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## Appeals judges weigh Ghislaine Maxwell's harsh confinement at Brooklyn federal jail

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Appeals judges seemed alarmed Monday by Ghislaine Maxwell's treatment behind bars, asking why it was necessary for Brooklyn federal jail staff to shine a light in her cell every 15 minutes overnight.

Maxwell, 59, says she's being held in conditions so harsh they amount to torture. The constant surveillance, coronavirus-related restrictions, gross food and other issues at the Metropolitan Detention Center make it impossible for to prepare for trial, she claims. Maxwell covers her eyes with a sock or towel to avoid being constantly woken up at night by the flashlights, her attorneys say.



Ghislaine Maxwell appears in Manhattan Federal court on Friday.

(Elizabeth Williams/AP)

Assistant U.S. Attorney Lara Pomerantz said that the Bureau of Prisons determined the constant checkups are necessary after making an assessment of Maxwell's security needs. "My understanding is that is routine," Pomerantz said, prompting tough questions from 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals Judges Richard Sullivan and Pierre Leval.

"Routine for every prisoner? Are you really telling us that?" Leval said. Maxwell is appealing a lower court's denial of bail — on three separate occasions — because she is a flight risk. Judge Alison Nathan found that Maxwell's foreign citizenship, wealth and ability to avoid detection all weigh in favor of keeping her in jail pending trial.

Members of the three-judge panel did not say when they will rule on whether she deserves bail. Maxwell's defense team argues she's being unnecessarily held in de facto solitary confinement to prevent her from committing suicide like her former boyfriend, Jeffrey Epstein.

“Is she a suicide risk or not? Or is there some other reason they’re shining lights all night long?” Sullivan asked.

Epstein hanged himself in August 2019 while awaiting trial for underage sex trafficking.

“The Bureau of Prisons doesn’t want to risk another embarrassment to itself, which is understandable on the part of the Bureau of Prisons, but perhaps unnecessary,” Leval said.

The judges considered ordering an independent psychiatric evaluation of Maxwell to determine if she is suicidal.

Maxwell’s attorney, David Oscar Markus, also sought an order that a Bureau of Prisons official explain the agency’s assessment of the British socialite in court.

She’s charged with enticing underage girls into Epstein’s sex abuse scheme in the mid-1990s, as well as trafficking another underage victim in the early 2000s. She’ll face a second trial for lying under oath. Dozens of women say Maxwell played a crucial as Epstein’s chief recruiter of underage victims. At times she allegedly joined in his abuse. Maxwell has pleaded not guilty.