

# Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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Aug - Sep 2023

## POOR AND OF COLOR: ALWAYS THOSE IN U.S PRISONS

The Most Important Prison Condition:

Is the high U.S. incarceration rate. It is the sixth highest in the world compared to other so-called Western democracies. The U.S. incarcerates 505 per 100,000 people. This shameful fact is the case although the U.S. represents only about 4.2% of the world's population — although it produces, apparently with no shame, 20% of its prisoners. Women now account for 7% of the population in state and federal prisons, expanding from 4.6% in 1995. There has been a 475% increase in the number of women prisoners in the last 40 years.

The sentence of Death by Incarceration is central to the system of mass incarceration so widespread in the United States. It is a material, institutional, and ideological pillar of a regime of state violence that systematically targets the poor and communities of color.

The system of mass incarceration in the state of Michigan, among others, is a system based on fear, vengeance and death that sustains the institution of policing, false arrests, convictions of innocent people, and mass incarceration in that state in particular and the United States in general. Some call it Death-By-Incarceration (DBI). DBI demonizes and traumatizes the poor and people of color with policies and practices of perpetual punishment while pretending to provide protection and safety. It has never actually been a deterrent to crime, although consistently presented as such.

There is an increasingly elderly prison population — both female and male, who have already been locked up for from 25 to 50 years. These folks not only pose a very low risk of "re-offending," but many of them have experiences, insight, wisdom and leadership abilities to share with their communities. They deserve another chance. Such treatment would, in large part, produce community restoration and accountability, transformation and rehabilitation with widespread redemption. Its lack is a waste and squandering of human resources which are sorely needed.

[based in large part on the May 2023 CURE Newsletter, Vol. 10, Issue 1. Address: CURE Life-Long, Inc., 4417 2nd Ave. — Suite 211, Detroit MI 48201-1214], article by Willis X. Harris: "Death-By-Incarceration is a Major Problem in Michigan in Particular and America in General. It Must Be Abolished Now.]

Prison Arithmetic

Unfortunately, it comes as no surprise to be told that 2/3 of incarcerated youth are youth of color. From 2003 to 2023, the incarcerated youth population dropped 77%, from approximately 100,000 to 25,000. Their ongoing problems include the challenge of getting their youth criminal records expunged, and/or sealed to avoid both stigma and the negative effect the records can have in getting employment on release.

In 1997 alone, 14,500 youth were imprisoned in adult facilities. By 2021, 2,000 youth under 18 were being held in adult jails/ prisons. By April of 2023 the number was down approximately 77% from 100,000 to just over 25,000. Washington D.C. was the only location mentioned that has a jail system for minors. At 18, people arrested there enter the federal system. In December 2022, there were 26 people under 18 in federal custody — on tribal lands or in D.C. Although 13 people were held in solitary in D.C. last year, it is reported that no one is now being so held. There are 1,000 people under 18 reported as being held in state prisons for convictions for which they were charged, convicted and sentenced as adults.

As of this writing, there are 108 youth in New Mexico prisons. In March of 2023, there were two dozen New Mexico youth reported as being locked up for life. Only 1% of former juvenile lifers freed have been convicted of another crime. And, although such extreme sentencing exists in almost half the states, as well as in Washington DC, it is banned in 26 states.

### Resources

ACLU of New Mexico  
(Denali Wilson).  
P.O. Box 566  
Albuquerque NM 87103.  
505-266-5915.

Juvenile Law Center  
1800 JFK Blvd  
Suite 1900B  
Philadelphia PA 19103  
1-800-875-8887

Juvenile Law Office  
2014 Tulane Street  
Suite 516  
Fresno CA 93721  
559-442-1244  
Monday - Friday, 8 to 5

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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 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](http://realcostofprisons.org)  
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### Another Chance

For those currently incarcerated, "second look" sentencing reforms provide a mechanism to undo past harms and to provide hope to incarcerated people with extremely long sentences.

In Oklahoma, there is consideration of the "Oklahoma Domestic Abuse Survivorship Act" will give courts the power to resentence individuals convicted of crimes where domestic abuse was determined to be a significant factor. It passed the State Senate with only one vote against it.

In Michigan, a "Second Chance Sentencing Act" has been introduced which will allow court reconsideration of a sentence after and imprisoned person has served at least 10 years of their sentence. This is true of at least 30% of those currently imprisoned in Michigan.

In New York state, legislation is pending that would allow people imprisoned to petition for resentencing after doing 10s, or half of their sentence. Some number of other states are also considering similar legislation.

A total of 23 states, including Minnesota and New Mexico have expanded voting rights to those on probation and parole.

As we know, felony disenfranchisement laws have a disproportionate effect on the Black voting population due to the racist Black overrepresentation in the police, court and penal system. Currently, one in 19 African Americans of voting age is disenfranchised; this is 3.5 times the rate of non-African Americans.

### COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS IN CALIFORNIA

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), together with the California Department of Technology, have contracted with ViaPath technologies to "enhance communications." technology including family connections for those imprisoned in state prisons. Types of connections in the six year long contract include: in-person and video visits, letters, electronic messaging, and video and audio calls. Fortunately, this seems to be a growing trend among prison systems responsive to for-profit companies pushing for them. In California, this is supposed to have begun January 1, 2023, and include access to services from tablets and kiosks for the entire incarcerated population. We shall see.

All telephone audio calls made from an incarcerated person in a California state prison are to be free to the incarcerated person and their friends and families. There are however, some "premium" features which "may incur charges."

There are paid tablet services funded through individuals Trust Funds. Deposits can be made by family and friends through ConnectNetwork's ViaPath Technologies'

In addition, friends and family are supposed to be able to send e-messages and photos to incarcerated people, who may then request that they be printed in the institution mailroom. ViaPath Technologies (VPT) charges 5 cents for black-and-white prints and 25 cents for color (maximum 2,000 characters). There have been some delays and cancellations in print services. Those so affected are supposed to receive refunds and \$1 credit for the "inconvenience."

All existing tablet and phone services are supposed to be maintained fully operational until the bid process for permanent contracts are completed. All adult institutions are supposed to have telephone and tablet services currently. In any places where there are delays in receiving tablets, people are supposed to be able to use kiosks, mail or telephone calls until they receive their tablets.

There are, of course, mixed experiences with and feelings about the tablets. It has taken time to get them all up and running, and for all those with funds to be able to get movies and all the free games. As of March 2023, the tablets had reached 17 of the 33 California prisons. Their services are supposed to include; ordering from the commissary, submitting grievances and making sick calls. The earbuds with a microphone for phone calls and video visits are much liked.