



# STATEVILLE SPEAKS

Voices from the inside • Summer 2022



Art by Elizabeth Kruger

## Survivors Tell Their Stories from Inside Logan Women's Prison

By Erika Ray

In October 2021, the women within Logan Correctional Center put on a performance titled "Look At Me" that entailed stories, poems, and declarations about our experiences with domestic/sexual violence and the fight to survive.

Each woman wrote a piece signaling her solidarity to the others in the fight to end generational cycles of abuse. The performance was shared via zoom by the Women's Justice Institute, then followed by a panel of survivors sharing their stories. The event galvanized a community of supporters into opening a new space for more dialogue about changing the way survivors of domestic/sexual violence are seen and treated by the criminal system.

On March 18, 2022, Chicago-based organization The Network held a three-day conference that wrapped up with a panel discussion from Logan prison. For many incarcerated people, it was an ordinary day, with count times, prison meals, work assignments, and day room socializing.

However, it was a significant day for survivors of gender-based violence. I sat with four brilliant women – Janet Jackson, Sharonda Miller, Debraca Harris, and Jeanine Elam. We were all participants in the "Look At Me" performance, and were asked to speak as

experts on what it feels like to be criminalized survivors, what laws need to be reformed, and the importance of having the public hear our voices.

Janet Jackson, our elder, has served more than thirty years in prison. Prior to her criminal conviction and sentencing, Illinois did not have a domestic violence law. Janet shared not only her story of surviving the abuse of her husband, but also the importance of passing HB 4847. If this bill is passed, it would expand the language of the existing law, as well as give time limits for those eligible for relief under the bill.

Sharonda Miller's description of abuse and the cruel treatment by county prosecutors brought her to tears. Miller was sentenced to serve a term of imprisonment in both federal and state prisons. She, like many others who are convicted of a "violent" crime in the state of Illinois, is required to serve every day of the 30-year sentence she received. If Sharonda was sentenced prior to the 1998 crime bill and its implementation at state levels, she would have been free in 2017 after serving fifty percent of her sentence. She spoke about the need to repeal the Truth-in-Sentencing guidelines, and the potential impact this could have on criminal reform in Illinois.

*continued page 3*

# STATEVILLE SPEAKS

## Summer 2022

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**Stateville Speaks was founded in 2004 by Renaldo Hudson and Bill Ryan**  
Northeastern Illinois University Justice Studies has been home to *Stateville Speaks* since 2009.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Voices	4
In Memoriam	8
Poetry	8
Announcements	10
Subscription Form	11
Political 'Toon	12

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### Thank you to our outgoing editors!

This issue of *Stateville Speaks* marks the end of an era and we commend the care, persistence and labor of two women.

Gayle Tulipano, formerly our Senior Editor, was dedicated to this publication, and more importantly, she was a passionate champion for the people whose struggles and brilliance are showcased by *Stateville Speaks*. In particular, we honor her excellent mentorship of Northeastern Illinois University Justice Studies student interns.

Dawn Larsen, formerly our Assistant Editor, tirelessly contributed to the complex logistics of producing the newsletter. Dawn responded to many of the hundreds of letters *Stateville Speaks* receives from people in prison, and like Gayle, she also wrote articles.

We are also grateful to Sal Barry who for ten years performed layout for *Stateville Speaks*. Our community is deeply grateful for their years of commitment and labor.

This is a transitional issue of *Stateville Speaks*. We will be doing fundraising and pulling in different stakeholders to keep it going. You can support us at this critical time by buying a subscription! Stay tuned for more!

*Stateville Speaks* wants to publish your article, essay, letter, poem or artwork in an upcoming issue! Please try to limit articles to around 500 words. Articles may be edited for length. Artwork will most likely be published in color. Due to the volume of submissions we receive, work can not be returned. If you have a topic you would like us to address in an upcoming edition, drop us a line and let us know.

Send letters, submissions, and art to:  
Stateville Speaks c/o Justice Studies  
LWH 4062 Northeastern IL University  
5500 N. St. Louis Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60625-4699



continued from the cover

Debraca Harris' story is an all-too familiar experience for young black women in this country. She spoke about being the survivor of sexual assault at the hands of her landlord, while being abused by her partner. She was sentenced to serve a term of 30 years in custody of the Illinois Department of Corrections without being afforded the opportunity to earn good time, or the possibility of parole. She weighed in on the importance of allowing all individuals in custody the opportunity to earn good time credits to reduce the time served in custody.

Harris displayed great courage when describing her recent court experience. She is one of three women who received relief under the 2018 amended domestic violence law. She and her family relived the hardship of her abuse at each court date as she fought to have her 30-year sentence reduced to the minimum, 20 years. While the court ruled that she was in fact the survivor of sexual assault and abuse, her sentence was only reduced by three years, leaving one to wonder: What worth does Black femininity hold inside of a court room?

I was asked what it feels like to be a survivor of gender-based violence and I could not give a concrete answer. I am still surviving gender-based violence and surviving does not always feel the same. While we are not picking cotton, or suaffering the slave owner's whip, we are experiencing what I call "soft lynching." Judges tie a noose, prosecutors place the noose around

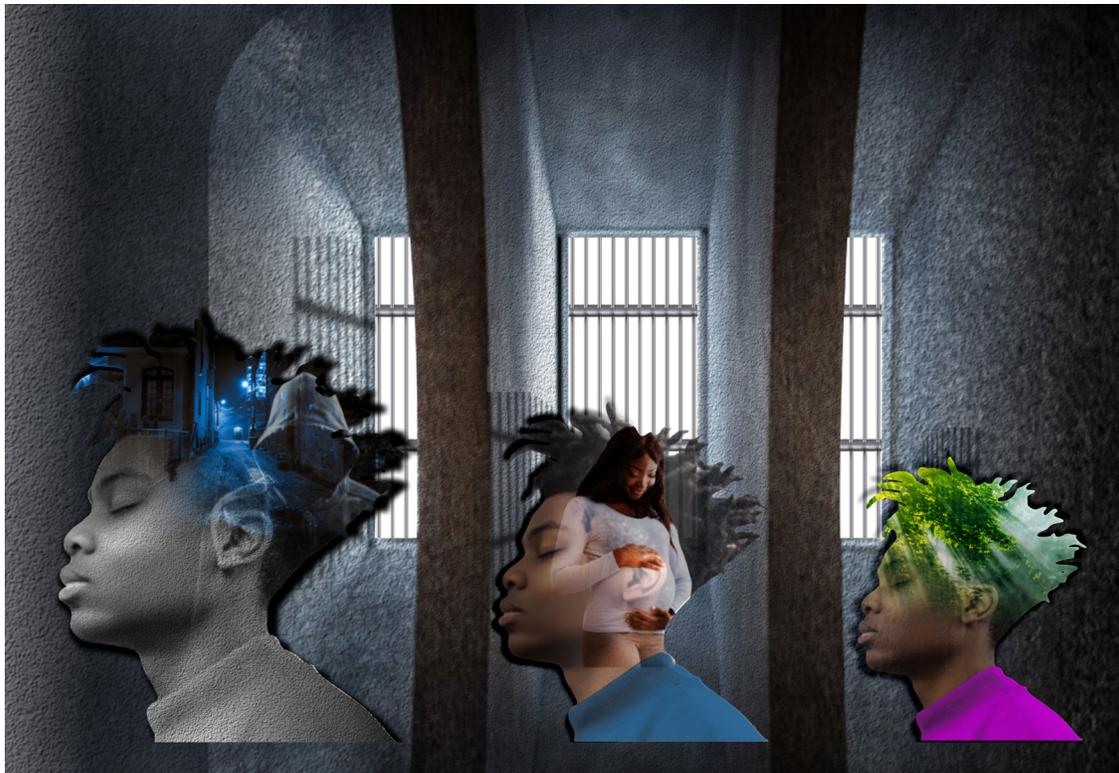
your neck, and prison chokes the life from us. It is death by incarceration.

As women and mothers, we have all witnessed the criminal system destroy our communities. This system has broken apart our families, it has created teen runaways, left victims of sexual trauma, and forced many to seek safety in gang affiliation – all while encouraging the gentrification of the places we once called home. We have had our stories weaponized by law makers and prosecutors, only to have them silence our abuse. When called by the public to make meaningful changes to reform the system, they ignore the harms caused in the past by harsh laws, while holding onto the moments of our worst mistakes.

It is our hope that this panel discussion inspired those who are physically and metaphorically shackled by the system to lift their voices in solidarity with us. At the conclusion, we pledged to fight against lawmakers who refuse to support meaningful criminal justice reform legislation, to vote our racist and sexist judges. The impulse of the American system to silence women is still a reality that we must dismantle.

The Network's vision to open a space for dialogue with us has been a gift, and allowed us to believe that we can begin to dream for ourselves, and it is validation that the power of femininity is fluid, vibrant, and unending. Every day is March 18, every month is Women's History Month. We are the manifestation of awareness, the daughters of freedom fighters. •••

**ERIKA RAY** is a Chicago native, mother, activist, and advocate for women's rights. She is currently a student in Northwestern University's B.A. degree program and an advocate for restorative justice with Northwestern/Moran Center's Restorative Justice Team. She is a graduate of Lake Land College's Associates Degree program. She holds a paralegal certificate from Blackstone Career Institute. She is a certified doula with Chicago Volunteer Doulas. Also a poet and writer, she is awaiting publication of a children's book, "Yasir's Idea."



*"Reflections" by Kenneth Norton*

*This artwork was included in a recent art exhibit titled Reckless Law at the Krannert Art Museum at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*

*"We all find reflection in our lives whether bad or good. In fact, I feel reflection is a third eye necessity – a spiritual component if you will. In the midst of our darkness, let us reflect most that we transition into a marvelous light from which we came."  
– Kenneth Norton*

## The Right to Vote Should Be Available to Everyone – Including Prisoners Like Me

By Joseph Dole

People in prison often begin their life in marginalized communities where their families' right to vote has historically been suppressed. Today, voter suppression of those communities is again on the rise. The fact that people are actively trying to legislate additional hindrances to already marginalized communities' right to vote highlights the need to ensure the right to vote for all of these communities' members – even if they are in prison.

This is especially true because, once convicted, their imprisonment further marginalizes them from society. In Illinois, where I'm incarcerated, everyone in prison is completely stripped of their right to vote until release. (For the thousands of people sentenced to die in Illinois prisons, this is a lifetime denial of the right to vote.)

As someone who has been sitting in prison for the last two decades, I know the full effects of being disenfranchised. It leaves us vulnerable to a voting public that has almost zero concern for our welfare, and deprives us of both a voice in society and what could be a powerful tool to facilitate our return to useful citizenship.

Fortunately, the organization Chicago Votes has been working to pass Senate Bill 828 in partnership with State Representative Lashawn Ford. If passed, this bill will restore voting rights to the roughly 30,000 individuals incarcerated in Illinois prisons, including me.

Those of us in prison are severely affected by our inability to vote. First, judges in Illinois are elected. For decades, getting elected required promising to be, or proving they were, "tough-on-crime" – meaning they would, or were, handing out overly harsh prison sentences. Those judges never had to worry about the victims of those harsh sentences voting against them in the next election, because prisoners do not have the right to vote.

This continues today and affects all of one's appeals and resentencing hearings. Moreover, the inability to vote means we can't vote for fair-minded judges who will protect our rights in civil court, nor vote against judges who openly discriminate against petitions filed by people in prison.

Second, most legislators don't view anyone in prison as their constituents simply because they can't vote. This is true whether they were a constituent prior to incarceration or whether the prison is in their district. If legislators don't need to court the votes of people in prison, it ensures they are unlikely to take their concerns or viewpoints into consideration when passing legislation.

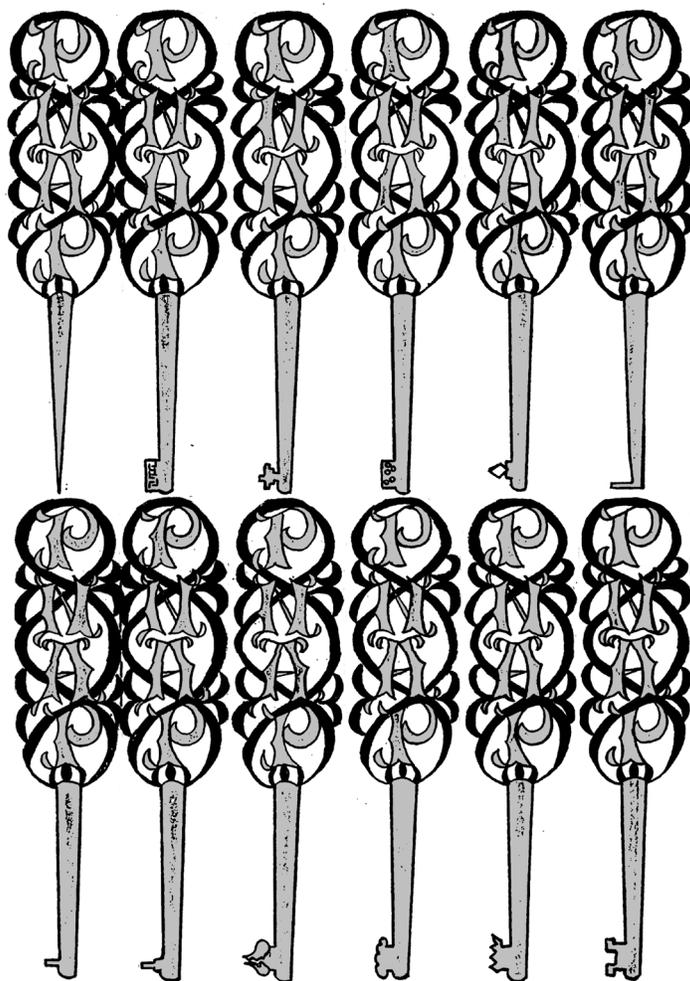
That simple fact greatly contributed to the passing of tougher and tougher sentencing guidelines, and also ensures that to-

day's "reforms" of those extreme sentencing laws won't help the currently incarcerated.

Thus, for numerous reasons the disenfranchisement of people in prison helps to ensure that they serve more time in prison. This does not serve any true penological or public safety goal. Rather, it largely just serves to benefit the personal political careers of judges and legislators, many of whom have already retired. Therefore, those in prison have a serious liberty interest in obtaining the right to vote.

The fact that people in prison can't vote for state legislators also leaves them extremely vulnerable to abuse by the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC). Legislators constantly cater to the guards' union because they are a powerful voting bloc. This allows them to get legislation passed that is beneficial to prison guards, but detrimental to those of us in prison. This has negatively affected everything from our right to access public records, to our ability to peacefully protest inhumane living conditions via hunger strikes.

We are also captive consumers at the "mercy" of monopolistic companies that routinely engage in price-gouging and other anti-competitive business practices – all to the detriment of the incarcerated. Additionally, the IDOC adds unnecessary, and unjust surcharges, or increases prices by demanding kickbacks or "commissions." This too is at our expense.



"Lock Pick Set" by Carlos J. Ayala  
Prison + Neighborhood Arts/Education Project (PNAP)

Without the right to vote, this is effectively “taxation without representation.” Thus, people confined to the IDOC were not only exploited by yesterday’s “tough-on-crime” politicians and ignored by today’s “reformers,” but are continuously exploited financially throughout our incarceration.

People in prison are also largely prohibited from earning a living wage, and are often forced to work for pennies per day with no days off for months on end in unsafe working conditions.

Being disenfranchised means we cannot vote for legislators who will look out for our interests — who will pass laws to stop our exploitation, require a living wage for prison labor, ensure we receive adequate medical care, have access to educational programming, and more.

Society has this misconception that people in prison are “anti-social” or hell-bent on destroying society and should therefore not be allowed to vote so they can’t “poison the system.” Nothing could be further from the truth, though. Don’t get me wrong; society’s constant efforts to marginalize, ostracize, oppress and discriminate against the incarcerated definitely doesn’t help engender strong ties to society; but despite all of that, ties to the community usually remain.

That’s because no matter how much society dehumanizes us, we remain just that — human. We are human beings with families and friends out in free society that we care deeply about. I myself am a son, father and grandfather. My right to vote, if restored to me, would be exercised primarily in support of my family’s safety and economic well-being.

My vote for candidates would also probably be much more informed than the average citizen’s, due to the fact that I have the time to research both the candidates and their stances on the issues. Moreover, I have the time to get a real understanding of the issues and not just vote along party lines or for someone who spouts the best misleading rhetoric.

People in prison also have a ton of experiential knowledge that can be used to help heal societal ills. We not only have firsthand knowledge about injustices embedded in our legal system, but we also have firsthand experience with oppression and being at the “mercy” of unaccountable agents of the state. For many people who come to prison, this makes us acutely aware of the injustices other people suffer and allows us to relate with empathy.

This is a significant factor not only in why people personally impacted by mass incarceration are at the forefront of the movement to decarcerate, but also why people who leave prison often get involved in working for nonprofits, become “violence interrupters,” fight against racial discrimination, corruption, and more.

Denying someone the right to vote is an extremely dehumanizing act. Rather than further ostracizing people in prison — the majority of whom will return to their communities someday — society should work to increase people’s attachments to society.

Restoring people’s right to vote while in prison would go a long way toward engendering feelings of belonging to society. This would both make it more likely that the incarcerated would work

towards the betterment of society, and increase the likelihood that they will be “returned to useful citizenship,” as our state constitution insinuates should be the goal.

The right to vote should be available to everyone, incarcerated or not. . . .

*Originally published in Truthout, Oct. 24, 2021. Reprinted with permission. This article has been slightly updated at request of the author.*

**JOSEPH DOLE** is currently serving a Life-Without-Parole sentence for a crime he did not commit. He is a published writer, artist, and activist, has been incarcerated for over 22 years, and spent a decade in the notorious TAMMS supermax prison. He recently received his Bachelors Degree from NEIU/UWW, focusing on Critical Carceral-Legal Studies. He is co-founder and policy director of Parole Illinois, an organization dedicated to abolishing long-term prison sentences. See more of his work on his Facebook page. He can be contacted at [JosephDole4paroleillinois@gmail.com](mailto:JosephDole4paroleillinois@gmail.com) or Joseph Dole K84446, Stateville C.C., PO Box 112, Joliet, IL 60434.

## HB4847 Would Give a Voice to Survivors of Gender-Based Violence

By Janet Jackson

When I went to trial in 1986-87, I was shocked by a judicial decision that I could not present evidence of my 10 years of abuse at the hands of my husband. My expert witnesses could not testify. At sentencing, I was only allowed to speak about my last year of marriage, the year we were separated. A bill advanced by Women’s Justice Institute and sponsored by Rep. Kelly Cassidy, HB4847, would change all that.

Currently pending in the Senate, after passing in the House, HB4847 would give domestic violence victims a voice after many years of being silenced by the system. At present, HB4847 is in committee and looking to be put on the floor for a vote in November.

HB4847 has three major parts. The first part would allow all those who were not permitted to present evidence of domestic violence the change to be reconsidered for mitigating sentencing. The crime remains the same, but the sentence can change. This compliments the federal domestic act of 1994.

The second and most important part for those currently incarcerated is a waiver of the two-year limitation in the relief of judgment clause. For the incarcerated, it means we will be able to file in court despite having been locked up for decades. We will be given a voice.

The last part of HB4847 concerns accountability in cases of domestic violence. It states that if a person was forced, coerced, or threatened into committing a criminal act by another they are

not accountable. For example, Jack beats Jill and threatens to kill her daughter if she does not help him rob a bank. Jack then forces her into the car at gunpoint and away they go. Jill is too scared to call the police who have not helped her in the past. This change in the accountability law could release Jill if she can prove her actions were forced. Jill would file under the relief from judgment act and the two-year waiver would apply.

As one can tell, HB4847 is not just for the person who killed their abuser. It speaks for the person who suffered violence at the hands of another, was forced to commit criminal acts and now is incarcerated as a result of this abuse. HB4847 also includes gender-based violence to include persons who were sex trafficked and those who suffered violence at the hands of another who was not an intimate partner.

What can you do to help pass HB4847? You can write as many senators as you can encouraging them to vote yes. Your law library should have a list of their addresses. Remind them that passage of this bill is not a "get out of jail free" card, but instead giving a voice to victims of violence. It does not guarantee any relief or change in charges. You can also ask your family, friends, and loved ones to contact their senators. Lastly, share this information with others. We are stronger united.

Let's not lose this opportunity and waste precious time. Get started now and we can get HB4847 passed! •••

**DR. REV. JANET JACKSON** is an writer, paralegal, and advocate who has been incarcerated for 36 years. She has an M.S. in Divinity, she has been licensed and ordained since 2011. She has a Ph.D. in Christian Counseling and Theology. She is a survivor of domestic violence who believes that together we can be the change.

## Prison Guards in Illinois Used Prison Labor to Raise Money for Golf Tournaments

By Brian Dolinar

A recent investigation into the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) revealed that prison guards there have been using incarcerated individuals to wash their personal cars, give haircuts and shine shoes at fundraisers to benefit the prison staff – in other words, they have been using the labor of incarcerated people for their own personal gain.

One senior IDOC staff member admitted to state-employed investigators that these fundraisers were "bad optics."

"It's really hard for me to just honestly stomach the idea," he told an investigator, that "employees benefit from offender labor."

This information came to light after an anonymous individual at the Pinckneyville prison filed a complaint in 2017 alleging that guards had improperly raised money for the so-called Employee Benefit Fund (EBF), established to provide various perks for prison guards, including birthday parties, Christmas parties, funeral

flowers, retirement gifts and Employee Appreciation Week.

The complaint then triggered an investigation by the state's executive inspector general's office. Whether the complaint was filed by a staff member or a person incarcerated at the prison is unclear.

Once it was underway, the investigation soon found that the issues raised by the complaint "may not have been unique" to Pinckneyville. EBFs existed at all of the IDOC's 25 adult prisons, and administrative headquarters in Springfield, bringing in almost \$1 million in 2017.

As the senior IDOC employee told an investigator, he believed that the EBFs had become more prevalent because the current administration was "pushing to improve employee morale." The EBFs were found by investigators to be open to potential fraud, and some included illegal raffles. Then-Acting IDOC Director John Baldwin feigned ignorance of the EBFs when questioned during the investigation, and said he had "no issue" with the use of prison labor.

### Fundraisers Were a Flagrant Violation of IDOC Policy

IDOC policy requires that EBF funds only come from purchases made by guards from vending machines and commissary (a store inside the prison with food, hygiene products and office items for sale). But during 2012-2017, the period being investigated, the majority of revenue for EBFs came from other sources. In 2017, 80 percent of the nearly \$1 million raised for EBFs in Illinois prisons came from fundraising efforts. A small but not insignificant fraction of that money was raised through the use of prison labor. Between the fiscal years of 2016 to 2018, fundraisers at 18 facilities using prison labor brought in a total of about \$56,300.

The EBFs have been a "longstanding tradition" in Illinois prisons, IDOC Chief of Staff Edwin Bowen told investigators. Bowen started working for IDOC in 1988, and his colleagues had told him EBFs had been around since the 1960s. According to the investigation, Bowen "opined that they are necessary to ease the pressure that corrections staff are under." The wardens oversee the EBFs at their own prisons and do not report to anyone. The EBFs had probably been outside statutory authority "forever," Bowen guessed.

Investigators interviewed EBF committee chairs at the Pinckneyville prison, and IDOC headquarters in Springfield. The chair at Pinckneyville confirmed that they held car washes, and that incarcerated people "sometimes" washed cars. In an attempt to justify this, the chair said incarcerated workers were paid for their labor, and that "they can refuse." Records showed that the Pinckneyville EBF raised \$5,923 between January 2016 and July 2017 from car washes. They raised an additional \$402 from shoeshines.

At the IDOC's administrative offices in Springfield, according to the committee chair, prison guards held car washes twice a week to raise money for their EBF funds during the warm seasons. Workers were brought from nearby Taylorville and Jacksonville prisons. As the EBF chair in Springfield confessed, the fundraisers largely benefitted "employees whose cars are washed."

## A System Ripe for Abuse

In Springfield, the EBF spent about \$30,000 a year on Christmas parties for employees. There were typically 300 people in attendance, both employees and their guests. In 2016, the hotel rental cost alone was \$19,581. Other expenses were for food, beverages, a DJ and prizes. In 2016, the EBF gave out a total of some \$8,000 in prizes. A check was written to the EBF chair for \$6,100 in cash prizes, almost half of which was given to the Employee of the Year and nominees. Such a system, the investigation concluded, was “ripe for fraud or abuse.”

While the EBFs are supposed to benefit all prison employees, they were sometimes used for individual guards’ entertainment. For example, the EBFs were used to pay for teams of four to play in golf tournaments. Pinckneyville’s EBF covered half of the \$300 entrance fee for its team to compete in a golf scramble held in June 2017, a benefit for the Employee Benefit Fund at Menard prison. Dixon’s EBF sponsored the \$320 entrance fee for a team, and Springfield’s EBF paid \$640 for two teams to participate in the same tournament held in 2016.

Prison staff were permitted a significant amount of staff time to organize these benefits. For the 5K race at Menard prison, it was found that the EBF chair sent almost 600 emails related to fundraising in one month.

Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker’s office sent out a letter on January 8, 2020, in response to the investigation, establishing new guidelines for EBFs. IDOC Chief of Staff Bowen, who oversaw the funds, received a 30-day suspension which he appealed and had reduced to 15 days. •••

*Originally published in Truthout, Apr. 17, 2022. Reprinted with permission. A full version of this article can be found online at Truthout.org*

**BRIAN DOLINAR** is an independent journalist based in Urbana-Champaign.

## Guard Found Guilty for the Killing of Larry Earvin at Western Illinois Prison

By an anonymous person incarcerated at Western Illinois Prison

*Editors’ note: In a federal trial that gained national media attention, a jury found officer Alex Banta guilty for the brutal beating of Larry Earvin, a 65-year-old Black man, at Western Illinois Correctional Center. According to reports, Earvin was assaulted by 13 guards in a corridor of the prison out of sight from cameras. Only three guards were charged. One plead guilty and testified for the state. The jury was undecided on charges against a third supervising officer. At the time of his killing, Earvin was just months away from his release date.*

Nothing has changed since Larry Earvin’s death in 2018. It’s the same culture. When the guard lost the trial, there was a sense of jubilation, a sense of relief. But there’s more a sense of wanting change, in terms of the harassment, and the constant badgering of prisoners. Here’s what I mean, let me give a background.

I’ve been incarcerated 25 years, I’ve never have had ticket, I’ve never done time in solitary. When I came here I started running into problems, and that’s because the culture from the officer’s standpoint. It’s not all of the guards. But there’s a group of people who feel like it’s their job to antagonize and harass individuals. Over the COVID period, there have been many assaults, until one officer was stabbed, because of the constant belittling.

A lot of people want to change, but there’s a culture of people who don’t want us to change. They want us to continue in a cycle of violence and crime. They don’t want growth.

What happened to Larry Earvin is what happens to a lot of prisoners. They have jumped on a lot of people in that area out of sight from cameras. In fact, guards bait you into that area. They just happened to kill Larry Earvin that day.

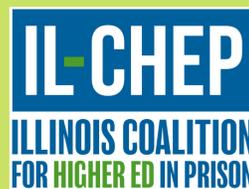
It was good we got justice for Larry Earvin, but more important, we want an institutional change in the mindset, we want the guards to be professional, follow the rules. We don’t want them to antagonize us. •••

## Submit ILLINOIS Educational Stories

### About IL-CHEP

The Illinois Coalition for Higher Education in Prison (IL-CHEP) is a coalition of programs and educators dedicated to providing quality higher education opportunities for people who are incarcerated in Illinois. We strive to support our students as they build meaningful lives and prepare for a successful future in civic life.

Equally important, we support and are engaged in public dialogue, policy, and action to end our state’s and country’s reliance on incarceration.



For more information please visit:  
[www.ilchep.org](http://www.ilchep.org)

### We want to hear from you!

Submit your stories and your experiences with higher education or college in prison programs. We want to hear from anyone, including those who want to participate in college programming but who haven’t had the opportunity to do so. We want to share your stories to benefit current and future students in higher education programs.

### Please include:

- Stories about your overall academic journey
- Challenges you’ve faced
- How educational opportunities have impacted (or will impact) your personal life and those around you

### Send submissions to:

Illinoischep@gmail.com  
or  
Adler University  
Attn: Flor Esquivel  
17 N Dearborn St, Chicago, IL  
60602

\*By submitting your story, you agree to permit IL-CHEP to publicly display your submission on various platforms that include but are not limited to: our website, social media channels, reports, and/or campaigns. IL-CHEP may use your story to promote and expand Illinois higher education programs for current and future students. We appreciate your submissions, but may not be able to respond to each individual.

## In Memoriam

# Gregory Koger



Gregory Koger, who did ten years in Illinois prisons, half of the time in solitary confinement at Pontiac prison, died March 2020. He was found dead in his apartment in Rogers Park by close friend Brian Nelson, now also deceased. Greg was a revolutionary. He participated in the 2014

rebellion in Ferguson. In his last years he worked on his unpublished manuscript, "Cell Block Dreams," from which the poem "Panorama" is taken. He established a non-profit to provide mental health treatment for those like himself who suffered from solitary confinement in prison. He ultimately succumbed to the trauma from his own years of incarceration. Greg will be remembered by those who knew him as someone who embraced the free world with every inch of his being. He is deeply missed.

## Panorama

By Gregory Koger

On a bed of cool grass, a panorama of light blue fills my vision, watchtowers on the periphery as continents of clouds drift slowly across. Miles and miles of refreshing pastel colors soothe my soul. Twenty feet away, groups of brothers breathe heavily as they heave hundreds of pounds of iron on the weight pile. My mind aloft beyond the atmosphere, past planets and asteroids, galaxies and nebulae, pondering the vastness of the universe above the razor wire and out of reach of the gun towers.

# Lauren Stumblingbear

Family and friends are saddened by the loss of Lauren Stumblingbear aka "Bear." Paris Knox remembered her: "Bear was a wonderful person. I met her in prison. She was the light that lit up the room. And so talented. I'm so honored to have been in her presence in prison and out."

Lauren's art is featured on page 9.



## Poetry

# GREATER LATER

 by Crushion Stubbs

If you listen hard enough, you can hear hummed prayers underneath dark clouds on the barbed wired fence side of town  
Where men are found, sidelined and confined by design,  
passing, "duck when shots are fired" signs  
Screamed at to, "get in line!" Self is what they seek to find, in the meantime, just trying to get by  
In brick-and-mortar headquarters, dialing home for Western Union money orders  
Longing for their sons and daughters, within borders nicknamed, 'Blindman's Retreat'  
Because if "the show" is in the free world, then they've got cheap seats  
So, on cheap sheets they seek sleep which only bespeaks their situation is much sadder  
Than those forced smiles in their prison photos because they know this is no laughing matter  
On any scaling ladder, this is brutal, as recipients of appeal refusals  
And lunch bags of spoiled meat, so they're forced to eat cheap noodles  
Often accused of complaining, when really, they're just explaining  
And exposing a part of the game that nobody wants to claim  
Because the more things change, the more they stay the same  
Every time a bus came, they'd proclaim, "on the new!"  
Searching for faces they knew, recognizing they felt confused  
Thinking, "this ain't you.... these bricks, this bit, this ill fit"  
Feeling as if, "something's got to give, and give quick!"  
Homesick, trying to be strong for so damn long  
Mama's starting to wonder, where in the world she went wrong  
But all along, they know they're the cause to start and stop it  
As hard as it is to admit, they know they're the cause that got 'em cellblocking it  
Watching clocks tick, while living in these bad conditions  
And tight positions, where they've got all these ghetto children hidden  
If at night you listen, you can hear men repent, through the vents,  
Crying, "should've, would've, could've, and if" trying to make sense of past tense  
Feeling sick in the belly of the beast, the depths of hell  
Whoever named this bitch, named her well  
They dwell with sharks in this concrete fishbowl  
Black and Latinos, seeing less and less, of more and more  
Slowly feeling the hardening of their heart beginning to start  
Anger sparked, while sticking mirrors through cell bars  
Caterpillars, praying to come out butterflies  
On appeals, changed laws, bills and alibis  
Institutionalized, given decades to sit still  
Because they feel, "if you can murder, then here's some time to kill!"  
When you can feel the chill from prayers made from despair  
You'll recognize them clear because they'll sound like this here  
"Lord, if this is fate, then what I speak is an eighth  
Of what takes place on the roughest piece of real estate  
My mouth, full of prayers, bricks, by the layers,  
If it doesn't get worse first, its gon' get greater later!"

## Inside the Belly by Orion Meadows

I'm inside the belly, but it's no folk tale.  
It's the reality of being confined within a prison cell,  
and on the gallery throughout the day the convicts  
scream and yell.  
Go ahead, ask me what it's like, my response – it's  
nothing short of a living hell.  
Yes, inside the belly is where I reside  
Where the organs of men still function, but their  
hopes  
and dreams have died,  
as the minutes and hours pass turning into months  
and  
then years,  
and the passage of times marked on the canvas of  
face the consequential sorrow emblemized by their  
tattoo tears.  
I'm inside the belly of the beast with no heart  
that swallows the prey mercilessly and gnaws on it  
incessantly until it rips it apart.  
For in the belly, sympathy does not live,  
and despite what catechisms teach us, the beast  
does  
not forgive.  
Right here in the belly is where I have been in the  
number of the ostracized and the most unfortunate  
of  
men,  
some unjustly in fetters, others rightfully so for  
their sins  
sentenced to abide in irrelevance and mediocrity  
over  
and over again.  
Yes, I'm inside the belly, the place which has many  
names – the can, the slammer, the joint.  
Call it whatever you wish, it doesn't matter it's all  
the  
same.  
For I dwell in the realm of shadows and perennial  
pain  
with my mind set on that great moment when this  
old  
beast shall be conquered and slain.

Submit your poem or artwork to *Stateville Speaks!* Send submissions to:

**Stateville Speaks c/o Justice Studies  
LWH 4062 Northeastern IL University  
5500 N. St. Louis Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60625-4699**

Due to the volume of submissions we receive, work can not be returned.

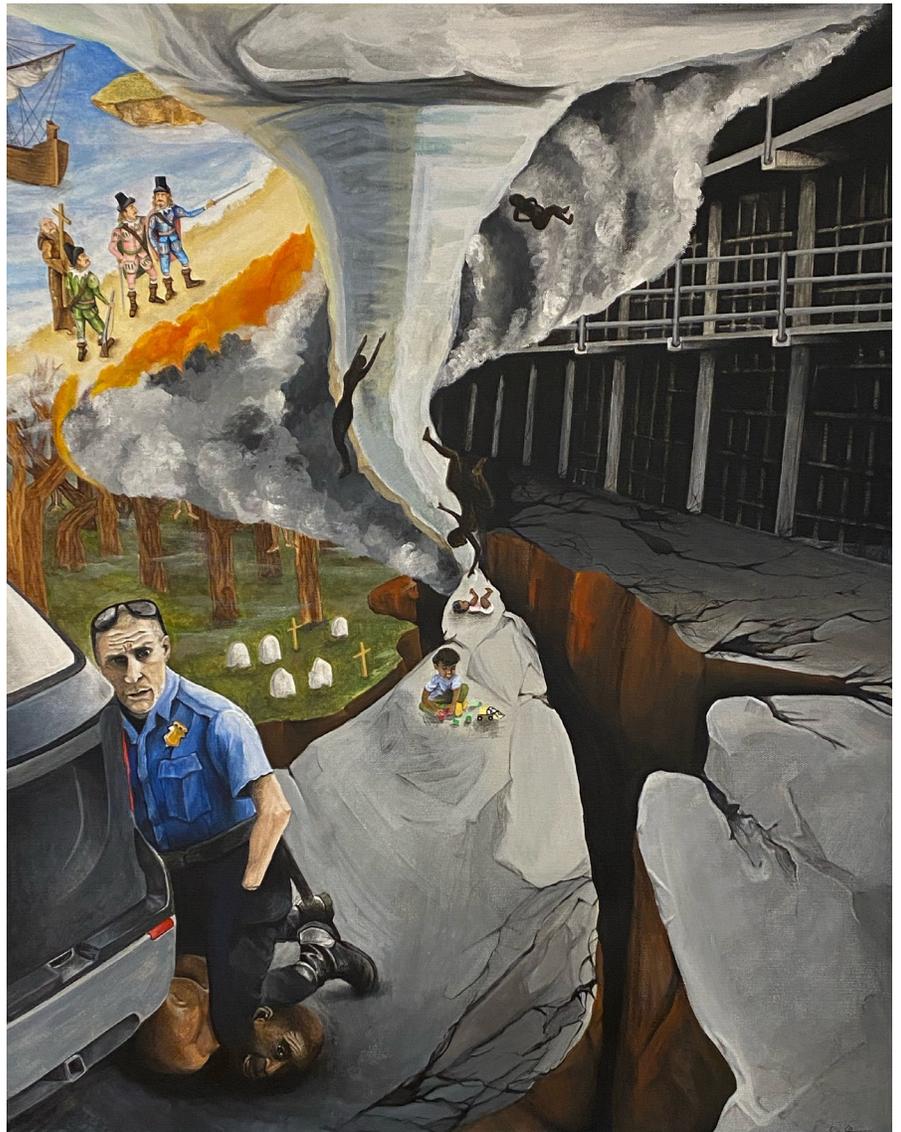
## Dear Black Youth by Willie D. Scales

Your struggles

God loves all Black youths! You are super special to him!  
Help each other take pride in each other's victories.  
Take time to love one another through all the difficult days.  
Maintain a positive attitude no matter what the circumstance.  
The only way things are going to change is if Black youths  
make some conscious and collective efforts to make  
it change today.

Black youths must become great Black people!  
I'm serving a natural life sentence. I got 38 years in.  
Keep your freedom! Today prison life is pure hell.  
Get your education. Stay out of prison.  
Satan wants you to kill each other, because you are all god's children.  
Take care of the old people who live in your hood.

One day you will be old.



Art by Lauren Stumblingbear

# Announcements

**Support Families' Right to Estate Equity (FREE) Act (SB3098/HB4490)** By Crushion Stubbs, Civic Engagement Organizer/ Fully Free Campaign/First Followers Reentry

Did you know that current law prohibits anyone with a felony conviction from serving as an executor or administrator of an estate after a family member or loved one has passed away? What this means in plain terms is, if your mother, grandmother or any loved one who has chosen to assign you as the one in their will to carry out their last wishes, if you have a felony, you are prohibited from carrying out those duties.

I personally find it highly hypocritical to tell someone to change their ways and correct their mistakes only to then turn around and solely identify them by that mistake, using it to limit, restrict and penalize one's family by stripping away their right to freely choose whom they want to fulfill their last wishes. Fortunately, I am not alone in this sentiment. The Fully Free Campaign, serving on behalf of directly impacted people, are working with leaders across the State of Illinois to dismantle the laws and regulations that govern permanent punishments, which are the barriers that deny or restrict rights and opportunities for people with a record long after their involvement with the criminal legal system is over.

The FREE Act seeks to remove language in the Illinois Probate Act that prohibits anyone with a felony conviction from serving as an executor or administrator of an estate. The FREE Act restores dignity and honor to families throughout Illinois to carry out the last wishes and affairs of loved ones. Why? Because families should be FREE to choose who takes on this sacred duty. People living with a record should be FREE to honor their family and fulfill their loved one's wishes. The FREE Act brings Illinois one step closer to dismantling the permanent punishments constructed from years of punitive and misguided policies. Join us in ending these permanent punishments. Contact [fullyfree.org](http://fullyfree.org) for more information and to sign up for updates on the FREE Act.

**Want to be on the radio?!?** WBEZ & Illinois Public Radio present PRISONCAST, a special radio event for people inside & their families at 2PM C.T. on Sun., Aug. 28. Request a song or a sound you'd like us to record from outside prison walls (some example submissions: Lake Michigan waves, a baby laughing, White Sox homerun fireworks). We'll play as many requests as possible! Record requests & dedications at [312-893-2931](tel:312-893-2931), or mail your name, requests & dedications by July 18 to: [Alex Keefe, c/o WBEZ, 848 E. Grand Ave., Chicago, IL., 60611-3509](mailto:Alex.Keefe@wbez.org). Listen August 28 on 91.1 or 91.5-FM!

**Parole Illinois Kicks Off the Campaign for Corrective Clemency.** Parole Illinois is finally ready to kick its Campaign for Corrective Clemency (CCC) into high gear. The CCC seeks to convince Gov. J.B. Pritzker to use his executive clemency powers much more expansively in order to address some of the historical harms and injustices that contribute to mass incarceration in Illinois.

The CCC asks Gov. Pritzker to issue blanket clemency in the following manners: 1) grant everyone currently serving a Life-Without-Parole (LWOP) or de facto LWOP (40 years or more) a

commutation of their sentence in the form of parole eligibility after having served 15 or 20 years of their sentence; and 2) grant everyone serving a sentence subject to the Truth-In-Sentencing (TIS) laws a partial pardon as to that aspect of their sentence, and thereby order the IDOC to recalculate their release date using the 50% (day-for-day) standard.

Both of the above are justified for dozens of reasons. First, while Illinois acknowledged its death penalty system was broken, corrupt, and inhumane, the state failed to acknowledge that people sentenced to death-by-incarceration (DBI) go through the same exact system, but are denied the heightened scrutiny of their convictions and sentences.

Second, if sentence lengths were long enough to serve the ends of justice prior to TIS then the penological objectives will still be satisfied if people today are not required to serve the TIS aspect of their sentences.

Third, the General Assembly has failed to act to cure the excesses of mass incarceration. While there have been a few minor pieces of corrective legislation passed recently, none of them are retroactive. As Corey Booker noted, when a legislature passes corrective measures, but fails to apply them to people currently incarcerated, you can "literally point to the people who are in [prison] unjustly right now." Basically, everyone currently in prison serving long sentences is there after suffering from a variety of injustices that occurred before, during, and/or after trial. These include political injustices (e.g. "tough-on-crime" rhetoric and the myth of punitive deterrence, etc.); constitutional injustices (e.g. suppressed evidence, perjured testimony, tortured false confessions, etc.); and/or racial injustices (racial bias infests every aspect of Illinois' criminal legal system).

Gov. Pritzker has claimed to want to make Illinois into a "beacon of humanity." He can start by correcting the excessive, unjust, and inhumane sentences handed down over the past several decades which 10,000+ Illinoisans are currently suffering from.

Go to our website [paroleillinois.org](http://paroleillinois.org) if you want to get involved and mobilize for the CCC!

**The End of Isolation Tour is a theatrical production touring the United States, using immersive theater to make an impact.** The END OF ISOLATION Tour centers around the play, *The BOX*, which underscores both the horror of solitary confinement and the humanity of people subjected to it, employing stories inspired by true events to bring awareness to the state-sponsored atrocities occurring in correctional institutions across the country.

*The BOX* is written and directed by Sarah Shourd, who was held in solitary confinement for over 400 days as a political prisoner in Iran. After discovering the prevalence of solitary confinement in the United States, she collaborated with other survivors and together, they have brought this project to life.

August 5-7, 2022 at Haymarket House, 800 W Buena Ave, Chicago. Learn more at [endofisolationtour.org](http://endofisolationtour.org)

**Submit announcements to Stateville Speaks c/o Justice Studies, LWH 4062 Northeastern IL University, 5500 N. St. Louis Ave., Chicago, IL 60625-4699.**

**Order Books for Free from Urbana-Champaign Books to Prisoners!** You can write to Books to Prisoners to request books you want to read. We are an all-volunteer organization that provides free books to incarcerated people in Illinois. Tell us your interests, or request specific titles or authors. Tell us if you are a beginner or advanced in the reading you want to receive. Be as specific as you can. For instance, ask for US history, or ancient Roman history, or World War II history, if that's your interest, rather than just "history." Please indicate more than one interest or title or author so that we have a greater chance of sending you something you will like. This a free service offered by Books to Prisoners, a project of the Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center. Send requests to: [Books to Prisoners, PO Box 515, Urbana, IL 61803](mailto:Books to Prisoners, PO Box 515, Urbana, IL 61803).

**Black and Pink Chicago & NLG Collaborate to Provide LGBTQ+ Legal Help.** The University of Chicago's National Lawyers Guild (NLG) and Black and Pink Chicago have partnered on a pro bono project dedicated to providing LGBTQ+ members on the inside with legal information. Black and Pink occasionally receives letters from the incarcerated LGBTQ+ community concerning various legal questions. For instance, many letters are from transgender women inquiring about the processes by which they may request transfer to a facility that better represents their gender identity, how to begin receiving hormone treatment in prison, and how to report assault and abuse. NLG-UChicago trains law students to write responses to these letters. With the help of civil rights firm Loevy & Loevy, students volunteer their time to provide thoughtful and helpful responses to the letters received. Note: Because NLG-UChicago volunteers are students and not lawyers, they can only provide general legal information and cannot provide legal advice or representation. Write to [Black and Pink Chicago, PO Box 577942 Chicago, IL 60657](mailto:Black and Pink Chicago, PO Box 577942 Chicago, IL 60657) or [blackandpinkchicago@gmail.com](mailto:blackandpinkchicago@gmail.com). Visit [blackandpink.org](http://blackandpink.org) for more information.

**Coalition to Decarcerate IL Releases Report: "A Culture of Disposability."** The Coalition to Decarcerate IL (CDI) is a group of loved ones of the incarcerated, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals, and activists working towards abolition and fighting for the rights and dignity of incarcerated individuals and their loved ones. We recently released a report, called "A Culture of Disposability," from a survey we conducted. In March 2021, CDI sent a 23-question survey on COVID-19 conditions to 800 incarcerated individuals via GTL and received 300 responses. At the time of this survey, incarcerated respondents reported: 2/3 of officers did not wear masks near them, 1/3 knew someone who died in prison from COVID-19, 1/5 of people who needed medication did not have access, 1/3 did not have access to mental health assistance when needed. This pandemic has affected no population as severely as those incarcerated. CDI condemns the actions of our state and IDOC for the incredible violence they have brought upon all incarcerated people by refusing to furlough or release more people during the pandemic. Right now, CDI is in the midst of a direct action series fighting for releases and adequate COVID precautions. Your loved ones can act now by going to [bit.ly/covidprison](http://bit.ly/covidprison). To learn more about CDI or access the full report go to [coalitiontodecarcerateil.com](http://coalitiontodecarcerateil.com)

**The Final 5 Campaign is dedicated to the closure of the five Illinois youth prisons.** We are a coalition of currently and formerly incarcerated youth, families impacted by the juvenile legal system, and allies who are committed to closing youth prisons. We call for the full closure of all Illinois youth prisons and investment in community-based resources that meet basic needs and increase community safety without prisons and police. Our campaign launched in summer 2020, led by a group of formerly incarcerated youth and other youth allies. Since then, we have held actions and outreach events to inform the public about the harms of youth incarceration and advocate for youth prison closure. We recently launched our Free the Youth Podcast. We would love to hear from anyone who has had their own experience in any youth prisons or jails. You can connect with us at [www.thefinal5campaign.com](http://www.thefinal5campaign.com)

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