

# Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

Vol. 47-D, No. 8

PO Box 1911, Santa Fe NM 87504

August 2022

## START WITH INEQUALITY, END WITH MORE INEQUALITY

### Racism in Imprisonment

The gap between Black and "white" folks in the U.S. who are doing state prison time for long prison sentences is growing. This is according to a new report by the Council on Criminal Justice (700 Pennsylvania Avenue SE, Washington DC 20003). Between 2005 and 2019, the share of Blacks in this country newly sentenced to state prison for more than 10 years grew from about 13% in 2005 to 19% in 2019. By comparison, during that same period, "white" people taken to state prison for long sentences grew from about 12% to 15%. These numbers are based on information from 29 states, accounting for more than half of the U.S. population.

By the end of 2019, more than half of the people in prison - 57% were doing sentences longer than 10 years, an increase from 46% in 2005. During that time, the average length of sentences increased from almost 10 years to nearly 16 years. Black people in this country were more likely than "whites" to get long prison sentences for convictions for murder, rape and sexual assault, as well as robbery and burglary. For street drug sentences, there was a shift between 2005 and 2019: "whites" were more likely to get longer sentences in 2005, but by 2019, Blacks account for the larger share.

For most convictions, Black people are more likely to get sentences of 10 years or longer than "whites". According to the director of the Sentencing Project (1705 DeSales St., NW, 8th Fl., Washington DC 20036), people of color are getting harsher sentences for the same convictions. This is true for juveniles, as well as for adults. She added: "The harshest of our sentences isn't related to public safety. It's politics in this country and it's racism. Anyway you slice it, if you don't account for racism, you don't understand what's truly going on."

The percentage of people older than 55 sentenced to prison more than doubled from 2005 to 2019, from 8% to 19% in 2019. At the same time, the percentage of people between 18 and 24 fell 35%.

### Mental Health: Dementia

An estimated 6.2 million people in the United States aged 65 and older currently have dementia and that number is projected to increase to 12.7 million by 2050. So, the prevalence of dementia among persons involved in the police, court and penal system can also be expected to increase. The number of prisoners 55 and older increased 400% from 1993 to 2013. It is predicted that by 2030, this age group will make up one-third of the imprisoned population.

A report by the American Bar Association's Commission Law and aging notes the "nationwide stiffening of criminal sentencing during the late 1980s and 1990s." So there are more older prisoners because terms of imprisonment are much harsher than they were before the 1980s.

In addition, there is widespread agreement that most prison systems are unprepared, or unable (—or, we would add, unwilling—) to provide a "safe and caring" place for people with neurocognitive problems — after all, if we were willing to deal with these situations in the first place, these folks would not be ending up with prison sentences as they do.

Obviously, systemwide training, at the least, is needed for "case identification" and response by all those working in the police, court and penal system: in law enforcement, as attorneys and judges, and, of course the staff of so-called correctional agencies. Of primary concern should be a "more appropriate placement" depending on "whether the defendant poses a risk to himself or to society." It is hard to imagine that prisons and jails will ever provide "therapeutically appropriate and protective conditions and programming for inmates with dementia" as authors of the report call for.

In addition, it is noted: "the report merges into the general problems that our society is facing in providing appropriate placements for poor people with dementia in an ageing population...."

## Puerto Rico

Organizaciones de derechos civiles están pidiendo la revocación de una serie de fallos racistas de la Corte Suprema de Estados Unidos que se han utilizado durante más de un siglo para justificar legalmente la discriminación contra la población de Puerto Rico y de otros territorios ocupados por Estados Unidos. Los fallos se conocen como "Casos Insulares" y han permitido al Gobierno federal negar a los puertorriqueños que viven en la isla el derecho al voto, el acceso a programas sociales como Medicaid y cupones de alimentos, así como a otros beneficios garantizados para quienes residen en el continente.

Esta nueva iniciativa para revocar los "Casos Insulares" reproduce después de que la Corte Suprema avalara la negativa del Gobierno de Biden a otorgar los beneficios completos del programa de Ingreso Complementario el Seguro Social a las personas mayores y personas con discapacidad que viven en Puerto Rico.

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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 stamp envelope for each month's issue you are requesting.. Five pages (= 1 ounce), which can be sent for one Forever stamp. Ten pages (=2 ounces and can be sent for a 20 stamp more.)

Please continue to send us your address changes, including both your old and ew 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](http://realcostofprisons.org)

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## SEND US HOLIDAY/CALENDAR CARD DESIGNS

Imprisoned Readers: Please send us a black and white drawing for the 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*. 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.

## WHO BENEFITS & HOW?

It's hard to believe when they are doing it, but every once in a while prison related literature will say something startling true. The example we have this month is from the FCI Tallahassee web site: "It is extremely difficult for prisoners to have any level of comfort when living with just the items that are prison-issued."

This was in contrast to a recent newspaper article that stated that that very same institution "offers yoga, Pilates, movies and an inmate talent show."

So, we move right along to a June 2022 article in Great Britain's "Guardian Weekly" magazine, headlined: "Inside job: Prison Labour (British spelling!) produces goods worth \$11 billion a year" which includes a lot of numbers, many of which follow:

- > 800,000 estimated number of prisoners with jobs in U.S. prisons
- > 13 - 52 cents hourly rate of pay for non-prison industry jobs
- 51,000 of prisoners with prison industry jobs in 2021

\$2 billion: the value of goods and services produced prisoners in prison industry jobs in 2021.

More than 80% of incarcerated workers do general prison maintenance, such as cleaning, cooking, repair work, laundry and other essential services. Public officials acknowledge that this work is "crucial."

There are seven states that pay nothing for most prison work: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina and Texas.

In 2021, more than 51,000 people, that is more than 6.5% of prison labor, held industry jobs. Those workers are paid 30 cents to \$1.30 an hour on average. In Oregon, for example, incarcerated workers are paid \$4 to \$6 a day, while a worker outside prison doing the same job makes an average \$80 a day. The work that prisoners performed in 2021 was estimated to be worth \$9 billion a year.

## ANOTHER KIND OF ABUSE

(This is from the "Mule Creek Post" Ione CA, dated June 2022). The question it raises is: how much has changed? In July 2021, FCI Dublin, one of six women's federal prisons, warden and staff members were charged with rampant sexual misconduct of women prisoners there, beginning in 2017 when prisoners began making complaints to staff. Two of the four men charged are expected to plead guilty to sexual abuse in federal court. A congressional investigation is also underway...