in the world. The devices used at the Judge Rotenberg Center weigh about 40 pounds. People have to carry their own devices of torture 24 hours a day even while showering and sleeping.
5. The shock that is used at the Judge Rotenberg Center to punish behaviors is much stronger than that delivered by an electric fence or a cattle prod, both of which deliver far milder shocks for a fraction of a second rather than the extremely painful two second shock delivered by the Judge Rotenberg Center devices. The Judge Rotenberg Center device was intentionally designed to be more painful and powerful than a police taser.
6. These two petitions will be used to encourage the Massachusetts state legislature to pass laws to stop the use of painful electric shocks on people with disabilities, as well as other physical punishments and deprivations used to change behavior. If laws are not passed, additional steps can be taken to get these issues on the ballot so Massachusetts voters can vote in 2020 on whether to allow the continued use of painful electric shock as punishment.
7. It is important to sign both petitions — one seeks to make these practices illegal, the other makes the uses of electric shock to punish the behavior of people with disabilities punishable by up to five years in prison.
8. If we get over 80,000 signatures from registered Massachusetts voters, we can get laws passed to stop this. If the legislature fails to act, we can collect a few thousand more signatures

to put proposed laws on the ballot in November 2020 for voters to decide.

9. 85% of the people at this center are Black or Latinx people with disabilities; 90% of the disabled people at JRC are non-white/people of color. This is a civil & human rights issue.

10. James Eason, a professor of biomedical engineering at Washington and Lee University said, “The lowest level shock used at JRC is roughly twice what pain researchers have said is tolerable for most humans.” As far as we know, there is no other place in the world that uses electric shock as punishment.

11. The devices are notorious for malfunctioning — sometimes shocking one person when the shock was meant for another or malfunctioning and giving shock after shock until staff can get to the device and disconnect the wires.

12. People who have been the victims of this inhumane treatment have suffered burns as well as post traumatic stress disorder and permanent psychological damage.

13. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture declared the use of electric shock at the Judge Rotenberg Center to be torture and said that such approaches would not be legal if used against convicted terrorists.

14. In 2002, Andre McCollins, 19 years old, was shocked for failing to take off his jacket — he didn’t refuse, talk back or resist … his teacher said ‘take off your jacket’ and he just didn’t. The first shock Andre received was for not taking off his jacket. He was then strapped spread-eagle, face-down on a four-point restraint board and shocked 30 more times over seven hours; all the subsequent shocks either for ‘tensing his muscles in anticipation of the next shock’ or ‘screaming while being shocked’. He screamed and pleaded for the staff to stop and was left in a catatonic state. He lives with severe trauma and permanent psychological damage to this day.

15. Some people think these practices have stopped because the founder of the institution is no longer at the Judge Rotenberg Center. Matthew Israel was forced out after being charged with destruction of evidence and obstruction of justice in 2010, but the inhumane practices he started are still happening.

16. This painful electric shock "therapy" has been denounced by almost every disability rights, medical, and psychiatric organization. A proposal by the FDA to ban the shock devices received thousands of supportive comments and letters from such organizations. The FDA agreed to pass regulations to ban the shock devices and wrote those regulations but never implemented them.

17. Six people have died and dozens have been injured at the Judge Rotenberg Center and its satellite group homes. In 2016, two Rotenberg staffers were convicted of beating, whipping, and spitting on a person with disabilities, a not unexpected outcome when there is a culture of cruelty and disregard for human rights.

18. How is this legal? It is legal because it is not illegal. While no parent would be able to do these things to their own child, in Massachusetts, if a psychologist recommends electric shock as punishment and a judge agrees, it is legal. The State of Massachusetts has tried a dozen times over many decades to close JRC or to pass regulations that would protect people there — each time, without success.

19. Don't some people have behaviors so severe that they need extreme measures such as this? No — there are people with disabilities who have behaviors just as severe in every state across the country who are being served humanely and effectively.

A quote from a letter by a survivor of the Judge Rotenberg Center, Jennifer Msumba:

The most sickening, horrifying experience of my life was being shocked on the restraint board; a large, door-sized contraption with locking restraint cuffs. Your body is stretched spread eagle, pinned tight, rendering you completely helpless. Then the terror starts. You have to wait for it. You never know when it's coming. JRC lavishes in the element of surprise when shocking us. Then all of a sudden the searing pain and jolt in your arm or leg or stomach, or the fingertips or thigh or even the bottoms of your feet. It's a radiating electricity that will travel through to your fingertips. Your whole arm jerks against the restraints. One down, 4 to go. Your heart races, you sweat profusely. All you want to do is throw up. Ten minutes feels like hours. You try to prepare yourself for the next shock. I keep saying in my head, 4 more, 4 more. Please just finish please. Trying not to scream in fear because I will be shocked for that as well. It comes again without warning. You lose your breath. Your heart beats faster than you feel possible. I start to hope my heart stops. Anything to let me away from this.

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