

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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Developments in Conditions

By state, Texas has the most imprisoned people: 136,000. California has more than 97,000 prisoners. Florida has over 81,000 – perhaps as many as 176,000 – held in prisons, jails and immigrant detention centers. Those in the 457-bed Ft. Myers Jail were not evacuated although in the path of the mandatory hurricane evacuation zone. And federal data concerning how many people have died in U.S. jails, prisons and detention centers is hard to come by.

The Marshall Project recently cited the U.S. Department of Justice had what they called “990 uncounted deaths” in fiscal year 2021. And a 2020 Reuters analysis of deaths in the country’s largest jails found death rates were 18% to 58% higher in facilities that had “privatized” their health care, versus those where care was provided by public agencies.

One of the largest private providers of jail and prison care is “Corizon Health.” A July 2022 report found widespread misconduct and abuse in the federal prison system, in particular at the U.S. Penitentiary in Atlanta Georgia.

The federal prison system is made of of 122 facilities across the country, housing about 158,000 at any one time. The “medium security” prison in Atlanta holds approximately 1,4000 people. The federal system has experienced chronic overcrowding, staffing shortages, corruption, sexual violence and “a culture that often encourages senior officials to minimize the extent of the problems.”

A July article on the Atlanta prison in the New York Times ended: “The witnesses’ assessment has been so bleak that it rivaled jailhouse accounts from earlier centuries. It also largely echoed the bureau’s own internal reports over the past seven years which have found lax security procedures, deficient management and the intentional disabling of security cameras and equipment.”

The only for-profit prison in Virginia, Lawrenceville Correctional Center, is owned by the GEO group, and has been under lockdown for more than a month. Resistance by prisoners continues. In Alabama,

community resistance and group coalitions successfully pressured three banks to withdraw financing for a multi-billion dollar plan that would have brought two privately owned mega-prisons into rural Alabama communities. In addition, thousands of incarcerated people at every major male prison in Alabama have refused to report to their work assignments.

The Alabama prison system has been the target of a federal investigation for years and the department of justice sued the state over concerns about overcrowding violence and a high risk of death for incarcerated people in late 2020. Ironically, the case is not slated for trial until 2024. Since the justice department’s suit began, the death toll has risen significantly and a prisoner work stoppage began September 26. Prisoners at all 13 prisons in the Alabama prison system have gone on a statewide labor strike to protest deteriorating living and working conditions, cruel sentencing laws, and the increasing rate of parole denials across the state. Prison officials’ have retaliated by withholding meals and greatly reducing the amount of food served. Many supporters are calling for increased resistance.

In 2019, 34% of Black applicants in Alabama were granted parole, and 36% of white. In 2020, 16% of Black applicants received parole and 29% of whites. By 2021, just 8% of Black applicant received parole. In 2021, parole has been granted to 15% of cases and to date this year, 2022, the grant rate is 11%.

Resources:

The Marshall Project
156 West 56th Street, 3rd Floor
New York NY 10019

Alabama Appleseed Center for Law&Justice
400 South Union Street – Suite 245
Montgomery AL 36104

Abolitionist Law Center
P.O. Box 8654
Pittsburgh PA 15221

Migrantes fueron víctimas de un delito

Un grupo de solicitantes de asilo que el gobernador del estado de Florida, Ron DeSantis, ordenó el mes pasado trasladar en avión desde el estado de Texas a Martha's Vineyard, una isla situada frente a las costas del estado de Massachusetts, podrían solicitar una visa especial para permanecer en Estados Unidos. Esto ocurre luego de que el sheriff del condado de Bexar, certificara que los 49 solicitantes de asilo habían sido víctimas de un delito cuando fueron persuadidos de abordar los vuelos con destino a Martha's Vineyard. Esta certificación podría permitir que las personas migrantes soliciten la visa que se concede a las víctimas o testigos de un crimen. Una exigente de contrainteligencia, convenció a los solicitantes de asilo a abordar los aviones, después de prometerles falsamente puestos de trabajo y vivienda si iban a Massachusetts.

THE LEAST READ PART OF THE NEWSLETTER

To receive the CPR Newsletter by postal mail monthly, send us a self-addressed stamped envelope for each month's issue you are requesting. Five pages (= 1 ounce), can be sent for one Forever stamp. Ten pages (= 2 ounces and can be sent for a 20 cent stamp more.)

Please continue to send us your address changes, including both your old and new addresses.

NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS OR LEGAL WORKERS. Letters sent to us marked "Legal Mail" are NOT going to a lawyer. PLEASE DO NOT MARK YOUR MAIL "LEGAL MAIL"! NO MATTER HOW DESPERATELY YOU NEED LEGAL ADVICE/ ASSISTANCE, WE DO NOT HAVE ANY.

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 on its great site: realcostofprisons.org

SEND US HOLIDAY/CALENDAR CARD DESIGNS

Imprisoned Readers: Please send us a black and white drawing for the CPR 2023 New Year's card & calendar. All designs must be respectful of our diversity: We cannot use any with racist, sexist or religious symbolism. The deadline is December 1. We still need more entries. Submission of a drawing serves as the artist's permission for our use, and will be credited. Prize: As possible, books of winner's choice.

MORE ON LEVELS OF ABUSE

Over and over again our experience is that just knowing and stating that the U.S. police, court and penal systems are unfair and ineffective in reaching its stated goals does not help it do so.

Take the case of ongoing practices at Rikers Island, the New York City jail. For the last six years federal Judge Laura T. Iswain has issued court orders to get New York City and its Mayor Eric Adams to improve the unconstitutional conditions there; the city has not complied.

Rikers is scheduled to close by 2027. Meanwhile, those held there continue to endure abuse, torture, and hazardous conditions. In response, there is currently an ongoing effort to petition the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York to appoint a receiver to protect those who, for the next 5 years, will be subject to the deadly conditions ongoing there. It is scheduled to close by 2027.

A receiver would be nonpartisan and would take direct control to "guide the facility with the goal of reform". Federal judges have resorted to receiverships since the 1970s, to reform some of the country's worst prisons and jails. Immediate change is much needed as in 2022, the violence among people incarcerated there is up 40% compared to 2021. Staff incompetence is said to be to blame.

The level of abuse incarcerated people are experiencing on Rikers Island results in its maintaining its reputation of being one of the worst places of imprisonment in the U.S. This is so even though most people being held at Rikers are pre-trial defendants, so have not been convicted and await hearings or are unable to afford bail.

Meanwhile, in addition, there is an effort by those running the New York City (NYC) Jails to reduce the current, decades-old minimum standard of 14 hours out of cell per day in NYC jails. The current jail commissioner wants to officially lock people in their cells at least 17 hours per day. An email only resource is #HALTSOLITARY CAMPAIGN, New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement (CAIC) at: vpate@nycaic.org

Further south, the Virginia Prison Justice Network will hold a rally in Richmond during the January state assembly session in January to raise public awareness about some of the key concerns of Virginia prisoners. They can be contacted at: 804-644-5834. Resource Information Help for the Disadvantaged can be reached at: P.O. Box 55, Highland Springs VA 23075.