



CAMPAIGN TO FREE SURVIVORS OF (POLICE) TORTURE (CFIST)

The National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression was founded in 1973 in Chicago, Illinois to mount organized action against unjust treatment of individuals because of race or political beliefs. Its founding grew out of the struggle to free Angela Davis from a racist frame-up on murder charges surrounding the aborted attempt by Jonathan Jackson to free his brother, George Jackson and the Soledad Brothers in 1970.

The National Alliance and its regional chapters continue to struggle for justice with a focus on many goals such as by the Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (the Alliance) which has started a campaign to free survivors of police torture, or CFIST. Its goal is to convince the governor to pardon all the people that have been wrongfully convicted, either through false confessions extracted through torture by police, or frame-ups by police using witnesses coerced to falsely implicate suspects and jail-house “snitches”, who lie that suspects “confessed” to them in exchange for favorable treatment.

The immediate demand of CFIST and the Alliance is for the governor to immediately pardon all those whom the Torture Inquiry and Relief Commission (TIRC) has found to have credible cases of police



torture, and for the state’s attorney’s office to move to vacate convictions and dismiss charges against survivors of torture and wrongful conviction. CFIST has provided a database of hundreds of such cases to the office of the state’s attorney in Cook County.

CFIST is also supporting amendments to the TIRC Act (SB2119) that would remove the deadline to file claims (which was in 2019), broaden its scope to the whole state, bring its definition of torture into compliance with the United Nations Convention Against Torture, and open a path to adequate funding to resolve claims within two years.

Freed prison survivors and family members of those incarcerated are the backbone of the campaign, and all are encouraged to come to the meetings, which are held virtually over Zoom twice a month. For information call or email 312-939-2750 or cfist@caarpr.org, or check out its web page on the Alliance site at www.cfist.org. You can also write us at:

National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression
1325 S. Wabash Ave.
Suite 105
Chicago, IL 60605 ■

LOGAN’S CORRECTIONAL CENTER: A WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

By Gabriela J Mims

It goes without saying that this pandemic has caused several tragedies. In addition, it has caused inconveniences for many people, and those in the prison community are no exception to these troubles. Beyond the illness, loss of visitations and commissary, removal of programs and classes that are no longer available to inmates, and even building maintenance are some of the important things that have been stopped or delayed during the pandemic.

The women at Logan Correctional Center in Central Illinois, who are not strangers to poor conditions (i.e., Dwight) have voiced their share of complaints about the living conditions. Inmates have expressed their

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HOUSE BILL 3665: A STEP TOWARD DIGNIFYING INMATES

By Isabella Martinez

On August 20, 2021, Congress passed Illinois House Bill 3665 (The Joe Coleman Medical Release Act).. Its purpose is to ensure terminally ill or mentally incapacitated inmates are provided the right to early release from prison. The bill presents guidelines for members of the Prisoner Review Board in determining whether to grant release, as well as criteria for what qualifies as “terminal illness” or “mental incapacitation”. Given it is not typical for ill inmates to be discharged, this bill is a step toward ensuring the carceral system treats prisoners with humanity and respect in their terminally ill or incapacitated state.

The bill amends the Unified Code of Corrections by modifying

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WRONGFULLY CONVICTED: THE TRUE STORY OF AN INNOCENT MAN

In the summer of 2004, I, Lamar Wilmington, was a 32 year old man with a special education. I was arrested and charged with a murder case that I did not commit. The main evidence against me at trial was a false confession I did not write or sign.

I went to the police station seeking refuge, because a car was chasing my vehicle and shooting at me. On June 13, 2004, I was viciously beaten and shot in the head by a group of gang members. The injuries I sustained after being beaten and shot required multiple staples and caused severe head trauma. It was June 14, 2004, when I went to a Chicago police station for protection from the people that were chasing me, but I was denied this protection. Instead, I was detained by the CPD without a warrant and taken to the Area 2 police station, where I was interrogated about a murder case. The CPD never cared or investigated who was chasing and shooting at me, or who beat and shot me in the head the day before.

Once I was at Area 2, a detective began interrogating me about a murder I knew absolutely nothing about. Even though I kept telling the CPD I had no knowledge about any kind of murder case, he kept insisting I was the one that committed this murder. I was unlawfully detained in police custody and tortured for several days by this detective and other Chicago police officers. The detective pulled each and every staple out of my head as a form of torture, but it was not limited to that. Those staples were placed in my head as a result of being shot in the head days before. I was in excruciating pain, and he had scarred me for life. I am a mentally challenged person who suffered severe head trauma, as documented by both state and defense doctors presented as experts.

The detective tortured me while I was unlawfully detained for several days, trying to force me to sign a written statement to

admit to a murder I did not commit. This detective has a history of coercing mentally challenged individuals into confessing to crimes they did not commit, just like me. I was convicted solely based on my false confession. There is no physical and/or DNA evidence that connects me to this case. I was denied effective assistance of trial counsel for failing to investigate the voluntariness of this coerced confession, and failing to investigate my alibi witness in regards to my whereabouts on March 4, 2004.

The Chicago Tribune article "Polygraphs and false confessions in Chicago" discusses a Tribune investigation which found that Chicago police have long ignored voluntary standards for polygraph exams. CPD also has a long history of torturing innocent Black men in police custody, just like me. The investigation into this case never questioned whether the Illinois State Police Crime Lab handled evidence in this case properly, nor the conduct of the detective who interrogated and tortured me.

Police in the world need to know what happened to me while in police custody, and the torture I experienced at the hands of this detective and other CPD officers.

The forensic pathologist in the murder case I was convicted for never did a proper or complete autopsy of the victim. She never swabbed the victim's mouth or any other body parts for DNA and/or any other evidence. This DNA evidence would have excluded me from being involved in this case. More recently in April 2017, DNA tests were completed. The results came back, excluding me from having contributed to the major human male DNA profile identified in this case. It was not my DNA. I am another innocent Black man who has been framed by the Chicago Police Department for a crime I did not commit, and who has been sitting in prison for almost 20 years as a result. I need help and support.

Sincerely,
Lamar Wilmington ■



Artwork by Rod "Kentucky" Black

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to another edition of Northeastern Illinois University's Stateville Speaks. And by the time you read this it will be a new year. One we hope that is filled with possibilities and promise. While admittedly, this last year was still filled with Covid-sickness and death, still slower than usual mail, loss of visitation, commissary, necessities, programs, and freedoms (used in the loosest of terms), there was some good, namely the release of many long-term prisoners - many who never dreamed they would ever get out. And yes, slowly visitations are coming back.

This past year we have also received such amazing, creative submissions from both our trusted contributors as well as so many first-time collaborators. Whether watercolors or essays, poetry, or drawings, the thoughtfulness of your works are inspirational. The newsletter should reflect this, with perhaps larger, more inclusive editions, but most certainly with

regularity. We also feel that every one that wrote us deserved a response. And it is because of this, actually because of our lack of this, that Dawn and I feel we have taken Stateville Speaks as far as we can with our limited staff of two plus our gifted layout/copy editor. So, with much anticipation, our hope is that your newsletter will be facilitated by a larger staff at the University. While we don't know the details, we are confident that the University understands the importance of this newsletter.

So, at this time we would like to let you know how important all of you, our subscribers, have been to us and how much we have learned from what you have shared with us over the years. Articles, pictures, stories, essays, most of all, your personal journeys. Every time we open an envelope, we have been touched. It was easy to think of the prison and justice system abstractly until we started working with Stateville Speaks at Northeastern.

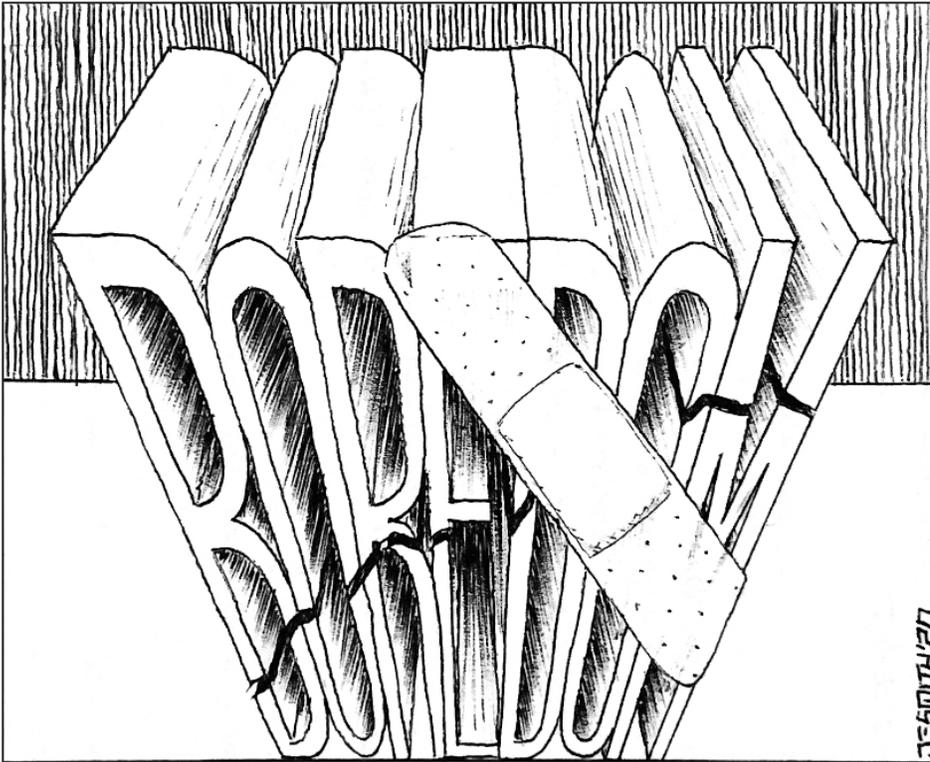
We have learned the justice system is not abstract, it affects most people at some time in their lives, and this has become clear to us while answering letters, reading submissions and during prison visits. Thank you for shining a light on the injustices in IDOC, policing, courts, and the justice system in general and guiding us in our knowledge of the reality of life behind bars.

It has been humbling, seeing the positivity, kindness and support in all the letters that we receive, even when you may not agree with us. You have been patient with our lag time (which is putting it mildly) and kind in your judgement of us. We truly want to thank you for this opportunity, to grow, to learn and to get to know you. It has changed our lives and how we view and assess the prison systems.

Please make this a smart, healthy, and safe new year. Keep the faith and keep your wonderful submissions coming. ■



On the Cover: Thank you to Chadwick Kelly for his thoughtful letter and this stunning piece of artwork shown above. We enjoyed Chad's "Stateville Speaks" word art so much that we decided to use it as the masthead for the Fall-Winter 2021 issue. His artwork had to be cropped to make it work for the front cover, so we wanted to also show his original, unaltered artwork here. ■



Artwork by J.E. Smith

SPECIAL THANKS

A Big Thank You to our two wonderful interns: Gabriella Mims and Isabella Ruiz for all their help and in giving a big push to get this edition out. Not only were they instrumental in helping facilitate the work, but they did also so with such care and compassion.

Gabriella graduated this December with her degree in Justice Studies from Northeastern Illinois University. A veteran and a mom, she has already landed a job working with helping at-risk individuals acquire housing.

Isabella will be completing her degree in Criminal Justice at Loyola University in Chicago this Spring, and while hasn't made the final plunge, she is seriously contemplating a career in law.

Good luck and many thanks! ■

A Real Life Story

By A Lifer

Once upon a time, approximately 65 years ago,
 My life story began, just so you know.
 Mother turned into an alcoholic, as well as a prostitute,
 No this isn't fiction, it's the honest truth.
 Grandparents called the D.F.S. they had seen enough.
 I got sent away, from there it gets tough.
 Placed in foster homes, plus orphanages too,
 Abuse was always constant by people older than you.
 In and out of juvenile, majority of my life,
 Drug and alcohol abuse numbed pain and strife
 No family member contact, until late in youth,
 By then it was too late, led to more abuse.
 An error of judgment, in drug-induced state,
 Led to an incident and a terrible mistake.
 No amount of time will ever truly heal
 Sadness of my heart, not the way to feel.
 Had no grief counseling, no substance abuse intervention
 From Department of Corrections from doing that detention.
 Released back into society, worst state than ever,
 It didn't take long, before this latest endeavor.
 Things took a turn, something I'll never forget,
 Innocent life was taken, to which I regret.
 Now forty years later, not the same man,
 With remorse and sorrow,
 I've been reborn again.
 Not all life stories have a happy ending,
 But pray mine will with a new beginning. ■

This Lonely Stream

By Jon W. Mettler

I sit by this lonely stream, twisting, turning along the valley
 as far as the eye can see, the sandstone canyon extends
 far into the distance lay the snow-covered mountains
 a lone eagle soars high upon the jet stream above me,

Out of sight the stream runs here and there without a care
 the bubbling, churning water keeps my troubles away
 nature is music to my ears as I lay back and sleep
 remembering fond childhood memories, I softly begin to weep,

The birds call to me seemingly asking me my name
 cardinals, robins, and hummingbirds busy with their daily routines
 on their endless hunt for life's necessities to survive
 the daily life and death struggle to constantly remain alive,

The light wind that bristles and whistles through
 in and around the canyon walls
 winding its way back to the open prairies
 along with intermittent waterfalls,

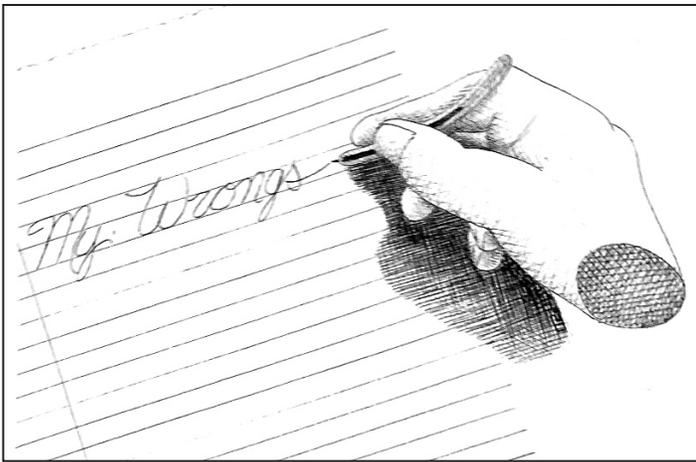
The day seems to have no end
 as I stare up at the light blue sky overhead
 clouds wander aimlessly above me
 off past the horizon, imaginary shapes fill my mind,

I sit by this lonely stream, lay back and once again fall into a dream
 as insects faulty buzz on their way to the next flower
 nature all around, a palette of beautiful color
 inspiring true oneness within myself to expound. ■

There Are Choices

By Terrance J. Williamson

Violence -
Is this the only way paved?
Victims enslaved to an early grave.
World behold the work of Tragedy,
Catastrophe, Evil's masterpiece.
But what if we could make this disaster deceased?
There are choices and ways to many paths,
A walk against Evil's wrath.
People free to live long lives in tranquility
with clarity.
God's masterpiece to master peace.
All to bring Violence down in defeat.
How worthy! This way, let us seek
Make tracks, then set course.
Why not - when you can show the whole world
There are choices. ■



Artwork by J.E. Smith

An Ode to Time

By Leo Cardez

Time is the only constant in the universe – ceasing for no man.
So ubiquitous we forget we're losing more and more of it every day.
And we can never get it back.
An alarm bell rings, another day at work.
Count lights flicker, another night of TV binging.
Then one day we look in the mirror and fail to recognize ourselves.
Wonder when the wrinkles set in or the gray start to appear.
Where did our 20s go... our 30s?
What have we done with our lives?
Would you even call it a life?
But wait, there is hope on the horizon.
Every sunrise is the dawning of another opportunity
– we can reverse course.
To hope. To pray. To love. To give. To change our world.
Lean into the day and ride this crazy rollercoaster screaming.
Times constraints will keep us moored to the safety routine if we let it.
Learn to embrace the darkness of the unknown with a brave heart.
Look time in the eye and dare it to catch you.
And here's the pay-off...
Our spirit will soar. Mind expands. And our legend grows.
Then, and only then, can we say we have truly lived. ■

I Am, But Yet

By Vernon Watts

I am the math solution, yet to be solved.
I am the path of evolution, yet to be evolved.
I am the realization of a revelation, yet to be realized.
I am the vision, yet to be visualized.
I am the King of a Kingdom, yet to be crowned.
I am the founder of the profound, yet to be found.
I am the voice of the voiceless, yet to be heard.
I am the wings for the wingless, yet to be a bird.
I am the words of a best seller, yet to be read.
I am food for the hungry, yet to be bread.
I am the butterfly transformation, yet to transform.
I am Mother Nature's natural son, yet to be a storm.
I am Father Time's timeless watch, yet to be seen.
I am Redemption from the Redeemer, yet to be redeemed.
I am the epitome of growth plus a second chance, yet they still cannot see
I am an Illinois Department of Correction inmate, YET TO BE FREE! ■

Hello World!

I give you (I Am, but, yet) for every inmate who became more than their number. I wrote this poem about progression, but, yet to be progressive due to the I.D.O.C. not honoring their mission statement to (RETURN OFFENDERS BACK TO USEFUL CITIZENSHIP). I been in I.D.O.C. for 20 years with 15 left to serve. I have achieved numerous bible course certificates; I have achieved 7 certificates in various classes from Lifestyle Redirection to Anger Management and I achieved my A.L.S. degree from Lakeland College with two President's List Certificates for Academic Recognition.

I am not professing or proclaiming perfection, because during my incarceration I received in total 10 disciplinary tickets in 18 years; but due to the Truth-in-Sentencing law I will serve my entire 35 years with no opportunity to be awarded Good Conduct Credits for good behavior. I want to know where are the checks and balances for the Dept. of Correcting to see if I am ready to be a useful citizen (or was I ever a citizen)? I am an advocator for rules and when they are broken or violated one must account for their actions, but what about redemption, rehabilitation and rejuvenation when one has abandoned childhood slip-up for man making decisions. Illinois is one of the few states (if not the only) with 5 different sentencing guidelines; C numbers get to see the parole board every 2-3 years, some numbers serve 50% of their sentence, while others serve 75%, 85% or 100%, like me. I'm not asking to open the doors and let all prisoners free, because sad to say, some deserve to be here for lack of self-improvement & responsibility as men/women; but if you check, I promise you will find those who deserve and worked diligently for restorative justice.

In conclusion I would like to cite the holy scripture "Galatians Chapter 5, verse 14 – Love your neighbor as yourself", and remember I am and many others are children of the "most high" like you, but, yet it appears we are only recognized as a CHECK and a NUMBER!

- Vernon Watts ■

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or sponsor an issue, see page 11 for details.

“Hyperbole”

By Carl Moss

‘Twas the night before Christmas
And all down the cell block,
The cons were grumbling because of deadlock.
Stockings were hung,
In the bars getting dry,
And most of the cons
Were trying to get high.
There was hooch cooking off,
And some rocks there to smoke,
But the price of the buzz
Was a serious joke.
Many were dreaming of holidays past
And wishing that this was their last
Christmas away from family spent.
By swearing life changes designed to prevent
The lawless behavior with certain conclusion
That success in crime is but a delusion.
So with my most fervent wish
On this most holy night,
Merry Christmas to all
And to all a good night. ■

The Talk – or – A Different Kind of Talk

By Terrence Williamson

I wanted to tell my son
About the birds and the bees,
But I had to tell him about Covid-19
And the spread of sickness and disease

I wanted to tell my son
He was you and full of life,
But I had to tell him
Death can come at any moment
Even in the middle of the night.

I wanted to tell my son
It’s ok, you have friends and family
Who will stand by your side,
But I had to tell him
Use social media,
Send a text or a tweet
For too many have already passed.
And in hospitals, nobody can be there
When you die

I wanted to tell my son
About many of things,
But, instead, I hugged him tightly in my arms
And speechless, I just cried.
Because besides my love for him,
I was unclear about anything
Even if this was our last time
To say, “Good-bye”. ■

These Hill Correctional Center Prison Rooms!

Willie D. Scales

These Hill Correctional Center prison rooms
Looking up at the sky
Things don’t seem that bad
But from inside these rooms
Things are really sad!

These rooms are called prisons!
And they’re relocked from within!
But people who are on the outside!
Usually find their way in!

Some, because of drugs!
Some, because of street gangs!
Some, because of no hope!
Some, because they like to steal!

Some, because they love to kill!
Some, because of jealousy and love!
Some, because they’ve never been kissed or
hugged!

Some, because they were cold and hungry!
Some, because they were foolish and lonely!
Others, well what can I say?
Maybe God was saving them for another day! ■

-LWOP Means

By Jamal Sharif

It’s a –
Life without Parole Boards
Life without privacy
Life without poll voting
Life within overcrowded penitentiary....

It’s a –
Life without pollution control,
Life without protection from EPA,
Life without professional black mold removal,
Life without pharaoh’s empathy....

It’s a –
Life without presidential emancipation,
Life without public oversight,
Life without potential for good-time credit
Life without paychecks rights....

It’s a –
Life without Prime Steaks & Ribs,
Life without Pizza Hut,
Life without Popeye’s Chicken,
Life without Papa John’s...
Prison food....yuck!

LWOP is ungodly, immoral and
must be abolished for the good of
America as a global leader.... ■

Reality “Don’t” Matter

By Milton Pope

Despite my loud
Cries for mama
I can’t breathe
Here in a land of many
Where my oppressors are knee deep
Discriminating against me
For being Black and free
A human being
Striving hard for
An American dream
Never meant for me
From the homes of Africa
Through the raging sea
Which carried my people
Here in slavery
Words like fairness
And equal justice
Not my reality
When my daily bread
Consists of brutality
My skin color
Such a powerful threat
My only accomplishment
Must be death
All in between
Reality don’t matter
What is right?
What is good? ■

Locked up in Hell

By Steven Shirley

My life locked up in Hell
My life was at a standstill
Locked in a cell with “no”
Choice or place to go
Having to endure this life
It’s hell “but” I still have to
Live it not saying a thing
I still live this hell life
In the hell hole counting
The days till I walk out
Now not having years
But having months till
I go home, “Thank God” ■

United Yet Divided

By Terrence Williamson

The earth was made in one whole
As so were the continents.
Yet time and waters divided them.
The foolish will follow the foolish
Without any regard.
Therefore, broken wounds
Will always leave awful looking
scars. ■

RESURRECT THE GREAT WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS

By Jamal Sharif

America continues to lead the free world in mass incarceration. Following the era of tough on crime policy of the 90's, labeling blacks as "super predators," lock 'em up and throw away the keys. Resulting in the U.S. having 5% of the world's people, but 25% of the world's prisoners. Far more than during chattel slavery.

Historically, we have forgotten the dire warning of President Lincoln's administration. They warned the American people "never allow government restriction on the writ of liberty (Habeas Corpus)". Often referred to as the poor man's writ, because it gave a voice to all peoples against government illegal restrictions. Allowed unlimited filing against theft of liberty. The great Writ of Habeas Corpus was a constitutional principle all racists wanted to destroy in favor of slavery.

Today more than 500,000 of the 2.3 million citizens behind bars in the U.S. are

imprisoned for non-violent drug offenses, a public health issue. Over 40% are people of color. African Americans and Latinos are far more likely to be arrested and prosecuted for drug violations than Caucasians. One in nine African American children has an imprisoned parent, compared to one in 28 Latino children and one in 57 Caucasian children.

In 2015, President Clinton publicly apologized for passing the "Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act" (AEDPA) (pub.L.104-132, 110 Stat. 4214 (April 24, 1996)). (200) supported and signed by President Biden. The worst bill in the history of America producing the mass incarceration of African American youths that even some conservatives want to end. The next morning President Obama became the first sitting president to visit a federal prison, causing the release of over 600 inmates, many serving LWOP.

Clinton's public apology for afflicting

such costly injustice on millions of "have nots" is not enough. To do nothing to correct the wrong of cruel and heinous punishment perpetrated on millions is a crime against humanity and violation of the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Millions of Americans are mostly unaware of this legacy.

Gutting the writ of habeas corpus and sacrificing prisoners' rights for political gain must be repealed. It's a disaster and a major roadblock to shutting the courthouse door on prisoners trying to prove they were wrongfully convicted.

Now is the time for "we the people" to ask President Biden to end the era of mass incarceration. "Mr. President – repeal the AEDPA of 1994 and resurrect the Great Writ of Habeas Corpus back to its historical place in American history" ■



"Protector of Peace" by Don Collins

THE JOHN HOWARD ASSOCIATION

THREE STATE PRISON OVERSIGHT DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC: THE CASE FOR INCREASED TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND MONITORING

December 21, 2021: The John Howard Association of Illinois (JHA), the Correctional Association of New York (CANY), and the Pennsylvania Prison Society (the Society), the nation's only non-governmental organizations dedicated to monitoring conditions in state prisons, release a collaborative report comparing the responses of the prison systems in three states to the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on each organization's unique access to prisons, the report compares how state prisons in Illinois, New York and Pennsylvania performed on measures to mitigate illness and death from COVID-19, including reducing prison populations, testing, use of face masks, operational adjustments, communication, and data transparency.

As this report is based on information collected in different ways from states that often took different approaches to fighting COVID-19, it does not always make like-for-like comparisons. Still, it finds demonstrable links between the different policies and results. For example, Pennsylvania's \$25 vaccination incentive for people in custody is linked to a vaccine uptake rate of 87% in August 2021, compared to a rate of 46% in New York in the same month. Similarly, despite roughly equivalent challenges and budgets, the rate of testing in Illinois far outstripped the other two states. In addition, the report shows how the Illinois Department of Corrections was able to distribute KN95 masks to each incarcerated person on a weekly basis, while other states only sporadically distributed Department-manufactured cloth masks.

This three-state comparison has yielded multiple examples of practices that could be replicated by the other states to bolster their pandemic response. If comparable oversight bodies existed across all 50 states, then many more examples of good practice could have been rapidly and practically identified for replication. Unfortunately, there are desperately few such oversight bodies in the United States. Despite the enormous challenges posed by the virus and obstacles in gaining access, the report represents a relentless determination across the three organizations to understand, analyze and draw attention to critical challenges and to make concrete recommendations to address them. While the development of the course of the pandemic is such that some of the issues are no longer directly relevant, the recommendations speak to the need for a broader cultural



change. Evidence of the fundamental importance of transparency of prison practices and information, both to the public and to the incarceration population, is the overriding theme of this report, explored in the "transparency case studies" and in the section on communication.

For more information on this report, our organizations, and the state of prison oversight in the US please contact:

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The Correctional Association of New York
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The Pennsylvania Prison Society
Claire Shubik-Richards
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Specifics on Illinois

From March 2020 until late March 2021, JHA was unable to monitor Illinois prisons in person due to COVID-19. During this time the organization pursued other ways of collecting information and gaining sight lines into facilities in order to better understand the realities inside our prisons and the lived experiences of people in state custody. While many of our requests to implement remote monitoring practices were denied by IDOC, we were able to find other ways to get data and to hear from people in prison. Notably, JHA was able to conduct a system-wide survey in spring of 2020, yielding over 16,000 responses and 6,000 pages of comments from people in prison. JHA was also able to establish regular, ongoing meetings with IDOC which has led to increased and expedited updates on policies, practices, and issues impacting population. Oversight of IDOC during the pandemic has

revealed the following information:

1. Of the three states in which the organizations work, the most accessible example of a DOC presenting data independently was in Illinois. IDOC's website includes quarterly reports with bimonthly population updates in addition to machine-readable population data sets which can be used by external actors.
2. After repeated requests from JHA, the IDOC COVID-19 dashboard clearly presents data on the number of tests of staff and incarcerated people, along with case numbers. The IDOC also has a clearly defined testing policy available on its COVID-19 page; it appears that this policy and public sharing of it may have resulted in a higher rate of tests being carried out as a percentage of the population in comparison to the other two states.
3. As evidenced by ongoing conversations with JHA, the fact that the organization was able to undertake the first-ever system-wide survey during the height of the pandemic in April 2020, and that IDOC responded to the survey in detail, IDOC has shown a willingness to engage with oversight during the pandemic.
4. Despite having ongoing communications with IDOC administrators, JHA has struggled to obtain adequate responses to some critical requests for information, including detailed COVID-19 protocols.

NOTE: This was a press release that accompanied JHA's 79-page report. To view the full report, go to thejha.org/special-reports/3state ■

SUBMISSIONS WANTED



Stateville Speaks wants to publish your article, poem, essay or artwork. Try to limit articles to around 500 words. Articles may be edited for length. Due to the volume of submissions we receive, work will not be returned. See page 11 for address.

IN MEMORIAM

We at Stateville Speaks would like to offer our condolences to loved ones, friends, and family over the passing of Ron Kliner. The Northeastern Illinois University Alumni died on October 4, 2021. He had been incarcerated for a 1988 murder in which he has always maintained his innocence. He was awaiting an October 29th judicial ruling that may have determined if enough new evidence was presented for a new trial or even a possible exoneration. In addition to a lack of DNA evidence ever linking him to the murder it was reported that he also had a very sound alibi during the murder. There has yet to be an official cause for his death.

Rest in Peace Ron Kliner, rest in peace.

Dear Stateville Speaks,

I am hoping you can print this missive in your next edition.

The Covid-19 virus has taken Jesse Hatch from us a couple of weeks ago, here at Lawrence. I first met Jesse back in the mid-1980's at Menard. He was a member of our Lifer's Inc. group there. Jesse worked in the law library pretty much nonstop in every institution he was in until his demise. He always assisted any inmate who needed his expertise or help. He fought for his innocence for years in the courts, but never secured the justice he sought. Jesse was determined, dedicated, and possessed a never quit attitude.

Brother you will be missed.

In memoriam,

Michael Drabing



Artwork by Sam Jones

LOST LIFE. FOUND LIFE

By Bryant Harvey

See, I understand the reasons people join gangs. I once felt lost, just like some of you. Once you start living that so-called "street-life", you need a sense of direction, the type of direction a father gives. In those streets you don't have that. That's why you join gangs thinking that it will provide the things a father is supposed to, like protection, love, direction, and loyalty, but that's wrong. Gangs can only get you a background, prison time & death! You think if you are not tough in those streets you won't make it, so to prove yourself, you join gangs. You rob and kill innocent people for money or street rep, wrong again! Living in those streets, you will never make it. You will never be successful in life. You start selling drugs, killing, then you end up dead, leaving your family traumatized.

If you don't have a father, choosing a gang to be your father is wrong. Build a relationship with our heavenly Father, he's the best Father any man or woman could ever have. It's not your fault you've been misled or feel hopeless and helpless. It is your fault if you recognize your mistakes and don't do anything to fix them.

I blame our society. Instead of trying to find a solution to gang violence, our society becomes enemies of gang members. They sit and watch kids destroy their lives. I believe if our society would come together and find a solution to gang violence before they end up dead or in prison, we can minimize our youth joining gangs and participating in illegal activities. Empathize. Let's come together and inspire people. Throwing them in prison is not by any means fixing the problem - it is making it worse. Instead of throwing our men and women into jails and prisons, encourage them out of this awful system and into their potential.

Remember, being challenged in life is inevitable. Being defeated is optional. ■

MY JOY RECOVERY JOURNEY

By Leo Cardez

2020 blew chunks. My God did it suck. I lost family and friends to a vicious invisible enemy and almost lost myself in the process. Even a rock will turn to dust with enough pressure. I could see myself falling deeper into the well making it harder and harder to see the light or believe there was any light to begin with. But Trump finally left, and vaccines were going into arms; my joint was slowly reopening.

I got a job working on the COVID wing as a "sanitation specialist." The job gave me an opportunity to leave the cell every day, walk outside, and maybe most importantly, have purpose. I enjoyed moving inmate's property across the vast prison by myself; for a minute I felt free. I saw the facility in a whole new light and began the long journey back with a more balanced mental state.

I started practicing yoga every morning for 30 minutes. It was harder than I thought, and I often felt I looked ridiculous in some of these poses. But within a month I began to see some results, not so much in my physique, but in my thinking. I was less stressed. I was happier. I smiled and even caught myself laughing at a commercial. I was hooked. I even tried the newest fad: meditation. It's been a beast. My monkey mind refuses to settle, but I keep trying.

I find myself looking forward to things again aka HOPE. I want to transfer to a facility with a dog training program. Inmates are assigned a pup to train as service dogs for two years before they are donated to a person in need. I love dogs. I'm a dog person to my core. Dogs not only re-introduce structure and responsibility into our lives, but they also imbue our souls with purpose and love. Dogs offer unconditional love. They do not judge us. I often used to think I wish I could be the man my dog thinks I was.

Today, I find myself dreaming of a better tomorrow. It has been a long arduous journey and I know I am not finished, but I do know I am on my way. ■

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concern for the neglect and poor maintenance in the facility since late last year. A report from the John Howard Association stated that because of the neglect, things are slowly falling apart and have become very unsanitary. The inmates have made complaints regarding leaking ceilings and mold, along with an infestation of rodents and cockroaches crawling on them as they sleep.

Even though there has been a reduction of inmates lessening the overcrowding, the conditions have not improved. In late May of this year, pipes in the facility had burst causing a major flood that lasted for days. Frustrated in the delay in fixing it, three of the inmates started a hunger strike. When word got out that inmates were participating in this strike, a call

for justice began.

A woman, Cassandra Greer-Lee, who is all too familiar with the injustice of the criminal justice system became involved. In a prior, extremely unfortunate turn of events, Greer-Lee lost her husband, Nickolas Lee, on April 12, 2020, due to Covid. He had been detained on a non-violent charge when he succumbed to the virus. When Greer-Lee heard about the conditions she gathered over two dozen activists from the Chicago area to join her to show their support for the women at Logan.

Eventually, the plumbing was repaired, but it created unsanitary living conditions. The leak and subsequent water damage caused mold in the walls and ceilings. The women

smelled like sewer water as they sloshed around in a foot of water in their living spaces, and the smell alone was described as pure rancid. They had to endure these conditions for days.

It is not very common that people get involved in penal affairs, but what Greer-Lee did was show everyone that at the end of the day, prisoners are still people who have rights. The Eighth Amendment states that people should be free from cruel and unusual punishment, which means those who are incarcerated still have basic rights that should not be violated. Even while in prison during a pandemic, we must not lose sight of the big picture. ■

HB3665, from page 1

Section 3-3-1 and creating Sections 3-3-14 and 3-3-15. The alteration to Section 3-3-1 states the Prisoner Review Board has “the authority to release medically infirm or disabled prisoners under Section 3-3-14” (HB 3665, 2021). In Section 3-3-14, the bill defines “mentally incapacitated” and “terminal illness”. “Mentally incapacitated” inmates are those that have any diagnosable medical condition, such as dementia or a severe, permanent medical or cognitive disability, which prevents the inmate from either completing “one or more activities of daily living without assistance” or “incapacitates the committed person to the extent that institutional confinement does not offer additional restrictions” (HB 3665, 2021). The bill adds that the individuals’ mental incapacitation must be unlikely to improve noticeably in the future. An inmate’s condition satisfies the definition of a “terminal illness” if it is “irreversible and incurable” and “likely to cause death to the committed person within 12 months” (HB 3665, 2021). Section 3-3-14 requires the Prisoner Review Board to consider applications for medical release from any committed person who is suffering from terminal illness, has been diagnosed with a condition that will result in mental incapacity within the next six months, or has become mentally incapacitated after sentencing due to illness or injury. The application should be filed by the committed person or by a prison official, medical professional, attorney, spouse, parent, or family member of the committed person with their consent. The materials and criteria for an application must always be available to committed persons on the Prisoner Review Board and Department of Corrections’ websites, which can be accessed in the libraries

and infirmaries of every penal institution.

This section continues, clarifying that the Prisoner Review Board must notify the Department of Corrections within 3 days of receiving the application. The department then sends a doctor or nurse to visit the inmate and create a written evaluation of their condition. This evaluation must be completed within 10 days and consist of their diagnosis as well as whether they meet one of the criteria for early release, as specified above.

Petitioners also have the option to request an institutional hearing. This hearing must occur within 14 days of the Prisoner Review Board receiving an evaluation. At the hearing, inmates may be “represented by counsel and may present witnesses to the Board members” (HB 3665, 2021). The hearing requires a three member panel, where the decision is made by the simple majority and is based on the following factors: the committed person’s likelihood of recovery, their cost of care to the State, the impact their incarceration may have on providing medical care within the Department of Corrections, the likelihood of danger or threat, victim statements regarding their release, and whether or not their condition was disclosed to the judge at the time of their original sentencing. After considering these factors, the panel must decide within 7 days of the hearing (their allotted time is 14 days if no hearing is requested).

If granted, mandatory supervised release of the person should reach at least a period of 5 years. Release should not exceed the aggregate of the discharged underlying sentence and the mandatory release period. The final subsection of Section 3-3-14 notes applying for medical release does not prevent committed persons

from being able to pursue clemency, relief from sentencing court, post-conviction relief, or any other legal remedies. Finally, the bill’s short addition of Section 3-3-15 clarifies that all applications for medical release are at full discretion of the Prisoner Review Board.

This bill is a positive step toward allowing inmates to spend their final time outside of prison. It represents the State’s attempt to give back dignity to incarcerated persons as they struggle with severe conditions or are nearing end of life. Hopefully, the State will continue in this direction. This act ensures ill incarcerated persons may be out of prison in their final stage of life, but it does not rectify the solitary deaths that will occur for those who do not have a terminal illness or mental incapacitation. Thus, future legislation should address allowing inmates who are nearing end of life, regardless of whether they have terminal illness or mental incapacitation, to be released from prison.

House Bill 3665, or the Joe Coleman Medical Release Act, was named in honor of Joe Coleman, an inmate who served a life sentence for robbing a gas station. Coleman, who had terminal cancer and posed no danger or threat to society, passed away alone in his cell while awaiting results for an application of clemency. In his life, Coleman was a respected veteran, father, and president of Lifers Incorporated, which is a program dedicated to raising money for local charities and improvements in Illinois state prisons. Joe Coleman and so many others who have passed away alone in prison serve as a reminder that this bill is long overdue. Nonetheless, this bill being passed is worth celebrating, as it is the State’s way of finally exhibiting humanity and respect toward inmates nearing end of life. ■

THE SYSTEM

By Sharonda Miller

Before the #METOO movement, I believed it was just-i-ee (just I see). After my trial I knew I had become another victim of “the system”. 21 years young and sentenced to 30 years the hard way. That’s at 100 percent, no parole, no good conduct time, no appeal, and no due process.

I often feel like I’m in a nightmare, while awake. How could I have known that saying “NO” to sex would cost me my life?

As I stared down at his .40-caliber pistol, I feared only God, and could not see my life end. As my four-year-old daughter interrupted the fight, I couldn’t fathom our lives ending. Fight or flight takes over you and you survive by any means necessary. And that is where it all began.

Rape or Murder? I had these two choices before me, and I chose neither. May God rest his soul. Truth is, you can never wash the blood off your hands. But God can.

Evidence stacked in my favor; I didn’t have to utter a word. Yet in this cold world as a single black woman, drug dealing, college dropout...how could my life measure up to these prestigious Assistant State Attorneys? White man, drug abuser, sexual predator. I truly believed he was my friend. Well, the system assured me my life was not equal and could not measure up. Not on their watch. The trial was a haze of an all-white jury, some even neighbors and friends of the detectives on the case. Evidence disappearing, the Feds. intervening (indicted my ass, charges unrelated). All to protect their own. I wrote organization after organization for some type of support. Anything? To no avail.

Due Process, who is that? Never met him

along the way. Now after 18 years and 6 penitentiaries (Chattel), I filed a late appeal on my own. See, along the way I met God, and he encourages me to never give up. I never claimed to be a Saint, but a Murderer I am not.

Fight or flight has kicked in full gear and I’m going all in. I began to study the law, and I’ve become a law clerk at 3 of the six prisons I’ve resided in. I invested money

I didn’t have into a paralegal certificate at Blackstone Career Institute, all while helping hundreds access the courts to receive the very thing I desire. Justice.

My hardest task along the journey, if I can

call it that, is to be a mother from behind these walls. Just because I’m off my post does not mean my duty can go undone. I’m a proud mother of my now 21-year-old. Amen. The fight for freedom is still a war I believe will end in my favor. However, it has been a helluva journey. I facilitate groups such as Civic Education, Peer Education, and take college courses to obtain a degree in the near future. Crusaders in this fight alongside myself have been writing proposals for prison reform, equal justice, and we’ve even created a #TEAM FREEDOM! All without computers. So, when I see people that I’ve served time with released on Presidential Pardons, and read the books by Cyntoia Brown and Brian Stephenson, I continue to have faith that God will prevail and that I will receive my freedom and continue to help others receive theirs. I know that whatever my future is will be much better than my past was. AMEN. ■

“The system assured me that my life was not equal and could not measure up.”

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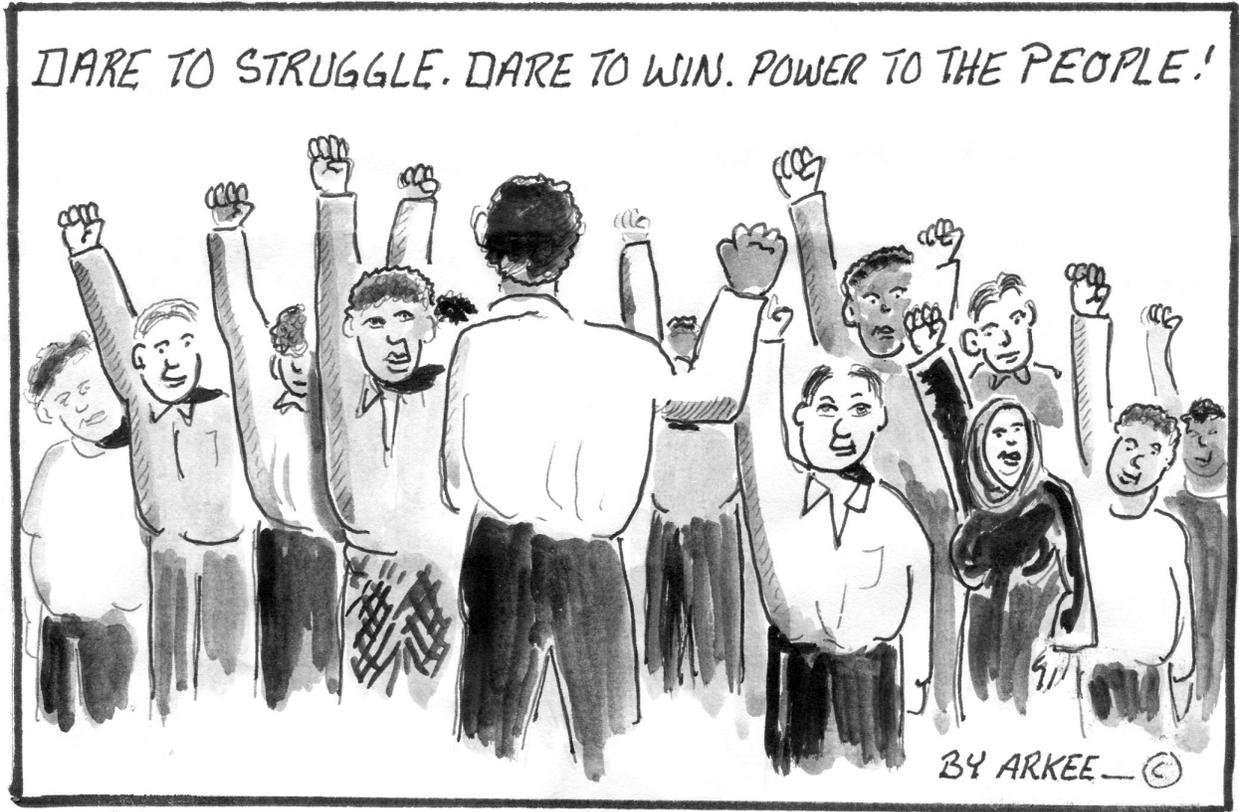
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