

# GRATER FRIENDS

## ***Rewriting the Script with Love by Darrell Sharpe of SCI Norfolk***

Non-violence requires strength for some people, but even more so for those of us coming out of violent neighborhoods. From a very young age, most of us are taught that violence is a legitimate method, not just for resolving conflict and survival, but for acquiring wealth too. Violence is deeply ingrained in our psyche. This is what makes acting with nonviolence difficult; this is why it requires strength.

First, we have to learn why violence is not a solution. We have to understand what impact violence has, not just on the victim or our communities but on the offenders themselves. A person who continuously carries out acts on other human beings will eventually suffer from what Frantz Fanon calls “Reactionary Psychosis.” These are severe psychological disorders that stem from violence and traumatic events.

So, after we learn why and how violence is not a solution, we must then start the process of deprogramming ourselves. We must take a critical and painful inventory so that we may adopt new sound principles for living. This is by no means going to be easy! We have to confront the ugly truth of who we were/are head on, which will take us out of our comfort zone. But, it’s necessary, particularly for those of us who have been stuck in these mind-sets for many years. We have loved ones awaiting our return, communities that need us to demon-

strate that manhood is more than reacting violently to conflict, and a world that needs our skill sets, talents, our love and understanding.

“Deprogramming” for me meant that I had to begin challenging the very beliefs that I had acquired coming up in the neighborhood I grew up in. I was a product of programming: the script that had been laid out for me. I realized my beliefs had shaped my attitude, which shaped my actions, which shaped my habits. I’m a creature of habit, and I was in the habit of thinking that to be kind, generous, loving, etc. was weak; to demonstrate these very virtues would be subjecting myself to being preyed on or victimized. But, I had to re-assess these things because not only were they diametrically opposed to the values I was raised with, but also because they were in conflict with the type of future I was beginning to envision for myself.

Dr. King said, “To meet hate with retaliatory hate would do nothing but intensify the existence of evil in the universe. Hate begets hate.” And if I accept this truth, and I do, then its opposite is also true: Meeting love with a greater love would only intensify the existence of love and kindness in the universe, for love begets love just the same. So it is with all virtue! This is the path that I have taken, and it has sincerely proven to be extremely beneficial and has rewarded me beautifully in more ways than I can possibly think of.

## **March & April: In This Issue**

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# Letter from the Editor

Dear Friends,

Spring is coming! As I write this, we are in the middle of one of those cold March spells, but warm weather is on its way. It's a time of year that is still winter, but after the bright spot of many people's holiday celebrations. We saw this tone while compiling this issue and have included some thought-provoking pieces in this issue. We hope reading this ignites some creative and energetic juices in our writers to help get you through the rest of the winter slump.

In this issue, Timothy Wright, one of the original creators of this newsletter, calls our attention to the importance of this *Graterfriends* community:

"The premise of creating *Graterfriends* was for the sole purpose of having each prison communicate with each other through *Graterfriends* so we could support each other. At this time, there were only seven prisons, with a couple in production at the time. And if there was a problem in one facility, all the rest wrote and advocated for change until that problem in that prison was rectified. There was a unity about prisons that doesn't exist today."

We see this camaraderie as we go back through our archives, and we see it in this issue as

well. You will hear from Gary Nelson and David Bohm about their opinions and concerns with the current meal policies. Both of these men are from different facilities, yet bringing their opinions together is important to build that unity that Mr. Wright calls us to remember.

Other problems that our fellow authors bring up in this issue are Darren Gentilquore's call for bringing back typewriters, Richard Gross's plea to have affordable dentures, and Patrick Horan's commentary on the e-cigarette pandemic inside prisons. What do you think about these issues? Do you see them at your facilities?

Warren Henderson calls upon the *Graterfriends* family, both inside and outside: "We need outside organizations' support, and while inside, we must have peaceful protests about the prisons' situations, or they will continue to take more and more from us."

Thank you for your continued support, and we hope to hear from more of you in the next round!

Best Regards,

Noelle Gambale & the *Graterfriends* Team

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# **An Overview of the Pennsylvania Prison Society**

Founded in 1787, The Pennsylvania Prison Society is the nation's oldest human rights organization. Our mission for 235 years has been to promote the health, safety, and dignity of people impacted by mass incarceration. In 1828, the Prison Society was granted access to all people in state or county custody in PA – we remain the only non-governmental organization in the United States with our level of statutory access to people in prison. Although some of our specific programs have evolved over time, we remain committed to responding to the needs of incarcerated people and their loved ones. Today, we use that access to monitor prison conditions, assist people in prison with individual issues they raise, build connections to family and community, and educate the public about the largely hidden world of prisons.

## ***WHO ARE WE?***

You may write to us at 230 South Broad Street, Suite 605 Philadelphia, PA 19102. You can also have your loved ones call our family support helpline at anytime: 215-564-4775. Our team can assist to answer questions about specific facilities, policies, general issues, and concerns. Our team is small and we are not able to provide legal assistance, but we will do our best to help you get the information and resources you need. Unfortunately, at this time as an organization we are generally not able to use ConnectNetwork to correspond with people confined in SCIs.

## ***HOW DO I CONTACT THE PRISON SOCIETY?***

## ***WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I WRITE TO YOU?***

We will always do our best to assist you. You can write to us to request resources, report conditions at a state or local facility, or request a prison monitor. The Prison Society is not a legal organization and can not provide specific legal advice or representation. However, our correspondence volunteers thoroughly respond to each and every letter we receive with information about other resources and organizations. We can also help you navigate different issues related to education, free books and other creative programs, reentry services, mental health resources, pen pal programs, and more.

We are grateful to the countless people in custody and their families who help promote prison transparency across the Commonwealth. Beyond working to address concerns on an individual and/or facility level, the information you provide drives our vital conversations with Pennsylvania legislators, allied organizations, and the public. As we work to educate others and engage in systemic advocacy, it is vital that this is led by the experiences and opinions of the people closest to the problem- you! Your voices directly informed our current advocacy to end the \$5 medical copay for incarcerated people, as well as our work to remove barriers to family visits.

## ***WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I SHARE WHAT'S GOING ON IN PRISON?***

## ***WHAT IS PRISON MONITORING?***

The Prison Society is the only non-governmental organization in the country with a legal right to meet privately with any person incarcerated in their state. Each month, we receive hundreds of reports concerning access to healthcare, abuse, property, conditions of confinement, treatment, and other issues. Our trained volunteer Prison Monitors can meet with anyone incarcerated in Pennsylvania state or county prison to hear their concern in detail and engage in follow-up advocacy.

Out of respect for one's privacy and safety, we will never send a Prison Monitor without an explicit request for a visit from an incarcerated person or their loved one. During a visit, a prison monitor will meet with the person in custody one-on-one to discuss and document their situation. Following the visit, volunteers are empowered to speak with prison administration on their behalf to try to improve the situation. It is important to note that we are not lawyers and cannot assist with legal issues or casework.

For individuals returning to the Philadelphia area, The Prison Society does have a mentoring program available designed to help ease the transition from incarceration back to communities by providing a strong social support network. We hope to expand this to other regions in the state in the future.

## ***WHAT ABOUT REENTRY SERVICES?***

Launched in 1981 by Joan Gauker and adopted by The Prison Society in 2002, Graterfriends is a critical outlet for incarcerated people to share their opinions and experiences. We are proud to have built a powerful community with you over these past two decades and encourage you to continue submitting to Graterfriends.

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. To protect Graterfriends from copyright infringement, please attach a note, on your submission, stating that you are the original author of the work and that you give us permission to edit and print; date and sign the declaration

## ***WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I WRITE TO YOU?***



# **PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SOCIETY**

# History Must Be Remembered

## Featured Article

*Timothy X. Wright of SCI Somerset*

As I read a recent Graterfriends that spoke on the death of another fallen comrade, Brad (Bub) Gamble, who I also knew personally, I began to think about how the television channel TCM airs a 2-3 minute segment called, "TCM Remembers." It's all about the movie stars who passed away during that year or before that year ended. My intention in mentioning it is this: White folks never forget about their heroes or stars. I don't say that from a racist mindset as you will see. I say it as being one of the 65% of the prison population which is Black. And being such, it is good to see that some of us REMEMBER those who have fought and struggled for us, inside and outside of these prison walls.

I was in attendance when Ms. Joan, James Taylor, Vernon Best, and others were brainstorming about how to bring Graterfriends to life. I was there. I remember. The premise of creating Graterfriends was for the sole purpose of having each prison communicate with each other through Graterfriends so we could support each other. At this time, there were only seven prisons, with a couple in production at the time. And if there was a problem in one facility, all the rest wrote and advocated for change until that problem in that prison was rectified. There was a unity about prisons that doesn't exist today. Why? Because many do not remember.

Let me give you an example of the unity I am talking about. In 1994, I believe, a brother named Skip from South Philly, whose attribute was Farrakhan, was given the death penalty. He returned from court, and the guards along with a lieutenant who was escorting them, went to Farrakhan's cell to take him to death row. They asked him to step out of his cell and began to put handcuffs on him. Before they could do so, Rodney Wells (Hop) had witnessed what was transpiring and began to shout down to the officers. This is what he said, "Out of all things that men have gone through in his life that were difficult, today is probably worse than all those days combined. So you are not going to put cuffs on him. You are going to walk him off this block as a man." At first, the officers were about to dismiss him until they saw men begin to cascade the tier in support of Rodney Wells and what he conveyed. The guards looked at what was happening and the lieutenant nodded to Mr. Wells and walked the brother out without cuffs. That day, I felt so proud of Rodney Wells. But for him, that was neutral.

We must remember that all the organizations that help us, like the Prison Society, FAMM, Abolition Law Center, CADBI, and others, cannot be taken for granted. Yet, as they work, we too must do the work necessary from this side. Our unity is the answer to everything we are suffering from. These prisons do not function without you. The DOC has a plan. What is ours? We must first remember where we were at and how it got here. The very best of us have gotten older, and we can't do as we once did. Our job now is to find and seek out those young men who will be willing to be taught by us, so that they can continue the fight for liberation. This is why having LIFERS' organizations throughout all of Pennsylvania prisons is paramount as each LIFERS' organization in existence has committees designed specifically to chart a course for the young men coming into these institutions. We cannot let a gap exist between the old and the young of our generation ferment in these prisons. They must be made to remember so that the work will continue and the goals we aspire to, be met. This way, us older men who have thirty five years or more do not succumb to death while incarcerated. I remember, which is why you see me submitting articles in place of the brothers who used to write and cannot do so any longer. To all men who wrote about our fallen, thank you for remembering. One Love.



## Pennsylvania's Jails are Becoming De Facto Psychiatric Hospitals

*Pennsylvania Prison Society*

Jails across Pennsylvania are reporting a troubling influx of people with severe mental health issues since the pandemic whom they are ill-equipped to care for, according to the Prison Society's latest quarterly survey of county jail staff.

Over two-thirds of county jails that responded to our questions said they've seen an increase in the number of people with serious mental health issues in their custody. Nearly as many admitted that they don't have the resources or ability to provide appropriate care for these vulnerable individuals.

The state's woefully inadequate mental health system and the stressors of the pandemic are at the root of the problem. Yet elected officials are allowing the situation to persist, even with new resources available to address the extensive gaps in care.

"They just shouldn't be in jail."

PrimeCare Medical, which provides medical services in over half of Pennsylvania jails, said its own data confirms that serious mental health problems are on the rise. Pamela Rollings-Mazza, a psychiatrist and the company's chief medical officer for PrimeCare Medical, said the severity of mental illness she sees among people in jail is something "I would see if I was working in a state hospital—an acute care hospital."

"They just shouldn't be in jail," Rollings-Mazza said. "County jails have become in essence the de facto hospitals. And they're not designed to be that."

Dozens of county jails contacted by the Prison Society said they lack enough mental health providers, appropriate housing, and training to manage the overwhelming numbers of people in crisis. In Crawford County, the jail's eight intake cells have become a makeshift "mental ward," where corrections officers keep watch on up to a dozen detainees deemed at risk of suicide or who show signs of mental illness.

Often, the only alternative is to try to commit people with serious mental illness in jail to a local or state hospital. But, "nine out of ten of the local hospitals will refuse our patients because they're inmates," Rollings-Mazza said. And beds in the state's two forensic hospitals are in short supply – combined, they have only about 360 beds for the entire state. Jails report, too, that the placement process for these facilities can be months long and involve an onerous, bureaucratic process.

In the worst cases, people with serious mental illness face a very real risk of death in jails, whether by suicide or at the hands of correctional staff. Rollings-Mazza said they can get into trouble when they are unable to comply with the rules that order prison life.

"If you're a patient who's actively psychotic and is not in touch with reality, it's hard to understand why you have to follow a time frame, and you have to eat at this time," she said.

Nearly 1 in 3 "use of force" incidents reported by Pennsylvania county jails involve a person experiencing a mental health crisis or with a known mental illness, according to an investigation by WITF and NPR.

Stalled pandemic relief funds can help

When they passed the state budget last summer, lawmakers designated \$100 million in federal pandemic relief funding to shore up mental health care. But by year's end, they still hadn't approved a spending plan for the funds, even after a behavioral health commission appointed for the task published detailed recommendations. The commission's report recommended \$23.5 million go toward helping people involved with the criminal justice system, including expanding treatment resources in county jails, pre-arrest diversion programs, and crisis intervention training for law enforcement officers.

Rollings-Mazza said a shortage of community providers and the disruption of services during the pandemic set the stage for the mental health cri-

sis in jails. The recommendations for the rest of the \$100 million would help address this issue, expanding treatment in the community and building up the mental health workforce.

The Prison Society's executive director calls on elected officials to authorize the spending without delay. "With legislators back from recess and a new governor sworn in, Pennsylvania's leaders need to approve these much-needed resources with the urgency this crisis demands," Shubik-Richards says.

## **FAMM's New Initiative: Free to Succeed**

### *FAMM*

FAMM launched a new Storytelling series recently called Free to Succeed. Every day, it seems, we see a new story about someone who got out of prison and screwed up. Left unsaid is that for everyone who fails, there are thousands who are succeeding. We never hear about them. That changes with Free to Succeed, which showcases success stories of people released early from prison. These are people who were granted second chances -- through reform, compassionate release, clemency, or a second look law -- and are now helping their families, communities, and society.

Their lives are perfect examples of why second chances should be part of criminal justice. Every single person in Free to Succeed is proving wrong the headlines that say criminal justice reform makes our country less safe. Each month we feature at least two stories with a host of storytelling components: audio stories, video stories, written stories, photo montages, and more. There are also special monthly "Heart to Heart: Free to Succeed" edition broadcasts across FAMM's social media platforms, in which listeners can interact directly with the month's featured people.

Though the series is national in scope, FAMM is working on expanding it in Pennsylvania specifically to support our Second Chances Agenda here: End life imprisonment, create medical and geriatric release mechanisms, and expand clemency. Please check out the series online and in this newsletter, and use the stories in your own work. Also, please feel free to reach out with any questions, ideas, and

suggestions of people to feature in future months.

## **Free to Succeed: Naomi Blount**

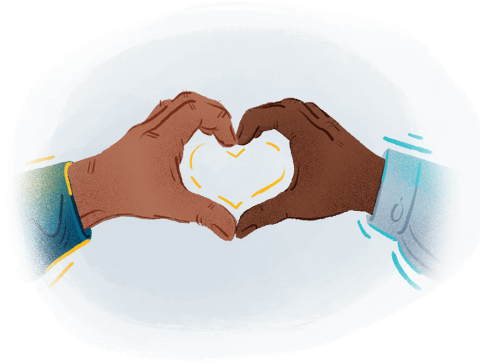
"Over the years, I have written my obituary numerous times," says Naomi Blount. "I never thought I would ever be coming home." That's because in 1982, she was sentenced to life in Pennsylvania state prison. She was 32 years old. A drug addict and alcoholic, Naomi struggled every day of her adult life. One terrible day, a man stabbed her friend, Brenda Baker. The two women then found the man and wanted to hurt him, but it was Brenda who delivered the fatal injury, not Naomi. In Pennsylvania, you don't have to be the one who committed homicide to get charged with the crime; you just have to have been there in a certain capacity.

Behind bars with no release in sight, Naomi's tough situation was matched by grit and determination to improve herself. Her son, 10 years old when she went inside, meant everything to Naomi, and for his sake, she vowed that even though she was supposed to die in prison, she would be leaving the world a better person than when she'd entered it. She earned several degrees, stayed clean, and helped others. "I wanted my son to, at least when he picked up my body, I wanted him to know that his mother was more than an alcoholic and a drug addict." Naomi applied for and was denied commutation five times. About to give up, she hand-wrote a heartfelt plea to the Board of Pardons, begging them to reconsider. Then, in the equivalent of winning a lottery ticket, she was granted clemency -- almost unheard of in Pennsylvania. She'd been in prison 37 years.

Remarkably, now 72, Naomi is not bitter. In the three years since she's been released, it seems as though there's nothing she hasn't been able to accomplish. She is a vocal advocate for reform, and she also works as a commutation specialist for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. "My job allows me to encourage those that are on the inside," she says. She's very close to her son, now 50, and his family. "I'm getting ready to be a great-grandmother for the second time," Naomi says. "This will be the first baby that I am home for." And the passion for music that she has had her whole life has flourished. Recently, she released a single, called "Mello-D" by Simply Naomi. She also works as a program consul-

tant for a group that helped her when she was inside, Shining Light. They provide support to people in prison.

Naomi is herself a “shining light,” trying every day to express what she feels deeply: gratitude. “I’m always saying, ‘Lord, thank you. Thank you, God. Thank you, God.’” Naomi’s rich life is guided by her desire to help the world, not hurt it. FAMM is working to show how she and so many others are using their second chances for the good.



## Legislative Advocacy From Prison

*FAMM*

**STEP 1:** Know that your voice matters, and that you can have an impact on the laws of Pennsylvania. Engaging with state lawmakers from prison is legislative advocacy. Pennsylvania has its own House of Representatives, Senate, and governor, and each plays a critical role in making laws that affect sentences and prisons. To become law, bills must be approved by committees, passed by both the House and Senate, and signed by the governor. Lawmakers are elected by people in the districts they represent, and care about what people think (especially registered voters). They keep track of how many people contact them about different issues. Since these laws affect you, your voice should be heard. It can change hearts and minds.

**STEP 2:** Decide what pending bill or issue you want to advocate. Think about your own experience. For ideas, see FAMM’s “Legislative Updates” in Graterfriends, or have your family and friends check our website (<https://famm.org/our-work/states-where-we-are-working/pennsylvania/>).

**STEP 3:** Identify your lawmakers and their contact information. Check your law library and ask your family to use FAMM’s “Find Your Lawmaker” tool here: <https://famm.org/actioncenter/>. You may wish to strategically reach out to lawmakers who represent your home or prison district, those who introduced a bill you support or oppose, or those who serve on relevant committees. (For example, the House and Senate Judiciary Committees control most legislation relating to criminal justice reform; the House and Senate Policy Committees decide each party’s biggest priorities; the Sentencing Commission creates sentencing guidelines, etc.). Research the lawmakers if you can.

**STEP 4:** Decide how to most effectively communicate with lawmakers you want to reach. Common methods of communication include letters, phone calls, emails, and in-person meetings (lawmaker visits to prisons can be very impactful). FAMM recommends writing letters as a first step because you can write, review, and edit before you send it. Discuss the bills with others to learn and practice new ways of discussing important issues. Identify yourself and the type of reform that you want the lawmaker to consider. For example, “Senator \_\_\_\_\_, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I’m writing to ask you to please support bill \_\_\_\_\_, which would \_\_\_\_\_.” Briefly discuss the reasons that you believe the lawmaker should support or oppose the bill. (Examples: “I am 60 years old and sick, and this bill would allow me to go home with my family” or “This bill would give me more educational and vocational training, so I can find a job when I get out”). End the communication by thanking the person for considering your views, and provide your full name and contact information in case they want to reach you. Consider including a photograph of yourself or your loved ones to put a human face on the need for reform.

**STEP 5:** Consider these guidelines before contacting lawmakers: Review your communication before you send it. It is helpful to write what you want to say, then reread it a few days later. Ask a person you trust to review it. Verify the person’s proper title, name spelling, address, etc. Keep the communication focused on one issue. Don’t communicate with the same person about the same thing repeatedly. One communication



per issue per legislative session (or important phase of the bill) is sufficient. The goal is to get more people doing legislative advocacy, so lawmakers will see that a lot of people care.

Don't communicate anything about the facts of a case that is not final. This means you should not talk about the details of your case if you are awaiting trial, pending appeals, PCRA's, evidentiary hearings, etc. Communications with lawmakers are not private, and could be used against you in a legal case. If you decide it is safe to talk about the facts of your case, do not minimize your role. Focus the communication on what you want to change proactively. Do not spend the communication on negativity.

STEP 6: After you have seriously considered all guidelines and reviewed your communication, send it. Congratulations, you have now officially engaged in legislative advocacy!

STEP 7: Consider next steps and spread the word. Is there another lawmaker who could impact the same issue? Is there another issue you'd like to support or oppose? Encourage your friends and family to do legislative advocacy. The more people building the movement for reform, the better. Finally, don't forget. Continue advocating after your release. Fill in the gaps for those left behind and advocate in ways you wish others had done for you when you were still in prison. Here's to your voice being heard.

*\*Write to FAMM's Pennsylvania State Policy Director if you have suggestions or feedback.*

## Tips for Writing Effective Letters to Civil Lawyers

### *Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project*

Here are some tips and suggestions from attorneys and legal staff of the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project (PILP) about writing effective and productive letters to civil lawyers and law firms when reaching out for legal help about conditions of confinement in prisons and jails:

**1. Give enough information:** It's always a good idea to include your name, facility, ID number, the pronouns you use, and the name you are incarcerated under (if it's different from the name you go by). This helps any attorney or paralegal reading your letter to quickly figure out who you are and where you are held.

**2. Don't give too much information:** If you are contacting a lawyer or law firm for the first time, it's probably best to send a short introduction letter (about one or two pages) describing who you are and what issues you are looking for help with. It's great when clients keep records of things like medical issues, grievances, and misconduct reports, but when lawyers receive a big packet of information and documents from someone they do not know, it can be overwhelming and take a lot of time to go through and may take them longer to respond. A shorter intro letter will be quicker to read and process and then the lawyer can reach back out for more information or documents if they need more. It might be a good idea to put in the intro letter which documents the incarcerated person has and can send later if the lawyer would like to see them.

**3. Try to describe the situation in chronological order and provide dates:** Sometimes people face issues in prison that have been going on for a long time or include multiple incidents. It may be easier for a lawyer to understand the problem if you describe the situation starting with what happened first and go in order when you describe everything that has happened. Whenever possible, it is useful if you include the dates when the incidents you describe happened. It is also helpful for the person learning about your situation to know whether a problem is ongoing or if it happened in the past. Knowing when problems started or occurred will help legal staff evaluate whether there is a concern about any Statutes of Limitations.

**4. Be clear about what type of help you are looking for:** It is absolutely okay if you are not sure what type of help to ask for, but if you do know what you would like from the legal office you are writing to, it can be helpful for the person reading your letter to know what you are hoping to achieve. For example, not every person wants to file a lawsuit. Some people may want help finding specific resources or would like an advo-

cate's help to request an accommodation or service.

**5. Describe any steps you have taken to resolve the problem on your own:** The first question PILP staff often ask incarcerated people who write letters is whether they have filed any grievances about the issues they are having in the prison. Even though grievances often do not solve the problem directly, it is necessary to exhaust administrative remedies, which usually means going through the entire grievance process, before filing a lawsuit about constitutional violations that happen in prisons. Knowing whether you have made requests to staff or filed grievances may help an attorney decide what the options are to address the problem going forward.

**6. No need to send physical evidence:** Although it can be really helpful when people collect evidence on their own, it can be confusing for legal offices to receive items in the mail that they have not requested. There is also a risk that evidence can be damaged or altered by sending it in the mail, which can make it less useful. It is usually best to describe what kind of evidence you have in your possession and ask before sending it to a legal office. If you are worried about evidence being confiscated or destroyed in the prison, it may be a good idea to send items to a loved one on the outside who can keep them safe.

PILP is a statewide legal aid organization that fights for the constitutional and civil rights of incarcerated and detained people in Pennsylvania, by providing civil legal assistance, pro se assistance, legal advocacy, and legal representation. PILP cannot provide assistance with criminal law issues.

You can write to PILP at any of its three offices: Lewisburg (115 Farley Circle, Suite 110, Lewisburg, PA 17837), Philadelphia (718 Arch Street, Suite 304 South, Philadelphia, PA 19106), or Pittsburgh (247 Fort Pitt Blvd, 4th Floor, Pittsburgh, PA 15222).



## **Brittney Griner and the State of Women's Prisons in the US**

*Mariel Persico of Villanova University*

A Level 4 Travel Advisory was issued by the U.S. State Department on Monday, February 13, urging American citizens to leave Russia immediately and to stop traveling there. This warning comes out amidst the rising tensions of the Russia and Ukraine war, but more so because of the frequent and wrongful detainments of U.S. citizens in Russia. Once detained for spurious or false charges, Americans are denied fair trials and subjected to absurd and harsh prison sentences. While Russia is notorious for its inhumane prison conditions and incredibly corrupt Criminal Justice System, many American women now bear the brunt of this injustice.

On February 17, 2022, WNBA star Brittney Griner fell victim to Russia's oppression and was detained by the Russian Federal Customs Service. During her offseason, Griner was passing through

the Sheremetyevo International Airport while playing with the Russian Women's Basketball Premier League. When going through customs, vape cartridges containing cannabis oil were seized by customs officers, and Griner was convicted of drug possession and smuggling. She pleaded guilty in July and was sentenced to nine and a half years in prison, even though she said she did not intend to break the law. In November, Griner was transferred to an all-women penal colony, a type of prison infamous for its harsh living conditions, brutality, isolation, and forced labor. The State Department declared that they believed Griner was wrongfully detained and vowed to work to get her back home. Luckily, after negotiations between President Biden and Russian officials, Griner was released through a prisoner exchange on December 8, 2022. Griner was released

in exchange for the United States' release of Viktor Bout. This Russian arms dealer was conspiring to sell weapons that would be used against Americans.

It is hard to say what exactly occurred at that airport that day and whether Griner even broke the law. It is possible that the Russian customs officers planted the cannabis oils into her luggage, giving her detainment some credibility. Many speculate that Russia wanted to cause an international incident. When Griner was arrested, Russia quickly wanted to discuss a prisoner swap. Her detainment came as geopolitical tensions were rising, with several international sanctions set as a response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Griner was held hostage and used as a piece in Putin's cruel game. It is critical that the United States, and all other nations, continue to place sanctions on Russia until they stop abusing human rights and legitimize


their Criminal Justice System.

Brittney Griner's experience illuminates the danger of the current situation in Russia. American women are incarcerated disproportionately more than in any other country. On top of that, once in prison, they experience physical abuse, mental trauma, separation from family, a lack of health care, and so many more difficulties. Women's prisons in the U.S. are not nearly as corrupt as in Russia. However, suppose attention is not paid to this issue of incarcerated women in the United States. In that case, the system may soon start to resemble Russia's. Change must start with each of us by demanding change from officials or by supporting advocacy groups that do the same. We must recognize the problem with our Criminal Justice System now and fix it before it is too late.



## Legal Chat

*FAMM, a nonpartisan sentencing reform organization, is working to fight mandatory minimums, create medical and geriatric parole, expand clemency, and end life without parole sentences in Pennsylvania. Your family members can learn about and support FAMM's efforts by joining our email list. Families should write to [famm@famm.org](mailto:famm@famm.org), and they can join FAMM's special Facebook group for impacted families at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/fammil提高inpa/about>.*



### Legislative Update: March 2023

This legislative session has already been historic, with the election of State Representative Joanna McClinton (D) as Speaker of the PA House of Representatives. Speaker McClinton is the first woman, and only second Black Speaker of the PA House, and FAMM wants to congratulate her on this incredible accomplishment!

The Senate and House have now solidified their judiciary committee memberships, and FAMM is looking forward to working with the judiciary committees on some transformative legislation this session.

#### HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

Rep. Tim Briggs (D), Chair  
Rep. Rob Kauffman (R), Minority Chair  
Rep. Christopher Pielli (D), Secretary  
Rep. Paul Schemel (R), Minority Secretary  
Rep. Kyle Donahue (D)  
Rep. Liz Hanbidge (D)  
Rep. Joseph Hohenstein (D)  
Rep. Kristine Howard (D)  
Rep. Emily Kinhead (D)  
Rep. La'Tasha Mayes (D)  
Rep. Christopher Rabb (D)  
Rep. Ben Sanchez (D)  
Rep. Melissa Shusterman (D)  
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Rep. Timothy Bonner (R)  
Rep. Torren Ecker (R)  
Rep. Joseph Hamm (R)  
Rep. Rob Leadbeter (R)  
Rep. Clint Owlett (R)  
Rep. Jim Rigby (R)  
Rep. David Rowe (R)

#### SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

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Sen. Gene Yaw (R), Vice Chair  
Sen. Steven Santarsiero (D), Minority Chair  
Sen. Rosemary Brown (R)  
Sen. Cris Dush (R)  
Sen. Wayne Langerholc (R)  
Sen. Tracy Pennycuick (R)  
Sen. Mike Regan (R)  
Sen. Kim Ward (R), Ex Officio  
Sen. Amanda Cappelletti (D)  
Sen. Maria Collett (D)  
Sen. Arthur Haywood (D)  
Sen. Nikil Saval (D)

So far in this current legislative session, we have seen the introduction of some co-sponsor memos and legislation that we are actively tracking, and we hope to see some more great bills around sentencing reform introduced this session. The following are some bills that have been introduced that FAMM is tracking:



**SB 135 - Sen. Sharif Street (D)**

SB 135 would remove the mandatory life without parole sentencing requirement for first- and second-degree murder convictions, except in cases of murder of a law enforcement officer in the first-degree. SB 135 would also establish the Life with Parole Reinvestment Fund to help support victim, reentry, and supervision services.

**SB 136 - Sen. Sharif Street (D)**

SB 136 would allow the opportunity for parole eligibility for incarcerated people who are at least 55 and have served 25 years or half their minimum sentence, and have a substantially diminished capacity to function within a prison facility due to chronic disease, cognitive or functional impairment, or diminishing mental or physical health.

**SB 174 - Sen. Camera Bartolotta (R)**

SB 174 would remove the copays and fees for incarcerated people to receive medical services.

**SB 197 - Sen. Camera Bartolotta (R)**

SB 197 seeks to change the current Board of Pardons unanimous vote requirement for recommending commutation of a death or life sentence to a four-fifths requirement. SB 197 is a proposed amendment to the Constitution, which would require passage in two consecutive legislative sessions, followed by an approved referendum by the voters of PA.

**SB 235 - Sen. Doug Mastriano (R)**

SB 235 would create a mandatory minimum sentence of 25 years to 50 years of incarceration for a conviction for fentanyl delivery resulting in death, and grades this offense as a felony in the first degree. FAMM opposes this bill.

**SB 385 - Sen. Amanda Cappelletti (D)**

SB 382 would provide an avenue for post-conviction relief in cases where domestic violence survivors were convicted for crimes in which the violence they endured affected their participation in an offense, but the impact of that domestic violence was not considered by the court.

**HB 231 - Rep. Carol Hill-Evans (D)**


HB 231 would allow opportunities for post-conviction review for our incarcerated veterans with mental health considerations related to their time in service.

**FELONY MURDER REFORM**

A new poll shows that 79% of people in Pennsylvania support felony murder reform! At FAMM, we are so excited that there is such vast support for felony murder reform in PA, and we are hopeful for some great opportunities to advance impactful legislation this session.

## Mail Room

*We edit the letters we publish. Originals will not be returned. All letters must be signed for consideration. Names will be withheld from letters only on rare occasions. All allegations of misconduct must be publicly documented before anything will be printed. Any statistics used in letters should be supported by sources.*



### The PA DDRD Law

*Harold Burton of SCI Phoenix*

I have read the recent article published in the September/October, 2022 issue of Graterfriends written by Cory Lambing titled “Rejecting Falsified Remorse.” I write in order to emphasize that I understand you and feel your pain, as I recently had to complete a four year parole hit. As you note in your article, I was pressured and essentially forced to accept responsibility for a conviction of Drug Delivery Resulting in Death, (DDRD), which I have been wrongfully convicted of.

I emphasize that I have been wrongfully convicted with respect to my conviction of DDRD as I was acquitted by the same jury, at trial, of the charged crime of Recklessly Endangering Another Person pursuant to Title 18 Pa.C.S. 2705, which, at the least, is the mens rea culpability element to be applied when another person dies as a result of using the substance (which was delivered). You may ask yourself: how was I sentenced to this crime, which I must add has been upheld by the Superior Court during the adjudication of my direct appeal? See, *Commonwealth v. Burton*, 234 A.3d 824, (Pa. Super. 2020).

Of equal importance is the arbitrary and discriminatory charging practices of prosecutors within this Commonwealth. Persons charged pursuant to Title 18 Pa. C.S 2506 (relating to DDRD) can face a maximum sentence of up to 40 years in prison while persons who are similarly situated but were charged pursuant to Title 18 Pa. C.S. 2504 (relating to Involuntary Manslaughter) for the same exact criminal conduct relating to a drug overdose death, face different sentences. I have read multiple cases where defendants are sentenced to these types of punishments.

While I am very sympathetic to the lives lost in this tragic opioid crisis, two questions must be asked: why is there such a disparity in prison sentences when it comes to whites as opposed to minorities? Where is the Equal Protection and Fundamental Fairness? Your guess is as good as mine.

### re: Changes to DOC Visiting

*Kenny Davenport of SCI Dallas*

This is concerning revisions to DC-ADM 812, “Inmate Visiting Privileges.”

I wrote to the Supt.’s Office at Dallas to ask about an aspect of Secy. Little’s memo of October 17, 2022 (as appended). The last line of the memo states that “a person previously on probation or parole is no longer a prohibited visitor.” Yet, part of the updated policy under section L.1(a) of the DC-ADM 812 states that “a former inmate of any correctional system” is a “prohibited visitor.”

I asked the Supt.’s Assistant why it states “a person previously on probation or parole is no longer a prohibited visitor”? I told her that I didn’t think the policy’s language matched what Secy. Little’s memo indicated. The response I got from her was as follows:

If a person is or was incarcerated, they are a prohibited visitor. If a person is or was on probation/parole but never incarcerated, they are not considered a prohibited visitor; however, the procedure remains the same and ultimately needs Supt. approval.

So, it seems to me to be a distinction without a difference! I am open to comments/suggestions from the readers as to how this aspect of policy unfolds at other prisons.

# A Call to Action: Join the Movement to Free America's Prisoners of War

*Anonymous of SCI Houtzdale*

In a diary entry by H.R. Haldeman, President Nixon's Chief of Staff, Haldeman suggested that the President was racially motivated when devising the War on Drugs. "You have to face the fact that the whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to."

The DEA was then created, and over time local police were given military-style weapons. They began to raid streets and homes, throwing our parents and children in prison for any amount of narcotics. If the contraband was in more than one package, it was often considered "drug trafficking" for sentencing purposes. Presidents Regan, Bush, and Clinton continued this war, adding mandatory sentencing laws.

Many of us had to grow up without a parent because they were in prison as a result of this war. We then turned to drugs ourselves, either to cope with the depression or to support what remained of our families. Eventually, we too were incarcerated, and believing this was a normal way of life, accepted our exorbitant sentences as our fate. We did not realize we could do anything. Recently, though, a few of us recognized the malicious injustice we were being forced to endure. We compared the continuity of our prison sentences while in the prison yard. Our sentences augmented by the parole board, we were serving additional decades in prison beyond our minimum sentence based on the parole board's prejudice or our addictions.

Friends of mine have done everything and more that a person could do to rehabilitate themselves. Yet they have been given additional, decade-long sentences by the Pennsylvania Parole Board. One person I know was given a ten and-one-half year "parole hit" after he admitted to using drugs while in prison during his evaluation for addiction treatment that he had requested. He had just served his minimum sentence of nine years. Others were given four years collectively because the prison refused to give them treatment that they qualified for, and they relapsed. Another received ten more years based on a misconduct for tobacco, and yet another was given two years for "prior unsatisfactory parole history," even though he had never violated parole. Several others offer similar horror stories, including nearly three dozen at SCI Houtzdale in Pennsylvania.

The aforementioned inmates have attempted to stand against this injustice by filing a "Writ of Habeas corpus" in the Western District of Pennsylvania in Pittsburgh because it costs taxpayers over \$42,727 a year to house each inmate, as opposed to the approximate costs of adequate treatment and which the prisons often do not offer. They instead offer Revia and Vivitrol, which have low success rates, and cause more medical issues. Pennsylvania prisons were given \$15 million to put in body scanners so that inmates could no longer traffic drugs into the prison, paving the way for officers and prison staff to capitalize on this market. The inmates receive years in prison for their relapse while the officers who bring in the drugs purchase new homes and vehicles.

Drug addicts are eventually released back into society in worse condition than they entered prison; they can be more violent and sometimes on harder drugs. The rules of war favor those in our Government who have profited from the incarceration of our people. We are the fathers, sons, brothers, and uncles of America. There are thousands of us who have paid our debt to society by rehabilitating ourselves while in prison, only to remain in a prison camp built for the War on Drugs. Allow us to be released to our families, allow us to receive adequate treatment, so that we may prove to our fellow Americans and families that we are more than just the stigma this war attached to us. We ask for you to stand with us. We shout as loud as we can, but our voices have been rendered inaudible, muted by the walls and the razor wire that envelops us. Please, shout with us, "free America's Prisoners of War!"

***For all the prisoners of war and their families. I confer my permission for you to publish any, or all of these words, and I encourage you to spread this message. This war has affected every single American; it continues to destroy our lives and it's time we stand together to end it.***

## **Advocate for Typewriters**

*Darren Getilquore of SCI Coal Township*

Approximately five years ago, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) did away with typewriters in all law libraries and regular libraries statewide. Their claim was that typewriters are obsolete.

The DOC brought in Word processors to replace the obsolete typewriters. For typewriters, we provide our own paper and create documents. The DOC as a whole is phasing that option out completely. Word processors require that now I/we must pay ten cents per page to print documents I/we create. This change now costs eight and a half cents more per page. Please do the math on a one hundred page brief.

The Inmate General Welfare Fund (IGWF) already pays all costs associated with the word processors. The toner, terminals, printers etc. General welfare means doing something for us, the inmates. The money collected shall go back into the IGWF to benefit me/us how? Sadly now every inmate working on their criminal appeal, civil action, or any other legal matter must spend money they may not have to print documents.

I am asking the Prison Society to advocate for me/the inmate population to cease this practice. The IGWF should benefit me/us.

## **Let's Avoid a Checkmate**

*Warren Henderson of SCI Albion*

To *Graterfriends*, for the prisoners of PA Prisons:

Many of y'all will know me, or know of me. I have been in 15 of PA's state prisons from 1981 to now, 2023. The PA prison system today is the worst I have seen in 40 years. Now, the so-called prison authorities are pushing the envelope on us as far as they can, as far as we allow them. They stick together to keep us in check, but half the prison staff don't like each other. They won't ever let us know because they will never show it in front of us.

Prison authorities used the COVID-19 situation to do something they have been wanting to do for years: limit the movement of prisoners in the pris-

ons. Now, we are denied the ability to walk to the chow halls to eat hot meals, denied yard time together, denied walking to commissary, denied religious services together, denied law library together, etc., etc., etc. And we will be denied more and more.

See, we allow ourselves to be separated by religion, race, and nationality, while the prison staff stick together no matter what to keep us in check. Let us allow ourselves to get out of this check before it becomes a checkmate. They are turning prison populations into solitary confinement. We need outside organizations' support, while inside, we must have peaceful protests about the prisons' situations, or they will continue to take more and more from us. We can't keep complaining about what is being done to us and not do anything about it. We must act together as one body. All of y'all keep this in mind, and let's make the conditions better for all of us.

## **A Foot in the Ass**

*Anhtony Williams of SCI Somerset*

As a result of lingering pandemic protocols, the DOC has been able to roll back the successes that men and women in the past have fought to establish through hunger strikes, lawsuits, and other methods. They now justify isolating the population and legitimize new draconic methods of operation by saying it is to address COVID-19 concerns and to reduce violence. It's all about mental control now. They give pacifiers like incentive meals, movies, playstations, and exercise equipment on the blocks, while they box you in with more fences in front of the blocks. All of this to mask the fact that they still have a foot in your ass.

Oppression, slavery, and incarceration, all force you to endure certain hardships. No matter how you pretty these things up, it doesn't shield the fact that you still have that foot in your ass. So, don't allow these pacifiers to prevent you from fighting to get out and obtaining the true tools that help remake yourself. Don't be content with the DOC's tools designed to "rehabilitate" you. Remember, rehabilitation means to restore one's former state. Isn't that what got most of us here? All power to life!



## Just Saying

*Anthony Ferliano of SCI Camp Hill*

I just want to touch on the topic of “misconducts.” Most officers in the DOC use their nonverbal weapon or “whip” to herd us in line as if it were 1650. Our “masters” whip the skin off our backs to put the rest of us slaves in fear. Nothing has really changed since 1650; these goofy-styled martinets are still running around, drunk on power, thrusting said power on my community; albeit such may be false in a sense, the intention rings very true. If fear is the mission, then consider that mission very much accomplished.

“Take it in or ima give you a write up!,” the pale-faced man yells. “Write up” the same threat as a lashing, just less damage (physically at least). Should one of us be back in society, working a job, and hear our boss use the term “write up” or misconduct,” we would automatically be jolted back to prison in our minds. That’s trauma! And that’s what this system does, one way or another: traumatizes us.

Then, they use these misconducts against us to stop us from making parole. A prisoner receives a misconduct for, let’s say, staying on the phone a little longer than he or she should have... or maybe they were a little slow on the draw walking back to their cell once day room had been terminated... or wait, this one’s my favorite, a prisoner gives another prisoner food because he or she is hungry and has no financial support. As if these misconducts mean men were any less human or any less likely to “fit” back in society. What are they saying to us? “How dare we stay on the phone a little longer because our son or daughter was telling us how his or her first day at school was!” “How dare we have a bad day and walk with less of a purpose, not to be thrilled to be locked back into a 4x8 bathroom where we live with another man or woman!” That last one would be equivalent to being arrested. Handing the homeless man outside of WaWa a dollar to be told “how dare we feed another human being!” That’s their attitude...”How dare you?”

What is even more absurd is if we appeal the misconduct with sense or maybe even a shimmer of education, we get that same attitude when they deny it. “How dare we have an education or knowledge

of law, code, and policy!” If only the people beyond these walls, gates, and barbed wire fences knew what was taking place on the inside. Let them go 60 days to State Road or any of the PA DOC “institutions.” And I’m only talking about misconducts here. The effect that it has on the human psyche is disastrous and damaging. It is as mentally and physically traumatizing as the whip.

What are we doing here, I ask? We need a change. Parole needs to be less subjective, and misconduct needs to be removed. Prison Period! Burn it down to the ground! Because this isn’t about reform anymore. It never was. It’s nothing more than a profitable torture chamber where ex-military and ex-coal miners get to parade around with the hype of war movies behind them and take out their own issues on us. I’ve seen dogs in the street living better than this shit... at least the dog doesn’t have to worry about write ups and parole... just saying.

## E-Cig Pandemic

*Patrick Horan of SCI Huntingdon*

Over the past couple of years, there has been another pandemic that has devastated the prison population - E cigarettes. They are both physically and psychologically addictive, and much of the prison population are hopelessly suffering from this addiction. They will sacrifice almost anything to feed this addiction, including selling their food, and other possessions. Earlier today, the Lifer’s Association paid for Chick-Fil-A for the whole population, and many of these addicts sold theirs for an E-cigarette. The real shame of the matter is that the DOC is well aware of how detrimental these are to the welfare of the prisoners, many of whom suffer from addictive personalities. The RHU is full of guys who have either received misconducts related to E-cigarettes.. These same men will be released from prison someday with an active addiction to deal with. As we all know, this often leads to seeking out heavier drugs, as well as the criminal lifestyle to support that habit.

But what does the DOC care? It’s a guaranteed returning customer and job security.

# Chow Halls vs. Units

*David Bohm of SCI Phoenix*

Last fall, the PA DOC released a survey about whether inmates would rather go back to having their meals in the dining halls or continue having them in units/in cells. I'd like to point out the pros and cons of both options. It may be too late to affect anyone's vote, but this list may help to better inform those outside, and maybe even staff members, of what each choice means.

First, the only factor that the survey mentions, time out of cells, implies that having meals in our cells gives us more time out each day. We've been doing meals in cells for a while now, and unless they change something, it currently gives us less time out of our cells than going to the dining hall did. Institutions might have different ways of doing it, but SCI Phoenix takes turns each meal between one tier eating at the dayroom tables and the other eating in their cells. At best, we get an average of 45 minutes out of our cells for meals each day. However, the walk to and from the dining hall, waiting to get a tray, and other aspects of the trip make going to the dining hall well over an hour out of our cells. So, as things are at Phoenix, the dining hall is the better choice for getting time out of our cells. I think the rest might be easier to present in a list format:

## **Pros of Getting Meals in Cells:**

- We have condiments, seasonings, spreads, and other food enhancers on hand.
- It's easier to save items for later.
- We can wash our hands just before eating.
- It's easy to pass or give items one doesn't want to others.

## **Cons of Getting Meals in Cells:**

- Food is at an ambient temperature from sitting around between being put on trays, loaded into carts, transported to units, sometimes waiting for count to clear, then being served.
- Last winter, we had trays with ice forming in them because they were outside too long.
- The trays get slopped up from liquids spilling around, inside, and outside of the trays during transport.
- When only the needed number of trays are sent over, there's no replacement if a tray is missing something.
- Increased bug risk

*We've had roaches come in on the cart and in trays, and trays that aren't taken may attract ants, flies, or other bugs.*

- It's harder (sometimes impossible) to get AP meals, especially when there are unannounced menu changes. We had a situation where not enough pork trays were sent over, so the block sergeant made guys choose between the AP or not eating.

## **Pros of Meals in the Dining Hall**

- Social interaction
- The food is noticeably hotter/colder than the tray it's served on.
- Provides a chance/reason to go outside, get some fresh air, and walk a little bit
- It's easier to get AP meals or correct serving mistakes.

## **Cons of Meals in the Dining Hall**

- Walking through bad weather to eat
- Touching multiple common-touch surfaces (doors, handles, railings) while going to the dining hall, then usually getting some sort of finger food (sandwich, pizza, cookies) without a way to wash hands before eating
- Getting rushed out before the 20 minutes we are supposed to be allowed are over
- Delays or hold ups during the meals carry over and affect the after-meal schedule.
- Not receiving extras from someone who does not want their whole tray
- Only being able to take fresh fruit out of the dining hall

I'm sure there are other factors to consider that I didn't think of or that other institutions deal with that we don't, and the ones I did come up with are of subjective importance. And although it wasn't an option, maybe the possibility of both could be considered: either serving some meals (like breakfast) on the unit or taking turns with some units going to the dining hall and some not. Whatever the outcome of the survey and the decision the DOC makes, I hope they'll address the drawbacks of where the meals will be served and build on the pros.

## **Food Services Policy**

*Gerald Brown of SCI Dallas*

In September, I had written to the Chief of Food Services for the Department of Corrections.

My issue specifically was how several important federal holidays are not being honored with a specific menu for those dates. These holidays include Juneteenth and Martin Luther King Jr. Day. These dates do not have the same equivalence as say Independence Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and most recently Labor Day. We had a special meal at Dallas for this Labor Day: barbecued chicken leg and strawberry ice cream!

Craig Copper, Chief, Food Services Division, responded, in part, as follows:

*"In general, the holiday meals that are offered as part of the Department of Corrections (DOC) Master Menu were established to align with holidays that are traditionally associated with common picnic-style or mass-recognized "festive" meals, such as Independence Day or Thanksgiving Day. The current holiday meals have been defined in the food procurement contract and food needs assessment is based in part off the provision of these defined meals. As such, the DOC has limited ability to procure additional specialty food items for additional holiday meals. When this is updated in the future, your request will be considered."*

I would urge others who feel as strongly about the issue as I do to write their respective Food Services Mgr. about this discrepancy; and to explore ways to have it rectified.

## **Let Me Get a Real Job**

*Richard Sean Gross of SCI Phoenix*

Ten years ago, I had dentures made at Graterford. I was told at that point that I could get new ones every five years. Now, I am being told that under a new policy, we get one pair for our entire life. New ones would cost \$492: \$246 for each plate. I have 20 years in and could live another 20 years. One set will not be sufficient. To charge people this kind of money when we earn sub-minimum wages is wrong. It amounts to a year's pay for many of us. The DOC keeps trying to get money out of its prisoners which is like trying to get blood out of a stone. We don't have it, and our people shouldn't have to pay for our medical care. If I am to be responsible for my own expenses, then let me out to get a real job!

## Heavens to Betsy

*Gary Nelson of SCI Greene*

Our parole board, attorney general's office, and courts all make decisions that imply that Pennsylvania never intended to provide the right to parole for second degree felony murder, which involves people who accidentally, unintentionally, or otherwise inadvertently caused the death of a fellow human being during the course of committing a felony. Our parole board, attorney general's office, and even our courts have used an increasingly tangled web of twisted taradiddles to utterly disregard parole for second degree murder, leaving people to suffer and die in prison.

To be sure, in accord with our basic value judgements as a society, the fundamental miscarriage of justice suffered by people like me being incarcerated for 20 years, 30 years, and even more than 40 years before finally dying behind bars without parole reviews is, at the very least, commensurate with the injustice suffered by an innocent person who is ultimately exonerated and released from prison after only 10 years of wholly wrongful incarceration. This is the biggest, cruelest, and most blatant injustice plaguing our criminal justice system in Pennsylvania, spanning the past 50 years, and yet no journalists are covering it. Why not?

We're intentionally retained for the greatest offense of first degree murder. Our Legislature deliberately established felony murder as a lesser offense than first degree murder, deliberately set the maximum sentence for this new and lesser offense of second degree felony murder at life imprisonment, and intentionally required individualized minimum sentences to be imposed in cases of the new lesser offense of second degree murder not exceeding one-half of the maximum sentence of life imposed with the right to parole reviews.

As many parents, teachers, and preachers would surely exclaim, "Well, heavens to Betsy! Do you really think they did all that by mistake? Lord, have mercy!"





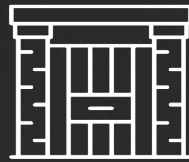
# Know Your Rights

## Voting with a criminal conviction or in pretrial detention

You have the right to register and vote  
in the following circumstances:



You are being held in jail on pretrial detention for a felony or misdemeanor charge(s).



You were released (or will be released by date of next election) from a correctional facility or community confinement facility upon completion for conviction of a misdemeanor or felony.



You are on parole living in a community confinement center.



Convicted of a misdemeanor and are in jail or prison.



You are on probation or parole.



You are under house arrest, regardless of conviction status or status of the conditions of confinement.

### How to register

Contact Inmate Program Administrator to request a voter registration form. Upon release contact the PA Department of State directly at 1-877-VOTESPA (1-877-868-3772) to have one mailed to you.

### How to vote

Contact Inmate Program Administrator to request an absentee ballot. Or call the PA Department of State directly at 1-877-VOTESPA (1-877-868-3772) to have one mailed to you.

# REQUESTS FOR RESOURCES

In lieu of a list, please request resources directly with this form. Please allow one month for a response.  
Complete and mail to the Pennsylvania Prison Society:

Pennsylvania Prison Society  
ATTN: Resources  
230 South Broad Street, Suite 605  
Philadelphia, PA, 19102

**Name, ID Number, Facility**  
**If Applicable: Returning County for Re-entry Resources**

**Resource Description**  
**Note: The Prison Society does not offer financial assistance**

# READER SURVEY

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

Pennsylvania Prison Society  
ATTN: Graterfriends  
230 South Broad Street, Suite 605  
Philadelphia, PA, 19102

## Name, ID Number, Facility

## Comments and Suggestions

First Class postage is required to re-mail  
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# **MARCH & APRIL**

## **2023**

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