

A Publication of The Pennsylvania Prison Society

GRATERFRIENDS

Promoting a humane, just and constructive correctional system and a rational approach to criminal justice since 1787

For George Floyd

The Invisible Knee Behind Prison Walls

by Nan Hill, mother of incarcerated individual at SCI Camp Hill

Here we go again. I CAN'T BREATHE. It was six years ago when we first heard those same words, "I can't breathe" uttered by Eric Garner, who later died as a result of being placed in a chokehold by a police officer. On May 25, 2020 George Floyd uttered the same exact words while Derek Chauvin had his knee on his neck and back. This officer put his hand in his pocket which concealed the fact that, by holding his hand there, he was allowed to apply more pressure to Mr. Floyd's neck. He looked directly into the lens of the video camera with absolutely no expression. What I saw was a man grimacing with the satisfaction of a slow kill, oblivious of the sounds or sights around him, even as his fellow officers pleaded, "roll him over." If you pay close attention, you will notice that Officer Chauvin did not acknowledge or respond to their voices. That's the satisfaction of a slow kill; he had to finish it.

This is the same knee they have in the prison system: I call it the hidden and invisible knee that guards and elected officials use. They can and will intentionally apply the same pressure knowing you can't breathe. Even as Mr. Floyd called out, the police officers stood idly by just as the guards in prisons. Why? They do not fear repercussions even when someone dies irresponsibly at their hands. We have watched our loved ones suffer under the hidden and the invisible knee, their cries ignored and no video recording allowed. Watch for that same stoic look on the face of guards and some elected officials showing no emotion as they apply the hidden knee, one that is concealed to us in the free world but felt by ALL behind the walls

If these atrocities were being videotaped behind the walls, how swift would justice be carried out for all those who grimace with the satisfaction of a slow kill? That's how serving time in prison is experienced, especially for those serving life sentences. That hidden invisible knee results in many men and women succumbing to death, or will soon, if we don't continue to fight for justice. There were protests all over the world because we watched an agonizing slow death at the hands of police. What took three minutes to kill George Floyd is the same as the amount of time it takes for a judge to bang the gavel to render a guilty verdict or give a life sentence. A life sentence is a slow kill. Life sentences are handed down in every courtroom in the United States; we watch helplessly as those that had to stand by and view countless videos of those dying on camera with no empathy, just another black life.

Did it take this most recent tragedy or will it take another to make people see that there have always been many hidden and invisible knees in our prison system, with those who rest their knee on the neck and the backs of incarcerated men and women until they die.

In Memory of George Floyd

by Tyreem Rivers DK2865, SCI Dallas

The pain felt only means that, by the grace of God, we are still alive. Just two days ago, I received word from a friend that COVID-19 claimed the life of his father-in-law. Reading the details of his message instantly brought tears to my eyes, and caused me a deep sense of grief

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towards the list he, his wife and family experiencing. I never met his father-in-law, I never met his wife; however, I know that if I were in a similar situation, he would genuinely empathize with me in the exact manner I empathize with him.

So why is it that, as human beings, most people find it difficult to connect with strangers? When will we as a country finally cured from the ugly faces of racism?

When will others outside the black communities and around the country begin to understand that Black Lives Matter isn't a call to promote racism, but rather a more intricate Nation—a wide reminder to corrupt police officers and others that the unnecessary killings of unarmed black men and women simply isn't right. Until all people in this country honestly take time to step outside of themselves and thank to empathetically share in the struggle, lost, or grief of another. They will never truly understand what it feels like to be a black American.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Friends of the Society,

These last many weeks have been trying for everyone. I want to use this space to acknowledge Prison Society staff, interns, and volunteers who have been working tirelessly despite multiple challenges.

COVID-19 poses a grave threat to the community we are dedicated to protecting. According to the CDC, the virus places a disproportionate burden of illness and death

on racial and ethnic minority groups. A population we know is also disproportionately represented in our Pennsylvania prisons — where there are 9 Black people incarcerated to every 1 white person. The Pennsylvania Prison Society is the only organization collecting and sharing data on COVID-19 spread in county prisons. **We will not look away.**

We have seen the video of George Floyd, the video of Ahmaud Arbery, and read about the horrific events that led to the murder of Breonna Taylor. While cell phone videos and police body cameras allow many millions of Americans to see police brutality in a way that previously was not possible, the abuse of people in prison and jails remains out of the public view. It is central to our

mission to be public witnesses and to ensure that all people are to be treated with dignity and humanity — regardless of race, color, or national origin. **We will not look away.**

It is an honor to lead and serve this community.

Claire Shubik-Richards
Executive Director

COVID-19 IN PA PRISONS: WHAT YOU ARE TELLING US

After spending the first few weeks of the pandemic talking to stakeholders across the state about their plans to keep prisons safe, the Prison Society wanted to know what the experience has been like for the 76,000 incarcerated people across the commonwealth. What is it like living through this pandemic in a prison cell? How do your experiences compare to one another?

Since the start of COVID-19, the Prison Society has answered calls and emails from hundreds of concerned family members who have shared the experiences of their loved ones on the inside SCIS and county prisons. Prison Society staff and volunteers have also been directly asking people in custody about

GRATERFRIENDS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Claire Shubik-Richards

EDITOR AND DESIGNER Kailyn Schneider & Alyssa Feitzinger

EDITORIAL ORGANIZER Noelle Gambale

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS Jennifer Stevens, Kevin Bendesky,

Taelor Jones, Emma Holyst,

Taylor Lawritson

FOUNDER Joan Gauker



230 South Broad Street • Suite 605 Philadelphia, PA 19102

Telephone: 215.564.4775 • Fax: 215.564.1830

Email: EditorGF@PrisonSociety.org

www.prisonsociety.org • www.Facebook.com/PrisonSociety

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We reserve the right to edit submissions. Original submissions will not be returned. We will not print anonymous letters. Allegations of misconduct must be documented and statistics should be supported by sources. All submissions should be no more than 500 words, or two double-spaced pages. Letters more than 200 words, or one double-spaced page, will not be published in their entirety and may be shortened for clarity and space.

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If you have a question about Graterfriends, please contact our staff by mail, email, or phone.

their experiences. And to date, we have approximately 300 survey responses from people, most of whom are confined in state-run prisons.

Here is what you are telling us thus far:

All state-run prisons have increased hand washing and cleaning. Uniformly, people in these facilities reported increased hygiene. Someone at a state prison in Western Pennsylvania noted, "They are making sure we clean. The cells have never been cleaner."

Living in lockdown is extremely trying. People in state facilities report having only one hour outside of their cell a day, during which time they must choose between taking a shower, speaking to a friend, or calling home. When asked about the atmosphere of the facility, most respondents described it as "tense" or "stressful." One person in a state facility in Northwestern Pennsylvania compared the lockdown to a "comfortable version of the hole."

Some county prisons are falling dangerously short. We have received multiple reports from county prisons that incarcerated people have no way to wash their hands and that communal areas are not cleaned. We are following up with those facilities.

People on the inside are worried about friends and family on the outside. "This virus is on the outside. My concerns are my family on the outside that they are safe, especially my niece; she's a nurse." While families have reported the immense value of the Zoom calls, the long wait to schedule Zoom calls as well as the limited time out of cells for daily phone calls has left many people on the inside feeling disconnected and concerned for their loved ones outside.

Staying up-to-date is difficult. The nature of a global health crisis is the constant influx of new information from media sources. Behind bars, many of you have noted how difficult it is to keep up on changing DOC policies, let alone outside news. One person in custody at a Central Pennsylvania prison explained that the frustration and confusion with changing policies within the DOC extends to both correctional officers and incarcerated individuals, leading to frustrations by both parties.

The Prison Society still wants to hear from you. If you haven't responded to the survey from the previous edition of Graterfriends, please fill it out and send it to us. We also know things are changing quickly—if you already sent a response and want to update us on what things are like now, send us another response. For your convenience, a copy of the survey can be found at the end of this edition.

With research partners at Carnegie Mellon University and your survey responses from the last edition of Graterfriends, we hope to be able to release a more detailed report about conditions across the state in a future edition.

INSIDE THE SOCIETY

The Prison Society is grateful for the dedicated supporters we have. This month, we highlight Janet Irons, an Official Visitor since 2013. Janet became involved with The Society after learning about the criminal justice system in the US and noting that there is a disconnect between what those on the outside know about prisons and what those who are incarcerated experience.

Janet has been an advocate for restoring outdoor recreation at Centre county prison. To pursue this, she engineered a meeting with the the Department of Corrections Director of County Programs. She also hosted the Executive Director of the PA Institutional Law Project to meet with the County prison Board of inspectors. In addition to this, she has completed several dozen visits.



Janet's commitment to The Society's mission shines through her work.

Thank you Janet!



CREATIVE ISSUE

We would once again like to remind our readers and contributors about our plans to publish a creative issue of Graterfriends later this year.

This issue will focus on creative works such as short stories, poems, recipes, as well as visual art. Submissions may be about criminal justice reform or anything that inspires you. All appropriate content will be considered. PPS staff reserve rights to make judgments of what is and is not appropriate.

Thank you!

REPORT FROM

NICOLE SLOANE, ESQ.

How a Pennsylvania Judge Turned Bad Debts into Crimes

By Nicole Sloane, Criminal Defense Attorney



Between 2014 and 2017, an Erie County Pennsylvania magisterial district judge handed out preprinted forms that led to criminal charges for minor debts in over 800 cases (Madeleine O'Neill, *Report: Hundreds charged with crimes improperly in Corry*, *Erie Times-News*, July 25, 2019, www.goerie.com). Instead of filing civil suits from organizations that claimed to be owed money, the judge gave the filers pre-printed forms to complete to charge the debtors with summary theft

of services (Madeleine O'Neill, *Misfiled Corry cases a puzzle for defendants, officials*, *Echo-Pilot*, September 8, 2019, www.echo-pilot.com). This allowed the organizations to be spared both the need to pay civil filing fees and the need to enforce any judgement in their favor. Instead, the court held hearings, found many of the debtors guilty of theft of services, and then collected the money for the organizations. *Id.* The misfiled cases made the debtors into "thieves" with a criminal record. The Pennsylvania Auditor General recognized that the misfiled cases allowed the local judge to act "as a collection agency for the filer" to recoup minor debts. *Id.*

The *Erie Times-News* reports that the theft allegations involved "sums as low as \$7 for a school lunch account and overdue library book fees, payments to the YMCA, and other minor debts." (Madeleine O'Neill, *Report: Hundreds charged with crimes improperly in Corry*, *Erie Times-News*, July 25, 2019, www.goerie.com) Despite complaints by local private attorneys over the years, officials who had the authority to change the practice looked the other way.

Most of the individuals charged with theft for minor debts did not hire counsel. Since they were charged with summary offenses, the defendants were not entitled to a free attorney through the county's public defender's office. The practice of misfiling civil cases as summary theft offenses was a standard procedure in Corry for years so most of those charged and found guilty did not realize they should appeal.

The misfiling of civil cases as theft charges by Corry Magisterial District Judge Brenda Williams Nichols continued until she was voted out of office in 2017. *Id.* Elected to replace her was Denise Buell, a licensed attorney. Soon after taking the bench, Judge Buell discovered the erroneous filings by learning of the impact of the theft convictions in the lives of the debtors. Many did not realize they had criminal records until the theft offenses were

reported during criminal record checks. Some claimed the thefts prevented them from receiving promotions at work or advancement in rank in the Armed Forces (Madeleine O'Neill, *Misfiled Corry cases a puzzle for defendants, officials*, *Echo-Pilot*, September 8, 2019, www.echo-pilot.com). Many lived in fear of falling behind on payments to the Court and being picked up and taken to jail by the Court's constable. Data has not been released as to how many individuals ultimately spent time in the county prison after getting behind on payments.

When Judge Buell discovered that misfiling civil cases as criminal had been a common practice before she was elected, she notified Erie County's Court Administrator and the Pennsylvania Auditor General. For a period of time, there was no public acknowledgment of the misfiled cases as officials researched how many people had been impacted. That changed when Madeleine O'Neill, a reporter from the *Erie Times News*, began asking questions and it became clear to officials that the story was going to come out, one way or another.

It is unknown whether the practice of misfiling civil cases as criminal is happening elsewhere in Pennsylvania. Nevertheless, it is a cautionary tale with lessons to be learned. The first lesson reminds us how important it is to research candidates and to vote. The voters in the Corry area made a difference in their community by electing Judge Buell who stopped the practice of misfiling civil cases as criminal. Those of us who are eligible to vote must cast informed votes in every single election. Even convicted felons are eligible to vote after release from prison regardless of parole or probation status. They should re-register to vote if necessary. The ACLU reminds us that those who are still incarcerated on misdemeanors (but not felonies) may vote using an absentee ballot. To obtain an absentee ballot, contact your home county's Clerk of Elections asking for an absentee ballot application. You must carefully provide your address exactly as it is to be displayed on a mailing envelope and ask for your mail-in ballot as early as possible to prevent delay.

The second lesson is about the importance of investigative journalism in communities. Madeleine O'Neill asked questions, pushed officials, and reported her findings in two different newspapers. Nationally, a clear link has been found between print newspaper decline across the country and an increase in unchecked corruption. Consumers of news are turning away from their local newspaper in favor of free electronic information sources. Local investigative journalism which historically kept local politicians and other officials in check are closing their doors as a result of declining subscriptions. They no longer have the resources to dig deep into corruption and other misdeeds. What can we do about that? We can buy that newspaper sitting by the register in that convenience store. We can also pay for newspaper subscriptions for our local or regional newspaper in either print or electronic form. Good investigative journalism is uniquely able to expose travesties such as the misfiled cases that impacted hundreds of citizens in the Corry area.

REPORT FROM FAMM

COVID-19 has begun to take a toll on the people who live and work in Pennsylvania's correctional facilities. Fortunately, the reported positive cases of COVID-19 in Pennsylvania's state prison system are currently concentrated to a few facilities. However, as we have seen at SCI Huntingdon, COVID-19 can spread like wildfire when introduced to a population by just one individual. How do you practice safe social distancing in overcrowded prisons and jails, when people are forced by design to eat, sleep, and congregate in close proximity to others? You can't.

Now that we are in the midst of the pandemic, the pitfalls built into our sentencing and prison systems are being laid bare. Overcrowded and full prisons make COVID-19 more dangerous to incarcerated people and staff. There are very few ways for those most vulnerable to the disease – the elderly and ill – to be released early and swiftly, before they get sick. Governor Wolf and Commissioner Wetzel have started a program to grant some people reprieves, but unfortunately that system is helping very few people and not moving quickly enough. What got us into this mess, and how can the legislature fix it?

First, we must demand more sentencing reforms from lawmakers. Decades of sentencing and prison policies that don't prioritize public safety, public health, and fiscal responsibility are now putting everyone's lives at risk. The General Assembly must begin the necessary work of undoing the damage they have collectively worked to create through mandatory minimum sentences and other harsh sentencing, parole, and clemency policies. Had the legislature been less focused on locking people up for long over the past decades, thousands more Pennsylvanians could be at home right now in their communities self-isolating, instead of languishing in prison at increased risk of serious illness and death from contracting COVID-19. Overly punitive sentencing laws swelled Pennsylvania's jail population by 428%, and our prison population by nearly 300%, since 1983.

Second, the legislature must create better parole, medical, and geriatric release systems that efficiently remove ill and elderly people from prisons. On any given day, there are about 96,000 people incarcerated in jails according to the *Prison Policy Initiative* and prisons across the commonwealth, many of whom are aging or ill and not a public safety concern.

For example, according to the budget testimony from Pennsylvania's DOC, there are 10,000 incarcerated people over age 50 and more than 3,600 people who have already served 20 years or longer in Pennsylvania prisons. All credible evidence, including from the PA DOC itself, shows lower recidivism rates for people released after age 50, after commutation of a life sentence, and after resentencing of a juvenile life sentence. The immediate public health benefits of releasing elderly and sick people in prison in

response to the COVID-19 pandemic far outweigh any foreseeable negative impact on public safety, and the long-term benefits of releasing this population are myriad. Yet, current laws make it very difficult or impossible for these people to receive medical or geriatric release, parole, or clemency. Those laws must change.

Thus far, most of the lawmakers who passed the mandatory minimums and other harsh sentencing laws that built our massive prison and jail populations have been eerily silent in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that threatens the lives of those very people. Legislation has been introduced over the years to reform Pennsylvania's excessive sentencing laws and downsize the population now at highest risk in our prisons and jails, but the General Assembly has largely refused to take action on this front. We're not satisfied with this status quo and will be urging lawmakers to pass medical and geriatric release reforms, as well as parole and clemency reforms.

Before it's too late, every official with the power to do so should be working to release seriously ill and elderly prisoners to prevent overloading our prison and public healthcare systems with new COVID-19 cases. We also must hold our policymakers accountable for enacting sensible, evidence-based sentencing policies so that we do not find ourselves in a similar position again. Pennsylvania's prison population has already dropped by 8,000 since 2012, all while our crime rates have continued to decline across the commonwealth. It is time we demand that our legislature recognize this progress as success, and support further efforts to safely reduce our prison population. Pennsylvania should strive to be a leader in protecting all of its most vulnerable residents and the employees charged with their care – during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Were you recently transferred or assigned a new state ID number? Let us know!

The DOC does not alert us when you are transferred or assigned a new number.

Please write us so we can update our mailing list and ensure quick delivery of your Graterfriends!

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FRIENDS OF THE SOCIETY

Q & A: Advice from the Outside

The Prison Society currently operates a mentoring program at SCI Chester and SCI Phoenix, and we also support people once they are released. Prison Society staff recently spoke with a current mentee who was released from an SCI about what his experience has been like since returning home. For privacy reasons, we are using only his first name.

Prison Society: What has been the most challenging thing for you since returning home?

Juan: It's really difficult to get a good job, especially right now. I have a job working nights with a temp agency. I'm happy to have work, but my felony prevents me from getting hired by the company full-time. As a temp, I make \$10.5 an hour, but regular employees make \$14. I'm determined, though, to stay home so I'm working, staying focused, and looking at my options.

It's also hard to trust people. All of the people I was associated with before spread out like cockroaches when I got locked up, and now they are coming around trying to be friends again. I'm largely keeping to myself and focusing on my family and work. It's an adjustment.

Prison Society: What has been most surprising to you about what life is like on the outside?

Juan: Technology! I was on the bus and saw a woman laughing at her phone. I asked what she was laughing at, and she told me she was watching a movie on her phone. Your phone can do everything now—before I was locked up, we just had CD players.

When I first got home, I also felt like everyone was always watching me, even when I was just walking around the grocery store. It's weird being around so many people.

Prison Society: How does living in a halfway house compare to living in an SCI?

Juan: It's not great. [He laughs.] The food is the same stuff you get up state, but the only good thing is that you have money and the freedom to order food when you are out. The showers are also weird—you have to learn all of the new tricks. I have to turn on all of the faucets in the bathroom in order to get hot water while I shower...

Prison Society: What has been your favorite thing about coming home?

Juan: Pepperoni Cheesesteaks!

Prison Society: Do you have any advice for those who are still incarcerated?

Juan: Study everything you can. I didn't get my GED while locked up, and you really need a GED to get a job. Study carpen-

try, sewing, etc. Get all the skills you can.



Please remember that any submissions we receive will NOT be published without permission to print and a note stating that you are the original author.

Submissions without either of these two requirements will not be printed. We also cannot print copyrighted material. Original submissions will not be returned.

Wondering about the status of a submission?



We think it is important for you to know that, because we receive many submissions, we are unable to print every article.

You may receive a postcard like the one above in the mail as a thank you for your submission with either confirmation that it has been considered for publication or a reason for denial.

BOOKCASE

Recommended by James Arthur, 457097, Riverhead Maximum Security Institution, Hening TN. These programs provide books and magazines to individuals incarcerated in U.S. prisons. Simply send your written request to them, listing your preferred subjects.

Books to Prisoners

c/o Left Bank Books
92 Pike St, Box A
Seattle WA 98101
www.bookstoprisoners.net
Does not ship books to prisons that require new books. Must wait nine months between requests.

DC Books to Prisoners

P O Box 34190
Washington DC 20043
Must wait five months (150 days) between requests.

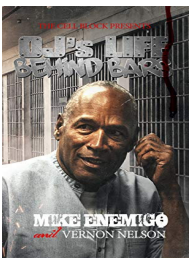
Prison Book Program

c/o Lucy Parson's Bookstore
1306 Hancock St, Suite 100
Quincy MA 02169
Offers free six-page resource list.

Prisoners Literature Project

c/o Bound Together Bookstore
1369 Haight St
San Francisco CA 94117
www.prisonlite.org

OJ's Life Behind Bars by Vernon Nelson



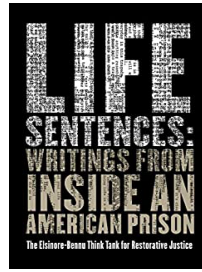
In 1994, Heisman Trophy winner and NFL superstar OJ Simpson was arrested for the brutal murder of his ex-wife Nicole Brown-Simpson and Ron Goldman. After his trial in 1995, he was acquitted of both murders.

In 2007 OJ was arrested in Las Vegas, for armed robbery and kidnapping. On

October 3, 2008 he was found guilty, sentenced to 33 years and was sent to Lovelock Correctional Facility, in Lovelock, Nevada. There he met inmate-author Vernon Nelson. Vernon was granted a perspective into the mind of one of the country's most notorious men; one that has never provided...until now.

This is the story of their friendship, conversations, confessions, loyalty, and betrayal...

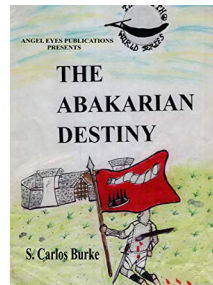
Available for order from the Publisher's Website at thecellblock.net, Amazon.Com, and Barnes & Noble for the cover price of (\$15.00-\$19.95 Paper Back) and \$7.99 E/Books available on all Kindle Listings.



Suggested by featured writer Oscar Brown, this book is a collection of poetry and prose by six incarcerated men, a hybrid of prison memoir, philosophy, history, policy document, and manifesto. The six authors—Fly, Faruq, Khalifa, Malakki, Oscar, and Shawn—met at the State Correctional Institution in Pittsburgh and came together in 2013 to form their group.

Centered around the principles of restorative justice, Life Sentences is more than a literary collection; it is a how-to guide for those who feel trapped and a letter of invitation, asking readers to join with the incarcerated and their families so we can all continue to fly over walls, form loving connections with each other, and teach one another to be free. (Available on Amazon for \$12.85 and Kindle for \$6.99)

The Abakarian Destiny By Sean 'Rate' Burke



In *The Abakarian Destiny*, Sean Carlos Burke provides a fresh take on the epic, filled with romance, treachery, lust, and adventure. Set in a sphere that holds five different worlds with over fifty kingdoms, the cultures seek and rely upon the lore of Magic for their adventures into The Fifth World.

It begins in the World of Di Aeros, also known as The Fifth World. The Zen Pash Kings, who have ruled the Kingdom of Abakar since the War Ravaged Age of The Time Before Time, struggle to maintain their supremacy upon the Abakarian Continent. Plagued with past conflicts, King Zetai Zen Pash must place the fate of his empire within the hands of a Sister of The High Order of Azenstar. If she fails, the Dim Lords will rule. All proceeds go towards the Authors Legal Defense Fund.

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OUR VOICES

I am in Recovery

K. Kabasha Griffin-El, DB7067, SCI Somerset

My given name is Keith F. Griffin. I'm known as "Kabasha." I was born and raised in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania, and I'm a veteran of the United States Marine Corps., diagnosed with service-connected Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Upon my discharge, I was simply a selfish, emotional wreck in deep denial. At that time, I was unable to acknowledge my need for help. I believed the false stigma that mental illness was for weak people. As a Marine, I claimed strength and considered myself strong. So, although I lived in anguish – fighting internal battles of conflicting thoughts and emotions – I told myself I didn't need help. Unfortunately, the worst happened before I could humble myself enough to express the words, "Help Me." I am now in recovery. Regrettably, in 1995 within two years of my honorable discharge, my actions resulted in someone's death, and my consequent life sentence.

Fortunately, throughout my imprisonment, some of the most loving, kind, forgiving, and gracious people have freely shared the best of themselves to my benefit. Some are family members, old friends and pen-pals that have grown to become great friends. Many of them are special people that took part in programs designed to benefit the imprisoned.

This is my first time in prison. There have been days when I've found myself deep in crisis, where I wanted to die. Each person that has shared his time and loving energy became the light I needed during those dark days. They became my advocates, connecting me to the world as they reminded me that I still have purpose in it. Through their inspiration, the desire to become an advocate was born within me.

After more than two decades of imprisonment, after several years of mental health treatment, I continue my journey of recovery through education, and involvement in worthy causes. Fortunately, I've found that here in prison, I've been able to create a form of sanctuary for myself within the education department. The library and school are my favorite spaces. Eventually, I took some business education classes, enrolled in several college courses, and worked as a Tutor. Thanks in part to those experiences, I was confident enough to accept offers to fill positions on the governing boards of various prison based nonprofit organizations. The executive responsibilities I enhanced my managerial and administrative abilities, and instilled confidence which enables me to effectively coordinate organization affairs with prison authorities and community resources. As my appreciation for advocacy further expanded, I became involved in a multitude of peer support programs. Through that work, I've found that those of us who have once victimized others, are now in great need of support. Acknowledging such truths, I deliberately prepare myself to serve, by continuing my education, with emphasis on self-improvement through programs. I've embraced these efforts as my obligation, and as a form of restitution in homage to those I've victimized.

The moment I was able to ask for help, I found a degree of healing that allowed me to devote several years to counseling. Still, PTSD, anxiety, and depression are issues that I deal with daily. I no longer allow stigma to be a barrier to my wellness. I acknowledge that I AM IN RECOVERY, and that my recovery is an ongoing process. I proudly recognize that, although I haven't arrived yet, hope empowers me daily as I journey through my personal pathway to recovery. I'm growing, learning, and becoming with each day. Along the way, I've learned to forgive and love myself, and to deliberately strive to be the best version of myself. Literacy has been key, for being able to read and write EMPOWERS me. Literacy boosted my self-esteem, and has enabled me to not only advocate for myself, but to encourage others to do the same. So, I utilize the platform provided by my positions where I'm able to share the wonderful power of the written and spoken word. I boldly share my personal stories, subjecting myself to vulnerability. I do so voluntarily as an example: to encourage; to remind others that they are not alone; and to inspire hope, overall wellness, and recovery. This work is allowing me to become the best of who I am meant to be. My hope is that my recovery experiences will aid others. I find healing and great joy in serving this purpose. For, I've discovered that helping people helps me.

Death by Incarceration

Omar Askia Ali, AF0814, SCI Coal Township

According to an article in the Pennsylvania Capital-Star, "In [John Fetterman's] first year as pardons board chair, Fetterman has worked to accelerate clemency programs in Pennsylvania. He's traveled to state prisons to encourage aging prisoners to apply for commutations."

Taxpayers fork over tens of millions of dollars a year on prisons. Our laws are based on Judeo-Christian principles, and one of the core tenets of our system is the power of redemption and forgiveness. That process had been all but extinct. The American Civil Liberties Union states that, "civil libertarians say the system must compensate victims of its mistakes."

America has the highest rate of prisoners in the world, and most people in this country have no knowledge of this. A highly visible example is the Central Park Five case, and even President Donald J. Trump made comments about them. However, the five black and latino teenagers who had been accused of the rape and beating of the white female jogger and convicted in 1989 were subsequently exonerated in 2003.

There is credence to the belief that a segment of law enforcers have staged wrongful convictions of individuals. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was unjustly incarcerated more than 29 times for his anti-social behavior during his lifetime. And, not once, did any district attorney or any prosecutor make one step forward to assist Dr. King or exonerate him. Therein, once any prisoner is blessed to obtain their release, they must be able to undo the psycholog-

ical slavery of misconceptions and transcend their abnormal actions, as well as their difficulties, to become a productive asset in the endeavor to eradicate the ills of our society. Prison will no longer be a part of his/her life. Prisons are a business person's dream, because a stationary clientele means big business. This is why there are very few rich people in prison, most are the poor. Think: Who is really getting paid, player?

Keep Your Head Up
Robert Burns, AY6370, SCI Fayette

Some people believe that, being incarcerated, you only have to deal with legal and institutional problems and concerns. It's not true. I'm suffering the second of a loss that no one should have to endure in a lifetime. My wife passed away on January 23, 2020 after a lengthy battle with cancer. She was the reason why I smiled when I arose; she was the reason why I sought help for my anxiety issues; she was the reason why I sought out the commutation process; she was the reason why I stayed sharp even after my transfer to this hell hole. She was my English-Canadian Queen.

This type of loss should not happen to anyone, especially one who is incarcerated – where the support system is minimal or sometimes non-existent without the help of a family. This is my second loss of this kind. My first wife passed after a brief battle with cancer in December of 1993. During that time, good-hearted people always try to say the same things: "She's in a better place" and "keep your head up." These words, 90% of the time, are said with good intention, but honestly you're not trying to hear it, not during your time of grief. I know I didn't, but I appreciated the effort. So, now things aren't as important to me. I know eventually I'll have to get out of this funk, but I don't know if I can! The first time I was able to escape the grief with drugs. But, since 2001, I no longer use them. So, now, I just wallow in my own pity. No one understands – God, Family, Institutional Staff! I'm alone with my memories and some crazy thoughts.

So from one Comrade to another.....
"They're in a Better Place"
"Keep your Head up"

This Place is SAD
Ashley Barber, OU8963, SCI Cambridge Springs

Women. There's at least 1,200 of them here. I would have to say there's 50 lifers, or close to 50. You would imagine that most have been down here for well over 20 years. But, most of us only know this because we're here. We haven't heard it. Why?

Because women will not, cannot, and refuse to stand up for one another. It's embarrassing. They will complain for a year about a microwave; they will pretend to ask if you're doing alright; but nothing happens here, nothing changes. Our time has been almost an entire waste, because no one cares about the woman next to them. We are losing privileges daily, the

young long-termers are lost and angry; but it won't change their minds, if it doesn't benefit them! Right?

We are not a community, a campus, a society of like-minded individuals; no, we are not even a "we."

How sad.

ADVOCATES

Hypocritical Hippocratic Oath
Rev Magi. Augustus Enoch, KL2144, SCI Coal Township

It's the obligation of every physician to put the health of his or her patient above the cost that may come with the necessary care. Unfortunately prisoners are put at the bottom of the barrel when it comes to receiving ethical and adequate health care.

After carefully reading DL-ADM- 13.2..1, I've concluded that there is no section found which rules that prison medical professionals must put their budgets over health care of their patients. So, why is it that those incarcerated individuals suffering from cancer, HIV, hepatitis, Arthritis, seizures, heart diseases, and even diabetes, go untreated, under-treated. or even intentionally misdiagnosed to evade the costs of treatment? It's heart-wrenching to know that so many people are suffering due to the health care accountants who crunch our life like numbers in their budget to determine if we should receive care or just corruption.

It is time for us to face the problem as a collective. File your grievances, and then send a detailed complaint to the Professional Compliance Office: PO Box 69522, Harrisburg, PA 17106-9522. This office will investigate the license of the healthcare professionals you name. You can also file a complaint to Jamie Rahn Ballay, Acting Regional Manager for the Office for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. That address is 801 Market Street, Suite 9300, Philadelphia, PA 19107. It will be the beginning of the end of this era that promotes prison medical budgets over prisoner health care.

Truth Brothers and Sisters

The Disappearance of our Constitution: The DOC Doesn't Know We Have Rights!
Mark Rokita, LJ8688, SCI Houtzdale

A group of our administration was recently making their rounds to make sure no one had hanged themselves from the stress of the lock-down. They stopped at my cell, knowing my admiration for law, and stated, "I bet you're having a field day with this." I have been studying law diligently for the past five years, clocking in 30 hours a week, and so I replied, "Of course, don't you realize this is a violation of our rights?" Two of them responded in tandem,

"You guys don't have any rights." When they walked away, I thought, "They're right."

A new policy introduced by the DOC, DC-ADM-801-HOU-2 or "VRS" (Violence Reduction Strategy) has the objective to punish an entire unit or block for the actions of an individual. For example: on J-unit at SCI Houtzdale, officers unlocked the security door and goaded a mentally ill inmate into entering the officers bubble. Based on the invitation of the officers, the inmate entered the door and was met with pepper-spray. The responsible officers then locked down the entire cell block.

The initial punishment includes being locked in our cells for three days, followed by 3 days restricted movement: no showers, visits, religious services, law-library access, employment pay, visits, or telephone. If your family comes to visit you, they will be turned away, and there is no way to warn them. If another incident occurs, the lockdown is extended. When you fill out a grievance, it is given to a member of the Violence Reduction Committee, which is made up of the entire staff. The grievances are denied and the lockdown is classified as a "limited state of emergency."

In order to combat this violation of our rights and abuse of power, we must file grievances and appeal to Harrisburg. When denied (and it will be denied) you must file a petition for review in the Commonwealth Court, citing the Constitutional violations. First, Eighth, Fourteenth Amendments, etc. You must send a copy certified to the Attorney General and the PA DOC.

The statement, "You guys don't have any rights," should make sense to us now. The entire administration is made up of individuals that began their employment as a Corrections Officer. None of them needed a law degree. It is up to us to show them we do have rights. We cannot just give up when the DOC denies our grievances.

Our courts are reluctant to intervene in prison issues because they believe the prison administration knows what they are doing. However, I believe judicial intervention is necessary. I am currently exhausting all administrative remedies in order to file a civil action requesting for judicial intervention relating to the issue of the policy that gives the administration the authority to MASS PUNISH groups of innocent individuals. Additionally, I am currently litigating the grievance procedure in the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania, requesting that the current procedure for grievances be dismantled as it offers no remedy to meritable issues. I have suggested that the court review the New York State alternative grievance system that involves both a staff and inmate committee review team, implemented in the wake of the Attica riots.

If you are interested in joining, please email or write to me.

Smart Communications/PADOC
Mark Rokita/LJ-8688
SCI Houtzdale
PO Box 33028
St. Petersburg, FL 33733

The Power of Networking *Robert Pezzeca, DX1148, SCI Forest*

My name is Rob Pezzeca, a lifer now in SCI Forest. Before I moved to Forest, my friend and brother juvenile lifer Jamar Sowell (whom we all know as Marbles) gave me his word, "Rob, if I go home, you tell me who to go see." Well Marbles went home, and just 4 days home he started going to see politicians. Our brother and comrade Robby Harris picked him up and took him to Harrisburg. They traveled to the capitol building, speaking to politicians about CHANGE. I told Marbles that one senator who was fighting for us is newly elected Sen. Katie Muth. So Marbles called and set up an appointment to go in. Marbles and Bobby went in to meet Katie, and they spent over two hours with her. During this meeting, they asked Sen. Muth if she would go to SCI Dallas for the Lifers Banquet, and she accepted. I publicly want to thank Katie for being the first sitting Senator to ever attend the Lifers Banquet on Dec. 4, 2019. These politicians want to come in to meet us. It's OUR job to invite them and make it happen. I want to thank Marbles and Bobby for being amazing human beings, for going home and being so passionately involved in the fight for parole for lifers and criminal justice reform. We lifers are a group of over 5,000 men and women. We all need to get more involved. I want to congratulate Heather Lavelle for becoming the President of the women lifers group in SCI Muncy. And let's remember how important it is to help someone file their commutation application. So many lifers are worthy and deserving, if you know someone who won't file, it's probably because they don't know how or are so nervous they just won't do it. Lend a helping hand. It's now my turn to help men at Forest apply for commutation. Help an elderly lifer do theirs, it's pretty easy.

Robert Pezzeca #DX1148, SC Forest

Pagan Oppression: Still Burning *Harold Sanford Carter III, MR4401, SCI Huntingdon*

Three hundred and thirty years ago, if you practiced anything Pagan you would find yourself in deep peril. Our country at that time would crush, drown, or burn you to death for the charge of witchcraft. Religious freedom is much better in recent times for people of polytheistic faiths. Unfortunately, that liberty has not followed men and women into the American prison system.

I am a prisoner at SCI Huntingdon in Pennsylvania, and the bigotry must stop! Religious study time is ignored, communal worship is denied, the primary texts of our traditions are not available, and we are told when to eat hallowed foods on our holy days. When we seek sage and cedar, we must abide by chaplains of other faiths and are subject to their customs. Our allowable religious items are few, while other faiths have pages to choose from. The chaplains who represent us are monotheistic. They are against everything we believe in, yet they govern and represent our very faith to our captors. Monotheistic

faiths feast on their holy days with food of their liking. Pagans are not allowed feasts. Other faiths study and pray in the chapel area without outside clergy. We must have outside clergy to study and pray despite having filed grievances about it. We are denied 1/2-inch quartz crystals from outside vendors and are told to search for pebbles in the prison yard.

In addition, religious accommodations are lengthy. They take four months. The grievance procedure challenging accommodation denials takes an additional three months. This turns into seven months, which is entirely too long to have to wait for denied religious accommodations.

My advice:

Band together spiritually—Asatru, Wiccan, Druid, shaman, witch, Thelema, and Hoodoo. Many Pagans together are omnipotent and resilient. Most advocacy groups entertain issues where several inmates are involved. Still, be sure to contact them individually.

File religious accommodations. Remember, do your research! When religious accommodations do not work, file grievances until they are exhausted. After all else fails, sue! Contact the Pennsylvania Institutional Prison Project. Remember that whatever other faith groups get, you can have, too, by the laws of parity, RLUIPA, and the Fourteenth Amendment.

If you believe in the freedom to worship and want to help incarcerated Pagans, give them legal advice if you are comfortable in doing so. Provide them with spiritual advice, sponsorship, study materials, and referrals. A Pagan convict typically requests relief from persecution, reading materials, and remote teaching.

Pagan oppression is still burning. This is the last frontier.

No Prison Reform/ Rehabilitation for Native American Prisoners

Marvin 'Running River' Banks, ND5137, SCI Coal Township

Hello, Prison Reform Movement,

I think you forgot about us, the Native American prisoners. We are prisoners, too, feeling the effects of overcrowding and the lack of rehabilitative programs. Please include us in your plans. As of now, there are no groups to help us reintegrate back into our own nations and societies. As of now, we are not allowed to freely practice our religion to help us rehabilitate. The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections only allows us to practice our religion one day during the week and only in the chapel; they tell us we can have private devotional prayers in our cells, but will not provide the things we need to do this. As of now, we have no personal pipes or drums, and cannot burn our sacred herbs anywhere except at the chapel on our one day. These limitations mean that we can't even pray in our cells.

Hello, Prison Reform Movement,

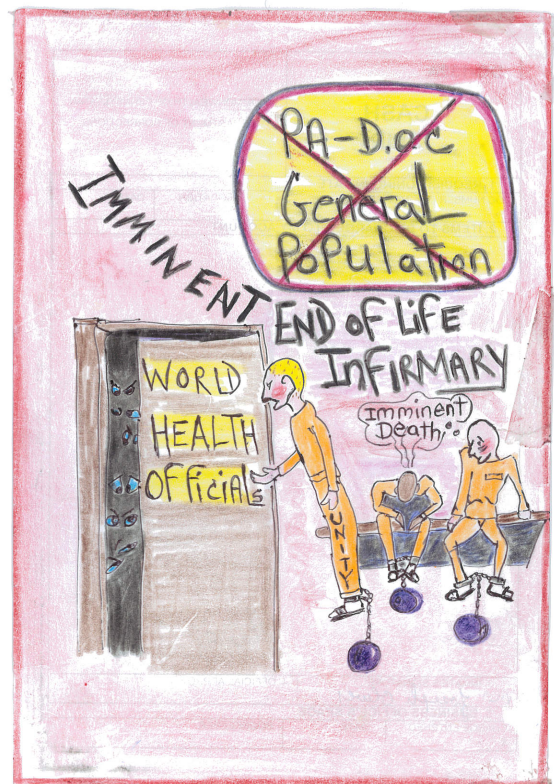
We are not rehabilitating. So, we are likely to get released and return. There are no re-entry resources for us. You never even bothered to ask if we had any issues. And, as prisoners, we do have many. As prisoners, we are living in two different worlds. As prisoners, we are trying to maintain our identities while the prison tries drastically to strip us of them.

Prison Reform, you forgot about your Native American prisoners. Prison Reform, we'll never forget what the United States Government promised our tribes.

Prison Reform, just because we are prisoners doesn't mean the promises and treaties do not apply.

The American Indian Religious Freedom Act is one promise; the 1st Amendment is another; the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and RLUIPA, a third. The government promised us many things like our right to be sovereign people and the freedom to hunt and fish on our lands.

But, I haven't heard the Prison Reform Movement or the government mention us once during the passing of all these reforming bills. Why? You promised!



Cartoon by Joseph
Oliver, AY7099, SCI
Pine Grove

LITERARY CORNER

Doing Life

David Mandeville DN7632, SCI Dallas

You are hereby sentenced to life.
Did I hear him right? Life? What's that?
I'm a teenager. Is that like 20 years?
No. It's life. What's that?
Till you die. Huh? How long is that?
20,30,40,50,60, maybe 70 years

Life was moving so fast out there.
Trying to get ahead, have some fun,
Impress the girls, find my way.
Wanted to be a fighter pilot, or special forces
But instead, drugs, burglaries, and now murder.
W.T.F? How did it get turned upside down?

A father gone, a family devastated.
He didn't deserve that I had no right.
One horrific moment, what was I thinking?
That's the problem. I wasn't.
Two families are now living a nightmare.
For what? Greed, fear, and a few dollars.

How do I right this wrong?
Doing good? Helping others? Not enough.
Prayer, fasting, forgiveness? Nope.
Nothing rights this wrong.
Nothing brings back the gone.
Time doesn't heal this wound.

Untitled

Joseph Mander NS4160, SCI Somerset

Fuck this world, it seems that everything I do is in vain.
For me to keep on having faith is truly insane
I put my heart upon my sleeve, and now I'm truly in pain
My chest is feeling like a chess board, like it's truly a game
So now you blame me for my heart being hardened as stone,
so why did Eve deceive me when she was a part of my bone?
The flesh of mine is like it's not even a part of my soul
So why we separate? Supposed to be a part of a whole
It's like Genocide, cause we can never truly unite.
When Chuck D Told us 'Fight the Power,' it was truly a fight.
The only problem, we were fighting, but with only ourselves.
We didn't care about the message, but for only our sales.
Whether it was music, or the crack we sold on the street,
and if we tried to share a message, they heard only the beat.
So tell me why the hell I try, when I don't ever succeed.
I guess 'cause faith provided something that I truly would need.

I keep the faith because I need it
And if I tell you something, I just pray that you would heed it
Just call it food for thought, but only useful if you eat it

The words on paper don't mean anything unless you read it
It really has to go just as far as I intend it
And if I took the time to tell you something, then I meant it
This isn't just a song, or something that I just invented
A message I receive, is just as important that I send it

Corona

Maurice Hart, NN7739, SCI Fayette

Corona scare well aware after beer/
No need for da panic cuz ya doctor right here/
Preventative is way better than curative/
Self-care is healthcare listen loud & clear:/
The virus live in spit in they nose & mouth/
You catch it if they sneeze or cough on you
No doubt!/
Or if you touch something that they touch too/
Without washing ya hands that's trouble./
Coronavirus been around this real rap/
"02 - 03" it was SARS CPAP/
Outta 8,000 cases 800 died/
Corona minor compared you'll be alright/
The spanish flu killed five hunnid thousand strong/
Don't panic letting propaganda break ya home./
God is very wise in his calculated plans/
You never know the reason why he shake up da (and/
This too shall pass in due time/
Until then be sure to abandon crime/
Or should I say build up more good karma/
So he can restore back da harmonic balance/
Corona scare well aware named after a beer/
Please chill; no panic DOC is right here

Cartoon by Joseph
Oliver, AY7099, SCI
Pine Grove



RESOURCES

PA State Officials

Governor Tom Wolf

Governor's Correspondence Office
508 Main Office Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120
P: 717-787-3391
F: 717-772-8284

Attorney General Josh Shapiro

PO Box 22653
Philadelphia, PA 19110
P: 215-886-7376

Senator _____

Senate PO Box 203 __ __ *
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Representative _____

PO Box 202 __ __ *
Harrisburg, PA 17120

*If you know the three-digit district number for your Senator or Representative, add it to the PO Box number. If you do not know, information for Senators is available at www.pasen.gov; information for Representatives is available at www.house.state.pa.us.

DOC Secretary John Wetzel

19020 Technology Parkway
Mechanicsburg, PA 17050
P: 717-728-2573
W: www.cor.pa.gov
E: ra-crpdocsecretary@pa.gov

Prison Society Mentoring Program

Families and Individuals Reintegrating Successfully Together (F.I.R.S.T.), our mentoring program, is a voluntary program for men currently in the Transitional Housing Unit (THU) at SCI Chester and SCI Phoenix.

The program helps prepare incarcerated individuals for successful reentry mentally, emotionally, and logistically. After a series of workshops on relevant topics (such as social media, applying for medical benefits, securing housing, and obtaining education and jobs), mentees are assigned to mentors, to meet one-on-one for at least six months to develop and achieve a personalized goal plan. We are also working with soon-to-be-released Juvenile Lifers across the state to help them bridge into life outside in the community.

We are always seeking mentors and mentee participants. For more information, or for a mentor application, please contact:

Joseph Robinson, Mentoring Program Case Manager
P: 215-564-4775, ext. 1005

FAMM

FAMM, a DC-based sentencing reform organization, is working to fight mandatory minimums in Pennsylvania, but needs case examples to help convince lawmakers to support fair sentencing.

If you are serving a long mandatory sentence for a drug or gun offense, please send 1) your name, 2) your contact information, 3) contact information for an outside friend or family member, 4) a brief description of your offense, and 5) your sentence, to:

FAMM

Attn: Pennsylvania Stories
1100 H Street, NW, Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20005

Note: FAMM does not offer direct legal assistance, but the organization will contact you by mail if they'd like to learn more about your case.

The Prison Society and Broad Street Ministry

The Prison Society at Broad Street Ministry is a collaboration providing reentry support for people returning to Philadelphia. At Broad Street Ministry, individuals can receive a P.O. Box, change of clothes and personal care items, as well as meet with a reentry associate. Broad Street partners with multiple non-profit organizations who offer on-site assistance with medical care, housing, employment, public benefits, and obtaining personal identification.

Broad Street Ministry

315 South Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107
P: 215-735-4847
W: www.broadstreetministry.org

LAMBDA Resources for LGBTQ People in Custody

Lambda Legal's mission is to achieve full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people and everyone living with HIV through impact litigation, education and public policy work.

As a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, we do not charge our clients for legal representation or advocacy, and we receive no government funding. We depend on contributions from supporters around the country.

National Headquarters

120 Wall Street, 19th Floor
New York, NY 10005-3919
P: 212-809-8585
W: www.LambdaLegal.org

RESOURCES

Expungements

Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity

1501 Cherry Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102
P: 267-519-5323

Expunge Philadelphia

Juvenile Expungement Hotline
P: 267-765-6770

Community Legal Services

Center City Office
1424 Chestnut St.
Philadelphia, PA 19102-2505
P: 215-981-3700
North Philadelphia Law Center
1410 W. Erie Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19140
P: 215-227-2400

ACLU

Whether it's achieving full equality for LGBT people, establishing new privacy protections for our digital age of widespread government surveillance, ending mass incarceration, or preserving the right to vote or the right to have an abortion, the ACLU takes up the toughest civil liberties cases and issues to defend all people from government abuse and overreach.

ACLU Pennsylvania Central Office

P.O. Box 11761
Harrisburg, PA 17108
P: 717-238-2258
W: www.aclupa.org
E: hbginfo@aclupa.org

Prisoner's Rights

Abolish Death by Incarceration

c/o Decarcerate PA
PO Box 40764
Philadelphia, PA 19107
P: 267-217-3372
W: www.decarceratepa.info
E: decarceratepa.pgh@gmail.com (Pittsburgh)
E: cadbiphilly@gmail.com (Philadelphia)
E: decarceratepa@gmail.com

PA Institutional Law Project: Philadelphia

The Cast Iron Building
718 Arch Street, Suite 304 South
Philadelphia, PA 19106
P: 215-925-2966 (Philadelphia)
F: 215-925-5337 (Philadelphia)
P: 570-523-1104 (Lewisburg)
P: 412-434-6004 (Pittsburgh)
W: www.pailp.org

E: alove@pailp.org

Prison Activist Resource Center

PO Box 70447
Oakland, CA 94612
P: 510-893-4648
W: www.prisonactivists.org/resources
E: info@prisonactivists.org

Reentry Services

Philadelphia Reentry Coalition

P: 1-215-683-3379
E: philareentrycoalition@gmail.com

Franklin County Reentry Coalition (Franklin Together)

533 S. Main Street Chambersburg, PA 17201
P: 717-263-5060 ext. 314

Life Without Parole

Women Lifers Resume Project of PA

PO Box 324
New Hope, PA 18938
P: 814-393-5400 (Cambridge Springs)
P: 570-546-3171 (Muncy)
W: www.wlrpp.org

Reconstruction Inc.

ATTN Fight for Lifers
PO Box 7691
Philadelphia, PA 19101
P: 215-223-8180

Pennsylvania Innocence Project

The Pennsylvania Innocence Project has a four-fold mission to: (1) secure the exoneration, release from imprisonment, and restoration to society of persons who are innocent and have been wrongly convicted; (2) provide clinical training and experience to students in the fields of law, journalism, criminal justice, and forensic science; (3) collaborate with law enforcement agencies and the courts to address systemic causes of wrongful convictions; and (4) strengthen and improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system in Pennsylvania through public education and advocacy.

Philadelphia Office

1515 Market St
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Pittsburgh Office

914 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

W: www.InnocenceProjectPA.org
P: 215-204-4255
E: InnocenceProjectPA@temple.edu

LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

PPS is partnering with FAMM, ACLU of PA, Americans for Prosperity, the Commonwealth Foundation and others to support positive reforms. In January, representatives from all five of these organizations spent a day at the State Capitol sharing their priorities with lawmakers and expressing their bipartisan support for criminal justice reform. The following are new legislative criminal justice initiatives introduced since August. For information on other currently pending criminal justice reform legislation, see previous issue. [Note: SJC = Senate Judiciary Committee, HJC = House Judiciary Committee.]

HOUSE BILLS

HB 1538, would require people a three year waiting period before reapplying for parole after receiving a denial for the following conviction categories:

Section 2502(C) (Relating to murder)
Section 2503 (Relating to voluntary manslaughter)
Section 2901(a.1) (Relating to kidnapping)
Section 3011(b) (Relating to trafficking in individuals)
Section 3012 (Relating to involuntary servitude)
Section 3121 (Relating to rape)
Section 3122.1(b) (Relating to statutory sexual assault)
Section 3123 (Relating to involuntary deviate sexual intercourse)
Section 3124.1 (Relating to sexual assault)
Section 3124.2(a.1) (Relating to institutional sexual assault)
Section 3125 (Relating to aggravated indecent assault)
Section 3126(a)(7) (Relating to indecent assault)

HB 1538 also requires that victim testimony be heard in person during parole hearings. Witnesses and evidence submitted on behalf of the parole applicant would not be required to be heard in person, but may be conducted via videoconference.

SECTION 2502(C) (RELATING TO MURDER).

SECTION 2503 (RELATING TO VOLUNTARY MANSLAUGHTER).

Section 2901(a.1) (relating to kidnapping).

Section 3011(b) (relating to trafficking in individuals).

Section 3012 (relating to involuntary servitude).

Section 3121 (relating to rape).

Section 3122.1(b) (relating to statutory sexual assault).

Section 3123 (relating to involuntary deviate sexual intercourse).

Section 3124.1 (relating to sexual assault).

Section 3124.2(a.1) (relating to institutional sexual assault).

Section 3125 (relating to aggravated indecent assault).

Section 3126(a)(7) (relating to indecent assault).

Section 4302(b) (relating to incest).

SECTION 2502(C) (RELATING TO MURDER).

SECTION 2503 (RELATING TO VOLUNTARY MANSLAUGHTER).

Section 2901(a.1) (relating to kidnapping).

Section 3011(b) (relating to trafficking in individuals).

LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS: CONTINUED

Section 3012 (relating to involuntary servitude).

Section 3121 (relating to rape).

Section 3122.1(b) (relating to statutory sexual assault).

Section 3123 (relating to involuntary deviate sexual intercourse).

Section 3124.1 (relating to sexual assault).

Section 3124.2(a.1) (relating to institutional sexual assault).

Section 3125 (relating to aggravated indecent assault).

Section 3126(a)(7) (relating to indecent assault).

Section 4302(b) (relating to incest).

HB 1538 passed out of the House 194-7 on June 19, 2019, amended and passed out of Senate Judiciary Committee 14-0 on April 29, 2020. HB 1538 is now in the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

Prime Sponsor: Representative White (R). The Prison Society opposes this bill.

Section 4302(b) Relating to incest)

HB 1827, or “Shawn’s Law,” would create a sentencing enhancement in situations of caused, aided, or solicited suicide where the individual who died by suicide is either under the age of 18, or is determined to have an intellectual disability. A sentencing enhancement would also be applied if the person who died by suicide had an autism spectrum disorder, no matter their age.

HB 1827 was amended and passed out of House Judiciary Committee 15-10 on May 4th, 2020, and re-committed to House Appropriations Committee after being amended on second consideration on May 19, 2020.

Prime Sponsor: Representative Keefer (R). The Prison Society opposes this bill.

HB 2016 would make exposing a law enforcement officer to bodily fluids a first degree misdemeanor, and a third degree felony if an individual knew or should have known the bodily fluids could be dangerous or infectious.

HB 2016 passed out of House Judiciary Committee 22-3 on May 4th, 2020, and was re-committed to House Appropriations Committee after second consideration on May 19th, 2020.

Prime Sponsor: Representative Schmitt (R). The Prison Society opposes this bill.

HB 2056, or “Cody’s Law,” would create a 2nd degree felony graded aggravated assault provision when bodily injury is caused to a person with a physical disability, intellectual disability, or Autism spectrum disorder.

HB 2056 passed out of House Judiciary Committee 21-4 on May 4th, 2020, and amended on second consideration and re-committed to House Appropriations Committee on May 19th, 2020.

Prime Sponsor: Representative Struzzi (R). The Prison Society opposes this bill

HB 2248 would provide the opportunity for veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and/or traumatic brain injury to petition for post-conviction relief presenting these diagnoses as mitigating factors.

HB 2248 was introduced on January 30, 2020 and referred to the Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee.

Prime Sponsor Representative Hill-Evans (D). The Prison Society supports this bill.

HB 2346 would increase the penalty for second or subsequent convictions of purchasing a firearm while knowingly prohibited to do so to a sentence of no less than five years.

HB 2346 was introduced on March 10, 2020 and referred to House Committee on Judiciary.

Prime Sponsor: Representative Murt (R). The Prison Society opposes this bill.

EXECUTIVE ACTION

On April 10, 2020, Governor Wolf issued an executive reprieve order, providing the possibility for temporary suspension of certain sentences during the duration of the disaster emergency.

The reprieve program does not apply to the following:

Persons committed for or with an aggregate sentence containing a personal injury crime, or any criminal attempt, criminal solicitation, or criminal conspiracy to commit a personal injury crime as defined in section 103 of the act of November 24, 1998 (P.L.882, No.111), known as the Crime Victims Act

Persons committed for or with an aggregate sentence containing a crime of violence, or any criminal attempt, criminal solicitation, or criminal conspiracy to commit a crime of violence as defined in 42 Pa.C.S. § 9714(g) (relating to sentences for second or subsequent offenses)

Persons committed for or with an aggregate sentence containing an offense under 18 Pa.C.S. Ch. 61 (relating to firearms and other dangerous articles) or a criminal attempt, criminal solicitation, or criminal conspiracy to commit the offense

Persons committed for or with an aggregate sentence containing an enhancement for the use of a deadly weapon as defined under law or the sentencing guidelines promulgated by the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing or where the attorney for the Commonwealth has demonstrated that the defendant has been found guilty of or was convicted of an offense involving a deadly weapon or a criminal attempt, criminal solicitation, or criminal conspiracy to commit the offense or an equivalent offense under the laws of the United States or one of its territories or possessions, another state, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, or a foreign nation

Persons committed for or with an aggregate sentence containing a violation of any of the following provisions or an equivalent offense under the laws of the United States or one of its territories or possessions, another state, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, or a foreign nation, including a criminal attempt, criminal solicitation or criminal conspiracy to commit the offense: 18 Pa.C.S. § 4302(a) (relating to incest). 18 Pa.C.S. § 5901 (relating to open lewdness). 18 Pa.C.S. Ch. 76 Subch. C (relating to Internet child pornography). A criminal sentence pursuant to 42 Pa.C.S. § 9712.1 (relating to sentences for certain drug offenses committed with firearms). An offense listed under 42 Pa.C.S. Ch. 97 Subch. H (relating to registration of sexual offenders). An offense listed under 42 Pa.C.S. Ch. 97 Subch. I (relating to continued registration of sexual offenders).

Persons committed for or with an aggregate sentence containing an offense of drug trafficking as defined in section 4103 (relating to definitions) or a criminal attempt, criminal solicitation, or criminal conspiracy to commit drug trafficking as defined in section 4103

Persons who are subject to a pending felony or misdemeanor arrest warrant or detainer

Persons who are currently serving a sentence to State prison and have been denied parole on that sentence

Persons convicted of any criminal offense committed while incarcerated

Persons who pose an identifiable risk to public safety

Persons with a prior conviction within the past 10 years for any crime contained under bolded sections

Enacted on April 10, 2020 by Governor Wolf. The Prison Society supports this executive action.

Were you recently transferred or assigned a new state ID number? Let us know!

The DOC does not alert us when you are transferred or assigned a new number.

Please write us so we can update our mailing list and ensure quick delivery of your Graterfriends!

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PA DOC MOBILIZATION PLAN

	Level 5 Most Restrictive	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1 Least Restrictive
Cohort Size	2	16 or Less	20 or Less	50 or Less	No Cohort Limitation
Work Detail	Not Permitted	Permitted to sustain critical operations.	Permitted in Cohorts	Permitted in Cohorts	Permitted
Treatment & Educational Services	Completed In-Cell	Completed in-cell with unit tutoring permitted.	Therapeutic Community & Psychology may occur on unit with cohorts and social distancing.	Treatment Programs & Education may resume with cohorts and social distancing.	Permitted with Social Distancing
Meals	Delivered to Housing Unit	Delivered to Housing Unit	May be served in dining halls with cohort limits.	May be served in dining halls with cohort limits.	May be served in dining halls with social distancing.
Medical Services & Medication	Provided on Housing Unit	Provided on Housing Unit	Medication distributed at Medical in cohorts. Medical Services on-unit where possible.	Medication distributed at Medical in cohorts. Medical Services on-unit where possible.	Medication distributed at medical with social distancing. Medical Services on-unit where possible.
Law & Leisure Library Services	Delivered to Housing Unit	Law Library may open in cohorts. Leisure Library remains closed with deliveries to housing unit.	Open with cohort and social distancing limitations.	Open with cohort and social distancing limitations.	Open with social distancing limitations.
Commissary	Delivered to Housing Unit	Delivered to Housing Unit	May be received in commissary with cohort and social distancing.	May be received in commissary with cohort and social distancing.	May be received in commissary with social distance limitations.
Barber Shop & Cosmetology Services	Not Permitted	Not Permitted	Not Permitted	Permitted with social distancing guidelines and enhanced PPE.	Permitted with social distancing guidelines.
Gymnasium	Not Permitted	Not Permitted	Not Permitted	Permitted in Cohorts	Open with social distancing limitations.
Activities	In-Cell	In-Cell	In-Cell	In-Cell	Normal Activities Resume
Visiting	In-Person Suspended Attorney Visits in Visiting Room Video Visitation Permitted	In-Person Suspended Attorney Visits in Visiting Room Video Visitation Permitted	In-Person Suspended Attorney Visits in Visiting Room Video Visitation Permitted	In-Person Suspended Attorney Visits in Visiting Room Video Visitation Permitted	In-Person Suspended Until Green. Attorney Visits in Visiting Room Video Visitation Permitted
Religious Activities	Delivered to housing units with religious services broadcast on inmate channel.	Delivered to housing units with religious services broadcast on inmate channel.	May resume in chapel with cohort and social distance limitations.	May resume in chapel with cohort and social distance limitations.	May resume in chapel with social distance limitations.
Unit Activity	Shower, Phones, Kiosks permitted in cohorts	Yard, Blockout, Showers, Phones, Kiosks permitted in cohorts	Yard, Blockout, Showers, Phones, Kiosks permitted in cohorts	Yard, Blockout, Showers, Phones, Kiosks permitted in cohorts. Special congregate events permitted.	Yard, Blockout, Showers, Phones, Kiosks permitted with social distancing limitations. Special congregate events permitted.

READER SURVEY

We welcome comments and suggestions from all readers. Please complete this form and mail it to PPS.

Is there any information you would like to see in Graterfriends that is not already included?

We are in the process of working to make our resource guide more helpful to our incarcerated readers. Are there any resources we have not included in past issues that you would like to see included in future issues, such as resources you have used in while incarcerated and have found useful? They can be related to books, legal help, reentry, etc.

COVID-19 SURVEY: PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SOCIETY

As part of our continued efforts to monitor prison conditions, we are asking you for your help understanding what is happening on the inside.

1. Do you feel safe? Yes No

2. Can you describe the atmosphere in the prison since the coronavirus outbreak?

3. What is the attitude of the staff like?

4. Have you seen any changes in activities and programming? Yes No Other
If so, what has changed?

5. Has there been a reduction in recreation time? Yes No Other
6. Are you able to wash your hands regularly? Yes No Other
7. Are you able to disinfect your cell regularly? Yes No Other
8. Is the prison disinfecting communal areas? Yes No Other
9. Are you and the people you know able to access medical care? Yes No Other
10. What are your concerns about how the prison is managing the coronavirus outbreak?

11. What facility are you in?

12. What is your housing unit?

13. What date did you fill out this survey?

14. OPTIONAL (your name will not be used in reporting out results)

a. Name and

b. Inmate Number

Thank you for your feedback. We are here during these uncertain times.

PLEASE NOTE: If you have other concerns, not related to the questions above, please write to us on a separate piece of paper. If you provide additional information on this survey, it may get lost.

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May/June 2020

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