

# Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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## COVID RELATED RESOURCES

There are an ever increasing number of resources available. The problem is the delay in distributing, so that, in fact it is often out of date. We highly recommend PRISON HEALTH NEWS, published quarterly. Issue 45, Winter 2021 is now available, free, from: *Prison Health News*, 4755 Baltimore Ave, Philadelphia PA 19143. A few excerpts follow:

*Are the vaccines safe? Any side effects?*

So far, data from clinical trials and experience from millions of people getting them suggest the vaccines are very safe. However, it is important to note that we don't have long term data yet. A lot of people do have some side effects from getting vaccine which usually last only a few days. They may be worse after your second dose than after your first.

*Who should not take the vaccine?*

Anybody who has had a severe allergic reaction to the COVID-19 vaccine or any of its ingredients should not take the vaccine. People with a history of allergic reactions to other vaccines should talk to their doctor and may need to take extra precautions. The CDC says that women who are pregnant can choose to take the vaccine—it has not been tested on pregnant women yet, but there is no reason to think it is unsafe for the pregnant or fetuses.

*Once I get the vaccine, can I stop taking precautions like wearing a mask and social distancing?*

Not yet. Since the vaccine doesn't offer 100% protection, scientists are recommending that we keep taking these precautions for now until more people are vaccinated. It is possible that the vaccine could keep you from getting sick, but you could still have the virus in your body and pass on to others.

Resources:

*Prison Covid*  
P.O. Box 48064  
Burien WA 98148  
Cost: 2 stamps  
per paper issue.  
Free via e-mail  
at: contact@prison

Center for Health  
Justice  
900 Avila St, #301  
Los Angeles CA 90012  
Prison Hotline:  
213-229-0979.  
Help with health  
care & insurance  
for those released  
to L.A. County.

## COVID Related Information

From March 2020 until the end of March 2021, *The New York Times* newspaper collected data on coronavirus infections and deaths from state and federal prisons, immigration detention centers, juvenile detention facilities, and local, regional and reservation jails in the U.S.

When data was not publicly available on websites, *The Times* collected the information through email queries, text messages, and public record requests. *The Times* used reports from state agencies, coroners' reports, medical records and reports from investigative agencies—always the most complete data. For state and federal facility population figures, *The Times* used the highest number of those housed in each facility for the period from March 2020 through March 2021, based on information from prisons when available.

Infection rates for the general population were derived from a *New York Times* database of reports from state and local health agencies. Infection data for all facilities is sure to represent an undercount because of a lack of testing. During the first five months of the pandemic, prisoners from multiple state prison systems reported that they had been sick with coronavirus-like symptoms but that they had never been tested.

Worldwide, about 2 in 100 people are known to have had the coronavirus. U.S. prisons, jails and detention centers have been among the nation's most dangerous places when it comes to infections from the coronavirus. Over the past year, more than 1,400 new prisoner infections and 7 deaths, on average, have been reported inside those facilities EACH DAY.

Social distancing is not an option inside these most dangerous places. Testing was not a priority inside them early in the pandemic. At an immigration detention center in Farmville VA, nearly everyone held there – 339 in all – was infected. And at the Fresno CA County Jail, more than 3,800 became sick.

In the past year, one in three states' prisoners are known to have had the virus. In federal facilities, at least 39% of prisoners are known to have been infected.

# Protect Mail For Incarcerated People

[from CURE National to the Attorney General]

(Smart Communications company *MailGuard* system in Florida, already processing state prisoners' mail for Pennsylvania, now has a contract with two federal prisons. Excerpts from a letter against this, follow.)

"*MailGuard* converts personal mail to electronic scans...this has a negligible impact on safety—but has devastating consequences to incarcerated people, severely affecting their emotional well-being, weakening family ties, and hindering their ease of reentry upon release. (It) also undermines crucial confidential communications, as required by the Prison Rape Elimination Act. It effectively eliminates access to mail communications for people with certain disabilities or for people without the means to purchase tablets.

"Eliminating mail is needlessly cruel.

"People in prison treasure the mail that they receive, and many save letters to read again and again to remind them that there are people on the outside who are thinking of them and who care about them.

"*MailGuard* incentivizes corporations to profit from incarceration...By supporting the program, the Biden Administration is enabling a business model wherein a private company can make profit by replacing the cheapest and safest form of communication available to incarcerated people with a service that is inaccessible, inequitable, and that fails to meet basic privacy requirements.

"People who are incarcerated deserve better."

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## 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 rPR return address in the upper left-hand corner of each envelope sent.

Five pages (1 ounce) can be sent for one Forever stamp. Ten pages (2 ounces) can be sent for one Forever stamp plus one twenty cent stamp.

Please continue to send us address changes to help upkeep our mailing list as accurate as possible.

NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS OR LEGAL WORKERS. Letters to us marked "Legal Mail" can result in our losing access to the prisons 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 their great site:

[realcostofprisons.org](http://realcostofprisons.org)

# MORE BOOKS AND LIBRARIES HELP

## The Million Book Project

It offers books as both a resource and a symbol of freedom, restoring hope, dignity, meaning and purpose to those incarcerated. The Million Book Project will bring curated 500-book literary time-capsules to each state in the United States, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico. The books included will run the range of subject matter and genre, from classic children's books like Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* and Junot Diaz's *Island-born* to Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. Such collections will help those doing time contemplate their tomorrows and be a testament to the power of reading and of readers. The end result will be an opportunity to reclaim mental space and dignity.

Reginald Dwane Betts, formerly incarcerated, an active poet and a lawyer, designed the program and is its Director. Contact: The Million Book Project, 127 Wall Street, New Haven CT 06511; 203-432-4992.

## Fresh Start @ Your Library

A program of the New Jersey State Library provides help to the formerly incarcerated. It provides everything from training in how to make a FaceTime call to compiling resources for job fairs and food banks. Its biggest problem has been the effect of the Covid-19 on library access – but resourcefulness gets the word out. *Fresh Start* has billboards in the New Jersey commuter train stations, as well as big ads on city buses.

In addition to providing computer training, tech support and job readiness training, the program also has social workers who help clients rebuild relationships when they come home. At the moment, they work most of their counseling by phone.

As in prison, those who are interested in gaining knowledge or trying to change their life, eventually finds their way to the library.

Contact: *Fresh Start @Your Library*, one is: New Jersey State Library;

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## From the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights

"This has been one hell of a year. Prisons are always hard places to live. This year it became one hundred times harder. Covid-19 has stolen our loved ones, harmed the health of thousands of people, and made the lives of people incarcerated much worse than before. *No one is more affected than imprisoned.*"