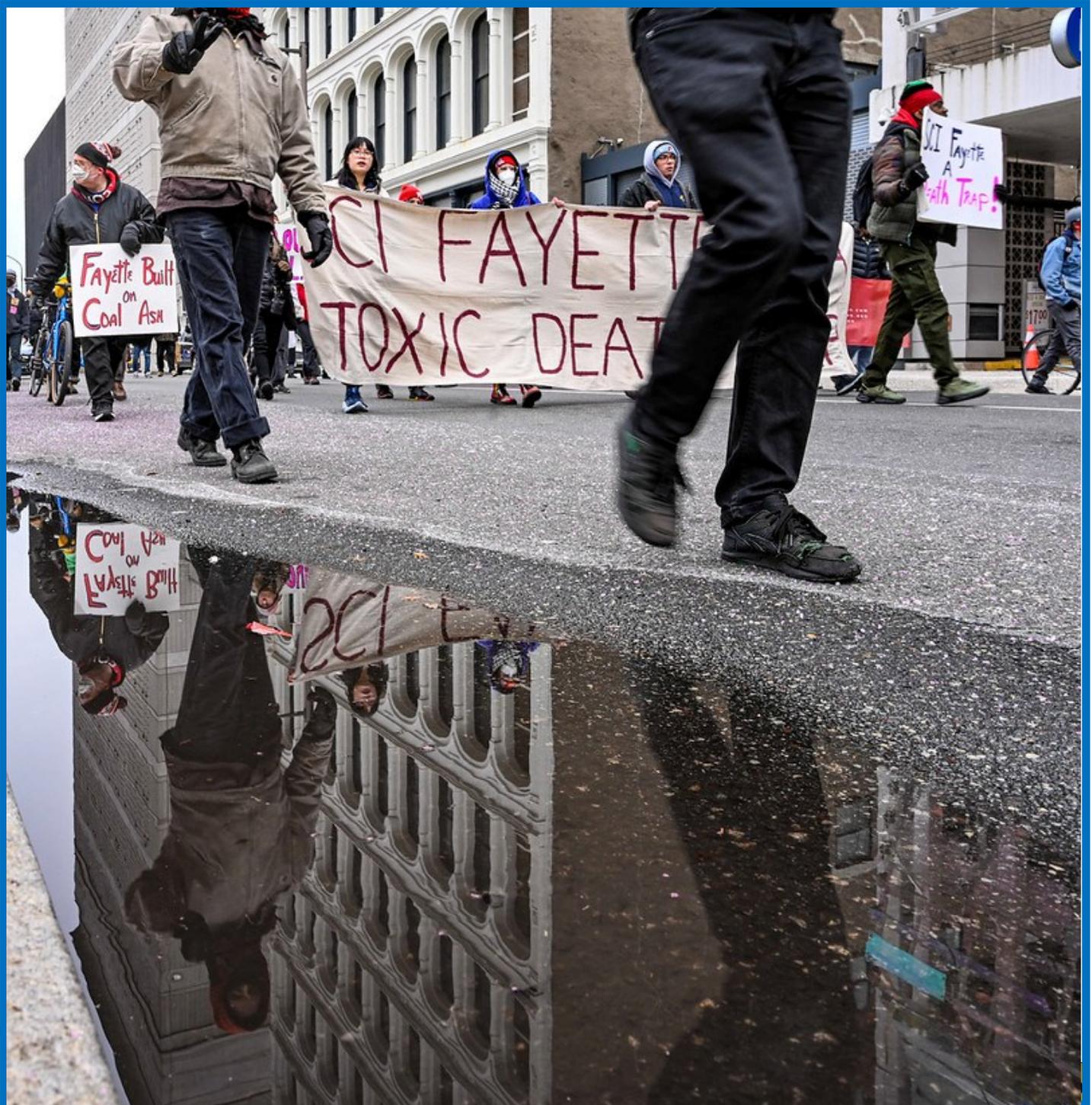


THE MOVEMENT

**Human Rights Coalition
Dedicated to Protecting the
HUMAN RIGHTS of All!**

Spring Issue #56

The Official News Magazine of the
Human Rights Coalition for the union of
Prisoners' Families





PA Gov. Shapiro has committed to closing two prisons. Human rights activist are asking him to save lives by shutting down SCI-Fayette which is fatal for those forced to work or live there. Send Gov. Shapiro your comments, see information on page 20.

Cover Photo and all rally photos in this issue are compliments of *Joe Piette*.

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The Editor Speaks

Greetings and Salutations!

Wow! What a start to a year that was destined to bring major change. And boy has it!

Already, there's immeasurable loss, turmoil, anger and derision. People who've served and done so with integrity and positive intent are unemployed and concerned about their ability to pay for housing (or find themselves homeless) and basic necessities. Thus feeling pressured to take whatever job they can get, despite their experience or education. The very education that has tens of thousands of citizens in deep debt. Simultaneously, in an attempt to protect their future, they're being pulled into a fight against numerous government cuts, rising costs, and the increasingly limited resources plaguing the entire workforce of our country. Many are being told they're ineligible for sensible mortgages, existing subsidies and other countless other benefits, while in the midst of mapping out how to stretch their savings and leave 401Ks intact.

We're human beings, thus our every day interactions will always spark conflict between the old and new. The antiquated ways of our elders and those who've passed on are up against new times and obstacles, many that were created by our attachment to the old faithful, that are viewed with societal misgivings and moral distrust, because change is scary and hard.

An overhaul is necessary! We need new voices attached to new faces, presenting new ideas and ideals in order to head in a sustainably forward movement. Given what's been revealed so far, I pray voters are clear on the grave choices made at the polls, or are you standing in denial about the instability of our government, the safety of our country and/or what the next 3+ years hold? Yes, a lot is new but way too much is the same - declining. And that's a universal reality.

People are hurting and scrambling, some resorting to crime, unfortunately. Children are deeper into their electronics and struggling to speak properly or do basic math without a calculator. Our elders are heading out of retirement and back into the workforce, so as not to have to choose between meals and medication, and THAT doesn't bode well for those of us NOT pardoned by this president, because they are the ones those of us inside rely on. So, how would we survive without that outside help from the previous or the next generation?

How do we survive without outside help and still thrive and improve our station in life.

I've been communicating with a lot of people and have come to realize that not enough of us are giving full, careful thought and consideration to our history, and therefore aren't gathering from those trials and errors, the practical ways and means to overcome the very problems we follow so intently in the media. Clearly, the question we need to ask is, "What have I learned?"

Every day we have time to work, play and "do" which ultimately means we have time to think. Despite outside forces, deadlines and pressure we push forward. In coming to this issue, I thought it wise to challenge myself and others to dig into life's experiences and answer a simple but loaded question, thus the feature section, 'What I've Learned'.

Please take the time now and going forward to share that with us. It can be in whatever form you need to express yourself. We are meant to live, share and learn from each other. No topic we cover is off limits. Our individual journeys take us through family, politics, community and world events. I'm hoping this jaunt through the yesterdays will enhance someone else's mind or spirit, leading us to a path of discovery that embraces 'new' and that promotes real and lasting change.

FORWARD!!!!

Peace,

Terri



Smart Communications/PA DOC
Terri Harper, OB7637, SCI-Muncy
PO Box 33028
St Petersburg FL 33733

I've Learned that although I needed to work to have what I wanted and what my family needed, I never gave thought to anything besides the monetary bottom line. That line led to having the means to "live outside of" which only fueled my arrogant spirit leading to losses that one can't always bear!

- by Terri Harper

What I've Learned . . .

What I've learned in 51 years of living and 25 years of incarceration is that I am under the rule of another. I am wearing the color brown and others are wearing the colors of authority.

I see, realize, understand and above all, I comprehend that we are all Human Beings and we all bleed red. To me, all of us should see that there should be NO division! We are all the same!

We can have differences of opinion, different ideas, different perspectives - different EVERYTHING - just as long as we don't tread on each other as we do the dirt from which we were created.

- Anonymous

I've learned that predators beget predators.

The Prison Industrial Complex is an inherently exploitative system that tries to pass itself as rehabilitative.

But when the [prison] staff who suck and pick on inmates get promotions; and the Block Creeps get 'no move' orders from the administration so they can [continue to] spy in unit showers; its clear that predators reign.

When long-termers wait on programming for decades and good works go unnoticed, who can claim self-improvement is a priority?

Character is in actions. The Department of Corrections reveals its character in the predators and prey it creates.

- Anonymous

I've Learned that grief is real, and that when you're grieving, especially back to back losses, and don't know how to handle it or channel your emotions, lashing out CAN lead to change ... after destruction.

-By Jamika Williams

Lessons Learned in Prison:

The Top 12 Takeaways for
2025 & Going Forward

- * There's no cure for stupid.
- * There's not a quick fix for ignorance, it requires patience and prayer.
- * A lot of people find God in prison, but HE isn't the ONE who's lost.
- * To expect respect try giving it first, even if it's not returned we've got to start somewhere.
- * When trying to get through to others, stop scowling and start smiling, and maybe your face will freeze in place.
- * If people turned gossip into prayer, there's no more reason for gossip.
- * In God's strategy for successful living, love still conquers all, and character is more important than intelligence.
- * Every blessing carries responsibility, so don't pray for the first one if you're not ready for the second one and so on.
- * The best thing to do behind someone's back is pat it.
- * There's a huge difference between putting your nose in other people's business and putting your heart in other people's problems.
- * Just because God created us from dust is no reason to treat anyone like dirt.

Here comes the boom, OOPS, I mean broom...So it's time to clean house and STRAIGHTEN UP!!!

- By Amy Gipe #OZ0117 (with input from Kim Maurer)

What I've Learned . . .

When asked to participate in this feature called, "What I've Learned", my first thought was, "this is a loaded statement", then I agreed to unload on it.

I've learned that the past is never the past. To err is inevitable in the human race, and perfection is non-existent on earth, period.

However, my poor choices decades ago are a black looming shadow that dulls or covers all my networking with God, friends, and family to create, rebuild, define, and refine myself into a greater Tameka.

Anyone who has travelled this highway understands that there will be lots of exits to lead you in the wrong direction. Wanting change, focus, determination, staying in my lane and the power of God has guided me to my destination of a greater me.

In my environment, the past is never the past because human error is most memorable. The positive is easily dismissed, overlooked, and at times, unseen.

My past is my past. Those who want to live in my prior mess, have at it, because I'm shining brighter than ever in my newly renovated life.

- by Tameka Flowers #OD8694

It's Okay to Dislike Your Body

Body image is important to many people, but for those affected by cancer, it can turn into an obsession. I never paid much attention to my body until I began puberty and realized that image mattered.

Growing up I was a pencil thin, short-haired, gangly-legged tomboy who was more comfortable in shorts and t-shirts than in frilly dresses. My mother tried her best to encourage me to dress and act in a more feminine manner, but I didn't care. All of my friends were boys, and I knew I couldn't join them in football if I was wearing a dress. As my body developed, I got angry. I didn't want to have breasts or wear a bra. Those things would encumber and imprison me, and I balked. My mother insisted I show modesty, so I opted to wear a camisole under my shirts. That lasted a while, but a bra became an inevitable part of my wardrobe.

Looking in the mirror, I couldn't accept my image. On the outside, I looked like a rough and tumble boy figure, but after showering I'd stand looking at myself in the mirror and I could only see what, to me, wasn't true. I was in fact, a budding young woman.

Fast forward 40 years. After much prodding from my mom and sister, I had my first mammogram. I was embarrassed to death to have it, which is an understatement, but I did it! The embar-

rassment turned me every shade of scarlet there is. I didn't want to be humiliated by showing my small, underdeveloped breasts. If I'd been more endowed, I might've been proud to show off a little, but that wasn't the case. I tried to avoid eye contact and couldn't wait to get out of there. Thankfully, it was a baseline mammogram and didn't show any issues. Every 2 years, I faithfully went for another scan. Every time there was nothing to report, and I was thankful. The older I got, the more I learned breast size was decided by genetics, or so I thought.

Years later, when cancer came knocking at my door, I hated my body a little more.

When the surgeon told me I had two choices, a lumpectomy or mastectomy, I cringed. Both would disfigure my small, but fairly perfect breasts. I was assured that no matter which choice I made, they could fix it and make me cosmetically appealing, but it was still a tough decision. A lumpectomy would leave a deep dent in the top of my breast or it could practically take the whole breast anyway. I didn't want to be deformed, so I decided to lop it off, which posed another problem. I'd be lopsided, so the other one had to go too. With both breasts removed, I was definitely forced to deal with body dysmorphia, so for months after surgery, I hated not only my body but myself. More than that, I hated cancer! It was the culprit that destroyed my body image. After my body healed and time went by, I accepted my choice to remain flat, versus reconstructing my breasts. I could've been any size, but I thought it pointless to endure another painful surgery.

Now, almost ten years post diagnosis, I look in the mirror and no longer hate what I see. In fact, I kinda like it. I'm back to my pre-pubescent state, with a lovely flat, chest. No bras and no heaviness on my chest, unless I decide to wear prostheses. My friends and family have learned who I am, with or without breasts, and they like me!

It's okay to dislike your body. No one is perfect. Of course plastic surgery offers an ability to adjust and correct body issues, but I've learned that my body is a tool, temporary dwelling while I'm on this earth, and if I take care of it, it will last a good while. Cancer, a multifaceted disease, isn't the only thing that can affect a person's body image. Some suffer warped perceptions brought on by psychological issues, and the views can cause unhealthy body image. That's why it's so important to seek professional help when struggling with poor self image.

They say that time heals all wounds, which is a nice concept, but I don't believe it to be completely true.

Time has given me the power to deal with what I see in the mirror and gain acceptance. While that may not be the case for everyone, it does help. Dealing with an altered body post cancer can be extremely challenging. Please don't forget that even though you may appear a little different on the outside, you're still the same beautiful person on the inside a very unique and special one-of-a-kind.

- By Bonnie Annis

What I've Learned . . .

One thing I've Learned that's going to be extremely valuable once I'm released from here, is Patience.

Everything we do here, we wait for. That has become my normal. Once I'm released, I'll have an understanding that Nothing will come quickly....I Must Be Patient. Things will happen.

- by Shanice Jones

Ten Things I've Learned

(From Least to Greatest)

- 10) Be your strongest advocate! No one can tell you about you better than you.
- 9) Be proactive in your healthcare - any diagnosis is 70% physical, 30% mental.
- 8) People are going to be who they are. It's up to you to decide if their shortcomings are tolerable against your standards.
- 7) Seniority rules! There is no such thing as fair. - It's impossible.
- 6) True friends tell you when you're wrong, but have your back regardless.
- 5) Be a good person - the world needs more good people.
- 4) Instead of always looking for someone to do something for you, do something for someone else.
- 3) Integrity & Credibility are 2 Essential attributes toward good character.
- 2) Fists = Force... Mind = Power
- 1) How we perceive any circumstance is what shapes our attitudes toward them this in turn controls our reactions/actions about them. The power to see obstacles, despite their severity, as an opportunity to do better, be better, and evolve continuously, is what it means to be invincible.

- by Amanda Blair #OK4930

What I've Learned is

that fear has always had me bound in chains.....Fear of failure, fear of being alone in a world that I never truly understood my place in, and fear of never overcoming the pain I held inside. Now, I've also learned that fear can have no place in my life, unless I allow it. The chains are broken. It ENDS with me! True freedom and true peace, I hold inside of Me - the broken vessel warrior queen.

- by Philicia Palmer

I've Learned. . .

The truth is always better than a lie.

- ◆ Some people say they want the truth, but can never truly handle it.
- ◆ Sometimes the truth can be way over the top, but nonetheless, it's the truth.
- ◆ One thing the truth will surely get you is "RESPECT", even if it's not what people expected, at least you didn't lie.

What you put into the Universe is what you will get back!

- ◆ Whatever you expect to get in this world should be what you contribute to this world; Time, Energy, Consistency, Positivity, etc.

All you have in this world is your word.

- ◆ Say what you mean, and mean what you say, and always stand on it. Its called "Integrity".
- ◆ Being a person of your word will get you further in life than saying what you "think" others want to hear.

There is no such thing as a dumb question.

- ◆ The only dumb question is the one not asked.

Never believe in the impossible, because if you pull the word apart, it simply states, "I'm possible". Believe in Yourself!

- by Natisha Gillespie #PE7907

I've Learned that young people have a great ability to make an old head feel relevant and useful.

- Anonymous

I've Learned that a person who is your total opposite can be the best friend you have!

- Anonymous

I've Learned that when a man puts his hands on you, you don't just cry. You KNOW, at that moment, this is NOT love!!

- Latoya Cherry

What I've Learned . . .

Life and its Lessons by Rachel Kozloff

I have learned a great many things over my 43 years of life. Starting out as a daughter I was loved greatly. Then becoming a sister twice in less than two years the focus changed but God, in my life, did not. From my teen years spent as a victim, a runaway, and a survivor to becoming a mother four times over and a friend and wife, God was in and out of my life. Being a divorced single mom - hurt, abandoned, lost and confused - led me to be where I am today, sharing what I have learned.

We as human beings, as educated, learned individuals must make the choice to empower ourselves. No one will do this for us, not in our relationship with God, not in our relationship with ourselves, and certainly not in our relationships with others.



by Rachel Kozloff

Knock and the door will be opened - we must choose to walk through.

Pain - we must choose to seek relief.

Lonely - we must choose to seek other like minded individuals and be vulnerable.

No matter your circumstance, YOU have a choice to make. No one can do it for you! It's why we have free will. We are responsible for ourselves, our well-being, and our healing. We are our own best advocates. We can be stronger if we choose to use the resources around us, both inside and outside these gates.

More and More each day

I feel disconnected

NEVER REJECTED

but I do suspect that

Time is making my heart grow weary,

daydreaming of the 1st day out,

without a doubt,

An event meant to be low key yet celebratory

For Me...

My family and the opportunity to finally show the 'I' who should've been way back when "they" needed me to be

Better

But then again, all this before

it turned ugly and I could count 3 decades and more

Gone

Body worn yet with renewed spirit, focus and effort carved in to

Begin Again and again as many deserve consideration of their trust and well being

To go on living, feeling and seeing this life

I forgot to treasure until finding myself tethered

to a system of never ending disparities

for those who look like me and yet . .

There's Hope After 34, numbers adding up like

keeping score...during a

Game, this is NOT

Instead it's a springboard for moving forward

with a solid plan to demand being heard,

understood and allowed to demonstrate

growth without restriction, living not just existing

To have time that means progress, not stagnation.

Accountability nevertheless

Now I must confess...

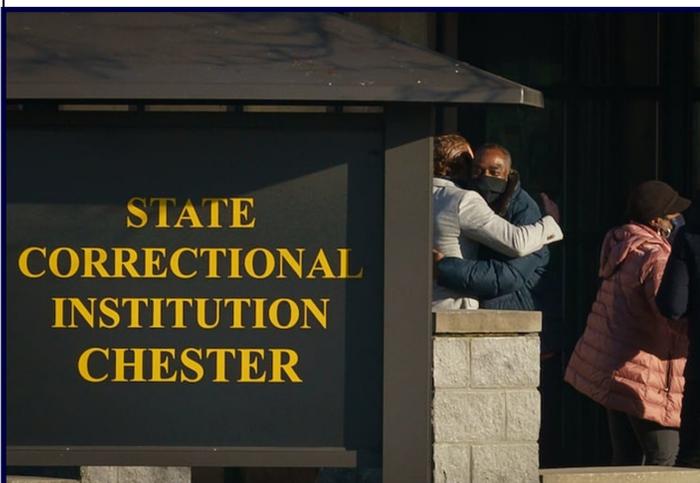
I'm Just Tired!

- by Terri Harper

Pa. will expand its innovative ‘Little Scandinavia’ unit in SCI Chester to three more state prisons

A pilot program dubbed “Little Scandinavia” has seen success in the state prison in Chester. Now it’s being expanded.

by Gillian McGoldrick



SCI Chester is one of the state's 23 state correctional institutions. Jéssica Griffin / Staff Photographer

A pilot initiative in Chester’s state prison modeled after the jail system in Scandinavian countries will be expanded to three other state prisons, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections announced last week.

Nicknamed “Little Scandinavia,” the pilot program at State Correctional Institution-Chester is made up of a 64-bed unit and has become one of the safest and most desirable units in the 1,100-bed medium-security Delaware County state prison, officials said. The program was created by researchers at Drexel University and the University of Oslo to test whether the Nordic restorative justice model would lead to lower recidivism rates when applied to a very different criminal justice system in the United States.

In Little Scandinavia, people incarcerated at SCI Chester are chosen by a lottery system and given single-person rooms, as opposed to the crowded multi-person cells that are common in prisons across the state and the U.S. They also order their own groceries each week, cook their own meals, and have common areas to encourage collaboration. This is modeled on the penal systems in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, which are internationally known for their focus on rehabilitation and reintegration — and the Nordic countries’ low recidivism rates.

Anyone incarcerated at SCI Chester is eligible for the random lottery to participate in the Little Scandinavia program.

Department of Corrections Secretary Laurel Harry announced during a state House budget hearing Monday that due to the pilot program’s success in Chester, Gov. Josh Shapiro’s administration is preparing to expand the program to three other state prisons “hopefully this year,” including in a maximum-security facility. The current pilot program and its research are mostly funded by private grants from philanthropists at Arnold Ventures. It costs the state approximately \$310,000 to reconfigure the space to accommodate the single-person rooms, PennLive reported.

There has only been one physical altercation in the unit since it became fully operational in 2022 following the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is much lower than violence rates in the general prison population, Harry told members of the state House Appropriations Committee on Monday. The reported low violence rates are in line with other specialized Pennsylvania prison units, such as the DOC’s veterans service units, Harry added.

In addition to its benefits for inmate well-being and outcomes, the unit has become the most requested work station for corrections officers because of the positive relationships they are able to form with incarcerated people in a place where they do not have to act punitively in the same way as in a traditional unit. Some officers have traveled to Sweden or Norway to visit their corrections facilities and receive specialized training.

“They all talked about having a less-stressed environment working on this unit, a sense of purpose,” Harry added.

Researchers from Drexel and the University of Oslo are still finalizing their report on the pilot program’s first few years, but Harry described the results to this point as “very positive.”

Researchers will still need to answer whether the Nordic penal system can truly be applied to the United States, which has the world’s highest incarceration rate, among other societal and institutional issues that do not exist abroad.

Nordic prisons are internationally recognized for their community-based prisons, where incarcerated people live more closely to the way they want to live outside of prison, including freedom to move about their units, wear their own clothes, and cook for themselves. The model is a stark contrast from the United States’ carceral system, where overpopulation, poor living conditions, and recidivism are common.

In Pennsylvania, there were more than 39,000 people incarcerated in state institutions as of January, according to DOC data. The recidivism rate for offenders has hovered around 64% for more than a decade, but declined slightly last year.

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Rep. Ben Waxman (D., Philadelphia) has become one of the top advocates for the Little Scandinavia model to expand to other state prisons, after learning about it at an unrelated event at the state prison two years ago. A former spokesperson for progressive Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner, Waxman said he was struck by the program's focus on rehabilitation so inmates could be successful once they finish their sentences.

"They're going to be able to come out with the real skills they would need to go back to ordinary life," Waxman said. "If you're not rehabilitating people, if you're not dealing with whatever led them to be in prison in the first place, you're going to wind up with unsuccessful outcomes."

From Philadelphia Inquirer, March 20, 2025

Prisoners Burned Themselves. So Staff Discussed "Making Them Pay Money."

by Elizabeth Weill-Greenberg

Last year, six prisoners at Red Onion State Prison, a supermax facility on the state's rural west side, intentionally burned themselves, prompting scrutiny of the prison from lawmakers and the public.

But rather than address the conditions that may have led to such desperate measures, emails obtained by The Appeal show that corrections staff discussed how best to punish those who'd self-immolated. In the documents, which were obtained through a public records request and partially redacted, staff members discussed how to deter further incidents of self-harm. Suggestions included charging prisoners thousands of dollars for medical care and criminally prosecuting them.

"I believe on Monday, we pull policy and start charging the inmates thousands of dollars for the hospital and medical treatment," Red Onion's chief of security wrote in September. "Once we iron through this, we can send the word through the inmate population that they're going to be changed [sic] thousands for their medical due to intentional manipulation. Just my thoughts on how to prevent this kind of behavior."

One of the recipients, Assistant Warden Dwayne Turner, voiced his approval.

"Yeah, sounds good," he wrote. "But, the first thing we need to figure out is why? Do they think they will get transferred? If so, we need to make sure they don't.... obviously they think they can gain something from doing that. We need to make sure they

know they won't gain anything....but making them pay money is good too[.]"



Photo by the VADOC

The minimum wage for incarcerated workers in Virginia starts at \$0.27 an hour. Local media outlet VPM News reported that Turner was promoted to assistant warden after he was accused of choking a restrained prisoner. Turner did not respond to The Appeal's request for comment.

Employees also discussed filing criminal charges against those who'd committed self-harm. In an internal email, the prison's institutional investigator said that the assistant warden had spoken with a Wise County prosecutor, who "stated that she will prosecute these inmate's [sic] for their actions."

In the same email, the investigator reported that "in the past few weeks" three prisoners had "set Fire [sic] to themselves." This characterization contradicts the Virginia Department of Corrections' (VADOC's) previous public statements.

"To be clear, these inmates did not set themselves on fire or self-immolate," a spokesperson wrote to The Appeal in November. "They were treated for electrical burns at the Department's secure medical facility at the VCU Medical Center and cleared to return to the facility."

Brett Hall, the Commonwealth's Attorney for Wise County and the City of Norton, Virginia, told The Appeal in an email that "no official decisions have been made regarding these specific matters, as of today."

"We have a great working relationship with the Virginia Department of Corrections and will continue to do so," he wrote. "These matters, just like any others, take time and require extensive review of the facts and the law. I do not have a timeline of when a decision may be reached regarding whether these specific cases will be prosecuted."

In an email, a VADOC spokesperson told The Appeal that the six prisoners were charged with disciplinary violations. Two

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(Continued from page 9)

were charged with “setting a fire damaging or injury to person or property.” Four were charged with “self-mutilation.” None have yet been billed for their hospital visits.

In the years before this latest wave of self-immolations, a man named DeAndre Gordon set himself on fire inside the facility. He later told a Virginia public radio station that guards had been routinely beating him, and he feared they might kill him. He said he decided to self-immolate because Red Onion did not have a burn unit, thus guaranteeing he’d be taken off-site.

Prison Radio first reported last year’s incidents, which The Virginia Defender then investigated. On Wednesday, the Defender is holding a rally to call for Red Onion’s closure and VADOC director Chad Dotson’s termination.

In December, Dotson told state legislators at a hearing on Red Onion that prisoners should “behave” if they want to be transferred to different facilities. He dismissed concerns about the prison’s conditions.

For decades, prisoners and their loved ones have decried conditions at Red Onion. At the December legislative hearing, one woman told lawmakers that her son in Red Onion was often given “ghost trays”—meal trays that contain no food. She said he lost 40 pounds in two months. Another woman said that when she was on the phone with her loved one, she heard officers beating a mentally ill man. She told lawmakers that Red Onion holds men in “harsh, degrading, and inhumane conditions.” A VADOC spokesperson told The Appeal in an email that four of the people who burned themselves were held in the Restorative Housing Unit, a restrictive area in which prisoners are confined to their cells for at least 20 hours a day.

One man who self-immolated, Demetrius Wallace, previously told The Virginia Defender that he lit himself ablaze in an attempt to get transferred out of Red Onion.

“I did actually set my foot on fire,” Wallace said. “I got the charge that shows it. They came to my cell door and saw the flames on the side of my leg.”

THE APPEAL, January 2025

For full article go to THE APPEAL: [Prisoners Burned Themselves at Virginia's Red Onion State Prison](#)

Setting Yourself on FIRE! A Survivor’s Statement

My name is Ekong Ben Eshiet Jr., son of Marsha Pritchett & Ekong Eshiet Sr., brother of Akon Eshiet, Breon Eshiet, Ben Eshiet, and Aaliyah Eshiet. I am one of the several brothers that was incarcerated at Red Onion State Prison (ROSP) who decided to take a stand against the oppression, the crookedness, the corruption, etc. that was being operated by ROSP employees. Sad to say, but these same employees who swore by oath to protect and

serve, are only protecting and serving themselves by harming and depriving the inmates and convicts housed at that warehouse.

So, due to the inhumane conditions that me and several other inmates were experiencing, SEVERAL of us started self-immolating by setting ourselves on fire, in hopes of not just escaping that prisoner torture warehouse, but also getting the protection and services needed for all the trauma we’ve endured there at Red Onion. And while those were the main goals that we were trying to get accomplished, we also had some different reasons for setting ourselves ablaze. So I’m here to tell you about my reasons.

I am locked up for a broad daylight shooting that occurred in January of 2018. I was sentenced to 12 years for this shooting after Judge Reynolds called me one of the most dangerous people he had ever met. And while I didn’t like what that judge, who didn’t even know me or my whole life story, said to me, I still, as a man, accepted the actions and accepted the sentence that I was given. And I instantly started working on correcting my ways behind the wall in the Department Of CORRECTIONS. Numerous times I tried getting a job, enroll in the GED program, and having my mental and behavioral issues addressed, but it was to no avail - except for school which took me a whole year to get enrolled in. As for treatment I just kept getting told I was on the waiting list. I tried getting put back on psych meds which I kept getting DENIED until I went on suicide watch and a hunger strike back in 2022.

After getting back on meds I kept asking to get put in a mental health pod where I would be able to get weekly therapy and be able to attend mental health programs but I kept getting DENIED! So I just kept getting in trouble until Wallens Ridge, another supermax facility in Virginia, finally got tired of me and sent me to Red Onion which is the worst prison that I ever did time at. As soon as I got off the van, the COs who had seen my name on the transfer paper started disrespecting my heritage by twisting my last name. So I told them that what they were saying was not my name and I told them how to say it the proper way, but they still continued to disrespect it. So basically from day one at Red Onion the anger and stress started vigorously building up inside me until I ended up burning myself.

Before I did I had constantly asked mental health for help which I was DENIED, of course. Only thing they would do is increase the dosage on my meds. I was taking like 8 or 9 pills a day. Just increasing the dosage on my meds but denying me treatment, counseling, or therapy which was only making my mental health worse, especially with the discrimination I was facing everyday because of my name, my religion, and my race. So I was basically just hurt and neglected and received no help whatsoever! It was like Red Onion employees were just telling me to take my meds and shut up.

With my back against the wall and no help from the ones who took oaths to help me I came to the decision that I had to do something that would get me away from what felt like hell on

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earth. So I burned myself. But after being taken to medical, put in a filthy cell for 3 days before I was sent to VCU hospital on the other side of the state for an emergency surgery I started wondering maybe I should've just killed myself because it seemed like I was just trapped in an uncomfortable situation. Once I got to VCU hospital I broke down and told nurses, hospital staff, the COs, and whoever would listen what I was going through at Red Onion. Though it did seem like they cared, it dawned on me that they couldn't or wouldn't be able to help me stay out of my "hell on earth". It was even worse when the assistant warden told me that I couldn't get a visit with my family. My family was going to come see me until they were denied, because, according to Red Onion Warden Anderson, I was a threat to myself and others. So at that point I was feeling numb inside and everyday I was waking up at VCU and thoughts of me going back to Red Onion would fill my mind, and eventually those thoughts became a reality. On my 6th day at VCU, two COs from Red Onion popped up in my room and screamed Merry Christmas. I was broken, I was defeated, I was dumbfounded.

On the way back to Red Onion I started thinking of what I could do to get an emergency transfer. I thought about setting myself ablaze again, but that option wasn't available for me because I was put in a medical cell which had no power sockets for me to set a fire. So I thought about breaking my back, which an inmate who had just broken his back told me would get me housed at Greensville, a medium security facility in VA. After surgery I would need therapy which would take months, probably a year to complete. But due to me being scared of being paralyzed I didn't go through with that. So my last option I could think of was a hunger strike which I went on for seven days before stopping it because of COs purposely targeting me everyday.

The COs would pull me out everyday to search my cell and intentionally mess my property up, especially my religious property. They would threaten me and continuously disrespect me. I ended up coming off hunger strike after they beat me up for refusing to move to another cell. Moving cells made absolutely no sense to me because there were no issues with the cell I was in. It only takes two COs to escort an inmate, but when they told me I had to move they came to my door like 7 or 8 deep, so I knew something was fishy.

So, short story shorter, I bucked and they sprayed me with mace including my burn wounds. Then they ran in my cell and shocked me with the shock shield over 5 times, even after I had stopped resisting. I began to fear for my life after that and I decided to eat because I felt, and almost certainly knew, if I continued with my strike they was going to find another reason to beat me up or worse kill me. I ended my hunger strike because of me being in fear of RETALIATION. The very next day after I ended my hunger strike I spoke with Warden Anderson about me being in fear of my life at Red Onion and asked for a transfer.

I was breaking down crying to this man asking for help and he showed no sympathy for me. All he did was ask how I felt about going back to Wallens Ridge. I said I didn't want to go back

there because it was not much different from Red Onion. I also told him I couldn't go back there because I had 5 separation orders there. When I told him that he looked like he was mad and he said he would see what he could do. I then asked about Sussex 1, another max security facility in VA, and he lied and said Sussex was no longer a level 5 prison, saying it was now a level 4.

Warden Anderson told me he would get back with me, which he never did until I started talking to news reporters and advocates about how me and several others were setting ourselves on fire in desperate attempts to get off Red Onion. After I started shedding light on what was going on at Red Onion, Anderson told the counselors and the unit manager of the building to let me know I was getting put in for out of state, which I wasn't mad at until I realized that the out of state transfer was just a retaliatory measure in response to me exposing what him and ever other Red Onion employee was trying to cover up about all the burn incidents occurring in the facility. I told my advocates to push for a transfer to Greensville or Sussex Mental Health pod and to push for an investigation.

Red Onion has been investigated internally by VADOC. It was a BIASED investigation in favor of Red Onion employees. During this investigation I spoke with SIU agents twice. The first time I spoke with the SIU agents I told them that I was only willing to go out of state if Greensville or Sussex 1 Mental Health pods wasn't an option for me. But after finding out that director of VADOC Chadwick Dotson and Warden Anderson lied to the public and told them that I had requested an out of state transfer, I spoke with the SIU agents again. I told them since Dotson and Anderson lied to the public and didn't give them the full truth I was no longer willing to go out of state. I told them while they had body cameras that if I go out of state I will kill myself and I even filed complaints about it so what I said is documented in VADOC.

Now seven months after setting myself on fire I am sitting in a cell in Indiana shaking my head. And Red Onion employees are talking about charging me and all the other brothers that set ourselves on fire. They are doing this only out of spite, because even though I got sent out of state, other brothers got sent out of state or are waiting on a transfer, the TRUTH is out there about Red Onion, Wallens Ridge, and the corrupt VADOC system that is being operated under the DICTATORSHIP of Chadwick Dotson.

To be honest, even though I didn't get exactly what I wanted, if I could go back and do it again I would. At the end of the day, whether I get charged or not, the truth is out there! Sometimes in life you have to sacrifice for what's RIGHT and for what you may want in life. My brothers and sisters will know that you still did something righteous in this life and through your actions change did or will come! I'm in Indiana right now and may face some bogus street charges for setting myself on fire, but with me knowing that the truth is finally out there about the CORRUPT VADOC system, I am in high hopes for the rest of my brothers and sisters that are doing time or got to do time in VADOC. The Struggle Continues & The Fight doesn't stop! You can kill a revolutionary but you can't stop a Revolution!

THE MOVEMENT

www.hrcoalition.org

A Better Gun Control

By Daniel Denvir

The only kind of gun control we have in the United States is the kind that locks up black people. We need an alternative.

Liberals have a smorgasbord of National Rifle Association contradictions to pillory: two black civilians shot dead by police while carrying guns, one legally; five Dallas police picked off by a black veteran reportedly firing a legally acquired “variation of an AK-style military weapon” amid a crowd peppered with marchers legally but confusingly carrying guns; three more police felled by another black veteran in Baton Rouge.

The acrimonious public debate revolving around the Second Amendment and what property-owning white men of eighteenth-century vintage meant by “the right to bear arms,” however, belies a quiet consensus: actually existing gun control comprises a set of criminal laws supported by Republicans and Democrats alike that incarcerate poor and working-class people, especially poor black men, in very large numbers.

Having a felony record, often from a drug conviction, generally makes it illegal for one to possess firearms and possession can trigger draconian sentences regardless of whether the gun is ever fired or even brandished. For young black men caught up in the criminal justice system, convictions for either guns or drugs often work in tandem toward one end: more time behind bars.

DeJarion Echols was caught with forty-four grams of crack (along with \$5,700 that was *computed* as another 450 grams) and an unloaded rifle under his bed, according to Families Against Mandatory Minimums. The resulting sentence, handed down in 2006, was twenty years in federal prison: one ten-year mandatory minimum for the inflated crack, and another for a gun that Echols denied using in connection with drug dealing and for which FAMM has said he did not own bullets.

Crystal Rose Garcia, Echols’s former partner, says he had started selling drugs a few months prior to his arrest to pay for college after a financial aid shortfall forced him to drop out. The two remain friends, she says. But the draconian sentence made their relationship impossible.

“That’s been hard,” says Garcia. “I tried my hardest to hold on and wait for him.” He and their ten-year-old daughter, she says, have a “great relationship and she can’t wait for her daddy to come home.”

A black man like Echols can serve a lot of time in prison for illegally possessing guns that, thanks to a jurisprudential revolution in Second Amendment interpretation, are for millions of white Americans a cornerstone of their constitutional rights. The same, however, is also true, if to a lesser extent, for people with felony records regardless of their race or ethnicity.

An estimated 19.6 million Americans have been convicted of a felony, according to a yet-to-be-published study (*Growth in the U.S. Ex-Felon and Ex-Prisoner Population, 1948-2010*). That’s 8.4 percent of the adult population, including roughly one-third the population of adult black men, who are in most cases barred from owning guns.

As with the war on drugs, the war on guns has effected a cascade of negative outcomes: aggressive policing on city streets, landing people in courtrooms where prosecutors leverage draconian sentence threats to systematically deny defendants their right to a trial, ending in a cell in one of this country’s miserable and bloated prisons.

Police stop-and-frisk dragnets have received widespread criticism for sweeping up people for drug possession and open warrants en masse. What gets little attention is that stop-and-frisk is premised in practice and in law (see the Supreme Court’s *Terry v. Ohio* ruling) on searching for guns.

As Harvard Law fellow Benjamin Levin writes in a trenchant law review article, the so-called drug exception to the Fourth Amendment is in reality inextricably linked to the policing of firearms. Gun debates, says Levin, rarely address the impact of “aggressive policing of gun laws, and really aggressive prosecutions of, again, young black men for gun crimes.”

It is often the very same people who end up with a felony record thanks to drugs who as a result are exposed to the possibility of harsh gun sentences. Yet even as politicians increasingly embrace the notion that the drug war is wrong (if only to a limited and largely rhetorical degree), many simultaneously call for yet lengthier sentences for, and more policing of, illegal guns.

Guns, like drugs, cause problems. But mass incarceration has failed to provide solutions, and creates new problems in its own right. There *is* a war on guns, though it’s nothing like the mass disarmament campaign that the NRA warns against. Rather, the war on guns targets and incarcerates a poor and disproportionately nonwhite class of people with felony records.

Bipartisan Prisons

Recent history teaches us that policies with bipartisan support, from financial deregulation to foreign wars, can be dangerous ones. The same has been true with mass incarceration in general and the criminal law approach to illegal guns in particular.

In 2006, New York mayor Michael Bloomberg, a political independent and one of the NRA’s highest-profile opponents, successfully pushed for a state law establishing a three-and-a-half year mandatory minimum for illegally possessing a loaded handgun. Last November, Democratic Milwaukee mayor Tom Barrett and Republican governor Scott Walker both supported the enactment of a three-year mandatory minimum for felons caught

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with guns. Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel and Philadelphia district attorney Seth Williams, both Democrats, have called for harsh illegal gun mandatory minimums.

In Baltimore, the death of Freddie Gray resulted in a crush of politicians pledging reform. That hasn't stopped Police Commissioner Kevin Davis from pushing for a harsh gun sentencing measure. It's co-sponsored by Senate majority leader Catherine E. Pugh, the Democratic nominee who will almost certainly be the city's next mayor.

James Forman, a law professor at Yale, says that black leaders have historically advocated for tougher gun laws out of desperation alongside calls for economic development — a Marshall Plan for cities. According to Forman, “they got the gun laws, but not the Marshall Plan.” The result, he argues, is the “worst of all worlds”: legally produced guns flooding impoverished communities where people feel the need to carry them and are frequently incarcerated or shot dead as a result.

State and local laws vary across the country but there are three key federal statutes driving the war on guns. First is the general prohibition on illegally possessing a gun because one has a felony conviction (or because of some other factors, including because one illegally *uses* drugs). In fiscal year 2015, 4,984 people were convicted under 922(g), 51 percent of them black.

Another key statute is 924(c), which establishes a series of mandatory minimum sentences ranging from five years to life for people who possess, brandish, or use a firearm during a drug or violent crime. Even if the gun was legally acquired or, as was the case with Echols, sitting at home unloaded. The power to pursue such sentences lies entirely with prosecutors, who use their discretion to intimidate people from going to trial.

The other key federal statute is the Armed Career Criminal Act, which establishes a fifteen-year mandatory minimum sentence for illegal gun or ammunition possession when a person has committed three violent or drug crimes. Those crimes can in reality be rather unserious and can all occur in quick succession — on one day and before any given conviction — and thus don't necessarily target wanton recidivists. In one case, a man was sentenced to fifteen years for illegal gun possession thanks to having been previously convicted for burglarizing three adjacent stores. The defendant had, Jenny W. L. Osborne writes, “become a career criminal in just over half an hour.”

As of the end of 2013, Bureau of Justice statistics estimate that fifty-one thousand people were locked up in state custody for public-order offenses involving a weapon — “carrying, exhibiting, firing, possessing, or selling a weapon” — or nearly 4 percent of the total state prison population. In the federal system, 30,500 people were locked up on weapons offenses as of the end of September 2014, or 15.8 percent of the total.

What's more, those numbers don't capture gun laws' true reach because BJS only classifies offenders by what is deemed to be their most serious offense. Nearly a quarter of 91,455 federal

prisoners classified as drug offenders in 2012 (sentenced since 1998) received a sentence involving weapons, according to an October 2015 BJS report. Roughly three quarters of drug offenders in federal prison in 2012 (sentenced since 1994) were black or Hispanic.

Calling the NRA's Bluff

The NRA and its allies have ensured that guns are produced and distributed with little regulation, while liberals who support gun control and conservatives who oppose them have crossed the aisle to pass draconian laws to punish those banned from possessing them. The upshot is the deregulated production of guns coupled with a partially criminalized regime for possessing them — and a two-tiered and racially discriminatory right to bear arms.

The country is flooded with guns. “Good” and iconically white citizens are given the maximal right to bear those guns. That right is justified by appealing to the need to protect against Muslim terrorists, unstable mass shooters, and most enduringly a criminal underclass, iconically black, that is mercilessly punished for bearing arms.

The NRA, funded (to a significant but unclear degree) by an industry that depends on a huge market for illegal guns to ensure profitability, has called for putting those very same black-market (and, not incidentally often black) customers in prison for extremely long periods of time. This is less a contradiction in American gun politics than its condition of possibility.

At the NRA's May convention, Donald Trump, accepting the group's endorsement, complained that “President Obama tried to take the guns from law-abiding Americans but has reduced prosecutions of violent criminals who use guns.”

Trump, as usual, knew his audience well, and his speech was in line with a recent push by the NRA to double down on foreboding law-and-order talk, warning that liberals, in the name of reform, want to flood the streets with criminals and disarm the citizenry. To be fair, the NRA has on occasion (at least in recent years) opposed harsh sentencing measures and some gun-rights advocates are staunch critics of mass incarceration.

But the NRA has a long history of agitating for harsh sentencing and prison construction. And it has relentlessly warned that “the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.” The notion is not only vigilante but profoundly carceral, grounding the right of certain people to own guns in the criminality of others. Yet many liberals, whatever they might say about the NRA, have accepted the basic and racist premise of its argument.

“Even a politician who doesn't accept the NRA's money will accept their rhetoric and define the problem as dangerous people with guns, rather than questioning the public policy purpose of allowing this industry to remain virtually unregulated, unable to be held even civilly liable for the effects that it has on the country,” says Stephanie Kollmann, policy director at the Children

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and Family Justice Center at Northwestern University Pritzker School of Law.

Gun policy has long pivoted around the specter of armed black people, from posses of post-Civil War white reactionaries disarming blacks to California governor Ronald Reagan signing a bill to ban open carry in response to the Black Panthers' brazen public display of weapons. Beginning in the 1960s, a crime wave took off as the modern conservative movement gained steam, giving potent white fears an aura of legitimacy and a political vehicle to shape both major parties' agendas. That fear, despite the precipitous decline in crime since the 1990s, is spiking once again.

When a Minnesota police officer shot Philando Castile dead by in his car, he was carrying a legal gun that his girlfriend has said he told the officer he possessed. His bloodied body, viewed by millions online, called the gun rights movement's bluff: is a black man carrying a gun that he was licensed to carry a "good guy" when he is shot dead by the police? The NRA was criticized, seemingly even by its own members, for, like the officer who shot him, failing to acknowledge Castile's right to carry.

Castile's death, like Alton Sterling's, contradicts the NRA's bedrock message, as David Graham pointed out in the *Atlantic*: "Castile and Sterling represent cases in which carrying a gun not only failed to make the men safer, but in fact contributed to their deaths."

The Foundational Other

Poor young black men shoot each other at alarming rates. But it's not, as a member of the *Wall Street Journal* editorial board put it, a simple matter of "black criminality, which is a function of black pathology, which ultimately stems from the breakdown of the black family."

Many black Americans, excluded from the formal labor market and harboring a longstanding distrust of law enforcement, depend on "self-defense or reliance on friends and family in confrontations with others," says Eric Schneider, a historian at the University of Pennsylvania working on a history of murder in the United States.

"Dependence on the underground economy for income — activities ranging from selling drinks by the glass after hours or hosting card games to more obvious illegal activities such as drug dealing — reinforced the tendency to rely on oneself rather than on the state for protection," Schneider continues.

As of 2009, black Americans had a gun homicide rate more than seven times higher than whites. But at the turn of the twentieth century, it was Italian immigrants who had the highest rate of homicide victimization. One big thing that has changed since then: the proliferation of guns which, Schneider notes, has made "confrontations more deadly." It is the prevalence of guns, and not underlying crime rates, that causes the United States to consistently lead its peers in murder.

And while Italian Americans became integrated into the white apex of the United States' racial caste system, black people, and the black poor in particular, remain that system's foundational other. Economic exclusion doesn't explain all rampant gun violence in segregated and poor black communities. But on a systemic level, it is its fundamental premise.

Those working in the informal or illegal economy, for example, deal in cash and without the benefit of the state performing basic regulatory functions, like guaranteeing contracts. Alton Sterling sold CDs on the street. Ronnie Horton, who said that he had purchased CDs from Sterling, told the CBC that Sterling claimed to need a gun because a friend who also sold CDs had been robbed.

What's at work is not pathology but rather political economy: many people with felony records carry guns for security that they do not trust that police will provide — including to secure the conditions for economic life, and life itself, that for more affluent Americans is among the state's primary functions.

Whether protecting their business — or, in the case of the inter-cine feuds that envelop many neighborhoods where too many young men excluded from the labor market have far too much time on their hands, their lives — guns are a horrible systemic problem that can on a personal level be an immediate necessity.

"If you are a young black man on the south or west side of Chicago who has prior contact with the law and a criminal background of a certain type, you are exponentially more likely to face a threat to your life," says Kollmann. "And you are completely prohibited from carrying a weapon in your self defense ... The people who form a lot of the NRA's membership are people who face statistically very unlikely threats to their person in their daily life. It is just a very remote possibility that going to their suburban grocery store they're going to need a weapon."

Violence is way down, and though "the growth in incarceration rates reduced crime," a major study from the National Academies' National Research Council found that "the magnitude of the crime reduction remains highly uncertain and the evidence suggests it was unlikely to have been large." The level of violence that persists — especially in cities like Chicago and Baltimore — is intolerable. But police and lengthy prison sentences can't put it to an end.

Economic power for marginalized men and their families is one path to disarmament; in the shorter term, programs that reach out to defuse disputes before they boil over, which often show success but never garner enough attention or funding, are another. Harsh mandatory minimums, according to University of Minnesota law professor Michael Tonry, achieve mostly nothing save for fomenting inequity and injustice.

Stalled reform legislation in Congress will do some, though not close to enough, to ease sentences. Amid calls for change, a major taboo holds against cutting gun sentences, which reflects a problem facing the movement to end mass incarceration as a

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whole: reform proposals are still mostly limited to crimes people don't think are too bad to begin with, like drugs — and even with drugs discussions about legalizing anything beyond marijuana have so far been a nonstarter. Liberals increasingly express concern for the collateral consequences of felony records, which limit people's access to employment, housing, and voting. But rarely does this sentiment extend to firearms — a denied right that, if claimed, can lead to draconian punishment.

Forman, the author of the forthcoming book *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America*, says that gun sentences begin to touch on a “third rail of criminal justice reform,” which is violent crime. He warns that the movement might be overselling a “nonviolent-only solution” and in doing so be building “a movement on a lie” that most people in prison are there for nonviolent offenses.

“We're not going to actually talk about punitive gun policy as a problem if we're unwilling to talk about criminal justice reform beyond nonviolent offenders,” says Forman.

A few things are clear: guns are a murderous problem; the NRA is racist and reactionary; and liberals are deluded if they believe that sentencing more black men to prison for gun crimes will do anything other than send more black men to prison. Government must disarm America, including NRA members, including the police. And it is government too that must end the war on guns.

Daniel Denvir is the author of *All-American Nativism* and the host of *The Dig* on Jacobin Radio.

From the Editor -

Article originally published in 2016. Still relevant in 2025? You tell us.

From <https://jacobin.com/2016/09/gun-control-mass-incarceration-drug-war-nra-shooters>

Call for Contributors

THE MOVEMENT magazine is looking for quality writing, especially from the families of prisoners, prisoners, and former prisoners that can contribute to critical thought and reflection in the various sections of this magazine. In particular we are interested in the following:

Feature articles: In-depth, analytical articles that critically examine the criminal justice system, poverty, racism, and that provide solutions to those issues.

Book reviews/political satire art/poetry: Is there a book you'd like to review for THE MOVEMENT magazine? Do you create political satire cartoons or other artwork? Do you write poetry? Let us know and send us copies of your work.

Letters: We love to hear from you. Families of prisoners and prisoners send us a shout-out letter and visiting room photo for our 'Love Knows No Bars' section, and send your letters to the Editor for our new 'Writings of Multiplicity' section of THE MOVEMENT. Please let us know if we have your permission to print your letter.

“Knowledge is Power, ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE!!”

Philly DA Larry Krasner, former judge Pat Dugan talk Trump, homicides and retail theft at candidate forum

The Democratic candidates agreed on most issues but highlighted their differences on issues like the city’s crime rate and the death penalty.

By Carmen Russell-Sluchansky, March 12, 2025



Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner (left) faces off against former judge Pat Dugan (right) in a district attorney candidate forum at the West Philadelphia Mennonite Fellowship on March 11, 2025. (Kimberly Paynter/WHYY)

Philly’s murder rate, retail theft and capital punishment were some of the key issues that took center stage at the Philadelphia district attorney candidate forum held at the West Philadelphia Mennonite Fellowship on Tuesday night.

Incumbent District Attorney Larry Krasner sought to fend off former Philadelphia Judge Patrick Dugan as both candidates defined their differences.

The Democrats appeared to agree on most topics, but sparks flew when Krasner suggested that Dugan aligned closer to President Donald Trump as a judge.

“You’re not going to call me some right-wing judge Larry, you’re not going to do that here,” Dugan shot back in the only break from the format rigidly enforced by moderator Shaka-boona Marshall, executive director of Human Rights Coalition, which organized and hosted the forum. “Was I a right-wing judge when I found your 10 clients not guilty?”

“I didn’t say you were right-wing judge; however, this is a good time for you to condemn Donald Trump so all people in the Northeast can see it,” Krasner retorted.

“I categorically denounce Donald Trump and his policies — the guy’s a nut,” Dugan said. “But we’re not running against Donald Trump. We’re running against each other. Stop running against Trump and run on the safety of the city of Philadelphia.”



Former judge Pat Dugan at a forum hosted by the Human Rights Coalition for Democratic candidates for DA on March 11, 2025. (Kimberly Paynter/WHYY)

Democrats sparred over Philly’s crime rate

In his opening statement, Dugan said the city’s high crime rate motivated him to run against Krasner, who he said was “too soft on crime.” Dugan specifically cited the high murder rate during Krasner’s tenure but added that non-fatal shootings and retail theft have become a bigger problem.

“It was enough that made this former paratrooper decide to step down and get into the arena because I want to make your neighborhood, your family, safe,” Dugan said.

Krasner responded that violent crime rates spiked at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic but said that the city has managed to bring them way down since.

“There was a thing called the pandemic and everybody is aware that every criminologist in the United States agrees that we have experienced in the last five years the largest increase in gun violence in United States history and the largest decrease in 2024 in United States history,” he said.

Philadelphia experienced a record high of 562 homicides in 2021. Last year, homicides dropped to their lowest level in more than a decade at 269.

But a high rate of retail theft has continued to persist.

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Dugan blamed that on Krasner's 2018 policy that treated stealing goods valued at less than \$500 as a summary offense, more equivalent to a traffic offense than one punishable by jail time.

"What about all those stores that are going to leave us because of your retail theft policy?" Dugan asked.

Krasner dropped the policy early last year.

How do the 2 DA candidates differ on the death penalty?

Krasner has long been a vocal opponent of capital punishment. The state has had a moratorium on it for 10 years.

Dugan was asked about his position on the freeze on executions and he said he could "understand" the reasons behind the pause, but added he couldn't say that he would "never consider it."

"There are some heinous crimes where that might come on the table," he said, offering hypothetical situations, such as a gunman shooting up a school killing "26 of our kindergarten children."

"It would have to be one of those exceptions," he said. "Those are some of the things that I would look at but, as a rule of thumb, I would not be looking to do."

The two candidates appeared to agree on what they would do to counter wrongful convictions.

"The conviction integrity unit, let me tell you, if I am elected to district attorney, I will put that on steroids," Dugan said. "I believe that one innocent person should not be in jail."

Krasner said his "record speaks for itself," citing enhanced forensics tools that even "the FBI doesn't have."

"Philadelphia leads the nation when it comes to the exoneration of people, the vast majority of them completely innocent," he said. "This is revolutionary stuff."

Both candidates said they were opposed to cash bail and arresting and charging protestors. They said they support stronger programs that provide alternatives to incarceration for misdemeanors and oppose deporting immigrants for petty crimes. But, Dugan said he was against "downgrading serious charges" to save offenders from being deported.

Audience reactions

Krasner was the clear audience favorite among the several dozen attendees.

Colette White, a health advocate, said she was voting for Krasner because she supports his views on what fuels crime and because he reopened cases to review questionable convictions.

"Jobs, homelessness, the psych issues and mental health needs all need to be looked at differently," she said.

She said she was not fazed by the increases in retail theft, saying it's always been high.

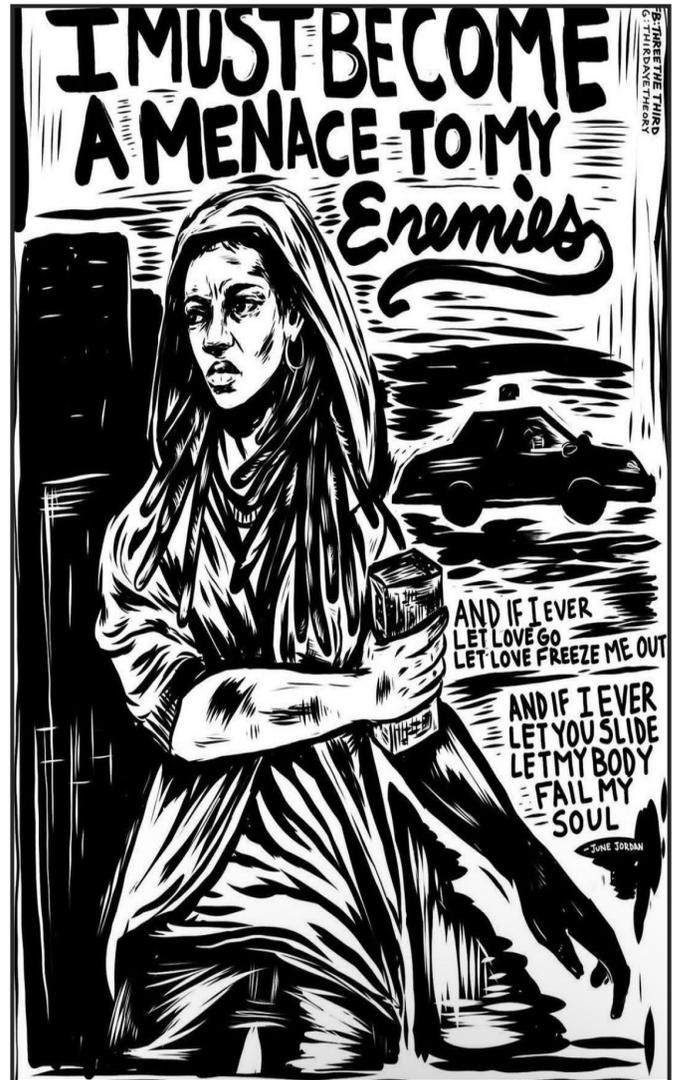
"I'm a native Philadelphian, homegrown, and it's always been that way," she said. "What has happened was there have been better things in place for those who get caught. Instead of sticking them in the jail for retail theft, give them another way."

Larry Kendrick, another audience member, said he came in "leaning" towards Krasner but that he appreciated hearing what Dugan had to say and that he was less certain now.

"He had a lot of good points to say," he said. "But it's easy to sit on the outside and say what things [Krasner] missed."

Krasner and Dugan are scheduled to attend another forum next week. Philadelphia's municipal primary election will be held on Tuesday, May 20.

Tuesday's panel was composed of former organizers for Kamala Harris' 2024 presidential campaign: Janée Taft, Eden Tesfaye and James Holloway DeLeon.



There's a DIFFERENCE (What's the DIFFERENCE)

By Rasheed Farrelle

There's a DIFFERENCE between somebody being a
SUCKA
and somebody being HUMBLE,
or somebody being QUIET
rather than them being LOUD
there's a DIFFERENCE between a MAN who'd rather
MOVE
all by himSELF
than,
somebody who can NOT move withOUT a CROWD...
see the difference from being SMART,
Rather than STUPID.
is to KNOW what is the DIFFERENCE
everyTHING that someone SAYS does NOT CALL for a
RESPONSE
they could CALL YOU out your NAME
or even THREATEN you with THREATS...
it's all IRRELEVANT
long as THEY don't CROSS that LINE
there's a DIFFERENCE between somebody being a
b***h...
or them BEING the bigger MAN
rather PUNCHING you in the FACE
or having CONTROL over their HAND,
over their MIND,
their EMOTIONS
trust and BELIEVE that there's a DIFFERENCE
and if you do NOT know the DIFFERENCE...
...WHAT'S the DIFFERENCE
WHAT'S the POINT?!
because the DIFFERENCE between being WORTHY,
rather than me wasting TIME...
is to be WORTH the deFINITION I deFINE
rather sitting wasting BREATH, wasting ENERGY
tryna TEACH YOU what is the DIFFERENCE.

Cause WHAT'S the DIFFERENCE...
if you can't even READ beTWEEN the LINES
(see there's a DIFFERENCE)
and until the DAY WE underSTAND how EASY it
IS to control our HAND
and turn from a BOY into a MAN, we'll be no
DIFFERENT
cause they will ALWAYS have conTROL...
cause it's MIND, BODY, SOUL...
and until we LEARN our ROLE...
"We will NEVER KNOW the DIFFERENCE"

THE MOVEMENT MAGAZINE

Founders

*Kerry "Shakaboona" Marshall
Patricia "Mama Patt" Vickers*

Editor-In-Chief

Terri Harper

Co-Editor-In-Chief

Patricia "Mama Patt" Vickers

Owner

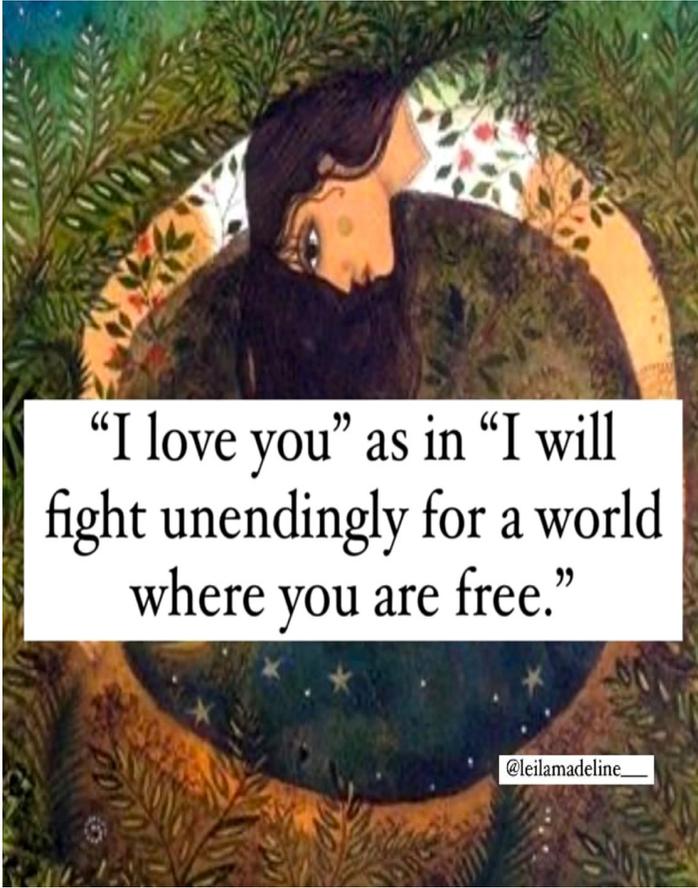
Kerry "Shakaboona" Marshall

Parent Organization:

Human Rights Coalition (HRC)

Founded: 2007

THE MOVEMENT



“I love you” as in “I will fight unendingly for a world where you are free.”

@leilamadeline__

Expert Sudoku Puzzle—Answers on page 35

	1		6				4
		4	1	5		6	
	6		3		8		
5		9	7				
1		3		5			
7			2				
						3	1
9							
		8				4	

A Story of an Addict

A story of an addict
 A lustful sin craving for
 When it won't ever crave you back
 It's more than what you see
 An illusion of a lucid dream
 Wanting more
 Just never enough
 When does it stop
 When is enough really enough
 That one glance
 that one touch
 With a rushing of memories
 of what you thought was fun
 just in that moment
 Everything changes revolving around
 that one moment
 "I need to let go."
 "Only once."
 "What's only one?"
 "Doing this won't harm me."
 "I can function."
 "I can't help it."
 "I have to, it's a must."
 "It feels good."

Telia Johnson #PE7513
 SCI-Muncy

I want to support the Human Rights Coalition by giving a Donation!

Name: _____

Institution/ID (if necessary): _____

Street Address: _____

City/State/Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

Donation Amount: _____ \$20.00 - \$40.00
 _____ \$50.00
 _____ \$100.00 or above

Families, we rely on member support, any gift you make above \$25.00 helps us a great deal.

Please make checks payable to the Human Rights Coalition and mail donations to:
HRC, PO Box 34580, Phila., PA 19101, ATTENTION: Charitable Donations.

*You may contact HRC-Philly
at this address:*

*Human Rights Coalition
P.O. Box 34580
Philadelphia, PA 19101
or*

*Email:
Info@hrcoalition.org*

**How can I receive a copy of
THE MOVEMENT?**

***Simply send your contact info
to:***

***Human Rights Coalition
P.O. Box 34580
Philadelphia, PA 19101
Attention: Newsletter!***

***Donations are always wel-
come, but not required for
your magazine.***



R

emember?

There was only 3 kinds of chewing gum - Juicy Fruit, Spearmint, Doublemint.



Everybody didn't have Jergens lotion, you'd greased your face with Vaseline, at least it wasn't ashy, and be on your way.

There was Colgate, Pepsodent, or Crest toothpaste. Can you name the others?

At your house did you have Alaga, Log Cabin, or Karo syrup?

The newspapers were only Inquirer, Bulletin and everyone's favorite the Daily News. Black newspaper still going strong -The Tribune.

Black magazines were Ebony, Essence, Jet, and Jive.

Readers Digest?

You used a mayonnaise jar to drink from, you was considered almost middle class if in your house there was a set of Tupper-

ware — plastic cups in different colors. Wow!

Whatever you washed by hand, put it on a hanger, open the oven door, and that was your dryer.

You made a pillow by stuffing some clothes in a pillow case.

Remember when the TVs only had three channels, 3, 6, and 10.

The TV guide was in the Bulletin or Inquirer Sunday Newspapers.

If the rabbit ear antenna broke, there was a solution. Get a wire coat hanger and put a piece of aluminum foil on it.

Remember when the last TV program ended at 12 midnight?

The Sayings of Nan Hill: A new booklet

January 2025

by Sean Damon, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Straight Ahead

One of the most uplifting things about being in social justice movements like ours is the people who are part of them, who bring not only their passion for the issue but their knowledge, talents, and skills. If you've spent any time with Ms. Sandra Hill, a longtime member and leader in the Coalition to Abolish Death By Incarceration (CADBI) and the Human Rights Coalition, you are probably well aware of hers.

One of Sandra's gifts is her keen ability to grab your ear and offer a little wisdom that might cause you to stop for a moment and think about what is unfolding around you. In all the stress and struggle of our ongoing push to end death by incarceration sentences (aka life without parole) in Pennsylvania, her words help return you to your center. Deceptively simple, they offer clarity and the hard-won perspective and insights of someone whose resilience

has carried her through decades of pursuing justice.

The world is so volatile and precarious at this moment that we have got to appreciate our people and give them their flowers now. It's really the only way we'll get through it all – celebrating and finding joy in each other and building community.

In that spirit, some of us printed a booklet of Sandra Hill's writing recently titled "The Sayings of Nan Hill". It's been a real pleasure to work on this book of poetry and homespun wisdom from Sandra Hill as well as an honor to struggle side by side with Sandra for so many years as we've worked together to bring people home from state prison and fight for a more liberatory world.



I was touched that Sandra trusted me with her writing and the idea for this project and that the Abolitionist Law Center and Amistad Law Project believed in it enough to provide the resources to publish it.

As well, movement artist Erik Ruin put his whole heart into this project and created wonderful original art for it – designing and printing the booklet from top to bottom. We were so lucky to have him on board and he really created a beautiful object in the booklet itself.

If you would like a copy, please contact me at sean@straight-ahead.org. Donations to support this project can be made here.

From: Abolition Law Center: [The Sayings of Nan Hill: A new booklet](#)

The HomeFront: Serving Our Community!

TWO PRISONS TO BE CLOSED, LET ONE OF THEM BE FAYETTE!

By: Tricka Parasimo aka Sonny

Updates from the Toxic Prisons Campaign

You may or may not have heard that Governor Shapiro made an announcement that he would like to close down two prisons this year. We are taking this as a great opportunity to make it known that SCI-Fayette should be closed because of the toxic air and water. While all prisons are toxic, and many in PA have toxic air and water, our campaign is pushing that SCI-Fayette should be number one on his list.

For those who have not heard of our campaign, since the Abolitionist Law Center did a study titled *"No Escape: Exposure to Toxic Coal Waste at State Correctional Institution Fayette"* we at the Human Rights Coalition have been working to expose the truth about SCI-Fayette knowingly and purposefully being built on a toxic coal ash dumpsite. We have been corresponding with many of you who have had physical ailments and encourage others to reach out if you, too, have experienced health issues since being housed at SCI-Fayette.

A former resident of Fayette, B. Preston Lyles has been leading the charge and speaking with organizations across Pennsylvania and the nation. We have been working with Frontline Resources Institute and the Emerald Cities Collaborative to research how we can better serve communities affected by environmental racism - where people in communities of color face a disproportionate risk of exposure to pollution and related health conditions.

We recently held a protest in Philadelphia to recruit more community members to join our fight. We are also planning screenings of our Documentary and plan to host more rallies in the city Philadelphia. If you have a family member in or around the city and they would like to be involved, please have them email: toxicprisonsshr@gmail.com. Our goal is to grow our collective and have your story be heard!

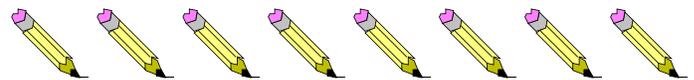
We are also working towards a committee dedicated to reaching out to legislators and going to Harrisburg to speak with representatives. We have created a legislative packet and are demanding meetings with those who are allies. We are doing this with the hopes of reaching Governor Shapiro and informing those with political power of the role they can play in fighting for YOUR human right to clean air and water.

What can you do from the inside? You can help by writing to Governor Shapiro asking him to permanently close SCI-Fayette (built on toxic coal ash) as one of the two prisons to be shut down. Share this information with your family and friends on the outside so that they can also communicate the need to close SCI-Fayette. Contact information for Governor Shapiro is:

Governor Josh Shapiro
501 North 3rd Street
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120
Phone: [717-787-2500](tel:717-787-2500)
E-mail: governor@state.pa.us

If you would like to reach out to us with your testimony of how Fayette has affected your health please mail:

Toxic Prisons Campaign
C/O Human Rights Coalition
PO Box 34580
Philadelphia, PA 19101



SAMPLE LETTER:

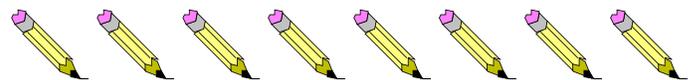
Re: Urging the DOC and Gov. Shapiro to close SCI Fayette

My name is _____ and I'm a [Pennsylvania voter, member of the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia, formerly incarcerated person or family member of an incarcerated person, health professional, environmental advocate, teacher, etc. – use whichever terms apply to you]. I am writing to urge the DOC and Gov. Shapiro to close SCI Fayette.

I applaud the Governor's decision to close two prisons, and reinvest that money in our underfunded schools and public transit. I believe that the people and communities most affected by incarceration must have a say in which prisons are closed. And I believe that when the prisons are closed, they must be closed for good – they should NOT be reopened in any capacity.

I stand with numerous formerly incarcerated people and family members in calling for the DOC to reconsider its proposal for which prisons to be closed, so that SCI Fayette is included. SCI Fayette was built on a hazardous coal ash waste dump. For years, it has been the source of numerous health issues stemming from chronic exposure to air and water pollution. The prison has become synonymous with the issue of environmental racism and 'toxic prisons' -- correctional facilities that deal with serious water and air contamination from nearby toxic sites. A prison sentence should not carry the risk of highly preventable health conditions. Do the right thing and stop this harm by closing SCI Fayette.

*Sincerely,
[your name]*



THE MOVEMENT



Gov. Shapiro: Shut down SCI Fayette!

by Joe Piette

Over fifty people came out on a cold winter day on Feb. 8th to tell Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro to close down SCI Fayette.

Shapiro announced earlier this week his intentions to close down two of the state's 23 prisons to save \$110 million.

After hearing from several speakers at Love Park near to City Hall, participants carrying signs and banners marched in the street to the Governor's Philadelphia office at 8th and Arch. There, a final rally was held.

SCI Fayette, like most state prisons, is marked by asbestos, mold, brown tap water, inedible food, roaches, rodents, broken heating systems, and poor health care. Because Fayette was built in 2003 in Luzerne Township next to a 506-acre coal ash dump, Fayette has the most egregiously toxic environment.

Incarcerated people at Fayette suffer from abnormally high rates of heart and respiratory illnesses, chronic skin disorders, gastrointestinal disease, and thyroid disorders. SCI Fayette has the largest cancer cluster of the state's prisons, with a high rate of premature deaths. For over 12 years, the Human Rights Coalition has waged a campaign to shut down this toxic facility.

That is why the groups who organized the protest - the Human Rights Coalition, Coalition to Abolish Death by Incarceration, Philly Muslim Freedom Fund, Put People First, Fayette Health Justice Committee - are demanding SCI Fayette by one of the prisons shut down.



Rally photos by Joe Piette



SHUT DOWN SCI-Fayette

SHUT DOWN SCI-Fayette!!



After Shapiro calls for 2 state prisons to close, prisoner advocates follow up with specific recommendations

By [Sunny Morgan](#), KYW Newsradio

February 9, 2025

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — After Gov. Josh Shapiro’s budget proposal called for the closure of two state prisons to save taxpayer dollars, several groups organized a march in the city on Saturday for prisoner rights and the closure two specific facilities.

The governor hasn’t said which prisons he plans to close yet, but advocates say SCI Fayette and SCI Huntington are two of the state’s worst-off prison facilities.

Leaders from several groups, including the city’s Human Rights Coalition and the Philly Muslim Freedom Fund, began with a rally in LOVE Park, before marching to Shapiro’s Philadelphia offices at 8th and Arch streets.

Shakaboona Marshall, executive director of the city’s Human Rights Coalition, says SCI Fayette is literally toxic.

“SCI Fayette is located on a Superfund site—the result of decades of hazardous coal fly ash dumping: 500 million tons of toxic waste poisoning the land, the water and the air, Marshall said. “This prison was built on this dangerous site with little regard for the health and safety of its inhabitants.”

Philadelphia’s Human Rights Coalition says SCI Fayette is located on a Superfund site and is a danger to the health of incarcerated people.

Organizers say aging SCI Huntingdon is becoming more and more dangerous.

“SCI Huntington, that particular prison has been in existence for over 100 years. It has asbestos in it, black mold, the roof is falling down. They have contaminated water,” said Marshall.

Jackson Kusiak, with the Human Rights Coalition, says the movement to shut down these prisons started with the people incarcerated there.

“It wasn’t us who started it here on the outside,” Kusiak said. “It was started by 15 men who were in long-term solitary confinement at SCI Fayette. And when I say ‘long-term solitary confinement,’ I mean 15 years.”

Photos by Joe Piette

Another organizer, Lorraine Haw, read aloud from a letter written by a person incarcerated in one of the facilities after being there for two weeks.

“First off, every day since I’ve been here, I’ve been given a spoiled milk. The water here is no good and has come out of the sink brown.”



Above: Lorraine Haw reads letter aloud.

B.P. Lyles, the lead organizer and project director for Toxic Prison Campaign at the Human Rights Coalition, says there must be alternatives to a prison cell.

“Somehow they’re finally figuring out that we are wasting too much money caging our brothers and sisters, and there are better ways, and we’ve got to get to it.”



Above: BP Lyles, Lead Toxic Prisons Campaign Organizer

THE MOVEMENT

www.hrcoalition.org



Prison Closures: What PA should consider

Governor Josh Shapiro and the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections have proposed closing two state prisons, saving the state over \$100 million annually.

March 13, 2025

Governor Josh Shapiro and the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections have proposed closing two state prisons, saving the state over \$100 million annually.

If done right, closing the prisons will not only save money in the short-term, it will benefit all Pennsylvanians.

“There are fewer people in prison since before the pandemic, enabling prison closures. If done right, closing two state prison could save Pennsylvania taxpayers resources that can be reinvested to make all of us safer,” says Claire Shubik-Richards, the Prison Society’s executive director.

There are a number of important factors to consider when deciding which prisons to close, including which facilities will require more repair, which facilities offer important programming, which facilities expose staff and residents to environmental hazards, distance from incarcerated people’s families, and staff culture.

More efficient prisons can increase access to programming

Criminal justice reforms to address mass incarceration have led to a steady decline in the prison population over the last decade, with Pennsylvania’s state prison system now at 82% capacity overall. In the DOC’s latest monthly population report, 8 prisons were at less than 80% capacity. Consolidating into fewer facilities would create a more efficient prison system while still operating safely below capacity.

Prisons often struggle to recruit specialized staff that provide services like reentry support and mental health counseling. Concentrating these staff in fewer facilities would help ensure that such resources are available without the interruptions that sometimes occur when a specialized employee leaves their job, leav-

ing a vacancy that can take months to fill. In addition, increasing the overall staff complement at the remaining prisons would mean more corrections officers were available to facilitate getting incarcerated people to educational programs, religious services, or addiction recovery groups. Currently, in some facilities that have programming, incarcerated people miss classes if there aren’t enough security guards to escort them to programs.

Important considerations for choosing which prisons to close

Older facilities in poorer physical condition should be prioritized for closure. State Correctional Institution (SCI) Rockview, which is one of the two prisons the DOC has recommended to close, meets this criterion. Parts of SCI Rockview are more than a century old and in serious disrepair, with crumbling walls, rust, and leaky plumbing. The DOC calculates that SCI Rockview needs \$74 million in renovations over the next five years to keep the facility in liveable condition.

Exposure to environmental hazards by incarcerated people and staff should also be considered. SCI Fayette in southwest Pennsylvania, for example, is surrounded by a coal waste dumping ground, and for years, the Prison Society has received numerous concerns about exposure to contaminated air and water among incarcerated people. An investigation by The Human Rights Coalition (HRC), Center for Coalfield Justice (CCJ), and the Abolitionist Law Center (ALC) found “a pattern of symptomatic clusters consistent with exposure to toxic coal waste” at the prison, including respiratory conditions, rashes, cancer, and cognitive impairment. Incarcerated people at SCI Mahanoy and SCI Frackville, neighboring prisons in the vicinity of abandoned coal mines in Schuylkill County, have also complained about chronic water contamination.

It’s also important to consider how closing the prisons would affect ease of visiting for families whose loved ones would be transferred to other facilities. The Prison Society is pleased that the DOC took this into consideration in making its recommendations, given the importance of family visits in reducing recidivism. The steering committee that recommended closing SCI Rockview found that less than 7% of the prison’s population came from neighboring counties, meaning that most families with a loved one incarcerated there likely live farther away.

Finally, the staff culture of the prisons should be taken into account. The state should try to preserve institutions that have a culture of mutual respect between corrections officers and incarcerated people. Unhealthy staff cultures can lead to high rates of violence and the arbitrary enforcement of rules.

“Prisons with entrenched, unhealthy staff cultures should be among the first considered for closure,” says Shubik-Richards.

LOVE KNOWS NO BARS

Waking up to another day is a present. Loving yourself is a gift. Sharing hope, encouragement, and emotional support is a joy.

Please enjoy your special day and know that brighter days are coming. **Happy Birthday! Happy Anniversary! Happy Earth Day!** Best wishes today and everyday.



By Ms. Yvonne Newkirk, Portrait by Mark Loughney



In memory of Mr. Robert Blaire

In memory of Mr. Robert Blaire

I had the opportunity of meeting one of the most dedicated and loving individual of human rights that ever walked the earth.

Bro. Blaire was a very active member of the Pennsylvania Prison Society. During his travels to a number of pris-

ons, statewide, he would contact me to ride along and visit folks needing a welfare check.

In August of 2024, I found out that Bro. Blaire was on dialysis Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Thinking this would slow him down and limit our prison visits I, and others, were surprised that Mondays and Thursday turned into his traveling days. Unable to drive he hired a dedicated caregiver and driver, therefore continuing his visits.

In September of 2024, upon me doing a welfare check on Bro. Blaire, he wrote back to explain the following:

"I was told, I have pancreatic, spleen, and liver cancer. Six months and I'm out of here. Shortly afterwards no pancreatic or spleen issues. I took chemo which put me in a wheel chair. I endured a few broken ribs and several hospitalizations. Re-injured ribs going from one chair to another."

Confined to a wheel chair and unable to walk, Bro. Blaire texted me about going to visits at Dallas, Camp Hill, Phoenix, and Chester. Nothing on earth could keep Blaire from his passion of doing for others. Therefore I was not surprised when I heard he had gone home peacefully in his sleep; that's the only time he was at rest, because he was a moving spirit.

We will all miss Bro. Blaire, his jolly laughter, his devotion and his wisdom.

It is time to rest.

Sorrowfully submitted,

Ms. Yvonne Newkirk.

March
 Steven Williams 3-2 (Coal Township)
 Donald Dowd 3-4 (Benner) *
 Steven Williams 3-9 (Huntingdon)
 Rebecca Olenchock 3-12 (Muncy)
 Brenda Watkins 3-19 (Muncy) *
 Dannielle Hadley 3-24 (Muncy) *
 Maria Rodriguez 3-27 (Muncy)
 Kieth Campbell 3-28 (Camp Hill)

April
 Jamal Ball 4-1 (Forest)
 Kriisten Edmundson 4-3 (Muncy)
 Damien Mikell 4-9 (Forest)
 Randall Chumley 4-10 (Huntingdon)
 Debra Ward 4-14 (Muncy)*
 Kyra Clardy 4-15 (Muncy)*
 Aaron Rabold 4-23 (Waymart)
 Enrifue, Sanabria 4-23 (Huntingdon)

May
 Maureen Hollie 5/1 (Muncy)
 Telly Royster 5/11 (Phoenix)
 Gary Bates 5/17 (Phoenix)*
 Sid Berger 5/23 (Cambridge Springs)*
 Sylvia Boykin 5/26 (Muncy)*
 Tommy Williams 5/29 (Houtzdale)*

June
 Damir Williams 6/6 (Albion)*
 Frank Metzger 6/12 (Phoenix)
 Claudio Manzanet 6/21 (Frackville)*

July
 Paula Johnson 7/14 (Muncy)
 Donald Johnson 7/15 (Dallas)
 Anthony Deloatch 7/25 (Dallas)
 Justin Stevenson 7/26 (Houtzdale) *
 Niegra Egerton 7/27 (Muncy) *
 Sakou Armour 7/27 (Greene)
 William Robinson 7/31 (Dallas)

Happy Belated Birthday

Andrew Olock 2/3 (Phoenix) *
 Donnell (Sadiiq) Palmer 4/9 (Phoenix)

Please remember, we on the out side are fighting for you everyday. From Ms. Yvonne

Open for Submissions: The Keeley Schenwar Memorial Essay Prize

The Keeley Schenwar Memorial Essay Prize, hosted by the Truthout Center for Grassroots Journalism, is now open for submissions. The prize, which honors my sister, a formerly incarcerated writer and activist who died in 2020, is open to all incarcerated and formerly incarcerated writers, anywhere in the world.

We award two prizes of \$3,000 for an original essay of 1,500 words or less on the topic of prisons, policing or a related subject. These essays are featured in Truthout and ongoingly publicized, drawing attention to urgent issues impacting people behind bars and uplifting liberatory ideas for moving beyond this violent system.

Essays may be submitted to essayprize@truthout.org. The deadline is May 20, 2025. Please share the guidelines with any writers you know who are experiencing -- or have experienced -- any form of imprisonment. And if you'd like to support the prize, you can write to center@truthout.org to let us know the gift is for the prize.

Thank you to everyone reading, sharing, creating, supporting, and uplifting social justice media! We are in this struggle together, and the movement is rising.

Love and solidarity,

Maya

Submissions to the contest reopen February 6, 2025. The prize is open to people who are either currently or formerly incarcerated (in any form of confinement: jail, prison, detention center, electronic monitoring, or other). The deadline is May 20, 2025.

Beginning February 6, essays can be submitted in two ways:

- They can be emailed to essayprize@truthout.org. (Feel free to submit your essay either as an attachment or within the body of the email.)
- They can be mailed to: Keeley Schenwar Memorial Essay Prize, Truthout, PO Box 276414, Sacramento, CA, 95827

Essays must be unpublished and unique to this contest; they should not be simultaneously submitted to other publications.

Each writer may submit one essay per year.

My Lost Addiction

Addiction is fiction was the thought in my mind
Saying I have willpower, so to use I'll be fine
Lying and denying every single day
Support the abort or look the other way

Thought I was okay, to use was my choice
Till I finally realize this disease has a voice
A powerful disease, addiction and I were at war
Triggers and cravings drove me to chase more

The floor wasn't rock bottom, so I continued to dig
To hide the pain and the trauma experienced as a
kid

Giving up on hope and all else was accepted
Family, goals, and myself were neglected

I continued to spiral down a dangerous path
But today I'm glad to place those times in the past
Opportunities and help were presented to me
One day at a time to succeed is the key

I cherish these days where my minds not insane
Now I can work through these thoughts that hold
space in my brain

I must work on myself for when they remove the
chains

And I receive the opportunity to show my family
I've changed

11/20/21 Reds

Smart Communications
Benjamin Dobrzynski, LW6483, SCI-Phoenix
PO Box 33028
St. Petersburg, FL 33733

“Is Innocence Irrelevant?”

The following state cases represent the “faces of HRC”. As you read, ask yourself if justice is being served by the judicial system when it criminally tries and convicts individuals knowing of their innocence, and intentionally denies fair trials to others.

In 9 Hours and 45 Minutes

What of all things happened in Apartment Complex Seven for 9-hours and 45-minutes?

In the late 1990's and early 2000's, the prosecutors in Cook County, Illinois, played a "game." This game's name was masked under the pseudonym "The Two-Ton contest," but among the prosecutors and judges alike, the game was more affectionately referred to as "niggers by the pound." The sole objective was to be the first person to prosecute as many Black people, most of whom were men, it took to amount to four thousand pounds. The more one person weighed, the more points they were worth.

On January 27, 1750, Cumberland County was incorporated in Pennsylvania. In 1752, two years later, Carlisle was named the County seat and on April 13, 1782, 30-years later, Carlisle was created as a borough. In 2025, Cumberland County now has 270,000 plus residents and the borough of Carlisle has 18,000-plus residents.

The Cook County scandal is synonymous with Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Michael Eakins' emails to the Cumberland County Criminal Justice System boasting about being RACIST, SEXIST, MISOGYNISTIC, and HOMOPHOBIC. In one case, Cumberland County Criminal Justice System turned a blind eye to a colorable investigation by Carlisle Borough Silver Spring Township Police Department by violating the constitutional rights of Kyle Hill, an African American gentleman.

What of all things happened in Apartment Complex Seven for 9-hours and 45-minutes? Randy Jacobs was the tenant of Apartment 7 and, according to Carlisle Borough Silver Spring Township Police Department logs, Mr. Jacobs was involved in two drug overdose cases in the previous 14 months. At any rate, the last overdose case of Lindsay Bowen is not only suspicious but a clear cover-up by Carlisle Borough Silver Spring Township Police Department. Mr. Jacobs' cell phone actually substantiated their misconduct.

In summery, on May 10, 2022, at 10:52 p.m., Ms. Bowen had a red t-shirt on and was in a fetal position while Mr. Jacobs took a photo. Fourteen minutes later at 11:06 p.m., Mr. Jacobs took another photo of Ms. Bowen still in the fetal position with a red t-shirt with lube next to her. On May 11, 2022, at 8:30 a.m., 9 hours and 13 minutes later, Mr. Jacobs took his final photo of Ms. Bowen in fetal position. Not only did she not have the red t-

shirt on, but it was blue. Mr. Jacobs decided to call Carlisle Borough Silver Spring Township Police Department at 8:39 a.m. to report Ms. Bowen had cardiac arrest 9-minutes later, after his last photo. Despite overwhelming evidence of Mr. Jacobs culpability, Detective Cody Phillips manipulated and engineered a false crime scene. Detective Phillips was demoted and has a history of racially profiling.

None of this evidence was presented in court. Instead, Mr. Kyle Hill was wrongfully convicted of the murder through an unjust trial.

Attorney Shannon Nicole Costa from Abom & Kutulakis Law firm is the hero in this case [COMMONWEALTH -VS- KYLE HILL, Docket No. 975 MDA 2024]. Attorney Costa protected the constitutional rights of her client Mr. Hill. Mr. Hill has overwhelming BRADY and STRICKLAND violations (prosecutors must disclose any exculpatory (aka favorable) evidence to the accused that is “material” to his guilt or punishment) and the trial judge refused to go against the Carlisle Borough Silver Spring Township Police Department.

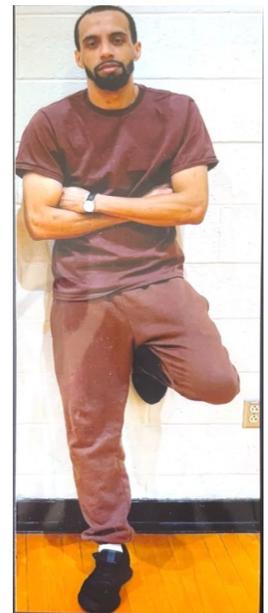
In closing, Cumberland County Pennsylvania was founded in 1750 during colonization and the United States of America wasn't yet a nation. Detective Phillips played the colonist by invading the constitutional violations of Mr. Hill, while photos of Mr. Jacobs' phone contradicts a different account by Carlisle Borough Silver Spring Township Police Department.

By Jerome "Hoagie" Coffey

1 *Crook County: Racism and Injustice in America's Largest Criminal Court*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017

2 *Commonwealth—VS—Antyane Robinson*, 204 A.3d 326 [No. 720 CAP] December 14, 2018

3 *Bernard Appel—VS—Cody Phillips*, 2020 U.S. Dist. Lexis 65884, Civil Action No. 1:19-CV-00788, April 13, 2020



Kyle Hill QQ3965
SCI-Pine Grove

LOVE KNOWS NO BARS

Your mother called, and sends her love.



To: Marcus Graham #HH0105

Every moment is a fresh beginning." - T.S. Eliot

Being Strong means rejoicing in who you are, complete with imperfections. Margaret Woodhouse

Write to Marcus: Smart Communications/PADOC Marcus Graham, #HH0105, Huntington, PO Box 33028, St. Petersburg, FL 33733



Mama Patt says "We will support you during this difficult time."



Marcus, "Whatever you are feeling or thinking, I want you to remember that all difficult times come to an end. Your current situation is one of those difficult times, and it will end too. I've been through some difficult times myself, and that thought always got me through. I found a way to remain sane and sound." Stay strong soldier, we are with you. With love, HRC Family

SOLITARY Talk!



THE ECHO OF ISOLATION: WOMEN IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IN AMERICA, PAST AND PRESENT

By: Kwaneta Harris

This article was originally published on Solitary Watch on March 11, 2025.

By Valerie Kiebala

In the shadowed corners of American prisons, where time stands still and humanity often crumbles, women have endured the cruel practice of solitary confinement for over two centuries. From suffragettes to political activists, from the mentally ill to the wrongfully accused, their stories echo through concrete walls, telling a tale of systemic oppression that persists into our modern era.

In 1872, when the sewing machine was revolutionizing American households, Susan B. Anthony spent three days in solitary confinement for the “crime” of voting. Her isolation, though brief, highlighted how solitary confinement was wielded as a weapon against women who dared to challenge sexual norms. During the same era, journalist Nellie Bly voluntarily committed herself to an asylum, where she witnessed and experienced isolation used as “treatment” for women deemed hysterical or difficult, a gendered diagnosis that would haunt American psychiatry for decades.

The 1970s brought new waves of political prisoners. Angela Davis spent sixteen months in solitary confinement while awaiting trial for charges of which she was later acquitted. As Americans gathered around their television sets to watch “The Mary Tyler Moore Show” celebrate female independence, Davis endured conditions that stripped her of basic human dignity. Her experience paralleled that of countless other women political prisoners who faced harsher punishments than their male counterparts for similar acts of resistance.

The justifications for placing women in solitary have remained remarkably consistent: “protection,” “safety,” and “maintaining order,” euphemisms that mask deeply rooted sexism. Women are often placed in solitary for minor infractions that would rarely result in such severe punishment for men. These include “attitude problems,” having contraband cosmetics, or reporting sexual abuse by guards, a particularly cruel irony that persists today.

Dangerous staffing shortages paint a grim picture, when many women are forced to remain locked in their cells for extended periods without being officially classified as housed in solitary. The practice continues despite overwhelming evidence of its devastating psychological effects, especially on women with histories of trauma, which describes up to 90 percent of incar-

cerated women. The conditions themselves tell a story of calculated dehumanization.

In the 1800s, women in solitary faced cells barely large enough to lie down, with minimal ventilation and no sanitary products. Today, while cells may have better ventilation, women inside still are denied basic hygiene supplies, adequate medical care, and even toilet paper. As smartphones connect the outside world instantaneously, women in solitary remain cut off from human contact, their voices muffled by steel doors and bureaucratic indifference. America’s role in this ongoing human rights violation extends beyond its borders. The United States has exported its mass incarceration model, including the practice of solitary confinement, to countries worldwide.

As the self-proclaimed leader of the free world, America’s continued use of this torture sends a dangerous message: that it’s acceptable to break human spirits in the name of punishment.

The parallels between the past and the present are stark. When Susan B. Anthony was in solitary, women couldn’t vote. Today, many states still deny voting rights to formerly incarcerated individuals. When Angela Davis was isolated, the prison system targeted political dissidents. Today, it disproportionately punishes women who resist abuse within its walls. While Nellie Bly exposed the horrors of nineteenth-century asylums, modern prisons have become our largest mental health facilities, with isolation still used as a substitute for treatment.

The more things change, the more they remain the same but this constancy is not inevitable. It is a choice, made daily by those who maintain these systems and by a society that turns away from the echoes of suffering behind prison walls. Until America confronts its addiction to punishment and its deeply ingrained sexism, women will continue to face the torture of solitary confinement, their stories adding new chapters to an already shameful history.

Kwaneta Harris is a Contributing Writer with Solitary Watch, an abolitionist feminist, and an incarcerated journalist. As a mother and former nurse, she holds a personal commitment to illuminating how the experience of being incarcerated uniquely impacts women. When she is not writing, Harris shares liberatory knowledge on reproductive justice with the other women in her unit. In addition to being the recipient of a grant from the Solitary Watch Ridgeway Reporting Project, Harris was also named a 2024 Haymarket Writing Freedom fellow. Her writings have appeared in PEN America, Truthout, Lux Magazine, Prism, The Appeal, Slate, Boston Globe, Dallas Morning News, and elsewhere. Harris has spent nearly two decades in Texas prison, including eight years in solitary confinement.

DOCUMENTARY “THE STRIKE” REVEALS THE HUMANITY OF PEOPLE IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT—AND THE POSSIBILITY OF CHANGE

By: Francisco Rodriguez

This article was originally published on Solitary Watch on March 13, 2025.

For nearly thirty years, Jack Morris awoke every day in silence, isolated in his parking-space-sized cell, and began his routine: put on his shoes, comb water through his hair, brush his teeth, and clean the floor. As hours blended into days and weeks into months, the passing of time was only discernible by the arrival of the next meal, briefly breaking the undying silence that permeated every moment of every second of every day.

Morris’s story is just one of many at the heart of the new documentary film *The Strike*, directed by JoeBill Muñoz and Lucas Guilkey, a film about the history and human toll of solitary confinement across California state prisons — and the unwavering struggle for change. At its forefront, the film features many of the so-called “worst of the worst;” men labeled as gang members by prison gang investigators, often based on vague evidence like letters, drawings, and tattoos, rather than actions. These men then spent decades locked away in solitary confinement in Pelican Bay State Prison’s notorious Security Housing Unit (SHU), serving “indeterminate terms” with no end in sight.

As journalist Shane Bauer states in the film, in 2012, California prisons were holding over 3,800 people in indefinite solitary confinement. For many, like Morris, this isolation lasted decades. California opened Pelican Bay’s SHU in 1989 with the specific intention of isolating individuals in solitary confinement on a mass scale. In 2013, after years of organizing, smaller-scale hunger strikes, failed negotiations, and broken promises, 30,000 people incarcerated across California prisons would participate in what became the largest prison protest in the history of the United States, a state-wide prison hunger strike.

Thanks to the strike and a concurrent lawsuit filed by the Center for Constitutional Rights, California reached a legal settlement in 2015, agreeing to release from isolation many of the nearly 4,000 people in indefinite solitary confinement across the state. But these changes had not come easily. The long and arduous fight, which included the work of hundreds of organizers, strikers, and family members, caught the filmmaker Lucas Guilkey’s attention.

According to JoeBill Muñoz, “We wanted to show just how much work, just how many people, just how many aspects of government, of social society, of civil society, how many communities had to be activated. Just all this work and effort that has to go into something that is required, but then also sort of

give a road map for what’s possible,” he said in an interview with Solitary Watch.

For Guilkey, the idea to create a documentary film about the titular strike came years before he and Muñoz met in the documentary film program at the University of California, Berkeley. He’d been following the hunger strikes at Pelican Bay, and began spending time with family members of the strikers and capturing their experiences. One of them was activist Dolores Canales, who is herself a survivor of solitary confinement, and whose son was in solitary at Pelican Bay.

“He really captured the heart of the families and the organizers and everything,” Canales said in an interview. “We immediately trusted him because he was helping us to tell this story.”

At its heart, *The Strike* gives a voice to those the prison system vehemently sought to silence: those who spent decades isolated within Pelican Bay’s SHU. Through various first-hand interviews with people formerly held in the SHU, viewers are given direct insight into the everyday horrors people faced while at Pelican Bay and the urgency of their resistance. For Muñoz, it was imperative that the strikers featured in the film felt they had the space to convey their stories to the fullest extent.

“To hear about somebody having this experience, decades in solitary confinement, organizing this protest—it’s kind of an unbelievable story,” Muñoz said. “When somebody comes up to you and says ‘Can you tell us that story?’ and in fact, we’ve set aside multiple days, multiple hours for you to tell us that story... that’s something that folks were eager to do and participate in.”

In addition to the interviews, *The Strike* features never-released footage from inside Pelican Bay during the various hunger strikes. One largely unedited segment from 2011 features a conversation between four of the hunger strike leaders and Scott Kernan, the undersecretary of California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation at the time. Kernan had summoned the collective to get them to stop one of their early hunger strikes.

In the film, journalist Michael Montgomery mentions how the four strike leaders were each from “different races, from different ethnicities,” highlighting the significance of their unity. “These are men who, in the eyes of the prison system, would never come together to do anything, they’re the men who are always trying to kill each other,” Montgomery says.

According to Muñoz, there is intentionality behind leaving this footage mostly unedited. He said leaving the footage as-is allows viewers to better connect with what they see and fully grasp the moment’s weight.

“As filmmakers, when you stumble upon gold like that, you kind of just want to get out of the way of the relationship between the footage and the viewer and allow the viewer the opportunity to experience what we experienced for the first time,” Muñoz said. “Seeing that footage was just the privilege of eavesdropping on this really historic moment.”

(Continued on page 33)

(Continued from page 32)

With the film's release, Guilkey and Muñoz hope the film will help mobilize audiences, and stress that despite the strike's success in shutting down Pelican Bay's SHU, solitary confinement is still an ongoing issue, in California and nationwide. Guilkey said that he sees considerable parallels between how officials used labels to justify the isolation of individuals at Pelican Bay and the Trump Administration's jailing of migrants at Guantanamo Bay.

"I'm witnessing the exact same thing happening right now, with them sending undocumented people to Guantanamo Bay, saying these are the 'worst of the worst' gang members... It's almost the exact same playbook," Guilkey said. "It's just sad to see history repeating itself."

For activists like Canales, who met and eventually married Morris after his release from Pelican Bay in 2017, the film's emphasis on the humanity of the featured strikers despite their past mistakes helps dispel the dehumanizing way society at large views incarcerated individuals. She said that only through giving people the opportunity to change will change occur.

"The human desire is to love and to be loved," Canales said. "That's how we bring about change and that's how we make change and know that everybody's worthy of another chance."

The film's final segment focuses on Morris's new life, freed from decades of incarceration. Viewers are shown footage of Canales and Morris's wedding, which Canales was initially wary about. She said that, knowing the hundreds of families,

organizers, and strikers involved in making change for those in solitary confinement possible, she was concerned focusing on her wedding at the end felt somewhat insular. Her sentiment shifted as she began to hear feedback on the film.

"I had a guy tell me, and he did twenty years in solitary, and he's like, 'Man, the ending! That part F'd me up right there!'" Canales said. "He had tears in his eyes and he said, 'I want that.' We're having guys from prison calling us and emailing us and that's their favorite part, you know?"

Morris, who has seen the film about 50 times, says he can already see the impact *The Strike* has on audiences during post-screening discussions. Audiences aren't just watching the film—they're asking what can be done next.

"They're asking questions of how this happened, why it happened. Where can we go?" Morris said. "They're asking, what can we do now from this point forward to continue this, in order to broaden the public's knowledge of this horrific nature? It has the potential, and I've seen it already, to change the perspective of a lot of younger audiences, in terms of what they may have perceived or interpreted to be a life of imprisonment in a state prison."

While it continues to tour the country, *The Strike* is now available to stream on PBS's "Independent Lens" until May 3, 2025.

March is Women's History Month

The Women of Five Wars

The limited but important roles women played in Korea and Vietnam paved the path to more expanded -- and in some cases more dangerous -- specialties in recent wars.

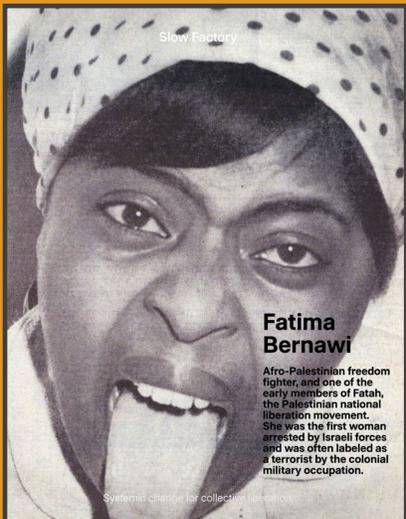


Image credit: Fort Wayne News Sentinel image of Mary Weiss Hester of the 801st Medical Air Evacuation Squadron caring for a wounded patient onboard a C-47 Skytrain. January 1953. (Library of Congress)

Once in Solitary Confinement, Always in Solitary Confinement

By: Hector "Pica" Huertos

It's true that once confined to solitary confinement, no matter the duration, we can never shake the painful psychological wounds that scar our minds much worse than they do our body.

As a man with 28 years in prison and over 20 years in solitary confinement, I would like to share some thoughts with my brothers and sisters locked down in these control units—ending in U's.

I first experienced solitary confinement in 1997 and I've hated it since. Yet, just about every year, no matter how hard I try, I end up back in solitary confinement. I've been to the SMU, SNU, MHU, I've been to 16 different RHU's, served 12 years straight on RRL, and even served time in the worst control unit the state of Pennsylvania ever had: the Long Term Segregation Unit (LTSU).

While in these locked down units, I've seen good, strong men lose their minds and revert to savagery in the literal sense. Engaging in bodily fluid warfare (those who know—you know) just to say the least and spare the embarrassing gruesome details.

I've seen good men surrender their heart, their will, and their life to the hopelessness of feeling trapped, confined, and bound. As painful as it is, I've lost (psychologically) a good friend to the mental deterioration of solitary confinement. Someone I considered my old head, strong, fierce, stand up, honorable and one who taught me the ropes when I first started my 12 straight years in solitary.

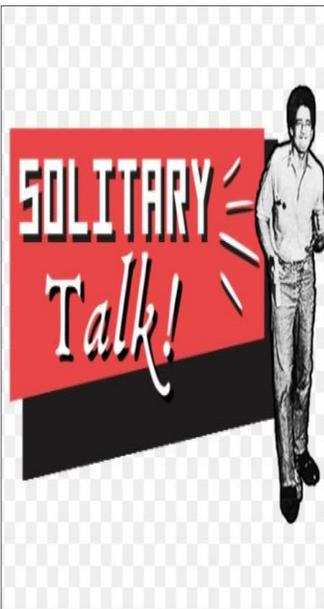
Today, he is not the same mentally, but as someone who taught me the ropes of being a man in solitary, I got love for him just the same. After all, are any of us the same after years in solitary confinement?

I see a new generation of young men coming through solitary and I feel like an old fool sitting in a cell side by side next to them.

Although it's not acceptable, it's understandable that young men will be fools. But there's nothing worse than an old fool.

Even worse are the examples we old heads left behind for the young generation. Today, it seems like they come fresh out the womb with the psychological effects of solitary knowing how to stack (hard sound language) and punch line agreements, and lungs to argue for days. It's like they're already endured with the liquid courage cowards feel by being protected by a 400 pound deer.

Stay strong and hold on to your sanity because we all know how that sanity will insanelly hold on to you... Oh yeah, we do know.



Solitary Talk!
By Valerie Kiebala

TWO OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCARCERATED WRITERS

1.) Solitary Watch is accepting proposals for grants to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated journalists through the Ridgeway Reporting Project. The grants, ranging from \$500 to \$2,500, will fund reported stories that have yet to be told about all aspects of solitary confinement, for publication in news outlets nationwide. To receive the full application instructions, including deadlines for each of the next two funding rounds, write to: Ridgeway Reporting Project, Solitary Watch, PO Box 11374, Washington, DC 20008. Please do not send proposals without first reviewing the full application instructions.

2.) Solitary Watch is also accepting submissions for the Voices from Solitary series, where we publish firsthand accounts from people surviving the lived experience of solitary confinement. Essays within this series tend to be 1,000 to 1,500 words in length with a maximum of 2,000 words. Featured pieces can spotlight an injustice that is uniquely produced by solitary; highlight acts of resistance or moments of community; or depict how the system of solitary confinement operates. Writers receive a payment of at least \$300 for accepted pieces. To submit a piece for consideration, formerly and currently incarcerated writers can either send their piece in the mail to Solitary Watch PO Box 11374, Washington DC, 20008 Attn: Voices from Solitary or by email to valerie@solitarywatch.org.

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2	6	5	4	3	7	8	1	9
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4	7	2	5	8	6	9	3	1
9	5	1	3	2	4	6	7	8
6	3	8	1	7	9	2	4	5

Write to Marcus and ask how is he doing; he could use a hug. 😊

Smart Communications/PADOC
 Marcus Graham, #HH0105, SCI-Huntington
 PO Box 33028
 St. Petersburg, FL 33733

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THE MOVEMENT

Your Legal Corner

WE ACCEPT LEGAL ARTICLES THAT EDUCATE AND EMPOWER PRISONERS AND THEIR FAMILIES ON THEIR CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS AND LAWS, AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THE POLICE, LAWYERS, AND THE COURTS ON BEHALF OF THEIR LOVED ONES.

I write this letter with hopes of acquiring your attention and support regarding a matter that aligns with CADBI's efforts.

First, I'm serving a life sentence. I'm approaching my 30th year after having been wrongly convicted. Like many, I recently obtained the Homicide (and District Attorney's) files in relation to my case resulting in discovery of evidence detailing my innocence. Like many, my case involved detectives accused of misconduct. Those in my case were indicted and are currently awaiting trial. I have hearings scheduled in August and September.

Second, the pattern and practice of misconduct that Philadelphia Homicide detectives engaged in has since been made common knowledge. To that point, while investigating the "pattern" relating to the detectives (Manuel Santiago & Frank Jastrzembki) affiliated with my case we reviewed a civil complaint (filed by an exonerated individual) that led to discovery of a hearing transcript in which the Commonwealth admits to the unlawful suppression of activity sheets. The unlawful (and unconstitutional) practice they admitted to have engaged in dates back decades. It is imperative that the following be understood: 1) the activity sheets are part of the homicide files; 2) the activity sheets contain information that have resulted in dozens of recent exonerations; 3) documents/evidence relating to the "suppressed" activity sheets have also been discovered in homicide files; and, 4) the admitted practice substantiates the fact that for decades many of us that have been appealing our cases were subjected to a fraudulent appeal process because (in addition to having been deprived a fair trial) the Commonwealth knowingly suppressed evidence required to determine claims and issues raised on appeal. The very evidence that resulted in exonerations decades later.

Third, the loved ones being fought for via CADBI that have never received their activity sheets during the discovery process after their arrest have endured a "Brady violation" and are eligible for a form of relief.

Specifically, filing of a PCRA will be deemed timely when filed within a year of discovering the violation. They have grounds for order to produce their homicide file AND, appointment of counsel to assist with disclosures based on policies and procedures implemented by the Commonwealth to "remedy" the admitted due process violation.

--A PCRA petition package is circulating that consists of 3 parts. #1 the PCRA form petition with a copy of the transcribed admissions attached; #2 a Request & Supporting Memorandum for the H-File & Appointment of Counsel; & #3 the supporting Case Appendix that consists of the relevant

portion of the Zimroth's Center (Prosecutorial Misconduct) Report released earlier this year. It specifically outlines facts and evidence involving exonerations based on evidence contained in activity sheets... decades later.

The point is that nothing more is being requested than what is ENTITLED as a matter of right and what they testified they would do to remedy the violation. MANY of those being advocated for are likely to have evidence in their homicide files that may result in exonerations, new trials and/or reduced sentences.

On another note, the admission is A MAJOR DEAL as it constitutes direct evidence of a pattern of admitted misconduct engaged in by Philadelphia's District Attorney's Office prior to the Krasner administration. Hundreds of men & women have died in the D.O.C. that may have had evidence that would have exonerated them had the Commonwealth not engaged in the admitted (and unconstitutional) practices. Again, the claim is based on the Commonwealth's testimony & controlling law. It is with potential to open a flood gate, therefore CANNOT be allowed to be swept under the rug. Awareness must be raised as this matter involves reviewing hundreds (if not thousands) of convictions of those CADBI have been advocating for.

As previously stated, I've successfully acquired both my homicide and DA file. In fact, the Commonwealth petitioned the court to give me an attorney and I was assigned an entire legal team. I'm clearly not asking for myself, I'm asking on behalf of those I've assisted and the many throughout the state that don't have a clue about what the Commonwealth has admitted to or that most of them have been subjected to a sham appeal process for decades and are not "time-barred" but can now get back in court.

By Burgos, Nazario

Your Legal Corner

WE ACCEPT LEGAL ARTICLES THAT EDUCATE AND EMPOWER PRISONERS AND THEIR FAMILIES ON THEIR CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS AND LAWS, AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THE POLICE, LAWYERS, AND THE COURTS ON BEHALF OF THEIR LOVED ONES.

RE: PATTERN AND PRACTICE OF MISCONDUCT

For over a decade now, a plethora of information has been revealed detailing the decades long pattern and practice of misconduct in the Homicide Unit of the Philadelphia Police Department ('PPD'). For the most part, this information was made publicly available by the Police Transparency Project database at <https://www.thepolicetransparencyproject.com> and in "The Homicide Files" of the Philadelphia Inquirer at <https://www.inquirer.com>

According to the Police Transparency Project website:

Without transparency there can be no trust between Philadelphians and the police.

Practices inside the Homicide Unit are largely hidden from the public. While some evidence of detective misconduct has, and currently is, the subject of Philadelphia Police Internal Affairs investigations, those investigations are not made public. Information about those investigations cannot be generally accessed by defendants and/or their counsel much less the general public. Moreover, after a defendant is convicted, he no longer has a 'right' to discovery and cannot subpoena these records absent court approval.

The database will be a critical resource for use in criminal trials, appeals, and civil actions. Evidence that detectives investigating a particular homicide case had a history of utilizing this unconstitutional pattern and practice could, under the right factual circumstances, be used during trial to impeach the detectives' trial testimony and/or as a basis on appeal to grant relief to wrongfully convicted defendants.

According to The Homicide Files, as of May 7, 2021:

In Philadelphia, 21 people convicted of murder have been exonerated since 2018. But those account for a fraction of cases in which witnesses and defendants made allegations that detectives fabricated statements, coerced confessions, or engaged in other improper techniques. Some of those allegations were not considered credible by the courts. This database aims to provide context by allowing you to review and filter allegations and learn about some cases in which people have alleged misconduct.

Both the Police Transparency Project and The Homicide Files databases use 7 categories to characterize the pattern and practice of misconduct, which include:

1. targeting of vulnerable people
2. threats

3. verbal abuse
4. physical abuse or force
5. supplying of false information and evidence
6. manipulation and destruction of evidence
7. isolation

However, many of us from Philadelphia know that it is not only detectives from the Homicide Unit that engage in this same pattern and practice of misconduct. Detectives from all of the Units in the city follow the same pattern and practice of misconduct, but there has been no spotlight on them. While people with homicide cases usually are sentenced to more time, there are many people in prison serving substantial sentences in which the same misconduct is being ignored.

Often witnesses and suspects succumb to coercion over a period of time and make an involuntary statement or the detectives supply some, or all, of the content. At many of these trials, witnesses and suspects would testify that they were forced or coerced into making a statement or that the contents of the statement did not come from them, in an effort not to be part of someone being wrongfully convicted, and they probably feel safer expressing this in a public courtroom. However, the detective that took the statement will then take the stand to say that the witness actually did state what is in the statement, so that the statements will be admitted into evidence to prove the truth of the matter asserted therein and the jury will be instructed to consider the statements as substantive evidence, despite being denied by the person testifying. See **Commonwealth v Brady**, 507 A.2d 66, 70 (Pa. 1986); **Commonwealth v. Lively** 610 A.2d 7, 10 (Pa. 1992).

We want to take steps to expose the pattern and practice of misconduct by detectives of other units as well. With that in mind, we want to know how many have been victims of this? What detectives were involved? What units were they part of? And what misconduct did they engage in?

By Nafis Pennington, #LY9718, SCI-Greene

Interview with Colonel Gambrell False Positive Urine Test In PA- DOC

By Jeffery A. Shockely #ES4796

False Positive Urine Tests within PA Department of Correction (DOC) have been gaining attention from back in 2024, that I am personally aware of, when several individuals who were about to go home on parole gave their exit urine test, a mandatory urine test taken before leaving the institution. Their results were positive which actually got mixed comments.

Who can really know what another is doing while serving prison time? It's so difficult to conclude that the administration - down through the correction staff - place any reliance upon our rehabilitation primarily for the reasons of being incarcerated, period. I say this after having spent 26 years serving a life sentence. Hearing the comments and seeing the actions of those who report to work with an attitude of "I'm going to get someone today" which is nothing near "I'm going to help someone today."

Here I've taken the liberty of sitting down with a gentleman about to go home, who received a "false positive" result.

Here is my interview with him.

Shockley - Hello Sir, we have been around one another for the better part of two years. You and I have heard of the false positive urine test popping up and I want to ask you if you wouldn't mind if I interviewed you? Bringing a personal touch to this thing.

Mr. Gambrell - No not at all.

Shockley - OK thank you. Let's start with you stating your name.

Mr. Gambrell - My name is Cornell Gambrell #QB6173.

Shockley - Thank you. Let me first say thank you for allowing me this time. I have received several messages from outside that I have shared with you about the false positives. To have someone I know and who has been upstanding within these confines since meeting you shocks me, no pun intended.

Mr. Gambrell - No, it's okay, I get it Mr. Shockley. This was something my family nor I ever expected, having done so much while here and especially being this close to going home.

Shockley - Can you give me a little history of who you are? Of course society and this administration has some perceived notion of who you are, but surely their perception is far from the truth, correct?

Mr. Gambrell - Correct. I was a product of military parents. My father was an Army E9 and my mother was an Army O3, who raised me in North Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I graduated from Simon Gratz High School. I retired from the military in 2019 as

a Colonel where my career was security police before moving into air operations where I work with flying F15 Fighter Jets.

I raised my family well in a traditional sense and my children followed in the family's military tradition; one of my children is an, active duty, Air Force Major. I pride myself on being a very active and present parent. After the military I worked for the city of Philadelphia from 1987 to 2018. Operating trolleys before moving up into position as Director of Rail Transportation for Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA).

Shockley - Wow! That is a remarkable resume. Incredible story, not one someone inside would think, by you being in prison. Once more, an example to not judge a book by its cover. If you don't mind - I'm not asking why you are here that's your business and no one else's however - when did you get here and please tell how this all impacted your family?

Mr. Gambrell - I arrived here at Mercer in May 2020 from Camp Hill. Being a veteran I came right to the Veterans Service Unit (VSU). I think that was a cushion, not being incarcerated before in my life. The dynamics of prison somewhat mirrors the military; the ranking system of sergeants, lieutenants, captains, and so forth; over-structured, regimented up to a point; there are movement times, however nothing is accurate or consistent, for instance, the military's "hurry up and wait." Time usage, also, with the 24 hour clock. I have maintained a low key persona during my time. I know compared to you and a few others my time is nothing; yet, it is my time and I have served it well getting engaged in various programs helping to facilitate a few. Even sitting in on a few of yours, Mr. Shockley. Not forgetting you're taking my CDL class.

Shockley - Yes, I thank you for the opportunity to take the class that I don't think otherwise would have been available here. Now let's get to the meat of this thing, tell me about the false positive if you don't mind.

Mr. Gambrell - Well I was notified on October 10th, 2024 that I made parole and my exit date was for 1/13/2025. I went for my exit urinalysis on 12/12/24 and 1/3/2025 was informed that the test came up positive of 1MG/ML of cannabinoid; a DC-141 misconduct was issued.

This chapter of my life opened up my eyes to so many things I had never imagined before. We've heard about prison and the people are judged inside. However, now I have experienced and know that no one can know the truth about an individual or the system of corrections until you have walked in the shoes of someone who stands beside you. Goes through this thing.

The way people are treated simply for being in prison without knowing the reasoning or circumstances for their individual predicament. It is difficult to find someone appearing to care or concern themselves with "some inmate."

Sure, I know some have done some heinous acts and yet . . . Anyway I was devastated being accused by the results. I had

(Continued on page 39)

(Continued from page 38)

done all the right things, or had presumed such, and here it is this positive result my family and I know to be untrue.

Shockley - I presume you notified your family how did they take it?

Mr. Gambrell - (Tears well up) O' my wife. My dear wife was so hurt, I could hear it in her voice. One call we're making plans to meet and be done with this. And next a phone call that I won't be coming home. No one can grasp the idea of such a thing, the impact on the family no matter how strong they've been beside you through this ordeal of incarceration.

"A hot urine!" she said in such disbelief. The things no one can imagine going through their mind. Had it not been for them knowing how unequivocally I despise drugs, this could have raised such major suspicions in their mind. That I could not use them for a home plan, lose their trust and so much more. No one in position of authority seems to care about how their decisions impact the very families they profess to want to keep together.

Shockley - The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections mission statement:

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections operates as one team, embraces diversity, and commits to enhancing public safety. We are proud of our reputation as leaders in the corrections field. Our mission is to reduce criminal behavior by providing individualized treatment and education to offenders, resulting in successful community reintegration through accountability and positive change.

Mr. Gambrell - I don't know about that any more, after having gone through this ordeal. The people inside [confined to prison] are not going out, and standing on the corners to buy drugs, and bringing them in. The mail is routed to an agency in another state, and virtual visits outnumber the contact visits. So if people are getting high resulting in these positive urines, how are the drugs getting in? Like COVID-19, inmates were not going out into the community, bringing it back to spread it. Nonetheless it got here. How? How can they be proud of their reputation allowing these things to happen, my family is distraught, not forgetting countless others expecting to go home. Who is accountable and to whom are they accountable?

I have done my time and want to be reunited with my family. I had to cancel my flight and other costly arrangements made to get me home quicker. Now I have to deal with the accusations here, my character questioned to fit inside their conceived notion of just another inmate trying to get over. Yeah this hurts.

Shockley - Colonel, I am so sorry for the things you and your family have had to undergo. I know you appealed it all, right? Can you mention what your hearing was like?

Mr. Gambrell - Yes I did the appeal process, but first the hearing was like a drive by colonoscopy, quick and painful. I was asked how do you plead? "Not guilty." According to the test results you are guilty. So matter of fact and unemotional.

The hearing examiner commenced to giving the sentence - 30 days cell restriction, with the right to appeal within 15 days, parole may be affected.

Shockley - Where do you stand now?

Mr. Gambrell - On January 10th, 2025 I received the results from my appeal from the Program Review Committee (PRC) which concluded in their findings: Exonerated, the misconduct dismissed. I want to say I won, and yet to be perched on such an edge of uncertainty when you've been compliant, straightforward in all matters hurts. I have occasionally assisted correction staff with some of the hard headed youth, squelching enthusiasm for a fight; they respect me for the values I stand for.

My family and I will be on egg shells until I touch base at home. Until then, it's their house Mr. Shockley.

Shockley - I thanked Mr. Gambrell for his time and allowing me to interview him. Later that evening I checked the kiosk and found the following message:

Good afternoon. My apologies for the delay in getting back to you. I jumped on this issue when I got your e-mail but the DOC took a while to get me full information. Here is the full update: The Department met with their vendor Pharmatech Laboratories to discuss the possible false positives and testing procedures.

The test for the K2 synthetic drugs are very sensitive and so in order to reduce the possibility of a positive test that may have resulted from indirect exposure, Pharmatech is going to establish a higher baseline level to increase confidence in a proper positive result.

Testing for these synthetic drugs only started in October. Accordingly DOC will not consider any results in December or until such time as they have the new testing level in place. DOC will be reviewing all individuals with positive test results from October and November and removing any misconducts where appropriate.

I have asked that DOC let me know when the new baseline level is in place so that I know moving forward. I have also asked that they provide me with the number of individuals who received misconducts as a result of positive K2 tests and to keep me apprised of how many misconducts are removed following the review.

Please let me know if you have any other questions or anything else that you would like me to work on. Best, Emily [this is from state Rep Emily Kinkead!]

From the Desk of JEFFREY A. Shockley -ES4796
SMART COMMUNICATIONS/PADOC - SCI MERCER
PO Box 33028, St. Petersburg, FL 33733

Being Oppressed Under the Influence

By Kyle Mcemore

We cannot intelligently discuss, and ultimately address, the naked oppression that the PA DOC is inflicting on incarcerated citizens without acknowledging the dismal state of those being oppressed.

Daily, the uniform conversations taking place among the incarcerated population centers around "how these dudes aren't going to stand up for nothing".

The vast majority of the incarcerated falsely believe and actively lean into the narrative that everyone else is the issue. That everyone else exists at the center of the problem as to why the daily quality of life for the incarcerated continues to wane while the daily oppression continues to ratchet upwards. And the trajectory of our individual and collective future prospects as a class of citizens continues to appear more bleak.

The truth that nobody seems prepared to acknowledge is that 98% of the incarcerated are dedicated, everyday, addicts! Their addiction is in addition to (and in most cases at the center of) their mental health issues which are as severe and go as equally unaddressed as their addiction issues. This sad reality doesn't even take into account the mental development challenges that also overwhelmingly exist among the incarcerated.

The PA DOC has firmly seized the opportunity that COVID offered and has institutionalized their emergency COVID policies and procedures as operational norms, for example, three hour contact visits, separated tier recreation, eating all three meals in the cell, etc. And while more is being taken, the oppressive techniques of the system grow more refined, and the incarcerated are being further driven out of their minds!

Nearly every thought, conversation and act revolve around e's [e-cigarettes], cans, duece, sub's, and the single-minded pur-

suit of their acquisition! Every single conflict and controversy can be straight line traced back to these DOC sanctioned narcotics. Everyone here is either a raging junkie or are effectively being treated as such via generalizations and proximity.

The ubiquity of drugs (this includes E-cigarettes which are more addictive and destructive than dope) allows the DOC to create a culture of oppression that is centered around the false narrative that all of us are addicts with junkie mentalities.

The generalized narrative runs so deep at this point that it has evolved into a widely accepted stereotype among DOC staff and brass. If someone has an asthma or a heart attack at this point, the staffs first reaction is to assume that the individual is experiencing an eppi! Such dangerous and life threatening conditions have become the norm because we have allowed one another to create, nurture, and maintain a culture of addiction. We languish in cells 18 hours daily, eat cold, putrid, and nutritionless food.

We experience widespread medical neglect and malpractice because we have allowed ourselves to degenerate into small addicted, distracted and ignorant want-nothing's (other than e's, drugs and junk-foods), know-nothing's (besides sports trivia and pop culture), and do-nothing's (besides complaining, begging and getting high)! The DOC sees what it's working with, and are acting in accordance to what it perceives our collective quality to be.

This is why the quality of life in PA prisons is inhumane, because we're living, behaving and allowing them to treat us like animals! This is why contact visits are only 3 hours, because we've allowed them to trivialize their importance. This is why the access to current technological information, education and training is being denied us, because we are not demanding access to it! This is why draconian parole policy is being forced upon us, because we aren't demanding that they change and are in keeping with national and global correctional trends! This is why the reentry services afforded to returning citi-

zens is trash because they are allowed (via our every action) to create a narrative that we are all trash who do not deserve to be received and setup for success properly back into society!

These are serious times, and only serious people are going to survive them and come out on the other side of the storm in tact and a better version of their authentic self. Those of us that harbor ambitions of being better, of living, and relating more intelligently must tighten up. The junkie life is a shallow half-life, and far too many of us have become addicted to the rituals of self-betrayal.

Remember, we teach people how to treat us! So if 99.9% of the time you are thinking, behaving, and relating to others on junkie time (begging, borrowing, scheming, stealing and lowering yourself), you cannot expect your wish to be thought of and related to as an individual worthy of respect and consideration the 1% of time that you arbitrarily decide to be on man/woman-time! You will be, rightfully, related to and seen as you are 99.9% of the time.

We are allowing ourselves to be oppressed under the influence rather than insuring that oppression is eradicated due to [our] influence! As wise man once shared with me the triple black fact that, "when someone gives you their attention, they give you the opportunity to change their life". We must stop complaining about what others are not or will not do, and be leaders and lead by worthy example. Often people do not embrace the right because they have not been shown a consistent practical example of what the right looks like! That means eating right, thinking right, relating right, preparing right, etc. And if you want to know where the resistance resides, look no further than the mirror and within your close circle. The days of being oppressed under the influence -- the days of being oppressed period must be brought to an end.

To add to Jennifer Morrissey's article in the last issue [say what?. .speak up!, Page 29, Issue #55]

Interestingly, I had similar experiences involving the Department of Corrections (DOC), Custody Court and correspondence. Since I'm in a different State Correctional Institute (SCI) and my child's custody in a different county, maybe some solution can be found in the parallels?

Between April & July 2024, I received six Unacceptable Correspondence (U.C.) forms from the DOC each from Montgomery County prothonotary. They had been returned due to improper coding on the envelopes. And each time I sent the U.C. form attached to a letter to the prothonotary asking them to resend my mail with the proper coding.

Only once did I receive anything from them, and it was a copy of one of my letters and a notification telling me it was improper filing. So they found the "proper coding" to send me that bull?!

I had family call them and they claimed they did not receive any returned mail, but also said they had no record of sending any either. I've received plenty of legal mail from Montgomery County Clerk of Courts over the years, so why is it that a different division of the same County Court system cannot manage? I've heard of other inmates requesting their privileged mail be sent to Smart Communications to ensure they receive it! Preposterous!

Luckily for me, my judge was adamant about me being present so the Court contacted the prison to schedule my video hearings and I was then notified by the prison. Not so lucky for me, my corrections Counselor showed up late and without the login information for my first hearing. I had to send in a grievance

against her to get the DOC to inform my Judge that my absence was not my fault.

As incarcerated mothers, the deck is already stacked against us in so many ways. Not receiving our mail, receiving it late and missing court dates are all just more barriers and could literally mean the difference between remaining in our children's lives or being kept from them forever. It's hard to not feel like these issues are by design when you realized how many of us it's happening to.

By Lacey Williams, #PC7136

PA Department of Corrections (DOC) has operated long-term solitary units forever. There are several reasons as to why. But two, that never change, is the assistance it gives staff with open racism agendas and the money central office receives from the federal government to house select prisoners falsely deemed a threat to general population, who are mostly Black and Hispanic.

These funds are misappropriated yearly with no calls for an audit by the very public who are not woke to the idea behind the scheme.

One of the tools used by corrupt officers, sergeants, lieutenants, counselors, unit managers, and psych staff is to target groups of these isolated men and women. And then using starvation, false misconducts, predicted outcomes in misconduct hearings, false reporting of behavior in the prisoners personal files, psych files and encouraging and soliciting prisoners confined to these units to assist them in oppressing those confined in ways that achieve their goals of painting a picture PRC and those in Central Office can use to justify separating families and to destroy medical and mental stabilities with steady alacrity.

These prisoners who assist staff know what they are doing, they are not misled, they want to take sides with the oppressors for extra trays, snacks, other such

petty favors (as well as consideration to advance themselves out of solitary). Or for privileges denied to those targeted such as phone calls, visits, commissary and other head pat gifts. Yet allude to themselves as standup prisoners.

These so-called prisoners sign on with administration staff to attack, cause disruption, obstruction and to keep administration aware of what your doing, especially when you're filing grievances and lawsuits. Its not widely reported, Why? How can this be highlighted and spoken about where families and advocates meet and rally? How is this not part of the problem obstructing the solution?

By Juan Rivera, #QQ9587

Personal Essay: Rewrite Walking Alone

"No one is born hating another person because of the color of their skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate. And if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite!

One sunny summer day while walking around the prison yard, I found myself observing the prison discord. Wondering why we choose to retain such divides inside this space that holds each of us for various crimes, considered the same as a result of previous decisions some of us wish we could take back that has changed more than a life or two.

I spied with my wandering eye a heated conversation among a group that looked intent on destruction of the calm that I was seeking. Speaking another language — perhaps Spanish. However, I could not be sure as the distance between them and me was greater by intention to avoid any conflict that I wished not be made my concern.

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say what? . . . speak up! / writings of multiplicity

(Continued from page 41)

I have observed numerous fights break out between individuals afraid to capture a sense of self developed and demonstrated among the older soldiers who have fought not among each other, but rather, a system that thrives to deny any basic point of humanity. Those who have died behind standing up for a future none of us are guaranteed to live beyond any sentence imposed by those who have never felt the slam of a cold, steel prison gate that rattles the soul.

Many times I have heard my share by not getting my life right in the chances given. Loved ones and friends who cared enough to tell me the truth in the lies I've tried to hide behind more times than the miles I have walked in these prison yards. Often I wonder who really knows how many seasons we go through with our own ideas, wants, desires and dreams that seem to be perfect without noticing the damage created selfishly? Not until those tears dry have I tried to say, "I'm sorry" that I accept that it's time to change.

Previously pushing for the next deal or great opportunity to get over, under, fearing to go through past hurts and pains from wars mentally and physically fought internally. Prison becoming an insane refuge, exodus of responsibility my inner child clings to as a warm blanket fresh from the dryer. Home seems so far away in this space of chaos and dismay as I make my way around the perimeter of asphalt and chalk lines faded by time behind thousands of paces in state-boots and over-priced catalog sneakers.

Mine included as I serve a life sentence that started the day I was born into a world I grew up too fast in. Our experiences do not have to isolate us. The battles fought are relatively, culturally, the same as the history that came before some of us were born to parents who only tried the best they could with what was allowed then and there. Who among us is perfect?

I check the Casio© watch on my left wrist set five minutes ahead of the actual time allowed to be free figuratively. Soon yard time will be over and empty out until another day, but first someone will grumble that "we got shorted time" which flames a familiar "Us against Them" dispute ending peaceful consolation. I distance myself out of a desire to be viewed differently than the stereotypical.

Isolating from those who wish to do more harm than is already in their prison jacket, police record, juvenile detention unmentionables. Silently I ask, "why must some continue to live in an era of demasculinization perpetuating ignorance upon ourselves and the next generation that suffers by the absence of the men we were meant to be?" No man or woman should be ashamed to venture forth from that ill-perceived normalcy of death and destruction of such a precious gift as the life we have been given.

I try to create less hostility internally by accepting that "I" got me here and in here I shall find myself no matter who shall disagree whose responsibility it is to rise above a past I wish could be re-done better. Let us raise these caskets of prison mentalities, governmental indoctrinations making some to feel less than the individuals we all were meant to be. Dispiriting social prejudices above any shaded past our families became ashamed. We've caused the communities to be lost as we were carted off; shackled, bound in stainless steel.

The hour has arrived, outside fades like the final scene of a movie only half enjoyed. The main character being myself with a wealth of roller coaster days and nights I question, "how can I be a part of a future no one is sure of because tomorrow is not promised? There is today and in this I shall be grateful for the time I have where each moment is brighter than the darkness left behind on so many angles they may never be made straight again. You see, my life sentence is concrete, yet, not written in stone while this asphalt

track temporarily remedies the anguish of what was in a moment of heated displaced aggression, rage, daily I come to understand.

I am walking alone.

By Jeffery Shockley

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CO

Your hatred for me appears to come from envy.

You don't like me because I'm me.

But.. I don't care if you don't like me.

I give you nonchalant energy,

I'm assertive and assured of me myself and I plus more,

Why do you wish to see me fail sinking lower than the floor,

You tell me that if I'm released this will be like a revolving door of back and forth incarceration that is what you know for sure.

The line luckily I don't have to depend on you for my support.

Because I'm loved by many who motivate progression in my thoughts.

Does my existence ignite your insecurities?

I had to ask.

Because if not then why the hell you keep your foot on my neck?

Could it be in me you see the distinct value that you lack as if I stole it from your life and you're trying to get it back?

Could it be because I'm black?

Or maybe more so because you're whack!

No one knows your motivations accept you and that is a fact.

I have plans that don't involve you.

You strive hard for my attention!

And your purpose seems to only be to get my recognition.

I recognized this solely as a sign of your condition

And the psychological effects there are of working in the prison!

By Khalil Hammond

THE MOVEMENT

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say what ? . . . speak up! / writings of multiplicity

MY WORST FEAR IS DYING IN PRISON

On January 23rd, 2025 I was housed on C block . . . now getting to my point, during the midday count on or around 12:30 PM Steve Cossom, #KR2294 and his cellmate was engaged in a fist fight.

Three officers who were on the Unit heard the commotion. I rushed over to Mr. Cossom's cell where they "ordered" Mr. Cossom and his cellmate to stop fighting. I got of my bed and stood at the cell door to watch the following take place. The Unit officer (John Doe 1) and Sgt. Davis gave another order for Mr. Cossom and his cellmate to stop fighting. Then Sgt. Davis key-opened the cell door as John Doe 1 and Sgt Davis began to spray the (OC) mace spray on Mr. Cossom and his cellmate to stop them on fighting. Sgt. Davis began to close his cell door, a little, before opening it back up to spray the mace again. Then Sgt. Davis slammed the cell door closed and allowed Mr. Cossom and his cellmate to continue fighting.

Within a few minutes the responding officers came to the Unit, and it was enough of them now. That's when they opened the cell door and rushed into Mr. Cossom's cell and separated them. The officers who handled Mr. Cossom slammed him to the floor placing their knees on Mr. Cossom's head, neck, and back as he yelled that he couldn't breathe before being placed in handcuffs. When these officers pull Mr. Cossom to his feet I could see that he was dizzy, out of breath, and couldn't keep his balance as these officers escorted him off the unit. The Unit went on lockdown as we learned of Mr. Cossom's death.

To the family and friends of Mr. Cossom, I want to express how truly sorry I am to have to report this matter to you in regards to your loved one. My biggest fear is dying in prison at the hands of those in charge to protect me and keep me safe.

I would like to help because the local news in this area is promoting a false nar-

rative about the death of Mr. Cossom. The first order of business that needs to be addressed is obtaining an independent autopsy to determine the real cause of his death. The next thing to do is file a wrongful death lawsuit against the Department of Corrections for their lack of care regarding Mr. Cossom's death and the action the correctional officers took when responding to the incident so that you can obtain CCTV of Mr. Cossom's every moment. Request the Unit CCTV, the walk to medical, the CCTV in medical, the CCTV when they entered into the Restricting Housing Unit (RHU), etc.

The Pennsylvania State troopers came to the Unit and processed it as if this was the crime scene, when I know Mr. Cossom did not die on this Unit; it was another part of the prison; this is part of the cover up for them to escape liability for his death. Also you should subpoena for all inmates housed on the Unit during the time of the incident; we saw what happened and Mr. Cossom walked off the unit.

The local news has reported that Mr. Cossom's death was based on a drug related overdose. Did Mr. Cossom stop fighting to smoke a page of K2 with mace covering the air and die? No! The next false claim is that your family member committed suicide. Did Mr. Cossom stop fighting and decide to take his sheet and wrap it around his neck and hang himself while struggling to breath from the mace that he was already inhaling. No! As for the inmate who Mr. Cossom was fighting, he did not kill your loved one, he is just the fall guy they are using to cover up and to escape their criminal liability.

In closing to the family and friends of Mr. Cossom once again I'm sorry for your loss. Yesterday it was Mr. Cossom today it could be me. So I'm willing to stand firm on everything that is stated and willing to come to court on behalf of your loved one. Not many of us have the courage to stand up against oppression and injustice and I want y'all to know that

there's nothing they could offer me or do to me that would make me fold. For any comments, concerns, and/or questions I can be reached (for now) at the following:

From the Editor - HRC received a number of letters since this tragedy on 1/23/2025. We have withheld the name of the person who wrote this letter and the name of others who witnessed this incident, until a subpoena is received.

Below you will see a report from the website of the DOC concerning the death of Mr. Cossom. It is odd, to me, that the reason why Mr. Cossom was in prison is mention in a statement of his death which seems irrelevant. Is the DOC attempting to down play the fact that Mr. Cossom was a human being, that his life was valuable, and that a murder is a murder? ATTORNIES, may contact the Human Rights Coalition, PO Box 34580, Philadelphia, PA 19101

DOC Website Report on Mr. Cossom, 1/24/2025

Somerset, PA – Kenneth Hollibaugh, superintendent of the State Correctional Institution at Somerset, reported that inmate Steve Cossom, 44, died on January 23, 2025. Prison staff and medical personnel immediately responded and provided life-saving measures. EMS arrived and advanced life support measures were continued. He was declared deceased at 1:58 p.m.

Cossom was serving a 7-to-15-year sentence for [Cc2910] Luring A Child into A Motor Vehicle from Philadelphia County. He had been at SCI Somerset since January 2, 2018.

In accordance with state policy, Pennsylvania State Police were notified and will conduct an investigation. The official cause of death will be determined by the Somerset County Coroner's Office.

The deceased's next-of-kin has been notified.

THE MOVEMENT

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**Honor Block . . .
What's that?**

Honor Block . . . What's that? Those are the words that came out of some of the staff here at SCI Somerset. The culture here is archaic at best. I've been here many years, the honor block used to be A-B and that was disbanded around the time of the "Michigan Transfers" (if you don't know about this ask your local "old head"). G-Unit has always been the workers/outside workers unit, both units had a few extra privileges but were never treated bad. After the death of Officer Basser-man, E-Unit was established as an honor unit and dubbed LTP Unit (Long Term Positive Adjustment Unit) because the DOC felt it was disgraceful to have such a simple title as "Honor Block". This was place where lifers and long sentence individuals who were non-problematic and unable to go to G-block, because of their sentence, could finally get peace and avoid the young dumb S#*t! Or we so had hoped.

The criteria was high but a lot of the "old heads" had met these already. Most of them were non-believers because as I said Somerset's culture was "promise, then pull the rug, and say sorry." I pulled the trigger first chance I had and was in the first group to move over other than those who were already on E-Unit. There weren't enough takers to fill the unit because of disbelief. They lowered the criteria in desperation and then lowered it again. The unit took off without a hitch, the men came together and made this thing possible. It worked so well several of us were asked to start a veteran's extension of EA onto EB. That was until the Pandemic hit.

All the progress that was done for this unit and the programs for the extension was all erased with bureaucracies and attitudes and boot-to-the-neck syndrome. Ever since the pandemic the only officers placed on this peaceful location are workers from the RHU and the union secretary/president, with their RHU attitudes and provocations. Every chance available

these officers are trying to dismantle all the good that has been done on this unit. They ignore the criteria and move in their house pets, snitches, and those who clearly disrupt the peacefulness of the unit, and yet, still since opening, there has been no incidents fights, VR, ISO's, or OD's etcetera. Yet the administration has been long overdue to add any privileges, they only take away. An Honor Unit should be just short of the Scandinavian Unit. If you ask those old heads from the Michigan transfer, they would say Michigan was just shy of that Scandinavian standard and that worked out well with over 900 people in an overnight experiment. Why can't we keep building off of that instead of rubber stamping "NO", why can't we find a reason to say "YES". All the negative outlook on us should really stop! "We're all human after all."

-Anonymous

Derelict and Tyranny

by Khalil Hammond

I often hear people say the system is broken but I don't think that it is. I believe that it operates exactly how it was intended to do which is to frustrate humiliate dehumanize dehumanize dehumanize and break the human beings encapsulated within it as a means to deter societal on-lookers from rebelling against it. In a majority politically unconscious Society of laws and order this system seems to serve a harsh but necessary purpose - on the surface. However if some digging was done it would be realized that the state of our current system is having an overall detrimental impact on our society. To more narrow the focus of my point I placed the focus on prisons and the purpose they are not certain. Many studies reports and analysts of the criminal justice system have found that poverty a lack of education broken family bonds and the lack of employment or employment opportunities are the leading causes for why people turn to criminal activity for resolve.

If these are where the biggest problems stem and rehabilitation is the goal slash agenda behind prisons then why aren't solutions to these issues the focal point of lot of local governments or officials employed to maintain the prisons?

The simple and most logical answer is that those in charge of and employed by the system benefit from it operating to a tune of organized chaos and confusion! Basically rehabilitation is not the goal!

As the recidivism rate fluctuates, it never significantly decreases, which should be indication that the current mode of operations isn't working for the agenda alleged. One of the biggest issues that I see is that there is no real oversight coming from outside of these prisons to keep employees honest about what's happening inside of them. This is why (on occasion) employees are able to sexually and or physically assault prisoners steal from prisoners kill prisoners harass and or antagonize prisoners through deprivations and hostile interactions and then falsely report what occurs with impunity.

This doesn't teach the inmate populace how to become productive members of society hence the recidivism rate! What should be alarming to those in society is that the majority of those subjected to these systematic oppressions for years will be returning to society, one day worse than when they came to prison.

Some may view this as a choice without completely understanding the psychological effects of long term incarceration or the inhumane conditioning of the incarcerated.

However without a proposed solution we are doomed to perpetually continue the current disastrous cycle. As the start to creating a solution for these institutional issues within the system I propose that our society pushes our elected officials to establish a prison oversight board and require all prison guards to wear body cameras there has to be checks and balances.

The Babylon System -

Bab.y.lon - noun, Etymology: Babylon, ancient city of Babylonia, 14th century, a city devoted to materialism and sensual pleasure, many liken Babylon to the United States, see Revelations 17-18.

If any prisoner, family member, or community activist would like to submit an article that is critical of the state and county prison systems, courts, D.A. offices, police, capitalist corporate America, and the government, just forward your article to the HRC's Newsletter Department for possible printing.

From the Editor: In Memory of Naomi Blount who recently passed from cancer after returning home in October 2019. The article below, a reprint NorthcentralPA.com, was published in 2020 and absolutely nothing has changed.

Thank you to Naomi Blount, Shavonne Robbins, Terri Harper, Jessie Alexander, Nicole Newell, and all the courageous women who are "the whistle blowers".

SCI-Muncy inmates reveal stories of medical neglect, high cancer rates

By Melissa Farenish, Jun 25, 2020

Muncy, Pa. -- "Shavonne had a great sense of humor. She really liked her friends. What you see is what you got with her. She was a straight shooter. She was well liked at Muncy," said Ellen Melchiondo, a volunteer from the Pennsylvania Prison Society. She recently spoke about Shavonne Robbins, one of the many inmates she became acquainted with at the women's State Correctional Institute – Muncy.

Robbins is one of the recent cancer deaths among women who served time at Muncy. She died on December 15, 2019 at the age of 43 after battling several years with a rare abdominal mucous cancer. Robbins, who was serving a life sentence, was at Muncy for 25 years before being released in 2017.

At the age of 16, she got "caught up with the wrong crowd," according to her cousin, Sissy Robbins. She was involved in a robbery in Philadelphia in which a man tragically lost his life. Robbins was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

Though Robbins knew she would probably never leave the prison as a free woman, she worked hard to earn her GED and became a mentor and tutor to other women incarcerated at SCI-Muncy. Known as one of Pennsylvania's "juvenile lifers," her circumstances changed after the Supreme Court banned automatic life-without-parole sentences for juveniles and ordered states to apply this ruling retroactively.

Unfortunately, Robbins was diagnosed with cancer prior to being released from prison.

"None of us realized she was so sick. She didn't tell anyone how sick she was," Melchiondo said. She died of a blood clot while she was in the hospital preparing for surgery in her hometown of Philadelphia.

"Muncy does have a higher rate of cancer, pulmonary issues, seizures, and psychotropic medications than any other prisons in Pennsylvania," Melchiondo said. Early screenings for health issues often are not conducted, according to Melchiondo. "Some prefer not to get a diagnosis and never go to medical."

Shortly before her death, Robbins wrote on her Facebook page that she wished she had asked for help when she needed it, but didn't. "She didn't want to be a burden when released. I think her death is directly connected with her prison experience," Melchiondo said.

Robbins was laid to rest in Philadelphia on December 24, 2019.

"When someone like Shavonne Robbins dies, and she's been there 25 years and was well liked, the prison allows the women to conduct a special Sunday service or memorial," Melchiondo said. Shavonne's service in December was filmed with the idea that it would be shown in the prison.

Sick calls not always taken seriously

Melchiondo said many women have told her that they feel their complaints to the health care workers in the prison are not taken seriously. There are often delays in care. "There really is negligence of care for all women," said Naomi Blount, who served 37 years at Muncy before being released in October 2019.

Blount is now a commutations specialist at the office of Lieutenant Governor John Fetterman.

Naomi Blount, a commutations specialist for the office of Lt. Governor John Fetterman, served 37 years at SCI-Muncy. She was released in October of 2019. Blount recounted some instances of the years at the women's prison in which she feels inmates' health concerns were not properly addressed.

When a woman at Muncy has any health issue and needs medication or medical attention, she is required to put in what the prison system calls a "sick call." A sick call can be used for

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minor ailments such as headaches to more serious issues such as pain or high fevers.

However, Blount, now 69 years of age, feels that many of these sick calls are not taken seriously by prison staff.

"I think we kind of messed it up a bit as well," Blount said. "When someone didn't want to go to school or work, they'd put in a sick call. They were skeptical about giving treatment because they thought we were all liars."

Each sick call has a co-pay of \$5. Medications also have a \$5 copay. Blount said years ago, the prison didn't charge for sick calls but that changed. "You can literally come from sick call having a bill of \$40 to \$45."

Most women working in the prison only make \$.19 per hour. Many have trouble paying for sick calls and medications.

Several women at Muncy wrote to *NorthcentralPA.com* detailing concerns about their health needs not being addressed when they put in a sick call. Sick calls must be put in by 8 a.m. and the soonest a woman will be seen is the next day. However, several women said they usually wait at least two days to be seen and sometimes longer.

"I just had foot surgery, after a five-year battle with the revolving door of medical directors," wrote Terri Harper, 51, who has been serving a life sentence since January 1993.

"I fell through cracks that exist because of CCS's inability to embrace 'continuity' with the care they barely give. It truly comes as a money thing. Because we get charged \$5,\$5,\$5, get the same ineffective pills for everything, the same ineffective eyedrops no matter how many times you tell the practitioner that your eyes are still stuck together and itchy every morning, over any reasonable period of time, and constantly get reminded that 'it's the same way in the real world,' Harper wrote.

Officials at SCI-Muncy said sick calls are prioritized in order of medical importance. If a woman puts a sick call in for a medication refill that is due within seven days, she may not be seen right away.

"Sick calls are triaged in order of medical importance and seen next day," officials said in a written request for answers. Officials said if a woman needs a medication refill within seven days, she may not be seen the next day. "SCI-Muncy does have medical coverage seven days per week and after normal business hours. A nurse is available 24/7 if an emergency arises," officials said.

Jessie Alexander, 67, has chronic pulmonary obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and recently left SCI-Muncy on compassionate release. She said it often took at least two days for medi-

cal staff to see her after she put in a sick call for her COPD issues.

There were often delays in her receiving breathing treatments. Alexander was diagnosed with COPD in 2012, and she estimates she went to the hospital emergency department at least 40 times since then.

"I was in ICU at least five or six times," Alexander said. "The last time, I was on a ventilator. One time I was considered DOA (dead on arrival)."

When Alexander returned from the hospital, she would stay a few days in the hospital infirmary where they kept up her breathing treatments. "But when I was back in general population, I was on my own again. Many times, I needed oxygen while in prison, but I stopped asking because I knew I wouldn't get it. It very was scary because there were many times I thought I was going to die," Alexander said.

Alexander, who served 35 years at SCI-Muncy, is now living in a hospice facility in her hometown of Philadelphia. Her family applied for compassionate release earlier this year.

"It means that with my diagnosis, I am within six months of dying," Alexander said.

Alexander, who wears oxygen all the time, is receiving regular breathing treatments and round-the-clock care at the facility. "I'm doing better. I get my breathing treatments on time, I'm getting rest and I'm getting better. I still have my bad days and good days, but my good days are better."

Continuity of care

Continuity of care is an issue, Melchiondo said. There is often turnover of staff at the prison's infirmary. Women are sometimes referred out to Geisinger or UPMC Susquehanna for further care, but communication between the prison medical staff and outside medical is not always there, she said.

The officials at SCI-Muncy said the turnover in the medical department is "similar to what is occurring in the community. Lycoming County and the surrounding counties include several hospitals as well as many additional venues for medical professionals to work where tuition reimbursement and sign-on bonuses are offered. A correctional setting is often seen as a negative environment in which it is difficult to recruit medical professionals."

Blount feels obtaining adequate healthcare is especially tough for those serving life sentences. "I believe that when they know that we are serving life sentences, we are overlooked."

Nicole Newell, another woman serving a life sentence, said she is hesitant to seek care. "I just learned that if I have cancer I won't be told until Stage IV due to me being a lifer. I've been

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here at Muncy since 1997. I came to Muncy at the age of 20. I got lock (sic) up at the age of 18. I'm now 43 and scared. I've witness (sic) some lifers go through so much pain due to the lack of medical care, later dying from cancer," Newell wrote. She recently started a grievance process regarding what she believes was a misdiagnosis of lupus.

Filing a grievance

The grievance process involves three levels to file, according to Su Ming Yeh, Interim Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project.

The woman must first file a grievance to a grievance coordinator, then appeal to the superintendent and the third level goes to a central office in Mechanicsburg.

If all three levels are denied, then an agency such as Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project may take on the case for a lawsuit in federal court, according to Yeh. She said they receive a large number of requests to take on cases, but due to limited staff cannot take them all.

"Even if we can't take a case on in court, we try to provide legal help," Yeh said.

Cancer rates are high

"It's not a coincidence that women at Muncy get cancer," Blount said. She worked a maintenance job when she was at Muncy and said she knows the older buildings, some which have been there since the 1920s, have asbestos and lead paint. "Of course, they're just infested with lead in the pipes and asbestos."

Blount said one time she was doing maintenance in the chapel and was told by a staff member that the old tiles needed to be lifted out but could not be removed due to the asbestos. Blount claims she and other workers in the prison were often not provided the correct protective gear when they were working with hazardous materials.

She also recounted a time in the 1990s that the water was so bad that inmates were given bottled water. "The blonde women's hair would turn green in the shower," Blount said. "So, who's to say how long we were drinking that water that was bad."

Several inmates who wrote to *NorthcentralPA.com* mentioned there are still concerns about the water today.

"Many of my sisters at Muncy have been diagnosed with cancer," Blount said. She named some of the women who died from cancer over the years – Joanne Butler, who got compassionate leave and died a short time later. There also was Theresa Battles, who was home for two months before succumbing to her cancer.

The high rates of cancer at Muncy has made Blount less inclined to visit a doctor. "Even today, I don't want to go to the doctor because I don't want them to tell me I have cancer," Blount said.

Inmates have wondered if the higher rates of cancer are due to the buildings being old. Or maybe it's in the water or the pipes. Some of these women have served more than 40 years there, Blount said.

Officials at SCI-Muncy have said that the buildings are tested frequently. In the case that a material containing asbestos needs removed, the prison has asbestos abatement teams come in.

Some of the buildings at Muncy have been there since the complex first opened in 1913 as the Industrial Home for Women. The complex, situated in a rural area 18 miles east of Williamsport, Pa., became part of the Bureau of Corrections as the State Institute in 1953.

At one time, the 793-acre complex in Lycoming County was a fully functional farm. The grounds of SCI-Muncy currently houses 76 buildings. As of late February, there were close to 1,400 inmates at Muncy, according to SCI-Muncy officials. 143 were serving life sentences.

"SCI-Muncy inmates have experienced several types of cancer including metastatic squamous cell carcinoma, hepatocellular carcinoma, malignant breast cancer, and lung cancer. All cases are closely monitored by medical staff at the prison and cancer treatment specialists. A team of medical staff, including physicians, establish an individual cancer treatment plan," prison officials said.

Death records for the years 2010 to 2019 obtained through the Pennsylvania Abolitionist Law Project show a total of 17 cancer deaths at SCI-Muncy.

Types of cancer listed in the records range from lung, colon, kidney, endometrial, and anal. There are no statistics available for women who were formerly incarcerated at SCI-Muncy and died of cancer later. Officials at SCI-Muncy said from January 2018 to March 2020, there were 12 inmate cancer-related deaths at the prison.

Officials at SCI-Muncy noted the prison is the diagnostic and classification center for female inmates in Pennsylvania. At the time of admission, women are provided a physical examination. Housing also is provided for sentenced county inmates approved for state housing, when there are significant medical needs that cannot be met at the county level.

"At times, the cancer or other life-threatening diagnosis are determined as part of the initial medical clearance process or during subsequent annual examinations/presenting symptomology," officials said.

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“Unfortunately, female offenders entering the state correctional system have not often had regular medical care while in the community, and the Department of Corrections (DOC) ensures that upon admission a full workup is completed to determine current medical needs and development of a medical treatment plan. When reviewing the DOC percentages of cancer diagnosis with that of the general community, there is no substantial percentage difference noted,” officials said.

High rate of hysterectomies

Many women mentioned a high rate of hysterectomies at SCI-Muncy.

“I never knew so many women in one place would need a hysterectomy or partial hysterectomy,” Blount said. “It was like a common cold around there.”

Danielle Morales, whose mother is serving a 12 ½ to 25-year sentence, said her mother told her that there has been a number of women there who have had hysterectomies. “One woman in her unit had a hysterectomy and was diabetic. She ended up with an abscess and it burst while she was on the unit,” Morales said.

“Generally, it sounds like they don’t look at them as humans,” Morales said.

Blount is skeptical of the need for some of the treatment given at Muncy. She recalled a number of women with large breasts were taken for biopsies. Blount said there once was a doctor at Muncy who told her not to come to the infirmary unless she was really sick because “they treat you like guinea pigs.”

Robbins also had a hysterectomy while at Muncy, according to Melchiondo. Doctors originally thought she had uterine issues, even though it turned out later to be cancer.

Officials at SCI-Muncy said 11 women in 2019 had hysterectomies. “Women are treated by a board-certified OB-GYN in consultation with outside physicians/specialists.”

Inmate stories

There were other stories from Muncy. Blount recalled a 26-year-old inmate who weighed more than 200 pounds. She began to lose weight quickly and started telling people she was sick. She went to the infirmary numerous times, but she kept getting sent back since they believed she was “pretending to be sick,” Blount said.

The woman’s roommate noted she was thirsty all the time. One day when the woman was feeling particularly awful, her roommate told her to lie on the floor in hopes that the staff would see she direly needed medical attention.

The woman laid on the floor and was taken to the infirmary a short time later where it was determined she needed to go to

Geisinger Medical Center in Danville. Her blood sugar was high and she was diagnosed with diabetes. But it was too late. The woman died in the hospital, Blount said.

Rose Dinkins, age 72, has been at Muncy for 50 years. According to an email Dinkins sent to NorthcentralPa.com, she was put in quarantine in February along with her cellmate who was sick with the flu.

Dinkins did not contract the flu, but she was stuck in a room with a cellmate who was coughing, vomiting, and crying from a splitting headache. “Last night, her fever broke, her bed was soaked, no clean linen was issue, she was forced to lay back on the same ones,” Dinkins wrote. “She was never given any flu medication, only Tylenol when the nurse brought it, there was a day she got nothing at all.”

Mental health treatment

SCI-Muncy also reports a high rate of women being treated for mental health issues. It is estimated between 70 and 80 percent of the women there have received some sort of mental health treatment.

When a woman first arrives at Muncy, she goes through a classification process. At this time, a member of the psychology staff conducts a clinical interview. The woman is screened and then is then assigned a mental health roster based on her current need, officials said.

Women who are assigned to general population are assigned a psychological services specialist (PSS) who meets with them to create individualized recovery plans. The PSS meets with the woman regularly to identify treatment goals. Sometimes the PSS refers the woman to psychological treatment groups, which can include subjects ranging from adjusting to prison to substance abuse treatment.

If a woman needs a higher level of care than can be provided in general population, there are several specialized units at SCI-Muncy which provide more structured psychological programming, officials said. One example is the Residential Treatment Unit which houses inmates with a serious mental illness, many who also have lower intellectual functioning.

“It is recognized that these inmates require more support and prompting to be successful in programming, and as such, there are incentives offered to these individuals when they are able to remain compliant with medications, maintain proper personal hygiene, follow the rules of the unit, and maintain a relatively clean cell.”

Those with more serious mental illness who have chronic disciplinary issues also have a special unit. “These individuals are offered structured psychological and psychiatric programming

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within a phase level system wherein they can eventually graduate to a less restrictive environment when their security needs permit,” officials said.

SCI-Muncy “takes a holistic approach to mental health,” officials said. There are 30 group sessions offered at Muncy per day. The House of Hope program is one that was developed for women who have experienced domestic violence. Muncy also has developed gender specific programming to address issues. The prison partnered with Marilyn Van Dieten, who has been a registered clinical psychologist for more than 30 years, to develop the programs.

About 80 percent of Muncy’s population are mothers. “Parenting is an important concern of the ladies when they get here,” officials said. Staff discusses the issues with the women when they arrive at Muncy and make sure that the children are being cared for. “If we can ease those concerns, we are better equipped to help.”

One area SCI-Muncy is focusing on is the link between physical and mental health. Women experience cardiovascular issues more often than men, which is most likely due to stress. “Women take care of everyone else before themselves,” officials said. “When women get here, we try to get them to focus on taking care of themselves.”

Harper acknowledged that SCI-Muncy has different units to address various mental health and trauma issues. “They run groups and have incentives and things like that. I think some of them are on the right track, while others are so heavily medicated that they seem off-planet, and that often leads to them being ostracized (sic) and/or made fun of.”

Blount is skeptical of the treatment of women with mental health issues. She recalled one time when a woman lit herself on fire. “She literally greased her body up and set herself on fire. I will never forget that incident,” Blount said.

Prison changes people, according to Blount. When you’re on the inside, you may find yourself doing things differently than you did when you were on the outside.

“A lot of times when people are good people in a bad situation, you end up doing things you wouldn’t do. For example, stealing food from prison or alcohol pads,” Blount said. Many women don’t have the money for medicines and supplies. “It’s not about rehabilitation or bettering your life,” Blount said.

The women at SCI-Muncy mostly look out for each other. Shavonne referred to her fellow women there as “family,” according to her cousin, Sissy.

When she was released in 2017, she did not forget about the women left behind. “When she got home, she would talk about

we got to help the others,” Sissy said. “Shavonne was the kind of person if you didn’t have shoes, she’d give you hers.”

Sissy and Shavonne grew up in the same neighborhood and are one year apart. “I think of Shavonne as more of my sister than a cousin.

“She was a wonderful person. Coming home, she still remained the same person. Humble. Family-oriented.”

The Robbins family made the three-hour trip from Philadelphia to Muncy several times a month to see Shavonne during her prison term. “Just seeing her behind those walls was hard. I never looked back when we’d leave,” Sissy said.

One time about six months before Shavonne was released, Sissy and her family came to a family day event at SCI-Muncy. Sissy noticed another woman there who had just had surgery and was in a lot of pain the entire time. She could not stop focusing on this woman.

“It seemed like no one helped her there. The other women took care of each other,” Sissy said. Sissy prayed that Shavonne, who was already sick with cancer, would not pass away in the prison.

Sissy has often wondered if Shavonne’s extended time at SCI-Muncy was a factor in her cancer diagnosis. She had heard stories from other women there about lack of health care or food. She also heard stories about aging buildings and issues with the water.

“Was it something in the buildings? I don’t know,” Sissy said.

“I know it’s a prison and they are there for their wrongs that they did, but they’re still human beings,” Sissy said.

In Memory of Naomi Blount



The world will be missing one of the greatest women who God has blessed me with meeting. Although I'm not good with years anymore, I do know the many years of tried and true friendship with Naomi.

She was a gifted singer and lover of sounds and could put them together in a minute, creating a song.

The first time I met her I was being interviewed, trying to make the cut to be in her singing group. Before I left that morning, I was in, and for me, that was the greatest thing. It meant that I was pretty good, too.

Naomi could also play the piano without ever reading a note. That gift amazed me. What topped everything was her ability to take the most out-of-touch person and bring them back to real time through sharing music. And that person wouldn't even dig it, they'd just be smiling and feeling good and included.

I prayed hard and wanted to see her so badly, once I was released. But now I'll have to wait my turn without her. Until then -

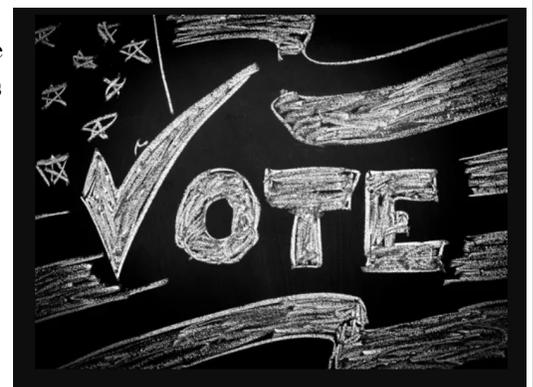
"Naomi it's been great. It's been an honor to be in your life for a reason . . . for a season. Love You Girl Meechie."

Philadelphians will vote on whether to establish a Prison Oversight Board in May Election!

Nonprofit community groups and concerned citizens rallied on the North Side of Philadelphia's City Hall on March 11th to announce that Philadelphia residents will have the opportunity to vote in the May 20th, 2025 Primary Election on a ballot referendum that would create a jail oversight board for Philadelphia County prisons.

This election question is an effort to create an oversight board to help hold the Philly Department of Prisons accountable. Spread the word and invite others who care about addressing horrific problems that are continuously occurring in the county prisons such as:

- 50+ deaths in the jails over the past couple years,
- Constant medical neglect,
- Unsanitary conditions throughout the jails,
- Locking up drug users they can't take care of,
- No out-of-cell time for people,
- Abuse of solitary confinement,
- And much more all without accountability!



Vote for a Philadelphia Prison Oversight Board! Folks on the inside, tell your mother, father, sister, brother, son, daughter, grandmom, grandpa, husband, wife, and friends to vote on May 20th, 2025.

THIS BALLOT QUESTION IS IMPORTANT! Your vote does count!

THE MOVEMENT

www.hrcoalition.org



Artwork titled "The Prisoner" by Daniel Gwynn

The Prisoner

Part of my survival and healing took place when I began to paint. I could draw a little before coming to prison. I learned to paint in prison through self-help books given to me by Mumia Abu Jamal. Painting has been my therapy, a form of meditation that helps me work through my issues. I got good enough to enter art shows & competitions & raise money to help mentally ill prisoners and family members of murder victims. Peggy Sims, from the PA Prison Society, told me about Art for Justice (AfJ). In 2001 I began to correspond with AfJ Director – who purchased my art so I could buy art supplies and shared my art and my story with the world. She also allowed me to become a part of the fight to bring awareness to the injustice in the criminal justice system.

From: [Art For Justice - About Daniel Gwynn](#)

