

Good morning. My name is Taylor Paryga. I've worked as correctional officer at High Desert State Prison for the last 8 years. I also worked at Ely State Prison for a year and a half before that.

To begin, I'd like you to take a moment to think about what comes to mind when you hear someone say that they work in a prison. Your thought process probably brought you somewhere along the lines of "Oh, I could never do that." Some of those reasons you came up with are a lot of the reasons why our corrections staff need more mental health support.

Every day, we come into our facilities in our uniforms with our duty belts, handcuffs, OC spray, batons and stab vests preparing for the absolute worst but hoping for the best. We go in not knowing if we're going home at the end of our shift, if today is the day an inmate decides to try and take our life, if we'll ever see our significant others, children and families ever again. And if we do go home, what kind of thoughts and feelings follow us that also impacts our families and friends.

We experience involuntary memories of various incidents including gruesome blood-spattered tiers after rival gangs attack each other with makeshift weapons, an inmate death where correctional staff had to perform CPR, unfortunately to no avail, two officers having to be rushed to the nearest hospital, which is 30 minutes away, for severe drug exposure while cell searching, four separate incidents of officers assaulted by inmates, one of which was an attempted stabbing. By the way all of these examples occurred JUST at High Desert State Prison and all just in the month of March.

Oh, and not to mention the absolute bone chilling flood of emotions when an officer radios for assistance. OFFICER NEEDS ASSISTANCE! Now, imagine having to process all of these situations completely by yourself, over and over again, and being expected to go back to business as usual with no additional support for 20 plus years.

The demons we carry through our careers can cause a number of disastrous consequences such as stress induced medical conditions like high blood pressure, alcoholism, PTSD, and tragically in some cases, suicide.

Even though we have access to EAP, the services provided are less than desirable and extremely limited. Me, personally, I would feel more comfortable talking to fellow corrections staff that have worked beside me and can truly relate to these experiences. It isn't easy talking to someone who has never been exposed to this type of work. You don't want to scare your family with your stories and make them worry about you even more. So we don't talk to anyone because we don't have anyone. We suffer in silence as we are the forgotten members of law enforcement. I am standing before you today asking you to please help us so we can help ourselves because we are not okay. Thank you for your time.