

A Publication of The Pennsylvania Prison Society

GRATERFRIENDS

The mission of the Pennsylvania Prison Society is to advocate for humane prisons and a rational approach to criminal justice.

PA Lifer Bruce Norris Dies Awaiting Governor's Approval for Commutation

After 45 years in prison, Bruce Norris finally had a chance to come home to his family.

The Pennsylvania Board of Pardons voted unanimously to recommend his release, and all that remained was for Governor Wolf to sign off on his clemency. But the 69-year-old would never get his chance. His petition still sat on the governor's desk 40 days later, when he died from the COVID-19 he caught while waiting in prison.

We were deeply saddened to learn of Mr. Norris' passing, and our hearts go out to his loved ones. Altogether, 102 people in custody and 10 corrections workers have died from COVID-19.

Mr. Norris' death should never have happened. At a time when Governor Wolf's own corrections secretary continues to emphasize the need to release more people from prison, his inaction is putting lives in needless jeopardy.

Others continue to wait for the governor to act.

There are about a dozen other people whose life sentences were recommended

for clemency by the Board of Pardons but who remain in prisons amid raging coronavirus outbreaks as they wait for the governor's approval. According to reporting by The Appeal, Governor Wolf has so far approved only one lifer recommended by the board last year. Seven of them have been waiting for over 150 days.

"It is unthinkable to keep people who have been given such a rare glimmer of hope in limbo--especially during a deadly pandemic that is overwhelming our correctional facilities," wrote Celeste Trusty, Pennsylvania State Policy Director for FAMM in a letter to Governor Wolf this week.

We join FAMM in urging the governor to act immediately on the many clemency applications sitting on his desk. Securing a recommendation from the Board of Pardons is a rigorous, lengthy process in which applicants are vetted by the board's five members, including Attorney General Josh Shapiro, Lieutenant Governor John Fetterman, and a representative for crime victims. The review furnishes the governor with everything he needs to know about each petitioner's

case to make a decision.

The governor's office has said it doesn't have the resources to keep pace with its own review of clemency recommendations made by the board, which have increased during the pandemic. But the administration's apparently inflexible approach to reviewing these recommendations represents an indifference to the deadly threat of COVID-19 faced by people whom the board has deemed deserving of release.

It also represents another failure by the governor to use his executive power to reduce the number of people in prison and mitigate the coronavirus epidemic in prisons. The reprieve program he established earlier in the pandemic used narrow criteria and resulted in temporary reprieves for only 159 people, a small fraction of the population reduction of 12,000 corrections officials said was necessary to control outbreaks. The state prison system has still only reduced its population by about half of that number.

"Let me be very clear: we need further population reduction," Secretary of Corrections John Wetzel said at a hearing held by Democratic state senators last month.

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From the Social Services Director



Dear Friends of the Society,

Though we have entered a new year, many of the same challenges from 2020 have remained with us.

At the time of press, 103 people in custody and 11 staff in Pennsylvania prisons and jails have lost their lives to COVID-19. Our hearts go out to everyone who has lost a loved one. Each death is made more tragic by the slow pace of inoculation

with the vaccine that could have saved each life.

January saw a massive virus outbreak at SCI Forest County. With more than 800 infections among people in custody, Forest County is now the most infected county in the country per capita. This outbreak is a vivid example of why prisons must be prioritized for vaccines. In less than a month, the virus has spread to over 40 percent of the population. Just two weeks ago, the entire county had only seen 347 cases. To our readers in SCI Forest, we are thinking of you.

In most parts of Pennsylvania, people in custody and correctional staff may have to wait until spring for vaccination, meaning these particularly dangerous settings will remain vulnerable to massive outbreaks for months to come.

But several counties are starting the work to eradicate this ongoing public health crisis. In January, Crawford County vaccinated nearly its entire staff, and now the jail workforce in Adams, Butler, Centre, and Franklin counties have also begun receiving shots. We commend these counties for finding a way to deliver vaccines to. These shots will prevent more tragic deaths among corrections officers and help protect people in custody.

As prisons across the Commonwealth begin to roll out vaccines for incarcerated people, we encourage you to make the best choice to protect yourself and those around you. We are here to answer your questions and concerns. You are not alone.

With gratitude,

Kirstin Cornnell
Social Services Director

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We reserve the right to edit submissions. Original submissions will not be returned. 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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Never Give Up Your Fight for Freedom

By Daniel Cummings

My name is Daniel Cummings, but most know me by my alias, Ali. Many of you have already heard the good news. This time, it is not by way of inmate.com. Smile: I will soon be leaving and I want to encourage you to never give up hope.

After nearly five decades of incarceration, on September 4, 2020, all five members of the Pennsylvania Board of Pardons voted to give me another chance to live my life as a productive citizen. I will forever be grateful. But I will never be free until the other men and women who have been incarcerated for 30, 35, 40 years are given the same opportunity.

As Chairman of the Board, Lt. Governor Fetterman has improved the commutation process by making it possible for lifers to obtain free applications. Also, getting applications to the Board for a review is much better with Brandon Flood as the new Secretary. My case is an example of their improvements.

After 48 years of incarceration and six commutation denials, on May 7, 2019 I received a letter from the newly appointed Secretary, Brandon Flood, informing me that the Board of Pardons had granted my case a public hearing. On May 28th, I was transferred to SCI-Camp Hill for my conference with all five members of the Board. My case was held under advisement and eventually denied.

After that denial, I was losing hope in the commutation process, but the following statement about the Lt. Governor encouraged me to file for a reconsideration: "Lt. Governor John Fetterman said that he 'has one goal for his tenure in Harrisburg that eclipses all others: to make sure people don't needlessly die in prison.'"

The Pennsylvania Prison Society, Let's Get Free, Fight for Lifers, and many other supporters have fought for lifers to be given a chance to obtain our freedom by our own merit. And now Lt. Governor Fetterman and the current Board members are giving us that opportunity.

I am enclosing my presentation to the board on September 3, 2020 in the hope that my situation will encourage every Lifer across the Commonwealth to never give up fighting for freedom:

"First and foremost, I would like to thank my Lord and savior Jesus Christ for this blessed day.

Sir/Madam. On August 20, 1972 my wife was drugged and raped by an associate of ours. I immediately called the police, who took us to the hospital where my wife was treated. They then took us to the precinct where we were questioned in separate rooms.

After not getting the results that we expected from the police, at some point between August 21-23, I lost my ability to think. My inability to think during that stressful time in my life has

caused much pain and suffering that could have been avoided had I been mature enough to control my anger.

Fearing that the accused would get away with raping my wife, I expressed my frustration the only way I knew how at that time. I took the law into my own hands, and this mistake has kept me incarcerated for nearly five decades.

Even after 48 years, the pain of causing the death of another human being still grieves me.

For a long time, I felt that my actions of avenging my wife's rape was justified. After many violence prevention classes and a spiritual awakening, I saw the errors in my thinking. Today I can honestly tell you that I am so sorry for taking the life of the man my wife accused of raping her. The pain and grief from all that occurred during the early morning hours of August 23, 1972 never goes away.

After my spiritual transition and baptism in 1988, I sat down and wrote a two-page letter of remorse to the family of my wife's accused rapist. I sent that letter to the board to be forwarded on to the family.

After expressing my sorrow, I was able to let go of some of the grief that I had carried for many years, and I finally found some peace of mind in knowing that the occupants of the home I terrorized now know that I never had any intentions of harming them. My out-of-control rage was only directed towards the man that raped my wife.

Sir/Madam, I know that I can never make up for taking that man's life, but if given the chance to re-enter society, my life's mission will be working with community leaders who are trying to direct at-risk youths to better paths.

Education is the key, and I am a strong believer in the "each one, teach one" mentoring strategies. With assistance from my family, I have built a website specifically for the purpose of reaching our young people before it is too late.

I know that words have power. If the words of encouragement from my website can prick the conscience of just one, then I am hopeful that our "Stop the Killing" messages will spread throughout communities like a wildfire.

I was 26 when I was locked up. I am now 75 years old. In many ways, I am blessed. I don't have many of the medical problems that come with old age. So I have set some goals that I plan to accomplish before my life is over.

My ultimate goal and mission will be to make this Honorable Board proud if I am given another chance to prove that I can be

an asset rather than a liability to the city of Philadelphia and my community. In closing, I would like to extend my sincere apologies to the District Attorney's office and the citizens of Philadelphia for taking the law into my own hands and causing the death of one of its citizens.

If there are any questions, I will gladly answer them now truthfully and to the best of my ability."

UPDATE: On August 14, 2020 my case was granted another public hearing. On September 4, 2020 all five members of the Board of Pardons gave favorable votes for my case to go on to Governor Wolfe for executive clemency.

After living together for the past 48 years, many Lifers have become like family. For the rest of my life, I will be a Lifer. I will do whatever I can to give a voice to the 5,400 men and women serving life sentences in the state of Pennsylvania without the possibility of parole.

Many Lifers are remorseful and have demonstrated their self-worth for decades. Their submissions to my website will be an ongoing project.

Have your family and friends visit: www.Stop-TheKilling.com

From The Pennsylvania Prison Society

Police Can No Longer Search a Vehicle in Pennsylvania
When There is Only Probable Cause
Nicole Sloane, Criminal Defense Attorney

In *Commonwealth v. Alexander*, 2020 Pa. LEXIS 6439, No. 30 EAP 2019 (Pa. 2020), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court held that for police to search a vehicle without a warrant, they need both probable cause and exigent circumstances. This decision is contrary to and overrules the decision of the same Court in *Commonwealth v. Gary*, 91 A.3d 102 (Pa. 2014).

In the *Alexander* case, Philadelphia police stopped a vehicle operated by Alexander. The owner of the vehicle was a passenger. Officers smelled marijuana. Alexander explained that he and his passenger had just smoked. Officers arrested Alexander and placed him in handcuffs while they searched the vehicle for more marijuana. Police did not find marijuana. They did find a locked metal box located behind the driver's seat. Officers opened the box with a key on Alexander's keychain. The box contained bundles of heroin leading to Alexander being charged with possession with intent to deliver (PWID).

Alexander filed a suppression motion in which he challenged the search of the vehicle. The motion was denied. After Alexander was found guilty at the conclusion of a trial, he appealed the denial of his suppression motion. Alexander argued on appeal that police lacked probable cause to search the vehicle and needed a warrant to search the lockbox.

The Superior Court affirmed the decision of the suppression court denying Alexander's suppression motion based upon the holding in *Commonwealth v. Gary*. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court accepted review.

In its decision authored by Justice Donohue, a majority of the Court held that Article I, Section 8 of the Pennsylvania Constitution provides greater protections to our citizens than the Fourth Amendment of the United States Constitution. The Court held

that warrantless vehicle searches require both probable cause as well as exigent circumstances. One without the other is insufficient to justify a warrantless search of a vehicle.

The Court acknowledged the rights of citizens in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to be free from unreasonable searches and seizures. The Court reminds us that getting a warrant is the "default rule." If an officer proceeds to search without a warrant, a reviewing court will be required to determine whether there were exigent circumstances to justify the officer's judgment that it was not feasible to get a warrant before the search.

So what are exigent circumstances that would allow the police to search an automobile without a warrant? To answer that, the Court points to what they call a "survey of cases." The cases reveal that exigency (or the lack of exigency) often depends on minor facts in "complex, volatile, fast-moving, stressful, and potentially threatening situation[s] in the field." The Court recognizes that exigent circumstances may include facts surrounding whether police "could safely guard a vehicle [before a warrant was obtained] or another person might move the vehicle." As I write this, the Commonwealth still has time to seek review of the decision at the United States Supreme Court.

Pandemic in Our Prisons: A Virtual Public Hearing
Lara Bros, Pennsylvania Prison Society

Shortly after 11 AM on Wednesday, January 7th, Senator Katie Muth (D) welcomed PADOC staff, families of incarcerated individuals, legislators, and concerned stakeholders to the first virtual public hearing on the state of the pandemic in Pennsylvania facilities of the year. The first 90 minutes were spent on testimony from Department of Corrections Secretary, John Wetzel, who gave a lengthy recap of what PADOC has been doing since March in state facilities to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Senators Katie Muth (D), Anthony H. Williams (D), and Sharif Street (D) had called the public hearing in order to focus on

legislative strategies to support the state's corrections system. Sen. Sharif emphasized that "for moral and pragmatic reasons," everyone is in this together, saying "incarcerated individuals do not have the opportunity to make decisions on their environment," which makes community cooperation outside prisons all the more crucial. The first half of the hearing was spent by Secretary Wetzel reviewing the mitigation efforts that the PADOOC had put in place for the last 10 months. Wetzel reported that since mid-October, 17 incarcerated individuals had died, while 422 had been infected. He stated that 244 staff members had also been infected with COVID-19. Among other updates, Wetzel expressed confidence in the new administration in prioritizing COVID in prison, and anticipates video visiting every housing unit within the next few months, as well as vaccines for incarcerated individuals around April of this year.

After Wetzel's testimony, Sen. Williams acknowledged that there were over 300 questions from viewers, and requested that these questions be answered by PADOOC and posted publicly. Wetzel responded that someone on staff would "get to them with a packet of answers and information." There was overarching emphasis that legislature was the way to decarceration, and it was noted that throughout the pandemic, no legislation had been passed to expand the compassionate release program beyond its current state. Wetzel noted that decarceration has not led to an increase in crime, and believes an additional 2,500 incarcerated individuals would need to be released to lessen the impact inside. PADOOC reports that it has released 6,500 incarcerated individuals since March. When pressed by Sen. Nikil Saval (Philadelphia) about expanding reprieve to prioritize health and safety, Wetzel stated that the governor was not interested in continuing reprieves beyond the current 159 he had granted. The reprieve system has been criticized as a means for decarceration because time released does not count towards time served, and has resulted in 51 people to date being returned to facilities after their reprieve is up.

The remainder of the hearing was dedicated to advocate and family testimony, including testimony from Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, Claire Shubik-Richards. Shubik-Richards stated that in comparison to the rest of the United States, Pennsylvania is handling COVID in prisons considerably better, but urged for rapid weekly testing of staff in all facilities, a return to Zoom for video calls, and for county facilities to increase their transparency in reporting of cases. Families pleaded for legislators to take action after 10 months, voicing that they felt that people in power were showing massive indifference to their loved ones.

The Campaign to Deprivatize the George W. Hill
Correctional Facility in Delaware County, PA
Robert A. Cicchinelli, Official Visitor

The George W. Hill facility is the Delaware County jail and has the distinction of being the only privately-operated jail in Pennsylvania. Private management began in 1998 when political interests undermined the proposal for a new jail. Wackenhut—which changed its name to GEO Group as it grew worldwide—built the jail for \$40M less than was appropriated as part of an agreement that they would then run the jail. GEO left in

2008 after a spate of inmate deaths led to a number of lawsuits. CEC gained management, but GEO acquired that company in 2017 and once again regained control of GWH. Thus, the prison-for-profit industry established a toehold in Pennsylvania.

The new facility has 1,883 beds and has operated above that capacity several times. GEO temporarily expanded its profits by housing additional people from Philadelphia County (and triple-celling people to make room) until Philadelphia withdrew.

While GEO personnel managed and operated the facility, they answered to a county-appointed superintendent, John Reilly. Under Reilly, the jail was able to operate almost entirely out of public view. The problems inside the jail rarely saw the light of day. Conditions were deplorable, but there were also more extraordinary events, such as chronic failures of heating and air conditioning, lockdowns, assaults, deaths and even a small riot. Members of the Prison Society Board and staff toured the facility at the end of 2012 after a pregnant prisoner was assaulted twice and miscarried twins.

In November of 2017, Kabeera Weissman and Heather Schumacher began organizing around the issues inside the jail. It was during one of the first meetings that I was invited to share the Prison Society's role in Delaware County, the issues which our Official Visitors have addressed, comparisons with other jails, and a broader view of criminal justice issues. Members of the community shared their own stories and those of their loved ones. There quickly came an influx of concerned citizens from every neighborhood, and the Delaware County Coalition for Prison Reform—DelCo CPR—was born.

The new organization quickly formed teams for the gathering of stories, strategic planning, outreach, and leadership. The current leadership team consists of attorneys, academicians, former jail residents, and community members with direct knowledge and expertise on criminal justice issues. Stories come from former residents, their families, and even current and former staff.

The campaign was simple: return the facility to public management and improve outcomes for those who are housed there. The first obstacle was within government. The jail was overseen by a Board of Prison Inspectors established under a statute dating back to 1866. These five political appointees included some of those who had pushed for private management back in the 1990s. Their meetings were held inside the jail during business hours.

Recording of the meetings was prohibited until some of these same concerned citizens reported the matter to the Delaware County District Attorney as a violation of the Sunshine Act. The meetings were soon live-streamed. At the same time, DelCo CPR began the push for a new County Jail Oversight Board.

DelCo CPR also publicly endorsed candidates who backed returning the jail to county control. It held rallies on the steps of the Courthouse. In 2018, two Democrats were elected to the five-member council—first ever in the history of Delaware County. Having realized the success of their message, DelCo CPR organized a public hearing. More than 100 citizens packed

the room, and the news media was there to record the line of empty chairs that had been reserved for the County Council and prison Board.

By 2019, the campaign for deprivatization had become a major issue, and newly elected officials supported the efforts of the Delco CPR. The results were quick and rewarding. The Board of Inspectors was abolished and replaced with a new Oversight Board comprised of elected officials and three citizens from the community. One of those is Jonathan Abdur-Raheem King, who also served on the Board of the Prison Society several years ago.

The new County Council publicly committed to deprivatization, formed a transition team, and hired a consultant to guide them through the process. They have publicly stated their intent to serve notice by April 1 of this year; the jail will be publicly managed before this year ends.

DelCo CPR's has committed to more than 40 substantial changes. These include efforts to create more movement within the facility through programming and recreation, better and quicker access to health care, more comprehensive mental health care, improved hygiene and sanitation, repairs and upgrades to critical infrastructure, more nutritious meals, medically-assisted detox and treatment, more opportunities for visiting, free phone calls, and an emphasis on re-entry. In short, we hope that citizens will leave George W. Hill better than they went in.

COVID-19 Survey Update *Pennsylvania Prison Society*

The Prison Society is continuing the survey of our readers about the conditions inside during COVID-19. We have done our best to communicate the results of those surveys to you in each issue so that you know your voices are heard and responses are being used in an effective way to communicate your experiences to those on the outside. Your anonymized responses have been shared with both the Department of Corrections and the general public in two published reports.

In this issue, we will discuss findings from more in-depth questions on the most recent survey. The following statistics are highlights from the 372 (339 from SCIs and 33 from county jails) responses we received between July 3 and December 3.

We found that the perception of safety has decreased in this period compared to April - August. In the first survey, 45% of people responded "yes" to the question, "Do you feel safe?" In the second survey, this figure dropped to 34%.

What contributes to the well-being of people in custody during a pandemic?

Communication: Survey takers were asked to rank how satisfied they were with prison communication. Among the 121 survey respondents who reported being "very dissatisfied" with prison communication, only 10% felt safe. Among the 32 who were "satisfied", 78% felt safe. Most (53%) of respondents stated that

they received information about COVID-19 from a facility info channel on TV. 44% received information through paper bulletins on their unit, 25% through staff verbal communication, and 14% from town halls run by the administration. These percentages add up to more than 100% because respondents could select more than one.

Time Outside Cell & Yard Time: The more time respondents were given outside their cell, the more satisfied they were with their facility's COVID-19 response. The 93 respondents who did not go to yard in the past week were closer to "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied," while the rest of the respondents were, generally "neutral" with their facility's COVID-19 response.

Video Visits: The 22 respondents who received a video visit with good service in the past week said they were between "neutral" and "satisfied" with their facility's COVID-19 response. The respondents who did not receive a video visit (204 people) were closer to "dissatisfied" with their facility's COVID-19 response.

Psychological Services: The 144 people who have spoken to someone from psychological services were generally neutral about their facility's COVID-19 response, while the 69 people who tried but have not been able to speak with someone from psychological services were "dissatisfied."

Access to a TV: On average, the 32 respondents who did not have access to a TV were "very dissatisfied" or "dissatisfied" with their facility's COVID-19 response. People who had access to either a block or personal TV were somewhat less dissatisfied, and people who had access to both a block and personal TV (n=93) generally felt "neutral."

Library Book Delivery: On average, the 122 respondents who say that library book delivery was offered were closer to "neutral" than "dissatisfied" with facility response, while the 201 respondents who did not have access to library book delivery are closer to "dissatisfied" than neutral. The 74 respondents who accessed the law library in the past week were on average "neutral" with their facility's COVID-19 response, while the 86 respondents who had tried but were not able to access the law library were, on average, "dissatisfied" with their facility's COVID-19 response.

Board Games & Puzzles: On average, the 71 respondents who said their facility offered board games were "neutral" with their facility's COVID-19 response, while the 252 respondents who were not offered board games were, on average, "dissatisfied" with their facility's COVID-19 response. The 110 respondents who said their facility offers puzzles felt more positively with their facility's COVID-19 response than the 213 respondents who say that they were not offered puzzles.

These results, along with more detailed analyses, have been presented to the PA Department of Corrections. Once it has provided comment, the full report will be issued publicly and within Graterfriends. A copy of our survey is attached to this issue. If you choose to fill it out and send it to us, that will help with our continued efforts to track how this pandemic is affecting people in custody over time. It would be helpful for you to take this survey even if you've taken it previously.

New Pennsylvania Resource Guides
Pennsylvania Prison Society

The Pennsylvania Prison Society recently partnered with the Sheller Center at Temple University School of Law to create resource guides for those in Pennsylvania state prisons. **These do not apply to our readers out of state or in county or federal facilities.**

These guides include information about:

- How to file a grievance
- Obtaining I.D. documents
- Accessing medical treatment
- Phone call help
- Appealing solitary confinement
- Child custody and support
- Compassionate release
- Reporting sexual abuse
- Reporting physical abuse
- Visits
- Transfers
- Receiving Mail

These guides include explanations of PA state prison policies, forms that you need to obtain, case law relevant to that topic, and legal organizations that may be able to help if you feel your rights have been violated.

Please write to us for copies of any of the above resource guides.

Native American Organizations
Rev. Bernie Ryan, O. N. P., Affiliate Pan American Indian Association

The construction of the Sweat Lodge at SCI Benner (first mentioned in the September/October 2020 issue of Graterfriends) is a wonderful religious accommodation for Native American prac-

tioners at that facility.

Nevertheless, everyone should be reminded not to allow this court victory in *Banks v. Smith* to create any careless notion for collective group petitions or secretive “Warrior” movements within the PA DOC. Exercising religious rights to practice tenets requires individual religious accommodation requests to the chaplaincy department.

Most significantly, aggressively promoting group stratagems is risky and may lead to problems. The DOC closely monitors and scrutinizes any outside organizational affiliations inmates may have, as well as their influence on any internal behaviors and unauthorized activities. Keeping the state facilities secure and orderly is a top priority for the DOC.

Membership in the American Indian Movement (AIM) or any Native American Organization does not mean they have the authority to require or dictate policy or the rules governing religious services within any Correctional Institutions.

Although not every PA DOC facility have its own Native Chaplain, the DOC does have qualified Native Chaplains, as well as spiritual advisors who can consult and meet the spiritual needs of inmates at some facilities.

Hopefully, the introduction of the sweat lodge at SCI Benner will be an inspiration to everyone, helping those practitioners to change their lives for the better. By reconnecting with their heritage and traditions, they might become better people who will not repeat those things that resulted in their Iron House experience. Aho!

Book Recommendations

Recommended by John Adams at Morgan County Jail and Clifford Karolski at SCI Camp Hill

Ithaca College Books Thru Bars
Ithaca College Library
P.O. Box 113
Brooktondale, NY 14817

Prison Book Program
Lucy Parsons Bookstore
1306 Hancock Street, Suite 100
Quincy, MA 02169

Providence Books Through Bars
42 Lenox Avenue
Providence, RI 02907-1910

Books Behind Bars
Prison Mindfulness Institute
P.O. Box 206
South Deerfield, MA 01373

Book ‘Em
The Big Idea bookstore
5129 Penn Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15224

Books to Prisoners Left Bank Books
92 Pike Street, Box Seattle, WA 98101

The Country Bookshop
Vermont Books to Prisoners
P.O. Box 234
Plainfield, VT 05667

Antioch College Books to Prisoners Project
One Morgan Place
Yellow Springs, OHIO 45387

Appalachian Prison Book Project
PO Box 601
Morgantown WV 26507

Ashville Prison Books Project
Downtown Books and News
67 N. Lexington Ave.
Ashville, NC 28801

Helpful Tips for Requesting Books

- Limit your selection list to no more than six.
- Always specify if your facility allows used and hardcover books.
- Do not request books from the same donor for a minimum of 90 days (three months).
- Avoid messy hand-writing.
- Always include your address at the bottom

of your letter.

- Always allow at least 90 days for delivery.

Sample Letter:

Wednesday, March 27 2019

Hello,

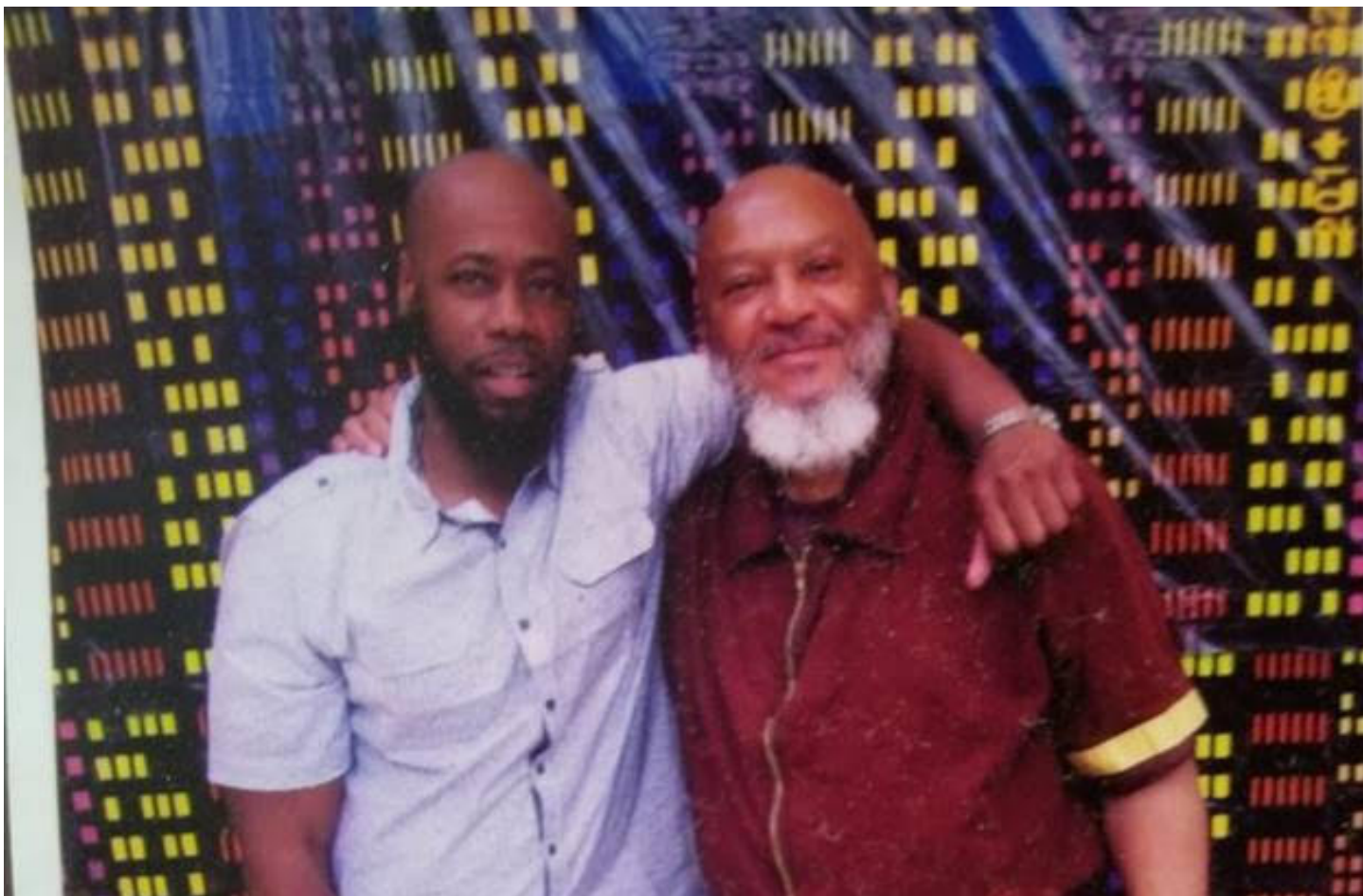
I am writing to respectfully request any soft-back books you can provide on the following True Crime, Fantasy, Poetry, Westerns, and Self-Help.

Thank you so much for your time and efforts.

Respectfully Submitted,
John Adams #123456
Po Box 2000
Wartburg, TN 37887

Reminder: Donations like books are expensive, and often not tax write offs. If it's within your ability to send a donation please do! Even if it's only one stamp. Anything helps. Proverbs 3:27 - Do not withhold good from those whom it is due when it is in your power to do it.

In Memoriam



In Memory of Bruce Norris

By Stan Rosenthal, SCI Phoenix

Commuted PA lifer and my dear friend, Bruce Norris passed away early on January 31st, 2021 from COVID-19 in a local Norristown, Pennsylvania hospital. I have known Bruce since 1989 when we worked together in the industries office and continued to work together when I clerked in the Activities Department. He was truly a good friend and possessed all the good qualities one would seek in a friend. He was a kind, honest and gentle person, always willing to help those in need. He tutored Villanova University students in Latin, sold Girl Scout Cookies for many years, and was heavily involved with the Lifers, Inc. prisoner based organization. He was committed to the indoor/outdoor Volleyball Program and rose to League Commissioner. He was always honest and fair. He defused heated volleyball games with his wise words and calm demeanor.

A true gentleman.

We talked regularly about his plans to move in with his sister in Northeast Philly. Perry Lighty (Face), his son, had a car, phone and a bicycle waiting for him. Bruce dreamed of a Sunday bicycle ride along the Schuylkill River on Boathouse Row. He was so excited to go on a ride with his children. His smile filled his face in those moments where he talked about those bike rides. We planned our ride together, someday.

I looked forward to speaking to him everyday, which was easy, as we lived on the same tier. I feel so bad for his loving family that always fought hard to get him home. He was only the Governor's signature away from freedom. Society missed out on Bruce's reentry. He would have shined brightly and given as much love as he received.

Bruce is included in the book *Doing Time* by Howard Zehr. We'll always have that lovely photo, his memory, and his words.

Be free, my friend. You are dearly missed.

Reports From the Inside

Breaking The Chains of Economic Slavery *Omar Askia Ali Sistrunk, SCI Coal Township*

The United States is a capitalist driven democracy where the marketplace is king and money is the horsepower that pulls dreams into reality. America was built off of profit made from the stolen bodies and labor of black slaves. History teaches us that the trans-atlantic slave trade was about economics, as was the Civil War. Indeed, at the core of racism is economics and an unearthly fear white people have of losing power to others, especially African Americans.

But what happens when a person with no money is locked out of any meaningful opportunities to obtain it? American history claims that President Lincoln freed the slaves, but freed them to do what? Their descendants remain an underclass battling a majority invested in their inequality and disenfranchisement. 95% of the U.S. prison population is in prison due to economically related crimes.

The by-product of the government's response to the increases in crime has been the creation of the "Prison Industrial Complex." Decades after, it is evident that the crime problem cannot be solved by building more prisons. The cost of building prisons and maintaining bloated prison populations has all but gutted state budgets.

The prison experiment has been both a racist and classist endeavor. The people at the top—the rich, wealthy, and white privileged—have not been affected. Poor whites have been ruled out of the equation, because their benefit therefrom is miniscule. In truth, impoverished whites of today are likely descendants of impoverished whites of yesterday. In any event, prisons are big, big business. Prison industries are traded on Wall Street. Businesses like Keefe have gotten fat off of the runaway Prison Industry Complex. It is now apparent to most that prisons are not the answer and that they have only operated to warehouse African Americans, Latinos, and poor whites.

Thrive for Enhancement *Bennie Brimage, SCI Mercer*

I am speaking to all Lifers with 20-or-more years served. There are roadblocks placed before us that only we can remove through knowledge and assertiveness. Let's take the steps to get where we need to be.

First, go to the Law Library and ask to see DOC Policy Manual 11.2.1. Make copies of the policies dealing with CL2 and CL2R Custody Levels for lifers.

If you don't know your custody level, you can ask your counselor. If your counselor states he/she has "overwritten" you to a CL3 but your PACT score is a 2, simply thank them and walk away.

Now for the enhancement. Compose a letter to the Director (Ms. Erin Brown) of Treatment Services. Tell her you are trying

to get your CL2R, but your Unit Management Team (UMT) is saying you can't because you're a Lifer. Explain that they have overridden you to a CL3 for no reason. Close the letter by informing them that DOC Manual 11.2.1 contains no such thing as a Lifer override, but rather states that Lifers should seek Outside Clearance (CL2R) status because it demonstrates reform and trustworthiness when it comes to Clemency. Ms. Brown will respond letting you know what you must present to your UMT to get your Outside Clearance. This policy was last updated in 2017.

I was a CL2 from November 1985 (CL3 was CL2 back then) until October 2019, with CL2R status from 1986-1995 and 2001-2012. We have to use every tool in our box to achieve our freedom.

Open Letter to Secretary Wetzel *Joseph Eaddy, SCI Dallas*

Temporary complacency tends to turn into permanent status if not challenged. In the current COVID-19 status, the steps the DOC has taken to keep family and inmates safe have been understandable.

It has come to our knowledge that the DOC is tampering with contact visits by erecting thick plastic partitions with phones, depriving inmates of the ability to stay in "touch" with, and, close bond to, family. The reality is that these institutions are home to many inmates who may never leave. You are taking away our humanity. By creating these barriers, you are giving the men and women in these institutions nothing to strive for.

Secretary Wetzel, levels of visits earned, and many of us have dedicated our time, patience, and good behavior for the ability to hold and be close to our families. Please don't alter this.

The mail system, now run through a third-party, deprives us of the ability to "smell home" in letters and of the right to see the progress of our children's work, their first numbers and letters. Yet, for the safety of the staff and others, the DOC adopted it.

Every visit is the most disgusting and degrading process of stripping naked, having every orifice examined, just to see our families, then done all over again upon the visit's end. Additionally, we must go through a state-of-the-art TSA body scanner to ensure we, or our families, haven't introduced any contraband. Every avenue for inmates to introduce contraband has been thwarted. Every inmate who transfers in or out, goes on a hospital run, is admitted or released from the RHU (the hole), or comes back from community work detail, must go through the body scanner to ensure no contraband is brought in.

When is Secretary Wetzel going to ask the inevitable question of not how, but who is introducing contraband into their institutions? Why, with all the present restrictions, are there still inmates overdosing, providing 'hot' urine tests and still in 2020, leaving these institutions with drug habits? These are the questions that need to be asked and answered instead of investing further frivolous spending to address a problem that the DOC

has supposedly addressed with its state-of-the-art security against the inmate population. It's not every staff member, but we know there are some who have spit in the face of the code of ethics they signed to uphold.

Secretary Wetzel, maybe it's time drug sniffing dogs are placed at staff entrances instead of in inmate cells and pat searching every staff member prior to shift. If they have an issue with it, then they should be asked the statement asked of every inmate prior to any search or pat down: "If you have nothing to hide, then there's nothing to worry about." Frankly, isn't it everyone's responsibility to uphold the security of the institution? Both inmates and staff?

By erecting these partitions, you are taking the humanity out of the men and women in these institutions by denying humans the ability to touch and bond with family.

Equal Justice Initiative
Frederick Page, SCI Phoenix

In all our efforts to promote Aging Out, we've awakened to a series of fragmented issues. To remind you, "Aging Out" is simply an across-the-board second-chance review for those who have served 25 years or more and are age 50 or older. That covers everyone who has been sentenced as a Long-Term Offender. That is Life Without Parole, Virtual Life and sentences designed to warehouse, rather than rehabilitate, incarcerated people.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Politics and public opinion seem to only address individual instances of injustice. Lifers Bills, 2nd Degree Bills, 18-25 Bills, Elderly Medical Parole Bills, Compassionate Release Bills are all designed to fight what is unjust. But, there is still a need for us to build a unified front towards a justice-for-all approach. Our energy should be directed towards eradicating injustice across the board.

The only standing release mechanism that reflects an equal justice initiative for Aging Out has been the newly established reforms of commutation. The commutation reforms of Lt. Governor John Fetterman have addressed all types of death by incarceration sentencing imposed upon Long-Term Offenders. That shows progress. It implies justice through second-chance reviews of one's own merit, setting an example for legislators to follow while considering revising current law. A working commutation process reflects true potential in both theory and practice by letting qualified, rehabilitated seniors out of prison. But, it addresses only some groups.

A united front begins with us partnering in promoting what works to establish true justice and not group justice. True justice covers the whole of injustice by seeking a cure to restore justice; group justice fails to address the pain and suffering of some who were bitten by the same snake as those it addresses. We must all call to end over-incarceration by establishing an equal justice initiative through just-release mechanisms. This is the responsibility of all organizations, civic leaders, legislators, the public, and incarcerated persons. Can we consider what

reform looks like following the example of the current commutation reforms? Take a stand for justice, not just us!

Why So Much Hate?
Anthony "Whitey" Day, SCI Albion

Where does racism begin? Why do people hate those whose skin color differs from their own?

This doesn't make sense to me. It confuses me so badly that I had to write these questions down and stare at them in search of an answer. The result? I have none.

What if we only saw in black and white? Would color still be an issue? Better yet, what if we were all blind? We could no longer hate based on color, right?

Why can't we appreciate the color of another person's skin just as we appreciate the different colors of flowers, the shades of grass, the autumn leaves? Wouldn't the world be a boring place without these colors? All that would be left is black and white, dark and light, you and me. Inside we are all the same. When I cut myself shaving, the blood that flows from the wound is the same color that flows from the wounds of all humans. We are human beings; we all come from different places, but on the inside, we are the same. If your child were ill and in need of an organ transplant, would you care what color the donor's skin was? Really, would it matter? Would you refuse lifesaving medical treatment for your child because the provider's skin is a different color than yours?

We need to stop focusing on the color of a person's skin and love each other for who each is. If everyone looked exactly the same on the outside, then our world would be boring, which is why our Lord decided to give us individual and

PA Parole Board Game
Larry Walker, Randolph Creighton-El, Charles Swartz SR, SCI Houtzdale

Times are tough during this COVID-19 pandemic and, within the prison system, perhaps tougher. You would think that our "great" Commonwealth, especially its PA Board of Probation and Parole (PBPP), would finally start to do right by those who are worthy within the prison system. However, that is not the case. The PBPP is operating with a "more of the same" attitude. Here is an example:

Inmates in SCI Houtzdale are denied parole for draconian reasons that do not support any penological goal. In one instance, Charles Swartz, Sr., has been incarcerated for a 13-year period. He received two hits by the PBPP in his first try. The first stated that institutional reports showed that he was a possible risk to the community. The second stated that he was a flat-out risk to the community. But, this does not add up for two reasons.

For one, Mr. Swartz, Sr., cannot be considered a "risk" to the community because he has not had any ties to his communi-

ty other than his family for over a decade. Statistics show that those who maintain strong ties to their families have a greater chance to become assets to their communities. Secondly, during his 13-year incarceration, Mr. Swartz, Sr., has not had any violent misconduct. While he has had two misconducts while incarcerated, they were not of the type that would show he is incorrigible.

Mr. Swartz, Sr., has demonstrated exactly what the PBPP and the PA DOC requires of an inmate for parole consideration. During the incarceration period, he has completed all of his programs, volunteered in other programs, and has maintained a job his entire 13-year stay. These actions by Mr. Swartz, Sr., prove that he will not be a risk to the community where he is paroled.

While his offense was not non-violent, Mr. Swartz, Sr., asks that he be treated fairly. The Governor has issued a reprieve releasing inmates who meet certain qualifications. Since that order, the Commonwealth has released inmates. Why is it that those who are qualified for parole are not being treated the same as those who meet the qualifications for reprieves?

In closing, it is unfair for inmates across the state to be denied parole when they have done everything they were asked to do and more to receive reprieves. People like Mr. Swartz, Sr., are being unlawfully subject to the draconian system of the PBPP. When will this stop? We call on all those who have been subjected to such punishments to complain to lawmakers. Although parole is a privilege, we should be treated fairly when we have met the very standard the system wants us to meet. Let's act now by doing our part in the fight for equality and justice.

The New RRL Experiment *Dale Wakefield, SCI Greene*

Inmates are being held on the Restricted Release List (RRL) under the extreme conditions of solitary confinement with impunity, causing irreparable harm to our mental and physical health. On October 15 2020, the administration at SCI Greene moved all of us on the RRL to L-block, formerly the Capital Case unit. According to the central office, all inmates on the RRL throughout the DOC will be housed at either SCI Greene or SCI Phoenix for the intended purpose of working us back to the general population. This was taken as more out-of-cell time, more social interactions and opportunities, but this is not the case. Instead, this is an experiment. We are treated indifferently and unequally, warehoused at this location indefinitely under the cruelty of solitary confinement. The torturous nature of these conditions cannot be understated.

The block they moved us to, L-block, wasn't even ready to adequately house us. We have no shelves, lockers, or mirrors in our cells. The 3x3 shower cages have no hooks to hang our clothes and towels on, violating PREA standards. The mini law libraries are not operational and only allow one inmate at a time. Even in the added crisis of a COVID-19 outbreak at SCI Greene, solitary confinement is receiving no fresh air from the outside. There are no windows to open and no proper ventilation. We

are being denied proper access to our mail and telephones to contact our families and loved ones, causing severe stress, anxiety, panic attacks, and depression. In the midst of this crisis, we are being tortured, a violation of the 8th amendment.

Pennsylvania and the PADOC have a rich history of such callous, systematic, patterned behavior, and have willfully seen fit to maintain this course no matter how much society has evolved. s. They are warehousing prisoners like us through an outdated system and draconian measures.

Legislative Updates & More *Robert Pezzeca, SCI Forest*

The Democrats have not controlled Pennsylvania's legislature in 25-plus years. The last time the Democrats controlled the State Senate was decades ago. We have a duty as prisoners to focus on the caucuses. The Criminal Justice Reform Caucuses in the House and Senate are powerful groups. Last year, the House leaders were Cheryl Delozier and Jordan Harris. The Senate Leaders were Camera Bartolotta and Art Haywood. But the Judiciary Committee is run by Republicans, and I don't think they want change. In the September/October Issue of Graterfriends, James Brown from SCI Albion spoke of a good time bill in his article. I know Democrats want to pass something like this, but can't. The only way we get change is a unified voice and the ballot box. But, Nov. 3 came and went and so many Democrat hopefuls were destroyed at the polls. We gained no ground. Now, once again in PA, we remain a Republican-controlled state.

We need John Fetterman to run for governor. You should have your family and friends slam his office with thousands upon thousands of letters urging him to run. It's the only way we get change. Attorney General Josh Shapiro seems slated to be our next governor. He will surely run on the next Democratic ticket. Is that who we prisoners want? I say no way.

I have seen my lifer friends die in prison because PA doesn't want to change. And, 19 innocent Philly lifers (17 Black, one Latinx, one white) and one from death row have been freed in the last few years under DA Krasner. But, at the last merit review, most lifers did not receive a single yes vote. We can all sit here and complain about more cable channels and better tablets or more sales or we can focus on our futures. We are 45,000-plus. Our voice could be powerful if we used it as one. But we don't.

However, the few of us who have been exonerated often choose to help out those still behind bars.

Terrance Lewis was an innocent lifer who earned his freedom and now fights for Philly lifers. He used his lawsuit to start a foundation. If you are a Philly lifer who has an actual innocence claim with some sort of proof to back it up, please contact the Terrance Lewis Liberation Foundation at P.O. Box 6363, Philadelphia, PA 19139. I applaud this man and his efforts. And, I want to congratulate my Philadelphia brother Bobby "Taqui" Harris on recently getting married! Bobby spent 29 years in prison as a juvenile lifer. He is home, working hard now.

He created the non-profit Unincarcerated Minds. Let's all get involved; it's not too late.

Inmate Lives Matter
Dwayne Hall, SCI Coal Township

With all of the racial injustice going on in the world, why is racism in prisons overlooked?

Is it because society views inmates as the scum of the Earth since we may have committed acts it has criminalized? Many of us in these prisons are actually innocent. And regardless of guilt, we are still people and our lives should matter, too. Unfortunately, inside these walls, black lives clearly and consistently do not matter.

What has to be done for us to matter? When will change come for incarcerated souls? We all must stick together, speak our minds, and voice our oppression. We cannot fix this if we are never properly heard.

#InmatesLivesMatter
#OutsideSupportNeeded.

For Augusto "Junior" Gonzalez
Robert Pezzeca, SCI Forest

I was informed recently that my dear friend died from the Coronavirus. Let me tell you briefly about my friend. I was in SCI Huntingdon with Junior for over 10 years. During my time on B-block with him, Junior was kind to anyone. He helped everyone out. For an old head, he was a fantastic goalie in hockey. I remember one game I shot the puck at him from up close, he caught it in mid air with the glove, tossed it back out, and I batted it back at him like it was a baseball and scored. He promised me I'd never score on him again, and I didn't. Junior was a great person who did not deserve to die in prison, let alone die from this virus. As someone who spent over 10 years in SCI Huntingdon, I know he received the poorest possible medical care. Riposa in Pace, Junior. His life sentence is over, and he is at peace now.

Goodbye, my friend.

Tributes to Those Lost During COVID-19

The Graterfriends team was greatly moved by Andrew O-Lock's piece *Lifers Lost* found in the July/August 2020 Edition (Vol. 48, Issue 7) as well as Stan Rosenthal's tribute to Bruce Norris found in this issue.

The large-scale impact of this pandemic has led to many deaths becoming part of a statistic, especially for those lost inside our prisons and jails. We would like to offer up the opportunity for others to write a tribute to someone on the inside that they have lost. We will feature these tributes in the next issue of Graterfriends.

Please write us a tribute with the following information:

Individual's name
Facility they were incarcerated
A few sentences about their life and impact.

PENNSYLVANIA
PRISON SOCIETY



—SINCE 1787—

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
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) you 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 & 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

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: hbinfo@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.]

January 2021

Members of Pennsylvania's General Assembly were sworn in for the upcoming legislative session on January 5, 2021. Senator Brewster (SD-45) was sworn in on January 13, 2021. We have 31 newly-elected legislators in our General Assembly this session.

As we see at the beginning of each legislative session, a flurry of cosponsorship memos and pieces of legislation have been introduced. We also expect many of the proposed reforms from last session, such as parole reform, to be introduced in the coming weeks.

The Senate and House Judiciary Committee assignments have been made for the upcoming legislative session:

Senate Judiciary Committee

Sen. Lisa Baker (R) - Chair
Sen. Gene Yaw (R) - Vice Chair
Sen. Stephen Santarsiero (D) - Minority Chair
Sen. Ryan Aument (R)
Sen. John Gordner (R)
Sen. Wayne Langerholc, Jr. (R)
Sen. Scott Martin (R)
Sen. Joe Pittman (R)
Sen. Mike Regan (R)
Sen. Amanda Cappelletti (D)
Sen. Maria Collett (D)
Sen. Art Haywood (D)
Sen. John Sabatina (D)

House Judiciary Committee

Members:
Rep. Rob Kauffman (R) - Chair
Rep. Tim Briggs (D) - Democratic Chair
Rep. Timothy Bonner (R)
Rep. Matthew Dowling (R)
Rep. Torren Ecker (R)
Rep. Johnathan Hershey (R)
Rep. Barry Jozwiak (R)
Rep. Joshua Kail (R)
Rep. Kate Klunk (R)
Rep. Jerry Knowles (R)
Rep. Andrew Lewis (R)
Rep. Natalie Mihalek (R)
Rep. David Millard (R)
Rep. Jim Rigby (R)
Rep. Paul Schemel (R)
Rep. Todd Stephens (R)
Rep. Jason Dawkins (D)
Rep. Liz Hanbidge (D)
Rep. Joseph Hohenstein (D)
Rep. Emily Kinkead (D)
Rep. Summer Lee (D)
Rep. Christopher Rabb (D)
Rep. Melissa Shusterman (D)
Rep. Jared Solomon (D)
Rep. Mike Zabel (D)

PA State House Judiciary Committee Actions

HB 14

House Joint Resolution **HB 14** seeks to amend the Pennsylvania Constitution to create a two-year window for people to begin a civil action for childhood sexual abuse if the statutory of limitations has previously expired.

Introduced by Rep. Gregory (R). **HB 14** passed out of the House Judiciary Committee on January 13, 2021.

HB 38

House Joint Resolution **HB 38** seeks to amend the Pennsylvania Constitution to change how appellate court judges are elected in Pennsylvania. **HB 38** would redistrict the Commonwealth into nine districts for the Commonwealth Court, fifteen districts for the Superior Court, and seven for the Supreme Court. **HB 38** would also require candidates for these Courts to live within the district in which they hope to be seated.

Rep. Diamond (R). **HB 38** is opposed by numerous civil rights, criminal justice reform, and legal advocacy groups. Passed out of the House Judiciary Committee on January 13, 2021.

Reader Survey

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

We hope you enjoyed our literary issue that we released at the end of 2020!

In 2021, we are looking to model a traditional literary magazine and have one common theme for the creative piece. We want your input!

What themes would you like to suggest for our 2021 creative issue?

We are also looking for visual art pieces throughout the year to use in our bimonthly issues. If you enjoy creating visual art- paintings, drawings, etc, please send them for use in upcoming issues!

COVID-19 Survey

As part of our continued efforts to monitor prison conditions, we are asking you for your help understanding what is happening on the inside. Since we have added some new questions, even if you have taken a version of this survey previously, it would help if you would fill it out again.

Please fill out this survey and mail it back to us at:
230 South Broad Street, Suite 605, Philadelphia, PA 19102.

1. Do you feel safe? Yes | No
2. How satisfied are you with the accessibility of medical care during the COVID-19 pandemic?
Very Dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neutral Satisfied Very Satisfied
3. How did you get information from the prison about COVID-19? (select all that apply)
Paper Bulletin on Unit Facility Info Channel on TV
Verbal communication by staff Town Halls run by prison administration
I did not get this information Other, please specify: _____
4. Do you have access to a TV?
Yes, block TV Yes, personal TV Yes, block TV & personal TV No
5. How satisfied have you been with communication about prison policy from the prison staff?
Very Dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neutral Satisfied Very Satisfied
6. How frequently do staff members wear masks?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
7. Did the incarcerated people around you follow good health practices in the last week by washing their hands often?
No Yes Unsure
8. Did the incarcerated people around you follow good health practices in the last week by cleaning shared items after use (example: phones)?
No Yes Unsure
9. Did the common areas you have access to get cleaned at least two times a day in the last week (examples: dayrooms, showers)?
No Some areas, but not all Yes, all areas Unsure
10. How often did you get cleaning chemicals from the prison to clean your cell / sleeping area in the last week (examples: soap, bleach, or peroxide)?
Never Once last week 2 or 3 times last week Unsure
11. Did you get enough cleaning chemicals to thoroughly clean your cell / sleeping area in the last week?
No, I did not get any No, did not get enough Yes Unsure
12. Did you have enough soap to regularly wash your hands in the last week?
No Yes Yes, but I had to purchase some from the commissary Unsure
13. How many times in the last week did you shower?
None, I was not able to shower None, I chose not to shower
1-2 times 3-4 times More than 5 times
14. How satisfied are you with the size of the meals you were served this past week?
Very Dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neutral Satisfied Very Satisfied

15. How satisfied are you with the quality of the meals you were served this past week?
Very Dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neutral Satisfied Very Satisfied

16. What activities/services is the prison administration providing to people in custody? (select all that apply)
Board Games Puzzles Bingo Religious Services
Library Book Delivery Other, please specify: _____

17. Last week, did you access the law library?
No, did not try to No, was not able to Yes

18. How much time outside of the cell (not including yard time) do you get per day?
Less than 30 minutes 30-60 minutes 60-90 minutes 90-120 minute 120+ minutes

19. How many times did you go to the yard last week?
I did not go to the yard (did not want to) I did not go to the yard (not allowed)
1-2 times 3-4 times 5 or more times

20. How many free phone calls did you make in the past week?
None 1-2 3-4 5 More than 5

21. In the past week, did you send at least one free email?
No, did not try to No, was not able to Yes

22. Did you get a free video visit in the last week?
No Yes, but bad service Yes, & it worked Does not apply to me

23. Since the start of the COVID-19 lockdown, have you spoken with anyone from psychological services?
No, have not tried to No, have not been able to Yes

24. Are you aware of the DOC policy change that medical co-pays are waived for flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, chest tightness, etc.)? Yes | No

25. How satisfied are you with the way your facility has responded to COVID-19?
Very Dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neutral Satisfied Very Satisfied

26. If you'd like to add to your answers above: What is the atmosphere of the prison like?

27. If you'd like to add to your answers above: What is the attitude of the staff like?

28. If you'd like to add to your answers above: What are your concerns about how the prison is managing the coronavirus outbreak?

29. What facility are you in? _____

30. Are you in the RHU? Yes | No

31. What is your housing unit? _____

32. What date did you fill out this survey? _____

33. Have you taken a version of this survey earlier? Yes | No

OPTIONAL (your name will not be used in reporting our results)

Name: _____

PPN 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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