

STATEVILLE SPEAKS

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE • SPRING 2018

NEW YEAR, NEW LAWS

By Dawn Larsen, Assistant Editor

Along with a New Year came several new laws, many that took effect this January. While not all will be pertinent to every reader, many, especially those that are trying to stay connected to friends and loved ones on the “outside,” should notice an improvement.

House Bill 6200 (The Family Connections Bill): sponsored by Representative Carol Ammons (D), 103rd District, states “Beginning January 1, 2018, the Department of Central Management Services shall contract with the qualified vendor who proposes the lowest per minute rate not exceeding 7 cents per minute for debit, prepaid, collect calls and who does not bill to any party any tax, service charge, or additional fee exceeding the per minute rate.” The new rates mean a 30-minute phone call will be capped at \$2.10. According to Brian Dolinar at Truth-out.org, prior to this bill being passed, “Illinois has the highest rate of what are called “site commissions,” with \$12 million collected every year from prison phone calls. These commissions, or what some call kickbacks, are paid back to the state by the provider, Securus, for the right to an exclusive contract. These commissions are often said to go to “inmate benefits,” but in Illinois, they cover basic expenses like medication, transportation and guard salaries.”

House Bill 2738 (The Protect Prison Visits Bill): also sponsored by Representative Carol Ammons (D) 103rd District “Provides that all of the institutions



and facilities of the Department of Corrections shall permit every committed person to receive in-person visitors, except in case of abuse of the visiting privilege or when the chief administrative officer determines that such visiting would be harmful or dangerous to the security, safety or morale of the institution or facility. Provides that an institution or facility of the Department may not charge a fee to either a committed person or visitor for video visitation that results in a profit for the Department.”

House Bill 2989: sponsored by Representative Justin Slaughter (D) 27th District, “Provides that the Department of Corrections shall in each institution or facility (rather than establish a pilot program in one or more institutions or facilities of the Department) permit committed persons to remotely visit friends and family members (rather than just family members) through interactive video conferences. Provides that the Department shall (rather than may) enter into agreements with third-party organizations to

provide video conference facilities for friends and family members of committed persons. The Department shall (rather than may) determine who is a friend or family member eligible to participate in the program and the conditions in which and times when the video conferences may be conducted. Provides that the Department shall require each institution and facility of the Department to have locked and monitored electronic tablets for committed persons to use for educational purposes.”

Senate Bill 1413: sponsored by Senator Michael Connelly (R) 21st District “Amends the Vital Records Act. Provides that a person shall not be required to pay a search fee for a birth record search or an additional fee for a certified copy of the record upon the person’s release on parole, mandatory supervised release, final discharge, or pardon from the Department of Corrections if the person presents a specified form completed by the Department of Corrections.”

Another bill, though not as far reaching, but no less important to those affected, will take effect on June 1, 2018.

House Bill 1764 (The Post-partum Bill): sponsored by State Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia (D) 83rd District. She has minced no words in her support of giving women a second chance, with her website post stating “House Bill 1764 creates a mechanism for courts to consider post-partum depression and post-partum psychosis as mitigating factors at sentencing.

SEE NEW YEAR, PAGE 7

Hope...Redemption...Change

A STRONG SHOW OF SUPPORT

By Sal Barry

Friends, family and advocates of those incarcerated gathered for an art show and film screening of Stateville Calling last summer. The documentary, made by Scrappers Film Group, tells the story of four older prisoners currently held in the Illinois Department of Corrections: Janet Jackson, Renaldo Hudson, William Peebles, and Paula Sims. It also features long-time, long-term, elderly prisoner advocate Bill Ryan and many other people that believe in redemption, change and second chances. The event was hosted by civil rights attorney Len Goodman, who kindly opened up his home for the fundraiser.

The documentary screening was held indoors, as several flat-screen TVs with attached headphones allowed visitors to watch Stateville Calling as they pleased, or pick up where they left off. A barbecue was held outside to the backdrop of art work, featuring work by incarcerated artists. The art show was organized by the Prison+Neighborhood Arts Project (PNAP). Some of the work is shown on this page. Turnout was strong, with over 100 people attending the event. The message to continue to reform the unjust laws and unacceptable prison conditions was equally as strong. ■



Top: Bill Ryan addresses the attendees.
Bottom: Some of the artwork on display.
Photos by Sal Barry

JUSTICE FOR ALL

By James Lenoir

That's what they're screaming, not understanding the police are scheming and killing the youth. The constitution was written with equal protection for all. Yet these are black and brown faces being inked on shirts with "STOP KILLING US" written on the top.

Justice for all is a hash tag, a moment in time! It's where the reality of the dark underbelly of the police department is exposed to its cruel, secrecy, dishonest and lack of care. For the laws it vowed to uphold, the so-called preliminary justice system, that's been unjust to the citizens no matter age or height, no matter race or humbleness.

Justice for all has never been in place, no

matter if you're black or brown, in school or at home, on your way to work or a ward of the state, at the park or by the store. You are always in the wrong place at the wrong time. You are always a threat – no matter nine years old or 43 years young.

Justice for all when the police have the power to choke you to death, shoot you to death and beat you to death – then claim justified force from an officer that says his life was in danger.

Is this justice for all when your life and my life don't matter? Is this justice when your words or my words do not hold constitutional security? The coroner ruled it a homicide; but

the prosecutor determined the police actions to be justified deadly force! Justice for all, where is it? When the voice for the voiceless becomes silent and chooses to turn a blind eye to injustice.

Justice for all is what they're screaming, but all we've been seeing is a corrupt system that protects the police who commit injustice to the black and brown citizens.

"Is there justice, when it's just us losing our lives?" ■

To subscribe to Stateville Speaks, or to submit an essay, see page 7.

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to another edition of Stateville Speaks! No, we never really stopped working, but after a long, sadly unnecessary, but needed hiatus, the paper is back. Sadly, because we spent most of 2017 complying with silly, arbitrary, individual warden or prison rules which have nothing to do with safety or incitement, but everything to do with censorship, mostly without reason. In an effort to get the newsletters into those prisons, we re-printed, redacted, relabeled and resent issues; sometimes, more than once. And yes, in some instances, we even ran out of reprinted newsletters and had to resort to photocopies to complete some mailings.

We did not have problems with all prisons, as some wardens and their communications directors actually read the newsletters and followed the rules of what may or may not be deemed appropriate or "questionable." While we may disagree with their reasons, we thank and applaud their honest efforts to notify us of their decisions, and tried to find common ground. To those of you who tossed them in the dumpsters, shame on you for not following a court order, for not believing in the Constitu-

tion, and just simply not doing your job.

To answer your most common question (behind if any progress is being made with an Elder Bill, or Good Time), Stateville Speaks is sent four times a year, Spring (March),

We spent most of 2017 complying with silly, arbitrary rules which have nothing to do with safety - but everything to do with censorship.

Summer (June), Fall (September) and Winter (December). To ensure proper delivery, we are constantly updating our database with IDOC's website in an attempt to keep up with your constant movement in the prisons. Things do happen, boxes break open and papers get damaged. Please let us know if that happened and we will resend them. If nobody is getting Stateville Speaks, really, please let us know.

INTRODUCING DEFINITE DECADE SENTENCING

By Sharonda Miller

Definite decade sentence is a law that will deter citizens from committing criminal acts, as it will obligate them to serve the minimum of a decade before being considered for release at the earliest. An offender must complete 10 years of their sentence under the Truth-in-Sentencing law before seeing the institutional committee and the Prison Review Board (PRB). Definite decade requires offenders to show proof of rehabilitation upon a hearing at the institution that will alter be referred to the PRB for final disposition.

A committee of four prison officials should be arranged to hear the offender's concise belief of rehabilitation and observe any proof in that regard. This committee would be made up of officials that come into direct contact with the offender during the transitional phase of rehabilitation. Counselors, adjustment committee personnel, lieutenants and the like are those that would be appropriate. The offender should be afforded a reference official as well, as a character witness or to insure all the offender's rights are met.

Once this committee makes a decision,

it will be forwarded to the PRB members for a final decision. If an offender is found to be rehabilitated, plans of immediate release will be afforded. Transitioning back into the community may be very difficult after such a time, thus requiring supervised release. If an offender is found to be non-rehabilitated, the offender will be denied, but is eligible for review once every three years thereafter.

This law is to coexist with the Truth-In-Sentencing, yet it allows those who are rehabilitated to be released, lessening the burden on the state's budget. Proof of this rehabilitation may be in many forms and are listed as follows:

- Educational certificates or attendance
- Disciplinary growth
- Non-court ordered classes
- Employment history
- Mental illness exemptions

It is our belief that if you put rehabilitated offenders back into the community, crime rates will decrease. This idea will of course be moni-

Moving forward, we again thank you for the continued support and the wonderful, thoughtful and enlightening submissions. How perceptive to suggest in this day and age of cell phone cameras, nanny cams, grocery store and even street corner surveillance, why not allow for prison transparency? Mr. Moss may be on to something when he stated "...there are hundreds of video cameras recording daily activities at every IDOC facility. Please take the steps necessary to make those recorded images available in real time on the Internet." (page 4)

Also, while many laws were passed to improve conditions for those of you incarcerated and those lucky enough to be leaving, are they making a difference? Are phone bills cheaper? Are visiting procedures streamlined? Please let us know if the laws we discussed are making waves, or even a ripple.

In our next edition, we hope to give you more information about HB 4173 (Pathway to Community, HB 531 (Restoring Youth Parole) and other important juvenile legislation.

In the meantime, we thank you for your support, insights and perspectives and ask that you continue to keep it coming! ■

tored for purposes of continuing the definite decade sentencing and the success rate of those released. We believe that once rehabilitated offenders are released, these voices go back into the community advocating non-violence from those who have been through the ordeal and have firsthand knowledge. We can make a difference.

We are ready to return to society as productive members. We are ready to return to our places and roles as mothers and fathers. And we are ready to raise awareness in our communities to help lower crime rates. We are ready to be examples of justice in Illinois,

- Offenders of Truth-in-Sentencing ■

SUBMISSIONS WANTED

To submit an article, essay, letter, poem or artwork for publication, please see address on page 2. Please do not send original work, as we cannot return them. Please limit articles to around 500 words. Articles may be edited for length.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE GOVERNOR

By Carl Moss

The mission statement of the Illinois Department of Corrections is being ignored and cannot become a reality without incentives. Those incentives will require a paradigm shift in current policy and a change in compensation packages for upper echelon prison administrators. “We must judge an institution not by its purposes but by its achievement...of those purposes” said Professor Harold Laski. [1]

The third component of the IDOC mission statement states that the Department will “maintain programs” that will assure a successful re-entry into society upon a prisoner’s release. This lofty rhetoric, while well planned, is not being carried out, and the reasons are both subversive and insidious: subversive because the resultant rate of recidivism is putting the free world population at risk and undermining the economy; and insidious because the corruption within the Department is very much like a metastasized [2] cancer eating away at the very fabric of society. Many examples of this corruption are available upon request.

The public service union with the most members in this once great state has a contract and agreement with the IDOC. There must be staffing ratios maintained to (allegedly) provide safety for their members. The theory here being that there is a perceived safety in numbers or the more guards standing around equates to the less likelihood that they will be attacked. This gang mentality is exactly what the Department has devolved into.

The agreed upon staffing ratios are not known to this prisoner. The published ratios can be found in the IDOC quarterly reports and range from as low as 8.8 to 1 in minimum security prisons to as high as 3.5 to 1 in maximum security. What this means, in the simplest terms, is the more prisoners in the system, the more staff that can be employed to maintain the agreed-upon staffing ratio. Full employment requires a prisoner in every bed.

Previous Illinois political leadership relied heavily upon patronage to staff the prison system. The resultant employees relied heavily upon nepotism to develop their personal staffing cadre. This has resulted in the current cloaca miasma [3] that is costing taxpayers well over a billion dollars a year, and is not reducing recidivism or protecting public safety. All this because prison administrators are willfully refusing to comply with the department’s mission statement.



Where a program is proven to be effective in reducing recidivism, that program is contrary to the best interest of the staff employed to supervise prisoners. THEIR JOB DEPENDS UPON A PRISONER BEING IN EVERY BED. Those staff charged with the responsibility of supervising a successful program will naturally do what is in their own best interest. This usually results in problems that result in the end of that proven successful program. Again, examples upon request.

The IDOC is like a living organism, and like every other living thing, its primal instinct is the will to survive; self-preservation. The department has a stake in maintaining the status quo and will do very little to reform itself. Change will require a paradigm shift from the Office of the Governor and hopefully with the approval of the legislature.

A suggestion for change is incentive-based compensation. This 25-year veteran of IDOC hospitality suggests that the Director of the IDOC, all prison wardens, Majors and Lieutenants be paid based upon the success of their efforts to rehabilitate. This would include a base salary with the assurance of a bonus based upon the reduction in the rate of recidivism. Concomitant to the bonus would be individual deductions for the cost of any legal defense resulting from staff malfeasance. Please task your Legislative Research Unit to study the above concept for feasibility and ask them to return with meaningful legislation for your approval before any more concessions are granted to the IDOC.

Finally, there are hundreds of video cameras recording daily activities at every IDOC facility. Please take the steps necessary to make those recorded images available in real time on the internet. This should result in several solid benefits to you and your administration. First would be transparency, and second will be prima facia [4] proof that there is no need for more prison guards.

Respectfully submitted,

Carl Moss

NOTES

- 1 – Harold Laski (1893-1950) was a British political theorist, economist, author, and lecturer.
- 2 – to spread to other parts of the body
- 3 – sewer smell. “cloaca” is Latin for sewer and “miasma” means “an unpleasant smell.”
- 4 - based on the first impression; accepted as correct until proved otherwise. ■

SPONSORS NEEDED

To make a donation to, or to sponsor an issue of, Stateville Speaks, please contact Dr. Cris Toffolo, NEIU Justice Studies Chair, at 773-442-4761.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Please let us know if you have moved so we can update our records and keep your newsletter coming.

TIMES HAVEN’T CHANGED

By Oohmar Shakur & Lamar H. Moore

I’m sitting here, tracing the essence of time. Remembering, reminiscing, and romanticizing about a period of innocence, before the world corrupted and extorted my vision, and exposed me to an actuality of my reality that Langston Hughes’ “A Dream Deferred” was no greater than M.L.K., Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech delivered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in August of ’63. In front of the heartbeat of several hundred thousand people so eager for equality, willing to confront an emotion that separates the bowels of racial indifference that confines, and shackles the genetic makeup of its citizens engulfed with an undeniable passion and personification that “all men are created equally.”

So, vehemently do we seek a thirst for freedom that the founding fathers of this nation guaranteed to all of its people, with no diabolical aforethought of the classes being divided by tribal or economic status. But that a new nation would spring forth to offset any tyrannical occupying forces that deliberately set out with felonious intentions to crucify the underprivileged masses of this nation whose downtrodden

and aspirational hopes fall on the deaf ears of zealots to be crushed and tramped under their feet with no consideration that a certain sector of American society lives will be traumatically affected forever. Even dear ears can’t hear what the eyes refuse to see. Lady Justice is blindfolded. The scale in her hands weighs the blood of the guilty-oppressive system whose crimes are immeasurable, but all witnessed by the eyes of God.

Martyrize my brothers and sisters. Rape, pillage and plunder our communities like varmints, delivering the remainder of our captives to a racial judicial system, that’s generated with the funds that’s been stolen from education reform, and they call me the criminal. But yet murder my brother in front of his daughter. Like black lives don’t matter. Systematic politics stimulates the systemic epidemic that created this pandemic in the first place. Diametrically opposed, standing on the opposite sides of the racial divide. Victimized by the hues of my skin, that makes me unique, radiates and illuminates everything in existence today. All my life I was told that I wasn’t good

“DOING TIME”

By Amy Shemberger

Counter to what most people believe, time does not heal all. Time and distance may take us away from all the emotions that tug on our heartstrings due to a circumstance, event, or occurrence, that has happened to us, but time alone will not heal. Doing time will not heal you! Healing takes both time and effort; steady, earnest and energetic effort. For example, if we physically suffer from a deep cut, our body must work to form a scab of protection over our wound and only then, from the inside out, does the healing process begin to take place. As the shield of the scab slowly falls off, the inner workings of healing are revealed.

The same time is true with our deeply rooted and profound emotional wounds. In time, while doing time, these injuries will NOT heal themselves. For they too need not only time, but also work and effort, as well as a proper shield of protection during the healing process. The roadway to emotional wellness

needs to begin with truth being worked into the deepest, most inner recesses of our souls. Next, believe it or not, being incarcerated provides the perfect scab, or buffer zone of protection from all prior deep emotional gashes inflicted from friends, family, and the dirty streets. Until ultimately, all the efforts put into our inner healing journey will become apparent on our surface exteriors in our words, actions, and reactions. Soon, others will start to see and feel the emotional wholeness in our surrounding aura.

Once again, healing requires an exertion of energy. Processing painful emotions is challenging, and just downright tough, but on the flip side, if we ignore them it will only lead us into a disconnect from both reality and ourselves. I have come to understand that pain is just this place where my will is being broken, due to the fact that the discomfort occurs at the specific spot where my own wants and desires

are neither being met or fulfilled. At the intersection of mental pain, we are presented with a crossroad choice to either walk down the road of discouragement, or to embark on the road of hope, healing, and faith. Pain and disappointments in life are inevitable, but discouragement is of our own choosing.

Some life lessons here on our earthly journey can only be learned in the valleys, rather than on the mountaintops, since the pain has this ability to teach us things that success just cannot. While trekking through this valley of the shadow of shame, encompassed by chain link fences and barbed wire, we must choose to put in the work necessary to our healing process. We must acknowledge painful memories and past wrongdoings with a humble and contrite heart, with the understanding that they are just a place. A place which either we cannot believe that we did those things or where we cannot believe that others did those things to us...A place where our will is being broken. ■

DO I DESERVE TO DIE?

(LAST WORDS FROM A YOUNG BLACK MAN)

By Marvin Alexis

As I lay here supine, faced down and stretched out
In the middle of this concrete ring.
Cordoned off by yellow ropes, while yelling folks
Watch in terror and disbelief scream.

I can't help but to ask passionately
Grasping on to the last moments of my youth,
Praying I have the might to hang on
'til I reach the ICU before I see You –
Why? Why me? Why now? Why God, why?
Do I deserve to die?

Am I meant to be another scene?
On the squared screen's projections,
Another black teen extinguished
By one who expresses a professed intention
To "serve and protect" us?
Am I meant to be another symbol for another movement?
Continually moving for correction,
Charting through marches, demonstrations and protesting,
Covered by a melee of media, empathetic, emphatic speeches,
Forums, talks and empty gestures?

I stayed vexed with mama at how she always stressed incessantly,
Daily praying that I navigated successfully,
Out of the clutches of the boys in the hood
And the boys in blue who would pursue us aggressively.
Nah, it's not all of 'em,
But it's been all of 'em we've seen growing up in the hood,
Crooked overseers... I mean, officers, up to no good.
Last week, two snatched up my cousin for nothing but simply
Talking jack,
They took him to HQ, beat him 3 shades of blue,
Then made him hobble back.
Another time, a crew planted packs of crack
On this kid who was just walking home from b-ball practice.
With no LP, he's 16 with a record,
His future is wrecked,
He wound up getting stabbed in the county,
Now his hoop dream's a deficit
Shrinking in his rearview mirror like past exits...

Respect?
As I siphon my lungs for these last gasps of breath, I inflect
This.
That word is not a birthright and shouldn't be expected.
Respect ain't a given due to status, cash,
A title, a badge, by force or with fame.
You earn that right from others, brother,
That which the queen mother of soul so boldly sang.
But my question, my question still remains,
As I lay here hanging on to what remains
Of my bullet riddled, lifeless, mangled remains –
Do I deserve to die?

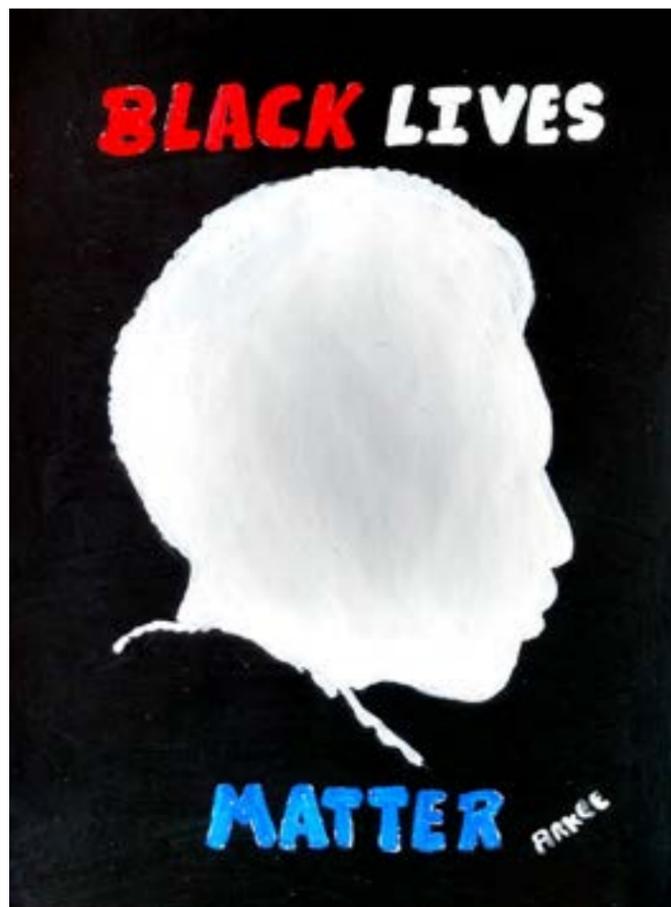


Illustration by Arkee

Was it really the hoodie that covered my braided,
Faded or dreadlocked hair?
Was it my sagging jeans that exposed my bright yellow
Joe Boxer underwear?
Was it the slang I used with the cocky swaggered walk
To match?
Or, was it simply the fact
That I refused to lower my gaze toward the clinched fists
Which gripped my twisted cap?
Or is it that,
You want us to re-enact
Past roles where I'm meek and weak with inferiority,
Just so you can feel secure and in control
As you impose your authority?

Someday, someday maybe we'll get this right,
Until then, may my spirit live on –
Through my family and through the rallies,
And through the memories as well as the documentaries.
Then hopefully I'll find... The sum... to my demise...
Did I deserve to die?

R.I.P. Eric Garner... Michael Brown... Tamir Rice... Trayvon Martin...
Amadoo Diallo... Oscar Grant,
And all those who have perished at the hands of police violence
and street violence. ■

NEW YEAR

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Additionally, it allows women to challenge prior sentences if post-partum depression and psychosis were not considered at sentencing." "Many women suffer from post-partum depression after giving birth so it's important that we recognize these mental health issues," Chapa LaVia went on to say, "It is my hope that this new law will bring about a deeper understanding about how feelings of extreme loneliness, sadness and in serious cases paranoia, can affect the behavior of a new mother."

The bill, initially proposed by Bill Ryan, founder of Stateville Speaks and longtime advocate for prison reform, brought it to State Representative Linda Chapa LaVia (83rd District), who ultimately sponsored it. When contacted for comment he stated "House Bill 1764, called the post-partum bill is landmark legislation. For the first time in the United States evidence of serious post-partum mental illness has to be considered as mitigation for sentencing. The bill clearly establishes retroactivity as a right for not only postpartum victims but others. Very importantly, 20 some ladies sentenced to long sentences in Logan will be able to submit evidence of post-partem illness for a modicum of justice." ■

WHO ARE YOU?

By KDJ...I am

I am that which is invisible to the naked eye,
But yet thru logic do I exist...
I am the era before all creation, alpha in the Beginning and the omega I'll be in the end...
I am that in which light, sound and speed are Measured, but I, still the unmeasured beast...
I've been known to be about your side a Valuable friend indeed, to others I just go by And by, truly a wasted commodity...
I am a system of reckoning in which the Universe finds its place...
I am an epoch that is and isn't, but that Is left to debate...
I am a motion that sometimes seems to stand Still, nevertheless I'm a fluent migration Perpetually testing ones will...
I have been called Father by many, yet to A wife I have taken none...
To some I am a period of leisure to where they Experience much fun...
I am the past and the present, that of the Future which is yet to come...
I am that which is hard on you for the Moment, but my wrath too soon will be done...
I AM TIME ■

Thanks to Illinois Prison Talk (IPT) for support and further dissemination of Stateville Speaks, and your tireless reform efforts.

Visit www.illinoisprisontalk.com to learn more.

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STAFF • SPRING 2018

Publisher: Cynthia Kobel

Editor: Gayle Tulipano
Assistant Editor: Dawn Larsen
Consulting Editor: Bill Ryan

Editors

Donald McDonald, Aldwin McNeal
& Anaviel B. Rakemeyahu

Assistant Editors

Stanley Howard, Jeanene Clay,
Vincent Galloway, Renaldo Hudson,
Tom Odle, Mychal Thompson,
Ronnie Carrasquillo, Angel Torres,
Margaret Majos & Ron Kliner

Women's Issues

Millie Lee & Janet Jackson

Cartoonist:

Arkee
Layout & Design: Sal Barry

Send letters & submissions to:

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

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POLITICAL 'TOON BY ARKEE



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