

# THE MOVEMENT

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

**Winter Issue #55**

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

*Wishing you  
all a  
Happy  
Holiday  
from HRC.*



*Artwork titled  
"Welcome Home" by  
Daniel Gwynn*

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## Cover Art: 'Welcome Home' by Daniel Gwynn

*"For 23 years I've been sitting here trapped in a box where the days just tick away, the walls closing in like a trash compactor crushing all hopes dreams and life. I paint to heal and survive."*

*"Painting has enriched my life - I've been blessed to be able to use my art to work through my pains and accomplish great things to help others. Where I once thought that all hope was lost, I've been able to open my heart to a variety of good people who had the courage and compassion to take a chance on me. I don't believe I could have survived this situation on my own. I am so grateful for my friends, my surrogate family. They have embraced me and supported my fight for justice. Together, as a family, we fought for my freedom."*

- Daniel Gwynn

We are happy to say that on February 27, 2024, the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office had the case against 54-year-old death-sentenced prisoner Daniel Gwynn thrown out and all charges dropped.

"[T]he exoneration of Daniel Gwynn today frees a man who is likely innocent. Sadly, it also exemplifies an era of inexact and, at times corrupt, policing and prosecution that has broken trust with our to this day," said District Attorney Larry Krasner whose office has supported the exoneration of 41 wrongfully convicted people. [From Death Penalty Information Center, Posted March 1, 2024]

Mr. Gwynn's case gained attention after his paintings were featured on the website of Art for Justice (AFJ).



**AFJ Shows the humanity behind bars. Brings awareness to systemic flaws in the criminal justice system. Seeks solutions to eliminate injustice.**

To review Mr. Gwynn's full story and art, go to:  
[www.ArtForJustice - About Daniel Gwynn](http://www.ArtForJustice-AboutDanielGwynn.com)

*Welcome home, Daniel, and Happy Holidays. We wish you an overflow of all that you've missed!*

*From HRC Editors*

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# The Editor Speaks



## Greetings Readers,

Another year is coming to an end, and there is much to reflect upon, from a world view, to the state of our individual communities and our interpersonal triumphs and situational challenges.

Thank God the election is over! No more demeaning commercials, contentious misinformation, or being left in the dark about what the next President is really planning.

Now, unfortunately, we know who won, who will benefit from the victory, and how far off we as a society are from equality, inclusion and mutual respect. The rhetoric won't stop and neither will the posturing from the powers that be. So we all have a lot of work to get done before the next election cycle to hopefully get educated on all those involved who want to lead going forward.

We are NOT great again until honesty, fair treatment, gender respect and individual health and medical decisions are back to being completely autonomous and clear of any outside interference. Minorities and women of this country are again tasked with fighting for consideration and progress, working toward unity across political, social and economic lines, and then demanding that the men who love us and care to value us in totality stand up against any person or group that seek to diminish or demolish us and our strengths from any vantage point.

We have God, so none of us need an overlord! Instead, we need to find ourselves on one accord or at the very least, in a place where we value our differences, never seeking to impose our views on others, but finding our way to ac-

ceptance. We can be successful as humans, as Americans, as defenders of democracy, but none of that will come overnight, nor without many obstacles. We have to be counted among the doers (where we've always been), not with the dreamers, antagonists or those sitting back just waiting for something good to happen.

Through all we've had to grapple with this year, my world was made exponentially better and more alive by the birth of my niece. She is the blessing our family needed and prayed for, after a major loss, and we have a new little human to help navigate this complicated existence. So, I give thanks this holiday season for family love and additions, acknowledging the bloodlines as well as the family I've created the last 3+ decades. Each person in my life has helped, uplifted, and motivated me to uphold strong standards, love unconditionally, think on a broad spectrum, keep copious notes, and above all, to forgive wholeheartedly.

Not everything is about me. As such know that I appreciate all of the readers, those who send in submissions to contribute to our cause, everyone behind the scenes at The Movement/HRC, and anyone who positively impacts what we are trying to accomplish. Hopefully 2024 and what we've shared has been motivation for you to start and complete important projects, and has given you energy that'll propel you into changes and upgrades to your work, education, personal connections and your community in 2025.

May we all be Blessed with open-mindedness, accountability, safer neighborhoods, responsible government, and the next generation's willingness to propagate peace.

It's been real!

Peace,

Terri

Smart Communications /PA DOC  
Terri Harper, OB7637, SCI-Muncy  
PO Box 33028  
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## I Grieve My Freedom

Imagine how powerful a moment it was when I noticed, "I grieve my freedom" written on a wall in the phone room while I waited for my call to be connected. I couldn't stop repeating it, as it really moved me. I know the phrase could be deemed insensitive, if not for sincere remorse and understanding toward victims and those left behind after

*(Continued on page 4)*

*(Continued from page 3)*

crimes are committed.

In no way can any victim's pain, loss or grief be quantified, at least not by me, uber conscious of what my crime created, and it's with that myriad of emotions in mind that I share.

Grief makes you long for many things, after wishing a certain devastating event didn't happen. Those longings range from the most basic items and activities, to physical wellness, societal inclusion and beyond. Directly, I mourn physical freedom, familial connections, seasonal clothing and supportive footwear, grocery shopping, driving, answering the telephone, cookouts, concerts, and even working '9-5'. I even think of how reassuring it'd be to have doctors trust that I know my body and have my concerns fully addressed, or to be present for a struggling loved one simply needing a hug or a house sitter. These longings remain unfulfilled after decades, yet the ties to them stay solid.

At least once a day, someone asks, "How are you?", with the standard answer being, "I'm fine, and you?", but the truth is that I'm often Not. The inability to control my every move, the monotony within each day that passes, and the absence of all that was my Life, are almost insurmountable. Even though things like paying bills, cooking a meal and participating in family gatherings were commonplace, I have to acknowledge that I took it all for granted. Playtime wasn't often, but I miss bowling, riding to A.C., shopping, going out to meals and lying on the couch eating Bonbons. So much more is missed, but nothing weighs more heavily than missing my baby girl's milestones and family tragedies and celebrations. I gave all of that away, when I chose ego and immaturity over job, knowledge, and common sense. I am left in the vicious cycle of change in corrections that doesn't nurture or allow me to reach my full potential. This is an observation not a complaint, because I have no right to bemoan my status. I did this to myself. I'm sharing, because life has a way of rehashing the best and the worst, presumably to influence us to do better than before. Making decisions on who, what, when and where becomes life-affirming instead of being routine.

Since reality doesn't include time travelling, I constantly reset and replenish, mind and spirit, by way of observations similar to this.

The giving away of my life has been a hard realization, but intense self-evaluations combat the negative feelings I've associated with people believing I'm irredeemable, and not

deserving of comprehensive healthcare or the healthy diet needed for me to be able to walk out the gates in good shape, with an ability to contribute and thrive.

Life, security, and humanity stolen must be accounted for. And yet we must answer about all that comes afterward. At some point there will be less turmoil, less disappointment (s), and far more joy, but not before unfathomable challenges. When the days of physical freedom, exploration and reintegration come, and relief is in my grasp, I will be ready as a result of the knowledge and respect for relinquished time, opportunities and connectedness. There will prayerfully be time for walks on the beach and in the rain, or just sitting on the stoop watching neighborhood children play. A possibility, no matter how far reaching, so it's always time to prepare.

Yes, "I Have Grieved", not just on the tangent of what's gone, but in acceptance of the character defects and unrealistic perceptions I possessed, that led me to harm innocent strangers. It is grief for all that I cannot fix. There's no do over!

There's no chance to sacrifice myself and reverse my then cowardice, nor can the strength I have today gloss it over. I'm left self-reproachful, learning more each day how to turn regret into atonement.

By way of the OVA [Office of the Victims Advocate], I can (and have) put pen to paper, attempting to fully express my remorse, although it's not guaranteed to be read nor bring forgiveness. There's that leap of faith taken, hoping to be heard and pardoned, even though nothing can fix what I broke. I grieve a cumulative suffering, and I'm not alone, so I pray this piece serves to convey the depth of work put into effecting a positive eventuality for this life and all the people I hurt.

Reflections are powerful no matter the size of the proverbial mirror, and I will not stop looking at mine. I OWN the tragedy! Now I'm ready to advance to and preserve the triumph.

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**Sudoku Easy Puzzle—Answers on page 7**

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**THE MOVEMENT MAGAZINE**

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**Parent Organization:**

*Human Rights Coalition (HRC)*

**Founded: 2007**

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**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.

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## For Pennsylvania’s aging prison population, a matter of life and death

Ezra Bozeman’s case accentuates problems with aging in prison.

By Harrison Cann , June 2024



Friends, family and advocates hold signs and photos to raise awareness about Ezra Bozeman. Photo credit: Celeste Trusty / FAMM

Like so many older Pennsylvanians, Ezra Bozeman dealt with increasingly serious afflictions with each passing year. And like so many older Pennsylvanians, he struggled to get the health care he needed. Bozeman suffered from a spinal issue that was misdiagnosed for years until he had an MRI in 2023. He then underwent surgery to treat his injury but subsequently developed blood clots, which resulted in a second surgery. That operation left him paralyzed below the neck, rendering him unable to do the community-building and mentoring work he was devoted to in his later years.

Bozeman’s struggles to deal with the devastating consequences of inadequate health care reflect that of many of his peers – with one exception. He was subject to the machinations of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections.

Boze – as Bozeman’s friends on the inside called him – spent nearly 50 of his 68 years of life in prison after being

convicted at age 19 of killing Morris Weitz, the co-owner of a dry cleaner in Pittsburgh, in 1975 – a crime Bozeman maintained he did not commit. He became well-known for providing support and comfort to fellow inmates. Like many other individuals serving life sentences, he worked as a Certified Peer Support Specialist while at SCI-Chester, where he helped individuals navigate the challenges of incarceration.

“The ‘old heads,’ as they call us, would be strategically placed all around the jail to stabilize prisons,” Lee Horton, an advocate for Families Against Mandatory Minimums, the nonprofit criminal justice reform organization, said. Horton, who was in prison with Bozeman, spends his days now calling into question the very system that kept seniors like Bozeman – who are often seen as valued mentors and difference-makers by both inmates and prison officials – incarcerated: “Why don’t you let them out and allow them to go back to those troubled communities and have that same effect out in society?”

Bozeman’s May 2 request for compassionate release – the state’s narrowly defined law that determines if someone can be released early due to their physical condition, was granted on May 20. Unable to move without assistance and confined to a wheelchair, Bozeman was put on life support upon his release. On

June 1, less than two weeks after leaving prison, he died at UPMC Altoona.

Christine Roess, Bozeman’s fiancée, described him through tears as the “most incredible, mature, wonderful man ... He had this real commitment to be love.”

Roess, the retired founder of a leadership development firm, met Bozeman through a friend and social worker in 2021 after Roess showed an interest in working with incarcerated individuals. From Zoom calls that progressed to in-person visits, Roess and Bozeman fell for each other, Roess bought herself an engagement ring and they began making plans together.

Roess recalled how Bozeman’s motto to “Be love” turned into his “key to freedom,” he wrote in a letter to her – “a love that transcends walls and circumstances, a love that knows no bounds.”

*(Continued on page 7)*

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Reflecting on the struggle to get him released, Roess said the system in place held him up “at every turn, at every juncture.”

“They say, ‘No one is above the law,’” she said, “but many are stuck under the boots of the law.”

The end-of-life struggle that faced Bozeman – one of Pennsylvania’s oldest and longest-serving prisoners – has become increasingly commonplace in the commonwealth’s prison system. Heading into 2024, there were more than 10,600 incarcerated people over the age of 50, accounting for more than 27% of the total prison population. The average age of an incarcerated individual is rising as well, jumping from 31 years old in 2000 to 38 years old in 2023, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections.

Rising demographics also mean rising costs: DOC spent \$59,598 on average to house a person last fiscal year, according to department data. But the cost to taxpayers can skyrocket to more than \$100,000 for an incarcerated person who needs regular medical attention.

Average medication costs per person under the age of 50 is about \$1,921, according to DOC, while for those individuals over age 50, it is \$2,928. And nearly all of the incarcerated elderly population is on life-sustaining medication, driving overall medication costs to \$40.5 million annually.

As the commonwealth deals with an aging population, its aging inmates – one of the largest such groups in the nation – face a similar and harsher reality where adverse living conditions and lack of access to health care age them at a faster rate than those on the outside.

Unless death is imminent, Pennsylvania has limited options for releasing aged inmates. Under state law, there are no parole opportunities for people serving life, even if they’re sick and determined to no longer be a danger to the public.

One option – the one sought by Bozeman and his supporters – is compassionate release. The state’s compassionate release law covers incarcerated people who are seriously ill and expected to die within a year, but requirements are so narrow that fewer than 50 people have been granted such release in the last several years.

Also known as deferment of sentence, compassionate release can be granted by a judge if the incarcerated individual is seriously or terminally ill, no longer able to walk, expected to live for less than one year, or in need of medi-

cal treatment better provided outside the prison facility. (If the individual’s condition improves, they would have to serve out the remainder of their sentence.)

Since 2016, 83 compassionate release cases have been filed, according to the Department of Corrections. During that time – including two cases in 2024 that are still pending – 49 individuals were granted release; 13 individuals died while waiting for a hearing.

Criminal justice advocates have long argued that the compassionate release standards are too restrictive, making cases like Bozeman’s difficult to process despite overwhelming support for his release.

“Compassionate release restrictions are so narrow it’s almost impossible” for inmates and their advocates to successfully petition for such action, Celeste Trusty, Pennsylvania state policy director for Families Against Mandatory Minimums, explained.

The process also initially puts the onus on a physician to deem an individual terminally ill and expected to die within a year – a diagnosis many doctors are uncomfortable giving, Trusty said.

“You have to look at the totality of their circumstances. You have to decide if society is better from their release or if they deserve perpetual punishment after already serving 20, 30, 40 and, in Ezra’s case, 50 years,” Trusty said. “It’s very frustrating for those serving mandatory life without parole because that doesn’t take into account how

*“They deserved a chance 25 years ago. They’ve become assets on the inside and we could allow them... to become assets out here.”*

**– Lee Horton of Families Against Mandatory Minimums**

people mature and change. They also suffer from medical issues that would not be as bad – if they were treated in the community.”

One possible change would be to allow correctional and medical staff, not just incarcerated individuals’ loved ones, to initiate the compassionate release process.

Wanda Bertram, of the nonprofit think tank Prison Policy Initiative, said expanding the process for compassionate release is “low-hanging fruit for policy reform” because it’s those around the incarcerated individuals, like correctional and medical staff, that best understand their needs.

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“If the people who are seeing them on a day-to-day basis had an ability, and even maybe a duty, to acknowledge and nominate them for compassionate release, that would get this process started a lot faster,” Bertram told City & State.

Bozeman thought he had suffered a “mini-stroke” in 2019 and was dealing with hypertension and some neurological issues. It wasn’t until years later when doctors discovered the misdiagnosis and saw he had pinched nerves in his spine in 2022.

According to his medical release petition, Bozeman’s spinal compression went untreated for another year until he required emergency surgery at Temple University Hospital in early February. He made a nearly full recovery, according to medical records, but a lung clot discovered shortly after he returned from prison led to complications and, ultimately, quadriplegia.

Bozeman’s story brings to light the fraught, drawn-out process surrounding compassionate release and the existential needs of aging individuals incarcerated in state prisons.

Horton said outside of the compassionate release process, there must be additional mechanisms for those serving long or life sentences, particularly those who were sentenced as juveniles, to have their cases reconsidered.

“Some just have one unfortunate day in their life. That day, at a young age, sealed their fate for the rest of their life,” Horton said. “There are a lot of elderly men and women in prison in Pennsylvania who are deserving of a second chance. They deserved a second chance 25 years ago. They’ve become assets on the inside and we could allow them to come home to become assets out here.”

Determining a fair, just and humane solution to the issue seems to be gathering momentum among key politicians, including Gov. Josh Shapiro, who became the commonwealth’s first sitting governor to endorse the release of someone in state custody in the process when he supported the relief requested in Bozeman’s case.

There also seems to be broad recognition among Harrisburg lawmakers that reforms are needed. Several legislative remedies were proposed this year, including one from state Sen. Sharif Street, who introduced a bill that would repeal the state’s current medical release provision and replace it with a law establishing more flexible parole opportunities based on age or illness.

Under his legislation, a medical provision could be granted to anyone with a terminal illness, a chronic and debilitating

condition, serious functional or cognitive impairment, or deteriorating health due to age. A geriatric provision would also be created to allow anyone age 55 and older who has served the lesser of 25 years or half their sentence to apply for parole. But in both cases, the parole board would have to determine whether the person poses a danger to the public.

State Sen. Lisa Baker, who chairs the Senate Judiciary Committee, has said she’s exploring a similar policy that would create a pilot program rather than a permanent change to the law.

Bertram worries that many parole boards are hesitant to grant release regardless of circumstance.

“The issue with parole boards a lot of time is that they simply have a bias against incarcerated people. They’re scared of them and they’re scared of, even more importantly, making a mistake and releasing somebody that goes on to commit another crime,” Bertram said, noting that a case review policy known as second-look sentencing, which would let incarcerated individuals serving long sentences petition their sentencing judge for a reduction of their sentence after serving a certain amount of time, has become popular in reform discussions. “Implementing something like second-look, where people automatically become eligible maybe 10 or 15 years into their sentence, that would be very powerful,” she said.

Trusty, who previously served as the commonwealth’s Secretary of the Pennsylvania Board of Pardons, said these measures would be a step in the right direction when it comes to having discretion in sentencing and relief after conviction.

“These people want to heal the harm they’ve caused and repair the community,” she said. “How much is enough? And how much are taxpayers willing to spend on this system?”

“There’s no compassion in letting a man come home to die,” Horton said. “Compassion would be to allow someone who’s been in prison 30-something years and is in their late 50s, 60s or 70s who is no longer a threat to society to come home,” he noted. “After a while, it’s no longer punishment – it’s torture.”

Roess plans to launch the Christine and Ezra Bozeman Be Love Foundation to promote policy change, criminal justice reform efforts – and Bozeman’s story.

*(Continued on page 9)*

(Continued from page 8)



“‘Be love’ was his central commitment,” she said. “So many people have been moved by that ... Compassionate release is such an excruciating misnomer,” she said. “There is no compassion in the compassionate release process.”

From:  
[www.cityandstatepa.com](http://www.cityandstatepa.com)

Ezra Bozeman, who died on June 1, receives a kiss from his fiancée, Christine Roess. Photo Credit Celeste Trusty / FAMM

### Easy

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## 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

## **KNOWLEDGE IS POWER**

### **Know Your Rights: Voting While Incarcerated**

The year 2024 held what was among one of the country’s most high-profile general elections in modern history. Many around the country, particularly in swing states like Pennsylvania, would have a hard time avoiding political advertising if they tried. Despite this, according to data from the University of Florida Election Lab, approximately 245 million Americans were eligible to vote in the 2024 general election; yet nearly 90 million did not cast a vote at all. This is no insignificant number, as both presidential candidates Harris and Trump received less than 77 million votes each.

In Pennsylvania alone, with over 9 million registered voters ahead of the election, less than 7 million casted a vote. In a presidential election where the presidential popular vote was decided by just over 100,000 votes in the state, the people must understand their vote’s impact.

While widespread apathy is still a major reason for lack of voter turnout, voter disenfranchisement and accessibility is as prevalent an issue as ever, particularly for those who are incarcerated. Knowing your rights is the first step to organizing your power. Though it varies state by state, in most cases people who have been convicted and are serving time for a misdemeanor or felony are still eligible to vote.

In Pennsylvania, incarcerated people are eligible to vote as long as they are not serving a felony sentence that runs through the election date. Most people in county jails are eligible to vote. However, how difficult voting may be varies widely from county to county. County jails do not have a universal process for voter education, voter registration or voting by mail. Many counties in PA do not have a written policy at all, with many vague at best. However, according to a study by All Voting is Local, seven Pennsylvania counties had a detailed, written policy that clearly outlines key dates, documents needed, and actions to take in order to be registered and vote by mail in an election, including Adams, Allegheny, Clinton, Delaware, Philadelphia, Washington, and Wayne County.

The fight for accessible voting will not be done until there is proper policy for accessible voting and registration for all, along with free flow of information and visitor access to aid the process in informing voters on their candidates.

Fortunately, many hardworking organizers have set up resources to help those who are seeking to utilize their power in voting. For those who are unsure of their eligibility and are no longer incarcerated, a start to your process can be found with “Restore Your Vote”, an online portal and project of the Campaign Legal Center. For those incarcerated in Pennsylvania, the PENNfranchise project, among others, are working to pass a law that would create a statewide policy to support voting in county jails, based on the current model of Centre County.

When asked about the roadblocks set up for incarcerated voters, executive director of the PENNfranchise Project Leigh Owens stated “These nearly 43,000 individuals, many of them people of color, could be the voting block that finally tips the scales of power in Pennsylvania toward the people. If our elected officials knew that their incarcerated constituents could cast a ballot, perhaps they would care more about the conditions inside these facilities and the conditions and laws that lead to mass incarceration”. Similarly, The Prison Society’s executive director Claire Shubik-Richards emphasized how voting can directly affect incarcerated voters’ own conditions: “If the 3,000 or so eligible voters in the Philly jails understood that the mayor controls how those jails are run, and that they can vote for the mayor, I think a lot of them would vote, and the mayor would need to pay attention”. The voice and vote of incarcerated voters will only be heard when they are cast.

Though the power to vote is often suppressed, it is only the more reason to vouch for and use your right to the ballot. If this power is not utilized, its impact will be non-existent and the status quo will remain.

Ultimately, most, if not all, incarcerated voters are dependent on mail that may be delayed through facilitation of jail officials. Understanding the timeline for registration, application, and voting punctually through these anticipated delays is critical. Even more critically, a voter must also consider and know where they will be on election day or when they will receive their mail-in ballot. If still unregistered, being able to access the required material such as identification documents is also essential within the deadlines. Plan to start the process early to compensate for any delays- but most importantly, plan to start.

All Power to the People, By Michael Babb

# Dear CADBI Family,

We are thinking of you as we head into the winter holiday season. We are reaching out to share about Freedom Side School, an exciting project founded by CADBI members to found a free abolitionist elementary school in Philadelphia for children who are directly impacted by mass incarceration.



**If you are interested in learning more about Freedom Side or joining our mailing list, please fill out the form below and mail it to the address below. If you would like a loved one on the outside to reach out to us, they can send us an email at [connect@freedomssideschool.org](mailto:connect@freedomssideschool.org).**

**[www.freedomssideschool.org](http://www.freedomssideschool.org)  
[connect@freedomssideschool.org](mailto:connect@freedomssideschool.org)**

**924 Cherry Street, 4th Fl  
Philadelphia, PA 19107**

In solidarity,  
The Freedom Side Team

-----  
Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_ DOC # \_\_\_\_\_ SCI: \_\_\_\_\_

We are currently fundraising to get the school open, with the hope of opening the school in the fall of 2026 at the earliest.

Do you have children in your life *currently under the age of 7* who live in the Philadelphia area and may be interested in attending the school?

- Yes
- No
- I have children in my life who are older

Your relationship to child/ren: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you interested in receiving periodic updates about the school?

- Yes
- No

What questions do you have about Freedom Side that you would hope to be answered in a future mailing?

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Institution/ID (if necessary): \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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Philadelphia, PA 19101  
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# LOVE KNOWS NO BARS



B-Days by Ms. Yvonne Newkirk,  
Portrait by Mark Loughney

**Hooray.** . .you are still here, you are stronger, you are wiser, and you are healthy. Many active organizations are fighting for you. We at HRC and CADBI will keep you in our prayers and do our best to provide the latest outside news and policies. We wish you every happiness on your very special day (every day).

## They Did It! Congratulations!!

This is the second graduation I have attended at Muncy. These females are fighters! They are fierce, they are go getters, and they are not letting metal wires or bars hold them back! Yes, I teared up!

**Bachelor of Arts from Adams State University**  
Elena House-Hay

**Restorative Juistice from Commonwealth University**  
Andrea Dusha and Rasheeda Hughes

**Blackstone Career Institute**  
Kyra Clardy, Amy Gipe, Morgan Mengel, Stacey Newkirk, and Taylor Griffith

**Machine Shop**  
Michele Houston, Candice Parrow, and Brenda Rodgers

**Optical/CBS**  
Tina Hosier and Jennifer Miley

**Automotive**  
Shamika Brown-Palmer, Misty Dunbar, Katie Kilmer, Jillian Robbins, Jill Uzdanic, Keyona Williams, and Christy Willis

**Cosmetology**  
Autumn Cramer, Andrea Dusha, Nadia Firdaus, Akeita Harden, and Sahdia Hargrove

**GED**  
Maegan Azbell, Lena Brown, Sabrina Dailey, Tammy Gallagher, Yvonne Hiller, Marjorie Jay, Ariana Kay, Demetria Knox, Bynlee Leake, Amanda Ritter, Nakia Rivera, Michele Sherwood, Nyieka Speer, Katelyn Stutzman, Jessica Warner, Tracey Williams, and Doris Williamson

**Restaurant Trades**  
Danielle Abbott, Maegan Azbell, Anye Bonner-Brown, Britany Boyd, Brandy Eakins, Crystal Fortini, Amanda Green, Alexis Harr, Damyrra Jones, Darian Kopps, Valerie Lane, Morgan Manfreda-Morton, Nafisah McNeill, Tara Mehorn, Stephanie Prebish, Carmen Ramirez, Ciara Robinson, Rebecca Sabo, and Katherine Swaim

— From Ms. Yvonne —

### November

|       |                   |              |
|-------|-------------------|--------------|
| 11/4  | Stratton Peay     | (Phoenix)    |
| 11/11 | Matthew Garcia    | (Chester)    |
| 11/12 | Cynthia Gonzalez  | (Muncy)*     |
| 11/12 | Nicole Newell     | (Muncy)*     |
| 11/21 | Jerome Coffey     | (Pine Grove) |
| 11/26 | Brittany Williams | (Muncy)*     |
| 11/28 | Tequilla Fields   | (Muncy)*     |

### December

|       |                   |                      |
|-------|-------------------|----------------------|
| 12/3  | Robert Furgess    | (Green)              |
| 12/4  | Sheena King       | (Muncy)*             |
| 12/7  | Melvin White      | (Mahanoy)*           |
| 12/9  | Christopher Berry | (Home)*              |
| 12/17 | Brian Charles     | (Phoenix)            |
| 12/21 | Denise Crump      | (Cambridge Springs)* |
| 12/21 | Thomas Greene     | (Dallas)*            |
| 12/24 | Malcolm Johnson   | (Phoenix)            |
| 12/29 | Dwayne Hill       | (Phoenix)            |
| 12/30 | Mark Taylor       | (Forrest)            |
| 12/31 | Yvonne Cloud      | (Muncy)*             |

### January

|      |                      |           |
|------|----------------------|-----------|
| 1/1  | Daniel (Khush) Smith | (Benner)* |
| 1/4  | Terri Harper         | (Muncy)*  |
| 1/12 | Amber Meidinger      | (Muncy)*  |
| 1/13 | Tammy Gallagher      | (Muncy)   |
| 1/15 | Eric Rambert         | (Greene)  |
| 1/22 | Reginald West        | (Phoenix) |
| 1/26 | Devon Stots          | (Benner)  |
| 1/28 | Marquise Marshall    | (Mahanoy) |

### February

|      |                  |                     |
|------|------------------|---------------------|
| 2/2  | Thomas Walsh     | (Coal Township)*    |
| 2/6  | Steven Williams  | (Huntingdon)        |
| 2/7  | Joseph Austin    | (Houtzdale)         |
| 2/12 | Doris Williamson | (Muncy)*            |
| 2/15 | Roberto Battle   | (Frackville)*       |
| 2/24 | Bruce Cooper     | (Dallas)            |
| 2/20 | Stacey Newkirk   | (Muncy)             |
| 2/28 | Amy Muffley      | (Muncy)*            |
| 2/29 | Desiree Hicks    | (Cambridge Springs) |

**Belated Birthday to Terry Dreibelbis 10/24 (Dallas)**

(\* indicates people I have met in person  
Always thinking of you,  
Ms. Yvonne





**D**o you realize we will have a lifetime of making choices about something or somebody? With this in mind, will you allow others to make choices for you, as sometimes we do? Or will you always be confident in the choices you make yourself and not go along with friends because of peer pressure or trying to fit in? How many of you have friends that have made, and still make, some really bad choices — even you yourself?

A lot of choices made are not always intentional, but it can cost you your entire young life. They can try you in court as an adult at the tender age of 13 because you chose to jump in the car with a friend knowing the car was stolen, hit somebody (you wasn't the driver), the person died, your life is over. Or they handed you the gun, you shot it. You didn't mean to kill the person, you didn't intend for that to happen, you just didn't believe it would turn out like it did or that this could happen to you.

Smoking a little weed, popping a pill, snorting a little cocaine, drinking a little syrup. You are not clueless about that type of activity. Most of you have been impacted by drugs, prison or death, be it friends or family.

You see it's never too late to make a different choice because your choice alone will determine your destiny.

YOU GET TO CHOOSE

---

**R**emember When . . .



Remember when you had to go back to the corner store if you didn't count your change and he cheated you, or the bread wasn't in a paper bag.

When everybody had credit at the corner store.

When Little Jimmy (and most boys) knew how to build a bike from another bike, fix the chain, had a air pump to fix the flat and off he went to take care of business.

When there were "Lay-Aways".

When sodas were in glass bottles and you could take soda bottles back to the store for money.

Do you remember standing in line with a wagon (or anything) to get government surplus cheese, butter, beef, spam, oatmeal, flour, powdered milk, cornmeal or peanut butter? Mac and cheese was the best, and don't forget the spam - that made it all taste good.

Remember there was two cleansers to clean out the tub: Comet and Ajax.

When "red light basement house parties" was the place to be. You didn't need an invite. Just show up to Bop, Slow Drag, The Stroll, Cha Cha, Slop, Strand, or Cross Fire. Everybody wasn't dancers; the *cool* guys just stood around and asked, "Who is he and what is he to you".

"Can I walk you home?" was the line. But he knew he couldn't go to your house, so you'd stop at the corner and talked; that was good enough.

When cool guys always had a toothpick in their mouth.

Remember when you knew heartbreak was coming cause you liked him and he didn't like you back.

When a teabag was used more than once.

When everybody drank Kool Aid.

When a box spring on a bed was really springs.

When you could always borrow a cup of sugar from Ms Tina.

Every neighborhood had a known Booster; this was his full time job, and it paid more than minimum wage.

In the hood, **POVERTY** was everybody's address.

Welfare checks came in the mail, you knew Woody the mailman; and he knew you and your check day, too.

Remember when you'd be in big trouble if you saw Ms Lisa carrying a bag and you didn't help. You got hollered at, "You know better, you wasn't raised like that."

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# The HomeFront: Serving Our Community!

Press Release, February 16, 2024

## PA Supreme Court Agrees to Rule on Constitutionality of Life Without Parole for Felony Murder

*Case could have national implications for movement against death by incarceration*

Harrisburg, PA – The Pennsylvania Supreme Court has agreed to hear a landmark case brought by a man challenging the constitutionality of his sentence: life without parole for felony murder. Derek Lee argues that, because he did not kill or intend to kill anyone, his sentence is disproportionate and cruel under both the U.S. and Pennsylvania constitutions. He seeks to end the state’s ban on parole for those convicted of felony murder.

Lee’s case emerges from a grassroots movement led by incarcerated people and their families who refer to life without parole as death by incarceration (DBI). While Lee’s case concerns only a subset of people serving DBI sentences, it could have broad implications for the effort to reduce or end life imprisonment, a defining feature of the U.S. criminal legal system and a major driver of mass incarceration.

“The Pennsylvania Supreme Court’s acceptance of Derek Lee’s appeal is a major opportunity for Derek and thousands of others in his position to begin rolling back these excessive and harmful sentencing practices,” said **Quinn Cozzens**, staff attorney at the Abolitionist Law Center. “As one of the world’s leaders in sentencing people to die in prison, it is long past time for Pennsylvania to join many other states in the U.S. and almost every country in the world in recognizing that people convicted of felony murder should not face death-by-incarceration sentences.”

The application of the felony murder rule, which holds liable for murder a person who participates in a felony that leads to a death, is particularly extreme in Pennsylvania because the mandatory minimum sentence is life without parole. With 5,200 people serving DBI sentences, the state has the country’s highest per capita rate and accounts for 10 percent of the U.S. total. Seventy percent of the more than 1,100 people in Pennsylvania serving death-by-incarceration sentences for felony murder are Black.

“We are hopeful that the Pennsylvania Supreme Court will provide justice for Derek Lee and all those sentenced to die in prison due to the felony murder rule,” said **Nikki Grant**,

Policy Director, Amistad Law Project. “It is a cruel form of punishment for someone who did not commit murder or intend for anyone to die. The Supreme Court has the opportunity to end this inhumane punishment that is currently robbing thousands of people of hope for a life beyond bars in Pennsylvania.”

In 2014, Lee and another man allegedly broke into a house in Pittsburgh to commit robbery. According to the prosecution, Lee was upstairs when the other man shot and killed a man in the basement. In his petition filed in July on his behalf by the Abolitionist Law Center, Amistad Law Project, and the Center for Constitutional Rights, Lee challenges his sentence under the Eighth Amendment, which prohibits “cruel and unusual” punishment, and the Pennsylvania constitution, which bans “cruel” punishment.

“Life without parole and other sentences that exceed life expectancy condemn individuals, disproportionately Black people, to death by incarceration,” said **Samah Sisay**, a staff attorney at the Center for Constitutional Rights. “These sentences are torture and deprive incarcerated people of any hope for a second chance, but the Pennsylvania Supreme Court has the opportunity to end this cruel practice.”

Like many other incarcerated people, Lee has managed to grow over the years despite the ever-present brutality and dearth of rehabilitative resources in prisons. According to his mother, Betty Lee, he preaches in prison as the assistant to the chaplain and was appointed to the executive board of the Pennsylvania Lifers’ Association. If he were permitted to return to his community in Pittsburgh, he would be a powerful role model for young men, she says.

Amicus briefs were filed in the case by former Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Secretaries John Wetzel and George Little, the ACLU of Pennsylvania and the MacArthur Justice Center, Eighth Amendment Law Scholars, and The Sentencing Project, Boston University Center for Anti-racist Research, Fair and Just Prosecution, and FAMM.

“As someone who began serving a DBI sentence as a child and was only granted relief through the intervention of the US Supreme Court, this decision by the PA Supreme court brings hope,” said Saleem Holbrook, Executive Director at Abolitionist Law Center. “We are hopeful that the PA Supreme Court will do what the state legislature has been unable to do; provide relief for thousands of incarcerated people and their families. Those sentenced to DBI should be given the opportunity to demonstrate they are not the same

*(Continued on page 16)*

**THE MOVEMENT**

[www.hrcoalition.org](http://www.hrcoalition.org)

(Continued from page 15)

people they were 20, 30, years ago. And it will give society an opportunity to demonstrate we are capable of extending compassion and valuing redemption.”

The questions the Pennsylvania Supreme Court will address are:

(1) Is [Petitioner’s] mandatory sentence of life imprisonment with no possibility of parole unconstitutional under Article I, § 13 of the Constitution of Pennsylvania where he was convicted of second-degree murder in which he did not kill or intend to kill and therefore had categorically-diminished culpability, and where Article I, § 13 should provide better protections in those circumstances than the Eighth Amendment to the U .S. Constitution?

(2) Is [Petitioner’s] mandatory sentence of life imprisonment with no possibility of parole unconstitutional under the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution where he was convicted of second-degree murder in which he did not kill or intend to kill and therefore had categorically-diminished culpability under the Eighth Amendment?

For more information on the case, visit the Abolitionist Law Center *case page*.



## Oct. 8th, 2024 Oral Argument against 2nd Degree

We were there! The courtroom was jam packed for the Oral Argument on the constitutionality of Life Without Parole for Felony Murder (2nd Degree). Our case was the first to be heard and “We The People” were punctual for the 9am hearing. Philly

folks traveled 6 hours and Pittsburgh folks arrived early enough to hold us some seats. The courtroom was packed, standing room only. If you didn’t want to stand there was a second courtroom where you could watch the hearing on a large TV screen. Spirits were high. We all had our own opinion of what was going to happen, but what we all would agree on was that we were there to witness what we hoped would be a historical moment.

With such a large turnout, I’m positive the judges understood the importance of this hearing. This case would make history as impactful as Miller vs Alabama where the

US Supreme Court ruled that sentencing children to Life Without Parole sentences was cruel and unusual punishment and therefore unconstitutional. And this ruling would not only impact Derek Lee, but thousands of others across PA prisons.

We were excited. Didn’t want to miss seeing Bret Grote, Legal Director of ALC (and as determined as a dog with a bone) take on this fight. We were curious to get a feel of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court Judges’ thoughts and which way they were leaning. We were focused on watching and listening, looking for a clue as to how they would rule. The seven judges threw questions at Attorney Grote left and right. They barely gave him time to answer one question before another judge asked another question – we were wondering, is this a good or bad sign. Bret went toe to toe with them for over an hour answering their questions without hesitation. I, personally, wanted to jump up and applaud. And I’ll tell you this, if the judges don’t rule in our favor, it will not be the fault of Bret Grote.

The only downside to this “oral argument” is that the judges’ decision did not and will not come any time soon; it will take as long as it takes, possibly six months or more.

After Case #1 (our case) was over and we all left, THE COURTROOM WAS EMPTY. You could clearly see which case was of interest to the people – drop the mic.

By: Mama Patt

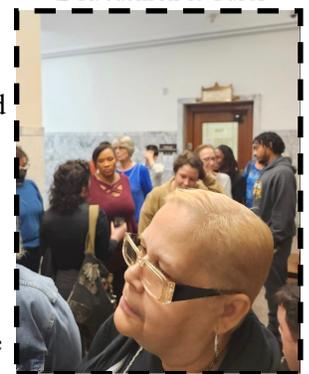
Photographer: Dana Lomax-Ayler who says, “The support was phenomenal. Bret Grote, Esq. didn’t miss a beat.”



L-R: Dana and Celeste



L-R: Jackson & Yusef



Ms. Dee Dee



L-R: Shandre & Dana

# The HomeFront: Serving Our Community!

## TOXIC PRISONS CAMPAIGN



*Reprint from: Frontline Momentum, Communicating Your Narrative, Issue 5: Summer 2024*

This month's grantee spotlight features an interview with B.P. Lyles, one of the lead organizers for the Toxic Prisons Campaign of the Human Rights Coalition. Founded in 2019, the Toxic Prisons Campaign is a program of the Human Rights Coalition, a nonprofit organization of current and formerly incarcerated people, their families, and supporters.

man Rights Coalition, a nonprofit organization of current and formerly incarcerated people, their families, and supporters.

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE TOXIC PRISONS CAMPAIGN?

The Toxic Prisons Campaign is essentially the environmental justice arm of the Human Rights Coalition. The program was started in direct response to the environmental injustices occurring at SCI (state correctional institution) Fayette. The prison was constructed on 50 million tons of coal ash waste and is situated near three coal slurry ponds. Since it opened in 2003, residents of SCI Fayette have experienced many negative health impacts and illnesses. Our initial goal for the Toxic Prisons Campaign was to raise awareness of the toxic environment at SCI Fayette and advocate for the prison's closure. We have since broadened our scope beyond SCI Fayette to address a wide range of environmental hazards found in prisons across Pennsylvania and advocate for the people who are exposed to those conditions.

### WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION TO CONTRIBUTE TO THIS WORK?

My motivation for this work is deeply personal. For me, it's incredibly important to help people to recognize that men and women who are incarcerated are just that: men and women, full-fledged citizens of the United States who are full of dignity and worth; possess gifts, talents, skills, and dreams; and can be great contributors to society. Re-

turning citizens deserve as much forgiveness and grace as you want for yourself. Every human being has room and capacity for growth, change, and development. No one has to stay stuck within the traumas of the past. Those coming from incarceration, regardless of the reason, should be supported in their opportunity to be released and live fully without having to endure a life sentence of rejection, ostracization, and marginalization.

It's also important to educate people on the toxicities and environmental injustices found in prisons. Polluted water and air, mold and mildew, corroded pipes, lead paint, toxic dust, pest and rodent infestations — all these things are happening inside prisons and people are getting sick.

More often than not, people who are incarcerated will not go to the infirmary because they are told what they are feeling is unimportant or doesn't exist. As a result, they don't receive proper medical treatment until they are in such a severe, advanced state that they need to go to the hospital. People are losing their lives and dealing with chronic diseases that could have been prevented if properly addressed early on. Subjecting people to toxic environments that make them sick is no way to treat American citizens.

### WHAT ARE SOME SUCCESSES THAT YOU ARE PARTICULARLY PROUD OF?

One recent success we are proud of is our documentary, "I Can't Breathe: The Toxic Prison Campaign's Fight for Environmental Justice." We produced the film in 2023 in part with grant funding from FRI. There are two parts to the film's storyline. One part looks at environmental injustices in prisons and the means by which we can help get justice for those impacted. The second part looks at what can be done to support people coming home from prison, including getting them involved in renewable energy related careers that will enable them to provide for themselves and their families. We have already screened the documentary in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and are now pursuing other screening venues, including colleges and universities. Our goal is to eventually post the film online.

### SHARE SOME OF THE LESSONS YOU'VE LEARNED IN YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL JOURNEY.

Being selfless is crucial. This work takes a lot of energy and effort and it requires people who have passion, ener-

*(Continued on page 19)*

# The HomeFront: Serving Our Community!

## FOR YOUR GOD'S SAKE – WHO 'da . . . ' ARE YOU/WE?

(AFTERMATH OF DRUMPF ELECTION)

**Me first – then you;** Who do I think I am? I am a universal being on an earthly adventure. Where I come from and all that stuff, I have no clue. And nobody's explanation satisfies or extinguishes doubt. For some, Muhammad, Moses, Jesus, Buddha – animism or nothing, has satisfied your definition of self. If you list every belief that we have, the lies (God told me to tell you), ignorance and confusion is clear.

Enter – 'Might is Right' on the historical theater, along with waves of "True Believers" (koolaiders) and we end up with today (Drumprf, Putin, Erdowan, etc., tyrants), all the men-made problems of today.

**Us/we second;** 'None of Us will get-outta-here-alive. We are connected. Humans are all from the same point of physical origin. Genetics says so. I offer this challenge, situate yourself in the "sea of humanity". Do it genetically, physically (mother/father – genealogically) racially, religiously, nationally and socially. This research should bring you to me, we, us. Us all.

**From the Editor:** Why does this author refer to Trump and **Drumprf**? Is this a slight?

Fact Check from: [Snopes.com](http://Snopes.com)

On 28 February 2016, the host of Last Week Tonight with John Oliver launched into a lengthy segment about Donald Trump, which culminated with encouragement from Oliver to use Trump's ancestral surname, "**Drumprf**." The "**Drumprf**" revelation wasn't new. We came across mentions of it in the course of research for a separate Trump family-related claim:

The name of Trump's grandfather, Friedrich Drumprf, was anglicized to Frederick Trump, but he died several years before the report. On 2 September 2015, the New York Daily News was one of the news outlets reporting on Ancestry.com's release of multiple historical records of prominent families. Several of the documents belonged to the Trump family: His paternal granddad — who came to America [a German immigrant] at 16 with little more than a name he later changed — lived a true rags-to-riches life, leaving his widow and three kids a modest fortune when he died, new records show. Fred Trump, born Friedrich Drumprf, in Kallstadt, Germany, in 1869, had an estate worth \$500,000 in today's dollars when he died in Queens on May 30, 1918, at age 49.

**Drumprf third;** What do I take away from the election? First I was dead wrong. I thought Drumprf would die in Marion Federal Penitentiary, same prison Gotti died in. Boy was I wrong. I thought his defeat would inspire violence against some of the ruling elite surrogates or progressives, (Right Winger attack on Nancy or the Squad) such that he would be committed to prison as a "threat to national security" and given his age, would expire shortly.

Power does its own will. All charges against the Arch-Criminal Drumprf are being dropped! Its time to release

every criminal (who can be safely returned to society) from prison. THAT SHOULD BE OUR DEMAND.

**Fourth/So Who are We (As a country)?** We are dominated by the Whi-Folk gang, who are racists, misogynists, xenophobes and outright stupid. Deserving of what his idiosyncratic whims should reap upon them/us.

We belong to race gangs and do not necessarily hate each other, most of us. But so-called Whi-Folk are afraid of the "Browning of Amerikla", largely because they feel Whi-skin privilege has given them real advantage in the capitalist rat-race, that we run. There is Whi-skin privilege, Drumprf is its quintessential symbol. Being a Kracker gang member/leader he, more than any other, prove laws are made for serfs (to be kept in line for the sake of "Our Kings") and do not apply to the "macho-man" who can enforce his will amongst peers and against the real interest of humanity. Weak cowering self-hating men live vicariously through the "grab em by the Pusysers" of the world.

Do not be fooled by the Drumprf election. The rulers have us divided – but NOT conquered! Since the beginning of Amerikla, fickle divisions have existed between both camps. We and they are divided. There are more of us than there are of them. But their strategies have been more effective in dividing us than ours in uniting us. The top

seven donors (oligarchs) donated millions to fool us and Drumprf, the arch-criminal, coward, and useful idiot won.

Going forward I will use the Free Market to Be Democracy. We are the economy. What we buy makes them! I will only buy from their divided quarter that supports democracy. We are also the government. Our lives are affected more by local policies than national. The Klan knew this truth so well, they requested the Yankees remove the soldiers from their South so they could end

Reconstruction. In exchange they gave the Yankees the presidency (1868). Then they murdered their way into local and regional power. From there, and ever since, they have made attempts to seize national power. A coalition of haters and oligarchs have succeeded with the Drumprf election.

Power does its own will. Might is right! Patriarchy just in case that got by you. Don't take my word for it. History has recorded this truth and every actor has a name, face, and obituary! Research damn it.

*(Continued on page 19)*

**THE MOVEMENT**

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gy, and concern for others. However, we need to recognize that burnout is real. Most of the people who engage in this work are volunteers. They have jobs, families, friends, and hobbies. It's important to encourage people to take breaks to decompress and do other things they enjoy so that they can re-engage and commit to the process for the long haul.

Another important lesson is that financing these types of missions can be very difficult. We have found success in connecting with other community organizations and like-minded partners to find out where they receive grants, even applying for grants together when possible depending on capacity and the grant's relevance to our mission. We are also constantly looking for grant-making organizations that are supportive of our mission, no matter the size of the grant. Due to the nature of the grant process, this can be time-consuming work and it requires a good deal of focus and attention. Yet because the work is so important to us, the time and energy are well worth it and the impact is generational.

**WHAT ARE SOME PROJECTS OR INITIATIVES THAT THE TOXIC PRISONS CAMPAIGN IS ASPIRING TO ENGAGE IN OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?**

One thing we want to do is develop an environmental justice curriculum for people who are incarcerated to train them on what environmental justice is; explore the intersections of environmental injustice, incarceration, renewable energy, and restorative justice; and talk about how to move into this new green environment. Through these trainings, we want to establish direct connections with people at various SCIs, who we will call point persons, and grow these relationships and our networks across the state so that we can become a resource center for people who are incarcerated and the people on the outside who love and care about them.

We are also seeking to build our capacity as a program, including hiring more staff, so we can deepen our involvement in environmental justice. Two areas of particular interest include reducing the number of prisons in toxic environments and helping people who are returning home to secure employment in green careers.

(Continued from page 18)

Race gangs, religious gangs, and region gangs are all constructs of the *patriarchal man* (men living in fear of each other because they don't know how to "share and share alike" – thus they take or kiss the ring).

**Fifth/Drumpf agenda?** Make the rich richer (kings forever) and enhance the structures of government to ensure "White Men with property" can own the rest of us in perpetuity. Sound familiar?

Well – the kid is a 'Free Man' and no man's ideas dominate my intellectual landscape. None. Believe as you might, I am FREE, free thinking and nothing can steal my JOY!

So – what is next? Unpacking and deconstructing the damaging beliefs/ideas institutionalized by punk-A?? "macho-man". Round two, three or four – no matter, I am lacing UP!

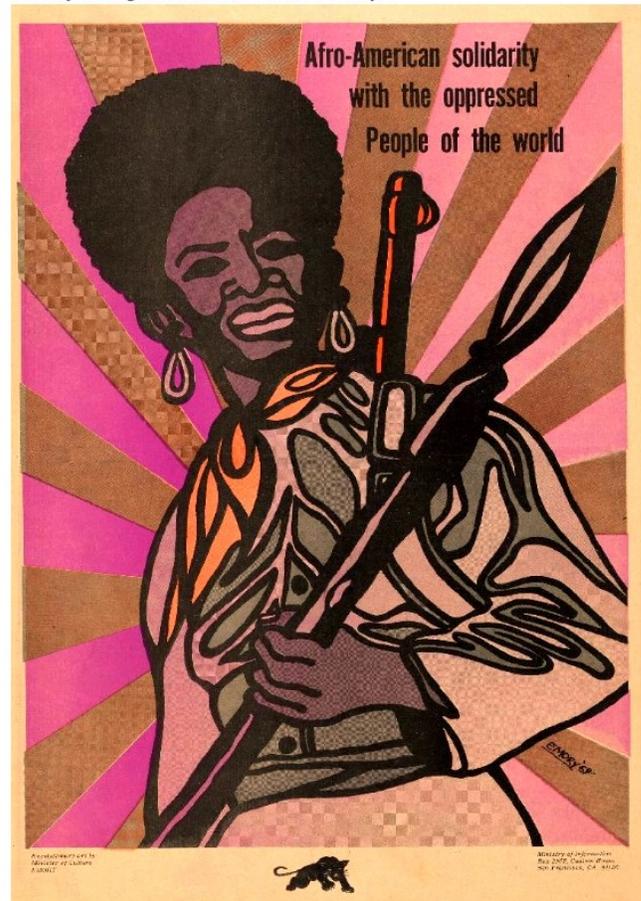
Join me.

FREE da MIND, FREE da PEOPLE. FREE da LAND!!!

When Men Love.

Sef - himself

Emory Douglas, Black Panther Party:



**Note from the Editor:** The Writers Room is a university-community literary arts program engaged in creative placemaking and art for social justice. The Writers Room has hosted HRC's Letter Writing Night for more than half the year of 2024. We appreciate their support and excited to be a part of their publication, *Anthology 11*.



The Writers Room at Drexel University invites submissions for **Anthology 11**, Writers Room's published collection of creative work from their community in 2024-25. For **Anthology 11**, readers of *The Movement* are invited to submit responses to the question: "**Why Do You Write Letters to the Human Rights Coalition?**" We welcome letters, essays, poems, and other written pieces from incarcerated individuals and community members as part of our ongoing mission to use art and storytelling for social justice. Submission guidelines below:

#### **Submission Guidelines:**

- **Length:** Up to 1 page.
- **Content:** Letters, essays, poems, or any form of written expression.
- **Editing:** Submissions may be edited for clarity, size, and print formatting.
- **Anonymity:** Anonymous submissions are welcome (please notate on your submission if you'd like to stay anonymous).
- **Deadline:** March 1st, 2025.

#### **How to Submit:**

Mail your submissions to:  
**Drexel Writers Room**  
229 N 34th St. 3<sup>rd</sup> Fl  
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Questions? email us at [writersroom@drexel.edu](mailto:writersroom@drexel.edu)

# Neverland

by Elena House-Hay

Welcome to our Neverland  
where souls die before they age.  
Where resistance flees in silence  
and ambition's duly caged.

Exhausted by an endless day  
that circles us in loops,  
studded with dates and promises  
that are never absolute.

Time slides like a rotary  
ticking back to nil.  
Strangling clocks in mortuaries  
hands warped against their will.

There's no escape from here --  
no hidden passage to find.  
No clever spells to learn  
nor wrinkles in design.

Neverland needs us, see?  
It won't let us leave --  
tubes, shackles, fences,  
our stay's guaranteed.

Bodies breeding paychecks:  
rustling tinder in rural towns.  
Count us as their cities,  
bury us in their ground.

Instigate our fights  
call our chains a bracelet.

Bemoan our slack potential  
then make sure we waste it.  
We're meant to be patient;  
we wait until we fray.

Circled loops cinch shut  
until it's easier to stay.  
Women fuse to wheelchairs,  
lungs shrink with mold.

Sap-rich limbs of youth  
bend sharp until they fold.  
Neverland is never empty of children  
strayed too far, of bitter, rigid spirits  
curled in upon their scars.

Of them and millions more,  
Neverland has its fill.  
There's plenty more souls to suck,  
empty before they're still.

*Elena is an incarcerated artist in Pennsylvania with work focusing on madness, systemic repression, and the promise of abolition.*

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## “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.

### Self-Defense is a crime if you are African American



Mr. George Dalie

Imagine you are sitting in a dayroom at a table, eating your food, minding your business, and somebody out of the middle of nowhere walks up while your back is turned and sucker punches you. After defending yourself from the sucker puncher, you face seventeen counts of criminal violations in Pennsylvania.

On July 19, 2006, 18 years ago, that's what happened to George Dalie when white supremacist prisoner Christian Baker intentionally provoked a confrontation with him at Chester County Prison. Mr. Dalie was excessively charged and the trial Judge William Mahon allowed it. Mr. Dalie is 6' 7" and 340 pounds, joining a list of African American men who have been criminalized and demonized by the United States of America's racist criminal justice system. In fact, in 1971, President Richard Nixon's aide Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote a memo identifying African American men as public enemy one. In 1995, American Legislative Exchange Council member Pennsylvania's Governor Thomas Ridge sent 250 state troopers and 250 correctional officers at a cost of two million dollars to invade State Correctional Institution Graterford, targeting one man: Robert Mims, who was 6' 7" and 340 pounds. Mr. Mims' was transferred on an interstate compact for 16 years from Pennsylvania to the Minnesota Department of Corrections and died.

In 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri, a white police officer named Darren Wilson killed an unarmed 18-year-old African American man named Michael Brown, who was 6' 5" and 300 pounds. Police Officer Wilson claimed he feared for his life because of Michael Brown's size. In 2017, the FBI released a report entitled, "BLACK EXTREMISTS" that stereotyped African American men through policing.

The report was authorized by United States Attorney General Jeff Sessions, a Trump appointee.

In 2007, Mr. Dalie faced a public lynching and kangaroo trial orchestrated by Judge William Mahon and Assistant District Attorney Ann Marie Wheatcraft (who is now a judge). Judge Mahon ridiculed, degraded, and humiliated Mr. Dalie throughout the trial because the victim was white. Judge Mahon's decorum on the bench reminded people of the United States Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Taney's legal opinion that: "...Blacks had no rights which the white man was bound to respect." Judge Mahon quoted *The Bell Curve* by Richard J. Herstein and Charles Murray which argued that African Americans are genetically inferior. Judge Mahon body-shamed Mr. Dalie at sentencing, demonizing him for his size.

Phillip Atiba Goff, a professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, looked at media coverage of capital cases in Philadelphia's newspaper from 1977 to 1999. He found that phrases like "urban jungle" or "aping the suspect's behavior" were more likely to be used for African Americans than white defendants. Mr. Dalie defended himself in SELF-DEFENSE after a wannabe white supremacist Christian Baker attacked him to get initiated as a member of some jailhouse white supremacist group.

In closing, Mr. Dalie case should be remanded back down and reexamined over the injustices and prejudices of trial Judge Mahon. The George Dalie I've known for over twenty years is humble, cares about humanity, practices the religion of Islam, is a pro se litigator, and is a family man that took on responsibility of his sisters after his father died.

#### In Struggle,

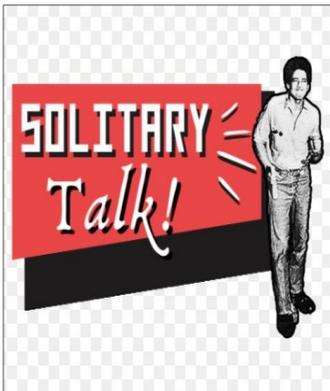
#### Jerome "Hoagie" Coffey

Smart Communications/PA DOC  
Jerome Coffey/AS1558/SCI-Pine Grove  
P.O. Box 33028  
St. Petersburg, FL 33733

<sup>1</sup> N.T. 11/1/06,id at 170-172, RICHARD YOUNG-VS-JEFFREY BEARD, 2007 U.S.

Dist. Lexis 6950, Civil Action no. 04-2211, January 31,2007

<sup>2</sup> id.at 407; DRED SCOTT-VS-SANFORD,60 I.S. (19 How) 393 (1857)



Columnist - Valerie Kiebala

## Know Thy Enemy

By: Jarreau "Ruk" Ayers

Within the United States Prison Industrial Complex, there's a growing process masked beneath the guise of rehabilitation, which takes place within the solitary confinement acronyms of SHU, RHU, IMU, SMU, etc.

Deep inside these dehumanizing incubators hidden from society is where the dismantling of the human spirit, creative minds, independent nature and rebellious hearts takes root. It's ultimately replaced with a separatist and submissive mind frame. Through the regeneration of the same "breaking of a slave" repressive tactics, they first snatch us away from the adopted family and friends of incarcerated individuals we've bonded with behind these walls of captivity. Your belongings are usually lost, discarded, or given to other inmates by officers. You arrive at an unfamiliar place and are forced to strip naked, surrounded by hatred, in an attempt to cause a feeling of emasculation. They dress us in jumpsuits in an effort to stigmatize us at the bottom of every social ladder that exists in society.

The smallest detection of resistance lends itself to being beat down, physically, mentally, and emotionally until it attacks our internal, spiritual place of solitude we've clung to in order to stay sane. Immediately our mindset becomes survival. Some approach it by physically resisting by any means. This usually leads to 10-15 correctional officers in SWAT gear macing you before storming your cell with electric shock shields and beating on your body. Some fight back intellectually by filing grievances and educating others and filing lawsuits. Others without hesitation begin to submit while the rest of us begin to mentally deteriorate to the point of needing medication or committing suicide. Eventually, all of us who've been subjected to this grooming process of torture, whether we admit it or not, have lost parts of ourselves and find it hard to accept that in some ways, we too have submitted. Sadly, most—if not all—of us submerged in this mental hell develop a false belief that we're somehow stronger, smarter, or different than the others suffering from the same torture. By design, a divide begins to manifest itself amongst us. Either you're looking at others as weak or they begin to look at you as submissive. Misdirected words of anger and hate begin to get exchanged.

I spent decades in solitary watching guards instigate these situations. I've also been subjected to officers trying to engage me in conversations about other comrades. Any tactic to cause a divide, they'll attempt! I've had visits, phone calls, and food withheld for simply refusing to be a part of the bullshit. Usually, at some point, a prisoner from general population shows up. The dynamic switches on those of us who have lived it, we can feel the indifference in which he sees us all or the difference in which he sees himself from us, which adds to the greater divide. The misdirected words of hatred or anger are now towards this individual. They return to population not to encourage others to speak out on our conditions but to instead speak of us as broken men.

My purpose in writing this piece is to bring a conscious awareness to every warrior—male or female—locked down. I need for us to know what we're fighting against internally, along with who the real enemy is, always has been, and always will be.

I believe history has already stamped that the strongest agent of change is within the united spirit of the collective. Therefore, the aim of the Prison Industrial Complex and this whole carceral state as an oppressor will hinge on creating a divide among us! A part of this crippling divide is creating an illusion that only through the mercy of our oppressor can we be elevated out of this place of torture and hell. By way of our trauma, they weaponize hope against us, knowing hope is a cure for despair. They alter its DNA and use it as a parasite to weaken, manipulate, and implement the final touches of this mental brain fuck to keep us from uniting.

Eventually, if you survive like I have after 19 years in solitary confinement, you may be released into society or population. Then what? How do you come to grips with some of the humiliations you endured in order to survive? Do you still look at those left behind as weak or stupid? Do you carry that false belief beaten into you that somehow you are different than those left suffering from the conditions you've emerged from? Do you act as if it never happened? As if it's still not happening to them! Or do you begin to heal and realign parts of us that may have bent but never broken!

Remember those left behind and speak out on the mental and emotional torture you suffered in hopes that it brings support to those stuck fighting for their humanity. Do you

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heal that line of division? Whether they read your words or hear your voice, you make sure they know through your actions: You never believed you were different, you would never leave them for dead, and whatever consequence you face fighting for their release and the abolition of solitary confinement, you're willing to face it. We take who we can with us on the climb out and once we make it to the top, we throw down the rope. That's who we are! That's our nature. Never truly divided. United as one, fighting the same enemy from the hole to population. The war never ends until we are free from these incubators of dehumanization and ultimately reunited with our families, communities, and our true selves.

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## Punished for False Test Results

By: Juan C. Rivera

My name is Juan C. Rivera, everyone knows me as "Yah-Ya." I'm currently in the RHU as well for a urine sample that has come up positive for Buprenorphine, which is known for "subs" in prison security. Never in my decades of being in prison have I ever tested positive for anything. In the last week of July, I submitted a sick call to renew the vitamins I had been getting, fish oil and Vitamin D+3. Well, during the visit with Dr. Baddick and another male nurse, I brought to his attention a crazy-looking bump at the tip of the knuckle on my right finger. He said immediately, "I know what that is," and prescribed me Bactrim, which cost me \$15.00. He said it's for the infection I have on my finger. Then, on or about Sunday or Monday, August 5, I went to pick up my meds. I took the first pill that evening, then the next one in the morning and again on the evenings of the 6th and 7th.

I was called in for a urine test. Now, I don't ever have to be nervous or worried because I'm not using. I had discontinued using the medication because it made me feel nauseous and sick. By August 17, I was escorted to the RHU for a write up for Buprenorphine. I requested an explanation from everyone on site and on paper. Nothing. I was ignored by all levels of staff and placed here with a 60-day hit for something I know I'm not guilty of. Today is September 6, 2024. I have 21 days in on that 60. I just got a request back from the security telling me that they can't do nothing about the lab results and my best bet is a time cut. Now, this morning, I also got a message from them

via the RHU Lieutenant, telling me if I'm placed on the list for re-test and it comes up positive, I will be re-charged. I've been asking for a re-test all along. My question is this: if I'm making the claim from the very beginning that I'm innocent, why wouldn't I be re-tested immediately? Why does it sound like they don't want to help me get to the bottom of this?

I reported that this has been going on throughout the state. Mrs. Krista Mader (SCI Cambridge Springs), Mr. Alfred Hardison (SCI Chester), myself Juan Rivera (SCI Frackville), among others that probably didn't know or are just afraid to voice their opinion. I'm not sure how these practices are not investigated, which I asked to be done in my situation. I've earned promotional transfers, my top pay position, my clear record of drugs/assaults, and when I'm asking for help, I'm being threatened with another sanction! Well, in the last couple of weeks, I have found three cases with these false positive results and no answers. Who is in charge? I should be seeing PRC and I hope they don't expect me to say sorry for something I know I didn't do in order to get out. The damage is already done but the litigation has only just begun. I was given my initial grievance back, stating, "We will not file this grievance." "You have to use a different method of grievance." What?! Allah knows best. Please inform the masses that there is an added danger towards us. Phamatech Labs, Inc. in San Diego, CA needs to be investigated for false practices and held liable for their actions and inactions as well as whoever else is involved in this scheme to wrongfully punish the innocent. Always in the struggle.



# Your Legal Corner

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

## Lawsuit to End Solitary Confinement

Kareem Blount of SCI Benner has recently received a favorable ruling in the Pennsylvania Eastern District Court. This decision is made regarding a lawsuit protecting his constitutional rights under both the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments in the face of solitary confinement within the Restricted Release List (RRL) in the Intensive Management Unit (IMU) program. Despite attempts to have the case dismissed, the Court withheld that Blount's case holds legal grounds.

Blount's overarching argument is based on the fact that the IMU program received federal funding when outlined as being six phases of three to six months each. Blount and others are now being held in phases of nine months each, in contrast to the policy which was proposed and received funding. Blount's grievances regarding this altered timeline have been denied and refused at the facility level.

Blount contends that not only is being held in indefinite solitary confinement through RRL "unduly restrictive" and at odds with the constitution, but he has also not been afforded the right to advocate for himself nor have his concerns been recorded in accordance with his right to due process. Though the court has not yet made a decision on the validity of the claim itself, the court has decided that the decision is "best explored on a fully developed record," and the case will not be dismissed.

Per Judge Lanzillo's Memo, Blount "entered the IMU program on November 23, 2021, and has remained there ever since. While in the IMU, he spends approximately 22 hours per day alone in his cell. His cell is artificially illuminated 24 hours per day and contains nothing but a bed, desk, and toilet. He eats meals alone in his cell and is generally denied most normal human interactions, including the ability to talk to other inmates. He cannot participate in educational, vocational, rehabilitative, or religious programming, and is generally deprived of mental or physical stimulation. He is not permitted in-

person physical visitations, although he is able to socialize with his family through video calls. It does not appear that he has been denied access to medical or mental health care." In his argument, Blount further emphasizes the inhumane conditions he is subjected to and the "deliberate indifference" to the symptoms he faces as a result of this confinement.

It is worth noting that in law, solitary confinement has been well-litigated and found to have adverse effects to those subjected to it. However, the law has also ruled that periods of isolation "may be a necessary tool of prison discipline," and solitary confinement by itself does not qualify as cruel and unusual punishment in our current legal interpretations. The grounds for which Blount will need to prove his rights are being violated will come from not solitary confinement alone, but his confinement's unique conditions, length, and the deliberate disregard to the effects of his confinement. This framework is one that holds legal grounds and has been successful in the past.

In terms of Blount's alleged 14th amendment rights being violated, he must prove that he has not been granted his entitlement to due process of law. While his status is reviewed every ninety days, his argument lies within the claim that these reviews occur without opportunity for him to advocate for himself, and the reviews themselves are lackluster, incomplete, without consideration of his deteriorating state, and are made without meaningful explanation. Fortunately, the court has determined that this contention also holds legal grounds and will not be dismissed.

The fight to end and reform solitary confinement is one that is long and ongoing. Blount's fight is not one where he is alone, even within his own state: a similar class-action lawsuit is ongoing in Pennsylvania with *Hammond v. Pennsylvania Department of Corrections*, where each of the six plaintiffs have documented mental illness diagnoses that have worsened considerably during repeated and prolonged periods of solitary confinement.

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ment. In this case, the plaintiffs are represented by attorneys which include the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project and the Abolitionist Law Center. Their argument also hinges on how solitary confinement predictably creates and worsens adverse psychological symptoms and the lack of due process, particularly in relation to the people's rights to services under the Americans with Disability Act.

As the complaint describes, "about 5% of the DOC's population is in solitary confinement at any given time, [while] approximately 40% of suicides and suicide attempts in the DOC occur on solitary confinement units."

This class-action case and Blount's case appears to have precedent and real potential for justice to be served. As the cases develop and more facts are presented, the court is expected to further investigate and make decisions.

As Blount continues to represent himself in his fight, he hopes for not only monetary and injunctive relief but to set a blueprint for others faced with similar injustices and within the IMU program.

*The Movement* applauds those who continue to survive and bravely fight the injustices faced in solitary confinement and in our prison system at large.

*Michael Babb*  
*Human Rights Coalition*

If this information is helpful you may Google search *Kareem Blount vs Unit Manager Ackrom* or use this link [Blount v. Ackrom, 2:22-CV-001040-RAL | Casetext Search + Citator](#) or write to HRC for copy of bill (14 pages) at:

Human Rights Coalition  
PO Box 3458  
Philadelphia, PA 19101

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available to us, but the viewing was canceled at the last minute because "the server was down."

In February, we scheduled an in-person meeting to view footage from the hours leading up to Stanley's death with LASD attorneys. This time, they claimed footage of Stanley after 9:09 AM was unavailable due to either a lack of mounted recording devices or inoperable cameras. Coincidentally, Stanley died around 10:00 a.m.

Nearly three months later, in a Zoom meeting, LASD changed its story again. Cameras were, in fact, operable throughout the jail. But the footage was incomplete. They showed us video from a camera perched above a garage of a shadowy figure in the distance that was said to be Stanley at about 9:11 a.m. We were informed that additional clips were unavailable because the department records over footage after seven months—even though we requested the videos almost a year prior.

The last hour of my son's life remains shrouded in darkness due to the inexplicable absence of footage. This glaring gap in surveillance video not only denies me, as a grieving parent, the closure I desperately seek but also underscores broader systemic failures within LASD.

Stanley was nonviolent and deemed by a judge and post-mortem experts to simply need mental healthcare. He deserved the care that our Sheriff Luna claims to offer. Instead, he died under mysterious circumstances. And, despite the department's \$4 billion budget, properly functioning CCTV cameras are a bare minimum the department fails to meet.

Most families whose loved ones die in LASD custody don't have access to legal counsel, ties to an NFL team, and a background in policy like I do. I hope that video of the final hour of Stanley's life can be identified and reviewed by homicide units, internal affairs, and critical incident and in-custody death review boards, as well as given to my legal team, family, and me.

Until this happens, I doubt that true accountability within LASD began last week based on Luna's words alone.

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# What's The News!

## A Philly lawyer has been suspended for four years for lying to two clients for a decade

Gary Silver repeatedly deceived a couple by telling them he'd filed a civil rights lawsuit on behalf of their deceased son, a state disciplinary board said.

by Chris Palmer

Reprint from: The Philadelphia Inquire  
Published Oct. 17, 2024

A Philadelphia attorney's law license has been suspended for four years after the state disciplinary board found that he lied to a couple for nearly a decade by repeatedly saying he had filed a civil suit over the death of their son in a state prison when he had done no such thing.

Gary Silver, who has practiced criminal defense law in and around the city for more than 30 years, "egregiously and dishonestly" misled the couple, the disciplinary board wrote in its opinion, speaking with them 40 or 50 times over the years and, each time, leading them to believe the suit had been filed and was slowly advancing through the courts. At times he even asked them to send him new documents.

In reality, the board said, not only did Silver fail to file a complaint, but he also missed the statute of limitations to do so — and then declined to tell his clients the truth because his inaction and misrepresentations could have exposed him to a disciplinary inquiry and disrupted his law practice.

"Silver placed his personal interests above his clients' interests and selfishly lied to his clients for eight years because he wanted to avoid professional discipline," the board wrote.

The board added that although Silver eventually acknowledged his misconduct and expressed remorse, he did so only after the couple, John and Susan McClellan had consulted another attorney, who discovered that no suit had ever been filed. And Silver — who had previously been disciplined three times, including for mis-

handling communication with clients — told the disciplinary board he might never have revealed the truth had he not been caught.

"Silver inflicted these problems upon himself by his steady avoidance of simply doing the right thing and being honest with his clients," the board said.

Silver declined to comment when reached by phone this week.

Attempts to reach the McClellans were unsuccessful.

Both testified during the board's inquiry.

John McClellan told the board he was "heartbroken" and "felt like [he] was made a fool of."

Susan McClellan said that after she learned the truth, it "felt like I lost [my son] all over again."

"When you lose a child, it feels like your heart is just squeezed that you can't breathe, and to find out that nothing was done on his behalf, it just — it's just like that devastated me," she said.

The disciplinary board gave this account of what happened:

The McClellans' son, John McClellan Jr., died by suicide in May 2011 while he was incarcerated at the State Correctional Institute at Cresson. The circumstances around his death raised questions about whether psychologists at the prison had done enough to help him, so the McClellans approached Silver about a lawsuit that fall.

Silver had never handled that type of suit, but he agreed to represent the couple, and in 2012, he engaged an attorney who specialized in civil actions to draft a complaint.

But Silver never filed it. And in May 2013, the statute of limitations expired.

Still, Silver didn't tell the McClellans about those issues. In fact, John McClellan continued to provide letters and documents to Silver for years, and Silver continued communicating with the couple every few months, sometimes asking them to send

him the new materials they said they'd obtained.

"On those occasions ... Silver told Mr. McClellan that all was proceeding well," the board wrote.

In 2021, a decade after their first encounter, the McClellans set up a meeting with Silver at his law office to seek updates and request to review case files. Silver agreed, then didn't attend, but told the couple his secretary could provide the complaint. They were given a draft that had been signed by Silver but never filed in court.

A few months later, the McClellans spoke with another attorney, Robert Lynch, who began trying to learn what happened. Silver ultimately admitted to Lynch that he had never filed the suit, calling it a "huge error" and saying he hoped that Lynch would be able to represent the couple.

Lynch agreed, and approached the Department of Corrections seeking a settlement of about \$675,000 — the amount the agency had spent to settle another lawsuit involving another man's suicide at the prison.

But because of Silver's inaction and the expired statute of limitations, Lynch could not file a lawsuit to seek documents or testimony from the agency that could help their case or take the matter before a judge or jury, steps that can cause officials to agree to pay large settlements.

So the Department of Corrections offered to pay the McClellans \$25,000 each — an offer it said was nonnegotiable.

They accepted.

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## Voting Rights

**Nebraska**— This week, the Nebraska Supreme Court ruled in favor of upholding a recently passed state law – Legislative Bill 20 (LB 20) – that restores voting rights upon completion of a sentence, in-

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# What's The News!

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cluding any parole term, eliminating the state's 2-year waiting period.

The change in Nebraska is part of a welcome trend outlined in a new analysis by the Sentencing Project... Since Jan. 1, 2020, 11 states — including California, Connecticut, Iowa and Minnesota, — have expanded voting rights for some non-incarcerated people with felony convictions. As states have enacted policies to curtail disenfranchisement, there has also been a decline in the number of people in prison, on probation and out on parole. As a consequence, the disenfranchised population has fallen from a little under six million in 2016 to about four million today.

As a national partner to Nebraska's Voting Rights Restoration Coalition, we were thrilled with the passage of LB 20 in July. The Sentencing Project organized a national sign-on letter, participated in weekly strategy calls, published data on Nebraska's disenfranchisement population and the disproportionate impact these laws have on Black and brown communities, and uplifted the voices and experiences of directly impacted Nebraskans to help support the passage of LB 20.

However, two days before the law was set to go into effect, Attorney General Mike Hilgers issued a formal opinion claiming that the legislature unconstitutionally infringed on the executive branch's exclusive authority to restore Nebraskans' civil rights. The Secretary of State Bob Evnen supported AG Hilgers' opinion and halted any new registrations of persons with felony convictions who would have been eligible to vote under the new law or its predecessor. Yesterday's Supreme Court ruling upholds LB 20 and allows eligible Nebraskans with felony convictions to register to vote.

That it took this long to reach this decision as the Nebraska voter registration deadline rapidly approaches is egregious. The fight for rights restoration must not stop here. True justice demands extending voting rights to all citizens, regardless of

their current legal status, ensuring that everyone can help shape the future of our communities.

In solidarity,

Nicole D. Porter

From: [Nebraska Supreme Court Upholds Law Restoring Voting Rights to Thousands – The Sentencing Project](#)

## LA's Sheriff Says He's Banned Deputy Gangs. After My Son's Death, How Can We Trust Him?

*Los Angeles Sheriff Robert Luna said that, as of Oct. 18, deputies can no longer join internal gangs. But after stonewalling and hiding footage from my family for more than a year, I don't believe Luna's words mean much.*

By Dr. D. Pulane Lucas, Oct 23, 2024; Reprint from THE APPEAL

After decades of controversy, lawsuits, and misconduct allegations, the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD) officially banned employees from joining or participating in deputy gangs on October 18. LASD had long denied that its violent, tattooed police gangs even existed, let alone ought to be regulated. But last month, Sheriff Robert Luna, who promised to eradicate the groups when running for office, announced that the department was finally banning gang participation in mid-October.

However, after my son died under Luna's leadership, why would families trust his word?

On February 1, 2023, I received the tragic news that my son, Stanley T Wilson Jr., had died in LASD custody. Stanley was a student leader, track star, and standout football player at Stanford University. He went on to play in the NFL for the Detroit Lions. After retiring from the NFL, Stanley struggled with mental illness, substance use disorder, and untreated trauma from being molested by an uncle who babysat him as a child. He spent the final

months of his life in LASD custody. Stanley was only 40 years old when he died. I learned from his post-mortem exam that he had suffered from chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE.

From the moment I was informed of Stanley's death, the sheriff's department made it increasingly difficult to gain clarity about his death. In fact, LASD still has not included Stanley's death in its in-custody deaths tracker.

Before Stanley died, a court ordered LASD to transfer him to the Department of State Hospitals no later than December 5, 2022, to receive proper mental health treatment. LASD failed to adhere to the order. In January 2023, LASD drafted paperwork for Stanley to be transferred to Metro State Hospital the next day. Stanley passed away that morning while he was being transferred. He died before his trial even began.

Both Metro State Hospital and LASD deny having custody of Stanley at the time of his death. Representatives from LASD told The Independent that Metropolitan State Hospital had custody of Stanley when he died. Yet, a document from the Metro State Hospital Police Department stated that Stanley had not been a patient or in the custody of the hospital at the time of his death. CCTV footage would provide crucial evidence in his death investigation.

So, in June last year, under the California Public Records Act, my attorney requested all surveillance footage of Stanley on the day he died. Our request included specific areas where Stanley was located, including where he allegedly fell from a chair. After no response from LASD and the county's repeated delays, we kept pushing to get the requested information.

From this point on, we received several conflicting accounts. At first, we were told there was no footage of Stanley's last day in custody. Then, in September of last year, LASD informed my attorney that Stanley's surveillance footage would be

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# What's The News!

## House passes bill that would allow Treasury to target nonprofits it deems to support terrorism

By THALIA BEATY and FARNOUSH AMIRI

November 22, 2024

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. House passed legislation Thursday that would give the Treasury Department unilateral authority to strip the tax-exempt status of nonprofits it claims support terrorism, alarming civil liberties groups about how a second Trump presidency could invoke it to punish political opponents.

The bill passed 219-184, with the majority of the support coming from Republicans who accused Democrats of reversing course in their support for the “common sense” proposal only after Donald Trump was elected to a second term earlier this month.

Speaking on the House floor ahead of the vote, Rep. Jason Smith, GOP chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, said his colleagues across the aisle would still be supporting the bill had Vice President Kamala Harris won the presidential election. “And we, as members of Congress, have the duty to make sure that taxpayers are not subsidizing terrorism,” the Missouri lawmaker said. “It’s very, very simple.”

But the proposal has drawn concern from a range of nonprofits who say it could be used to target organizations, including news outlets, universities, and civil society groups, that a future presidential administration disagrees with. They say it does not offer groups enough due process.

“This bill is an authoritarian play by Republicans to expand the sweeping powers of the executive branch, to go after political enemies and stifle political dissent,” Rep. Pramila Jayapal, the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, said on the House floor ahead of the vote.

Critics also see it as redundant as it is already against U.S. law to support designated terrorist groups. The proposal, which now goes to the Democratic-controlled Senate where its fate is uncertain, would also postpone tax filing deadlines for Americans held hostage or unlawfully detained abroad.

The bill would create a new category of “terrorist supporting organizations,” according to an analysis by the Congressional Research Service of a previous version of the legislation. This category is defined as any organization the Treasury Secretary designates as having provided material support to a terrorist organization in the past three years.

“We think this legislation is an overreach,” said Jenn Holcomb, vice president of government affairs at the Council on Foundations. “It would allow the Secretary of the Treasury to designate a 501c nonprofit as a terrorist organization at their discretion. And our concern is it doesn’t have enough in there to really ensure that a nonprofit understands the reasoning that a secretary designated as such.”

The bill would give a nonprofit designated as a “terror-supporting” 90 days to appeal that designation. Nonprofits like the American Civil Liberties Union have said that the bill does not require that the Secretary of Treasury disclose all the evidence that was used to make the designation.

The bill text outlines how the Treasury must send “a description of such material support or resources to the extent consistent with national security and law enforcement interests.”

In a joint statement with the Independent Sector, National Council of Nonprofits, and United Philanthropy Forum, the Council on Foundations also said the bill would shift the burden of proof to the nonprofit, and even if an organization was eventually cleared, the nonprofit would “risk irreparable damage to their operations and reputation.”

If it were to become law, the bill could apply to a range of nonprofits, including membership organizations, unions and private foundations.

A version of the bill was first introduced after the Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel and the House passed a previous version of the bill in April, including with the support of some Democrats.

The bill was also brought up for a vote last week but failed to garner a two-thirds majority required under the suspension of the rules.

Democrat Rep. Rashida Tlaib, the only Palestinian-American representative in Congress, said Thursday before the vote it would be her third time voting against the bill.

“I don’t care who the president of the United States is,” she said. “This is a dangerous and unconstitutional bill that would allow unchecked power to target nonprofit organizations as political enemies and shut them down without due process.”

## THE TWO MOST STOLEN ITEMS IN THE WORLD



## MY FIRST-LAST-GULP

By Yassin "Sin Raus" Mohamad

I felt as if I ate my last hope,  
rushing through prison-life with my first last gulp.

I thought it was just, do a crime & receive a sentence,  
attend all mandatory programs & repentance.

Nah, it's much more than that.  
Stay out of trouble, be patient & fall back,  
that's all crap.  
So listen & read my facts.

They uses my kind to destroy each others mind,  
One side is angry & the other is medicatedly fine.

Some stands up for our human & prison rights.  
While others only stand up for count singing:  
"Everythang gon' be alright".

I was labeled bitter & rebellious when I was fighting  
for elders & young fellas.  
I ended up on the Restricted Release List,  
Cause I have influence & guards was scared & jealous.

Now I'm in the hole being persecuted & disrespected.  
Same underwear for a week,  
no property & I still don't feel regretful,  
just neglected.

Reaching to my outside support.  
Family, Law Projects, Prison Society, HRC, the Movement Magazine & Federal court.

And some friends while filing grievances.  
I swear if freed I'll never return to prison,  
& if you reading this, I truly mean this,  
ask minutes before six.

But will they let me survive this incarcerated war?  
To once again embrace my family, & make love to  
that special girl out in the real world.

Play with my grand children & apologize to my kids,

& educate society about the inhumane crimes DOC hid.

This is something that's true, seasoned with pepper & salt.

I'm not pointing the finger because maybe this will  
be my first-last-gulp!

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Movement Magazine,

I want to salute you and the entire family of THE MOVEMENT. I want to congratulate our Elder Shakurr for obtaining his freedom after 42 years.

When I first entered solitary confinement, I was told by Martin Horn, in the year 1999, that I'd never see PA general population again. However, after a quarter century I was released from SCI-Phoenix IMU program into Phoenix general population on July 1, 2024 and it felt like I just been released to the real world. I'm enclosing my first prison ID that I took when I was released from the severe bondage that I was forced to live in for 25 years, 7 months, and 2 days.

I thank you though. Because THE MOVEMENT kept me inspired, determined, and driven to make Martin Horn and Jeffery Beard's words false. And I made it to population where I'm at right now. Again thanks and here is a poem ["My First-Last-Gulp"] I am donating to you for publishing. You can publish this as well with my photo.

Take care and remain strong. Tell Shakaboona and Chetewayo that Lil Yassin finally made it to general population and still have some sense of humanity.



Sincerely,

Smart Communication/PA DOC  
Yassin Sin Raus Mohamad  
#CU0143, SCI-Phoenix  
PO Box 33028  
St Petersburg, FL 33733

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**Dear Law Project,**

My name is Jennifer Morrissey. I wrote to you back in March of this year [2024] requesting custody modification motions for Delaware County Pa., which I have received.

Thank you very much for that.

I filled out the motion and informa pauperis, and dropped them in the mail May 13th. On May 29th a judge granted the informa pauperis. On June 17th, I received an "Unacceptable Correspondence" form, stating that the Delaware County courthouse had sent me legal mail, but that mail was being returned to sender because of "incorrect legal coding", per DC-ADM 804.

I was then permitted a courthouse call. I spoke to a woman who assured me that what was sent must have been a duplicate copy of the judge granting the informa pauperis, because she saw nothing else listed on the docket. Having no reason to believe she wasn't being truthful, I thanked her for her time and help, and hung up the phone. On July 17th, just one month later, I received yet again an "Unacceptable correspondence" form from Delaware county. This time, it came from the Office of Judicial Support. That very same week, I photocopied both "U/C"

forms and wrote a letter to the clerk of courts explaining that I was receiving incorrectly coded mail, and this is an important issue that I need to be properly updated and informed of, etc.

On July 30th, I was finally called to pick up legal mail, correctly coded from Delaware county's Office of Judicial Support.

I opened the mail and couldn't believe what I was reading.

"AND NOW, to wit, this 5th day of July A.D. 2024, after a conference before the Court-Appointed Custody Master, it is hereby ORDERED and DECREED as follows....Father awarded everything due to mother being a no show." The order claimed "the court had no way of contacting mother."

I called the court administrator explaining the problem, and she said there was nothing she could do. I asked her why the prison, where I am, was never notified that I had a court date. She told me that I was notified on June 17th, and if I was unhappy with the outcome, I had 20days to file a reconsideration. I reminded her that the hearing had been on the 5th, so the 20 days was the 25th, and sadly for me, the legal mail post date on the envelope was the 26th, of which I didn't receive until the 30th.

To summarize the rest of our conversation, she basically told me I was beat and to get a lawyer. She kindly gave me the phone number for the Southeastern Pa. legal aide of-fice.....The Number Is Disconnected.

**THIS IS OUR COURT/JUSTICE SYSTEM**

Smart Communications/PA DOC

Jennifer Morrissey #PC0562,  
SCI-Muncy  
PO Box 33028  
St Petersburg FL 33733

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**"SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE"**

4-14-24

Back in the year 2000, while I was being held in the RHU (Restricted Housing Unit) at SCI-Frackville, the guards, among other things, dressed up in full extraction gear, came to the RHU, and extract us out of our cells using gas, electric stun-shields and other devices FOR DRILLS while men in suits with clipboards watched and took notes.

When we complained to the higher-ups, including Central Office, the response was: "The Institutions can include inmates in drills and we expect you to follow any order given to you." This resulted in 28-30 of us on a Mass Hunger Strike, which did change "some" things.

Fast-forward to 2024 where the new thing at Frackville is the Double-Shakedown, which consists of half the guards going to one block to search, while the rest dress up in C.E.R.T. (Corrections Emergency Response Team) gear and go to a completely different block to trash prisoners' cells and property as though they are reacting to an emergency situation. In other words a C.E.R.T. Team Drill. Otherwise, why would half the guards wear their regular uniforms and the rest dress up in C.E.R.T. clothing?

*(Continued on page 32)*

*(Continued from page 31)*

Especially when there is no emergency?

It's because SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE! The prisoners at Frackville are still being forced to participate in Frackville drills. It may be just a drill to the gung-ho guards, but the pain and suffering is real to us!

Smart Communications/PA DOC  
Earl (Anwar) Cotton #AS-0993  
SCI-Frackville  
PO Box 33028  
St Petersburg, FL 33733

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**8-4-24**

Hello to All,

Let me start by saying my name: I am Shawn Conklin. I was sent to SCI Mahanoy in July of 2016. My first cell was block DA with an inmate named Tyrone Briggs AKA (RED). As it later turned out, he was murdered by this honest-never-corrupt institution called Mahanoy in 2019, and every coward involved that didn't lose their job got promoted, and the 8 million plus was pocket change for the DOC! Since 2019 I got no trust in anyone here, and if my life ever meant anything, it don't mean shit now and any day could be my last. I went to the RHU on 6-2-24, and while there I got a notice that my issue of THE MOVEMENT was being sent to security for containing information exposing racism, corruption and just info that the prison doesn't want inmates to have. Well I got my issue along with everyone here at Mahanoy that got robbed on 7-28-24. I must also tell you that while in RHU my property was missing: \$40.00 worth of items.

Coffee was dumped all over my property and clothes. When I got out, I put in grievances and clearly stated that the coward pig that packed my stuff made sure all my receipts disappeared so she denied and rejected my grievances, sighting insufficient proof and documents - no surprise. This whole prison is full of lying corrupt scumbags!

Now I was put on enrollment for school, a GED class. WTF, I got my GED in 1993 in New York! So I get a letter saying "the system" has no record of me having a GED and I will lose my GLP, job, and it will affect my parole hearing in 2034. At age 59, like the typical FU, I will be denied no matter what I say or do!

There are so many other issues that I could complain about and that you have probably heard repeatedly. So, on that note, I want to thank you for THE MOVEMENT and all the info that would otherwise (if left to the slimy corrupt DOC) be unknown to inmates. That's what kills me about them pushing their school on me — which, might I add, is always canceled — but yet they want us dumb and ignorant to everything around us!!!

Permission granted to use in anyway!

Smart Communications/PA DO  
Shaun Conklin/LZ2716/SCI Mahanoy  
P.O. Box 33028  
St. Petersburg, FL 33733

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## Dear Newsletter Committee,

It is my prayer that this little note does find you all doing well. I am grateful for the team and the wonderful, informative, "Movement" magazine.

I pray that you have found some relief from the physical and mental anguish that seems to have us all politically and socially somewhat dismayed. However, even in this we give God the glory, Amen.

I wish to apologize in advance for the enclosed material. While it is not so much a writing/article for submission, yet, parts may be included at some point in a future issue as an opinion piece that falls in line with the mission of THE MOVEMENT magazine, perhaps.

You may not be aware, that on 7/11/24, I was denied Merit review. However, I have submitted the "Reconsideration Request Form" and supporting documents, which are enclosed for your review. Additionally, a copy of the letter sent to U.S Senator, John Fetterman.

As one of the premier Prison Reform Agencies, you give so much and I question what can I do to help? To assist in any of the challenges within the system. So, it is that I share with you the things done. That may give hope and courage to others to not simply accept, "no." We must combat the current standard of the Board of Pardons (BOP) not giving reason (s) for their denials.

If I may share a recent piece with you for your consideration of submission where applicable:

*Look around...*

*Look around...*

*Look around...*

*What do you see in this epiphany of the time behind the space we used to fill in the loved of loved ones and dis-*

*(Continued on page 33)*

*(Continued from page 32)*

*appointing theories of disjointed realities at times even when we did not believe.*

*How can anything be retrieved we've fought so hard to hold on to through inflicted pains for a battle that was not theirs in the first place? However, grew on pace within our own insanities too many times we refused to see.*

*Even swore we'd never be yet complaining the same to gain an imagined advantage. Twisting their truth about who we were behind some lies we'd all tell the mirror in front of the person no longer identified by name because of state numbers or letters that became emblazoned forever in this time that now belongs to the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections.*

*Why are we so loyal to the worst version of ourselves ... ? Acting in a manner of rejecting our better selves. Life does not have to gravitate from some frame of a picture that is not necessarily true, nor has to be throughout our lives.*

*Decide to be on the inside looking out or living from the outside trying to fit in or come back to that which was complained of during the other time the whole time of being here inside the mindset that brought us here.*

*Prison is a state of being incarcerated, reminding on invisible pains seen behind mocha-brown complexioned skin. Closed eyes disguised in generational curses, mass incarcerations, modern day plantations. Too often limiting the ability to be everything other than historically what society wished for me, or you or of our children true.*

*Remorsefully, I think of what I've done and dream of all I can do to make another's legacy mean more than just another "untimely death". Something I must do to be true to who I was meant to be in spite of a tainted history lived addictively.*

*No more excuses as I look around, I'm looking around, I've looked around.*

*We are better than this.*

*Thank you for your kind attention and I look forward to hearing from you.*

*Sincerely,*

*Jeffrey A. Shockley*  
9/10/2024

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## **Seven Years**

by Elena House-Hay

I read once that the human body replaces the majority of its cells every seven years. Blood, skin, muscle, and marrow, all the nails and hair you cut, all the rounds of elimination, healing, and regeneration.

Your body changes but "you" stay the same. You survive and have a brand new body to go on with. I always thought it was a positive idea. Then I got a little older. Then, I got incarcerated.

Some complications now occur to me. Not everything is replaced. Your teeth, your neurons, your hair aren't necessarily lost or regenerated. If you're a female, your eggs are the same ones you were born with. The cells that do get replaced sometimes grow back weaker, worn. And all through your regenerative time, your

environment works on you: epigenetic markers glom on to DNA, free radicals shred nuclei, telomeres shrink, connective tissue scars, arteries harden, toxins concentrate.

There are ways to mitigate this: eating well, exercising, managing stress. Mitigation can even be fun. You can spend time with loved ones, get a dog, join a gym, learn new recipes and cuisines. When you mitigate, you care for yourself, invest in yourself and become more aware of what your "self" is.

The years of change and overturn can be a labor of seasons - bounty, rest, sowing, and growth, opening to the sun and wind, facing the sky like a sunflower grown perennial in defiance of its built-in clock. But, what do those years look like - the seasons - when you've spent seven years in prison?

This month marks my seven years. There is no jubilee. Just another thirteen years to go. What has happened to my body? Myself? My cells, my body, and my DNA have incorporated prison.

Prison is stressful. Cortisol runs high. This has negative correlations with adrenal health, besides damaging major organs, the limbic and the endocrine systems. There are no vacations or retreats. There is little privacy and few outlets.

Prison is metal and concrete. The beds kink backs and hips, torquing them, cramping them, misaligning them into spiograms. Joints fall out of sync, muscles spasm, circulation has fits. Arches flatten on cement blocks, veins spider into skin, each step rubs patch-

*(Continued on page 34)*

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

(Continued from page 33)

es into joints. There is no softness. There are no chiropractors, and the pervading theme is "hard."

Prison grows off superfund sites. Fly-ash from coal sinks into the ground, water runs brown, mold fuzzes the vent and ceilings. Cancer rates pop overnight like mushrooms. There is limited preventative care or filters, no air samples or land remediation.

Given this, what has prison done to me these past seven years? What toxins lay dormant in my tissues like a dark clot? How many holes can my teeth withstand before they crumble away like dried up sponge? How far has my hip socket displaced, which bones and tendons still stay on their axis? Which neural pathways have been renamed with cortisol, and of these which will channel my PTSD? How many times will my lungs fill thick with Covid, how many times can I expect to recover?

I've tried to mitigate these years. I've kept in shape. I've moderated my diet. I've brushed and flossed. I've meditated, stretched, read, fasted and hydrated.

And I have recurring connective tissue injuries. My bones pop when I move. My cholesterol is high. I have panic attacks. My GI system won't work without medication. The food I eat is packaged, my track is asphalt, the water never tastes clean. I have 15 minutes with my loved ones and people poke me when I meditate and whisper about me when I do my stretches.

These are not complaints. These are segments of my reality. And even this is still a marked advantage over the

women confined to wheelchairs or bound to walkers and canes. I'm fortunate, I don't share the pain of women with failing kidneys, deteriorating disks, stage 4 cancer, or heart failure.

I go to chronic care for asthma, not diabetes, hypertension or lifelong infections. It could be and is worse for many people withering away in prisons.

For those of us who don't share the worst, we do bear witness to it, and it makes us afraid. Illness strikes a keen compassion in us, because in the care and concern we show -- washing bodies, cleaning faces, sitting at hospice, etc. -- we see our own fate.

Will I leave in a chair? Would medical ignore my bone cancer until I snap a femur? Would they let my womb fill with fibroids and blood until I need a transfusion? Or will it be something as simple as how many teeth will I lose? Will my family recognize my smile? Will they see the scars where my skin lost a tug of war with a metal cabinet or bed?

I've been lucky these seven years. I wonder how many more lucky years I have before prison remodels my body into something fragile and sick: a moth with no wings, a spider with no legs, a dove with no song.

I entered prison a 20-something female and will be 30-something soon, and I'll be a 40-something female when I leave.

Will I be able to hike familiar trails? Will I need heart medication? Will I need dentures? Will my brain rewire? Will my arms and legs make the full arcs I claimed in youth or will they jerk around like broken noisemakers. Will I leave at all?

How many eggs will I have left? Will I be healthy enough to see them born? Will anyone want to see them come to term? I don't know.

Through this, I worry my SELF might not stay the same. I worry if I stay intact, I won't be able to go on with the body prison's made me, or that it'll carry inside it brindled seeds of decay. I worry about cancerous seeds taking root. I ask, "Will I choose the time, or sacrifice one for the other?"

Seven years, 13, 20. The rest of my life will be the ineffective scourge that must sand down prison plaque. I hope some clutch of 7 years spent in freedom will be enough.



Smart Communications/PA DOC  
Elena House-Hay, PA-4953, SCI-Muncy  
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# 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.*

## How One Philadelphia Prison Could Change Incarceration in America

*A ground-breaking partnership between Drexel and the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections is revolutionizing the U.S. prison system, one block at a time.*

By Ben Seal · 11/2/2024

Inside the imposing beige walls of the state correctional institution in Chester, there is a fish tank whose inhabitants are part of

something bigger than themselves. There are nearly two dozen of them — African cichlids, tetras, and a lone angelfish — swimming among artificial coral and rock formations. Tiny bubbles rise from the helmet of a plastic scuba diver through the crystal-clear water.

Kevin “Amir” Bowman used to pull up a seat in front of the fish and gaze, watching them dart back and forth inside the tank or lazily drift on by. That was before he got out, exonerated last March after serving 34 years of a life sentence he thought would take him to his death. He’d bounced around through eight prisons in that time, moved from one to the next by the powers that be, always alert to the sound of distress and the threat of violence, no matter which unit he was placed in.

In Chester’s Little Scandinavia, though, he found something different — a unit modeled on principles adopted from Norway and Sweden, where—even those countries’ worst offenders are treated with humanity and given rights and privileges unheard of in American prisons. There, he was given his own cell, shared a kitchen with the other 63 men on the unit, and could be called by his chosen name, Amir, not just his last name or his prisoner identification number, BF6556.

He wasn’t alone in watching the fish. The unit’s other members did it too. And maybe they each saw something different, but he knows what he found in their company.



Kevin “Amir” Bowman and C.O. Turquoise Danford share a meal at SCI prison in Chester. / Photograph by Swedish Television SVT/John Stark

The fish tank sits just inside the entrance to Little Scandinavia, serving as a beacon of sorts for the change happening here. The unit opened in March 2020 as part of a novel research project jointly led by Jordan M. Hyatt, an associate professor of sociology and justice studies at Drexel University, and Synøve N. Andersen, an associate professor of criminology at the University of Oslo, who are studying the impact of Scandinavian-style reforms on both inmates and officers.

To create Little Scandinavia, the Department of Corrections renovated Charlie Alpha, a first-floor block that had once held 128 men in 64 cells, like all the rest at Chester. Today, it doesn’t resemble a prison very much at all.

Modular furniture gives inmates a gathering space for conversation and community meetings. A treadmill and elliptical machine offer them a chance to exercise anytime they want. Noise dampeners on the ceiling keep the common area quiet enough that during a visit this summer the only obtrusive sound came from an active air conditioner. In the kitchen, residents cook food they’ve ordered with their own money from a local grocery store on a set of electric stoves still sparkling four years after they were installed. There are duplicates of everything so the unit’s Muslim members can keep halal. Everyone respects boundaries, and everyone maintains order.

“It’s spotless,” Andersen says. “My kitchen does not look anything like that.”

If the superficial changes make it immediately clear that something different is happening here, the less visible aspects of the overhaul reveal the depth of the reforms — and their potential to change the lives of those who enter the unit and set eyes on that fish tank.

The inmate-versus-officer dynamic has dissolved, replaced by a sense that everyone is working toward the same goal. Staff have been retrained and renamed — contact staff, rather than correctional officers — in an effort to support residents as they prepare for life after prison. There are three staff on the unit at a time, compared with one on a standard block with twice as many men. The officers and inmates cook and exercise and play games together. They share meals. They share something of themselves, liberated from policies that normally forbid fraternization and keep everyone on one side or the other of a clear divide.

*(Continued on page 36)*

**THE MOVEMENT**

[www.hrcalition.org](http://www.hrcalition.org)

(Continued from page 35)

This is still a prison, and there is no mistaking that the men are still incarcerated, but they speak of Little Scandinavia with fondness and an appreciation for their newfound independence. After years sharing cells in crowded, cacophonous blocks, they describe relief from the constant pressure and gratitude for being given the space for self-reflection. There is a sense of community in Little Scandinavia that belies the building in which it's housed.

"Everything you were missing in an upbringing — mentorship, guidance, a peaceful existence — you can have here," says Eliezer, 51, who has served 29 years of a life sentence. (The DOC requested that inmates' last names not be published.)

American prisons don't work. They're overfilled, unsafe, and expensive. The country spends at least \$80 billion a year on its federal and state institutions and gets little in return. The majority of those who are released end up going back, and the unemployment rate for the formerly incarcerated is at least six times the national rate. If the goal of corrections is to rehabilitate offenders, the conditions inside America's prisons are an inherent obstacle. Little Scandinavia suggests that a healthier environment is possible — and that it would make a genuine difference in the lives of the incarcerated.

Hyatt and Andersen's work is still ongoing. Data on prisoner and officer well-being won't be available until next year, and the block's recidivism rate will take longer to identify. But Little Scandinavia's lack of violence and the perspectives of its residents and staff suggest that the experiment is already answering some of the grander questions posed by the project: Can American prisons be run differently? How will inmates respond to opportunity? What would happen if humanity and dignity were instilled in institutions that have for so long robbed people of both?

## Welcome to Scandinavia

Little Scandinavia is the concretization of ideas Hyatt and Andersen have been discussing since they met at an academic conference in 2015 and began collaborating. In the years that followed, they began organizing exchange programs for Drexel students that include visits to Norwegian and Swedish prisons, renowned for being the most humane and effective in the world.

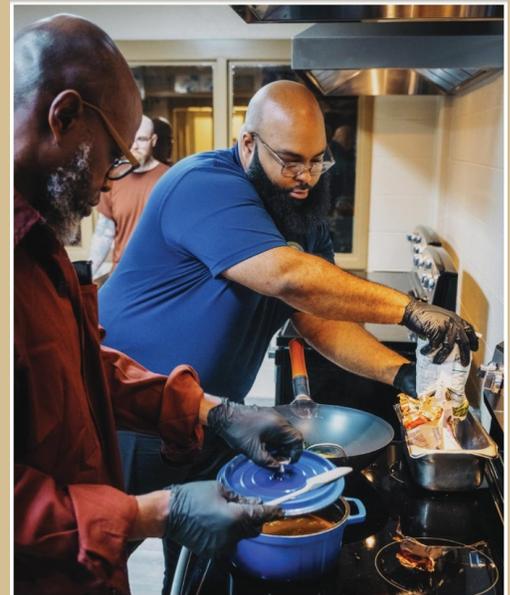
In Pennsylvania, the recidivism rate after three years is 65 percent, in line with U.S. averages that reach closer to 80 percent after five years. In Norway, the rate is around 20 percent after two years and 25 percent after five years, according to Are Høidal, the former governor of Halden Prison, who is now a senior adviser for Norway's correctional service and a member of the research project's advisory board.

Høidal came to Chester in 2017 on a visit organized by Hyatt, planting the first seeds for the change that soon took root. "From Norway, Pennsylvania's prisons appear cruel and unusual," the Inquirer's headline read. The next year, at a meeting at DOC headquarters, Hyatt and Andersen presented to then-Secretary John Wetzel the idea of extending their research on Scandinavian prisons to Pennsylvania. The DOC chose a stand-alone unit as its preferred approach.

"Every single person who goes to a prison in Scandinavia comes back and says, 'We should do something like this here,'" says Hyatt. But until Pennsylvania tried its hand, nobody had. There was no model for the DOC's undertaking, he emphasizes — "no prior evidence, no safety net, nothing to compare to."

The DOC gave the green light for a delegation of department officials and employees to tour Scandinavian prisons in

2019 and spent \$310,000 in startup costs to restructure the unit, Secretary Laurel Harry said earlier this year. Arnold Ventures, a Houston-based philanthropy focused on addressing the root causes of institutional injustice, was the primary funder of the delegation's visit and two more, in 2022 and 2024, through a grant supporting Hyatt and Andersen's research.



Residents and staff cook a meal together / Photograph by Swedish Television SVT/John Stark

When staff from Chester visited Norway in 2019, touring Halden and other prisons and then working inside them for two weeks, they were stunned by what they saw: officers and inmates eating meals together, playing video games, laughing.

"I was blown away. It was jarring, eye-opening," says Paige Devane, one of the unit's contact officers, who began working at Chester in 2018. "I said, 'Oh my God, I've been trained wrong.'"

Beyond the unusual approach to architecture and design, which the DOC would later import to Little Scandinavia, Devane noticed more subtle indications that Norway's revolutionary methods were working. Officers' shoulders weren't tense. Their

(Continued on page 37)

(Continued from page 36)

hands weren't clenched. They didn't seem to live in fear of the next fight. When she and her fellow staff returned, "everyone was on fire." They were ready for change.

***You don't realize how un-normal you've been living. Once you're here the contrast is so obvious.*** — ***Richie, a resident of Little Scandinavia***

The unit was fixed up — new furniture, a softer paint palette, plants to breathe life into the room — and the first six men, all lifers, moved in. Little Scandinavia was designed to reflect the broader population at Chester, where roughly 10 percent of inmates serve life sentences. Residents are selected via lottery, not based on good behavior.

Amir Bowman was shocked to be selected. "I don't get blessings like that," he says. His cell was "immaculate," complete with a small refrigerator, a television on the wall, and a new mattress. Most important was the absence of a cellmate.

"It was bizarre," he says, "but it was beautiful."

The unit's first residents became known as the Original 6. Their input shaped how the block is run — community meetings when new residents move in, for example — and they took on mentorship roles, offering what wisdom and support they could to the younger inmates who later joined them. Because of the pandemic, the unit didn't fill out until May 2022.

At the beginning, it took time for the men to adjust to a living situation that felt strangely normal for the first time in years. For the first week, it was so quiet they could hardly sleep.

"You get used to years of the noise," says Eliezer, who painted the murals in the unit's entrance — a hiker atop Norwegian fjords and a globe with Scandinavia and Pennsylvania highlighted beneath the words "Humanity Across the World." "Suddenly you could hear a pin drop. You could hear yourself think."

Prison is defined by "chaos and overstimulation," says Richie, one of the six original lifers. The 60-year-old South Philadelphian's thinning gray hair and rectangular wire-rim glasses suggest the weariness of a man who's been in prison for 37 years. When he began interviewing his fellow inmates for a newsletter and for a documentary produced by Sweden's public broadcasting network, he kept hearing the same refrain: "I have so much less stress, so much less anxiety."

"You don't realize how un-normal you've been living," Richie says. "Once you're here the contrast is so obvious."

Amon, 27, broad-shouldered with braids and thick-rimmed glasses, has spent a comparatively brief three and a half years inside. Living in the relative calm of Little Scandinavia allowed him to realize he'd been depressed for two years in traditional

housing units. "It was a hostile environment. Heinous," he says. "It makes you feel degraded."

Moving into Little Scandinavia felt like "a transition from not having to having" for Justin, who came to the unit last November as he neared the expected end of a 15-year stint. "We take care of each other," he says. "There's a sense of family."

The fish play some small part in that, and so do the dogs and cats residents are allowed to keep, rescued from euthanasia at local shelters. (The pets are part of a broader program throughout the prison.) A grin washes over Justin's face when he mentions Boogs, his tuxedo cat. When Boogs injured himself earlier this year jumping down from the unit's second tier and had to be taken to the vet, Justin burrowed into his cell for hours waiting for his return. The animals offer comfort, but they mean something more than that too.

"It makes you feel human," Justin says, "like you can be loved by someone other than yourself."

Life in Little Scandinavia is suffused with these opportunities to feel whole again — the freedom to cook a meal that tastes like home; easy access to a phone to call an ailing mother or a child on their birthday; the chance to sit alone in a room, music playing, processing life in here and the future out there.

"When we first came here, I can't tell you how many men said, 'I was able to cry for the first time in years,'" Devane says. "We have a lot of unhealed trauma."

From what she sees, Andersen says, American prisons emphasize retribution. Wrongdoing is met with punishment. Pain begets pain. Trauma persists. In Sweden and Norway, prison is more about what comes after. Sentences are shorter — a maximum of 21 years in Norway, or 30 years for terrorism — and spent learning skills that can be used on the outside. Inmates retain their rights, including the right to vote, which they're encouraged to do. They're asked to change and given a setting and support system that make it possible.

The difference from the U.S. model is stark, and it prompts a question that seems to be on the minds of everyone who steps foot in Little Scandinavia: What's the purpose, Andersen asks, of punishment, broadly speaking, and prison more specifically?

### ***A History Lesson***

From a historical perspective, the Philadelphia area seems an appropriate place to make such inquiries. It was on farmland then just outside the city that Benjamin Rush and the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons persuaded the state to build Eastern State Penitentiary, an experiment in prison reform that reverberated around the world.

When Eastern State opened in 1829, Philadelphia's prisons were little more than pens in which to corral criminals and those ac-

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cused. They were rife with violence, abuse, and disease. Rush and his fellow reformers believed they could establish something better — less punishing and more effective at creating change. What they built was revolutionary in its own way, if ultimately not exactly humane.

Inside the intimidating medieval facade that surrounded Eastern State, seven long wings radiated from a central rotunda. The 250 prisoners were given their own cells and hooded upon entry and exit to avoid interaction with fellow inmates or guards. Food was passed through small openings in cell doors to avoid contact. Prisoners were kept in complete isolation, given little more than a Bible and a skylight over their heads — the word and the eye of God overseeing their penitence.

After his visit in 1831, the French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville wrote to his government with admiration for what he saw. “Can there be a combination more powerful for reformation than that of a prison which hands over the prisoner to all the trials of solitude, leads him through reflection to remorse, through religion to hope?”

The building’s design and the principles of its operation were intended to inspire regret and rehabilitation. As we know from modern research on the physical and mental toll taken by solitary confinement, it surely did little of the latter. Nonetheless, Eastern State, which rejected the then-common use of corporal punishment, became a model for the progressive treatment of inmates. It established penitence as the institution’s purpose and isolation as its tool in that aim — punishment of another sort. More than 300 prisons around the world were developed with Eastern State as the model, and its methods became known as the Pennsylvania system. It was closed in 1971 and today is a museum.

To those involved, Little Scandinavia represents a chance to begin turning the page on the long history of inhumane treatment in American prisons. There, solitude gives way to community. It’s a way to consider all that we take for granted on the outside that those on the inside have had taken away: the autonomy to decide when and what to eat, to turn on a light to read during a sleepless night, to retreat from tension or ask for help when it’s needed.

“It presents an opportunity to think about what pieces of that deprivation are intentional parts of the punishment — what we intend as a society — and what is a function of history and pragmatic decisions like budgetary constraints. And it forces us to think about where we as a society want to be with regard to punishing people after they’ve committed crimes and then welcoming them back into the community,” Hyatt says. “People can disagree about those things, but this project encapsulates and touches on all those issues in a very concrete way. We hope it encourages some amount of reflection.”

For State Representative Jordan Harris, D-Philadelphia, who has visited roughly half of the state’s prisons as part of his efforts toward criminal justice reform, Little Scandinavia demonstrates that it’s possible to be “firm on crime and fair on humanity at the same time.” During a recent visit to Chester, he was struck by the sense of dignity throughout the unit — a reminder that prison doesn’t have to force the incarcerated to suffer and that suffering doesn’t lead to reformation.

“Incarceration itself is the punishment,” says Harris, chair of the state House Appropriations Committee. “The fact that you can’t go home is the punishment. The fact that you can’t see your family is the punishment.”

Amir Bowman spent 34 years living with that punishment and plenty more on top of it. He saw the way the indignities can fester — inhumane treatment from officers, the threat of violence that never lifts, the physical toll of violence itself. Contemporary departments of corrections often refer to the three C’s: care, custody, and control. But he didn’t see much of the first one until he reached Little Scandinavia.

“You take out care and it’s just custody and control. ‘I have you and I’m going to control you.’ That’s where you breed an angry man or woman,” he says.

That’s borne out in America’s alarming recidivism rates, among the highest in the world, which speak to the prison system’s failures during incarceration and broader societal failures to support reintegration afterward. Nearly two million Americans are incarcerated in state or federal prisons or local jails at any given time, and nearly six million, roughly two percent of the entire population, are under supervision by the criminal legal system, including probation and parole. Prison overcrowding makes practices like those on display in Little Scandinavia a costly proposition, given that it houses half as many men as a typical unit. Pennsylvania already spends about \$64,000 annually per inmate, according to the DOC, only to see the majority of those who go home eventually return.

The overcrowding, lack of care, and recidivism are all connected, Bowman says. Roughly one-quarter of inmates experience physical assault during their stays, research has found, while post-traumatic stress disorder is estimated to affect 18 percent of male and 40 percent of female inmates.

“Take a person from Little Scandinavia and take a person from a tense environment in prison: Which one would you rather have living next to you?” Bowman asks.

Given the dangerous, ineffective, and costly nature of American prisons, Little Scandinavia offers a road map toward something better, Harris says.

“We have to reimagine justice in our commonwealth and, quite honestly, in America,” he says. “What we’re doing isn’t work-

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ing, and there are so many across the world who are doing it better.”



Contact officer David Baxley plays pool with a Little Scandinavia resident / Photograph by Swedish Television SVT/John Stark

## The Nordic Model

Norway’s prison system wasn’t always a role model.

When Are Høidal entered the correctional service in the 1980s, prison facilities were outdated and so was penal philosophy. Oslo Prison, which he joined in 1989 and later ran for a decade, had been in operation since 1851 and was designed with Eastern State in mind.

Recidivism rates across the country were high, pushing past 65 percent. Escapes were common, drug abuse and violence were prevalent, riots broke out from time to time, and two officers were killed by inmates in the span of a few years. “It looked,” he says, “like the United States.”

To lift itself out of this morass, the service delivered a parliamentary report in 1997 that defined new values, principles, objectives, and performance goals. (Another report followed in 2008.) It may sound like a stuffy bit of bureaucracy, but Høidal says it turned everything around. The report aimed to both reduce recidivism and address the stigma and unintended consequences of serving time that hinder reintegration. Importantly, it had the support of every political party in Norway, as well as of the officers’ union.

The report focused its attention on the role of the officers themselves. Before it was published, they were merely guards, focused on security work. They didn’t converse, “especially not about their problems,” Høidal says. The report recommended that officers serve as something more like social workers, emphasizing their role in the rehabilitation of the incarcerated population. The subjects studied during officers’ two years of education and training changed too. Now they would learn about ethics, human rights, and the law.

Central to the new approach was the concept of dynamic security, a transition from static methods that had traditionally defined prisons — cuffs and bars and doors that limit movement and enforce control. Officers instead spent their days with inmates, building a rapport that accomplished more than restricting liberties ever could. Violence decreased significantly, particularly against staff, who were no longer seen as the enemy, Høidal says. Dynamic security is one of two defining principles Little Scandinavia adopted from its namesake.

“We’re disarming people by getting to know them,” says Devane, one of the Chester unit’s original officers.

Beyond the philosophical shift in officers’ responsibilities, the other principle that has guided Norway’s correctional service since the report is normality. Life inside should reflect life outside, as much as possible. Rights are retained. Health care is preserved. At Halden Prison, the first built after the report, which Høidal ran from its opening in 2009 until 2022, architecture was considered a rehabilitative tool. Thus, housing units replaced cold, harsh materials with comfortable furniture, softened edges, and amenities. Normality is the second leg upon which Little Scandinavia stands.

It took five years to implement the new way of working in Oslo, Høidal says, and longer to shift the system as a whole. But in time, recidivism rates plummeted. Norway’s incarcerated population, once around 5,000, is now less than 3,000. The difference in size is an important distinction in considering the importation of Norwegian principles to the United States. SCI Chester holds more than 1,000 men, and around 40,000 people are incarcerated throughout Pennsylvania.

“Change is possible, but it takes time,” says Andersen, the Norwegian researcher. “It’s not done in a heartbeat. People have to stay invested and committed for a long time to see actual, system-level change.”

In Sweden, too, penal philosophies evolved in the second half of the 20th century, says Martin Gillå, head of the office of international affairs for the Swedish prison and probation service and a member of Hyatt and Andersen’s advisory board. The system developed around a recognition that socioeconomic factors contribute significantly to many criminal offenses — or, as he says, that “the perpetrator is a victim of circumstances.” Offenses are considered to be a trespass against the state, a violation of the social contract rather than a crime against a victim.

In the U.S., by contrast, the involvement of victims and their relatives in the sentencing process suggests a greater concern with retribution and redress, Gillå says. He notes the April execution of Brian Dorsey in Missouri despite pleas for clemency from 72 corrections officials, among others, who described him as a changed man. “Justice needs to be served,” he says with a hint of sarcasm. “You can ask yourself, what kind of justice?”

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The Swedish prison service's motto translates to "Better out," underscoring its ultimate goal of positively influencing those who enter its oversight. Like Norway, it emphasizes dynamic security and high staff-to-inmate ratios. Sweden's three-year recidivism rate of 41 percent is less impressive than Norway's, but still far superior to that of the U.S. and most other countries.

"From an inmate perspective, I'm adamant that it works," Gillå says. "Both from a human rights standpoint and in terms of rehabilitation and reintegration."

For years since their prisons established a successful blueprint, international visitors, including Hyatt and his students, have gone to Norway and Sweden to understand what makes their systems effective. Something similar is now happening in Little Scandinavia, which has hosted judges, prosecutors, educators, and politicians, as well as corrections officials from seven states that are members of the Prison Violence Consortium, also funded in part by Arnold Ventures and aimed at understanding the causes and effects of prison violence. The Missouri Department of Corrections sent staff and researchers to Chester for a week last year to study Little Scandinavia and is now developing a unit that will share some of its fundamental concepts, Hyatt says.

While there are meaningful differences between the U.S. and its Nordic counterparts, Andersen says that shouldn't stop American prisons from emulating their most transformative principles.

"Many people travel to Scandinavia, see these nice-looking prisons, and think, 'We can't do this,'" she says. "But if you focus on that you lose the main point. You can still treat people in a different way — even if the place is big, even if it's grimy, even if it's old. You can still relate to each other and work together."

### ***Look in the Mirror***

There's a story Gillå likes to tell about the relationship between inmates and the people who oversee their confinement. A repeat offender returned to the same Swedish prison for the third time, preparing to serve another lengthy sentence that would put his total stay near 27 years. When the prison's governor asked if he was getting tired of it, he turned the question back on her. How long had she been at the prison, he asked. Thirty-two years, she responded. "Look at you," he said. "You've been here longer than I have." Their positions within the prison may have been different, but they shared the same environment.

The harsh conditions inside American prisons aren't detrimental only to inmates; officers bear the weight too. Research has shown that 25 percent of corrections workers have depression, more than three times the national average, while 27 percent experience PTSD, at least twice the rate of U.S. veterans. Suicide rates are nearly 40 percent greater than for the rest of the

working-age population, and life expectancy is just 59 years, 15 years below the national average.

To that end, the researchers studying Little Scandinavia are as interested in the welfare of prison employees as they are in the health and well-being of those they oversee. With less noise, more comfortable residents, and better relationships among everyone involved, officers are benefiting. There has been just one incident of note in the two years since the unit filled out — a disagreement this June between two men that escalated but stopped short of being a serious event after staff and residents intervened. One of the men was removed from the unit and has since returned without issue. Otherwise, there has been no violence whatsoever, a stark contrast to the rest of the prison, Hyatt notes. The number of incidents of serious misconduct is also meaningfully lower than in the broader prison, he says.

In addition to the relational benefits of dynamic security, the increased staffing ratio puts officers in a better position to address issues that arise. "Even the best officers can only handle so much," Richie, one of the Original 6, says. The changes, though, go even deeper than that.

Tyler Karasinski, who has been working at Chester for more than six years, was skeptical that Little Scandinavia would work, even if he wanted to believe in the idea. But after making the trip to Norway in 2019 and sticking with the unit since it opened, he's been convinced. Working in Little Scandinavia has allowed him to eat more healthfully and exercise more, just like the residents. For a while, he was exercising regularly while at work, performing CrossFit-style workouts with Eliezer right in the middle of the block. "He's my guy, almost a right hand," says Karasinski, who has lost 85 pounds, part of a "Biggest Loser" challenge throughout the unit that's seen several residents lose nearly 100 pounds. He credits Little Scandinavia for the change.

The unit isn't perfect, Karasinski acknowledges. It's still prison, after all. But the staff are happier, and he now feels good about coming to work every day. He used to be a "lock them up and throw away the key" kind of guy, he says. Now, though, he sees things differently. "We can do a hell of a lot better on the inside trying to change these guys," he says. "It's better for us and it's better for them."

### ***A Transformational Approach***

There may be nothing else in the U.S. quite like Little Scandinavia, but Nordic-style reforms are slowly catching on.

Inspired by a visit to Norway, North Dakota's prison system began emphasizing dynamic security and rethinking its policies and philosophies. The changes led to a 74 percent reduction in the use of solitary confinement and improvements in the health of residents and staff.

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Oregon, following the Nordic model, began a pilot project aimed at reducing isolation and improving the health of those with serious mental illness, part of an effort to reform the state's use of solitary confinement.

Washington included \$12.7 million in its budget to hire 52 new staff in an effort to introduce more humane treatment to its prisons. Like North Dakota and Oregon, it is part of the Amend program, run out of the University of California San Francisco, which aims to change prison culture with Scandinavian concepts.

Few reforms have reverberated as widely as those proposed by California Governor Gavin Newsom, who wants to turn San Quentin, one of the country's oldest and most notorious prisons, into a center for rehabilitation and a last stop before reentry. The California Model, as the state calls it, was designed based on Norwegian principles. It aims to transform San Quentin by the end of 2025.

When SCI Chester reimagined Charlie Alpha with these same ideas in mind, conventional thinking would have anticipated chaos. But it never came. Instead, the changes have brought order to the lives of residents and staff. As he contemplates the project's impact, Jordan Hyatt is already thinking about where it could lead next. He wants it to serve as a foundation for future reforms, in Pennsylvania and beyond. What could a similar unit focused on lifers accomplish, he wonders, or one for women, or for those about to exit this chapter of their lives and enter the uncertain future?

"It's evident that this is something that works," says State Representative Ben Waxman, D-Philadelphia. "But it doesn't just work. It's a transformational approach to how we think about prisons."

Waxman acknowledges that the future of this program and others like it is as much a question of resources as anything else. Beyond the money spent to spruce up Little Scandinavia, the ongoing cost to maintain it is limited to the increased expense of staffing three officers at a time — and the opportunity cost of housing 64 fewer men than other units do. The daily cost per resident in Little Scandinavia is \$2 higher than the prison's overall average of \$190.

But, as Waxman pointed out this June in a letter to Governor Josh Shapiro and the DOC's Harry, reducing recidivism is "economically prudent," in addition to its obvious social benefits. The letter, signed by 29 other state representatives, urged the continued funding and expansion of Little Scandinavia.

### ***A Taste of the Outside***

On the day he was released from prison, Amir Bowman's family took him out to a restaurant to welcome him home. He has three living children — a son died while he was incarcerated — and

six grandkids. They were joined by old friends, and it was a busy scene. One of his daughters ordered him a celebratory meal: steak and lobster. When the food came, everyone turned to see how he'd react to his first taste of something special in 34 years.

"It wasn't a big thing to me," he says. In Little Scandinavia, he'd eaten pan-seared steak and baked lobster. He'd learned to cook at the side of some of the unit's staff, expanding on what his mother had taught him so many years ago. When he mentioned in passing that he'd never tried crawfish, an officer bought and cooked some for him, then showed him how to eat them. The interaction has stuck in his mind ever since. So the steak, the lobster, they weren't life-changing.

"It was just a meal to me," he says, "but it was the ambience. It was a meal outside."

Bowman now works at the Philadelphia Anti-Drug Anti-Violence Network, canvassing the Strawberry Mansion neighborhood where he grew up to share his story in hopes that it might keep someone else from experiencing what he did. He helps mediate disputes and visits victims of gun violence to offer wound kits and assistance lining up care. He discusses with them the anger they might be feeling, the desire for retribution, and urges them toward a better path. In honor of his son he's building a nonprofit, Just Better Men, focused on helping adolescents through adversity.

This summer, Bowman went back to Little Scandinavia to talk to the men there. The support he received on the unit helped him hit the ground running when he left, even though he spent most of his time there thinking that day would never come. He had help getting his driver's license set up and his credit established and lining up a job. He wanted to let the men know there's something there for them on the outside, and that they were in a place that could help them grasp it.

"This is just a taste of what you can get," he told them. "If you enjoy this, imagine if you get back into society."

Some already are. Justin, Boogs's proud owner, earned an associate's degree in liberal arts at Eastern University while inside and is planning on a bachelor's in psychology as soon as he's able. He also got his carpentry license inside and has been using the higher pay scale for Little Scandinavia residents to send money home. (The DOC's minimum wage is typically 23 cents an hour — an astonishingly low rate. Even the comparatively generous \$2.52 maximum allowed for the unit's members is one-third of minimum wage.)

"I have a life to live," Justin says of his anticipated release. "I took 15 years of my own life."

**I hope it spreads like wildfire." — Paige Devane, contact officer at SCI Chester**

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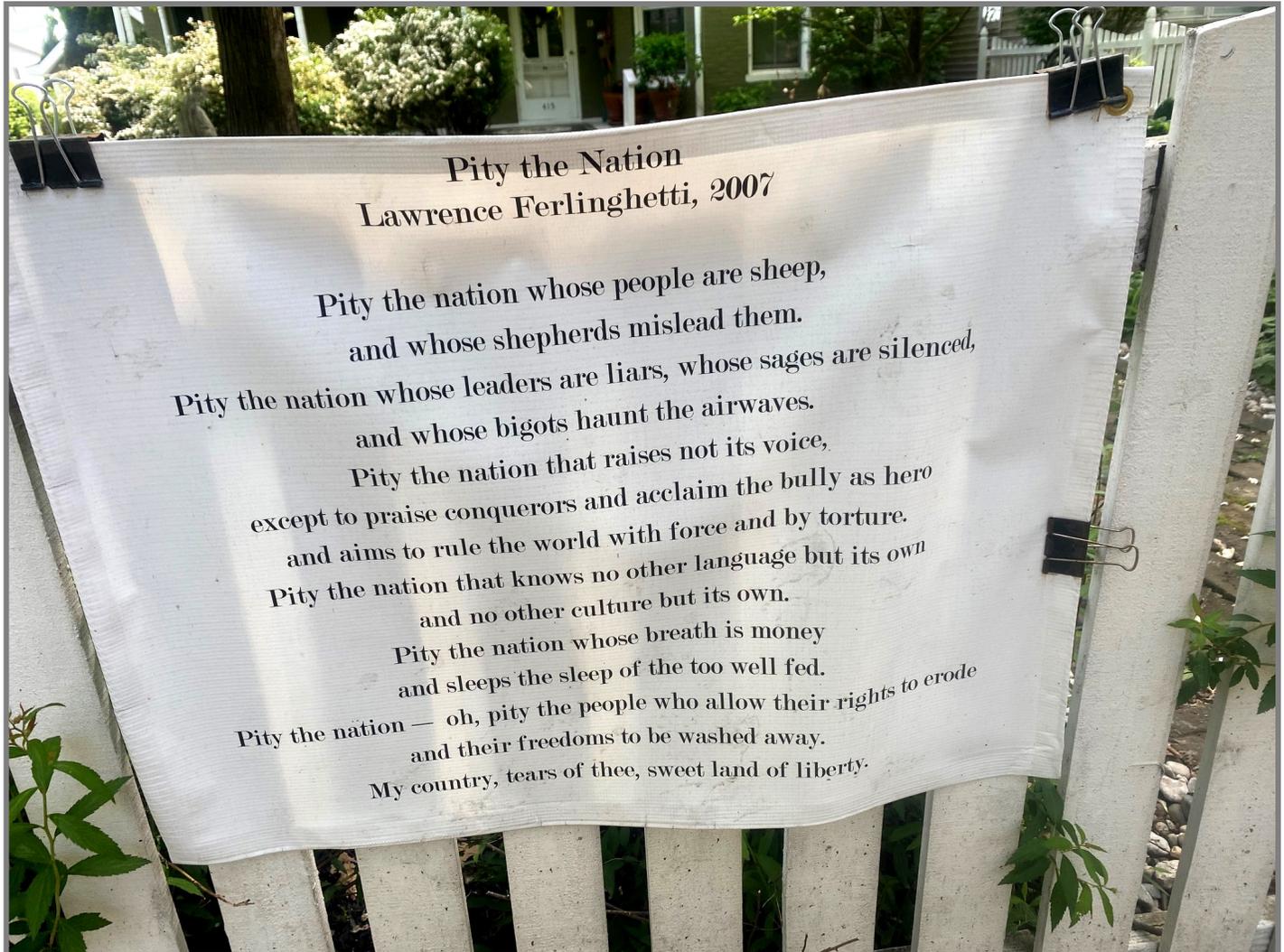
Amon, who moved into Little Scandinavia in June, considers the unit to be “something special” within the DOC. The pervasive stress that followed him for three years has dissipated. In its place, he says, he’s been given a stepping stone for his reentry, which he expects this fall. He wants to be another success story, like Bowman, a testament that the approach works. “To me,” he says, “it’s healing the offender.”

For Devane, one of the few officers who witnessed Bowman’s entire journey through Little Scandinavia, seeing him return with his head held high was poignant. She says it shows the potential for the unit to make meaningful change in residents’ lives and to “plant seeds of positivity.” For now, there may be nothing else quite like it in the country, but she wants that to change.

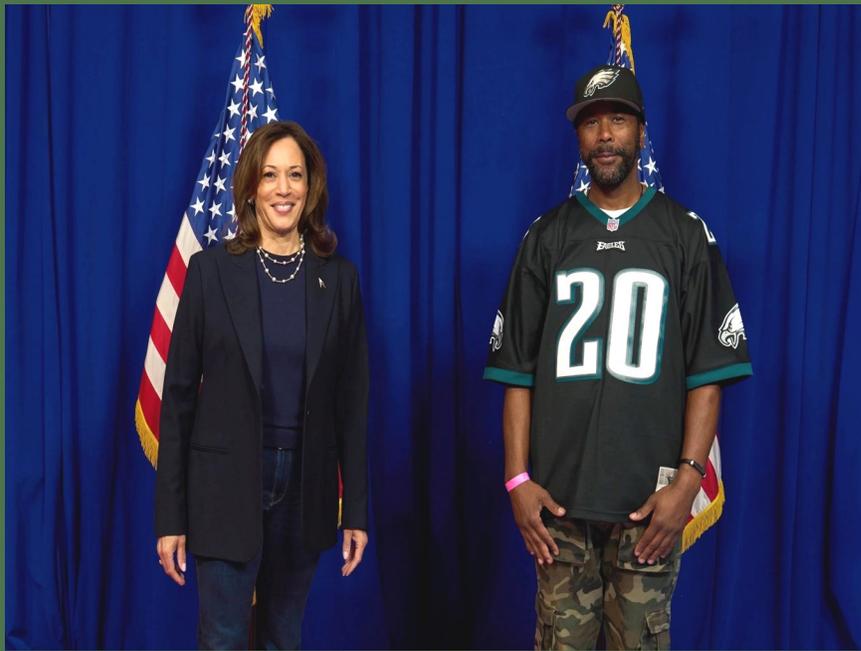
“I hope it spreads like wildfire,” she says.

In at least one way, it already has. The aquarium that once entranced Bowman with its tranquil water is no longer unique within Chester. Inspired by its calming presence, the prison has introduced several more in the past couple of years, populating other units and corners of the building. There are now four fish tanks throughout the prison, each one carrying a small piece of Little Scandinavia with it.

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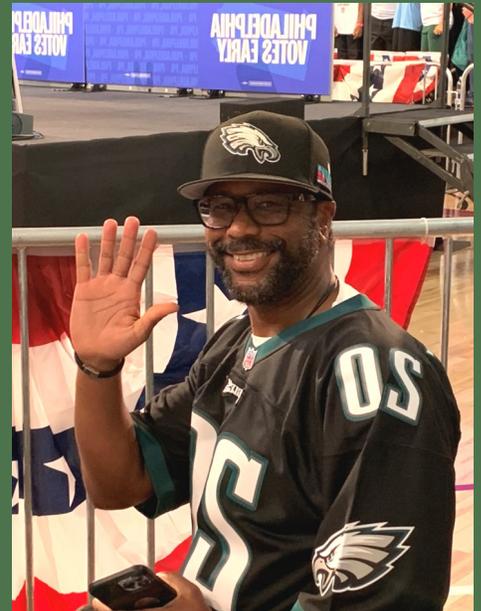
**SHAKABOONA** HAVING THE PLEASURE TO MEET AND INTRODUCE VP KAMALA HARRIS IN PHILLY ON STAGE BEFORE THE WORLD!



THESE DAYS I WILL REMEMBER. I, SHAKABOONA, BEING THE FIRST FORMERLY INCARCERATED PERSON AND ONE OF PHILLY'S TOP COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS & GRASSROOTS REPRESENTATIVES TO BE INTRODUCING PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE / VICE PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS ON NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL STAGE AT THE ALAN HORWITZ SIXTH MAN CENTER IN PHILLY TO PHILADELPHIANS AND THE WORLD.

THEN LATER PHOTOGRAPHING AND SPEAKING WITH VP KAMALA HARRIS!

ALSO CHATTING IT UP WITH PHILLY MAYOR CHERELLE PARKER, PA SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE JOANNA MCCLINTOCK, AND STATE REP. RONI GREEN BACKSTAGE & IN THE VIP SECTION NEXT TO THE STAGE.



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*Wishing you ALL  
A Blessed  
New Year!*

"The image portrays Handala, the 10-year-old refugee child created by Palestinian cartoonist Naji Al-Ali (1938 – 1987). Handala represents the artist at the age when he was expelled from his homeland during the 1948 Nakba – the forcible expulsion of two thirds of the Palestinian people – and he will never grow old until he returns home." - Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign