

A Publication of The Pennsylvania Prison Society

GRATERFRIENDS

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

In Memorium

Russell “Maroon” Shoatz



Russell Maroon Shoatz served 48 years, 22 of which were spent in solitary confinement.

Russell Maroon Shoatz was granted compassionate release on October 26, 2021, after suffering from advanced colorectal cancer. He died less than two months later, on December 17, at the age of 78.

In Maroon’s own words (1995): “Rest easy Fighting Maroons. There are many now and to come who will derive inspiration from your valorous examples, inspiration that will ‘arm their spirits’ to fight the good fight...’til victory or death!!”

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From the Social Services Director



Dear Friends of the Society,

We are excited and humbled to embark upon another year with you, one in which we hope we will be able to spend much more time together in person.

The Society is committed to making 2022 a year of growth— of personal growth and of organizational growth. I'm excited to announce that we have hired our first staff

person located in Pittsburgh and work is underway to strengthen our presence in all areas of the Commonwealth. Later in this issue, you will read excerpts from our Annual Report, where we reflect on the last year and map our vision for the future.

2021 was an important year for Graterfriends, as well. We started our first issue of the year on a low note- when Lifer Bruce Norris passed away while waiting for Governor Wolfe to sign his commutation papers. In that same issue, we also shared news that long-time Graterfriends writer Daniel Cummings was finally coming home after 50 years behind bars.

In 2021, we put out 7 issues: 6 of our regular issues and 1 creative featuring 24 pages of poems and art produced by you. We expanded the number of outside contributors, featuring articles from our partners at The Institutional Law Project, FAMM, The

PA Innocence Project and Opportunity Inc.

We now have more than 1,000 incarcerated subscribers, more than ever before. We have subscribers within every single SCI— with the most subscribers within Benner, Houtzdale, Phoenix, Forest, Somerset, and Dallas. And we published writing from 96 different authors.

Graterfriends is nothing without our subscribers and our contributors. We look forward to reaching more people and constantly improving content based upon your feedback. If you've never submitted a piece for publication before, reach out! We want to hear from you. We love hearing from you.

And finally, I would be remiss if I didn't thank our team of volunteers who make it possible for Graterfriends to reach all of our subscribers. Each issue is compiled exclusively by a team of dedicated volunteers— they are reading and transcribing your submissions, sending you questions, designing the physical issue, and processing your subscriptions. Without them, and without you, there would be no Graterfriends. Special thanks to Noelle and Kailyn for keeping the wheels moving. Thank you Marissa, Jack, Lily, Chloe, Taylor, Kevin, Greg, Shana, Monica, Lara, and Will.

Graterfriends is special. Thanks so much for being part of this incredible community.

With gratitude,
Kirstin

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Graterfriends is a publication from the Pennsylvania Prison Society.

We reserve the right to edit submissions. Original submissions will not be returned. Allegations of misconduct must be documented and statistics should be supported by sources. All submissions should be no more than 500 words, or two double-spaced pages. Letters more than 200 words, or one double-spaced page, will not be published in their entirety and may be shortened for clarity and space.

To protect Graterfriends from copyright infringement, please attach a note, on your submission, stating that you are the original author of the work and that you give us permission to edit and print; date and sign the declaration.

Farewell, Soldier
Reginald Lewis, SCI Phoenix

I last saw our Brotha Russell “Maroon” Shoatz around February 2014, in the old Graterford prison, shortly after he’d come down from a hearing in Federal Court, where a major precedential decision was finally issued, ordering him released from decades long solitary confinement.

In the Mosque, at the end of Jumma prayer, we shook hands and embraced and laughed, exhilarated by his victorious win. After all, for three, long harrowing decades, an overwhelmingly white male patriarchal judiciary and tyrannical rulers of the Prison Industrial Complex entrenched in a neo-Colonialist mindset perpetuated the false narrative of Maroon: lying in their demands for annual exorbitant budgetary expenditures on sophisticated Orwellian technology used for the hyper-surveillance of a rapidly aging and deteriorating Revolutionary Icon.

Yet, he expressed no bitterness towards a brutally racist system that had turned his life into an interminable shuttle in and out of the most oppressive isolation units in the State of Pennsylvania. He was kind, humble, and gracious. Piercing dark eyes held the dignity and magisterial air that defied his pain and suffering.

The next time I saw him, we attended a theatrical production in the prison’s auditorium. I sat beside him while he read piles of mail he’d received from artists, writers, scholars, and students from around the world. Endowed with a seemingly encyclopedic range of knowledge on a plethora of subjects, he told me how much he loved my poetry. I basked in his wisdom as he proffered a “Baldwinesque” critique of my book of essays. Maroon also told me that, two years earlier, he was equally elated hearing the news that a fair and compassionate Federal judge ordered me removed from Pennsylvania’s death row after 30, long, traumatic years. Yeah, he was cut like that, mortised, like a rare jewel.

Never again should any human be subjected to such cruel, immeasurable psychological and physical torture. Surrounded by his beautiful family, his ethereal light departed this dark, evil, stinking, corrupt Dunya (World). O, Allah, may you accept our Brotha in the highest strata of Al-Jannah, (Paradise!)

FAREWELL, SOLDIER.

Russell “Maroon” Shoatz and Pennsylvania
Compassionate Release
Brother George Wayne Brooks, SCI Coal Township

In 2019, Maroon was diagnosed with colorectal cancer, survived 12 rounds of chemotherapy and was scheduled for surgery in the fall of 2020 to remove the primary cancerous mass. However, he contracted COVID-19. When Maroon was finally able to have his surgery after months of preventable delays, the cancer had metastasized. By the spring of 2021, he had terminal stage 4 cancer.

The court was first petitioned for compassionate release in August of 2021 but denied. The court was then petitioned after an emergency arose in his health since the original hearing. After the August hearing, his condition deteriorated within days, and

he rushed back to the hospital. The medical care he received, or lack thereof, started a death sentence.

Russell Shoatz III, his son, has been quoted, saying of the hearing, “What’s in the transcripts are the evidence that the prisons don’t have the capabilities to take care not just of their healthy prisoners, they definitely don’t have the ability to take care of their geriatric prisoners, and that they have effectively killed my father.”

The judge’s decision could have a positive impact on the passage of S.B. 135, which seeks to eliminate the sentence of life without the possibility of parole. S.B. 835 would provide parole for the sick and elderly. Maroon’s compassionate release hearing exposed the DOC’s failure to provide medical care. If Sen. Street’s bills are passed into law, they will benefit elders, people with chronic medical conditions, and those with terminal illnesses in Pennsylvania along with setting a precedent that could benefit other states.

Maroon is not an isolated case. The situation is becoming crucial for the aging prison population and this crisis demands the public’s attention. This crisis of long-term incarceration of older adults is largely the result of increased long sentences, three-strike laws, and life without parole sentences, Sen. Street’s bills would release back into their communities many people who are aging behind bars without undue risk and with enormous savings in human suffering and dollars spent on senseless incarceration.

S.B. 135 and S.B. 835 would provide an alternative to continued incarceration for seniors who pose no threat, or minimum risk to public safety by releasing them to supportive housing, along with other reentry services and community supervision or family hospice care.

Given the steady rise in the percentage of incarcerated individuals who are in their older years—which stands at more than 10% of our state prison population today—the Commonwealth needs to do a much better job of meeting elders’ needs in a more humane way -- and this can be done without jeopardizing public safety. Data shows that early release for those 50 and older who have already served long prison sentences would not only save taxpayers money but also give better quality of life during the aging process.

S.B. 135 and S.B. 835 would allow people to return to their communities in their older years and receive what they are not receiving in prison: a supportive, caring environment to address complex health care and supportive service needs. It would allow for elders to mend the fractured bonds with family, relatives and friends still living in the community. Most importantly, it would be a step in the right direction on reforming systems that regularly deny parole and commutation and greatly reduce death by incarceration along with reducing the enormous amount of unnecessary pain, horror, and suffering.

From The Pennsylvania Prison Society

Executive Summary of Time for Justice: The Urgent Need for Second Chances in Pennsylvania's Sentencing System *FAMM Update*

Too many people in Pennsylvania are serving long prison terms that don't make communities safer. People who do not pose a risk to public safety languish in prison for decades because Pennsylvania's laws don't give them a second chance. This report, which focuses on people serving minimum sentences of 20 years or longer, looks at the harms and injustices of extreme sentences in Pennsylvania, as well as opportunities for reform.

Key findings:

1. Pennsylvania's prison population has been shaped by some of the harshest sentencing policies in the country.

- In 2019, Pennsylvania imprisoned more than seven times the number of people that it did in 1970. That growth was driven by punitive policy choices, not increases in crime, and it did not make Pennsylvanians safer.

- Pennsylvania is a national leader in imposing extreme sentences. This ranking is largely driven by two laws: the mandatory minimum sentence of life imprisonment required for first- and second-degree murder, and the denial of parole eligibility to anyone serving a life sentence. In Pennsylvania prisons, 13.4% of people are serving life without parole (LWOP), compared to only 3.6% nationally.

- The population serving extreme sentences in Pennsylvania has surged over the last few decades. There were more than nine times as many people serving extreme sentences in 2019 than there were in 1980.

- Pennsylvania's extreme sentencing practices have overwhelmingly impacted people of color, especially Black people, who make up less than 11% of Pennsylvania's population but 65% of people serving life sentences and 58% of those serving non-life sentences of 20 years or longer.

- Pennsylvania's extreme sentencing practices have created a large (and growing) elderly prison population, which increased thirtyfold from 1979 to 2019.

2. Pennsylvania's extreme sentences are a high-cost, low-value proposition for taxpayers.

- Researchers have found no evidence that severe sentencing policies discourage people from choosing to engage in crime.

- Extreme sentences are not necessary for preventing recidivism, because the vast majority of people who commit crimes – even very serious crimes – naturally grow out of criminal behavior as they age and mature. For example, of the 174 Philadelphia juvenile lifers – all originally convicted of homicide – who were re-sentenced and released following landmark U.S. Supreme Court decisions, only two (1.1%) had been reconvicted of any offense

as of 2020.

- Based on average incarceration costs, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) is spending \$220 million per year to incarcerate 3,892 people who have already served at least 20 years. The true cost is undoubtedly higher, because incarceration costs increase dramatically as people age and need more medical care.

- The average cost for incarcerated individuals in skilled or personal care units is \$500 per day (or \$182,625 per year), more than three times the cost for the general population.

3. Extreme sentences harm communities, families, and the economy.

- Extreme sentences deprive the community of valuable human resources. Many people serving extreme sentences could be productive economic assets in their communities if released and could play important roles in community violence intervention.

- Extreme sentences devastate families emotionally, psychologically, and financially, and contribute to poverty.

4. Extreme sentences are often unjust, excessive, and imposed without considering individuals' level of culpability or other mitigating factors.

- Mandatory LWOP deprives judges of the opportunity to make individualized sentencing decisions that take into account all important facts of a case.

- Nearly half of those serving LWOP were under age 25 at the time of the crime. That means that their brains were still developing and their level of culpability was diminished but that they will generally spend more time in prison than people who were older. More than 2,000 people incarcerated in Pennsylvania have spent more time in prison than the amount of time that they were alive prior to their crime.

5. Existing release mechanisms fail to remedy extreme sentences.

- Parole grant rates have declined since the 1970s and early 1980s, and Pennsylvania is 1 of only 7 states that denies parole eligibility to all lifers. The lifer population is the population that most needs parole – and the population that would generate the most cost savings to taxpayers if given the opportunity for parole.

- Commutations, the only way that people serving life sentences can leave prison alive, used to be common but have become extremely rare. That is in part due to a requirement that for lifers, the Board of Pardons must unanimously vote in favor of clemency for an application to be sent to the governor. And clemency alone will never be sufficient to address all excessive sentences doled out in Pennsylvania in the era of mass incarceration.

- Pennsylvania's law allowing for release of incarcerated people with terminal medical conditions is extremely narrow, procedurally cumbersome, and hardly used. Pennsylvania does not have a

geriatric release mechanism.

FAMM's Recommendations:

- Repeal and modify mandatory LWOP sentences.
- Expand opportunities for all people serving extreme sentences to demonstrate their rehabilitation and earn the opportunity for release.
- Expand medical release and create geriatric release.
- Make all sentencing reforms retroactive.
- Eliminate the requirement that the Board of Pardons must unanimously vote in favor of clemency before a lifer's commutation application can be sent to the governor.
- Reinvest savings resulting from decarceration in reentry and victim services.
- Include data collection and reporting requirements in all reforms to monitor and address any disparities that may arise.

As part of FAMM's ongoing efforts to support second chance legislation in Pennsylvania, we have released a report titled "Time for Justice: The Urgent Need for Second Chances in Pennsylvania's Sentencing System." A summary is provided here; the full report can be found at <https://famm.org/our-work/states-where-we-are-working/pennsylvania/>. For more information, contact FAMM at the address provided in Legislative Updates, famm@famm.org, or (202) 822-6700.

The Legalization of Collateral Consequences *Jill McCorkel, Ph.D. Villanova University* *Philadelphia Justice Project for Women & Girls*

Six years ago, Georgia executed Kelly Gissendaner, a 47-year-old mother of three. She was the 16th woman in the United States to be executed since the Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976 (Lisa Montgomery became the 17th in 2021). Gissendaner was convicted of the murder of her husband, Douglas, after a man she was having an affair with went to the couple's home and stabbed Douglas to death. That man, Gregory Owen, later made a deal with prosecutors and received a life sentence in exchange for testifying that the murder was all Gissendaner's idea.

Gissendaner's execution took place over and against the objections of each of the three children she shared with her husband. One of the children told a reporter from CNN, "My dad would not want my mom to be executed.... He would not want us to endure another devastating loss." On the eve of her scheduled execution, state authorities subjected her children to a horrifyingly cruel choice -- see their mother one last time or travel several hours across the state to go before the Board of Pardons and Parole to make a final appeal to spare her life. Standing outside Georgia's execution chamber, her daughter Kayla recalled, "We chose to try and save her life and they still denied us." Gissendaner was killed by lethal injection shortly after midnight on September 30, 2015.

The experience of Gissendaner's children is a poignant reminder that punishment is not a burden that is solely borne by the individual convicted of a criminal offense -- it has profound and often tragic consequences for children and loved ones.

I realize this is not exactly breaking news to anyone who is reading this column.

It is also not news to social scientists. Over the two decades, hundreds of research studies have explored all ways that mass incarceration impacts the children, families, loved ones, and communities. The effects, particularly for kids with an incarcerated parent, are almost entirely negative. For example, kids with an incarcerated parent are much more likely to suffer negative health, psychological, academic, and economic consequences compared to kids whose parents are not incarcerated. Mass incarceration poses so many problems across so many domains for children and family members that social scientists gave this phenomenon a name -- "collateral consequences." In essence, mass incarceration is a weapon of mass destruction—it crushes everything in its path.

As obvious as this is to social scientists and to anyone who has been incarcerated, it is not obvious to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 2003, the Court issued a ruling in *Overton v. Bazzetta* that upheld severe restrictions on visitation imposed by the Michigan Department of Corrections. Among the restrictions were limitations on children's visitation, even when those children were the daughters and sons of incarcerated parents. Michigan claimed to have adopted these restrictions in order to prevent illicit drugs from entering the facilities. The state further suggested that denying children visits with their parents was beneficial in that it protected kids from witnessing "harmful conduct" in visiting rooms. However, social science research demonstrates that the opposite is true. In most cases, visitation is good for kids and good for incarcerated parents. In fact, spending time with an incarcerated parent provides a buffer against some of the negative consequences of parental incarceration. Visitation helps incarcerated parents too. Parents who get visits with kids report improved mental health outcomes, fewer disciplinary sanctions, and lower rates of recidivism following release.

Despite this, the Court upheld Michigan's restrictions largely on the basis of institutional security. In so doing, the Court failed to acknowledge that Michigan's policy had harmful consequences for kids and family members—that they were being punished despite not having been convicted of a crime. While the Court did acknowledge that children have a right of contact with their parent, they defined this in the most minimal way possible. A child's right of contact could be satisfied so long as the institution allowed for a letter or a phone call—no visit necessary. As we have since learned from two year's worth of pandemic quarantines, these things are not the same.

The Court had a real opportunity in the *Overton* case to curb the some of the collateral damages of mass incarceration. It chose instead to legalize them.

In Joy
Dr. Latisha Webb, Opportunity Inc.

Happy 2022! It's a year to discover deeper depths of YOU!! The year 2021 came, went and is now a part of our history. As Opportunity, Inc. ended its 10 years in service celebratory events, we sum up our decade with the phrase, In Joy.

Inspired by our Sista2Sista Soul2Soul communal art project in November 2021 with members from Let's Get Free, CADBI and FAMM, we underwent a series of deep meditation exercises, processing our experiences as family members and advocates of persons who are incarcerated and painting. In addition, we laughed and cried. The most endearing memory during our time together creating artwork for our Sistas included the joy experienced in the moment. Each of us walked away with a deeper sense of human connection. We did not simply enjoy one another and the process of creating for those on the inside. We existed in joy...

We want to remain in joy by creating art for community connections for our 318 Sistas who are incarcerated and serving 20 years or more in the state of PA. We are grateful for the collaborations and strategic partnerships with ReConstruction, Inc. and Keep It Real Ministry in Philadelphia; Naomi's Project in Maryland and Let's Get Free in Pittsburgh. Each of these partnerships has and is making this program a success. More so, kudos to our volunteers in California, Georgia, Virginia, Maryland, New

York, NY and Philadelphia who write our Sistas every month. If you would like to volunteer or host a communal art project, then email Dr. Webb at drwebb@opportunitytoadvance.com.



Book Recommendations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Appalachian Prison Book Project
PO Box 601
Morgantown WV 26507

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

Helpful Tips for Requesting Books

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

of your letter.

- Always allow at least 90 days for delivery.

Sample Letter:
Wednesday, March 27 2019

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

Thank you so much for your time and efforts.

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

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

Reports From the Inside

The DOC Mail System *Candis Bradshaw, SCI Muncy*

The DOC's current system of processing mail is extremely flawed. Many inmates are not receiving their mail through St. Petersburg, and it is uncertain if the problem is with the St. Petersburg facility or with the local prison. I know of one lifer whose mother sends her letters frequently, and not a single one has come through. In my case, a teacher of mine in Texas has had every single letter returned to sender. Other friends of mine have reported the same issue. Another friend in Silver Spring, MD sent me a manila envelope, and that has yet to appear a month later.

Delivery of books and other items through Bellefonte is an abomination. The delivery delays affect not only inmates but staff. The program I am in waited one year to receive clear, plastic art boxes through the Bellefonte system. Another staff member reported still waiting for materials they ordered 8 months ago.

We have no idea when our books, bought through valid vendors, will arrive. I am waiting for books to study that I need as soon as possible. They were delivered to Bellefonte almost 3 weeks ago, and I have no clue when they will clear the system.

I understand the DOC is claiming penological interests, in that mail was delivered to a jail that contained drugs and employees were harmed due to the exposure. But regarding the books, they are required to come from vendors such as Amazon and Barnes & Noble. There is very little, if no way, for these items to be contaminated with drugs. Essentially, our books are being denied delivery for questionable reasons. I believe we all -- inmates and DOC staff -- are entitled to timely delivery of books from third-party vendors.

I would implore the DOC to seek alternate means to ensure security and safety of their employees while providing inmates and their employees timely delivery of all mail, especially that through the Smart Communications facility over 1,200 miles away.

Raises *Jeffrey Baker, SCI Huntingdon*

How long has it been? I've been down over 15 years and have only read about prison inmates receiving raises in the old law books. The last raise I remember reading about was a raise back in 1985. Our current rate of pay maxes out at 42¢ an hour. The problem is, almost no one in SCI Huntingdon makes that. Our library and Block workers max out at 29¢ per hour.

They claim if you are trained to do a certain job, you can receive higher pay rates. Problem, they don't train you to do any jobs. They not only cut our pay, but they cut our hours. We can only get paid for 6 hours per day. Almost all of us would like a job where we can work out of our cells for 8 hours a day and receive a fair salary for it.

The massive decline in CI shops and "skilled" positions has

bankrupted the inmate population so much that we are a blight on our families and friends. We beg for support. We are not learning to be part of a real society, instead learning to mooch off it like parasites.

The education department in the DOC has let us all down. We are not capable of learning real life trades and skills that could make us successful out in the real world. Alternative energy is the way to a new beginning. We could get ahead of the curve and learn a real life trade that could gainfully employ us and make us a success. We should be learning how to make and install solar panels. There is no reason we as inmates can not learn to manufacture the panels. We have the manpower and the room. We could make solar for all the prisons and state buildings, and yes, even the FED building. We could be ahead of the curve for once.

They could be teaching us about geothermal heating and cooling systems. We could learn to make and install windmills. Why not piggyback on what is certain to be the next great industrial revolution and teach us to be forward?

Teach us to be self-reliant, so that we are not a parasite. Raise our earning potential, in here and out there. Turn the DOC into an earner.

In Support of Parole Eligibility for Lifers *George Rahsaan Brooks, SCI Coal Township*

Pennsylvania is one of only six states in the United States that does not offer parole eligibility for life sentence offenders. Absent a fair parole opportunity for persons serving life sentences, those sentences amount to death sentences. I was found guilty of a crime that I didn't commit and the judge's opinion falsely claimed that the deceased identified me to his siblings, and the victim's mother gave a complete and accurate description of me to the police.

I filed for commutation based upon those falsehoods in the trial court's opinion, which the courts took as true because, at the time, courts were deciding my case. I have no court transcripts to dispute those lies, and after I was able to obtain my court transcripts decades later, the courts closed their doors on me after deciding that I did not diligently obtain court transcripts. I was guaranteed due process under the 14th Amendment, and I was unable to timely obtain the transcripts due to my indigency.

I filed an application for commutation because it was the only remedy available for me to obtain my release from prison, then prove my innocence. If this state was parole eligible, I would have obtained parole over a decade ago. What is the logic and rationale for denying parole eligibility when other states sentence people like Charles Manson, David Berkowitz, Ted Bundy, and other mass murderers to life with the possibility of parole?

Absent is the fair parole opportunity for Lifers who did not commit intentional murder and to Lifers who are rehabilitated and more likely than not would never offend again: prisoners who are not a threat to public safety, who are elders with chronic health issues and who have served decades incarcerated and who are

costing tax payers millions of dollars, turning prisons into veritable nursing homes. This serves a legitimate penological objective!

Based on many books written and vast studies conducted over decades, it is safe to say that the American justice system is severely flawed. With the capacity for humans to grow, develop, and change over decades, it is illogical for our lawmakers to continue to oppose legislation for parole eligibility. Less than 1.2 percent of juvenile Lifers granted parole have re-offended and/or relapsed into criminal behavior. To me, this is proof: People are much better than the worst mistake they were unfortunate enough to commit.

By parole eligibility, I am advocating that parole be considered on a case-by-case basis. The life-sentenced applicant would need to gain support and approval by a comprehensive parole board after demonstrating -- by clear and convincing evidence -- remorse, hard work at transformation, and behavior that showed they pose no threat to public safety. As Secretary of the Department of Corrections John E. Wetzel has stated at various times, Lifers provide leadership and stability within the Department of Corrections' institutions; Lifers maintain a high level of work ethic and have proven to excel in academic, vocational and treatment programs as well as also serving, in some instances, as mentors and tutors to the younger segment of the prison population. Would it not be also beneficial to society to allow those same reformed Lifers, who might qualify for parole, an opportunity to provide the same stability and leadership in their respective neighborhoods if once granted parole?

Passing legislation that would allow parole eligibility for reformed prisoners who have demonstrated remorse and worked hard to transform themselves would not diminish the seriousness of their crimes nor would it absolve them from further accountability. It would instead, I feel, give them the opportunity to further use the talents, education, and lessons learned from both their mistakes and growth. To refuse to use their talents when the youth in their neighborhoods need it amounts to being wrong and incorrect. However, it would be both right and correct to pass legislation that would give them an opportunity to obtain parole, which will in turn strengthen the very inner city communities that society claims it is attempting to protect.

In Pennsylvania, denial of good time, life without parole sentences, mandatory sentencing, and mass incarceration all evolved to bolster political careers and to patch over failures of political imagination in addressing crime from the 1960s to early-1990s. That patch did little to improve public safety, and it widened inequality. Denying good time and parole to Lifers will never solve the problems that prisons are used to mask!

Remain Vigilant

Brian Fuller, Torres Unit, Texas

We love our children. Sometimes it breaks our heart when we are forced to lie to them: "No, honey, there aren't really any monsters in the world." We don't want to scare them. We're afraid they won't be able to understand.

Rest assured that there is nothing new under the sun. Those

atrocities that haunt our past will revisit us if we refuse to remain vigilant and aware. The denial of truth will never negate its existence. It only serves to illuminate ignorance.

I've still got a lot to learn. My stubbornness is easily confused with perseverance! Stay happy, healthy, safe, and strong. Much love and respect.

Video Visits

Charles Carrington, SCI Mahanoy

I am incarcerated here at SCI Mahanoy, where they have installed virtual video visitation screens on every housing unit. The problem is that they installed visitation screens six feet away from inmate showers, with no divider, partition, or screen to prevent inmates on the housing unit from waving at your family on the screen. I've seen inmates make inappropriate gestures to people's families and friends on the screen. This has caused issues and tensions between inmates. When inmates take it upon themselves to put something up to prevent others from talking during their visit, the officers remove it, stating they need to see the screen.

The screens that we used in the visiting rooms had dividers, screens that prevented others from stalking your visit. Even the telephones on the housing unit have dividers and partitions. Video visits are between the inmate and the visitor, not the visitor and the entire housing unit. Nobody has responded to my inmate request to staff (DC-135A).

The Jailhouse Lawyer

Keith Lamont Burley, SCI Forest

The Jailhouse Lawyer is a Warrior whose pen is a sword, forged in the fire of his frustration.

He is sincere, trustworthy, and honest. He does not say or do anything which would materially breach the constitutional protection the U.S. Supreme Court has declared for him regarding his helping and assisting his fellow incarcerated citizens.

The Jailhouse Lawyer acknowledges his predecessors, such as in the case of Gideon v. Wainwright, where an indigent man from 1963, the father of the pauper petition, petitioning the U.S. Supreme Court for a lawyer expended time and energy, countless hours in the Law Library. Now indigent defendants have a right to counsel.

He acknowledges Miranda v. Arizona, Brady v. Maryland in that these were remarkable men who stood against the arbitrary vindictiveness of those who sought justice outside the law. So like these, the Jailhouse Lawyer works off precedent, and seeks to understand the ambiguity of law, since that law is not stable. Since it will flex and change, not bound by any set rule or discipline, he must adapt to procedure.

The Jailhouse Lawyer uses the law as a weapon in the most practical solution. He is not vulgar, arrogant, or conceited. His fight for freedom is never vain. He works hard, puts forth effort and lives with resolve. The Jailhouse Lawyer reads a judge's words, not their mind. He's disciplined, reserved, has self-restraint and

modesty. Humble in his practice of what Mumia Abu Jamal termed “Hard Law.” The case law we read has been written by those who challenged the state, the system, and refused to forfeit their dignity and honor for an illusory pot of gold that doesn’t exist at the end of the rainbow of rebellion and deceit.

To COs who Refuse to Vaccinate
Marty Dunbar, SCI Mahanoy

As a prisoner in the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections I have seen so many prisoners get this COVID-19 when it first hit the state institution. Some of them died, some did not, but they were never the same after getting this disease.

Mr. Union President, I saw your Members coming to work with their nose running, coughing, and everything else, which was horrific to me, and others around me. Your members were the ones bringing this disease inside each of the State Institutions in Pennsylvania!

Remember each time a Correctional Officer steps inside of a State Institution, they are responsible for each and every Prisoner’s health inside of that Prison.

Stop playing “Politics” with your Members Lives.

Commutation Elusive for Delaware Inmates
Robert Saunders, James T. Vaughn Correctional Facility

Everyone would agree that many factors should be considered before commuting a life sentence, including the severity of the crime, the person’s role in the crime, family and community support, prison misconduct history, educational achievements, involvement in prison programming, employability upon release, and empathy and remorse. Most people also think incarcerated individuals should earn freedom and those who transform themselves the most should be released. In Delaware, however, the commutation of a lifer is contingent upon who you know. Many lifers in the Delaware prison system have never taken anyone’s life. Some of those lifers have earned college degrees, gone decades without any misconduct, maintain family and community support, and possess employable skills. Yet the same lifers remain incarcerated while principal perpetrators with less education and worse prison misconduct histories get their sentences commuted. Why?

In their 2019 Fall newsletter, the Sentencing Project explains:

“At least 16 states and the District of Columbia have introduced legislation authorizing retroactive sentencing remedies for people sentenced to life imprisonment. In 2019, the Sentencing Project’s director of advocacy Nicole D. Porter joined more than 100 New York advocates to testify in support of a New York State Senate parole bill for older people and a presumptive parole reform bill. The “Elder Parole” bill would allow people aged 55 and older who have served 15 years in prison a consideration of parole release regardless of crime or sentence, including those sentenced to life without parole. The Presumptive Parole Reform Bill would change the standard of parole release and create a presumption

of release for all parole applicants, including those with a life sentence without the benefit of parole.”

These bills would eliminate denial form letters from being sent from the governor’s legal advisors stating your application for commutation consideration “due to totality of the circumstances.” What are these alleged circumstances, which the Department of Corrections, Board of Parole, and Board of Pardons lack knowledge of when they have recommended the individual for commutation. To eliminate the disparities and inequalities in the commutation system, Delaware needs to create an independent lifers section for the parole board to ensure impartiality, endowing the section authority to parole the most transformed lifers. A commutation should be based on merit, not on who you know.

Prison Food
Carol Hann, SCI Muncy

I’m a wrongfully convicted inmate stuck in the system, enjoying the stale bread that the mice didn’t get and cold, undercooked, or burnt food.

Now we wonder: why must we eat cold, stale, or over used leftovers? A few reasons:

Thieves everywhere are stealing the good stuff, because they only make 20 cents to start in the kitchen. If they work 8 hours, they make \$1.60 a day, minus the 25% they pay in court costs (40 cents) which leaves them \$1.20 a day. It’s \$5.00 for a sick call if you get a bacterial infection in your intestines from eating the food, which was made without using clean gloves or clean workspaces.

With a problem, you need a solution: pay the inmates more and enforce the rules. If you steal, you’re fired. If working in the kitchen is a top paid job, then inmates will think twice about losing the job. This way, the better food supply will return, and you won’t have to serve tainted food to hungry inmates. Then, the medical staff can help treat more serious problems instead of inmates with bacteria infections and food poisoning problems. Food for thought.

Please Read
Earl Smith, SCI Huntingdon

My name is Earl Smith, but a lot of my family and friends call me Buddy. In 2005, at the age of 20, I was sentenced to Life Without Parole. A man lost his life because of me, and everyday I wish that I could bring him back. Before I was locked up, I had a lot of hopes and dreams. I wasn’t perfect, but the sad thing is, it only takes one wrong decision, and you can ruin yours and someone else’s life. I’m not asking you to feel sorry for me, but I figured that the best way for me to do my time was to understand what it means to take responsibility for my careless actions.

I want my victim’s family, my family, and the world to know that I’m remorseful and hurt by the pain that I caused his family and mine as well. So, instead of doing my time with no meaning, I wanted to learn why I put myself in that situation, and I wanted to understand who I hurt by being the reason that a human

being's life was cut short. I understand today that the 20 year old me was not thinking the right way by believing that I wasn't hurting anyone because they too were participating in criminal activities. Please understand that I'm not in any way trying to slander my victim. What I'm trying to illustrate is that the 20 year old me, and some of the youth today, believed that because a person was participating in criminal behavior, we were not hurting anyone (such as an "innocent person" per se). I say that to get to this point: we are wrong for thinking that. Just because we are not hurting an old lady or children, we still are hurting people, even if they too were drug dealers, thieves, burglars, or whatever criminal background a person may have.

In our country, we are all human beings who are viewed as being equal. I can only speak for myself, but I would like to think that there are so many people who think the way I once did when I was a child. That's the purpose of me writing this: to help address what we see in our communities today when it comes to crime. While I have been incarcerated, I held many conversations with plenty of individuals who believed that because they committed a crime against someone who happened to commit crimes, they were not hurting anyone, and they truly believed this.

I pray that our troubled youth can be awakened by seeing my situation as what not to do. The reason why this means so much to me is because I don't want to see anyone else go through this -- not another family losing a loved one or another family losing their loved one to the prison system. I may not have all the answers, but I believe that I can in some way reach one person to help them change their life by being honest with them about everything that comes with street life and prison life. My life from now on is about sharing my story and helping those who need it. I end here saying thank you for taking your time to read this, and God bless to you and your family.

A Message to Incarcerated Veterans
David Osifchin, SCI Dallas

The SCI Dallas Veterans Service Unit (VSU) is gearing up for a successful re-start with the easing of COVID restrictions. In March of 2020, the COVID-19 virus and subsequent necessary steps by the PADOE to restrict movement put a damper on our available resources and enrollment numbers. We lost one of our own to COVID: Robert Daniel, USMC Vietnam Veteran and Purple Heart recipient. He was an active participant in our VSU and is greatly missed. We have gained a new SCI Dallas PADOE Veterans Coordinator, Mr. Edwards, a 20-year Navy veteran with an impressive resume. He is dedicated to working with staff and VSU residents to ensure the SCI Dallas Mission Statement core purpose is achieved: "To Coordinate And Implement Programs And Services That Assist Incarcerated Veterans In Making A Successful Transition Back Into Society."

Mr. Edwards stresses that programs are people, and that we as VSU residents are ultimately the people that make it run and that we make ourselves and the VSU a success through our personal efforts and the camaraderie associated with residing on a Veterans Service Unit.

If you are an incarcerated veteran who is willing to put in the

effort and help make yourself and the SCI Dallas VSU a success story, please contact Mr. Edwards, VSU Coordinator (AB-Block) via Inmate Request if you are currently at SCI Dallas, or contact your Unit Counselor at your facility to seek transfer to the SCI Dallas Veterans Service Unit.

Be the Change
Michael Mutawakkil Mayer, SCI Somerset

In the twenty-five years I've been incarcerated, I've witnessed a sad trend among those who wear brown. We have a tendency to cry and complain to each other about the issues that arise around us, as if any one of us has the power to change them, instead of complaining to those who actually can change or fix whatever those issues may be.

Some are worse than others, though. They are just compulsive complainers who go from person to person inciting them to do something but won't so much as put in a request slip to get anything done. We all know people like this. Isn't it about time we stop crying to each other and let those who are in a position to make things happen hear our voices? Write a request, file a grievance, talk to somebody that's in charge, do something, but if you're not willing to put the work in, then stop whining.

Change doesn't happen just by thinking, and if you're not willing to put forth that effort, then you don't have the right to complain.

1994 Crime Bill and Legality of Sentence Claims
John Passmore, SCI Somerset

In the wake of the unfortunate murder of George Floyd and the subsequent call for social justice reform, criminal justice reform, and the dismantling of racist systems, I implore you to get involved in this important matter below.

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, commonly referred to as the 1994 Crime Bill and signed into law by President Clinton, has been biased and detrimental to all Americans in the Criminal Justice Court System. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania adopted and put into effect the provisions of that 1994 law that allowed "time bars" and "procedural defaults" to take away a person's appellate rights, even if that person has an illegal sentence. The results are that thousands of African Americans, poor people, and the uneducated have been locked out of court proceedings, where they could challenge their illegal sentences and/or make other legal challenges because the aggrieved party did not meet the one-year time limitation to present legal challenges.

Currently, thousands of Pennsylvanians are time-barred and procedurally defaulted from presenting "Legality of Sentence Claims" due to the one-year time limit to present legal claims after a person's sentence becomes final.

It is fundamentally unfair that a one-year time limit to present legal claims is put against incarcerated Pennsylvanians, who have limited or no general education, no legal education, and are adjusting to prison life, yet they are expected to learn and navigate a

legal system that practicing lawyers learn how to navigate in four to twelve years of college education. How can incarcerated Pennsylvanians be expected to present legal claims with competence in a one-year time limit?

IT IS TIME TO CHANGE THIS IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA'S CRIMINAL COURT SYSTEM!

A lot of support is building in the Commonwealth to allow criminal defendants who have current or have presented past Legality of Sentence Claims to be allowed to present such claims to the proper courts and not be subjected to the one-year time limit. In essence, Legality of Sentence Claims will not be subjected to time bars and procedural defaults. For example, people with sentencing issues like appropi violations, being sentenced beyond maximum, being sentenced outside the guidelines, etc. could petition courts for relief regardless of when the Legality of Sentence Claim was presented. On the other hand, other such legal claims (besides Legality of Sentence Claims) will still fall under the one-year time limit.

Tom Wolf (PA Governor), John Fetterman (PA Lt. Governor), Sharif Street (PA State Senator), and the Pennsylvania Black Legislative Caucus have been contacted about these issues and asked to change the law, so please contact them too and explain that you support Legality of Sentence Claims being free of time bars and procedural defaults, explain that it is vital that Pennsylvania Post-Conviction Provisions on Time Bars be eradicated, and let the Governor know that you've noticed that he changed the "After-Discovered Evidence Rule" that now allows for after-discovered evidence to be presented from up to one-year after discovery of such evidence, when previously defendants only had 60 days to present After-Discovered Evidence Claims. Therefore, Legality of Sentence Claims provisions should also be changed to allow defendants to present such claims at any time, without any procedural defaults and/or time bars.

Please note that it is important that you point out to the Governor that legal claims other than Legality of Sentence Claims for the time being should still be subject to one-year time limits, as we only want Legality of Sentence Claims to be challengeable without time bars and procedural defaults.

Pending Restricted Release Indefinitely *Donald Carr, SCI Greene*

I've been in solitary confinement since 2018 because I have a bad anxiety disorder, which I take medication for. Situations such as staff abuse, documents being falsified, assaults, and lack of food spike my anxiety.

I originally came to the RHU for participating in a fist fight. I am still pending RRL despite having been assaulted. There is a lack of psychological treatment here to adequately address my psychiatric issues. I spoke to a psychologist here at SCI Greene, and he feels the DTU would be beneficial for me. However, I can't go there because the Central Office has not denied or approved my RRL packet which was sent in 2019. I have not received responses from my letters to John Wetzel, and there is no limit to

the length of the RRL process. I am going to max out a 10 year sentence having spent the last 4 years in solitary confinement, while in a highly anxious and PTSD mind state.

When I do go home, I will not feel comfortable being in public because I will always think officials are trying to kill me. I refuse to drive because I don't want to get shot by a racist cop. I refuse to become a victim because I lack legislative power to protect myself.

The only way I think there can be a sense of peace without feeling oppressed is to have consequences when staff violate a rule. What is the justification for indefinite solitary confinement? What is the appropriate way to obtain peace when grievances are denied and retaliation comes from filing the proper paperwork?

The Full Truth *Jessie Crawford, SCI Phoenix*

My name is Jessie L Crawford, and I am currently an inmate serving a 3.5 to 8 year sentence, and I recently became eligible for parole as of June 3, 2021. I was able to provide the Department with my home plan, employment statements, recommendation letter from the employer, and an acceptance recommendation letter, indicating that I was accepted into a sober living facility. I also provided the department with four certificates of completion from the vocational training class, custodial maintenance, as well as OSHA construction safety certification. I provided receipts for my PA state identification, and social security card. I also provided the certificate of completion from the AOD outpatient drug addiction group. Everything that I named is a requirement by the Department in order to be considered for parole.

I was told that I met every criteria for eligibility for parole, and I was told that because of my conduct and positive adjustment to the prison, that I would receive the positive recommendation of support for parole on December 23, 2020. I received the full support from all of the facility staff, Warden, Deputy Warden, all of the insitutional parole staff as well as the unit staff. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, the parole docket was backed up and my case was moved.

I was eventually called to the parole office for the pre parole interview. At such time I provided all of the information previously stated, but I added what is called an "offenders version" and receipts for the CVCF, the crime victims compensation fund, which must be paid in order to be released on parole at this time. I was again told that my chances for parole were high due to my positive adjustment and conduct at the prison and that my reentry plan was strong, and because of my continued efforts at sobriety, my home plan, and the job set up for me, I am a good candidate for parole. I was told not to worry, that I was in good standing, and that all of my paperwork would be digitally scanned and forwarded to the parole board prior to the initial parole interview.

At the initial parole interview, the interviewer asked me if I wanted to max out my sentence or go home, and I replied that I wanted to go home. He then indicated that he saw that I had two prior state prison numbers and that I violated parole a few times. I told him that I had figured out that the root of my parole violations was my drug addiction, and at this point in my life, my

sobriety is the number one priority in my life. After this, he asked me to explain what happened the night I was arrested. At that point I got nervous because I wanted to articulate, as detailed as possible, and take full responsibility for the crimes I committed. I also wanted to show that I was remorseful. I explained what happened the night of my arrest, at the same time trying not to stumble over my words.

He then asked me about the night of my arrest. I explained that in order for me to be a better person I have to be better by holding myself accountable for the way I live and being smarter about the people, places and things that I do. He replied to this by asking: "Speaking of places, when you get paroled, where are you going to live?" I answered his next questions, and he said: "Okay Mr. Crawford I want you to know that violating parole and carrying guns is going to catch up with you. Good luck, and you should hear back in about four weeks". He never once asked me anything about my programs or what I did with my time.

A decision was finally made in my case and it said that I was denied parole for the following reasons:

" 1)Your risk and needs assessment indicating your level of risk to the community 2) Your prior unsatisfactory parole supervision history 3) Reports, evaluation and assessments/level of risk indicates your risk to the community 4)Your refusal to accept responsibility for the offense committed 5) the negative recommendation made by the prosecuting attorney".

The unit counselors, the institutional parole agents, and myself were shocked by this decision. One of the most shocking things about this decision was that I was given a one year hit and the reasons did not coincide with the facts in my case. I also wrote clearly that I take full responsibility for the crimes I committed and I am remorseful. I was never asked if I took responsibility for the crime. I do not think they even looked at the parole packets, because if so, they would have clearly seen that in my paperwork. At this point I was stressed, confused and wanted to know what went wrong. I inquired with my unit counselor about the statements regarding me being a risk to the community. I was told by the counselor that she doesn't see how that's possible because the facility had already deemed me no risk to the community because I have outside clearance.

I then started to question the statement that I received a negative recommendation from the prosecuting attorney. I went to the law library and I discovered a statute (61 PA. C.S. 6137) that outlines the process of how the parole would have to obtain this letter of recommendation from the prosecuting attorney. I saw that this process must start six prior to the expiration of the minimum date, so I wrote to the institutional parole office and didn't get an answer; I asked my unit counselor, and she was unable to provide or locate this recommendation form. I then spoke to the psychiatrist assigned to the unit and asked her if there is a recommendation letter from the district attorney and she told me that she could not find anything in my file from the district attorney. She advised me to write to the records department, and I did as well as to the superintendent, the deputy warden, and the major.

I received a response from the records department indicating

that they could not find any letter from the DA office in my file. As of when I wrote this article, there is no verification that a letter was ever sent. My wife contacted the prosecuting attorney, and he stated that he does send out recommendation letters, but most of the time it's a negative recommendation. However, if the inmate has done all that is required of him and doesn't get in any trouble, he wouldn't have to send a negative recommendation letter. He told my wife to tell me to write him a letter and show him all what I accomplished and the next time he would be sure to give me a positive recommendation.

As of this date my records have not been delivered. I also sent the same packet of information to my wife and she also has not received the mail. I have utilized every step I could take to clear this up inside the facility, and now I'm looking for outside assistance. If I try to appeal the decision by the time my case is heard, it will take a year and by that time I will be ready to see parole again. This is an issue that needs immediate attention. During a global pandemic when they should be decreasing the prison population, they have resorted to not telling the full truth to keep people in prison, using these general statements, with no one checking if it is true or not because they feel that no one can tell them anything. They abuse their discretion with no consequences. I hope this would be a problem for the people outside as much as it is a problem for the men inside. I am asking for help in this matter because I honestly don't understand how this happened and how some things are not checked when it comes to the inmates parole process.

Retraction Announcement:

In the November/December issue of Graterfriends, an article titled "Capitulation via Compliance" was misattributed to Brian Fuller at SCI Benner. The article was written by a different Brian Fuller, currently incarcerated in Texas. We sincerely apologize for the error. We will correct the issue for our archives.

Resources

PA State Officials

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

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

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

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

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

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

Prison Society Mentoring Program

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

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

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

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

FAMM

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

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

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

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

The Prison Society & Broad Street Ministry

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

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

LAMBDA Resources for LGBTQ People in Custody

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

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

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

Expungements

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

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

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

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

ACLU

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

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

Prisoner's Rights

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

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

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

Reentry Services

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

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

Life Without Parole

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

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

Pennsylvania Innocence Project

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

Philadelphia Office
1515 Market St
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Pittsburgh Office
914 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

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

Legislative Highlights: FAMM

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

January 2022

The state legislature returns for the second year of its two-year session. The Senate and House of Representatives are in session 3-6 days in Jan., Feb., and March. Agencies including the Pa. Dept. Corrections will testify about their budget requests in Feb. It is a long road for a bill to become law: it must be approved by committees, the House, the Senate, and signed by the Governor. This is Governor Wolf's last year in office; he cannot seek reelection due to term limits. The May 2022 primary will determine the candidates for the Nov. 2022 election (which will also include the attorney general race).

Mandatory minimum sentences – HB 1587 (Rep. Brown) and HB 1590 (Rep. Stephens)

HB 1587 would create two-, five-, or 10-year mandatory minimum sentences for people who possess guns and have a felony record, depending on prior convictions. HB 1590 would require courts to impose the lesser of 5 years or the minimum sentence under the sentencing guidelines if the person is convicted of a crime of violence, armed drug offense, or felon-in-gun-possession.

FAMM and the Prison Society oppose both bills. The House Judiciary Committee passed both bills by party line votes on June 15, 2021. The bills are out of the House Rules Committee and actively on the House Voting Calendar. They could advance at any time during session. FAMM will continue to vigorously oppose both bills and remind lawmakers that the state Supreme Court struck down mandatory minimum sentences for gun and drug offenses in 2015. FAMM continues to ask Governor Wolf to keep his promise that he would veto any bill containing mandatory minimums.

Life Without Parole Reform – SB 135 (Sen. Street) and HB 135 (Rep. Dawkins)

SB 135 would, if passed, provide parole eligibility after 20, 25, 30, or 35 years in prison to adults and juveniles convicted of first- and second-degree murder, depending on age and victim status. HB 135 would, if passed, make people serving life sentences (except those convicted of murder of a law enforcement officer) eligible for parole by deleting the words "without parole" from existing laws. Neither bill has received votes or review by committees since referral in Feb. and Oct. 2021.

Parole related bills -- SB 835 (Sen. Street), HB 518 (Rep. DeLuca), HB 2030 (Rep. Mihalek)

SB 835 would, if passed, create a parole mechanism for certain ill and/or aging prisoners to petition the Parole Board for release. The medical parole provision would apply to people who have a qualifying serious medical issue and a weakened ability to function in prison. The geriatric parole provision is separate, and would apply to people who are 55+, have served half their time (or 25 years, whichever is less), and the Parole Board agrees that there is no danger to the public. The bill has not yet received any votes or review by committees. It was referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee in Aug. 2021.

HB 518 would, if passed, require "repeat violent offenders" to do 85% of their time before being eligible for parole. Introduction followed the shooting death of a police officer in the lawmaker's district, and has not received any review since referral to the House Judiciary Committee in Feb. 2021.

HB 2030 would, if passed, create credits toward time off one's minimum prison sentence upon completion of educational programs (for example, there would be a 90-day credit for getting a GED, 120-day credit for a diploma, 180-day credit for an advanced degree, etc.). The bill excludes certain types of crimes, including murder, rape, etc. It would also create a pilot program to study how many people in prison and on probation have learning disabilities and need additional supports.

Clemency reform – SB 694 (Sen. Bartolotta) and HB 1719 (Rep. McClinton)

SB 694 would, if passed, begin the process of changing the constitution so that the governor can grant clemency whenever the Board of Pardons recommends a person for clemency by a vote of 4-1 (currently there is a unanimous requirement). HB 1719 would do the same but with a 3-2 vote, enabling more people to be considered for clemency. The bills have not received any votes or review by committees.

Prison Conditions – HB 1283 (Rep. Bullock), SB 686 (Sen. Muth), HB 1074 (Rep. Davis), HB 1753 (Rep. Brown)

HB 1283 would, if passed, provide incarcerated parents with one free phone call or email per month to each of their children. SB 686, if passed, would ban the use of solitary confinement and provide alternative disciplinary measures, such as limiting visitation, recreation, or work. It would allow confinement to a person's own cell. SB 1074 would ban the use of solitary on pregnant women, LGBTQ, and people who are 21 or less, or 70 plus, with a 15-day cap on solitary use. HB 1753 would, if passed, abolish the \$5 medical copay in state prisons and prohibit the Dept. Corrections from charging incarcerated people fees for medical services. Note

January 2022

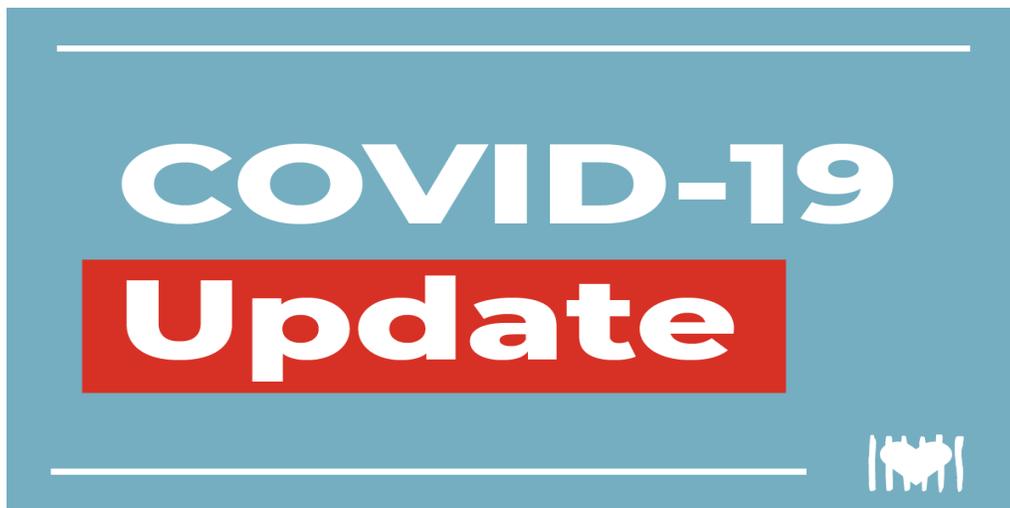
that FAMM and the Prison Society are working on multiple avenues to reduce or eliminate the copay. These bills are sitting in their respective Judiciary Committees.

Other bills of interest – HB 706 (Rep. McClinton), SB 104 (Sen. Street), HB 1888 (Rep. Rabb)

HB 706 and SB 104 would require that incarcerated people are counted in their home districts in the U.S. Census, instead of their prison district (a practice known as “prison gerrymandering”). HB 706 advanced out of committee in Sept. with a recommendation to include college students and those in local jails in the bill. It is on the table, and could be called for a House vote at any time during session. SB 104 remains in the Senate State Government Committee, where it was referred in Jan. 2021.

HB 1888 would allow lawmakers to request that the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing prepare a demographic impact statement for any law amending the crimes or judicial code, in recognition of racial disparities in imprisonment. The bill was referred to the House Judiciary Committee in Sept. 2021.

**Note that many bills have multiple co-sponsors; only the prime or first-listed sponsor is included here.*



Share your Story!

In the July/August issue of Graterfriends, you heard from us about why charging medical copays in prison is bad policy. Since then, the Department has reinstated the use of copays, which had been suspended for most of the duration of the pandemic.

Public officials also know that barriers to accessing health care in prison, including copay charges, can make outbreaks such as COVID19 worse. A paper written by a group of correctional physicians in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine cited “medical copays that demand a substantial portion of a prisoner’s income” as a factor that could “prevent the timely identification, isolation, treatment, and referral of cases.” Illnesses worsen when people avoid the doctor, which means more aggressive and more expensive treatment when they can no longer go without it. (ex. Preventing patients with diabetes from ending up on dialysis, or treating those with high blood pressure before they end up with heart disease or stroke)

The Prison Society and FAMM are working together to permanently eliminate medical copays and fees that block access to health care in prisons. If you or a loved one has a story about the impact of the medical copay, please share it with us by writing to us at:

Prison Society
230 South Broad Street, Suite 605
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Reader Survey

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

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

How would you rate the diversity of Graterfriends' contributors? Would you like to see more representation in any categories?

In preparation for our 2022 creative issue, what themes or artwork would you like to see included? Please submit either your own work or suggestions below.

Birthday Recognition

January

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 Dale Arnold, Jerome Marshall, Cesar Rodriguez Arevalo
2 Darnell Cooper, Vercell Martin, Jason Siderio, Adam Santiago Jr, Brandon Pierce	3 Bennie Brimage, John Dwyer, Robert Redding	4 Ralph Good, Timothy Hinkledire, Terri Harper, Abigail Fanus, Saveria Russo, William Cruz, Michael Archacki	5 Marty Dunbar	6 Joshua LuKach	7 Bruce Silar, Jeffrey Watson	8 Reinaldo Fantauzzi, Caroline Guy, Raque Burkeholder
9 Curtis Jones, Randy Whitacre	10 Raymond McLaughlin, Ryan Dale Noel, Courtland Stackpole, Juan Johnson	11 Dennis McK-eithan, Josue Cervantes	12 Leon Bodle, Daniel Gwynn	13 Tyrell Hart, Marcus Jones, Francis Boyd, Michael Drawbaugh	14 Nichols Beligiorno, Darnell Gilyard	15 Steven Cooper, Joseph Bowen, Darrell Goodley, Shane Sperow
16	17	18 Jeremy J. Dillon, Justice Spece, Edmond Jackson	19 Jaylin Huggins, Andrew Smallwood, Michael Covington, Rico Lofton	20 Alan Stklovsky, James Deutsch, Zachary Stada	21 Cosmo Dinaro, Patrick Mongeau	22 Richard Wheeler, Warren Easley, Anthony Osche
23 Melony Ford	24 Carl Sachette, Edward Sistrunk, Kevin Stillman, Colin Best	25 William Stiveson Jr., Jade Samuels	26 Max Stine, Lamont Bullock, Richard McAnulty	27 Manna Massaqoi	28 Robert Henry 30 Daniel Cummings, Navarro Matthews, Gregory Dunbar, Curtis Palmore	29 Jerry Branch, Jeremy Atkinson 31 Shaheed Warren, Clinton Geist

The Graterfriends team sends their thoughts to those who celebrate their birthday in January and February.

February

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 Omar Hardy	2	3 Alexander Peterson, Robert Ohler, Keith (Khalif) Smith, Yassin	4 Paul Schlueter	5 Shawn Shipton, Sherman Waters
6 Charles Curtis, Mark Christine, Chris Young, Jonathan Margoles	7 Sylvia Boykin, Derrick Cramer, Darnell Grimsley, Michael Baroni	8 Eric Thomas, Patricia Sloan, Thomas Resuta, Ricardo Noble, Henry Dennison Jr.	9 Lanyere Rockamore, Kermit Gosnell, Frank McGinnis, Rico Carter, Cesar Fernandez, Kareem Kellam	10 Gordon Davis, Jose Feliciano, William Webb	11 Richard Iovanna, Keith Lambing, Barrett Tunsil	12
13 Ronald Chapman, Tim Jacoby	14 Kenneth Lane	15 Cameron Speer, Angel Cruz, Corliveeth McMillian	16 David Conson	17 Edward Wilson, Larry Futrell	18 Larry Stromberg, Donnie Jones	19 Gary McClain, James Dawson
20 Demetrio Mendez, Derrick Neal, Heather Hess, Stacey Newkirk	21 Joseph Patterson, Stephen Wood, Joseph Wilson, Ronnie Tilghman	22 Manuel Rose, Derrick Wearry, Rickey Wilson, Matthew Michaels, Larry Rodgriuez	23	24 Edward Wissing-er, Roger Parker, Tyler Bradshaw, Ricardo Natividad, Warren Henderson	25 Salvatore Ross, James Beal, Angel Borrero, Ralph McCain	26 Greggory Theobald, Wayne Johnson
27 Clarence Love	28 Kurt Keiper					

The Graterfriends team sends their thoughts to those who celebrate their birthday in January and February.

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