

GRATER FRIENDS

A NEW NORMAL

Timothy X. of SCI Somerset

As everyone incarcerated who is affiliated with a religious or cultural organization within the Department of Corrections knows, as of the conclusion of 2022, there will no longer be traditional religious or cultural meals brought and served to members of these organizations. The Department of Corrections has held that such religious or cultural meals associated with these organizations will only be observed as an “incentive meal.” And when I asked what does that mean, I was told the definition of a religious or cultural “incentive meal” means that “any observance of a special meal during religious or cultural observances will no longer come into institutions from the outside as paid purchases, but will be from one of the institutional meals being served on the day of that religious or cultural practice.” So, if any of the two Muslim Eid Feasts land on a day where the afternoon meal of the prison is Sloppy Joe and the dinner meal is Appalachian Stew, then we have to choose between the two as our feast meal.

Shocking, right? Yet that is what we will be faced with next year when our Eid feast comes

around. And this isn’t just about us as Muslims. It affects every religious and cultural organization within the DOC. Ever since Islam came to the shores of North America, Muslims have held an Eid feast at the conclusion of their thirty (30) day Ramadan fast. And this observance has been practiced among those incarcerated in the PA DOC for over fifty (50) years.

I am directly appealing to all Muslims to challenge this decree in each prison facility where you are housed. Because, if we as Muslims allow the DOC to take this practice from us then we may as well have the Superintendents of these prisons to conduct our Ju’mah services for us in place of our Imams. If you don’t know how to file a class action lawsuit in this matter, ask anyone who knows the law in your prison. The different organizations in the prisons continue to sell us “doggy bag” products—sodas and ice cream and various outside items—yet a meal (feast) that we pay for out of our own pocket and has been a fixture in our religious and/or cultural structure for decades is being taken away from us.

We as Muslims need to

take a stand and say, “Never Again.” Never again will we sit back and let government agencies trample on our First Amendment rights as they did in the 60s and early 70s. This is not just a Muslim problem. This is a violation of each religious organization within the PA DOC. We all must stop this atrocity before we end up not even having Ju’mah service at all. Get with your chaplain Imam and ask will he support your efforts to restore the two (2) Eid back to how it has always been in these institutions. It is not a security issue nor does the cost associated with these meals come from the pockets of the PA DOC (IGWF). We pay for such out of our own pockets.

Support or no support, Muslims, we have to take a legal stand. And remember we are not standing alone. Peace.

IN THIS ISSUE

Cover Story	1
Letter from the Editor	2
Overview of the Society	3-4
Mail Room	5-14
Chat Room	15-16
FAMM Talk	17- 21
Request for Resources	22
Reader Survey	23
Subscription Form	24

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Graterfriends Community,

You have likely noticed many changes to the last few issues of *Graterfriends*, and I wanted to take the time to share what our team has been working on. Over the years, we have heard feedback that *Graterfriends* had strayed from what it once was. Our editorial designer Kailyn and I began diving into issues from the late 90s and early 2000s in search of what had been lost. After spending some time with the earlier editions, Kailyn decided to bring back the old section headings, such as “Response” and “Legal Chat.” We hope these not only provide a more structured newsletter, but also allow for a sense of community to grow – dialogue between those in different facilities. Our return to the old language of *Graterfriends* aims to center the newsletter on those incarcerated, rather than the outside organizations who occasionally contribute. I have also decided to bring back the “Letter from the Editor” in an attempt for transparency; I want to let you know what our team is up to and why we are making the choices we make.

A large piece of feedback that we are still working to resolve is your request for resources, namely legal. We hear you, and we are doing our best to deliver. The hurdle we face in placing any type of resources in *Graterfriends* is that we cannot speak to the quality of them. It is important to us that we only publish information that is accurate and of high quality. Since we are not a legal organization, sometimes this poses a problem. This being said, you may write to the Prison Society’s main office listed in this issue and request specific resources be sent to you personally. And, we encourage you to write to us if you have used a specific resource and have had good results – this will keep our records up-to-date.

Our entire team is listening to and tracking the feedback you are providing. We welcome your ongoing feedback. For those of you that have been loyal readers since the 90s and 2000s - what do you miss? What can we do better?

Best Regards,
Noelle Gambale & the *Graterfriends* Team

GRATERFRIENDS

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as they appear	

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SOCIETY

WHO ARE WE?

Founded in 1787, The Pennsylvania Prison Society is the nation's oldest human rights organization. Our mission for 235 years has been to promote the health, safety, and dignity of people impacted by mass incarceration. In 1828, the Prison Society was granted access to all people in state or county custody in PA – we remain the only non-governmental organization in the United States with our level of statutory access to people in prison. Although some of our specific programs have evolved over time, we remain committed to responding to the needs of incarcerated people and their loved ones. Today, we use that access to monitor prison conditions, assist people in prison with individual issues they raise, build connections to family and community, and educate the public about the largely hidden world of prisons.

You may write to us at 230 South Broad Street, Suite 605 Philadelphia, PA 19102. You can also have your loved ones call our family support helpline at anytime: 215-564-4775. Our team can assist to answer questions about specific facilities, policies, general issues, and concerns. Our team is small and we are not able to provide legal assistance, but we will do our best to help you get the information and resources you need. Unfortunately, at this time as an organization we are generally not able to use ConnectNetwork to correspond with people confined in SCIs.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I WRITE TO YOU?

We will always do our best to assist you. You can write to us to request resources, report conditions at a state or local facility, or request a prison monitor. The Prison Society is not a legal organization and can not provide specific legal advice or representation. However, our correspondence volunteers thoroughly respond to each and every letter we receive with information about other resources and organizations. We can also help you navigate different issues related to education, free books and other creative programs, reentry services, mental health resources, pen pal programs, and more.

We are grateful to the countless people in custody and their families who help promote prison transparency across the Commonwealth. Beyond working to address concerns on an individual and/or facility level, the information you provide drives our vital conversations with Pennsylvania legislators, allied organizations, and the public. As we work to educate others and engage in systemic advocacy, it is vital that this is led by the experiences and opinions of the people closest to the problem- you! Your voices directly informed our current advocacy to end the \$5 medical copay for incarcerated people, as well as our work to remove barriers to family visits.

HOW DO I CONTACT THE PRISON SOCIETY?

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I SHARE WHAT'S GOING ON IN PRISON?

WHAT IS PRISON MONITORING?

The Prison Society is the only non-governmental organization in the country with a legal right to meet privately with any person incarcerated in their state. Each month, we receive hundreds of reports concerning access to healthcare, abuse, property, conditions of confinement, treatment, and other issues. Our trained volunteer Prison Monitors can meet with anyone incarcerated in Pennsylvania state or county prison to hear their concern in detail and engage in follow-up advocacy.

Out of respect for one's privacy and safety, we will never send a Prison Monitor without an explicit request for a visit from an incarcerated person or their loved one. During a visit, a prison monitor will meet with the person in custody one-on-one to discuss and document their situation. Following the visit, volunteers are empowered to speak with prison administration on their behalf to try to improve the situation. It is important to note that we are not lawyers and cannot assist with legal issues or casework.

For individuals returning to the Philadelphia area, The Prison Society does have a mentoring program available designed to help ease the transition from incarceration back to communities by providing a strong social support network. We hope to expand this to other regions in the state in the future.

WHAT ABOUT REENTRY SERVICES?

WHERE DOES GRATERFRIENDS FIT INTO OUR MISSION?

Launched in 1981 by Joan Gauker and adopted by The Prison Society in 2002, *Graterfriends* is a critical outlet for incarcerated people to share their opinions and experiences. We are proud to have built a powerful community with you over these past two decades and encourage you to continue submitting to *Graterfriends*.

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.



A.I.M. For Native American Civil Rights

Jeremy Fontanez of FCI Cumberland

I want to thank Brother Marvin Running River Banks at SCI Benner for his persistence in fighting to have the Sweat Lodge Ceremony (Inipi Olowan) finally held in PA Prisons.

I am not Native American. My father is Puerto Rican, and my mother is Italian. But, I am a Sweat Lodge Brother who has been participating in Lodge ceremonies since 2006. Currently, I am in the federal system. In 2002, I was indicted by the feds, and in 2004, I was sentenced to a 35 year federal sentence. However, in 2003, I was simultaneously charged in Pennsylvania, and in 2004, sentenced to Life without Parole, plus 29-48 years for a late sentence. It has been 20 years since I fell. My first federal institution was up in Lewisburg. It was my first ever penitentiary. I was housed there from 2005 to 2009. During my time there, I was befriended by the Native American Pipe Carrier.

My Pipe Carriers name was Frank Bettelyon, or Tatanka Ho Waste. He was a Lakota from the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. I was young, fresh in the system and unsure of my place in this world. At 27 years old, the mental and emotional burden of my sentence weighed heavy on my shoulders. Frank adopted me and brought me into the circle. He saved my life, spiritually and mentally. I fell in love with these ways and never looked back. I learned how to tend the fire, set up the Inipi, pray, sing, drum, dance; all of it. All because of Frank.

Over the years I sweated with the likes of people like Lenny Foster, Leonard Pelher, and others. Although I am Italian and Puerto Rican, these elders accepted me into their world and taught me what they know, not only about the ceremony and Native Ways, but also about the struggle.

Although I'm mixed, I do represent the Taino Nation from my Puerto Rican side. Frank, Leonard, and Lenny tasked me with the responsibility of remembering their ways, carrying them, and passing them on to young brothers coming into the sys-

tems. An honor for which there are no words.

I continue these ways to this day, even when my faith is weak, and my hope is dim. I continue to try and honor those elders who entrusted me with these wars, even when young Native Brothers discriminate against me for not being Native from The Rez.

During a Sweat Lodge ceremony Frank named me: Matho Chikala (Little Bear). I carry that name to this day. In 2011, while in Pekin FCI, Frank passed away of a brain tumor. He was three years away from release, after serving almost 30 years. Unfortunately, I was unable to be by his side.

Because I go to the PA prison system once I'm done in the fed, I follow the happenings of the PA system through Graterfriends and other material. I have been aware of the issue with the Sweat Lodge for some time. I have also followed the progress of Brother Marvin. Thanks to you, my right to participate in the Sweat Lodge will be established by the time I arrive in the state system 10 years from now. Thank you, Brother, for your diligence and persistence in this struggle.

And to all others: Black, white, hispanic and all other brothers and sisters, who are fighting in the struggle for a better future.

If You're Looking the Other Way, You're Part of the Problem

Darrell Sharpe of MCI Norfolk

Maybe this is the time to raise consciousness to our struggle and plight here at MCI Norfolk State Prison. The food we are being served day in and day out is usually inedible. On a daily basis we are force-fed cheap, processed food that falls well below the recommended dietary needs set forth by the government dietician that, by the way, your tax dollars pay for. Under the prison's guidelines to be followed, grown men are being fed the bare minimum amount of nutritious food to survive. People's families, who are already stretched to the limits fi-

nancially, are left scraping together money to send their loved ones to buy commissar so they can eat. We pay inflated prices from the commissary; a lot of the time, the food is more expensive here than in your grocery stores.

You're probably wondering just who makes all of that profit on that food? You guessed it: the prison. Before you go there, I'm not asking that we have a gourmet food line installed here, but rather for basic food that we can eat like any other human being. So, if that hasn't gotten your attention, then maybe this will...

Your taxes are used and delegated towards a set budget for food to be brought and prepared for consumption. There are public records of everything bought and how much is paid for it. The established budget would at least be fair, if that's where the money was actually going. There are written records to prove this next part of the story. The average guard working here makes about 52,000 a year, and that doesn't include overtime that is well protected by the union. The Officers in charge make much more. During the pandemic from February 2018 through 2019, there was over \$23,000 spent on foods purchased through the Norfolk Inmate Account for food that was not consumed by any inmate population. The staff is allowed to eat while on their shifts for a cost of \$1.35 per meal plus tax and they are supposed to be served the exact same meals as the inmates. This is covered by DOC Policy, 103 DOC 214: Employee Meals Implemented and monitored by the Deputy Commissioner of Administrative Services these meal tickets are never purchased.

Meanwhile, we are served Red Sodium Turkey logs (that resemble burnt skin); when potatoes are on the menu, we get a child's lunch size bag of potato chips, when fresh vegetables are listed, we get a handful of iceberg lettuce with no dressing. Mashed potatoes look like watered down potato soup with big black spots from rotten parts just left in. The hamburgers don't look like actual meat because they are purple-grayish in color. With all of this being said, I could go on, but you by now get the idea. So it is with a very heavy heart that I say, whatever way that you want to look at this injustice is totally up to you. Whether it's that some staff are robbing us blind, or that they are treating human

beings like the slaves were, as being subhuman. But I am compelled to say, just looking the other way at social injustice doesn't fly anymore in this day and age. So, if you're still looking the other way, then you are part of the problem.

Standing In Solidarity Against Repression

Khalil Hammond of SCI Greene

Observation and life experience show all of us who are paying attention that oppression conquers resistance; now this theory rings true. As of June 8, 2022, inmates of SCI Greene's IMU (Intensive Management Unit) have initiated a mass protest against the perceived sham of a program and several of its conditions. Ironically, this very same thing occurred in SCI Phoenix earlier this year when its IMU inmates collectively unified to bring attention to their inhumane and oppressive conditions. In confinement until further notice, the inmates' protest consisted of a hunger strike and non-participation in any other program focal points, such as weekly groups and pre-unit team reviews (which are perfunctory in nature). There were about 22 inmates on the hunger strike and 26 participants in the protest overall, at the start. Those numbers have slightly waived, but not by much.

The IMU itself appears to be nothing more than the DOC's response to multiple civil litigations against its unethical use of long-term solitary confinement and in disregard of the known detrimental effects of prolongation in solitary confinement.

Inmates in SCI Greene's IMU are faced with having to eat with handcuffs on for cell meals and with staff who openly practice deprivation games of things such as showers, meals, library access, legal exchange, yard exercise, scheduled medical appointments, and in-person visits with outside organizations like Human Rights Coalition. Inmates who are approaching their minimums or being reviewed by the parole board are hindered from reaching parole eligibility requirements, as they are not being allowed to complete their mandatory correctional programs in the IMU. To my knowledge, Pennsylvania's administrative code prohibits the use of AC status for punishment or punitive elements imposed

as part of AC status conditions (see 42 Pa.C.S.A 93, 10-11). I would surmise that if I can't meet parole eligibility requirements due to my confinement in AC status under the table RRL, then I'm clearly being subjected to a punishment.

The inmates in the IMU are not being allowed to use the town library together in accordance with policy and are being deprived of the opportunity to receive exemptions to retain legal materials for active litigation (also within policy). It appears the intent is to covertly block access to the courts, and the inmates here are tired of it. Although the department claims to have a zero tolerance policy for things like physical and sexual assault or abuse, just that has happened without intervention by administration. Certain officers have been allowed to operate against department policy ethics and the law with impunity here. These inactions only encourage or embolden the staff to act in the manner they have been (assaulting, depriving, and constantly threatening inmates with bodily injury).

We (at SCI Greene) in the IMU are in need of outside support and solidarity for our cause. *

Each State Institution Needs A Lifers Organization

Marty Dunbar of SCI Mahanoy

For the past two years the whole world was shut down because of the COVID-19 variant, but we still had those on the outside who really cared about the human beings who are incarcerated in the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. Community groups and lawmakers who support those inside have been saying "enough is enough" as far as the problems in the state prison system in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Long term prisoners are one of the biggest problems. The state prison system incarcerates many elderly human beings who are dying at a fast rate. These are human beings who made a mistake and are serving a long prison sentence. Something must be done to correct this injustice, especially with so many innocent individuals who have a life sentences.

I remember back in the day when you had all

of the Republicans saying "lock them up and throw away the keys!" It's not like that anymore. Some of those Republicans have been educated about how harmful this thought process is by different advocacy groups. They saw a different picture, with the injustice that has been happening in this state, and they want to play a part in fixing the injustice. This is why a few state institutions have closed down. For those who are reading this article, I'm letting you know that if it was not for the support of groups like The Human Rights Coalition, The Pennsylvania Prison Society, and the Coalition to Abolish Death by Incarceration, a lot of those juvenile Lifers would not have been released back into society.

These three outside organizations supply a lot of much needed information to Lifer organizations and help remedy the injustice of so many elderly human beings incarcerated in Pennsylvania prisons. However, this type of necessary information is not always passed out at the prisons to so many that need it because there is no specific Lifer group at the institution they are incarcerated at. This is why it's so very important that SCI Mahanoy and other state institutions have Lifer organizations.

I want to give you an example of something that the prison administration at SCI Somerset allowed: some prisoners met during the pandemic to create a Lifer and long term prisoners organization. Brothers like Sage, Rick, and so many others were doing a good job for the men there and kept them up on what was going on.

The temperature is right at this institution (SCI Mahanoy) if Superintendent Mason allowed for some Prisoners to meet to get the ball rolling.

If you have outside support groups and lawmakers who are allowed to visit other state institutions which have Lifers organization, then SCI Mahanoy should have the same privilege. To fix the injustice of elderly human beings dying at a fast rate during their long sentences, these outside organizations and Lifers need to be able to work together at each institution. This is why my head line states that each state institution should have a Lifer organization.

Remembering Attica

Fifty-One Years Later

Patrick "Rock" Middleton of SCI Albion

September 9th, 2022, marks the 51st anniversary of the riot at Attica State Prison in upstate New York. Lasting for five days, it was the deadliest prison riot in American history. After three days of stalled negotiations between prison officials and the prisoners' outside representatives, Governor Nelson Rockefeller ordered an armed assault on the morning of the fifth day, September 13th. To start it off, National Guard helicopters flew over the infamous D-yard and dropped huge, military-grade CS gas into the mass of roughly 1,280 prisoners and their encircled hostages. The gas put every prisoner and hostage on the ground, gasping for breath. After that, the massacre began. Armed with shotguns and high-powered rifles, state police and prison guard sharpshooters stormed the catwalks above D-yard and opened fire. The "turkey shoot" lasted for approximately 15 minutes. In the end, 29 prisoners and 10 hostages lay bullet-riddled and dead.

One of the hostages, a guard, was shot four times by his colleagues and lived to tell about it. He later proclaimed his life was saved when the prisoner holding him put his own body in the way of the shooting to protect him. Another shooting victim, white revolutionary Sam Melville, was killed in cold blood with his hands raised high in the air in surrender. A state police detective fired a shotgun into Melville's chest from 15 feet away and later testified he was proud of his work.

The grievances the Attica prisoners were fighting for may sound familiar to Pennsylvania prisoners today: an end to prisoner beatings while handcuffed, an end to standing counts, an end to slave wages, better medical and dental care, fairness in the parole process, and more vocational and educational programs.

I've always wondered whether the Attica prisoners were so desperate for change they failed to consider the obvious fact that taking hostages would not end well for them. Here's another obvious fact: they had another option, one that would surely have brought about change if they'd just given it a chance. Just days before the riot, prisoners repre-

sented different groups met to discuss what to do about their grievances. There was one group who wanted no part of any violence. Instead, they proposed to shut down the prison with a peaceful work stoppage. They would make the guards prepare all the meals and push all the food, trash, and laundry carts. No prisoner would work until their grievances were addressed and changes were made.

Such a peaceful plan would never work today. Why? Because the current generation of prisoners knows little to nothing about willful sacrifice, delayed gratification, and camaraderie. They only whine and complain and wish things were different.

Lifelong Learning

Brian Fuller of Torres Unit

Ultimately, we are all responsible for our own education or lack thereof. I've always been secretly jealous of those who made academics look easy. Most of us struggle. Yet, it is in that struggle where we reach common ground and attain transcendence. Because after all, if we are willing to invest the effort, we will realize the possibilities.

Never in a million years would I have thought I'd be doing this again. You see, I'm one of the thousands upon thousands who fell through the cracks in the "system." Back when this nightmare first began, I knew I couldn't continue making decisions based on emotional reactions. So very early, I set my sights on education and outreach. They imprisoned the body... not the mind.

When we get locked up, something happens with our memories. Instead of forgetting them, they go into hyperdrive, permeating our thoughts at will. It's as if someone else has grabbed the remote. The screen inside our head changes, and all we can do is smile in sweet surrender as we bask in the splendor of days gone by.

I was working at a foundry before I got arrested. It was hot, hard, dangerous work. I loved every second of it. When molten metal is poured from the crucible into the mold, it looks like hot lava flowing from a volcano. I'm immediately shot back through space and time to that inquisitive five year old sitting on the floor, flipping through pages of

National Geographic.

Dad walks in, and I point to the caption. "Etna is Grandnana's name!" He smiles and says, "Close enough. Maybe Etna is how they spell Edna in Italy." I keep turning pages and don't even look up to speak. "Itlee is where they make peetsa and skettee."

Autistics are visual learners. I wouldn't even find out I was on the spectrum until much later in life. Everybody always told me I was a smart boy. I was a good boy. All I knew was that the other kids picked on me. I was a little weirdo and they hated me. I didn't dare tell the grownups what was really going on in my brain. Those were the days when kids were expected to be seen and not heard. To deviate from the norm would let everybody down.

Our public school system was considered top-notch. Nowadays, kids can't imagine a time without computers. I simply loved those old books. The weight of them. The smell of them. Beautiful illustrations and brilliant photography. Before I could even spell words like biology, architecture, and geography, I'd already been absorbing them subconsciously. Those sneaky teachers had duped me into study time. All the while, I thought I was doing my own thing.

The streets would bring a different kind of training. Navigating social awkwardness and shrewd business negotiations. Staying aware of one's surroundings. Reading faces and body language. Skepticism means survival when so many people are trying to swindle you. Don't ever let anyone tell you that you're just being paranoid: follow your instincts, trust your intuition.

I entered the workforce early in life. Mentally ill does not mean mentally deficient. Compensation is a poor measure of intelligence. I've worked for some complete imbeciles. All I could do was watch silently in horror while they ran perfectly good businesses into the ground. I had the willingness to work hard; I just lacked the confidence to speak up.

Moving from job to job broadened my skill set. Regardless of the task, I always struggled with concentration and attention span. My body could perform like a human robot while my brain would detach itself to daydream, working out pressing problems or projects that really interested me.

I've done almost every job there is to do

in this place. I'm at the age now where they don't make me work if I don't want to. However, I can still work circles around these youngsters. Our "50s" really are the new "30s." Somehow, I still feel like a teenager in my head. I'm the oldest student in both of my college courses. I'm even older than one of my professors.

We're currently locked down at the moment. While everybody is trying to figure out how to get their contraband through "shake-down," I am pre-occupied with when we are going to attend class again. This is the first time, in roughly two years, that our renowned professor has been allowed to come and give a lecture in person. I truly enjoy his energy, focus, and enthusiasm.

For whatever reason, our captors seem to have such a perverse disdain for knowledge that it borders on fear and loathing. Out of all the things they could have confiscated, I'll miss the magazine subscriptions the most. When I noticed the cart headed for the library, I asked the sergeant, "Can you please donate those to the education department?" Our art, history, and literature must be preserved at all costs.

Although this relentless foolishness still makes me angry, I'm learning to channel that energy into fuel. It becomes the catalyst for change. Who knows? Maybe another renaissance will explode out of the kinetic force locked inside of our own potential.

Real Thoughts to Consider

David Moua of SCI Houtzdale

I just needed to get this off my chest:

Looking back at my 23 years of being incarcerated, I would not have ever thought that I would have a minimum at all. Due to the ruling in *Miller v. Alabama*, it became unconstitutional to sentence a minor to a mandatory "Life Without Parole" sentence. Many minors that fit this unbearable sentence were actually re-sentenced to some time served, some a couple of years left and some unbearable lengthy sentences such as fifty plus years. Fifty plus years. This sentence is another type of Life sentence, whether you see it or not; it's just in num-

bers.

I say this because many minors that have come home are actually doing really well adapting and reacclimating themselves into society. Some have made it, and they are working in non-profit organizations or voluntarily striving to give back to the community. Some people may call this redemption, but, honestly, I truly believe that us minors just made bad decisions in our lives that eventually cost us and ruined our futures as minors.

We should be given a chance. Before, we were thrown away like we are not people. Feelings like this make us forget who we are as humans. It still feels like it doesn't matter what happens to us minors as long as those who are up there are getting paid.

Where is your mercy? If it was one of your own family, you would do everything to change these laws and ask for mercy. I'm no longer that 16 year old kid who made that bad decision. I've become a person who has confidence in myself to where I am my own leader. Quiet I was, I now have a voice. I've become a student, teacher to many, empowered by positivity of my own potential that I didn't know existed, voluntarily serving within the prison community.

Why do those who have authority still permit these disproportionate sentences to be handed down? If you do not think over a period of twenty plus years a minor has not changed, then that only means that the system is still broken. Where is the real change? How do we earn our freedom? Is it by leaving here as a senior citizen in need of SSI, with no loved ones left, having to fend for ourselves?

Let us be an asset to the community as not someone who made a bad decision but as people who show and seek redeeming quality. We have been students, teachers, mentee, and mentors. We have been upstanding members for decades, not having misconducts or infractions. We have shown a change in decision making and the ability to think and no longer make impulsive decisions. The excessive sentence is a result of what action? We as juveniles were convicted of first degree murder and if not given a capital crime, you can't see one "premeditated" murder as more heinous than another. It leaves the question: is this purely punishment or meant to reform and create more productive citi-

zens?

Let us take steps forward and not take three steps back. So hear us legislatures that this is what really is going on. We as juveniles do deserve a second chance at life and not to be thrown away. Real thoughts to consider.

Failing to Protect Us: A Backdoor to Corruption?

William Montgomery of SCI Mercer

I am currently motivated by the words of one of the Department of Corrections' (hereinafter, DOC) very own 21-year veteran employee to seek out and file one of the largest inmates class action lawsuits against both the DOC and the Pennsylvania's Board of Probation and Parole (hereinafter PBPP). It is our intention to put an end to the misapplication of their belief that they can continue to abuse their powers.

That being said, we want to make it very clear to every one that we don't starve for mutiny; we merely wish to take a stand against those who have intentionally and deceitfully orchestrated one of the most disreputable and grossly offensive human abduction schemes ever: to keep thousands of inmates confined in the DOC's human warehouses beyond their minimum date of sentence. This same employee, through his very own introduction speech during classification class at Camp Hill, went on to explain without any hesitation and in explicit detail how both the DOC & PBPP embarked on an evil plan in which inmates would be set up for failure, ensuring that we would not be paroled on our minimum dates of sentences.

We move to gain the attention of the courts and legislators to assist us by rendering totally ineffective the powers in which they were given and to make effective immediately new laws that would guarantee inmates being released upon their minimum dates. Again, inmates have long-awaited their opportunity to be heard and to tell their stories about how they were able to acquire their certificate of satisfactory completion of their so-called required/mandated program without having to participate.

Enough is enough. The truth needs to be exposed and told by inmates. Help us with the fight against tyrants who arose in the false witness of reporting.

A Forgotten Class of Defendants

Taji Jamal Lee of SCI Mahanoy

Since 1986, there have been thousands of people sentenced to mandatory minimum sentences in Pennsylvania. Currently, there are still thousands of people serving sentences related to Pennsylvania's now defunct sentencing procedure. So why are we still here you ask?

In June of 2013, the US Supreme Court ruled that the process in which judges were imposing mandatory Minimum Sentences violated the 6th Amendment. (*Alleyne v US*, 5700.5. 49) In response to this holding, Pennsylvania's appellate courts issued a series of their own rulings striking down their own statutes as unseverable, thus unconstitutional (*Com v Newman*, 99 A 3d80) and (*Com v Fennell*, 105A.3d13). However, in 2016, The Pennsylvania Supreme Court rules in (*Com v Washington*, 142 A 3d810) that if your conviction became final before June 17, 2013, you're not included! Returning two years later to clarify their equal protection clause violation in (*Com v DiMatteo*, 177A.3d182), they explained that they're holding in Washington only bars relief from the defendants who prompted the change in the first place! (*Idat192*). Understand, this would be the equivalent of the US Supreme Court saying that the change in the juvenile life cases wouldn't benefit the thousands of children sentenced to die by incarceration but only those sentenced after 2012!

For the first-time, nonviolent, low-level drug offenders, 17.5 years into our 30 to 60 year sentences, I would like to know: what about us? Where is the Fair Sentencing Act at the state level for us? When the Obama administration passed the Fair Sentencing Act in 2010, roughly 6,000 people who had received 20-30 year sentences for crack cocaine offenses were resentenced and most of them released! My case involved 63 total grams of narcotics; what about me? To others like me, don't

be fooled by these dormant organizations and fame-hungry grassroot groups! Meaningful legislation is our only hope, so get involved!

Write to every senator (Greenleaf, Street, etc.) you can find and ask them: what about us? If your institutional law library allows you to print, then print pages 187-188 from *Com v. DiMatteo*, 177 A.3d182. This is "how and why" as well as "how and why" the courts exploited us to maintain the stranglehold on mass incarceration! Your turn.

Rejecting Falsified Remorse

Cory Lambing of SCI Forest

It should be noted that "remorse" and "taking responsibility" are treated as interchangeable by both the Judicial Court System and the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole. But, they are different. Remorse is an emotion. For almost anyone, it is difficult to assess remorse accurately as it occurs in stages. This ambiguity lends itself to implicit biases that fuel disparities in judgment.

Taking responsibility, on the other hand, is just another way of saying that a person "confessed" or "admitted guilt." In the instant circumstance, the Board has labeled not only the composer of this letter but also numerous inmates' protestations of innocence as a failure and neglect to take or accept responsibility.

Remorse and taking responsibility are permissible mitigators in at least two areas of Pennsylvania's Criminal Sentencing Laws: in downward departures from minimum sentence and in the penalty phase of death penalty trials. In contrast, a lack of remorse, or failure to take responsibility, may not be held as an aggravating factor in death penalty cases because "to equate a Defendant's not guilty belief with lack of remorse... would, in effect, punish the Defendant for exercising his right to Due Process" *Pope v. State*, 441 So.2d 1073, 1078 (Fla.1983).

To this extent, why is it permissible to force an inmate, who firmly and honestly believes that he or she is innocent, to forgo this belief and right and bold-face lie to the Parole Board? Why must one show falsified remorse and fictitious responsibility

in order to be deemed adequate for release back into society? Should not other factors in these circumstances be weighed more heavily? Overwhelming statistics and case records reveal that countless innocent people have been sitting behind the walls of Pennsylvania Department of Correction institutions for most of their lives. This fact has to be recognized, regardless if one has been given the opportunity to sit on the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole, the Judge's seat, or the Office of the Governor in this Commonwealth.

This writer's argument is that punishing an incarcerated person by denying him or her an opportunity at parole for proclaiming his or her innocence is analytically indistinguishable from punishing a Defendant for asserting the right against self-incrimination. Some considerations are categorically impermissible and cannot be waived through some sort of assumption of risk that an inmate takes on by showing up and speaking during the parole hearing. For example, an inmate cannot be denied parole for having a religious affiliation merely because they volunteered such information during the hearing. Likewise, volunteering to speak honestly and admit innocence should not terminate an inmate's Constitutional right against self-incrimination during a parole hearing, but it continues to do so.

So, as the current standard lies, where does it leave the actually innocent inmates who do not confess a falsified sense of guilt and remorse during a parole hearing? Ultimately, it is a catch-22; leniency is predicated on fake admissions of guilt and false confessions. To be considered for parole release requires lies, even at a time when the right against self-incrimination remains critical to any retrial that may be granted to such inmates in the future. It is obvious that this current standard cannot be maintained and that an inmate who has spent his or her entire incarceration maintaining such innocence and still completed not only their minimum sentence, but all that was requested of them, should be provided such a right to continue to profess such innocence before the parole board and not ceaselessly be considered a risk to the community.

In all honesty, the consequence of such a long term of incarceration plagues an actually innocent individual each and every day as they maintain themselves behind the walls of imprisonment.

Remorse can be seen all over their faces, and the fact that such innocence is maintained and that they refuse to confess make-believe tales of criminal acts should be considered more honorable. Any community in this Commonwealth would not only want such an individual as a citizen, but as a leader. One wishes our elected officials represented the very same qualities.**

RRL/Solitary Confinement/IMU

Jacob Mitchell of SCI Phoenix

I am a Prisoner placed into an indefinite solitary confinement called Restricted Release List. The PA DOC is doing everything in its power to keep solitary confinement alive and oppress those of us in it. I was placed in solitary confinement because a grown man tried to rape me. I fought back, and he unfortunately wound up dead. The man killed caused the incident that ended in his death.

Now, PA has placed Restricted Release inmates in an Intensive Management Unit (IMU) with or without our consent. If we refuse to participate, they take all our privileges, such as TV, tablet, phone, kiosk, visits, etc., to pressure us to remain in IMU.

There is no guarantee to move on to the next phase, and there is no guarantee to make it back to general population. If by some luck you are continued through the phases, it's still 3 years of solitary confinement then a year of MCU, and if you get to population, you're on probation with a target on your back.

MLK Jr. said: "To cooperate passively with an unjust system makes the oppressed as evil as the oppressor."

This is extremely correct, and this cooperation is how many people suffer in solitary confinement. Everyone here in SCI Phoenix has spent 2 to 20 years in solitary, and anyone, from the COs, to the psych, to PRC, to those of us living in these tiny bathrooms, can see the extreme mental deterioration back here:

1. Screaming at each other on the doors called,
2. Going to yard to throw feces and urine on each other,

3. Suicide attempts,
4. Incoherent ramblings screamed out loud that have no intelligent meaning.

In August 2022, I'll only have 2 years straight in solitary confinement, so I'm experiencing all this with fresh eyes. It's 100% cruel and unusual punishment. Even through the numerous lawsuits, we still suffer. When will impact litigation end this cruelty to PA Prisoners in solitary?

R.I.P. Russel Shoats. He suffered through 22 years of this. *

PCI Commissary

Robert Pezzeca of SCI Coal Township

For decades, I have been hearing that Keefe is owned by President Bush, his family, and others. Keefe is not owned by the Bush's. But they do supply PA state prisons, as do other vendors such as Union Supply and JL Marcus. I have not reviewed the most recent commissary contract, but what I can show you is that from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021, PA state prisoners spent \$60,477,637.00 in the prisons' commissary:

I received this letter in May of this year:

Dear Mr. Pezzeca:

Please be advised the initial request sent in April was responded to by PCI for nos. 1 & 4 and forwarded to the Office of Chief Counsel for handling as a Right-to-Know. The remaining items nos. 2 & 3 will need to be answered by a different office.

From 7/1/20 thru 6/30/21

No. 1) Total Sales 60,477,637

No. 4) Total Net Profit 3,999,231

In regard to shorts and boxer underwear made by PCI, the industry has recently fulfilled backorders making these items available to the Commissary in the very near future.

Thank you for your attention in this regard.

Sincerely,

Richard Gaul

Assistant Director

That's over one million bucks per week. This amount does not include phone time or link units for the overpriced GTL tablets. PCI has informed me via letter, which is included above so the prison society has proof of my claims, that they made, in profit, \$3,999,231.00. That's just \$769.00 shy of \$4 million dollars in profits. Yet, DOC policy states that the commissary can only take a 4.75% profit. So, how is it that we spent 50 million but they made about 4 million in profits? If I spent 100 million and you made 4 million in profits then that would be 4%, but, somewhere, something is wrong. I am not a mathematician nor a legal scholar, so I present this to everyone reading who has the knowledge and background to research this.

PCI has begun selling boxers once again, but now, I notice that it is a very inferior quality material. I know my old friends who work in the CI shop in SCI Huntingdon do their absolute best to make quality clothing for us all, but when given poor quality material that separates or tears when you wring out the water after hand washing, there's nothing that can be done.

If anyone has any ideas or suggestions, we are all listening. PCI can be reached at:

PCI PO Box 47 Camp Hill, PA 17001-0047.

Stop History from Repeating Itself

Forever A. Nobody

STEP 1: Understand the error of your past ways.

STEP 2: Seek forgiveness from all those you trespassed against living or passed-on.

STEP 3: Seek forgiveness of yourself.

STEP 4: Tell all your perceived enemies that you choose peace. Do not consider their reply. Put peace before you,

STEP 5: Forgive everybody, no matter their trespasses, living and passing-on. I do not care what you suffered. Your suffering made you a SURVIVOR!

STEP 6: Gain dominion over that little voice in your head. Talk to it. Tell it if you choose love, peace, and life. When it tries to spoil you, wrestle with it, when it leads you into conflict, conversations, judgments, gossip, disloyalty, spreading rumors, SHUT IT DOWN! You have to stop doing these things because they are keeping you down.

STEP 7: Stop trying to manipulate your environments for material gain. This also means stop manipulating your support groups and loved ones. If you can't be honest with them about your motives, you don't truly cherish and love them. You make it all about you. That's not solid. Bottomline.

STEP 8: Never go back the way it came. Understand that you've been plucked from your previous environments because death was knocking on your door and you were too blind to see. This doesn't mean you were about to die. Worse even: you may have been on the verge of hurting or destroying more lives than you could ever know.

STEP 9: Breathe. You've satisfied these steps, you'll notice the illusions of the world unraveling right before your eyes. Your heart will beat easily. Your smiles will be genuine. You'll sleep at a new sense of ease. Now go find, go, and say thank you for sharing life.

Same Old Song

Shawn Younker of SCI Greene

There was some hard language getting tossed around the prison yard on Easter Sunday, and not all of it sounded profane. Words like "Board Action" and "Behavior Assessment" were not among the favored topics this week for reasons nobody wanted to explain. Nor did they have to. These days, it would seem that even the Easter Bunny would be apt to receive one parole hit or another.

Beds are empty. Parole must do everything they can to keep them filled. If that means denying a much-deserved freedom to an eligible convict, so be it. Same old song and dance, for good or ill, even for those of us who managed to survive the hateful pandemic inside these vicious confines, under the

constant threat of infection.

But survival is not a parole credit.

As of late, it is not uncommon to see inmates get a parole hit for no reason at all. We follow their rules, get jail support, do these programs, and even complete voluntary coursework. Still... no dice. Parole: denied. What kind of message is this sending to the new guys?

What kind, indeed?

Perhaps a complete and total revamp of the parole system is what we truly need. And soon. Many people, inmates and otherwise, have been shouting these complaints for ages. Something has got to give. These tyrants have had their way long enough.

Even the Easter Bunny could agree with that.



Editor's Notes:

* If you are seeking release while maintaining innocence, you may write to our office for a guide on commutation.

** At the time of publication, the hunger strike has ceased. The Prison Society will provide an update on the status of the IMUs at Greene, Camp Hill, and Phoenix in the next issue

RE: "The Evils of Dauphin County Prison"

Curtis Spivey of SCI Fayette

You say that you plan on filing a 1983 to get rid of a policy that denies you the right to subscribe to Prison Legal News, etc.

I just finished reading the *Prison Legal News* May 2022 issue, and it was about the many prisons and jails they have sued since 1990 so prisoners can have access to Prison Legal News and other publications. They also had an article about suing prisons in Nebraska and New Hampshire for denial of publications.

I was thinking maybe you can have a few of the men there at Dauphin County Prison write to Prison Legal News, letting them know that your jail has a policy that stops you from subscribing to their publication. Also send a copy of the policy to:

*Prison Legal News
PO Box 1151
Lake Worth Beach, FL. 33460.*

Make all letters legible, short, and to the point. You may also need to have a friend or family member order you the Prison Legal News, and when your prison sends it back to Prison Legal News, they will more than likely take on the fight.

Common Ground

Wilbur Brown of SCI Camp Hill

I want to touch on a topic that was addressed in the May & June Issue of 2022 regarding medical fees, 37 Pa. Code § 93.12 and in DC-ADM-820.

You must find a common ground in wages for the free people and inmates. Some people on the street make \$30.00 an hour, while some inmates make 42¢ an hour. What is the common ground? Minimum wage. An inmate's minimum wage is 19¢,

and minimum wage on the street is \$7.25. This is where you start.

EXAMPLE: A person working for \$7.25/hr can buy seven candy bars for one hour of work. (\$1.00 per candy bar). An inmate working for 19¢/hr has to work 37 hours to buy the same amount.

EXAMPLE: At 19¢/hr, an inmate has to work 26.3 hours to pay the \$5.00 medical charge and an additional 26.3 hours for each prescription. But, if the person making \$7.25/hr on the street had to work the same 26.3 hours, it would cost them \$190.66 for the medical visit and \$190.66 for each prescription. Even now, at inmates' max pay of 42¢/hr, you still have to work 12 hours to pay the \$5.00 copay and 12 hours for each prescription.

My argument before the Commonwealth Court is, since I will never get out and have a \$22,000.00 court cost, why does a person not incarcerated, at \$7.25/hr, only have to work 3,034 hours when I have to work 115,789 (at \$0.19 per hour) hours to pay off the same cost?

Review of Sara Kruzan's *I Cried to Dream Again*

John Hargreaves Prison Society Volunteer Director

This memoir recounts the compelling and sad story of Sara Kruzan who was regularly physically abused and ultimately sex trafficked. At sixteen, she murdered her pimp as part of a robbery plot. She was the only one of three plotters to be arrested.

The conviction led to her juvenile life sentence in California. She illustrates, in graphic detail, the violence meted out by her mother that contributed to entry into a world filled with sexual violence at a young age. She shows, in depth, how grooming works and vividly illustrates how sexual abuse of children can be minimized, overlooked or just completely denied.

Throughout the two hundred pages, Kruzan exposes her cruelly traumatic experiences. The first

half of the book is told through the eyes of a child and then flows into the prison life of a teenager. The women in her cellblock have creative ways of handling the stress and getting through the day. It is with these women that, "I comprehended that I was destined to live the rest of my days in prison-plus four years after my death! It meant that I could never benefit from mercy. It meant that good behavior would count for nothing because there was nothing I could ever do to better my situation."

With the help of other incarcerated people, she ultimately is empowered enough to reach out to groups outside prison. These groups and her cellblock friends show her a way back to community and friendship.

This story of advocacy becomes a fulfilling tale of bravery and honesty.

RE: "1994 Crime Bill and Legality of Sentences"

Michael James French of SCI Rockview

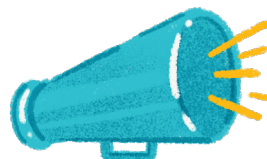
The first time I read *Graterfriends*, I came across the article, "1994 Crime Bill and Legality of Sentences" by John Passmore from SCI Somerset. This was regarding The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994.

If someone is truly innocent or has been coerced or manipulated into a guilty plea because of ineffective counsel, it is now up to the uneducated defendant to become a self taught litigator and attorney. It is up to them to obtain a law degree from the prison law library with little to no help, with or without a GED.

These circumstances give the courts an easy way to ping pong one's case out of their court. preying on the ignorance of the defendant's knowledge of the law and his/her constitutional rights.

I was coerced and manipulated into a 12 month negotiated plea agreement with no indication of a max sentence on the crime of aggravated assault, which I was convicted of. It wasn't until sentencing that I was informed of the 1 to 8 year sentence on this fabricated crime. However, there was no factual basis that this aggravated assault was committed. The indifference that parole shows to inmates and the biased recommendation from the court means I will probably max out my 8 years on a crime I did not commit. Just before I filed my Certificate of Appealability, I read an article in the *Criminal Legal News*, by Dale Chappell, concerning confirmation bias that coincided with my case. This article was about prosecutorial misconduct, wrongful persecutions, and the shielding of evidence evaluations, which all show the misconduct by the criminal justice system itself.

I have watched other inmates' frustration and anger while they are trying to fight their injustice with no prevail. They will give up or get washed out of court due to their lack of knowledge of the law.



Legislative Update: September 2022

Lawmakers will return to Harrisburg this month from their summer break. The legislature has limited session days the rest of the year due to the November elections. The House and Senate will be in session 3-6 days in September and October, and 1-3 days in November when the current two-year legislative session ends. Remember, 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. Note that many bills have multiple co-sponsors; only the prime or first-listed sponsor is included here.

Mandatory minimums – HB 1587 (Rep. Brown), HB 1590 (Rep. Stephens), SB 1295 (Sen. Mastriano)

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.

HB 1587 and HB 1590 are out of the House Rules Committee and actively on the House Voting Calendar. They could advance at any time during session.

SB 1295 would create a new first-degree felony charge of fentanyl delivery resulting in death, punishable by a mandatory minimum of 25 years. The bill was introduced by Senator Mastriano (who is also a candidate for Governor) and referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee. The bill referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee. FAMM opposes these bills and has asked Governor Wolf to 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. FAMM wrote SB 135 and is actively advocating it.

Parole related bills -- SB 835/HB 2347 (Sen. Street and Rep. Kinsey), HB 518 (Rep. DeLuca), HB 2634 (Rep. Kail), HB 146 (Rep. Bernstine)

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. HB 2347 is an identical House companion bill to SB 835. FAMM wrote these bills and is actively advocating them.

HB 2634 would, if passed, allow people to petition the sentencing court for release due to medical necessity (such as terminal illness, chronic and debilitating condition, serious functional or cognitive impairment) or extraordinary and compelling family hardship (such as the death or incapacitation of the caretaker of the person's minor children). The bill has no exclusions or time served requirement; calling for a detailed

case-by-case review of all relevant factors. FAMM wrote this bill and is actively advocating it.

HB 518 would, if passed, require “repeat violent offenders” to do 85% of their time before being eligible for parole.

None of these bills have received any votes or review by committees yet.

HB 146, called “Markie’s Law” after an 8-year-old homicide victim, would prohibit the Parole Board from paroling people convicted of a new violent offense while in prison (such as institutional assault) until 24 months after their minimum on their original sentence or the date of the new conviction, whichever is longer. It would delay parole 12 months for people convicted of obstruction of justice offenses while incarcerated. It passed the House of Representatives in March and has been approved by the Senate Judiciary and Appropriations Committees. It is actively on the Senate floor. FAMM opposes the bill and has asked Governor Wolf to veto it as it is akin to a mandatory minimum.

Earned time credits – HB 2030 (Rep. Mihalek)

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. This bill has not received any votes or review by committee yet.

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

SB 694 would, if passed, begin the process of changing the state 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. FAMM issued public letters to Governor Wolf and the Board of Pardons calling for clemency expansion and improvement (see reprint in March/April 2022 issue) and asking the Board to give reasons for denial (see reprint in this issue).

Prison Conditions – HB 1283 (Rep. Bullock), SB 686 (Sen. Muth), HB 1037 (Rep. T. Davis), HB 1753 (Rep. Brown), SB 1296 (Sen. Bartolotta), HB 1419 (Rep. Jones)

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. HB 1037 would ban the use of solitary on pregnant women, LGBTQ+ people, and people who are 21 or less, or 70 plus, with a 15-day cap on solitary use.

HB 1753 and SB 1296 would, if passed, end the \$5 medical copay in state prisons and prohibit the Dept. of Corrections from charging incarcerated people fees for medical services. These bills have not received committee votes yet. Note that FAMM, the Prison Society, CADBI, and Physicians for Criminal Justice Reform are working together on multiple avenues to reduce or eliminate the copay: Public letter asking Secretary Little to end the copays (<https://famm.org/our-work/states-where-we-are-working/pennsylvania/>); inside-prison call to action (see reprint in July/August issue); family call-in day to the Governor on August 30.

HB 1419 would, if passed, prohibit shackling and solitary confinement of pregnant women, require corrections officers interacting with pregnant women to have trauma-informed care training, prohibit full body searches of females by male guards, provide an appropriate amount of feminine hygiene products at no cost to women, and provide additional visitation between primary custodial parents and minor children. This bill was approved by the House Judiciary Committee and is actively on the House voting calendar, where it could be called at any time during the remainder of the session.

Other items of interest – HB 706 (Rep. McClinton), SB 104 (Sen. Street), HB 1888 (Rep. Rabb), HB 2524 (Rep. Schmitt)

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 also count college students and those in local jails. It is on the House tabled bill calendar, but could be called for a House vote at any time during session. SB 104 has not gotten a committee vote yet.

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 has not gotten a committee vote yet.

HB 2524 would make many amendments to Pennsylvania’s Right to Know (RTKL), including a provision to bar RTKL requests from incarcerated people with limited exceptions (such as if the records pertain to the incarcerated person directly), and those deemed “vexatious requesters.” This bill passed the House and is now being considered by the Senate State Government Committee.

#VisitaPrison Campaign: An Inside Call to Action

FAMM launched a new campaign in July asking every state and federal lawmaker in the United States to #VisitAPrison. This is an ongoing campaign to increase awareness among policymakers, the media, and the public about who is incarcerated in America’s prisons and jails and for how long; what the living and working conditions are like for incarcerated people and correctional officers; and what families experience as they seek to maintain strong ties with their incarcerated loved ones.

FAMM believes that “you can’t know if you don’t go” – that is, lawmakers should not create policy (sentencing, prison, re-entry) if they are not familiar with the people and conditions in our nation’s prisons and jails.

Equally important, we believe that policymakers who do take the time to visit prisons and jails will see that there are significant problems that need to be addressed. Specifically:

We lock up too many people for too long. Our prison population is getting older with more sick and elderly people serving extreme sentences. Many of these people could be released safely back into the community if we had mechanisms for reviewing lengthy sentences.

Too many prisons and jails are unsafe for both incarcerated people and correctional offi-

cers. Overcrowding, lack of programming, and other factors can make prisons extremely dangerous. Yet these facilities receive very little oversight, and when they do, inspections are announced far in advance so that problems can be hidden during the visits.

Families face enormous challenges while trying to maintain bonds with their incarcerated loved ones. Visiting can require traveling long distances; prisons do not share basic information regarding the well-being and health of people in prison, even during emergencies; and regular communication between families and incarcerated loved ones is often limited and expensive.

FAMM needs help from incarcerated people! Your voice matters. Please read our Incarcerated FAMM Member Guide and start working on the campaign with your friends. Invite lawmakers from your home and prison districts to visit you and a small group in the prison. Let them know that they can reach out directly to Maria Goellner, FAMM Pennsylvania State Policy Director, to set up these visits. Additionally, ask your loved ones to visit www.visitaprisson.org to support the #VisitAPrison campaign.

#VISITAPRISON

INCARCERATED FAMM MEMBERS

Making the Most out of Your F

Thank you for participating in FAMM's #VisitaPrison challenge! FAMM and our partners are w
across the country. Will you join us? Below is a guide you can use (with support fr

STEP ONE

Find out who your lawmaker is or ask a loved one to find out for you.

Use your home address (not the address where you are incarcerated). Some facility libraries have congressional directory with lawmakers' addresses in them.

STEP TWO

Write your letter (or email).

If you are handwriting your letter, use clear print as much as possible. We recommend typing your letter if that is an option for you. (See the sample letter below).

When writing your letter follow these tips:

Introduce yourself - share your name, where you live and what your sentence is.

Make a clear ask - invite your lawmaker to come and tour your facility and to meet with you specifically. Share why it is important to you to have them come and meet you.

Share your story - Share just a little bit about your story without going into too much detail. You want to share just enough to have them curious about you but not the whole story.

STEP THREE

Send your letter to your lawmaker's office.

If you hear back, let FAMM know. Email visitaprison@famm.org to let us know your lawmaker is coming to visit you as part of the Visit A Prison Campaign. If you do not have access to email, mail your letter to the below address:

FAMM | 1100 H Street NW, Suite 1000, Washington, D.C., 20005 | ATTN: Visit a Prison

GUIDE:

FAMM #VisitaPrison Challenge

Working to get as many lawmakers to go inside and talk with people incarcerated in prisons, like you, (on behalf of you and your loved ones) to reach out to your lawmaker and invite them to visit your facility.

Sample Letter:

Dear [Lawmaker's name],

My name is [your name]. I am serving [# of months] months inside [name your facility], in [city, state of your facility]. I am joining FAMM's Visit a Prison Campaign, and inviting you to tour my facility at your earliest convenience. My hope is that when you come and visit our facility, you will see that we are people deserving of a second chance.

Sincerely,
[your name].

REQUESTS FOR RESOURCES

In lieu of a list, please request resources directly with this form. Please allow one month for a response.
Complete and mail to the Pennsylvania Prison Society:

Pennsylvania Prison Society
ATTN: Resources
230 South Broad Street, Suite 605
Philadelphia, PA, 19102

Name, ID Number, Facility
If Applicable: Returning County for Re-entry Resources

Resource Description
Note: The Prison Society does not offer financial assistance

READER SURVEY

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

Pennsylvania Prison Society
ATTN: Graterfriends
230 South Broad Street, Suite 605
Philadelphia, PA, 19102

Name, ID Number, Facility

Comments and Suggestions

First Class postage is required to re-mail
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Philadelphia, PA 19102

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