

A Publication of The Pennsylvania Prison Society

GRATERFRIENDS

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

It's Time to Reopen Pennsylvania Prisons for Visits from Loved Ones

It has now been 14 months that people incarcerated in Pennsylvania state prisons have gone without a visit from family, friends or loved ones. Suspending visits was an important measure to keep the coronavirus out of prisons, but it's no longer necessary to prolong this painful separation. With more of the state vaccinated and cases falling, Pennsylvania will put an end to nearly all Covid-19 restrictions at the end of the month. But the Department of Corrections, and most county jails, have refused to announce when families will be allowed to visit prisons again.

It's time for the DOC to finally commit to a plan to safely resume visits in state prisons.

The corrections systems in 28 states plus the federal prison system have resumed in person visits in some form. Most of these states have had higher coronavirus infection rates in prison than Pennsylvania, and all are placing certain conditions on visiting as a safeguard against the risk of spreading the virus. Some are opening individual facilities on a case-by-case basis, limiting the frequency of visits or the number of visitors, or allowing non-contact visits only.

Joe Amon, a clinical professor of community health and prevention at Drexel University's Dornsife School of Public Health, says it would "absolutely" be safe for Pennsylvania prisons to begin allowing visitors again with basic, familiar precautions, like screening visitors upon entry, requiring masks, physical distancing, and arranging for outdoor visits when possible. He points out that the prisons have already figured out how to handle the inflow of others from the community, including the hundreds of corrections officers and

other staff who come and go daily.

"There's no reason, I think, that prison or correctional officials should be saying that it's impossible to do this," Amon says. "It's important for the welfare of the people who are in detention and it's the right scientific and humane thing to do."

JoAnn Wyjadka's 27-year-old son Corey has less than a year of his sentence left before he's eligible for parole, and she worries that isolation during the pandemic may make his readjustment to life outside of prison more difficult. Recently, he was transferred to a state prison that's much closer to her home in Philadelphia, but it brought them no nearer to seeing each other again in the flesh.

"It's hard because he's only an hour away," JoAnn says. "I would be able to visit like three times a week, as opposed to once every two-to-three weeks. I think it would help with his re-entry."

While they talk on the phone regularly and use the video visiting system the DOC put in place during the pandemic, JoAnn says those calls can't replace the experience of an in-person visit. Like many other families, their calls have sometimes been plagued with connectivity issues. But JoAnn says one of their biggest problems with the virtual visits is that she and Corey can't look each other in the eye, because of the way the camera is situated on his end. It's also hard to talk about private family matters when they know their conversation is being recorded.

For others facing longer periods of incarceration, visits can be a much-needed

source of hope. Virginia Hammond's son Chris, 46, has been in prison since 2001 serving a life sentence. During their visits, they would have sprawling conversations that jumped between the news, politics, and philosophy--and challenge each other to a game of Scrabble.

Chris looked forward to the competitions, Virginia says, telling her, "I'm going to study my words and you're not going to beat me next month." The visits, she says, "did a lot to lift his spirits."

"He had a forward-looking perspective after the visit, which I think is one of the benefits."

The Prison Society calls on the Department of Corrections to safely reopen prisons for in-person visits without delay.

In addition, we call on all state and county officials to: offer COVID-19 vaccinations to all people in custody and staff as soon as they become available; implement weekly, rapid testing of all staff that come into contact with people in custody until they are vaccinated; require that every county publicly report prison testing results and virus-related deaths in custody; test and quarantine every new person entering custody; and eliminate the medical co-pay for accessing health care while in custody.

PENNSYLVANIA
PRISON SOCIETY



—SINCE 1787—

From the Social Services Director



Dear Friends of the Society,

As I am writing this, nearly 15 months have passed since the start of the pandemic. So much has changed during that time and so many have lost so much. But we remain here for you and here for each other.

Since March 13th, 2020 we have:

- Responded to more than 4,000 inquiries from family members with questions or concerns about what is happening in the prison where their loved one is located.
- Dispatched volunteers to look into 1,160 specific complaints about conditions from incarcerated people and their families.
- And distributed more than 1,000 surveys regarding COVID conditions in prisons and analyzed the 626 survey responses returned from April through early December.

Thank you to those of you who have reached out to us with information, with questions, and with survey responses. Without you, we would not have been able to accurately report on what has been happening behind bars. We shared the information you reported to us the Department of Corrections. We reported that the Department needed to increase out of cell time, to increase access to phone calls and video visits, and to improve access to medical care and cleaning supplies. After sharing this informa-

tion, we heard from many of you that access to cleaning supplies improved.

We also used the information you reported to us to prepare our testimony before the Senate about conditions in PA prisons. We used the information you reported with us to inform the media about the experiences of incarcerated people across the Commonwealth. And we continue to use the information you provide to us to advocate for policies to reduce prison populations and to make sure that your voices are among the loudest in the fight for reform.

You will notice that the survey has changed this issue. We have reduced the number of questions regarding COVID-19 to better capture what changes may be occurring as prisons begin to reopen. We have also added questions about in-cell meal service. The PA DOC has announced that they plan to continue in-cell meal service after the pandemic, ending the use of chow halls. The Department has said that food quality has not changed with in-cell food delivery and that eliminating chow halls is a change that will benefit people in custody. We want to know about your experience and opinions.

Please take the time to fill out the survey, even if you have filled out prior versions. Your voice is critical in ensuring that the Society is an unbiased, independent source for what is happening in Pennsylvania prisons.

With gratitude,
Kirstin

Graterfriends

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From The Pennsylvania Prison Society

Report from the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project: The COVID-19 Vaccine Can Protect Incarcerated People

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, lawyers and advocates with the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project (PILP) have been working to ensure that incarcerated people have adequate protections against COVID-19 and are living in safe, sanitary, and humane conditions. PILP has been corresponding with incarcerated people throughout the pandemic and unfortunately many have been suffering under prolonged lockdowns, lack of medical care, no programming, and unsanitary conditions, among other challenges.

Now that the COVID-19 vaccine has become more available, it could be a way to not only protect incarcerated people from COVID-19, but also could lead to the lifting of restrictions imposed by prisons. PILP strongly encourages each incarcerated person to receive the vaccine. Some people have chosen not to receive the vaccine; that is certainly their right. But it is important that everyone in prison has enough information to make an informed decision about their health.

COVID-19 is a dangerous virus that has already killed over half a million people in the United States. Every day, hundreds of people get seriously ill and die from this virus. COVID-19 has been especially bad in jails and prisons, because people are confined to small spaces where the virus can spread quickly. PILP wants incarcerated people to be safe, and the best way to keep safe from COVID-19 is getting the vaccine.

Incarcerated people in Pennsylvania might soon be offered, or already were offered, one of the COVID-19 vaccines. Each person might be offered the Moderna or Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine. There is also a vaccine made by Pfizer, but most prisons and jails are not offering this one because it needs to be stored in extremely cold conditions with special equipment that most prisons do not have.

The Moderna vaccine requires two shots, four weeks apart. The J&J vaccine is just one shot. Both vaccines prevent the vaccinated person from getting COVID-19 and both vaccines prevent serious illness and death from COVID-19. Doctors and scientists have already conducted months of testing and safely given the vaccines to tens of millions of people in the United States and across the world.

There was a temporary pause in the use of the J&J vaccine in April because of a very rare blood clot complication. After carefully reviewing reports of this complication, on April 23, 2021, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) determined that it is safe to continue offering the J&J vaccine. The CDC made this decision after finding only 15 reports of blood clot complications out of over 8 million people who have received the vaccine. All of these reports came from women under 60.

While the two vaccines work in slightly different ways, they both teach the body's immune system to recognize and fight the COVID-19 virus. In addition to preventing you from getting

COVID-19, the vaccines protect other people by making it harder to pass the virus from person to person. Although scientists developed the vaccines quickly, they did not skip any steps or cut any corners before making them available to the public.

PILP is aware of the long and brutal history of medical misconduct in prison and realizes that many people in prison are understandably skeptical of receiving a vaccine administered by prison staff. As lawyers and advocates, it is PILP's job to protect the health of incarcerated people as much as possible, and we are extremely confident this vaccine is safe.

Vaccines can sometimes cause side effects, including arm soreness, tiredness, headache, muscle pain, and fever. These are all normal and typically disappear within 1 or 2 days. It is impossible to get COVID-19 from the vaccines. It is safe to take the COVID-19 vaccines even with underlying medical conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, Hepatitis C, and HIV. The COVID-19 vaccine does not affect a person's ability to have a baby. Recently, there has been news of some side effects from the J&J vaccine, but PILP still believes that the vaccines are safe, and that the benefits outweigh the risks, and in fact, almost every staff member at PILP is now fully vaccinated. However, if people have questions, discussing this with medical staff is encouraged.

When most incarcerated people have received the vaccine, conditions in prison may also get better. With more protection against the virus, PILP will be advocating that prisons should provide more out-of-cell time and recreation options and allow in-person visits with loved ones and programs run by outside groups.

Johnson and Johnson Vaccine: Follow up to the DOC Memo

Following a pause in administrations of the Johnson and Johnson vaccine, the DOC has resumed administering vaccines as of May 3rd, 2020. As noted in the DOC's May 3rd memo, this is a decision backed by both the U.S. FDA and the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. This article is to supplement and clarify the memo and any other information you may have received in the last few weeks since the pause:

Why was the vaccine administration paused?

The Johnson and Johnson vaccine was paused because of data indicating that the shots may cause "rare blood clots and low platelet counts." The combination of these problems are referred to as "thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome" or TTS.

When the vaccine was paused, the CDC acknowledged that the side effects were "extremely rare."

Dr. Fauci has stated that the pause in the vaccine for such a small number of cases should give people more confidence in the health agencies' focus on the safety of Americans.

Why was the vaccine reinstated?

The ten day pause was lifted when 15 members of the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices board voted to allow the continued administration of the vaccine. The board is made up of scientific and medical experts who do not have ties to the vaccine manufacturers.

First, experts found that the risk was rare enough that it was in the public's best interest to have access to the vaccine.

Second, the vaccine was reinstated because the risks of the vaccine do not outweigh the benefits. The CDC predicted that with the Johnson and Johnson vaccine reinstated, it can potentially prevent 600- 1,400 deaths and between 800-3,500 ICU admissions. The CDC predicts with continued vaccine rollout only 26-45 more cases of TTS.

Experts emphasized that the one-shot treatment of Johnson and Johnson is important for incarcerated populations who will have a harder time accessing a second shot of Moderna or Pfizer.

Is the vaccine safe and effective? What is the risk for the blood clotting side effect?

Yes. The vaccine is safe and effective, and the benefits of the vaccine have been found to outweigh the risks.

Jesse L. Goodman, MD, the former FDA Chief Scientist and professor of medicine and infectious diseases at Georgetown University, said of the vaccine reinstatement, "Let's keep the risk in perspective. The risk of dying from a car accident in your life is something like one in 100, the risk being struck by lightning is something like one in 15,000."

Who experienced this side effect?

Out of the 8 million doses of the Johnson and Johnson vaccine administered in the US, there were only 15 cases of confirmed TTS. The confirmed cases were all in women between the ages 18 and 49. Some possible cases involving men with TTS are still under review.

Who is at risk for this complication?

Women between the ages of 30-39 are at the highest risk for TTS. Statistically, there is a risk of 11.8 cases for every 1,000,000 doses given.

What are the symptoms that may indicate signs of blood clotting?

According to the CDC, for three weeks after receiving the vaccine, you should be on the lookout for the following symptoms that could be sign of a blood clot with low platelets:

- Severe or persistent headaches
- Blurred vision
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pains
- Leg swelling
- Persistent abdominal pain

Easy bruising or tiny blood spots under the skin beyond the injection site

What should be done if I experience this side effect?

The new information sheets and warnings for the Johnson and Johnson vaccine have been updated to indicate the TTS risk. Health care providers have been updated on how to spot and treat symptoms of blood clots.

Additional Disclaimer:

The vaccine could lead to "an increased risk of thrombosis involving cerebral venous sinuses and other sites (including but not limited to the large blood vessels of the abdomen and the veins of the lower extremities) combined with thrombocytopenia and with onset of symptoms approximately one to two weeks after vaccination."

Report from Nicole Sloane
Driver's Nervous Behavior Alone Doesn't Justify Continued Detention

In *Commonwealth v. Mattis*, 2021 Pa. Super 83 (Pa. Super. Ct. 2021) the facts allege that a Trooper with the Pennsylvania State Police stopped Andrew Mattis for speeding in Fayette County, Pennsylvania. According to the trooper, Mattis was "extraordinarily nervous and fidgeting" which led the trooper to ask Mattis to get out of his vehicle. The trooper was holding Mattis' license and registration at the time he asked Mattis for permission to search the car further preventing Mattis from leaving.

Despite being told he had the right to decline the search, Mattis allowed the trooper to search his car. During the search of Mattis' vehicle, the trooper found two glass smoking pipes, a small amount of suspected marijuana, a metal grinder and a scale with residue. As a result, the Commonwealth charged Mattis with traffic and drug offenses.

Mattis filed a motion to suppress the evidence arguing that the Trooper prolonged the traffic stop beyond its original mission. Mattis argued that the trooper therefore created a second investigative detention without reasonable suspicion of criminal conduct. The suppression court rejected Mattis' argument. After he was convicted, Mattis appealed the denial of the suppression motion to the Pennsylvania Superior Court.

In a well-written decision authored by Superior Court Judge Megan McCarthy King, a panel of the Superior Court agreeing with Mattis vacated the judgment of sentence.

Writing for the Court, Judge King acknowledged that the Fourth Amendment to the United States Constitution and Article 1, Section 8 of the Pennsylvania Constitution protect citizens from unreasonable searches and seizures. The Court recognized that decisional law acknowledges that police officers may not conduct a warrantless search or seizure absent an exception to the warrant requirement.

Reviewing the record of the suppression hearing, the Superior Court noted that the trooper testified that Mattis had been ex-

traordinarily and continually nervous, fidgeted around a lot and was shaking. The trooper testified that Mattis' nervous behavior was not typical of other drivers. It had been Mattis' nervous behavior that led the trooper to ask Mattis to exit the vehicle "to figure out why [Mattis] was so nervous at the time of the stop." The trooper then asked Mattis if he had anything illegal inside the vehicle. While still holding Mattis' license and registration, the trooper asked whether Mattis would consent to a search, which Mattis did. During the suppression hearing, the trooper admitted that at the time the trooper requested Mattis' consent to search, Mattis had not been free to leave.

The Superior Court held that the trooper had sought to obtain additional information unrelated to the initial traffic stop for the speeding violation but did not have sufficient reasons for doing so. Once the primary purpose of the initial stop for the speeding violation ended, the trooper's authority to order Mattis to exit his car was gone. As a result, the trooper's request for Mattis to exit his automobile was an investigatory detention requiring reasonable suspicion that was not present. Mattis had not been free to leave as evidenced by the fact that the Trooper held onto Mattis' license and registration. The Court held that nervous behavior alone does not provide a sufficient basis to warrant an investigatory detention. The Court vacated the judgment of sentence and remanded for a new trial during which the Commonwealth would be prohibited from introducing the illegally seized evidence.

*Dr. Jill McCorkel: Professor of Sociology and Criminology,
Villanova University, Executive Director, Philadelphia Justice
Project for Women and Girls*
Gender Inequality & Mass Incarceration of Women

Every year, the United Nations releases a report about gender inequality in countries around the globe. The report compares the opportunities and obstacles that confront women and girls in different countries. In Afghanistan, for example, only 1 in 20 girls are able to pursue education beyond the sixth grade due to high rates of child marriage and violence against girls. In contrast, Kenya offers tuition-free schooling, has violence prevention programs in schools, and bars marriage before the age of 18. Not surprisingly, women in Kenya have much more economic and political power and lower mortality rates than their counterparts in Afghanistan. Research also shows that countries with high levels of gender inequality, like Afghanistan, tend to be worse off in almost every way than countries where there is greater gender equity. The higher the degree of gender inequality, the greater the rate of poverty, famine, illiteracy, disease, and gender. Gender inequality, in other words, causes losses not only for women and girls but for the entire country.

There is no country with perfect gender equality, but some countries come pretty close. At the top of this year's list are Switzerland, Denmark, and Sweden. Women in these countries live longer, earn more, pursue a diversity of careers, are highly educated, and are represented in government. Countries at the bottom of the rankings (meaning they have the highest degree of gender inequality) include Yemen, Chad, and Afghanistan. Women in these countries experience high rates of violence and premature death, poverty, and illiteracy. The United States

comes in at #46 on the list – well below most European countries, and lower than China (#39) and Israel (#26).

The rankings are calculated based on women's labor force participation, representation in government, access to healthcare, and educational attainment. Unfortunately, the researchers did not consider incarceration in their equation. If they had, they U.S. would have dropped much further down in world's gender inequality rankings.

The U.S. is not only a global leader in incarceration, it is the global leader in the mass incarceration of women. We lock up more women than any other country in history. Only 4% of the world's female population lives in the U.S., yet we account for over one-third of the world's incarcerated women. This, of course, has terrible consequences for women, their families, and communities.

It has not always been this way. Women—particularly white women—have historically fared better than men in the criminal legal system. Women were less likely than men to be sentenced to prison following a criminal conviction. All that changed with the War on Drugs and the widespread introduction of mandatory minimum sentences. Since then, women's rate of incarceration has grown at twice the pace of men's incarceration. These increases do not reflect changes in women's crime participation. Women's crimes are typically less serious, less violent, and less frequent. The mass incarceration of women is the result of three decades of punitive crime policies, racism, and structural barriers that prevent women from achieving their educational, economic, and political goals.

An Announcement

Prison Society Correction for March/April Issue:

The Prison Society recently changed the software used for managing Graterfriends Subscriptions. In the transition, many subscribers had their last names erroneously changed. We apologize for this mistake. We believe we have corrected the issue, but if you did not receive your March/April issue, please reach out to our main office. Again, our sincere apologies.

**PENNSYLVANIA
PRISON SOCIETY**



— SINCE 1787 —

Reports From the Inside

The Devastating All White Jury *Omar Askia Ali-Sistrunk, SCI Coal Township*

“The Negro does not want love. He wants justice.” E. Franklin Frazier, 1894-1962

Since the Trayvon Martin tragedy, and George Zimmerman’s farce of a trial, there has been a backlash of public outrage and concern regarding the racial inequalities permeating the American justice system. The fall-out from Zimmerman’s acquittal has culminated into a universal consensus that the criminal justice system is broken. All agree, Democrats and Republicans, Judges and A.D. ’s, Attorneys General nationwide, law enforcement, and citizens of all persuasions, that the criminal justice system is applied prejudicially towards people of color.

One of the oldest and most pernicious of these inequities is that old relic of injustice called the “ALL-WHITE JURY.” All but forgotten by the general public, the Zimmerman trial has thrust this tactic once again into the center of public awareness.

It has repeatedly shown up as a topic discussion in newspaper articles, on news shows and on C-SPAN. Most Americans are misinformed and sincerely believe that the average African American defendant receives a fair trial before a jury of his/her peers. They were astonished to learn that this was not the case.

Even more shocking to them was the revelation that D.A.’s all over the country routinely violated African American defendant’s rights by manipulating the jury selection process, using peremptory challenges to exclude African American jurors in order to seat “all-white juries.”

The tactic has served two diabolical purposes. The first has been to acquit whites guilty of crimes against African Americans: e.g., the white defendant’s who killed Emmett Till, the officers who beat Rodney King, the white men who were acquitted in Shenendoah, PA of beating a Mexican immigrant to death, and now George Zimmerman for the murder of Trayvon Martin. The second, and most often utilized, has been to pick “all-white juries” that would ignore the evidence and convict on the basis of race and racial stereotypes.

In the movie “Twelve Angry Men,” starring Henry Fonda, the injustice of the “all white jury” is laid bare. In a shocking display of racial attitudes and prejudice, we see what happens when “an all white jury” deliberates the fate of a person of color charged with first degree murder.

Little attention is paid to the evidence, instead eleven jurors are poised to convict on racist notions and stereotypes. However, the Henry Fonda character fights against these attitudes to turn the other eleven jurors around to acquit the defendant. In reality, Henry Fonda’s character does not exist.

Recognizing the unconstitutional and nefarious nature of the tactic, the Supreme Court of the United States in several rulings over the last forty years have outlawed the practice in a succession of cases: E.G., Swain V. Alabama (1965), Batson v Kentucky, (1986); Miller El v. Dretke (2005).

Instead of adhering to these precedents, prosecutors nationwide have repackaged the tactic in order to circumvent the Supreme Court precedent and render it impotent in protecting the fair trial rights of African Americans. In these respects, Pennsylvania state courts are among the most relentless abusers.

For example, a state prisoner named Omar Askia Ali, AKA Edward Sistrunk, was tried twice by “all-white jurors.” Many other PA prisoners have suffered convictions at the hand of this nefarious tactic. Indeed, there exists in the public record evidence that the Philadelphia D.A.’s office over a forty year period have maintained a policy of picking “all white juries” in trials involving African American defendants. Training sessions were held, codes developed, and guidelines promulgated in implementing the racist tactic.

Case in point, during the Philadelphia D.A. administration of Ron D. Castille, former chief justice of PA’s Supreme Court, ADA Jack McMahon in 1986 recorded a training session in which he taught the racist tactic to incoming A.D.A’s. Later, in 1990, then director of training for the Philadelphia D.A.’s office, Bruce Sagel, taught the same tactic. Mr. Sagel’s “ideal jury” was “12 Archie Bunkers” who will convict on little evidence. The reference is to the bigoted lead character in the 70’s sitcom “All in the Family.” This type of racist and illegal policy has caused hundreds upon hundreds of African American defendants all over the country to be unjustly convicted.

The question, however, is what do we do about it. In response, I am suggesting that any African American tried by an “All-White Jury” to contact the Human Rights Coalition, 4134 Lancaster Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19104; Leon Williams’ Journal, 327 So. 13th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107, and/or, the PA Prison Society, 230 S. Broad Street, Suite 605, Philadelphia, PA 19102. Make them aware, so that this issue can be taken to the current D.A., politicians or the court to be considered for the review for the possible action. Please note: Do not send any large files; just very brief summaries of your situation that proves you were unjustly tried by an “all-white jury.”

*Note the Prison Society and Graterfriends are not associated with nor can speak to the quality or accuracy of the legal services listed above

Mother’s Day During COVID-19 *Juicy Queen Bee, SCI Albion*

I know COVID-19 has people wishing they were home with their family, seeing their faces. I know so many people have died; friends, family, and so many in pain.

I’m tired of worrying about my mom. She went into the hospital, and it’s been hard being away from her. She went into the hospital in December because her oxygen dropped, and she fell the wrong way and broke her ankle. She’s going to need an operation and rehabilitation.

It hurts because my brother and sister can’t be there for her because COVID-19 means there are no visitors allowed. I’m stuck in here, but they can drop things off. However, the thought of

losing your mother is worse than being stuck in here. If you're not close with your mom, get close. You only get one. It's the worst when you're in prison and can't call your mom, but have to rely on all the information from your brother, even though we have always been close. I still wish I was there with her.

Love is real, but a mother's love always stays. Even if you might not always agree with your mother, her love stays. My mother is my rock and my best friend. I love her and all mothers.

I will continue to look up to her, even when she flies to be with all her sisters, brothers and parents, as she is the last child living.

Happy Mother's Day, 2021!

Tell your mother, if she's still alive, that you love her, even if you haven't talked in a while. Tell your children's mother that you love her as the mother of your child.

Mother's Day Thoughtfulness *Kasheyon Lee-Chima, SCI Benner*

Unfortunately I am not a poet or the greatest at spoken word, yet I hope this article would motivate you. Recently, I knelt down to pray:

Heavenly father,
I come to you with a humble and contrite heart during this Mother's Day season. Another year has gone by where I am unable to embrace my mom with a hug and kiss. The reason be due to the geographical distance and the social distance (pandemic).

Midway through my prayer, I began thinking of the Graterfriends readers. I can only imagine just how many others are in similar circumstances. Therefore, I wanted to share this prayer to serve as a reminder to everyone that, regardless of how far away we may be from our mothers, we should all take the time to find a way to let her know how special she is. Readers, you may be in a financial situation where buying the best teddy bear, or the biggest bouquet of roses may be difficult. Yet, I encourage you to do something simple without losing its meaningfulness by sending a drawing, a card or even a simple letter. Many of us may not have the ability to send any type of present, but that's okay because the most meaningful and sentimental gift that anyone can provide for Mother's Day doesn't come in the form of an object, rather it comes by a conversation between God and yourself.

Saying a prayer and spending a few seconds giving thanks to our creator for gifting us with a person so special and dear. "God, you blessed me with someone that means so much to me. I pray and thank you for the relationships that I have with my mom."

Who wouldn't want to be physically close to our moms during this special day? And although it may not be possible at the moment, we ought to put our trust and faith in our Lord for it to become soon. "Lord, I pray for health. I pray that you will continue supplying our moms with health, nourishment and protections. I ask that you, oh Lord, will bless them with strength, healing and even patiences (for the times when we're hard)..."

For those of us who are not close to our moms and don't have the desired relationship, I pray that you would ask for forgiveness. Know that as long as there is still a chance to mend broken relationships, I pray that feelings and emotions are put aside and grace and mercy be given.

Finally, for those of us whose mothers are no longer with us, I'm sure that this may be a somber moment. May she rest in peace. Prayerfully, she was given the chance to accept Christ into her life and is now watching us from above. If this is the case, it is important for you to ensure that you do whatever is needed to make mom proud so when that day comes, you will be able to rejoin with her in Heaven.

Brothers and sisters, I never desire to appear too holy, but one thing I aim to do is encourage you about God and the endless possibilities of what he can do. I serve the true and living God who is able to turn nothing into something; who can always turn what we think is too late into ample time; who when we don't believe there's a way into unforeseen plenty of ways. Thus, I pray that the raiders and Graterfriends family will extend your hands to reach out and grab hold onto the anointing of the spirit. That you would extend your heart to be receptive to the will of God and extend your mind to no longer conform (fit in) to the evil ways of this world, but to be transformed (changed) to the ways and will of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Sons and daughters, always remember that it is never too late to let our moms know how much we love them. To all the moms, whether biological or someone dearest, I congratulate you on this special day.

As I conclude this note of encouragement, I want to give the biggest shout out to my Queen Diana! My mom is everything to me and I wouldn't want to trade her for any other mom in this world. I am truly blessed to have you in my life. I send you a virtual hug with lots of kisses. I'll be calling you! With love, from your son, -Lee, 2021.

P.S. If you are a reader and would like comfort for the death of your loved one or if you are moved to accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, I encourage you to send a request to your Chaplain.

Being Different *Earl Smith, SCI Huntingdon*

Standing out from others is good. Why would you want to hide in the crowd? You have to separate yourself from the nonsense. In jail, it's kind of hard to stay away from each other because we're in prison, so where can we go? But when you're trying to do right and live by the rules, people tend to stay away from you or look at you like you're weird. DAMN right I want to be weird, because I don't want to get caught up in any of your BS! I'm trying to change the way I used to think. Being older, you have to change, right? Well, a person in his right state of mind should want to. It shouldn't be frowned upon that I don't want to go back to hustling on the streets. You should be happy. Instead of hustling drugs, I'm trying to hustle jobs now, and to work as hard as I can.

While in prison, the way you're living is going to be the same way you're going to live when you come home. We can't say I'm

gonna do the right thing when I go home if everyday while we're locked up, we're running around getting high or scheming others to get by. When you finally get the chance to go home, you're still going to be doing the same thing. I believe that I should practice living my life now in the way that I plan on living my life on the streets. I know it's not easy, but it's important to keep moving forward when you're trying to do right. If you keep doing the right thing, walking the right path and talking the right way, eventually it will become a habit.

We have to stop worrying about what others think of us as long as we don't lose our morals and still carry ourselves like the men we are. Some people are afraid of change because they're scared of being different. If everybody's not doing it, it doesn't feel right. Well, I feel sorry for you because when you find yourself, and you break free and have your own identity, it feels so good to be free and to be known for setting the standards and showing people how things should be done. We respect rappers that set the bars, but we tend to try to follow them instead of seeing the BIG picture. Stand Out From Others.

Rumble Young Man
Edmond Jackson, SCI Forest

I was told that I talk about law too much. Is that why I overturned my case on September 14, 2015? I knew that an injustice occurred in my life and something needed to be done about it. Regardless of how that appeal turned out, I was consistently in the Law Library and still am. I only say that to say I'm not going to let an injustice stop me from unlocking these prison doors. I feel good to keep fighting at the end of the day and the law says I can challenge my conviction and/or sentence. I advise the readers to keep fighting and love yourself. Honor and freedom. Keep a legal mind and believe it will be light at the end of the tunnel. Life is not over yet.

Waiting for Something
Carol Hann, SCI Muncy

Can someone explain to me why there is nothing for the innocent in prison? There is no assistance, no help, no re-entry programs, and no parole. Lt. Governor John Fetterman promised a new pardon application for the wrongly convicted but lied to us. He sent his posse of people out to help the guilty get pardons, transitional help, welfare, and all kinds of benefits to get back into society.

But what did he give the innocent? Nothing. I wrote to him and was ignored. Please stop sending me nothing, and instead send me something. I got nothing. It's all I get. I have so much of nothing that when I get something, I won't have room for it, and I'll have to pass it on to someone else — probably someone that's guilty to enjoy.

Also, why are inmates quarantined for outside trips and the staff is not? Every time an inmate leaves the ground, they get 14 days of quarantine and the staff gets zero. We could not get infected unless the staff brings it in, and they work all over and spread the virus all over. Well, I guess I finally get something: COVID-19.

Thanks a bunch, now can I get my freedom back? Or are we

back to nothing again?

Take care out there. Someday we will get something besides COVID-19, and someone will read our pleas. Until then, gotta go make room for nothing.

Earlenders
Joseph Mander, SCI Somerset

I got the perfect idea for a company. The company would be called earlenders.com

Imagine you need somebody to talk to. You go to www.Earlenders.Com and type in your name, your phone number, and the issue you want to address.

Say that your dog died. After you enter your concern, we (Earleaders) find one of our staff that is experienced, or at least informed and been through that situation before (not all of our staff are dog owners, but we find the right staff member who has dealt with the death of a pet, or more specifically, a dog who has died), and that staff member calls the customer back. We're basically unlicensed therapists who get paid to provide comfort, advice and lend an ear to whoever needs it. Whether it's a divorce, death of a loved one, infidelity, addiction, gambling problem, obesity or betrayal of friendship.

Whatever the problem, we're there to lend an ear. Just think about it!

History is a Necessity
Darrell Ameen McKelvie, SCI Benner

There's an African Proverb that states, "A people without knowledge of their history is like a tree without roots." A person is only as strong as his knowledge; If his knowledge is limited, his perspective is limited.

While at SCI Chester, I attended the OurStory Cultural Awareness sessions taught by the late Mr. Claude A. Green, Jr., who was a volunteer and held sessions every Wednesday evening for 2 hours. His purpose was to build self-esteem through educating the men about the contributions Africans, and African American gave to the world. Mr. Green was called by the men "Moholo" (One old enough to teach) or "Baba" (Father). Culture Awareness's motto is "Each One Teach One" and the theme is "Free Your Mind" centered on Dr. Carter G. Woodson's famous statement, "If you control a man's thinking, you don't have to worry about his actions..." In 2003, he was selected "Volunteer of the Year," at SCI-Chester, and on May 21, Cultural Awareness celebrated their 100th session.

Mr. Green conducted over 400 regular sessions, plus afternoon special events like Mother's Day, Father's Day, Black History Month Programs, and Kwanzaa. Cultural Awareness sessions were always open to the entire population, and reached over 600 men, handed out 150 certificates, and handed out over 4000 pieces of information to those inside and outside prison. The handouts with information that were passed out came from his company OurStory. Outside guests were invited to come in like Thaddus Kirkland, State Representative for Chester, and many

others. Also several state employers from Africa like Ghana, Namibia, Nigeria, Lebanon, and LIBERIA gave presentations. Also handouts were given on How to start a business, finance, home budgeting, and saving.

Mr. Green always stated in his opening presentation, “We cannot teach all of any subject in the time available, but we will try to present enough to get you started on your own.” He also published his own book called, “What We Dragged Out of Slavery” which is a must read.

Mr. Green was an ordinary man who did extraordinary things, and we like to thank Mr. Norman Williams, and Mr. Robert Zankle helping coordinate Cultural Awareness Sessions over the years through the activities department.

The Passing of an Elder Brings Upon Self-Reflection

Damien Mikell, SCI Forest

It's February 10, 2021, 10:34am. My location is State Correctional Institution Forest, Marienville, PA. The global COVID-19 pandemic has been in full rage for over a year.

As I sit at my desk within my living quarters, watching the prison COVID-19 information channel, I was just made aware that an elder of mine, William Abbott, affectionately called “Cool Pop”, passed away on January 19, 2021, presumably from COVID-19 related complications.

“Cool Pop” was 67 years old with the indomitable spirit of a man half his age. “Cool Pop” could always be counted on to extend either a helping hand, listening ear, or simply a few words of sound advice to anyone in need. Just last year, during a special Black History month presentation, “Cool Pop” volunteered his talent and time to play the drums where he dropped on everyone in attendance the mental jewel: “The rhythm and cadence from the beating of the drums were a way for the ancestors of the past to discreetly and secretly communicate with each other.”

“Cool Pop,” you the person, along with your wisdom and wit, will definitely be missed by many.

Today, for the first time in a long time, and quite frankly, directly because of my having found out about “CoolPop’s” unexpectant passing away, I am actually taking time out for myself to sit still and reflect on three (3) indisputable facts: 1: I have been sentenced to die in prison. 2: I have spent the past twenty-five (25) years of my life in prison for a crime that I did not commit. And 3: I have to implement tunnel vision to place a high priority on my personal affairs.

Don't judge me, because if you knew me, you would completely understand the origin and spirit of my above words.

Very quickly, I would like to share with you an encounter involving myself and “Cool Pop”.

One day, while on my way to the chow hall for dinner, I saw “CoolPop” on the walkway and explained to him that I had just received some legal mail and had a ten day window to respond. About a week later, I am walking into the Law Library when I see “Cool Pop” already in the place, sitting at a computer. I continue walking on, extending my regards to everyone I knew in passing. Eventually, I sit down, getting to work. About five minutes later, a young brother walks over to me and says, “Excuse me, I always

see you over here, can I ask you a quick question?”

This question turns into an impromptu, half hour session of Q&A and legal research. “Cool Pop” had had enough. All I heard was “Cool Pop’s” voice, smoothly saying, “Fatty, let me get a minute with you. Don't you have a deadline? Listen, I know you got a big heart, and I know you like helping everybody else. But, nobody's case in here should be more important to you than your own.” Needless to say, I politely excused the young brother and spent the last ten minutes getting some much needed copies for myself. Coincidentally, I had just made the copy cut by two minutes. This encounter epitomizes the essence of “Cool Pop.”

Writing this piece, for strange eyes to see, is the beginning of something brand new for me.

In closing, I end with hopes that, while in quarantine isolation during this pandemic, you take the time for yourself to actually sit still and reflect on the past, present, and future trajectory of your life.

“CoolPop”, I hear those drums, loud and clear. I gladly accept your passing of the torch.

“Cool Pop”, Rest In Peace.

Watch Out For Civil Action No.3:15-1573

Fernando Nunez Jr., SCI Mahanoy

I thought I should inform you that on November 13, 2020, the United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania, denied, in part, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections' attempt to dismiss my claim that the DOC's marriage and contact visiting policies place a substantial burden on my religious exercise and beliefs under the Religious Land Use Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA). As a Muslim prisoner, I am unable to have conjugal visits with my lawful wife, and I can't congregate in prayer with my visitors during contact visits.

I have reviewed the prison policies in other states that allow conjugal visits, such as New York, California and Washington. And after doing so, I believe a strong argument can be made that the DOC should adopt those policies as well.

Taking Responsibility

Earl Smith, SCI Huntgindon

What does it mean? Taking responsibility?

I believe that there's a misunderstanding about what “taking responsibility” means to some of us that are incarcerated. We can take responsibility for our actions, but, how? Just saying you are is not enough. A lot of us that truly know what taking responsibility means know that it's a lifestyle. We have to wear it. It has to come to a point in your life, that you finally wake up and understand that what you did and how you once lived your life was never the way of the human race. The bad thing about all of this, is that, when you do learn how to take responsibility, you're not able to show the world that we are remorseful or that we understand what needs to be done. We, as Lifers, don't get the chance to show the world that we finally are “woke,” we understand the hurt we caused our fellow brothers and sisters.

A lot of us rot in jail without ever having the opportunity to show the world that we changed. So now I understand why people in society fear having those who have been incarcerated come home: because you never hear about the positive changes that the men and women are making within themselves. I believe that It will help us as a community to know that there are some prisoners who have truly become model citizens who are ready to reenter society to help others that may be on the wrong path.

What amount of money is enough? Because, that's part of the problem. It's my duty to take responsibility for my actions, but we need the government to take responsibility for how bad the prison industry is today. There's so much money being made that it's blinding the government from seeing how much they're hurting us.

Let's start reaching out to our government leaders and ask them to start thinking about what will help us become better people, instead of making them richer. If you're reading this And you have a loved one serving a life sentence, reach out to your local state representative or senator and let them know you believe that Lifer should be given a second chance.

Do Black Lives Matter?
Larry Walker, SCI Houtzdale

In 2020, we had a lot of protesting because of white cops killing our black people. This week, a Black man shot seven Black people, and the only thing the Black Community here said was that it was a shame that there were no signs, no protesting, and no marching for those victims of senseless gun violence.

So, before we chant "Black Lives Matter," we have to stop hurting and killing each other, including violence inside Pennsylvania's prisons. All lives do matter.

Our leaders need to start groups or have meetings with stakeholders to see how we can stop our race from hurting each other and start helping each other.

COVID-19 is exposing a lot of built-in systemic racism in America, particularly in Black and brown communities; lost jobs, disparities in remote learning, even in the way vaccines have been distributed. People of color do not need to be causing harm to one another at this time, yet the news reports continually show that my people still have a long way to go to find peace.

At the end of the day, we must embrace "Black Lives Matter" as a way of life, not just as a slogan we can shout at marches. We must use this time to reflect on how we contribute to the problem of violence and stop hurting each other. We must have the courage to respect each other and show peace and love to others. This is the only way we will find happiness in the midst of so much pain and sadness.

Smart Communications
Kevin Schaeffer, SCI Albion

Here are three arguments for why the DOC should abandon their contract and policies associated with Smart Communications:

1) The policies are ineffective.

These policies were put in place specifically to stem the flow of drugs and other contraband into the PADO, to prevent exposure of staff to unsafe materials, and reduce the violence that comes with drug debt. Such harsh measures were justified with accusations of drugs coming in through the mail, through contact visits, or even dropping from the sky by drone. Yet, even immediately after that grueling late 2018 lockdown when mail and visits were halted and the policies were put into place, there was never a significant interruption in the availability of drugs. In fact, according to word of mouth, costs are lower today than they've ever been. In a strange way, the pandemic has provided the ideal vacuum to prove the inefficacy of the 2018 policy changes.

Since March 2020, there have been no contact visits, no outside volunteers, no outside-clearance workers and very few vendors. There is no congregation between blocks in the yard, chapel, education or chow halls. All mail is now scanned remotely, all books and legal mail supposedly screened, and yet, there seems to be ZERO disruption in the drug trade. It seems the primary source for contraband entering PA prisons is currently (and likely always has been) via staff.

Cell searches are still aggressively executed within the prison when inmates are believed to have drugs, and yet the DOC seems unconcerned with policing its own, who callously perpetuate the issues these policies were supposedly instituted to prevent. Inmates continue to use drugs at a high rate, for lack of help with their addictions, or just for lack of anything better to do with their time. People are still regularly removed by medical for having "episodes" from drug use. Debt remains a huge problem too. On a weekly basis, someone is spirited off my block to protective custody for racking up drug debts. Violence related to debts is still common. Inmates with the right connections can make thousands a month on the drug trade. From what I've seen, the 2018 policies have only succeeded in giving a minority of corrupt staff a monopoly on the drug trade.

2) The policies are expensive.

The three-year contract with Smart Communications cost \$16 million. Not included in that is the local cost to each prison mail room, which likely spends hundreds every month on ink and paper to re-print all the scanned materials. Maybe these costs could be justified if they were accomplishing what they set out to do, but we're almost three years into the new policies, and both entities are still regularly losing and delaying our mail, neither are accountable to the inmate grievance process in any way and neither have prevented the flow of drugs into facilities. Especially given the DOC's present budget crunch amid the pandemic, it's certainly worth asking: couldn't these funds be spent in a more productive way?

3) The policies have had a negative impact on inmates and their families.

Inadvertently or not, these policies have unnecessarily strained

and complicated an inmate's ability to communicate with his support system on the outside. Letters are still often delayed by as much as two extra weeks. Lately, even after being scanned to the prison, the mail room has been taking an extra week to print and deliver the mail. Given that, even a simple letter could prove an essential lifeline for a struggling inmate. This extra delay creates undue strain on the state's increasingly isolated inmate population. Smart Communications' tracking system is inconsistent, and their customer service line offers no real help. The uncertainty of a letter's delivery, of its status and location, creates additional stress on family connections and often leads to less overall mail being sent.

Loved ones send inmates books and reading materials, only to often have them go missing at the SPC without explanation. There is still no definitive policy on the time range the SPC has to process our books, and they offer no transparency on the process. If a book is denied, we're given no reason as to why or even an opportunity to have it shipped home or returned for a refund. It's simply gone. The SPC works at an incredible delay, still taking upwards of a month and a half to deliver materials. At a time when inmates are desperate for distraction, denied even access to the library, the SPC drags out the delivery of reading and educational materials, correspondence courses and religious materials, art and music supplies—all items that offer inmates a productive use of their time and chance to work toward self-improvement. Meanwhile, drugs are readily available as an alternative.

The DOC's interlibrary loan network was also dismantled as a

result of these policies, despite the fact that it would be all but impossible to abuse for the purpose of smuggling contraband. Rather, it was often the only resource for an inmate, especially an indigent inmate, to indulge his educational curiosities. For a brief time, the program was resurrected only among PA prison libraries, which drastically reduced the selection available, but even this has ended since the pandemic.

The contact visit experience was also made more austere as a result of these policies, stripping most food and drink options, and limiting movement in the visiting room, despite the implementation of expensive, enhanced security measures (body scanners, more staff and surveillance).

With the Smart Communications contract renewal approaching, and the Corrections budget depleted by the pandemic, now could be the perfect time to raise awareness and maybe even effect a reversal of some aspects of these policies.

For the past three years, we've been told to wait patiently and that the mail process will improve, but it hasn't. There's been no significant improvements since they've first been implemented. Inmates are left without their mail and without answers. The local administration deflects blame. The mail room accepts no responsibility. Smart Communications and the SPC are beyond the inmate grievance chain, and wouldn't compensate inmates or their families for lost or destroyed mail anyway.

Book Recommendations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Appalachian Prison Book Project
PO Box 601
Morgantown WV 26507

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

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

of your letter.

- Always allow at least 90 days for delivery.

Sample Letter:
Wednesday, March 27 2019

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

Thank you so much for your time and efforts.

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

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

Resources

PA State Officials

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

Attorney General Josh Shapiro
PO Box 22653
Philadelphia, PA 19110
P: 215-886-7376

Senator _____
Senate PO Box 203 _ _ _ *
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Representative _____
PO Box 202 _ _ _ *
Harrisburg, PA 17120

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

DOC Secretary John Wetzel
19020 Technology Parkway
Mechanicsburg, PA 17050
P: 717-728-2573
E: ra-crpadowsecretary@pa.gov

Prison Society Mentoring Program

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

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

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

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

FAMM

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

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

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

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

The Prison Society & Broad Street Ministry

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

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

LAMBDA Resources for LGBTQ People in Custody

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

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

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

Expungements

Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity
1501 Cherry Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102
P: 267-519-5323

Expunge Philadelphia
Juvenile Expungement Hotline
P: 267-765-6770

Community Legal Services
Center City Office
1424 Chestnut St.
Philadelphia, PA 19102-2505
P: 215-981-3700

North Philadelphia Law Center
1410 W. Erie Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19140
P: 215-227-2400

ACLU

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

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

Prisoner's Rights

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

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

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

Reentry Services

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

Franklin County Reentry Coalition (Franklin Together)
533 S. Main Street Chambersburg, PA 17201
P: 717-263-5060 ext. 314

Life Without Parole

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

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

Pennsylvania Innocence Project

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

Philadelphia Office
1515 Market St
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Pittsburgh Office
914 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

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

Legislative Highlights

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

FAMM Legislative Update: June 2021

Several important bills to address lengthy probation and prison sentences have been introduced (or will be soon) in the state legislature. So far, though, these bills have not been reviewed or advanced by committees in the Pennsylvania legislature. None of these bills are law yet – to become law, they must be approved by committees, the House of Delegates, and the Senate and be signed by Governor Wolf.

SB 5 – Probation Reform (Sen. Bartolotta)

SB 5 would, if passed, make numerous reforms to probation sentences in Pennsylvania, including (1) banning the use of consecutive probation sentences; (2) capping probation sentences at 5 years for felonies and 3 years for misdemeanors; (3) banning courts from extending probation sentences because a person cannot pay fines and fees; (4) limiting when people can have their probation revoked and be sent to prison for probation violations; (5) capping the length of time people can be sent back to prison for probation violations, and makes these caps retroactive for people who meet certain criteria; and (6) requiring probation to be terminated after a person has served 18 months of probation with no violations.

SB 135 – Life Without Parole Reform (Sen. Street)

SB 135 would, if passed, provide parole eligibility after 20, 25, 30, or 35 years in prison to adults and juveniles convicted of first and second degree murder, depending on their age at the time of the commission of the offense, and who the victim was.

Clemency reform

Under current law, the governor may not grant clemency to a person unless the Pennsylvania Board of Pardons first recommends the person for clemency by a unanimous vote of 5-0. Senators Bartolotta and Haywood plan to introduce a bill that, if passed, would allow the governor to grant clemency whenever the Board of Pardons recommends a person for clemency by a vote of 4-1. This will enable more people to be considered for clemency by the governor.

SB 549 – Expedited Medical and Elderly Release for COVID-19 (Sen. Williams)

Sen. Williams has introduced a bill that would create a 90-day “Temporary Disaster Emergency Inmate Transfer Program” that would allow the Department of Corrections to transfer prisoners vulnerable to serious cases of COVID-19 to a community corrections center or facility or home confinement.

Mandatory minimum sentences for gun offenses

The state Supreme Court struck down mandatory minimum sentences for gun and drug offenses in 2015. Since then, several lawmakers have tried to pass bills that would bring back these mandatory sentences. Several bills will be introduced soon to do this:

Rep. Amen Brown is planning to introduce a bill to create mandatory minimum sentences for people who possess guns and have a felony record.

Sen. Regan plans to introduce a bill (SB 897) that would create a 5-year mandatory minimum sentence for possessing a gun while selling drugs.

Rep. Stephens is planning to introduce a bill that would make the guidelines sentence presumptive when guns are involved in a case, and require the court to explain departures from that guidelines sentence.

Reader Survey

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

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

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

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

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

In-Cell Meal Service Survey

The PA DOC has announced that they plan to continue in-cell meal service after the pandemic, ending the use of chow halls. The Department has said that food quality has not changed with in-cell food delivery and that eliminating chow halls is a change that will benefit people in custody. We want to know about your experience and opinions. We will share the anonymous results from this survey with the Department of Corrections leadership. The more survey results we receive, the louder your collective opinion will be heard.

Please fill out this survey and mail it back to us at:

230 South Broad Street, Suite 605, Philadelphia, PA 19102.

1. Do you prefer food served in the chow hall, or food delivered to your cell?

Strongly prefer food delivered Prefer food delivered Indifferent Prefer the chow hall Strongly prefer the chow hall

2a. If you prefer having food brought to your cell or housing unit, please let us know why. Check all that apply

- a. The chow hall can be hectic or chaotic
- b. You don't get enough time to eat at the chow hall
- c. I have been told we will get more rec time if we continue to have food brought to us
- d. Other (please explain):

2b If you prefer going to the chow hall, please let us know why. Check all that apply

- a. I like the social component of going to the chow hall
- b. I like the movement of getting to the chow hall several times a day. It breaks up my day. c. If something is wrong with the food, you can get new food at the chow hall
- d. There is more hot food when food is served in the chow hall
- e. Portions are bigger when we eat in the chow hall
- f. I oppose eliminating the chow hall because I see it part of a bigger plan for the DOC to take away people's privileges.
- g. Other (please explain)

3. How does the quality of food now compare to food served in the dining hall before the pandemic?

Food is better now than before Food is as good now as before Food is worse now than before

4. How does the variety of food served now compare to food served in the dining hall before the pandemic?

Food is more varied now than before Food is as varied now as before Food is less varied now than before

5. How do portion sizes compare to food served in the dining hall before the pandemic?

Portion sizes are larger Portion sizes are the same Portion sizes are smaller

6. How does the number of fruits and vegetables you receive now compare to pre-pandemic levels?

I receive more fruits and vegetables I receive the same amount I receive fewer fruits and vegetables

7. Have you been served rotten fruits, vegetables or other food in the last month?

Yes No

If yes, what was the food that was rotten:

8. Do you buy more food from the commissary than you did prior to the pandemic?

Yes, I buy more food now I buy about as much food No, I buy less food

9. How much money do you estimate you spend from commissary on food each week?

\$ _____

10. What is your age? _____

11. What is your current SCI? _____ 1

2. What else would you like us to know about the DOC plan to eliminate chow halls?

Prison Reopening Survey

With more than 30% of all Pennsylvanians vaccinated, Governor Wolf has ordered Pennsylvania to ease COVID restrictions starting on May 31, 2021. We want to know if restrictions are being eased at the different SCIs. We want to know what COVID-related issues remain. We will share the anonymous results from this survey with the Department of Corrections leadership. The more survey results we receive, the louder your collective opinion will be heard. Many of you have answered these questions before. Answering them again allows us to show to the DOC what has changed over time and what remains the same.

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

1. Do you feel safe?

Yes No

2. Did you try to access medical care during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes No

2a If you answered yes to question 2, how satisfied are you with the accessibility of medical care during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Very Dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neutral Satisfied Very Satisfied

3. Since the start of the COVID-19 lockdown, have you spoken with anyone from psychological services?

No, have not tried to No, have not been able to Yes

4. Have you received a COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes No

4a. If you have not received a COVID-19 vaccine, if you were offered one today, would you take it?

Definitely not Probably not Probably would Definitely would

4b. If you answered anything other than “Yes” to question 5, or “Definitely would” to question 5a, please circle all that apply.

I am concerned about possible side effects I don't know if the vaccine will work I don't trust the DOC
I don't trust the COVID-19 vaccine It is against my religious beliefs Other:

5. How did you get information from the prison about the COVID-19 vaccine? (select all that apply)

- a. Verbal communication by staff
 - b. Town Halls run by prison administration
 - c. Inmate Info Channel on TV
 - d. Paper Bulletin on Unit Brochures
 - e. I did not get this information
- Other, please specify:

6. How much time outside of the cell (not including yard time) do you get per day?

None Fewer than 30 min 30-60 min 60-90 min 90-120 min 1 20+ minutes

7. How many times did you go to the yard last week?

I did not go to the yard (did not want to) I did not go to the yard (not allowed) 1-2 times 3-4 times 5 or more times

8. How many free phone calls did you make in the past week?

None 1 More than 1

9. In the past week, did you send at least one free email?

No, did not try to No, was not able to Yes

10. Did you get a free video visit in the last week?

No Yes, but bad service Yes, & it worked Does not apply to me

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

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

13. What, if anything, has the prison shared with you about plans to ease restrictions and reopen?

14. What is your current SCI? _____

15. Are you in the RHU?
Yes No

16. What is your housing unit? _____

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

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

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

Name: _____ PPN number: _____

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

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

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