

Skenazy on civil commitment; quotes Molnar of NARSOL's affiliate TX Voices

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By [Lenore Skenazy](#) . . . For many men serving time for committing sex offenses in Texas, their prison term never really ends—even if they complete their sentence. That’s because they’re required to enter a live-in mental health facility before returning to society.

That facility—in Littlefield, Texas—is actually a former maximum security prison in the middle of a dirt field.

“It comes as a surprise,” says Mary Sue Molnar, founder of [Texas Voices for Reason and Justice](#), a nonprofit dedicated to reforming the state’s sex offense laws and registry. “I often get letters from prison saying, ‘Oh my god, they’re going to civil commit me. What should I do?’”

Civil commitment is the practice of keeping people locked up past their release date, on the grounds that they are so dangerous they need therapy—years and years of it—before they

can safely return to society.

Of course, Molnar notes, if the state really “wanted them to have treatment and counseling, they had plenty of time to get that done. In some cases, these men served 20 to 25 years” in an ordinary prison before being civilly committed.

This might seem just. But even as we feel great anger and sorrow on behalf of sex crime victims, we can also see that civil commitment is an extra prison sentence by another name.

Originally called *clients* or *residents* when the center opened in 2015, the men have been re-labeled “inmates” since Management and Training Corporation, a private prison company, took over in 2019.

“MTC does not run it in a therapeutic manner whatsoever,” says Mandi Harner, a former security officer at the facility who was fired for having a relationship with one of the residents. “They run it like a prison. I’m not going to tell you everyone in there is an angel. But there are some men who deserve treatment they’re not getting, and also some who did things as teenagers who don’t deserve to be there their whole lives.”

For their first year or two at the treatment facility, the men are required to wear electronic ankle monitors that they have to pay for, according to Harner. MTC declined a request for comment about this and other claims made by sources in this article, as did the Texas Civil Commitment Office (TCCO), the government agency that oversees the facility.

There is only one way to get out of Littlefield: The men must work their way up through four tiers of treatment before they are allowed to petition for their freedom.

The therapeutic techniques sound hodge-podge. The inmates “have to admit to all of their offenses and share it with the group,” said one of the founders of Texans Against Civil Commitment (TACC), a former Littlefield therapist who writes

under the name 'Murphy' and who claims to have been fired for not seeing "eye to eye" with management. "And they have to keep a masturbation log so the therapist knows how often they're masturbating and what they're masturbating about. So she knows whether it's healthy or whether it's deviant." The men must also record whether or not they climaxed. These logs are read aloud in group therapy.

The prison also employs polygraphs and [penile plethysmography](#), measuring changes to the circumference or volume of the penis as the men watch and listen to different stimuli.

When an inmate moves up a tier, which can take a year, he can find himself demoted for many reasons, including very small infractions. One man who had been at Littlefield for years and made it through all four tiers was finally about to get his release hearing. But he did something wrong—rumor had it he swore at a guard—and was knocked back down to tier 1, where he would have to start anew, according to Murphy.

He went to his cell and hanged himself.

[*Read the remainder of the piece here at reason.com.*](#)