

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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BIG NUMBERS, BAD NEWS

The U. S. incarceration rate is the highest on earth and its negative effects include significant disparities by class and race, as many of our readers well know. During 2019, the first year of the Covid pandemic, the number of those incarcerated in this country decreased by at least 17% — the largest and fastest reduction in history of the U.S. imprisoned population. Not surprisingly incarcerated while people benefited disproportionately. The fraction of incarcerated Black and Latino people sharply increased. Racial inequities in average sentence length were amplified and appear to be a major contributor to this phenomena. Because of the substantial decrease in the overall number of people incarcerated — by approximately 200,000 — there was an increase in the proportion of incarcerated Black, Latino and other “non-white” people.

Among those locked up in state and federal prisons in 2020, at least 6,182 people died, a 46% increase from 2019. Parallel to that change, life expectancy in the U.S. fell in 2021 for the second year in a row. This is despite the poor data collection by the U.S. Department of “Justice” which failed to identify more than 900 deaths in prisons and local jails in the 2021 fiscal year.

A major reason life expectancy is less in the U.S. than in other “developed” (read “rich”) countries is not only because of the higher number of people locked up here than elsewhere but also the longer sentences they must endure.

As a reminder, for the 40 plus years starting in the 1980s, the number of those incarcerated more than quadrupled — as a result of changes in governmental policies. In

2000s the death rate from people leaving prison was 3.5 times higher than for the rest of the population in the first few years after release. Studies also so that currently/formerly incarcerated Black people suffered a 65% higher mortality rate than their “non-Black” peers. Although there was a substantial decrease in the overall number of people incarcerated (by approximately 200,000), there was a “meaningful” increase in the proportion of incarcerated Black, Latino and other non-white people locked up.

The death rate for people leaving prison was 3.5 times higher than for the rest of the population in the first few years after release. Thousands of people are released from prisons and jails every year with conditions such as cancer, heart disease, and infectious diseases they developed while incarcerated and were inadequately treated for. This is especially apparent in southeastern states such as Alabama and Louisiana which have some of the highest incarceration rates in the country. Deaths from drug use, violence, and lack of access to health care were especially high in people’s first two weeks out.

Because the federal government has not collected the information they are supposed to, the number of people who have died in prisons and jails since the covid pandemic began is not definitively known.

The following makes worse the bad news above: the U.S. is ranked 16th out of 23 countries in literacy proficiency, 21st in numerical proficiency and 14th in “problem solving in “technology-rich environments”. Together we must learn and help each other acquire information and skills to keep us healthy and to improve our lives.

GOOD NEWS/BAD NEWS

The bad news: Claim Deadline – must be mailed by June 6, 2023. The good news is: If you were released on bail from Rikers Island at least once between October 4, 2014 and October 21, 2022, and *reasonably believe your release may have been delayed at least 3 hours after your bill was paid*, a Class Action Settlement has been reached with the City of New York that provides for payment to eligible Class Members, the costs of notice and administration, special service awards to the Class Representatives and attorneys' fees and costs. Bad & Good.

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

TAX FAIRNESS

The three year long Covid-19 public health emergency declaration was formally ended on May 11, 2023. During its three years, out of the over six million people who got sick from the virus, over a million died. However, during this time, the wealth of the roughly 700 billionaires in the United State increased by a total of \$1.7 trillion- from \$2.95 trillion to \$4.65 trillion.

During this time the concentration of wealth among these roughly 700 billionaires had increased from \$2.95 trillion to \$4.65 trillion – a total growth of \$1.7 trillion. Republicans in Congress are opposing the continuation of services that help working families in order to make the 2017 Trump tax cuts permanent for millionaires and billionaires.

Why shouldn't billionaires with yearly untaxed wealth gains pay taxes on them?

Less is More

We're talking books here. The number of titles banned in prisons across the U.S. varies tremendously from state to state. In Rhode Island only 68 books were banned; with 2,740 state prisoners. In Texas, nearly 10,000 books were banned and 69,610 state prisoners. The total number of books, found by the *Marshall Project*, that incarcerated people cannot get in prison: 54,000. Florida alone bans somewhere around 20,000.

The process of banning books varies from state to state. About half of the states do not keep track of the books they do not allow into prisons, evaluating each book on a case-by-case basis. In contrast, Oregon disposes of its list of not allowed-books every three years and then reevaluates them.

Some more details on Texas practice and procedures: The policy is to review all reading material before each is allowed in to a facility. A publication can be rejected based on whether:

- a. It contains contraband that cannot be removed;
- b. It contains information regarding the manufacture of explosives, weapons, or drugs;
- c. It contains material that a reasonable person would construe as written solely for the purpose of communicating information designed to achieve the breakdown of prisons through offender disruption such as strikes, riots, or STG activity;
- d. A specific determination has been made that the publication contains graphic presentations of sexual behavior that is in violation of the law, such as rape, incest, sex with a minor, bestiality, necrophilia, or bondage;
- e. It contains sexually explicit images. Publications shall not be prohibited solely because the publication displays naked or partially covered buttocks. Subject to review by the Mail System Coordinators Panel and on a case-by-case basis, publications constituting educational, medical, scientific, or artistic materials, including, but not limited to anatomy, medical reference books, general practitioner reference books or guides, National Geographics, or artistic reference material depicting historical, modern, or postmodern era art, may be permitted; or
- f. It contains material on the setting up and operation of criminal schemes or how to avoid detection of criminal schemes by lawful authorities charged with the responsibility of detecting such illegal activity.