



**American Friends  
Service Committee**

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# **“FROM THE INSIDE OUT”**

**A report by the  
Prison Watch Community Oversight Initiative**

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*This report was created by Program Director Bonnie Kerness (973-410-3978/  
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with us.*

Dear Friends,

It is with pain in our hearts that we come today to report on situations that no human should be subjected to, no matter their crime.

In New Jersey, we have a prison population of approximately 11,000 humans on any given day. The majority of these are men and are housed at various locations throughout the state. Prison Watch gets hundreds of letters monthly detailing various issues that individuals serving time experience. This communication has been open for decades now, therefore it takes a lot to shake the souls of those who read and respond to these cries from behind the walls, which includes students and volunteers.

Those of you who have read and reviewed the previous 6 issues are aware that generally we pick a topic, and report on it from throughout the state, and often nationally. This publication was started to enlighten, educate, and inspire action in those who read it. One result is that activists like yourselves are moved to ask more questions, to get involved locally, and to tell your friends, co-workers, and others what you learn. The best thing that happens is that you are moved to take action, to write letters, and emails; to make calls; to step outside the comfort of reading to acting on what you now know. There is an old saying "Those who know better, do better" In this case, we would revise that saying, "Those who know, must act."

In what follows you will hear of the conditions of confinement for imprisoned elders and terminally ill prisoners of all ages in New Jersey. What they were convicted of is irrelevant to the condition they are exposed to and living with. In most cases, the reality is they are dying, with no humanity, dignity, or basic human services. What follows is redacted (to protect the writers) from recent letters to AFSC's Prison Watch. None of the writing has been edited.

There are 753 men over 50 currently housed in South Woods prison in Cumberland County, NJ. One of the 'benefits' that is stated by the institution itself is that there is a "Palliative Care Unit." Excerpts from the letters describe what the reality of Palliative Care is in the New Jersey Department of Corrections. 753 men is double the number of this age group (by number and percentage) to any other prison in the state. The people inside describe this as the dumping ground for the elders and very ill in our prison population. To give perspective, 35 men died in custody last year. 33 of them were over 50, the oldest being 80 years old. If this was a relative of yours, how would you want them to be treated as they aged, or became terminally ill? What is your image of what this looks like, within a prison setting? Hold that image, and then read the letters below.

# SouthWoods



*South Woods State Prison is located in Bridgeton New Jersey, part of Cumberland County. It is a mixed custody facility that houses over 3,420 male inmates in three medium security units, and a single minimum security unit. Additionally, there is an Extended Care Unit responsible for housing inmates in the infirmary, and a Palliative Care Unit. Offenders can receive medical and mental health treatment on-site.*

1/17/2019

Dear Prison Watch:

I pray this letter find you and your family in good health. A friend of mine gave me your name and address in hoping that you can help in some way. I am in South Woods State Prison, I am writing because of what go on at this prison, and know one care about the beating of inmates as well as inmates that die, And they didn't have to die, the inmates at this prison want to talk about what go on but fear that if they say anything they will bet beat as well,

### **This is some off what go on at this prison**

1. They a place were they put inmates that are very sick and waiting to die, these inmates can't get out of bed, to use the man room so they do it in the bed, and the medical staff let these inmates lay in if for days and some time for week.
2. Inmates don't get shower for days at a time, and the medical staff when ask about clearing the inmates up, the staff tell the inmates that work over in this E.C.U tell use they don't have the staff to do what the inmate really did,
3. Inmates die at this prison some time one a day then sometimes two a day, I have saw inmates laying in bed crying out for help and the nurses just walk right by, and the inmate die and the sad part about this, is these inmates are young like 25, 41, and lower,

4. The S.C.O and a lot of the nurse be have sex with the S.C.O they use rooms that no inmates are in. and if some one say anything about what they saw the inmates is move off, And you should see how the staff kill the state of New Jersey with overtime, we have been trying to tell this to the Governor. I know inmates that have sent letters to the Governor Philip D. Murphy at the state house, But this is Governor do not write back to any inmates. This prison is very racist, this prison is ran by 80% all white men and woman that do what every they want.
5. We have try to sent letters to Tv and Radio people but we don't believe that the letters ever left the prison. We have also been trying to tell the Governor about the over time the S.C.O make by trying tell the Governor about the over time the S.C.O make by taking inmates to court or medical hospital to see doctor. The inmates have saw why they went to see, but we have to sit for hours until why want to bring use back, we some time get back to the person around 7.30 or 8.30 and some time later then that, just so they can make the over time. If some one can look in to this, you will see that the state can save a lot of money, and at this prison you have S.C.O and medical kill the state for over time, why do they do what they do **BECAUSE NO ONE COME TO LOOK OVER WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON.**

I am asking if you or any can help let the state house know that we really need to have someone from the Governor office to just come and maybe talk to some of the inmates in the E.C.U units.

2/1/2019

Dear Prison Watch:

Reading your word on "AGING IN PRISON" I have been trying to find people that as volunteer that would want to help, But from this South Woods Prison it is very hard, I know that you have heard about some of how this place is ran. They know that a inmate is sick and never tell then until it is to late, I will report to you as when the S.C.O beat up on inmates, this happen just every day. Just few days ago. A inmate was beat very bad, and this was not my one officer this was over ten, I know that people hear don't believe it because people have said don't believe what inmates say. And the other people just don't care, I just give you just a little background of who I am, I came to Trenton State Prison at a young age, I just say that to let you know that I have been around for very long time.

Now getting back to the aging in prison. Then have a place call E.C.U in South Woods Prison, this is the place where inmates from all over the State of New Jersey, come to die , I know I was in this place four months, I can tell you first hand, I have saw inmates that have lay in body fluids in E.C.U which is a hospital that inmates from all other prison come to die. I have seen inmate's that work in E.C.U as porter, These are the ones that help clean inmates up and if it was not for the inmates, no telling how long a man that and if it was not for the inmates, no telling how long a man that can't get out of bed will lay that way. Also inmates for days don't get showers, And the sad part is that when we ask one of the nurses letting them know that people need to be clean up, this is what they say, "we don't have the

nurse”, inmates call for hours trying to ask for help. But this is what nurse say a lot of, “I will be right back”, and you will not see they until the next days. I have saw inmates as young as 23 die, and it is like two or three inmates die within a few weeks apart, And E.C.U is a place where officer as well as inmates take nurse in room that know one is in, and have sex with them, this what and why nurses cannot clean inmates. Now just let me end on this note, they have new nurse come to work the E.C.U but 80% of all the nurse come looking for a inmates or looking for a officers that make good money to take care of then. and the sad thing about this is we don't have anyone to write that will look in to these thing, The S.C officers Sgt and all the rest , they do what they want and get way with the killing of inmates and I know that you may not believe this as well, but I live and still live it to this day, I just try to ask people if they know some one that we as inmates can write.

It is also bad to see the young black man that is now in all prison, I tell you but you will have see it for yourself. You that kids that look no more then 15 years old. With 30, 40, and life, and they don't understand what is going on, because they never been in prison before, and at this prison the state don't care about being in prison before, and this person the state don't care about putting one of these young kid in a two man or four cell, with a older man that not been with a girl over 20 or 30 years. The kids becomes the woman or the girl they see on tv. It is sad but that is the real life in prison, and i find that when i first come. If a man had sex with a other man he would get lock up, and the prison would sent a letter to the person family, letting them know of what there brother, father, or any one that is in the family, and the letter would never say who did what, all they say your brother or father was in a sex act with a man. But today inmates go on visit and if they try to get sex from their visit they would be put in lock up, and they will take away your visit for 6 mos to one year, but today if inmates have sex with other inmate, they may put him and they person that he have sex with in lock up for three to maybe five days, and they come right back to the same unit or they put one in one unit and one in the other unit, now you guys tell me something is not right with that picture.

The medical staff at this prison is very bad, The Doctor's at this prison tell a inmate things that are not true, and by the way we have about 15% of inmates are in wheelchairs and these are AGING prisoners. It was a inmate that have been in prison for over 43 years and come from medical unit E.C.U. One of the inmates that work as a porter was taken this inmate somewhere in the prison. Now this inmate is over 250 lbs, the porter that was pushing him ran over something and inmate trip out of the wheel chair where he have been in for years for some walking problem, he fell out of the wheel chair and now he can't walk at all. This is because the nurses don't want to do what they is pay to do, and I get some bad feeling that we don't have anyone that can do anything about what go on at this prison. I really believe that because this prison is 85% white, and the units are black inmates, this place is like being down in the south back in the 50's that really. But to end this letter. I will tell you what of what take place at this prison I am going to take a count of all the inmates that is 50 years old and over. I thank you for the big fight that you are for us, I thank you for the rest of the inmates in South Woods Prison, may the lord bless you and family and the work that you do.

FINALLY.....

The American Friends Service Committee has always recognized the existence, continued expansion and conditions of confinement of the punishment system as a profound spiritual crises. We are calling for advocates to hear what the people at South Woods are telling us. Shirley Chisholm once said, "Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth." We need to pay attention, we need to stand up for the rights of people who cannot do it for themselves, we need to engage officials and continue to place these voices in the middle of our lives and consciousness. I've heard it said that Apartheid was legal, the Holocausts were legal, slavery was legal, colonialism was legal. Legality is a matter of power, not justice." Let us please honor the bravery of the people who shared their torment with us by taking action.

Bonnie Kerness, MSW  
Program Director  
AFSC Prison Watch

## Call to Action:

**Governor Phil Murphy**

Email/Phone <https://nj.gov/governor/contact/all/>

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**Phone: 609-292-6000**

**Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver**

Email <https://nj.gov/governor/contact/all/>

**Phone: 609-292-6420**

**Maurice Hicks, Acting Commissioner, NJ Department of Corrections:**

**Phone # Phone (609) 292-4036**

Email [http://njdoc.gov/pages/email\\_Us.html](http://njdoc.gov/pages/email_Us.html)

## **Other references on the Aging of our Prison Populations:**

<https://www.aclu.org/other/plight-elderly-prison>

<https://inpublicsafety.com/2018/06/addressing-the-challenges-posed-by-an-aging-prison-population/>

<https://www.quora.com/What-is-prison-life-like-for-elderly-inmates>

<https://www.quora.com/Are-inmates-nicer-to-older-inmates-sick-inmates-or-inmates-with-cancer>

<https://www.thenation.com/article/our-prison-population-is-getting-older-and-older/>

<https://narratively.com/20-inmates-show-the-heartbreaking-cost-of-growing-old-behind-bars/>