

# The Star-Ledger

## **N.J. court halts release of video allegedly showing beatings at women's prison after officer accused of assault sues**

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A New Jersey court on Monday at least temporarily blocked prosecutors from releasing video that allegedly shows officers beating women at the state's only women's prison, in an incident that has already led the corrections commissioner to resign and the governor to announce plans to shutter the facility.

Jose Irizarry, one of ten officers charged in an ongoing criminal probe, filed an emergency request last week saying his constitutional rights would be violated if footage was released before trial.

An appellate judge agreed to halt the release until both sides could present their arguments, according to court records.

Irizarry's lawyer said allowing the general public to watch the video now would make it hard to find impartial jurors.

"We're in the literal infant throes of a case," Peter Till said in an interview. "The public isn't the jury."

A spokesman for the state attorney general's office declined comment. The agency had planned to release the video Monday because its "initial investigation ... is substantially complete," court records show.

At least six women have said they were injured at the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility in Hunterdon County when officers pulled them from their cells late Jan. 11 and in the early hours of Jan. 12.

Gov. Phil Murphy tapped former state comptroller Matthew Boxer to run an additional investigation, and his team at Lowenstein Sandler LLP has already watched more than 20 hours of footage.

The firm produced a 73-page report which described the video as "exceedingly violent" and "alarming in a way that is difficult to put into words."

During one extraction, staff trying to search a woman could be seen "ripping her clothes in what appears to be an unnecessarily violent manner," according to the report. Footage also showed officers pushing a woman up against a wall while one "punches her numerous times on her face, chest and back," investigators wrote.

Staff in charge of filming the extractions may have purposely obscured some misconduct, the report said.

“In many of the videos, it is difficult to see exactly what is happening at every moment because the recording officer is standing behind other officers, frequently recording the officers’ backs instead of recording the inmate and what is happening to her,” the report said.

Irizarry, 37, of Paterson, has been charged with second-degree aggravated assault and two counts of second-degree official misconduct, according to the complaints against him.

Officials accused him of “forcibly” using a shield on a prisoner who was not fighting back and failing to report excessive force by his colleagues.

His lawyer previously said they’d “vigorously defend against what we regard as baseless charges.”

Irizarry has until noon Wednesday to further explain to the court how the release could violate his rights, Judge Joseph Yannotti wrote. The attorney general’s office then has 24 hours to respond.

The state’s largest corrections union also filed a lawsuit in May to delay what they believed was a plan to release the footage before Memorial Day weekend.

The point wasn’t to permanently keep it secret, William Sullivan, president of PBA Local 105, said at the time. The union just wanted to know what the video showed ahead of time to help officers prepare for a possible backlash, he said.

The union abruptly withdrew their complaint the next day.