

An Open Letter, from the Rivera Family



In loving memory of Jose V. Rivera
7-20-85/6-20-08 • A Navy Hero

Jose's death did not have to happen. Jose served in the United States Navy and survived two tours in Iraq. But it wasn't the war that killed him – he survived the war.

We lost our son and brother on June 20, 2008 at the hands of inmates using improvised weapons at the United States Penitentiary in Atwater, CA, where Jose was a correctional officer. And as a federal correctional officer, dealing with the most violent criminals in the United States, he was not armed, nor was he provided an armored vest. Under Federal Bureau of Prisons policy, Jose could only be armed with a radio.

He was taken from us because of the situation in federal prisons today. The Justice Department is cutting back on staff and cutting funding for programs that could prevent the kind of violence that took Jose's life. Overcrowding, underfunding and depriving our officers of the tools they need to defend themselves will only lead to more violence and more lives lost. Just this week at the United States Penitentiary in Hazleton, WV there was another lockdown due to an assault, tragically proving that what happened at Atwater was not an isolated event – it's happening across the country. If federal prison funding continues to decline, incidents such as these will skyrocket. When will the Justice Department take action? Do more correctional officers have to die?

Jose is gone. His death is senseless. We can't bring him back. Please let Congress know that this tragedy could have been prevented. Call your Representatives and Senators at 202-225-3121 and tell them that the underfunding and overcrowding of federal prisons is unsafe, reprehensible and will be the cause of more tragic deaths.

Sincerely,

The Rivera Family

