

Trans inmate sues federal government. Guard at Ontario prison used slurs, tried to force strip-search by man, she claims

A transgender woman is suing the federal government for \$325,000 over allegations a correctional officer used transphobic language while insisting she be strip-searched by a man.

The incident occurred at Beaver Creek Institution in Gravenhurst early on the morning of Nov. 19, 2025, when inmate Sydnee Lines, 37, was returning from an emergency hospital visit, according to a statement of claim filed in Ontario Superior Court. Lines was serving a sentence for criminal harassment, uttering threats and failure to comply with probation.

According to what's known in the federal prison system as an individualized protocol, Lines was supposed to be only strip-searched by female employees, and she was to be referred to using she/her pronouns.

But the statement of claim alleges Lines was told by an unidentified male correctional officer that a female officer would search her from the waist up, and a male officer would search from the waist down. She refused to comply, citing her individualized protocol.

The statement of claim alleges that the correctional officer said - within earshot of other officers and inmates — words to the effect of “Do you still have a penis in your pants?” as well as “Until you have a vagina, you are still a man.”

The officer also allegedly referred to Lines by a transphobic slur and as a “thing.”

After almost half an hour, the officer conceded the search had to be done by female staff - “The search occurred without incident and revealed nothing,” says the statement of claim.

“By making inappropriate and unwanted comments about her genitalia and attempting to force her to submit to a strip search conducted by a man, the male CO imposed serious and profound psychological suffering upon her,” says the statement of claim.

Lines also filed an internal grievance immediately after the incident, which was upheld by a Correctional Service Canada analyst, Craig James, who said he wanted to “sincerely apologize” for what happened.

“This incident does not reflect the standards of respect and dignity that we are committed to upholding for all individuals in our care,” James wrote.

He said he would ensure that training is given to staff to ensure they fully understand policies related to gender identity and expression.

Lines' lawyer, Jeffrey Hartman, said one of the main reasons for filing the lawsuit is to help ensure that the transphobia alleged to have occurred at Beaver Creek doesn't happen in any other prison or elsewhere.

“My client wants to send a clear message that trans people are human beings who are deserving of respect and dignity and who are entitled to be themselves,” Hartman said.

It's unclear why Lines was being housed at Beaver Creek, a prison for men.

Correctional Service Canada declined to comment on the lawsuit as it's before the courts, but said it “takes seriously its obligations to provide safe, secure, and humane treatment while assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens.”

Jacques Gallant
The Star
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Common Questions:

Why is this incident significant?

It raises concerns about the treatment of transgender individuals in the prison system and highlights the need for better training and adherence to human rights protocols.

What are my rights if I face similar discrimination?

Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, you have the right to be free from discrimination based on gender identity. Legal action and resources are available to address violations.

How can I take action against discrimination in a correctional facility?

File an internal grievance, consult with human rights organizations, and consider seeking legal advice to understand and assert your rights.