

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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FIGHT BACK

IN CALIFORNIA

[As we know, all numbers given will be outdated.]

The number of coronavirus cases among California prisoners has once again skyrocketed, with more than 4,000 active infections—the highest number since the pandemic began. Over 22,000 people imprisoned in California have tested positive for COVID-19, and over 90 have died. Transfer of prisoners from San Quentin to other prisons may yet again have taken place by the time this is being read.

According to Terry Kupers, California MD and longtime prisoners' rights advocate:

"Prisoners are known to have a very high rate of coronavirus infection and the infection of prisoners poses a public health danger to the community.

"Prisons and jails, like hospitals and nursing homes, are 'total institutions.' There are large numbers held in a confined space and it is impossible to provide for social distancing, enhanced hygiene, healthy ventilation, masks, hand washing, sanitizing and health-supporting activities such as regular exercise and ongoing healthy social interaction.

"Officers are often less than rigorous about wearing masks, washing hands and maintaining social distance. They cross over without proper precautions from areas of the prison designated for infected prisoners to areas where there have been no known infections.

"Prisoners disproportionately suffer from medical illnesses that increase their susceptibility to viral infection and serious illness. The rate of infection with coronavirus among prisoners is five times higher than in the community-at-large, and the risk of serious illness and death is also extraordinarily high.

"From a public health perspective, it makes sense to vaccinate prisoners on a priority basis, just as there are plans to vaccinate healthcare workers and residents of nursing homes first.

"It is stigma that prevents officials from taking the step of prioritizing the early immunization of those imprisoned."

IN NEW MEXICO

Fifty-six men imprisoned at the Penitentiary of New Mexico (PNM), just outside of the state capital Santa Fe, were reported on December 17 to have filed suit against PNM in a handwritten petition accusing the facility of not protecting those imprisoned there from the coronavirus. The petitioners asked: 1) that the state Supreme Court intervene, 2) that prisoners be awarded a lump sum for damages, and 3) that an attorney from the Public Defender's Office represent them.

Their petition claims that efforts to prevent infections were lax at the penitentiary, causing a serious outbreak in late October. (In early November there were 47 cases. PNM has had 141 confirmed cases since the pandemic began. On 12/16/20, six new cases were reported at PNM, of a state total of 36 new cases reported among those imprisoned. That day 1,088 cases were reported among NM federal detainees and a total of 2,040 cases among NM state prisoners. There were 43 additional COVID-19 deaths, the state's second-highest fatality count until then, in one day).

Further, the suit claims that prison officials didn't conduct enough tests, didn't separate prisoners from those possibly infected, continued to have prisoner crews work outside in violation of state prison guidelines and allowed a worker with COVID-19 symptoms into a kitchen area multiple times.

The suit asks that the state corrections secretary make the prison adhere to COVID-19 guidelines, reform the prison's internal practices, provide proper medical care and release eligible inmates to community detention centers to ease prison congestion.

Those infected were quarantined in areas with bad air circulation, weren't allowed outside for fresh air and received no checkup, X-rays or other information about their health from medical staff.

"It is cruel and unusual punishment to subject inmates to the substantial risk of contracting COVID-19." The petition states. We disagree: It is not unusual.

END of YEAR FEDERAL EXECUTIONS

December 10 Brandon Bernard
December 11 Alfred Bourgeois
This brings the 2020 total to ten.
We mourn their loss.

Yet, 150 people on death row have been exonerated in this country.

THE LEAST READ PART OF THE NEWSLETTER:

To receive the CPR Newsletter by postal mail monthly, send us a *self-addressed, stamped envelope* for every month's issue you are requesting, up to 12 at one time. Put the CPE return address on the upper left-hand corner of each envelope you send.

Continue to send us address changes to help us keep our annual calendar mailing list as accurate as possible.

NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS OR LEGAL WORKERS. Letters to us marked "Legal Mail" can hurt our access to the prison they come from.

Many, many thanks to the Real Cost of Prisons project, which posts our Newsletter on-line monthly for free downloading and distribution. All issues since 2009 are at: realcostofprisons.org — a great site!

BRIEFS

Positives

> Democrat members of Congress introduced a joint resolution December 2 which would amend the 13th Amendment's ban on chattel slavery to expressly prohibit involuntary servitude as a punishment for crime.

> California has passed AB 3073 which will allow eligible individuals to pre-enroll in SNAP (the current name for the "food stamp" program), while still incarcerated. This will enable them to get food assistance for themselves and their families immediately upon their release. The governor signed the bill on September 28.

& Negatives

> The majority of people in jail are there because they can't pay bail. The bail system exerts pressure to plead guilty because it is so costly to remain incarcerated. They may lose their jobs, their children and their housing.

> Eleven million people pass through U.S. jails every year.

> Of Black men born in the late 1970s, 70% of them are estimated to have been in prison. Even though it was a time when so-called "crime rates" have been at their historically lowest level in 40 years.

> In the U.S., there are about 27,000 professional licenses for which those with a criminal record cannot even apply. The NYC Housing Authority does not permit those that have been incarcerated to live in public housing with their own family.

Restaura por completo de DACA

En una gran victoria para los inmigrantes, un juez federal le ordenó el 4 de diciembre al Gobierno de Donald Trump que restableciera de inmediato y en su totalidad programa de Acción Diferida para los Llegados en la Infancia, conocido como DACA, a su versión original. Gracias a la orden, unos 300.000 jóvenes podrán postularse al programa por primera vez. Esta medida también restablece la validez de las autorizaciones de trabajo a dos años y permite que los solicitantes puedan viajar al extranjero antes de que se apruebe su solicitud.

La orden del 4 de diciembre llega más de tres años después de que Trump decidiera poner fin al histórico programa en el 2017, lo que sumió en la incertidumbre a cientos de miles de personas y sus familias. Desde su aprobación en el año 2012, DACA ha otorgado protección contra la deportación y permisos de trabajo a por lo menos 700.000 personas indocumentadas que fueron traídas a Estados Unidos durante su infancia.

A Last Word of Thanks

"...Many years, I have shared the work that we have done with our friends in Georgia's prisons and on Death Row...and the opportunities we have had to share in the struggle for justice...This is my last letter, a letter of the deepest gratitude for the ways that we have joined together... The tasks ahead of us are daunting..."

"May the fire of justice burn in our bones."

—Murphy Davis, *The Open Door Community*, Atlanta & Baltimore, died October 22, 2020.

"She has actually spent more time in jails and prisons than most people who have been convicted of a crime...constantly looking for ways to bring light into dark places." said Bryan Stevenson, founder and director of the Equal Justice Initiative, who states: "I work in an country that has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. I work against a system that treats you better if you're rich and guilty than if you're poor and innocent. We work to overturn this horrific era of mass incarceration that has been brought about by the politics of fear and anger...And fear and anger are the essential ingredients of oppression and abuse."

MURDER INC. BOOK 3: PERFECTING TYRANNY

by Mumia Abu-Jamal & Steven Vittoria

"Even in the hells of the prison system, Mumia fights for our human rights. We must continue to fight for him and his human rights." — Colin Kaepernick