



MI-CURE NEWS

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF
MI-CURE, PO BOX 2736, KALAMAZOO, MI 49003-2736
(269) 383-0028 WWW.MI-CURE.ORG

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PRISON PROGRAMMING

We are continuing to highlight some unique prison-based programs from throughout the country. As noted before, we believe that programming is important, and should be available to everyone who is incarcerated.

Prison Newsletters

The first prison newsletter, *The Prison Mirror*, was published in Minnesota in 1887. The first study of prison newsletters was conducted in 1935 and found at least 100 publications, with nearly half of all U.S. correctional facilities publishing one. By 1959, the number reached its peak of 250 newspapers. (At one point, there were newspapers in nearly every Michigan prison.) After 1959, the numbers dropped; by 1998 only six publications were identified. Now there are at least 24 prisons with newspapers. Those are in Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Washington.

The following information is from the website of the Prison Journalism Project:

“Prison Journalism Project provides incarcerated writers with the tools and training to establish themselves as credible journalists, so they can meaningfully participate in the decision making processes that impact them and their communities...”

“The prison industry is one of the biggest and least transparent businesses in this country and benefits from the fragmentation of information and news about those who are incarcerated. There is a critical and urgent need to connect the dots between prisons across the country and bring transparency to an opaque industry. Intentional, responsible and well-crafted journalism from within the incarcerated community can also break stereotypes and ultimately drive change.”

The Prison Journalism Project has three addresses, each for a specific purpose.

Write to 2093 Philadelphia Pike #1054, Claymont, DE 19703 to send articles. Do NOT send photos or artwork to this address.

Write to 2625 Alcatraz Ave. #328, Berkeley, CA 94705 to submit photos, artwork, and prison publications.

Write to 3501 Southport Ave #240, Chicago, IL 60657 about all other matters. Do NOT send stories, photos or artwork to this address.

Sources: “The Prison Newspaper Directory finds that the number of prison-based papers is growing,” by Hanaa’ Tameez, NimanLab, March 14, 2023; prisonjournalismproject.org

Training to Become Alcohol and Drug Counselors

California prisons are conducting a demanding program to train incarcerated individuals to become certified alcohol and drug counselors. To enter the program, an individual must go years without a serious misconduct, write a 500-word essay on maintaining their recovery and helping others, have at least two references from prison staff, and complete an interview process.

The program itself includes classes in neurobiology and pharmacology, ethics and the law, family dynamics, and relapse prevention. In addition, they spend hundreds of hours being educated on addiction and counseling. And they must complete thousands of hours as interns before gaining state-recognized certification as alcohol and drug counselors.

The program has operated for more than a decade. Recently, the Lancaster facility in Los Angeles County recently graduated the first class from a Level IV (high security) institution.

Former graduates have been released from prison and gone on to work as contracted staff at California prisons. Others work in community programs.

Source: “At this California prison, ‘we are no longer prisoners. We are professionals,’” By Emily Alpert Reyes, Los Angeles Times, March 12, 2023

FOOD SERVICE

Most of the material we have read about food service in U.S. prisons is less than flattering. The food has been called punishment. Prisons have been labeled out-of-sight food deserts. Some writers claim that incarcerated people are treated less than human and unworthy of care.

That’s the bad news. The good news is that it doesn’t have to be that way.

Impact Justice, for example, is “working... to expand access to fresh, nourishing appealing food in prisons and jails as a fundamental human right and as part of preparing people to return home healthy and able to contribute to their families and communities.”

The Maine Department of Corrections has developed methods for improving food service. Tim Cebula recently described a lunch served at the Maine Correctional Center. “...loaded up trays with big, fluffy house-baked dinner rolls and fresh steamed broccoli that sat astride mounds of pasta Bolognese, its meaty sauce packed with ground beef, ricotta and Parmesan cheese, fresh garlic and bell peppers.” Trays were finished off with “ripe-and ready bananas and cartons of local milk.” The Mountain View facility in Maine touts the variety in its meals. It “has served as many as 11 kinds of coleslaw alone, featuring veggies like beets, kohlrabi and bok choy.” The variety, they note, keeps food from becoming boring.

For several years, Maine prisons have grown much of their own food in on-site organic gardens. They bake all of their breads, and purchase discounted produce and grains from local vendors. More recently, they have entered into a partnership with Impact Justice and Brigaid. Founded in 2016, Brigaid uses trained chefs as advisors to improve food in school cafeterias, hospitals, senior centers, and similar settings. The goal will be to create a model that any prison system can use. The program will also train workers so they are qualified to work in institutional kitchens and restaurants.

Impact Justice is involved in other projects. It is one of several organizations working to provide more nourishing food in DC jails. And, it is working with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and others to develop an indoor farm at a women’s facility. It will use shipping containers with irrigation systems and grow lights to produce nutrient-rich leafy greens to supplement meals and provide job training for incarcerated women.

These approaches are cost effective in many ways. Benefits include the following:

- Better nutrition produces a healthier population.
- Fresh, nutritional, appealing food improves morale.
- Local growers, especially small-scale farmers benefit from trade with the prisons.
- Excess food grown in on-site gardens can be shared with local food pantries and soup kitchens.
- There is a reduction in food waste.

A recent TV commercial suggests that the most important tool in the kitchen is one’s brain. We adamantly disagree! We believe that, as evidenced in Maine, the most important tools in the kitchen are the heart, the desire, and the dedication to produce fresh, nutritious, appealing meals. It would also help if the key players viewed quality meals as a fundamental human right.

Sources: “Bringing the movement for food justice to prisons and jails,” *Impact Justice*, <https://impactjustice.org/innovation/food-in-prison>; “Maine

prisons’ food program on track to become national model,” by Tim Cebula, *Press Herald*, February 18, 2023

SEX OFFENDER REGISTRATION ISSUES

The following is the latest information from the ACLU of Michigan on the litigation challenging Michigan’s registry.

“As we explained in our last update, the case is now in ‘discovery’ where both sides are able to get information from the other side in order to prove their case. During the discovery process, we uncovered information that led to the decision to add an additional claim to the current case.

“In late March 2023, we filed a motion seeking to add this claim, which focuses on people with out-of-state convictions who are subject to registration under SORA 2021. Specifically, we argue that registrants with non-Michigan convictions are subject to harsher registration requirements than in-staters, and that they receive no notice or opportunity to be heard in violation of their due process and equal protection rights.

“In addition to this claim, we also asked the court to certify a non-Michigan offense subclass that requested relief specific to this class. This class would consist of those of you within the class who are required to register under SORA 2021 based on a conviction or adjudication you received outside of Michigan. The Court has not yet ruled on these motions, but we will keep you posted when they do.”

NOTE: Since receiving the above update, we were informed that the court has granted the motion to add a claim for individuals with non-Michigan convictions. Attorneys will argue that these individuals should get due process before the Michigan State Police decides their Tier levels. They will also argue that these individuals should not be treated worse than people with Michigan convictions.

THINKING ABOUT CRIMINAL DEFENSE ON THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF GIDEON

The Current State

On March 18, 1963, the U.S. Supreme Court declared, “The right of one charged with crime to counsel may not be deemed fundamental and essential to fair trials in some countries, but it is in ours.” Sixty years later, the Sixth Amendment Center (6AC) reviewed the state of indigent defense in the U.S. They “estimate that, collectively, state and local governments spend approximately \$6.5 billion, or \$19.82 per capita on indigent defense.” Since the country spends \$123 billion on police and \$82 billion on corrections annually, that may not seem like much. However, it does demonstrate progress. Ten years ago, the country spent \$2.3 billion on indigent defense.

6AC’s report singled out Michigan for the progress it has made in improving state oversight and funding of its indigent defense system. Many other states have made progress, as

well. New Mexico, Idaho, Delaware, Utah, and Nevada created oversight bodies. New York, Colorado, and Maine have expanded oversight capabilities. In addition to Michigan, Idaho, New York, and Ohio have significantly increased state funding. A number of states have improved the coordination of indigent defense, including Texas, Alabama, California, Michigan, Maine, and Tennessee. Other states have begun the process of studying their systems with an eye to improving them. Those include Pennsylvania, Illinois, South Dakota, and Iowa. Guam has asked 6AC to study its indigent defense system.

Will Unionizing Help?

In September 2022, the Defenders Union of Colorado (DUC) became an affiliate with the Communication Workers of America Local 7799. The union includes multiple job classifications who hope to find the tools to demand systemic change. “DUC aims to achieve workload caps; a livable wage; skill pay for bilingual and other value-adding staff members; improved leave policies and relief from a workaholic culture; improved justice, equity, diversity and inclusion policies; strategic input in budget, planning, and legislative advocacy; meaningful review of supervisors; better training; and more avenues for career growth. Our mission is to improve services to all our clients and working conditions for all our members. These goals go hand in hand. Only by fulfilling them can we truly keep Gideon’s promise.”

Unfulfilled Promise

The authors of a recent opinion piece in USA Today argue that “(S)ix decades after the Gideon decision was handed down, the promise of that ruling – America’s promise – remains unfulfilled.” They go on to argue that, “Ultimately, the struggle for freedom requires rooting out systemic racism and the oppression of women and marginalized communities, including in the legal system.”

They cite a variety of problems including...

- Unmet needs for housing, education, health care, behavioral health services, child care and living wage jobs
- A country addicted to mass incarceration
- A large incarcerated population that is disproportionately Black,
- Government overreach related to the criminalization of reproductive health care and overcriminalization of drugs, police abuse and prosecutorial misconduct.

The authors are April Frazier Camara, President and CEO of the National Legal Aid and Defender Association; Lori James-Townes, Executive Director of the National Association of Public Defense; and Lisa Monet Wayne, Executive Director of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers. “For the first time in history, the leaders of the nation’s three preeminent organizations of criminal attorneys are Black women...”

They go on to make several other points.

- Public defenders provide a vital check on governmental abuse of power and corruption, as well as on law enforcement and prosecutor misconduct.
- If we believe in a fair, rational and humane justice system, we must respect public defenders and appreciate their vital role in the justice system.
- We should provide public defenders reasonable caseloads and equitable funding and resources.
- Every state and territory has the infrastructure to fight for equal justice under the law. But the fight for justice is not yet a fair fight.
- Our challenge is to ensure that we do not leave the story of the fulfillment of Gideon’s promise, and for a better system of public defense, to our granddaughters.

Federal Legislation

U.S. Senators Cory Booker and Dick Durbin have introduced a bill to create the Providing a Quality Defense Act. The bill would improve indigent defense by establishing a grant program to do the following:

- Provide grants to public defense offices to establish loan repayment assistance programs for public defenders.
- Direct the Attorney General to develop best practices and recommendations for public defender and panel attorney caseloads, public defender compensation, and panel attorney compensation.
- All states to report data about criminal cases to the Attorney General for the purpose of developing best practices.
- Establish grants for educational programs for public defenders and panel attorneys.

Booker and Durbin also introduced the Sentencing Commission Improvement Act that would add a new, ex-officio nonvoting member with a public defender background to the U.S. Sentencing Commission. The Commission establishes federal sentencing policies, practices, and guidelines; advises Congress and the executive branch on crime policy; and researches information on crime and sentencing issues.

Sources: “The State of the Nation on Gideon’s 60th Anniversary,” by David Carroll and Aditi Goel, Sixth Amendment Center, March 14, 2023; “Harnessing Union Power for Public Defense,” by Kiyomi Bolick, INQUEST, March 16, 2023; “‘Right to an attorney’ only goes so far. Our war on crime leaves injustice in its wake,” by April Frazier Camara, Lori James-Townes, and Lisa Monet Wayne, USA Today Opinion Contributors, March 17, 2023; “Booker, Durbin Introduce Bills to Improve Access to Counsel Guaranteed by Constitution and Increase Representation of Public Defenders in U.S. Criminal Justice System, Press Release by Cory Booker, March 16, 2023

A SAD ANNIVERSARY

This year marks the 50 Year Anniversary of the mass incarceration era. According to the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NACDL), “Over five million people are under supervision by the criminal legal system. Nearly two million people, disproportionately Black, are living in jails and prisons instead of their communities, a 500% increase since 1973.”

The NACDL conducts a number of projects aimed at reducing incarceration. Those include the following:

- Battling over-criminalization, focusing on the criminalization of pregnancy and reproductive health, conducting training and advocacy around drug laws, and education on the need for misdemeanor reform.
- Defending public defense and the right to counsel.
- Exposing police misconduct.
- Fighting for the right to a trial and exposing the trial penalty that results in a substantial difference between the sentence offered if one accepts a plea rather than the sentence given after a trial.
- Recognizing and redressing racial disparities in the criminal legal systems.
- Advocating for the restoration of rights and expanding expungement.
- Promoting release of incarcerated people through clemency and compassionate release.
- Safeguarding privacy in cases involving new surveillance tools, technologies, and tactics.
- Promoting second look sentencing.

Other organizations and individual are also looking a novel ways to reduce incarceration.

“**Eric Reinhart**, a physician and anthropologist at Northwestern University in Chicago has proposed... a corps of 2 million community health and justice workers, or 6 per every 1,000 residents, recruited among formerly incarcerated individuals.”

“Community health workers are key figures in many healthcare systems around the world. They aren’t highly specialized medical professionals, but rather community members who have training to support their peers as they deal with health issues.” They can remind neighbors to take medication, check on people with fragile health, perform blood pressure checks, and help to navigate health care needs. These needs are particularly important in disadvantaged communities – the same communities from which many incarcerated individuals came and to which they will return.

Salmaan Keshavjee, a professor of global health and social medicine at Harvard says, “A lot of the diseases that we need to care for in the 21st century... are diseases that people often don’t know that they have, and that are best taken care of in the community – things like blood pressure, diabetes, certain infectious diseases that you can screen people for. You need

mechanisms for delivering care in the communities where they live and work.”

Robert Fullilove, professor of clinical sociomedical science at Columbian University says, “Mass incarceration, having been formerly incarcerated, having been in a family where one has been incarcerated, dramatically changes one’s social status, and changes in social status always create changes in the status of one’s health. So, there is no question that getting people who have experienced that first hand to become engaged in efforts to try and improve the quality of health of their community is certainly an idea whose time has come.”

There are challenges to consider. The program would be expensive, but the savings in health care and recidivism would likely offset that. Training such a large workforce would be challenging. But Keshavjee cautions, “You can overly professionalize it, and if you do that, then the risk becomes that the very people who want to go into it can’t afford to do the training. We’d have to think of a way where the training portion of it could even start in prison.” There would also have to be a linkage between the community workers and the health care system. There could be concerns about whether people with criminal records could be a danger. Keshavjee’s perspective on that: “More people are dying from lack of healthcare than anything else, so the fear that some pot smoker giving you your insulin or helping you walk around the block is somehow going to lead to your early demise, versus the fact that you don’t actually have care, it doesn’t make any sense.”

The Brennan Center for Justice is promoting what it calls the “Public Safety and Prison Reduction Act.” The proposal is to provide \$1 billion in federal funding for states that successfully implement policy changes to reduce unnecessary incarceration, with funds to be used for tracking and measuring success. The bill would prohibit participating states from enacting punitive sentencing laws, such as mandatory minimum laws and truth-in-sentencing laws.

Sources: “On the 50 Year Anniversary of the Mass Incarceration Era, NACDL calls for Reflection and Reform,” NACDL, February 9, 2023; “The US has too many prisoners and not enough community health workers. Here’s an idea to solve both problems,” by Annalisa Merelli, Quartz, March 9, 2023; “A New Idea on Justice Reform,” by Michael Waldman, Brennan Center for Justice Reform, March 14, 2023

MICHIGAN’S AUTOMATIC EXPUNGEMENT

Michigan’s automatic expungement law took effect on April 11. As a result, many old criminal records are being expunged without a court process and without any cost to individuals. The governor’s office estimated that upward of 1 million records would be expunged when the system went online. According to Safe & Just Michigan the State Police reported that about 842,000 people woke up April 11 with fewer items on their criminal record. Of those, approximately 250,000 have no visible criminal record at all.

Criminal cases due for automatic expungement include the following:

- An unlimited number of misdemeanors punishable by less than 92 days imprisonment will be automatically expunged seven years after the sentence is completed.
- Up to four misdemeanors punishable by more 93 or more days will be automatically expunged seven years after the sentence is completed.
- Up to two eligible felonies will be automatically expunged ten years after the sentence is completed.

Crimes that are not eligible for expungement include those involving assault, human trafficking, driving while intoxicated, crimes of dishonesty, those punishable by more than 10 years and that result in serious injury or death.

It is still possible to have records expunged by judicial petition, and more kinds of offenses are eligible for expungement by this method.

Notices of automatic expungement will NOT be sent. Safe & Just Michigan is advocating for the creation of a web portal to make it easier to determine when records have been expunged. In the meantime, individuals can check their record using the Michigan State Police's Internet Criminal History Access Tool for a \$10 fee.

Source: "Auto expungement is almost here! About a million records to be cleared," Safe & Just Michigan newsletter, March 30, 2023; "Automatic Expungement is Here – A New day for Michigan, a new day for you!" Safe & Just Michigan, April 14, 2023; "Automatic expungement for 1 million Michigan residents began Tuesday," by Janelle D. James, Bridge Michigan, April 11, 2023

LEGISLATION

Michigan Legislation

HB 4160-64 and **SB 119-123** have been introduced to prohibit sentences of life without parole for crimes committed when the offender is less than 19 years old. The bills will bring Michigan in line with 26 other states. Both sets of bills have bipartisan support.

HB 4173 will create a Criminal Justice Policy Commission that would, among other things, analyze corrections-related data and develop modifications to the state's sentencing guidelines.

HB 4191-4 will improve the delivery of driver's licenses or state ID for people leaving prison.

HB 4427 will allow incarcerated people to use the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to obtain their own records.

HB 4450-2 would provide Productivity Time Credits for participation in and/or completion of programming. Those credits would reduce the individual's sentence. Credits could not be earned during months when a person receives a major

misconduct, is classified as very high risk, or is housed in Level V or VI.

HB 4468-71 have been introduced to provide good time. Individuals with indeterminate sentences would earn good time for every month in which they did not receive a major misconduct. Good time would be equal to the number of days in the month. It would be applied retroactively.

SB 33 will require the Department of Corrections to provide the pre-incarceration address for all incarcerated individuals to be used for voting district population counts.

A **Second Look Rally** was held in Lansing on April 19, 2023. While we do not have bill numbers on these proposed bills yet, we do have information on what is expected to be in the bill(s). If an incarcerated individual has served at least 10 years of his or her sentence, an attorney or prosecutor could petition the sentencing court for a sentence reduction. The judge would consider things like the age at the time of the crime, the person's history while incarcerated, mitigating circumstances, and how the crime is viewed today. The judge can then reduce the sentence to time served, reduce the sentence by at least 20%, or deny the petition. Persons convicted of a mass shooting, domestic violence, sexual conduct with a victim less than 13 years old, child pornography, or human trafficking would not be eligible for a second look.

A bill is being drafted to provide free **communication services** for persons incarcerated in Michigan's prisons. Those services include telephone services, email, video communication, or text messaging services. The bill will require the department to maintain a reasonable ratio of working communication devices to individuals incarcerated and permit each individual to use communication services at least 120 minutes each day. We do not yet have a bill number

We urge you to contact your state representative and your state senator to express your views on these bills. They can be reached at the following addresses:

Representative (*include name*)
State Capitol
PO Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Senator (*include name*)
State Capitol
PO Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536

Federal Legislation

U.S. Senator Cory Booker has introduced a series of bills to improve labor policies in U.S. prisons. A summary of those bills follows.

The **Fair Wages for Incarcerated Workers Act** would ensure that incarcerated workers are paid the federal minimum wage for their work. It would also eliminate certain wage

deductions while ensuring that incarcerated people can still fulfill important legal and financial obligations.

The **Correctional Facilities Occupational Safety and Health Act** would foster safer workplaces for people incarcerated in federal, state, and local institutions by:

- Amending the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act to explicitly include correctional facilities operated by state and local governments as employers and incarcerated workers as employees.
- Requiring states with state occupational safety and health plans to include incarcerated workers and require correctional facilities to issue regular reports to the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) on labor conditions and any potential violations of workplace safety laws.
- Requiring the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) to apply the occupational safety and health programs for the BOP employees to incarcerated workers and require annual reports.
- Creating a grant program for state and local governments to amend their occupational health and safety plans to cover incarcerated workers and to support enforcement.

Ensuring Work Opportunities in Correctional Facilities Act would promote job and educational opportunities in prisons to prepare returning citizens to successfully reenter society and to reduce recidivism by:

- Authorizing additional funding for the BOP Occupational Education Programs which offers job training to incarcerated individuals.
- Increasing the number of programs authorized through the Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Program (PIECP) from 50 to 100.
- Double the annual funding for two First Step Act-authorized state and local grant programs and extend grant funding from 2024 through 2029.

Combating Workplace Discrimination in Correctional Facilities Act would strengthen protections for incarcerated workers against civil rights violations and discrimination. It would do the following:

- Prohibit requiring people incarcerated in BOP facilities to work.
- Amend the Prison Litigation Reform Act of 1995 to end the requirement that incarcerated individuals exhaust all available administrative remedies before being able to sue a correctional facility or office under federal law to assert their civil rights.
- Prohibit retaliation against an incarcerated person by any officer of a correctional facility for refusal to work.
- Remove “refusal to work” from the list of BOP inmate behaviors justifying sanctions, including

disciplinary segregation, monetary fines, loss of earned time, and delayed parole.

- Grant the protections of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to incarcerated workers to prohibit employment-related discrimination against workers based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.
- Require correctional facilities to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act, including notice provisions, policy implementation and training, and annual reports to the Attorney General.

Congresswoman Deborah Ross has introduced legislation to **end prison gerrymandering**. The bill would require the Census Bureau to count incarcerated people at their last known residence rather than their prison cell.

Congresspersons Emanuel Cleaver II, Sheila Jackson Lee, and Shontel Brown have introduced the **Prison Libraries Act** designed to advance reintegration efforts, reduce recidivism, and increase educational opportunities for incarcerated individuals. The bill would authorize \$60,000,000 over six years for grants for state prisons to build library capacity.

We urge you to contact your U.S. Senator and your U.S. Representative to express your views on these bills.

Source: “ ‘Second Look’ bill could get prisoners out early,” by Alyssa Burr, Kalamazoo Gazette, April 25, 2023; “Booker Introduces Package of Bills to End Unfair and Abusive Labor Practices in U.S. Correctional Facilities, February 17, 2023; “Bill introduced in Congress to end prison gerrymandering nationwide,” Prison Policy Initiative email, April 26, 2023; “Reps. Cleaver, Jackson Lee, and Brown Introduce Bill to Advance Reintegration Efforts, Reduce Recidivism, and Increase Educational Opportunities for Incarcerated Individuals,” Press Release, April 25, 2023;

TREATING OPIOID ABUSE

Governor Whitmer’s proposed budget for FY 2024 includes the following:

“The Governor’s budget includes \$15.6 million to support the establishment of four prison sites to administer Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT), with each site having the capacity to treat up to 400 patients. Each prison site includes nurses, qualified mental health providers, (contracted) recovery coaches and correctional officers to do this labor-intensive medical work and provide the necessary custody coverage to ensure that drugs are not diverted. Qualified mental health professionals and recovery coaches provide education, counseling, and support services for MAT patients.”

Source: “FY 2024 Executive Budget Recommendation Department of Corrections Medication-Assisted Treatment,” February 8, 2023

UPDATE ON THE CHALLENGE TO NEW YORK CITY JAIL MAIL POLICY

In the last edition of *MI-CURE News*, we reported on efforts by New York City jail officials to digitize all mail to incarcerated individuals and deliver it only by tablets. A number of individuals and organizations objected, pointing out how important mail is to people in prison.

On March 15, Just Detention International reported in an email, “that the city’s oversight board refused to vote on the proposal – stopping it dead in its tracks.” Just Detention went on to note, “The claim that (scanning mail) stops drugs has no factual support – a narrative cooked up by predatory companies to grow their bottom line.”

The effort to stop digitizing mail will certainly continue, but this is an important victory in challenging the policy.

COLLEGES HELPING INCARCERATED PEOPLE

Film students at the **University of California-Santa Cruz** are partnering with law students at **Georgetown University** in Washington D.C. to examine potential wrongful convictions. The law students look at transcripts, police reports, videotapes and interview witnesses and the convicted person. The students are supported by a network of experts. The film students use the material to create a documentary. The students are seeking the truth, with no preconceived notions. Their research may lead to the conclusion that there was no wrongful conviction. If so, the case could be dropped. This spring, students from **Princeton University** joined the effort. Since 2018, five wrongfully convicted people have been released from prison after participating in the course.

Music students at the **University of South Carolina** are helping incarcerated mothers to compose musical messages for their babies.

The Minnesota Health Department is partnering with the **University of Minnesota** on a pilot program to facilitate 3,500 video visits and provide parenting education programs to parents incarcerated in jails.

At **California State University, Fullerton**, a group of formerly incarcerated students live at the John Irwin House, just four miles from campus. Project Rebound operates the house where students are offered academic counseling, networking opportunities, financial advice, tutoring, community, help in accessing campus resources, financial aid and more. Residents pay one-third of their take-home pay as rent. Of that amount, two-thirds are spent on house upkeep and the rest is placed in a saving account and returned to residents when they leave. Residents are expected to maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher, attend workshops, and participate in Project Rebound’s community service program.

Other colleges are also providing housing for formerly incarcerated. **Washington University** in St. Louis identifies landlords who are willing to overlook lack of credit history. Thrive for Life has operated a house for formerly incarcerated students in New York City since 2019 for some students

enrolled at **New York University** and **Columbia**. The organization is working to develop housing at **Marquette University** in Milwaukee, **Sacramento State**, and **Fresno State**. **Howard University College of Medicine** runs the nonprofit Prison to Professionals that includes transitional housing for formerly incarcerated students in Baltimore.

The J. F. Ingram State Technical College in Deatsville, Alabama has received a state grant to aid individuals leaving prison. The college offers in-prison training in high-demand careers such as welding, automotive repair, plumbing and HVAC, carpentry and more. As these individuals approach their release dates, the college works with them to find employment.

Source: “How students are helping to get people out of prison” by Charlotte West, Open Campus, April 12, 2023; “Revolutionary housing: How colleges aim to support formerly incarcerated students,” by Gail Cornwall, The Hechinger Report, February 6, 2023; “Alabama college helping prison inmates reintegrate into society,” by Jasmyn Cornell, WTVY, February 14, 2023

SHORTS

FAMM Reports Federal Compassionate Release: In a recent email, Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM) has reported that the U.S. Sentencing Commission recently approved changes to the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) compassionate release criteria. Those changes, which will be effective on November 1, 2023, include the following:

- Survivors of physical abuse resulting in serious bodily injury or sexual abuse inflicted or directed by BOP personnel will be able to seek compassionate release directly when the BOP fails to act.
- Judges will be able to identify unusual or unforeseen reasons warranting compassionate release, so long as the reasons are similar in gravity to the medical, geriatric, family circumstances or sexual abuse grounds.
- If an individual has served at least 10 years of an unusually long sentence, the individual can apply for release if there is proof that the sentence they are serving is grossly disparate when compared with the sentence they would receive today.

Pennsylvania Prisons Raise Wages: Beginning January 1, Pennsylvania prisons raised the wages for incarcerated workers by 20 %. The minimum wage has gone from 19¢ per hour to 23¢ per hour. The wage range for most jobs is now 23¢ to 50¢.

Source: “News: Pennsylvania Institutes Prison Pay Increases, A First in 30 Years” by Jeffrey Shockley, Prison Journalism Project, April 9, 2023

New Second Look Network: The Sentencing Project has announced the creation of a new Second Look Network – a coalition of attorneys and post-sentence advocates throughout the county who are working on behalf of incarcerated individuals serving lengthy or unfair sentences. “The Network

will facilitate the exchange of ideas and information between its members, and provide various opportunities for collaboration on effective litigation and mitigation strategies, host training sessions, and provide connections to experts and local policy efforts. The Network will also provide communications and media support to its members.”

NOTE: This is not a service organization. It is designed to support and enhance the efforts of individuals engaged in this work.

Source: *The Sentencing Project, March 7, 2023*

Elected Officials Should Visit Jails and Prisons: The National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers recently suggested that lawmakers, judges, and prosecutors should visit jails and prisons. Staff shortages and other problems have led to institutions that are unsafe to live and work in, yet most of the people who write and enforce sentencing and prison policies have never even visited one.

Source: “*Perspective: America’s Jails Are in Crisis: Elected Officials Should Visit Them,*” *National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, January 30, 2023*

Abolishing Prison Slavery: The 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution permits slavery to be used as punishment for crimes. In the November election, voters in four states (Alabama, Oregon, Tennessee, and Vermont) amended their state constitutions to prohibit slavery and involuntary

servitude without exception. Those states join Colorado, Utah, Nebraska, and Rhode Island in abolishing slavery.
Source: *Daniel Rosen, Worth Rises, November 9, 2022*

Former Lifer Wins Pulitzer Prize: David Luis “Suave” Gonzalez was sentenced to life without parole in Pennsylvania when he was 17 years old. While in prison he fought his way into Villanova University’s privately funded college program at Graterford Prison, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in education and marketing. He also developed a friendship with journalist Maria Hinojosa.

After the Supreme Court decisions that led to the release of many juvenile lifers, Gonzalez was released in 2017. He and Hinojosa then worked together to document his time in prison and after release in a podcast called *Suave*, which won the 2022 Pulitzer Prize. Gonzalez now is a support coach with a reentry program for formerly incarcerated students at a community college and is co-host of *Death by Incarceration*.
Source: “*The Department of Corrections Couldn’t Stop This Lifer From Winning a Pulitzer Prize – It Tried,*” by Rahsaan “New York” Thomas, *Slate, October 20, 2022*

WITH SYMPATHY

Since publication of our last newsletter, we have learned of the deaths of MI-CURE members and supporters Nathan Edwards – 132106 and Alice F. Murdock.