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## Brownback invites Holder to tour TCF

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By **Andy Marso**

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Gov. Sam Brownback has invited U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder to personally tour a Topeka women's prison.

The Brownback Administration maintains that a report by the civil rights division of Holder's department that found widespread sexual abuse at the Topeka Correctional Facility is outdated.

In a letter to Holder sent Friday, Brownback noted that the investigators who compiled the report haven't been to the facility in well over a year, while the federal Bureau of Prisons, which houses four inmates at TCF, found "no deficiencies" at the facility in a February 2012 audit.

"As such, I am sure you can understand that I am puzzled and, in fact, deeply concerned by the alleged 'findings' of the September 6, 2012, letter," Brownback wrote to Holder. "In that letter, the Special Litigation Section of the Department of Justice draws conclusions that are purportedly current 'at this date.' In actual fact, the last contact the Special Litigation Section has had with anyone in my administration or in the Kansas corrections community was in May of 2011."

Holder's office did not immediately respond to a phone call and email.

A series of stories in The Topeka Capital-Journal in 2009 and two independent audits in 2010 exposed employee-on-prisoner and prisoner-on-prisoner sexual abuse.

The federal investigators who last visited the facility in May 2011 wrote in their report that "the women at TCF universally fear for their own safety," and that at the time of the visit the Kansas Department of Corrections and TCF leadership had not done enough to ensure inmates' Eight Amendment rights.

Facing the possibility of a federal lawsuit, Brownback and Corrections Secretary Ray Roberts have stated that they have taken myriad steps to enforce their "zero-tolerance policy" for sexual abuse since they took office at the beginning of 2011.

Among them are installing 100 more security cameras at TCF and quadrupling the amount of time that footage is stored, as well as hiring more female staff members including current TCF warden Hope Cooper.

A news release about Brownback's letter to Holder also highlighted the hiring of a Prison Rape Elimination Act coordinator "to ensure department-wide compliance with PREA standards."

The Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence released a statement saying it has been in contact with corrections officials about strategies for combating sexual abuse in prison.

But the statement from KCSDV communications coordinator says that the organization's suggestions have not yet been implemented and KCSDV is "extremely troubled" by the Department of Justice report on civil rights violations at TCF.

"We hope that with the impetus from these findings, TCF will develop the facility-wide culture and much-needed programming that provides a safe space for victims to disclose abuse and addresses the long-term impact of trauma that many of the women at TCF have experienced," the KCSDV statement reads. "No woman deserves to be raped or sexually assaulted, no matter where she is."

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