

# STATEVILLE SPEAKS

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE • SPRING 2020

## AN OPEN LETTER TO...

### GOVERNOR J.B. PRITZKER

Dear Governor Pritzker,

People in Illinois prisons and jails will die in the coming weeks if the state does not take responsible action. They are living in crowded conditions with no access to soap or hand sanitizers. Medical care is costly and inadequate.

In a briefing on March 18, you said you were considering the release of people in prison for nonviolent offenses. "There are some very dangerous people who should not be considered, but there are others that are very vulnerable and who have committed some non-violent offense and who should be first in line if we were to do something like that." These people should certainly be released.

But we have to do more. In state custody are 84 men and women who are over 70 and 684 people over 60. They are especially vulnerable to COVID-19.

The following individuals deserve immediate review, along with many others who are at serious risk. Arkee Chaney, 73, who has been imprisoned for 33 years as a result of three strikes legislation. Paula Fiedler, 67, who has multiple medical issues. Janet Jackson, sentenced to life for conspiring to kill her abusive husband, also with multiple medical issues. Pearl Tuma. Mason Burl. Howard Wiley. They are elderly, rehabilitated, and in need of immediate protection.

Elderly people and people with chronic health issues as well as others will die in prison because of our inaction in the face of a pandemic. Please, Governor, respond to vulnerable citizens in prison.

Bill Ryan  
(on behalf of over 80 different individuals and organizations)



### CARDINAL BLASE J. CUPICH

Dear Cardinal Cupich,

We hope and pray that you are well and weathering the current storm of pandemic COVID-19 illness that has already sickened and taken so many from us. We join you in praying for all, especially our seniors and those most at risk – cancer patients, pregnant women, HIV patients, and all with compromised immune systems. As was recently noted by Illinois Department of Health Director, Dr. Ngozi Ezike, at a news conference with the governor, people confined to prison and nursing homes are especially at risk, because self-isolation is not an option for them.

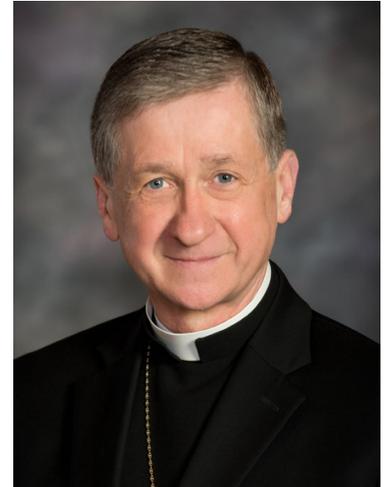
Catholics and the Chicago community look to you and the Church for leadership and hope in this troubled time. We are asking you to join with us in asking Governor J. B. Pritzker to act to release elderly and at-risk prison inmates to the care of their families wherever possible. In most cases these are men and women who have served decades behind bars already and in no way pose a danger to society.

We are heartened by the steadfastness of Pope Francis and the Church in the struggle against the Death Penalty. Now we are challenged to save the lives of these men and women who are crammed into prisons and have no recourse except to accept their fate unless we all act.

Will you join us in appealing to Gov. Pritzker to act to release these vulnerable men and women? Thank you, and God bless you.  
Sincerely yours,

Bertha Escamilla, Ted Pearson, Bill Ryan, and Armanda Shackelford  
Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (CAARPR)  
(on behalf of over 80 different individuals and organizations)

*For more about CAARPR, see page 7.*



## JOHN HOWARD ASSOCIATION'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19 AND PRISONERS

John Howard Association and many other stakeholders have been advocating for the immediate release of people in custody. There are many people especially vulnerable in prison under crowded, under-resourced conditions who can be successful upon release including those who are elderly, pregnant, and/or terminally or chronically ill. People who have been successful while living at an Adult Transition Center and people who have learned valuable re-entry skills and successfully completed programming at Life Skills

Re-entry Centers should also be released. Additionally, people who are close to their release dates and those who are eligible for earned discretionary sentencing credits along with other categories of people including (but not limited to) those with low level offenses can be safely let out of prison through a variety of release mechanisms available to the Governor. Releasing people is a public health necessity for them, for the people who work in prisons, and for their families and communities. We are all healthier if we are each healthier – that is the principle behind so many of the social distancing and sheltering-in-place protocols we are now living under.

A major hurdle for release of some people is a place to live. Stakeholders are being creative and innovative in finding places for those who do not have a home to go to, but more places are needed immediately. JHA challenges all housing providers, including universities with currently vacant student housing, rehabilitative and other residential treatment programs, and any other group with space for returning citizens to stay to be equally creative and contact IDOC directly with information about their space availability.

**JHA urges the Governor to accept imperfect and incomplete release plans at this time. Under the best of circumstances Illinois struggles to provide robust re-entry planning for people leaving IDOC. While there is a commitment to changing this, the reality is that Illinois cannot yet offer ideal re-entry services.**

JHA may not be able to get you all the information you seek, but we are listening, tracking the issues, and advocating for better care for your loved ones. Below are the most common questions we've received, followed by our responses based on currently available information.

**Question:** What's the best way to request your loved one get released early due to the coronavirus?

**JHA:** Many stakeholders are advocating for the release of multiple categories of people who are incarcerated. We know that IDOC is recommending releases and the Governor is making decisions about who leaves. This is happening slowly. We encourage you to petition the Governor's office, contact your elected officials, and support the work advocates are doing on the ground to secure release for as many people as possible.

**Question:** If you aren't able to contact your loved one in IDOC, what's the best way to get an update about how people are doing at that particular facility?

**JHA:** IDOC has set up a COVID-19 hotline you can contact at (217)558-2200 ext. 7700 or email questions to doc.covid@illinois.gov We also suggest you try calling the facility and speaking with your loved one's counselor or the Warden's office. You can also try contacting Springfield if you can't get a response.

If you haven't already, you could have your loved one fill out a medical information release form as a proactive measure, which can be downloaded on the IDOC website: <https://www2.illinois.gov/idoc/Offender/Pages/Information%20Release%20Forms.aspx>. You can mail the form to your loved one and ask him/her to complete it.

**Question:** If Coronavirus breaks out, what is IDOC's plan for hospitalization and ventilators?

**JHA:** We continue to encourage IDOC's collaboration with state and local health authorities. As resources are scarce for everyone these plans are still being worked out. We will continue to request information about planning be made public.

**Question:** What can be done to ensure a loved one in prison is getting necessary medical treatment?

**JHA:** Frustratingly, this is tied to communication access. We know that movement is restricted so depending where someone is this will affect access to various forms of communication available.

Communicate with your loved one to the extent possible, reach out to IDOC facilities and officials, and document issues. As mentioned above, you should make sure you have a medical release form executed so IDOC staff can communicate with you. You can also contact plaintiffs' attorneys (Uptown People's Law Center, <https://www.uplchicago.org/what-wedo/prison/covid-survey.html>) in the Lippert healthcare class action settlement so that they have your information recorded and the court-appointed monitor may be able to look into it.

Areas of concern that JHA is monitoring and/or advocating for include an early release for as many people as possible, continuity of safe practices and distancing throughout the system, staff devoted to improving communications of video conferencing, phones, email and the mail room. Proper sanitation and hygiene as well as medical care are of also great concern.

We recommend people reach out for information from IDOC. They are providing updates on their Facebook page and have a dedicated COVID-19 response phone line (217) 558-2200 ext. 7700 and email doc.covid@illinois.gov. We caution not to expect proactive updates on individuals from the facilities given the number of people housed there. DOC has begun sharing FAQs on their COVID-19 response page <https://www2.illinois.gov/idoc/facilities/Pages/Covid19Response.aspx>. JHA recommends increased reporting and tracking of questions and information in order to provide the public with as much up-to-date information as is possible.

We encourage you to share your experience with these methods of contacting IDOC with us so that we know how your communication with IDOC is going. You can share your information, experiences and questions by leaving us a voicemail message at (312) 291-9183 ext. 208 or completing our online form at: <https://www.thejha.org/take-action?sectionscrollto=section-contact-us>.

We will continue to share information we receive and hope you will stay in touch with us. ■

John Howard Association  
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Chicago IL 60601  
[thejha.org](http://thejha.org)

*Due to space constraints the above was an edited version of the JHA response.*

## FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to another edition of Northeastern Illinois' Stateville Speaks. First and foremost, we hope you are all managing to stay safe.

Indeed, it must be extremely hard to rely on the wisdom and dedication of others to make good judgments on your behalf, especially when everyone was still trying to figure out what constituted good practices. It must be equally stressful to have no visitations and limited communications with family and friends.

While we do not have any extra insight on the virus, treatments, or its length of stay, the one thought we would like to share is that you have many, many people concerned with the conditions on the inside and your well-being.

Almost instantly, organizations became very proactive. The John Howard Association set up and continues updates on a well-crafted resource center on their website. The Illinois Prison Project continues working tirelessly for the release of aging and at-risk prisoners. Additionally, the Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression continues their push for police accountability to keep people wrongfully convicted out of the system to begin with and fight for those already wrongfully there.

Lawsuits were filed by some of the most impressive civil rights attorneys who have coalesced in an effort for more prisoner release,

while Parole Illinois has been cataloging info on the website to help us keep it straight. Many took part in the caravan at Stateville to show solidarity to all of those affected by the pandemic in prisons.

While many, many more advocates and organizations have come forward with their best efforts in these troubling times the State may also be more proactive than ever. At almost every Gubernatorial press conference, questions regarding prisoner safety are asked and they appear to be answered both thoughtfully and with great concern for the implementation of best practices.

The IDOC website is also filled with transparencies regarding infection and recovery rates of both prisoners and staff within each individual prison. They have also published their response to COVID-19 and their policies during this pandemic.

Those of us on the outside can only hope that their adherence to these policies are truly being followed, especially on the ground. Please let us know how you are and, please contact the John Howard Association, who is actively tracking this information.

And most of all, please know that many people do care, are concerned about your well-being and are keeping your presence front and center. Be safe. ■

## A MESSAGE FROM PAROLE ILLINOIS

During this difficult time of the COVID-19 crisis, Parole Illinois has deepened its bonds of friendship and solidarity across prison walls. We see the great urgency for the voices of incarcerated people, their families and loved ones to be heard. Along with our allies, we participated in a "Decarceration Caravan" calling for the immediate release of all vulnerable people incarcerated in the IDOC.

We also helped organize a vigil and show of solidarity with folks inside Stateville. Along with Prison Neighborhood + Arts Project, MAMAS, and American Friends Service Committee, we hosted a virtual press conference that will highlight the ways that the CV 19 crisis exposes long standing problems in Illinois prisons--including senseless incarceration of people long beyond the time they are ready to return home.

We continue to demand an immediate response to the crisis as well as long term solutions that provide fair opportunities for review and release of all incarcerated Illinoisans. ■

Parole Illinois  
601 S. California Ave,  
Chicago IL 60612

## STATEVILLE CARAVAN



The #WeAreStateville Solidarity Caravan took place on Friday, April 10. A noisy, horn-honking caravan of vehicles followed a route around Stateville C.C. for an hour to show support for the thousands of people currently incarcerated, as well as those who are working at the facility during this pandemic. They wanted everyone behind the walls to know that they are not forgotten and that many people are very concerned for their well-being and safety.

# COVID-19 CONCERNS FOR PRISONERS SPAWNS LAWSUITS

In response to the rapid spread of COVID-19 within the Illinois prisons, three lawsuits were filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. All three cases, Money et al v. Jeffreys et al: Mandamus (Case Number 1:20-cv- 02094), Money et al v. Jeffreys et al: Habeas Corpus (Case Number: 1:20-cv-02094), and Money et al v. Pritzker et al (Case Number 1:20-cv-02093) were filed by the law firms of Lovey & Lovey, Uptown People's Law Center, Equip for Equality, Illinois Prison Project, Community Justice Civil Rights Clinic and Roderick & Solange MacArthur Justice Center.

The lawsuits name both the Governor of Illinois, J. B. Pritzker, and Acting Director Rob Jeffreys of the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC). It was filed on behalf of ten plaintiffs.

The suit was filed to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19, accusing the State of not "acting with urgency" after the first death of a Stateville C.C. prisoner, from the novel virus by requiring the State to

release as many prisoners as possible that qualify, "...particularly those who are elderly and medically vulnerable."

Pritzker has maintained throughout his daily afternoon press conferences that he has been reviewing prisoner histories to release as many as inmates as possible, with particular attention to pregnant women, those with serious underlying health conditions as well as many nearing the end of their sentences. His main concerns were the ability to open some space within the prisons, while not creating public safety concerns. Another important aspect cited by the Governor was the assurance that those who were released would have a home in which to safely quarantine.

Perhaps to show transparency with the State's response to COVID-19, the IDOC's website has a comprehensive section dedicated to information regarding the pandemic, conditions within the prisons, including current and frequently updated statistics for each prison. ■

## Confirmed Cases of COVID-19 in IL State Prisons

Locations	Staff Confirmed	Staff Recovered	Incarcerated Individuals Confirmed	Incarcerated Individuals Recovered
Crossroads ATC	1	1	3	2
Danville	1	1	0	0
Elgin Treatment Center	4	0	0	0
Fox Valley ATC	7	5	4	3
General Office	1	1	0	0
Graham	1	1	0	0
Hill	2	1	14	4
Jacksonville	1	0	0	0
Joliet Treatment Center	5	2	0	0
Kewanee LSRC	3	2	0	0
Logan	4	3	1	0
Menard	2	2	0	0
North Lawndale ATC	3	2	5	5
Parole	2	1	0	0
Pontiac	5	2	1	1
Sheridan	6	5	12	12
Southwestern IL	1	0	0	0
Stateville	75	68	148	119
Stateville NRC	35	27	1	1
Western IL	1	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>147</b>

Source: IDOC website. Information as of May 9, 2020.

## COVID-19 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Is IDOC currently allowing visitors?

No, all visits were suspended March 14, 2020 until further notice. This also includes outside volunteers, contractors, and tours. Attorneys may still visit but are subject to a medical screening and temperature check upon arrival to the facility.

### Have transfers been suspended?

Yes, all interagency transports have been suspended except for court writs, medical and mental health appointments, and emergency transfers.

### What are you doing to prevent staff from bringing COVID-19 (coronavirus) into the facility?

Upon arrival to the facility, staff are screened, have their temperature checked, and receive personal protective equipment (PPE) to wear during their shift.

### Are you providing proper cleaning supplies?

Yes. During this period, we have increased our cleaning schedules and the amount of cleaning supplies on hand. We are closely monitoring our supply levels at each facility and are in close communication with our vendors to maintain adequate inventory.

### Are you providing proper food and hygiene for men and women in custody?

Yes, nutritionally balanced meals, showers, and antibacterial soap will continue to be provided.

### May I continue sending mail to my incarcerated loved one?

Yes, you are encouraged to write as often as possible.

### My incarcerated loved one is on disciplinary restrictions. How will I contact them to ensure they are well?

The Department recognizes the importance of remaining in close contact with loved ones. Restrictions are reduced during this time period to ensure all incarcerated individuals are allowed at least one call to loved ones a week. Concessions have been made to allow offenders on grade restrictions both telephone privileges and video visits.

### Will the Department continue to release men and women scheduled to be paroled or discharged?

Yes, the Department will continue to process individuals being paroled or discharged. They will be screened and have their temperature taken upon their release.

### Is the Department offering enhanced communication services?

The Department is providing all people in custody with funds for two 20-minute phone calls and one 15-minute video visit. In addition, GTL is providing all individuals with one free 15-minute video visit per week, for 12 weeks, beginning March 20, 2020.

### Do you know when the visitation suspension will be lifted?

Not at this time. The Department will monitor the situation to determine when it is safe to restore visits.

### Is the Department considering eligible incarcerated individuals for early release?

The Department is exploring all options at our disposal to protect those in our care. ■

Source: IDOC Website, retrieved May 9, 2020.

## DEAR STATEVILLE SPEAKS

First and foremost, I would like to thank our Governor, J.B. Pritzker for reminding the people of the State of Illinois, whether incarcerated or not, we are all people. As a result of our Governor's zero tolerance to treat each other less humane, Stateville C.C. administrators have taken the following actions:

- The National Guard and Stateville C.C.'s Tactical Team have been deployed and activated to assist medical staff here at the facility.
- Those residents who have been displaying signs or symptoms related to COVID-19 are now being quarantined properly as a group, separated from general population.
- Three small bars of Dial soap per two residents and one surgical mask have been distributed by correctional staff.
- All staff have now been issued additional masks, gloves and surgical gowns, for everyone's protection.

Yet, in spite of that, Stateville C.C. administrators continue to be silent as the feeling of uncertainty continues to grow amongst staff and residents. IDOC's Chief of Mental Health Services has attempted to address the fear and anxiety through a memo dated March 26, 2020. However, Dr. Hilton's memo means and does nothing to calm the minds of staff and residents on the frontlines of this pandemic.

Thus, what I am beginning to witness and foresee is an escalated level of stress that is starting to affect staff and residents. While I am no expert, my twenty years of experience within our Illinois Criminal Justice System has taught me that high levels of stress can result in aggressive and physical confrontations. For that reason alone, it is imperative that our administrative officials here at Stateville make their rounds throughout the institution to try to address the concerns of both staff and residents.

Certainly, what we are facing globally is no easy challenge, but what we do, or fail to do, will be recorded in the books of history as we face this historical challenge.

In sum, I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the correctional staff, both men and women, security and non-security alike for being an example of what it truly means to serve the people of Illinois. These men and women continue to show up for work in spite of the fear, anxiety and perhaps lack of leadership in the face of this pandemic.

- Alann Vega,  
School of Restorative Arts  
North Park University ■

### TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

By Martin McCoy

Man tries his best not to be his worst  
An animal is what it is from the first  
Radicals fight for what is expected  
Tyranny is power that won't be neglected  
Intimacy is the embracing of the separate idea  
Nation is a collective of fears

Make dreams a reality  
Conviction is more than a salary  
Connecting to people is necessary  
Offer your gifts before you are buried  
You are living now!!! ■



Do you want to submit an article, letter, essay or illustration to Stateville Speaks? See page 7 for guidelines and mailing address.

# RE: SURVIVING COVID-19 INSIDE STATEVILLE C.C.

I am an active prisoner within Stateville C.C. The following is my personal observation as to how Stateville C.C. administrators have reacted in the face of this COVID-19 pandemic.

On March 14th all visits were temporarily suspended here at Stateville C.C. However, all non-essential staff were still allowed to enter the institution. In particular, Stateville continued to run medical writs, x-rays to the NRC, GED and ABA school programs as usual. Word that the institution may be placed on lockdown immediately spread amongst the prison population.

Yet, there was no lockdown, and everything appeared to be normal.

However, within the following days several residents in Bravo Unit began to display symptoms of high fever and a cough. Immediately thereafter, Bravo Unit was placed on quarantine. How did being placed on quarantine look? Healthy residents were forced to remain housed next to residents potentially infected with the virus.

Moreover, officers were in and out of the unit and continued to conduct shakedowns and cell searches. In addition, these very same officers along with a pair of cadets were allowed to leave the quarantine unit and pick up the food for the residents. That is, exposed officers were allowed to enter into the dietary department as food was being prepared. Additionally, one of those officers was also seen working overtime in Charly Unit wearing the same clothes, gloves and mask.

On March 25th, Charly Unit became the second unit placed on quarantine as one resident returning from a medical writ tested positive for COVID-19. Like Bravo Unit, officers were again allowed in and out of the quarantine unit.

In the midst of this pandemic I must acknowledge those who have been proactive as best as they can. As residents began to experience multiple symptoms related to the virus, the women Med-Techs have been the only ones responding valiantly, by putting themselves at the frontline, as they respond to all medical emergencies, known as Code 3 here at Stateville C, C.

On the other hand, no serious efforts have been given to sanitize the institution or at minimum the areas most affected or at risk for spreading the virus. The only thing that has been given was a bath and face towel with some heavily diluted disinfectant solution that only lasted for two consecutive days. No warden, or any other correctional staff, has

bothered to inform its resident of what is happening. In sum, that is how Stateville administrators have reacted in protecting the health and safety of its staff and residents.

Today Governor, J.B. Pritzker and Dr. Ngazi Ezike gave a description as to how the IDOC is handling the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our governor's pro-active leadership has not gone unnoticed even by those of us on the inside. As we begin week three since the IDOC decided to suspend all visits and have now placed all Units here at Stateville C.C. on quarantine, I would like to confirm and state the following:

First, Stateville C.C. Health Care administrators have begun to check the temperature of all staff coming into the institution. Yet, the concern is what about those coming into the facility that have the virus but have no symptoms?

Second, as of three days ago most staff that I have seen, have begun to wear a protective mask. Yet, the concern is what about those correctional staff who refuse to wear them?

Third, it was reported by Dr. Ezike that Stateville is currently on a Level 1 lockdown. That is, medical staff are the only ones allowed to move within the facility, not true. Short-term residents, known as MSU workers, are being transported daily from their NRC living units to work behind the wall inside Stateville's dietary. Apparently, such a decision came about from Stateville administrators as they stopped all assigned dietary workers from going to work to prevent the spread of the virus.

Stateville NRC residents and those of us behind the wall have already been exposed and are at risk equally. Thus, the decision by Stateville administrators only makes matters worse, because if the food was already bad by having untrained MSU working the dietary department, the food is now inedible.

One additional concern is the way the phones are set up in our institution. They are set up in a way that they have to be shared



by all. Thus, it makes it the perfect vehicle to spread the virus from one resident to another. While I understand the importance of communicating with our family and friends via phone calls, Stateville C.C administrators must find an alternative solution at this time.

Ultimately, it has been a painful and traumatic experience to witness firsthand how our elderly residents here at Stateville C.C. are being affected by COVID-19. Our medical staff, which is mainly composed of women, continue to respond valiantly and tirelessly to the numerous medical emergencies here at Stateville C.C. Gratitude must also be given to the correctional staff, on the frontlines of this pandemic, for their courage and efforts in doing what they can. Thank you to Principal Costibile for her help in allowing those enrolled in school here at Stateville C.C. to continue their education through a correspondence approach in spite of this pandemic. I would also like to thank everyone who has not allowed this pandemic to forget about the men, women and children who are incarcerated.

Last, but not least, I would like to send my condolences to the family and friends of the resident who lost his life as a result of COVID-19 today.

Thank you and stay safe. ■

## A VERY SPECIAL THANK YOU

We would like to extend our gratitude to Len Goodman for his continued generosity and support of Stateville Speaks. It is because of this kindness that we continue to print and distribute the newsletter into the prisons, and for that we are extremely grateful.

## CHICAGO ALLIANCE AGAINST RACIST AND POLITICAL REPRESSION

The Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression aims to end mass incarceration, defend the Bill of Rights, and end the legacy of white supremacy. Specifically, the primary focus of the Alliance is on establishing democratic community control of the police through enacting legislation creating an all-elected Civilian Police Accountability Council (CPAC), and winning freedom for incarcerated survivors of police torture through Executive Pardons by the Governor. In addition, the Alliance campaigns for the freedom of all political prisoners, for ending the death penalty, for ending life sentences without possibility of parole, for adequate health care in prisons, for rehabilitative programs in prisons, and for ending harsh and inhumane prison conditions. The Chicago Alliance is part of the newly re-founded National Alliance. The initial National Alliance, of which we were a branch, was formed after the victory in winning freedom for Angela Davis by the National Committees to Free Angela Davis and All Political Prisoners.

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## REVITALIZED

By Patrick Comi



As my heart melts into fury, with no one to console me, Love seems to be a distant memory. My heart has been Ripped apart, feasted upon, and devoured by vengeance. Loneliness is a soothing pain in which I find sorrowful comfort. How could I ever go on living this way: abandoned and left just as my last breath slipped into nothingness? I have been judged, condemned to pity by those who live in misery, but purged are my resurrected thoughts. I received the ultimate of being nailed to the cross, then placed into the bottomless pit where I came face to face with myself-Will. I had the key all the time, but refusing to accept it; the key to compassion.

Gifted as I be, with a lifted mentality, essentially, I am Will, and everything is a manifestation of it. Revitalize yourself. ■

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Please do **not** send originals.  
Please limit essays to around 500 words.

# POLITICAL 'TOON BY ARKEE

— STATEVILLE —  
WHEN YOU'RE  
LOCKED AWAY  
IN A CAGE, MORE  
OFTEN THEN  
NOT...



KEEP HOPE  
ALIVE!!!

— MENARD —  
WHEN FREEDOM  
SEEMS SO FAR  
AWAY...



KEEP HOPE  
ALIVE!!!

— LOGAN —  
WHEN A MOTHER'S  
HEART IS  
BROKEN INTO  
PIECES...



A MOTHER'S CHILD

KEEP HOPE  
ALIVE!!!

— PONTIAC —  
WHEN YOU CRY  
YOURSELF TO  
SLEEP AT  
NIGHT..



KEEP HOPE ALIVE!

THE CHILDREN OF  
GOD CANNOT  
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