

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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AND STILL WE RISE

There has been a 1,700% increase in incarceration of women since 1973. The growth of incarceration for women has grown at least twice as fast as that for men. As of 2018, there were 219,000 women incarcerated in the United States. Of them there were 99,000 held in state prisons and 89,000 in local jails. Women are much more evenly split between jails and prisons than men are. Of the women in jails, 60% have not been sentenced.

No current figures were available for those in federal facilities, which we know, due to current immigration detention policies and practices, have grown enormously in the last year. The latest figures available are that state and federal agencies pay local jails to imprison an additional 13,000 women. Drastically understating today's reality, ICE and the U.S. Marshals report contracting with local jails to hold 5,000 women.

From the available statistics, that makes a total of 102,000 women held in jails. Since incarcerated women have lower incomes than incarcerated men, they have an even harder time affording cash bail. This is despite the fact that of jailed women, 80% of women are mothers and most are the primary caregivers for their children, so are not considered to be a flight risk. Yet bail amounts are typically a full year's income.

About 25% of convicted incarcerated women are held in jails, compared to about 10% of total convicted people. And jails make it harder to stay in touch with family than prisons do. Phone calls are more expensive and other forms of communication are more restricted. In addition, jailed women are more even more likely to suffer from mental health problems than either women in prisons or imprisoned men in whatever setting.

It will come as no surprise that African American and Indigenous American women are markedly overrepresented in prisons and jails. Incarcerated women are reported as 53% "white," 29% Black, 14% Hispanic, 2.5% Indigenous, 0.9% Asian and 0.4% Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander.

However, there is an additional form of discrimination. A third (33%) of incarcerated women identify as Lesbian or bisexual, compared to less than 10% of men. Lesbian and bisexual women generally receive longer sentences than hetero.

And then we get to the really big numbers: over a million (83%) of women are on probation and parole. Just 17% of women directly under the control of "departments of corrections" are incarcerated. But, 74% of the total--that is, three out of four--are on probation and 9% are on parole. This is in contrast to the total number of people--that is, both women and men--under correctional control, where a third (again, 33%) are imprisoned.

And again, no surprises: If you have been judged to be a "bad girl" and locked up for it, it turns out that you will be disciplined more often and more harshly than men for "low level" violations. Women, on average were given almost double the number of disciplinary violation tickets as men. And the biggest difference is the one for "insolence." Not "safety" or "security."

As we know, women in prison often have a history of trauma. And they have symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder more than any other demographic group, including combat veterans. Often imprisoned women have a history of sexual and other physical abuse. In addition to solitary confinement, a common punishment in prisons is losing phone privileges. When that occurs, not only is the person imprisoned punished and further damaged, but so are her children.

RESOURCES:

Women's Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2018, prisonpolicy.org/reports, Aleks Kajstura, November 13, 2018

Investigation in U.S. Prisons, Women Punished More Often Than Men, npr.org/ 2018/10/14, Jessica Pupovac

Becoming Ms. Burton, from Prison to Recovery to Leading the Fight for Incarcerated Women; Susan Burton & C. Lynn

From Her Mouth to Your Ears, A Survivors Manual by and for Women in Prison, AFSC Prison Watch, 89 Market St, Newark NJ 0860.

PRIMERO

Primero, ellos vinieron por los socialistas,
pero yo no hablé porque no era socialista,
Después vinieron por los sindicalistas,
pero yo no hablé porque no era sindicalista,
Luego vinieron por los judíos,
pero yo no hablé porque no era judío,
Al final vinieron por mi y, para entonces...
ya no quedaba nadie que hablara por mi.

-- por Martin Niemoeller, durante la segunda guerra mundial

UPDATE ON FLORIDA INFO REQUEST

A most heartfelt thank you to those who responded to our request for information about the then nominee for Secretary of Corrections in New Mexico under the new governor. All the letters we received were specific, detailed and in agreement. However, she, Julie Jones, previously, the head of corrections in Florida, withdrew her name from consideration. We don't know why, nor do we yet have any idea of who might be nominated next.

Clarification

We apologize for the misleading headline in our November 2018 issue regarding the current book policy in Pennsylvania prisons. It was poorly chosen, but based on the changes made to the original ones Pennsylvania came up with last fall.

If you have feedback about the current procedures for getting books in Pennsylvania prisons, we would be most interested in learning about them. We also could not find any specific information concerning exactly WHICH dictionaries all prisoners who ask for them are now supposed to get "for free."

To receive the CPR Newsletter by postal mail monthly, send us up to 12 self-addressed, stamped envelopes--with the CPR return address.

Keep sending us address changes and renewal requests in order for us to maintain our *only* permanent mailing list--the one for our January holiday/new calendar--as accurately as possible.

Also, note that the correct address to be sure to reach us at is: PO Box 1911, Santa Fe NM 87504. Some resource address listings are incorrect in this regard.

And still: NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS OR LEGAL WORKERS; for our protection, please do *not* mark envelopes addressed to us as "Legal Mail."

Many, many thanks to the Real Cost of Prisons Project for posting our Newsletter on-line for free downloading and distribution. It is at:
www.realcostofprisonsproject.org--this is a GREAT site! Thank you for all your support!

Angela Davis says:

"Black people, especially, owe a great deal to Palestinians, who have been struggling for decades and decades and refuse to give up. They are an inspiration to people who are fighting for freedom everywhere on the planet."

No Surprise: Better Food is Better

Imprisoned people are 6.4 times more likely to be sickened from spoiled or contaminated food than others. About 44% of state and federal prisoners have experienced chronic disease, compared with 31% of the general population. Health care--\$12.3 billion a year--is the public prison system's greatest expense. Changes in diet such as increasing the amount of fresh produce consumed and reducing the drinking of soda for the 2.3 million U.S. prisoners, could save more than \$500 million over five years. In addition, "dietary discontent" contributed to uprising among prisoners in Michigan, North Carolina and Washington.

More nutritious food doesn't have to cost more money. There are more prison agricultural programs now that enable those imprisoned to grow some of what they eat. Such programs also improve mental health, reduce recidivism rates, and improve job skills. Of course for-profit companies are also increasingly involved in providing the typically prison provided processed meats and generally high-starch meals commonly served. The high fat, high chemical content foods provided by for-profit commissaries and vending machines also lack nutritional value, although they may provide more flavor--if you have the cash.

Of course, there are many other health risks that go along with imprisonment. They include neglect, blocked access to care, physical and sexual violence, and brutality by staff. In addition, when prisoners are sick or injured or die in custody, the circumstances are concealed.

According to a new book by Homer Venters, MD, the former chief medical officer for New York City's Correctional Health Services, which describes the conditions common at Rikers Island--and why he supports its closure--which stated: "We work in settings that are designed and operated to keep the truth hidden. Detainees are beaten and threatened to prevent them from telling the truth about how they are injured, health staff are pressured to lie or to omit details in their own documentation, and families experience systematic abuse and humiliation during the visitation process."