

PATRICIA MENDOZA'S Injured Worker Horror Story

I injured my back lifting prisoner restraints. I've lost my career, my health and have no income. I need back surgery, but SCIF has denied needed medical care. SCIF says I now owe THEM money, because \$6,000 is all they'll compensate me. I protected society for 20 years and now it has abandoned me.



About Me: My name is Patricia Mendoza. I live in Ontario.

My Family: My husband, Louie, and I have two daughters: Marie and Michelle.

My Job and What Happened: I worked as a Correctional Officer for 20 years. I put my life on the line to protect society from convicted rapists, molesters and murderers. I worked double shifts, lost time from my family, and was in danger every time I drove through those prison gates. My last assignment was at the California Institute for Men (CIM), a minimum through medium security prison in Chino. My job was to transport inmates within the prison compound, and to the NORCO facility nearby. The prison inmates, of course, had to be transported in restraints. Part of my job involved carrying the heavy restraints. This was very physical work. On March 12, 2004, I injured my lower and middle back while lifting prisoner restraints in a transport van. An MRI found nerve damage, 3 bulging discs and bone spurs. My doctor said that immediate surgery was not recommended, but would be in the future. I did physical therapy, chiropractic and steroid injections into my spine. None of that helped very much. The doctor said there's nothing more we can do for you.

What this has meant to my life: I've lost my job and career. I can't serve as a Correctional Officer again, but am receiving no training for a new job. I wear a back brace most days, and I limp. We had to take another mortgage on our home to get by. I used to run 5 miles every other day, camped, rafted white water river rapids. Now, I can barely sit through a meal or a movie.

**Permanent
Disability
BEFORE
\$33,350
AFTER
\$6,000**

How the Governor's Workers' Comp Law Affects Me

How Workers' Comp was supposed to help me: Workers compensation insurance was to heal my injury, provide temporary support, and help me find a new job that fits my physical disabilities. SCIF denied needed care and cut off disability support. I now need surgery, but SCIF denied a new MRI. The first doctor said I'm 33% disabled, but SCIF reduced that under the new schedule to 6%. Now, they're demanding I pay THEM \$1,700. But I've had NO income since March 2006!

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