

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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NEW YORK MEGAJAIL

In New York City's lower Manhattan Chinatown neighborhood there are now city plans underway to construct a new "megajail" that would be a third as high as the Empire State Building. This is one part of the plan to replace the horror of the Rikers Island jail. But the mind and the heart boggle. How, for example, could they possibly safely get all the people being held there out in a timely manner in case of an emergency? And it is just one of four new jails that are part of "replacing" the Rikers Island facility. Just to tear down the buildings currently there will cost \$250 million.

As a jail, it is presumably intended for pretrial detention and some "short-term" stays. The neighborhood has long been considered, by those in power, to be appropriate for such a city building. There has been a jail at that site since 1838 and over time those buildings have been torn down and always replaced with larger ones for the same purpose. The current plans call for the new building notably to be 350 feet tall - the tallest jail in the world - but also to be a couple of blocks long in every direction. As to what it will look like, that is still unknown to the public as the plans, as of November 2022, have not been revealed.

What is also close by is a full range of courts, and also a jail - commonly called the Tombs. Yet, the last time housing was built in the neighborhood was 35 years ago. There will also not be any new hospitals. Or schools. In addition, this is an area where the water table is very close to the surface, and therefore the soil is not stable. There will be years-long demolition and hears-long construction. Critics refer to this project as: "regressive as anything that's ever been done in the history of New York City."

WITH HOPE

"I do want to see all oppressed people free. Therefore, we must continue to fight oppression on all levels."

KR, SC

JUST DETENTION INTERNATIONAL

"Everybody has the right to be safe...
End prisoner rape."

JAIL DEATHS INCREASING

U.S. jails in which death rates have increased include those in: Houston, New York, Oklahoma City, Seattle, Pittsburgh, Louisville KY and in California, Texas and Georgia. Direct causes include not only Covid-19, but also suicides and fatal drug overdoses. The Most recent national figures available are, unfortunately, from 2019 due to the federal Justice Department's failure to fulfill a 2013 congressional mandate to conduct a comprehensive count of all deaths in custody and recorded only 39% of deaths in local jails. The most recent national figures available, from 2019 show jail deaths were rising even before the pandemic.

From 2000 to 2019, national jail deaths per capita increased by 11%, to 167 per 100,000. In 2019, suicide was the leading cause of death. The number of drug and alcohol related deaths was the highest ever recorded. More than half had a history of mental illness or had been declared incompetent.

At least a dozen of those who died this year were in their 20s, 30s, or 40s. More than half had a history of mental illness or had been declared incompetent. In Houston, among the dangers conditions in the jail, severe staffing shortages were reported. The district attorney however declined to dismiss cases in bulk.

Because many acts associated with mental illness, such as spitting on a police officer, are categorized as violent hundreds of poor defendants who need treatment must remain in jail while they are on the log waiting list for a community psychiatric bed.

Lack of treatment for opioid abuse is common in jails. A case filed in New Mexico in December opposes the practice of denying access to those imprisoned to prescribed medication such as methadone or buprenorphine - contending that practice is akin to withholding treatment for other chronic conditions - and violates prisoners' civil rights. They claim that providing the meds to those who were already taking them before entering prison would reduce the state's high recidivism rate and reduce human suffering.

LA INSURRECCION DEL 6 DE ENERO

El comite selecto de la Camara de Representantes que investiga la insurrección del 6 de enero de 2021 en el Capitolio de Estados Unidos ha concluido su investigación de 18 meses al remitir recomendaciones dd cargos penales contra el expresidente Donald Trump. El 19 de diciembre el congresista demócrata del estado de Maryland, dijo que Trump traiciono el juramento que hizo al asumir el cargo al ser parte de una insurrección contra el orden constitucional:

"El comite considera que existe evidencia mas que suficiente para remitir recomendaciones de acusaciones penales contra el expresidente Trump por ayudar o apoyar y darle fuerza a las personas que participaron en un ataque violento contra Estados Unidos en el Capitolio. El commit ha presentado evidencia significativa de que el presidente Trump tenia la intención de interrumpir la transición pacifica del poder que rige nuestra Constitución."

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

UPCOMING EXHIBIT

Within the next year, the state of New Mexico's contemporary art museum in Santa Fe will be presenting an exhibit composed of prison art from around the country. We hope to be able to increase the number of pieces they have to choose from for possible inclusion.

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

- James Baldwin

JAILS & PRISONS: SITES OF REPRODUCTIVE HARM

Not surprisingly, prison abolitionists and designers say there is no such thing as gender-responsive or trauma informed jails or prisons, and that carceral facilities will always disproportionately harm poor communities and communities of color. That no matter what, a jail will be a space of harm. You will never find healing when you are isolated from the people that help you feel and be cared for. Further, expanding or building new jails and prisons leads to increased incarceration rates: "If you build it, they will fill it" is proven again and again.

Women affected know we need to build treatment centers in our community; we need to build mental health centers, community centers, parks, schools - everything that other (and richer) communities have, - we need to build the same thing in communities that are under-resourced and over-incarcerated. No matter what, a jail will only be a space of harm... You will never find healing when are isolated from the people that help you feel and be cared for.

Expanding or building new jails and prisons leads to increased incarceration rates, a historical pattern illustrated by the saying: "If you build it they will fill it."

Tortuous conditions are often attributed to overcrowded or dilapidated buildings, while abolitionists correctly argue that it's the inherently oppressive culture of carceral institutions that traumatizes people. "There is no amount of paint, there is no amount of posh, and there is no amount of anything else that you can use to design away the culture." The growth of Rikers Island is an example of this. "Carceral feminists", including Gloria Steinem, are pushing for the construction of a new jail for women in Harlem.

Further examples are the Correctional Facility for Women in Niantic CT and the Western Massachusetts Regional Women's Correctional Center. Despite these and other atrocities, the architecture industry continues to design carceral spaces because of the capitalist imperative to profit, often at the expense of the most marginalized.

It is important to remember that architectural design is "service oriented" (!). You're serving the client - the person who has the money and resources and power for these types of projects - in these cases it is the Department of Corrections. It's not actually servicing the people who are going be using that space. The folks who are incarcerated and caged in these spaces are tied to this system of profit. And, it is extremely profitable.