

GRATER FRIENDS

A Renewed Commitment

George Rahsaan Brooks of SCI Coal Township

2024 was a year filled with challenges, and we all have had our share. Close friends and family members have joined the ancestors. Some of us were denied commutation and parole while some of us received adverse court decisions. However, some of us were overjoyed because we received encouraging news. I was blessed to receive good news. After having filed many PCRA petitions that were denied due to time bar provisions, a judge ruled my that my 17th PCRA Petition should be entertained because I made a strong prima facie showing that a miscarriage of justice may have occurred. The case is Commonwealth v. Brooks, CP-02-CR-8889-1975.

In spite of being denied commutation, parole, etc., a lot of prisoners have achieved their GED, completed college courses and received a college degree. Whether we received good or bad news or whether things went in our favor or against us, we are duty bound to take control of our lives. We all have to work harder to hold a positive vision for the coming year, in this increasingly hateful, mean spirited and complex world. We all will be called upon to dig deeper, using challenges as opportunities to make differences in our lives.

We may feel we did not do as well as we could have in 2024, that we fell short of what we could have accomplished. But, if you are not confined to a hospital bed or wheelchair, if you are still breathing, if your mind is still capable of functioning, and if you are rising and making it through each and every day, the possibility exists for you to achieve your goals and objectives.

Each of us are struggling in our own particular way to be the best that we can be. We are in a new year. Let us again resolve to do better in various aspects of our lives.

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An Overview of the Pennsylvania Prison Society

WHO ARE WE?

Founded in 1787, The Pennsylvania Prison Society is the nation's oldest human rights organization. Our mission for 235 years has been to promote the health, safety, and dignity of people impacted by mass incarceration. In 1828, the Prison Society was granted access to all people in state or county custody in PA – we remain the only non-governmental organization in the United States with our level of statutory access to people in prison. Although some of our specific programs have evolved over time, we remain committed to responding to the needs of incarcerated people and their loved ones. Today, we use that access to monitor prison conditions, assist people in prison with individual issues they raise, build connections to family and community, and educate the public about the largely hidden world of prisons.

You may write to us at 230 South Broad Street, Suite 605 Philadelphia, PA 19102. You can also have your loved ones call our family support helpline at anytime: 215-564-4775. Our team can assist to answer questions about specific facilities, policies, general issues, and concerns. Our team is small and we are not able to provide legal assistance, but we will do our best to help you get the information and resources you need. Unfortunately, at this time as an organization we are generally not able to use ConnectNetwork to correspond with people confined in SCIs.

HOW DO I CONTACT THE PRISON SOCIETY?

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I WRITE TO YOU?

We will always do our best to assist you. You can write to us to request resources, report conditions at a state or local facility, or request a prison monitor. The Prison Society is not a legal organization and can not provide specific legal advice or representation. However, our correspondence volunteers thoroughly respond to each and every letter we receive with information about other resources and organizations. We can also help you navigate different issues related to education, free books and other creative programs, reentry services, mental health resources, pen pal programs, and more.

We are grateful to the countless people in custody and their families who help promote prison transparency across the Commonwealth. Beyond working to address concerns on an individual and/or facility level, the information you provide drives our vital conversations with Pennsylvania legislators, allied organizations, and the public. As we work to educate others and engage in systemic advocacy, it is vital that this is led by the experiences and opinions of the people closest to the problem- you! Your voices directly informed our current advocacy to end the \$5 medical copay for incarcerated people, as well as our work to remove barriers to family visits.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I SHARE WHAT'S GOING ON IN PRISON?

WHAT IS PRISON MONITORING?

The Prison Society is the only non-governmental organization in the country with a legal right to meet privately with any person incarcerated in their state. Each month, we receive hundreds of reports concerning access to healthcare, abuse, property, conditions of confinement, treatment, and other issues. Our trained volunteer Prison Monitors can meet with anyone incarcerated in Pennsylvania state or county prison to hear their concern in detail and engage in follow-up advocacy.

Out of respect for one's privacy and safety, we will never send a Prison Monitor without an explicit request for a visit from an incarcerated person or their loved one. During a visit, a prison monitor will meet with the person in custody one-on-one to discuss and document their situation. Following the visit, volunteers are empowered to speak with prison administration on their behalf to try to improve the situation. It is important to note that we are not lawyers and cannot assist with legal issues or casework.

For individuals returning to the Philadelphia area, The Prison Society does have a mentoring program available designed to help ease the transition from incarceration back to communities by providing a strong social support network. We hope to expand this to other regions in the state in the future.

WHAT ABOUT REENTRY SERVICES?

Launched in 1981 by Joan Gauker and adopted by The Prison Society in 2002, Graterfriends is a critical outlet for incarcerated people to share their opinions and experiences. We are proud to have built a powerful community with you over these past two decades and encourage you to continue submitting to Graterfriends.

We reserve the right to edit submissions. Original submissions will not be returned. Allegations of misconduct must be documented and statistics should be supported by sources. All submissions should be no more than 500 words, or two double-spaced pages. Letters more than 200 words, or one double-spaced page, will not be published in their entirety and may be shortened for clarity and space. To protect Graterfriends from copyright infringement, please attach a note, on your submission, stating that you are the original author of the work and that you give us permission to edit and print; date and sign the declaration

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I WRITE TO YOU?



PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SOCIETY

Travel after Incarceration

David Meade, Pennsylvania Prison Society

Many people, including those that are incarcerated, are under the false impression that parolees aren't allowed to travel to other states or outside of this county.

I used to sit in my cell watching a show by Anthony Bourdain who used to travel all over the world experiencing new cultures and different types of foods. The show motivated me to want to travel to different countries, but I was pessimistic about being able to make it to any of these places due to being on parole and supervised release.

Upon being released after 10 years of incarceration, I began to build a rapport with my parole officer and began asking about the rules for travel. In Pennsylvania, people on parole need written permission from their parole officer to leave the state, and they need court approval for international travel. This may sound complicated, but to obtain court approval, you just need to fill out a form that requests a Temporary International Travel Permit.

If you want to travel, the first thing to do is to communicate with your PO about your dates before you book anything. You must then provide your agent with copies of your plane ticket and the address of where you will be staying along with the information of any one who will be accompanying you. You must also provide details of the attractions that you will be engaging in such as horseback riding, jetskiing, bowling, couples massage, etc. My last piece of advice is to always assure that you have insurance on your trip, because at any given moment your parole officer or their supervisor can change their mind at any given time after saying yes that you could go on your trip.

Some countries have stricter laws than others about letting people with criminal histories enter their country. For example, Canada and New Zealand have very strict policies. Before starting to plan a trip, research the countries you hope to visit and talk to your Parole Agent to find out the places that are prohibited for parolees to travel.

On my first birthday after release, a great friend of mine treated me to and accompanied me on a trip to Dubai. The experience was outlandish and filled with serenity and peace. I enjoyed the people, the food, the masjids, and the breathtaking architecture. I never saw anything like it-- as far as the glass buildings, gold planes, and Lamborghini cop cars, etc. I had the time and experience of a lifetime in Dubai, and I would love for all of my fellow brothers and sisters that were formerly incarcerated to experience the same euphoria I experienced while traveling, whether it's to Africa, Amsterdam, or wherever you have dreamed of going! Never limit yourself to just one place or destination. This world is very big and full of wonders so never stop planning or dreaming of trips in the future to come.



FAMM LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Pennsylvania's General Assembly has been busy lately, and just wrapped weeks of Appropriations hearings, including House and Senate Appropriations hearings for the PA Department of Corrections. Here are the latest legislative efforts that FAMM is supporting:

Medical Release

Rep. Ecker (R) and Rep. Kajewski (D) have introduced a co-sponsorship memo signaling upcoming legislation around expanding access to medical release for incarcerated people. **FAMM SUPPORTS THIS EFFORT.**

SB 136 (Street (D)) would authorize a sentencing court to modify a term of imprisonment when a person has a serious, chronic and debilitating physical or mental health issue; or is at least 55 years old and have served the lesser of 25 years or half of their minimum sentence. **FAMM SUPPORTS THIS EFFORT.**

Felony Murder Reform

SB 387 (Street (D), Bartolotta (R)) was introduced and referred to Senate Judiciary Committee on March 6, 2025. SB 387 would allow parole eligibility after 25 years served for people with second-degree "felony" murder convictions. **FAMM SUPPORTS THIS BILL.**

HB 443 (Briggs (D)) was introduced and referred to House Judiciary Committee. HB 443 would allow people convicted of second-degree "felony" murder to be eligible for parole after serving 25 years of their sentence. **FAMM SUPPORTS THIS BILL.**

Life Without Parole Reform

SB 135 (Street (D)) was introduced and referred to Senate Judiciary Committee on February 3, 2025. SB 135 had been introduced in previous sessions and would allow people convicted of first-degree murder to be eligible for parole after 35 years served, and 25 years served for second-degree murder. **FAMM SUPPORTS THIS BILL.**

No Cost Communication for Incarcerated People

SB 231 (Cappelletti (D)) would require PA state prisons and county jails to provide free voice and video communication for free for incarcerated people. **FAMM SUPPORTS THIS BILL.**

Eliminating the Medical Copay for Incarcerated People

Senator Bartolotta (R) and Rep. A. Brown have both introduced cosponsorship memos signaling their plans to reintroduce previous legislation to eliminate the medical copay required for incarcerated people. **FAMM SUPPORTS THESE EFFORTS.**

CALL TO ACTION:

Are you or any groups you're a part of interested in submitting legislative testimony for any of any of these bills? FAMM would love to help facilitate getting more directly impacted testimony before the legislature!

If you'd like more information on participating in this effort, please write to:

**FAMM
C/O Celeste Trusty
1100 13th St. NW Suite 201
Washington, DC 20005**

Prison Monitoring + Advocacy = Legislative Action

Leigh Owens, Pennsylvania Prison Society

The core mission of the Pennsylvania Prison Society is to promote the health, safety and dignity of Pennsylvanian's incarcerated population. What happens behind prison walls goes virtually unknown by most of society. Unless an individual is impacted by the criminal legal system, whether first or second hand, most people don't have the luxury of spending time thinking about solutions to the inadequate prison conditions that the population and in many cases staff are subjected to on a daily basis.

Inadequate cell time, lack of recreational and educational opportunities, access to healthcare and cleanliness are just a few of the common complaints we hear from our constituents, many of which are confirmed through our prison visits. Our team makes regular prison visits to facilities all over Pennsylvania at the county and state level to witness conditions, and as the Education and Advocacy Director, part of my job is to determine how to address issues. We regularly facilitate facility tours with elected officials to show them first hand what goes on inside Pennsylvania's prisons, and people from both sides of the political spectrum agree that change is needed.

A great example of how our advocacy leads to action is through the work of one of our legislative champions, as well as a PPS board member, Representative Emily Kinkead (D-Allegheny Co). Representative Kinkead is in the process of introducing several legislative initiatives aimed at directly addressing some of the inadequacies in Pennsylvania's prisons.

The below bills have not been introduced yet, so there are currently no bill numbers associated with yet. However co-sponsorship memos have been circulated to legislators, which provided the following information on each upcoming measure.

- Establishing Mandela Rules for Imprisonment in Pennsylvania: Last year, the Judiciary Committee held a hearing on reforming the use of solitary confinement in our Commonwealth and this proposed legislation seeks to adopt the recommendations from that hearing:
- Establish stronger criteria for what specific offenses allow correctional facilities to remove individuals from the general population rather than utilizing alternative reprimands that already exist.
- Explicitly require, with limited exceptions, minimum daily standards to allow not just for out-of-cell time but actual congregate time for everyone in the restricted housing unit to avoid the worst damages caused by total isolation.
- Cap time in the restricted housing unit for any incarcerated individual at 15 days in segregation, or, in the alternative, provide them with seven hours of congregate out-of-cell time per day.
- Prohibit correctional facilities from placing any individual with diagnosed mental illnesses into restricted housing. If an individual with a mental illness must be removed from the general population, they must instead be placed in mental health units with at least 7 hours out-of-cell time and appropriate programming.
- .- Guarantee a hearing before placing an incarcerated individual into restricted housing.
- Establish clear evidentiary requirements and rules for recording hearings.

- Prohibit any punitive restrictions on clothing, food, hygiene, sanitation, healthcare, bedding, or cell conditions in restricted housing.
- Allow individuals to keep normal property and personal items while in restricted housing.
- Require extensive documentation and recording of each placement in restricted housing.
- Require publicly available statistical reporting about how many people are housed in restricted housing and all non-general population units in every Pennsylvania jail and prison.
- Establish a legal cause of action for all individuals placed in restricted housing if a facility fails to comply with the above rules.

Ensuring continuation of prescribed medication during incarceration: In Pennsylvania, every incarcerated individual has the right to health care, including access to health care professionals and medical services such as diagnosis, evaluation and treatment. Part of ensuring the proper and holistic care for incarcerated individuals is ensuring that any medical diagnosis made for individuals prior to their incarceration is recognized throughout their involvement in the criminal justice system. This legislation would prohibit the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) from removing or refusing to recognize an incarcerated individual's prior diagnosis for any given medical condition. An exception is provided for cases in which the health care practitioner who made the diagnosis, or a practitioner unaffiliated with the DOC, can submit a written agreement that the diagnosis can be removed if appropriate.

Environmental Study of State Correctional Institutions: In the last decade, individuals who are incarcerated in Pennsylvania and advocacy groups have identified our state as having an issue maintaining a sanitary, rehabilitative environment within its correctional institutions. Of the 24 state correctional institutions, four have limited or no air conditioning, and five have only partial coverage. In some facilities, employees and residents have reported serious pest infestations, like rats and cockroaches, while others have identified black mold, exposed wiring, sewage backups, and even a lack of running water. Instead of rehabilitation, unsafe and unsanitary state correctional institutions contribute to sickness and discontent among the individuals who are housed and who work in them. This resolution directs the Department of Corrections to study the prevalence and impact of environmental issues in state correctional institutions. It is vital that we determine if the individuals housed in these institutions are being exposed to harmful, hazardous, or unsanitary conditions and that we ensure the individuals housed in these institutions are receiving the clean air and pure water they have a right to.

We applaud Representative Kinhead for her tremendous work in helping to ensure the health, safety and dignity of incarcerated Pennsylvanians is protected.



Graterfriends accepts submissions regarding prison legislation, life, and creative endeavors. We do not accept submissions that are offensive in nature and target specific individuals. All letters must be signed for consideration. Names will be withheld from letters on rare occasions. While Graterfriends seeks to preserve the integrity of your work, we reserve the right to edit submissions as we see fit. Allegations of abuse or misconduct may be censored or omitted for your protection and safety.

Honor Block: What's That?

Anonymous

"Honor Block: What's that?"

Those are the words that come out of some of the staff here at SCI Somerset. The culture here is archaic at best. I've been here many years, the honor block used to be A-B and that was disbanded around the time for the "Michigan Transfers" (if you don't know about this ask your local oldhead). G-unit has always been the workers/outside workers unit. Both those units had a few extra privileges, but were never treated badly. After the death of an officer, E-A honor unit was established and dubbed LTPA unit (Long Term Positive Adjustment Unit). This was a place where Lifers and long sentence individuals who were non-problematic and unable to go to G block because of their sentence, could finally get peace and avoid the young dumb inmates! Or so we had hoped.

The criteria was high, but a lot of the "old heads" had met these already, though most were non believers because as I said Somersets' culture was "promise, then pull the rug, and say sorry!" I was in the first group to move over. There weren't enough takers to fill the unit because of the disbelief that the DOC lowered the criteria in desperation, and then lowered it again. The unit took off without a hitch; the men came together and made this thing possible. It worked so well several of us were asked to start a Veterans extension of EA onto EB.

That was until the pandemic hit. All the progress that was done for this unit and the programs for the extension was all erased with bureaucracies and attitudes and "boot to neck" syndrome. Ever since the pandemic, the only officers placed on this peaceful location are workers from the RHU with their RHU attitudes and provocations.

Every chance they have available, these officers are trying to dismantle all the good that has

been done on this unit. They ignore the criteria and move in their house pets, snitches, and those who clearly disrupt the peacefulness of the unit, and yet still since opening there has been no incidences, fights, VRIs, O- Ds' etc.

An Honor Unit should be just short of the Scandinavian Unit. If you ask those old heads from the Michigan transfer, "Michigan" was just shy of that Scandinavian standard, and that worked out well with over 900 people in an overnight experiment. Why can't we keep building off of that? Instead of rubberstamping "No," why can't we find a reason to say "yes?" All the negative outlook on us should really stop! We are all human after all.

No Mercy for Lifers

John Kissell of SCI Frackville

Doing Life in the PA Death Pen!

So many of my brothers and sisters have died over the years doing life. We all know most of society doesn't care! Except for our families and a few organizations, and a coalition to abolish death by incarceration.

Another lifer dies; who cares? That's how real life is in society.

I am 49 years old. Now, I just move on day to day, thanking the Lord for each day! Do I want to go home someday? Damn right I want to; more than anything I want to go home! All my brothers and sisters want to go home someday.

I must go on each day living my life the best I can. I'll continue on the road the Lord put me on. I will do my best from day to day.

A prayer for all my brothers and sisters in prison each day.

49 years. I'm still alive. I love all of my brothers and sisters

Loss of COVID-19 Vaccine Incentives

Joshua Bacon of SCI Chester

On July 18th, Deputy Secretary for Administration Christopher Oppman issued a memo explaining that all vaccine incentives were ending effective immediately. This affects all prisoners in an SCI in Pennsylvania. This might seem insignificant - five dollars for a flu shot seems like an unimportant thing to whine about. My concern is not with the loss of the incentive itself, but the consequences of this decision.

Ideally, we would all make informed, intelligent medical decisions for the sake of public health

and well-being, but as a country we are poorly informed when it comes to viral infectious diseases. Misinformation and disinformation are rampant. The DOC made great strides in 2021 when it announced a \$25 incentive for the COVID vaccine. Sure, there were ethical concerns - \$25 is nearly 130 hours of labor at the lowest pay rate; it was difficult to be a conscientious objector, but overall, the benefits were positive

DOC prisoners had extremely high vaccination rates, and countless COVID deaths were prevented by this policy. Sure, they made other COVID policy mistakes, but the vaccine incentives work! The fact is, it's not just about my mask or my vaccination; it's about herd immunity. Herd immunity is how we protect the elderly and those with weak immune systems, and how we further protect the vaccinated (because yes, you can get sick even if you take a vaccine). By eliminating incentives, the DOC has greatly reduced herd immunity - now only those of us actually concerned with infection will be immunized. The twenty-something year old guys here on a 2 to 4 sentence only got the vaccine for the incentive.

I'd love to hear more opinions on the subject, but I think there will be grave long-term consequences to this decision, and the Prison Society should add this issue to its current campaign to end the \$5 medical copay. In writing this column, I consulted with several currently practicing medical professionals, including a veteran anesthesiologist with a Doctorate in Nursing and decades of front-line health care experience, who I'm to call "Mom".

Let's Stop Playing Games

Marty Dunbar of SCI Mahanoy

I just got done reading Darrell McKelvin's article in the July/August issue of Graterfriends. I want to truly thank him for telling the truth in the article which was about returning to the dining halls.

We all know that the survey done by the DOC was fake news. We all know that DOC staff members make all the decisions from what new items we are allowed to order to what kind of activities we can do or what our visiting days will be.

This is why I am saying: "Let's Stop Playing Games" with the opening of the institutional dining halls.

COVID-19 stopped us human beings from getting the programs we need to make parole, stopped our loved ones from visiting, and cut our phone calls. Now, COVID-19 has calmed. The DOC has opened back up. Us human beings would love to start getting hot meals again. SCI Mahanoy still has not served a hot meal!

Meals are being made in the dining hall about an hour before they sent to the housing units. Then, once the meals are in the housing units, you have inmates standing around the officer's desk for about ten minutes before they start passing the food trays out. At this point, the food is already cold.

Everyone in this institution that I have had a conversation with said they voted to go to the dining halls to receive their daily meals. They put this on the DOC survey! So, who is playing games?

The DOC Policy states that those who are in the care of the (DOC) are supposed to receive 2 hot meals and 1 cold meal, not 3 cold meals. So, let's stop playing games and open the dining halls back up.

**Written in 2024*

The Itch Won't Go Away

James S. Jones of SCI Phoenix

In short, for the last three plus months myself and others have been experiencing extreme itching. This began shortly after several others tested positive for Ligonier's disease. The itching was so severe that several individuals had bodies that looked as if they had been attacked by Freddy Cougar with blood stains to support it. While others, bodies looked as if they had chicken pox. Many are over 50 years of age.

MY sick call experience was like this: "you have a rash, buy hydrocortisone." This has not been working. Finally, they gave out hydrocortisone with a steroid step down. This also did not work. They continued to say it was nothing more than a rash.

One individual had a biopsy. They started telling everyone that had the same symptoms different things - its eczema; its psoriasis. People, the itch would just not go away. Some of the symptoms were the same as scabies. Several groups of people went back to sick call asking to be treated for scabies as they were showing signs of scabies. Again, they heard, "Here's some lotion, it's only a rash."

Overtime at SCI Mahanoy

Antonio Hawley of SCI Mahanoy

Here at SCI- Mahanoy as a kitchen worker I would hear many other prisoners complain about not being paid, especially for the overtime they put in. For those who are on the 1st shift, your time is 4:30 A.M. to 12:00 PM, 2nd shift is 11:30 AM to 6:00 PM, and overtime, well you already know, is working on shifts that you are not normally working. When I got my kitchen worker job at Mahanoy, prisoners would warn me, "make sure you get paid!" This would come from all manner of prisoners, and I would laugh them off.

The 1st time I pulled overtime and got back to the block, a Lifer came up to me, seeing how tired I was (probably thought I was stressing) and asked me if I was okay. I told him that I had just pulled overtime in the kitchen. (meaning 4:30 AM to 6:00p.m.) He stated "Better make sure you get

paid" I paid him no word, but in my head the seed was planted.

Well the payroll for the kitchen in Mahanoy is the 6th to the 7th of every month. On Dec 2, 2024, I received my monthly account statement. This was weird as prisoners normally got it on the 6th. Anyways, I got a certified copy of my account record. And, what do you know? I did not get paid at all!

There isn't a policy in effect that justifies this. I filed a grievance on this issue. I never had this issue when I was a kitchen worker at SCI Rockview, but I had never pulled overtime. The fact that other prisoners were warning me says a lot about the administration of overtime. The fact that a Lifer warned me also says a lot- how long as this been going on? The Supervisors of Mahanoy are failing to intervene. We cannot work and not get paid.

Being Vindictive

James R. Cruz Jr. of SCI Fayette

Over the course of four days in October 2024, 30 inmates and 20 Kairos volunteers came together for 30 hours. We all had a great time learning about ourselves and being better Christians with God.

The only issue was that if an emergency had arisen, it would have been total chaos. We were placed for those 30 hours in a classroom that was about 25 feet by 25 feet with only one exit, and shelves, 7 tables, and 50 chairs filling the room. The Kairos volunteers, all seniors, would have been unable to maneuver out especially since a couple use wheelchairs. A complete sardine scenario, and a fire and safety hazard to all!

Leadership was well aware of the tight quarters, before and during the event. The only response we received is that they will look into the situation and they will do better next time. It is critical that we are placed in a larger, safer environment for Kairos' weekend events. Someone needs to be held accountable for putting life, health, and limb at risk when we all knew a larger room was available. Volunteers, and inmates as well, should not be put in harm's way.

The Zombie Medication Line

Larry Stromberg of SCI Phoenix

All across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, there is a Zombie Medication Line in prison that forms immediately after it is announced over the loudspeaker. A large and insane stampede comes rushing like a pack of ravishing wolves with one purpose in mind: “I want and need my medication now! Get the hell out of my way, before I run you down!”

It’s known as “The Zombie Medication Line” and it’s controlled by the Department of Corrections for a specific purpose and endgame. “Show me the money!”

This “Zombie Medication Line” is common in every state and federal prison across the country to control the incarcerated population with prescribed medications - instead of getting inmates the psychological and psychiatric help that they so desperately need.

At one time, there were multiple mental health facilities in Pennsylvania to treat individuals who have mental health issues or were considered criminally insane for the crimes they committed against society. These facilities were more equipped to treat individuals with psychological issues. But due to a lack of funds, most of these mental health institutions were shut down.

Now, most inmates with severe mental health issues are housed and treated by the Department of Corrections. They are given prescribed medications by a prison psychiatrist, but with very little therapy treatment to help them deal with whatever mental health issues and disorders they have.

In essence, these people have become drug addicts. The Department of Corrections is the drug dealer. The incarcerated become addicted to the substance supplied by the DOC, and the pharmaceutical companies with contracts with the state and federal prison system. At one time in my early incarceration, I was put on psychiatric medication prescribed by a state prison psychiatrist to deal with my heavy depression and anxiety. I was put on Ativan, Sinequan, and Risperdal. But once I started taking those mind-controlling medications, I went into a deeper depression.

I became part of the Medication Zombie Line. I gained over thirty pounds, had no motivation, and slept all of the time. I moved like a zombie. I didn’t even feel human. I’m grateful that I was able to wean off all three medications with the psychiatrist’s approval, especially Risperdal.

So eventually, I was able to get off all psychiatric medications. That was 25 years ago. I believe if I continued taking those medications, I would be dead today, six feet under. I would have never started my creative writing process, grown in my faith, completed my institutional programs, became a Certified Peer Support Specialist or started college in the Villanova University Program at SCI Phoenix. The medications would have controlled me and I would have been a zombie.

Then, there are the drug addicts dealing with heavy addictions before coming into the prison system. They turn to psychiatric meds prescribed by a prison psychiatrist to feed their addiction. They also consume other drugs that are being sold by the drug-dealing prison population. They are willing to fight or even kill to get their medicated utopia high. Many even die from overdosing in the process.

They consume you to the point of mind control. Some of these men in the penitentiary try to fool the guards during the medication line by not taking their medication, by hiding the pills deep in their mouths or somehow stick the pills up their buttock and end up selling those pills to all the drug addicts on the block. That’s a common thing in prison.

So, the Zombie Medication Line is alive, thriving, and well in the prison system in Pennsylvania. Something has to change to heal the sick, and addicted.

Phamatech False Positive Scandal

Dominic Barber of SCI Cambridge Springs

If you or anyone you know tested positive for K2 during a recent random urinalysis, I've got information for you!

First, make sure you grieve the incident (not the misconduct) all the way up to the central office. You have 15 days from the time of the results. Make sure you check grievance policy.

I have spoken to an attorney who is looking to file a class action lawsuit against Phamatech, a medical technology company that manufactures diagnostic devices and provides laboratory testing including for drugs and alcohol. The company violated the False Claims Act in a San Diego lab by submitting false claims to Medicare for laboratory drug testing services. It is alleged that Phamatech improperly paid a medical clinic to induce it to refer orders for laboratory drug testing to Phamatech and consequently received government reimbursement for those tests in violation of the federal Anti Kickback Statute and the False Claims Act.

This company seems to have a history of negligence, untrustworthy labs, and fraudulent actions. Do not allow this situation to ruin your freedom. Fight it tooth and nail; you are not alone.

My Story Starts with the “Kids for Cash” Scandal

Carol Hann of SCI Muncy

My legal story starts with the “Stop Kids for Cash” scandal. I am from Luzerne County and couldn't believe the rumors around town about all the kids essentially stolen from families that struggle to keep homes and families together. I didn't believe it until my son disappeared into the system. I know some of you think, like society does, we are all bad parents and child abusers, but that's not the facts.

I'm appealing my case, and I have the PA Innocence Project investigating my case, and the Exoneration Project. I wrote to many legal advocates to get assistance. As soon as a decision

is made on my case, I will tell the media everything. There's people that shouldn't raise hamsters, let alone children. There are others that just need a helping hand. I became a parental advocate at figtcps.com and cried my eyes out, talking to parents about their horror stories, and decided to take the risk and go after the crooked scum in Luzerne County.

I came to SCI Muncy, March 2013. I was scared at first. I never went to jail or prison ever in my life. The inmates took me under their wings. There's a few ignorant ones, that's society. Many inmates took me to the chapel groups, and the law library. Back then, law library times were 2 1/2 hours a trip, so much information, and hired help guided me. The Chaplain gave me addresses for the Innocence Project. I filed my first PCRA Appeal in 2015. It “disappeared” in the move between SCI Muncy and Luzerne County courts, what a surprise.

I want an appeal. I filed my own paperwork on time. Now I await justice finally.

While I await that, I study case law and read cases for wrongful convictions. I print what I can afford and write petitions up, in my cell. I have my “angels” out there that send me information and cases. If I find quiet time, I work on cases for Domestic Violence Survivors in prison that got life sentences for surviving brutal attacks by their victims of death. It's a disgrace in society. Society should be ashamed of itself for giving survivors a life sentence for killing a monster, in a kill or be killed situation. The cops kill innocent people and get a raise in rank, and paycheck, and these poor victims lose everything. Awareness is key.

I sent articles out to different newsletters. At first they liked them, then they stopped posting my articles because they aren't politically correct. I'm feisty by nature. My message to you all is: Awareness is key! When bad things happen, it's for good reasons, and at the time we can't begin to comprehend it and ask, “Why God?” God picks the weakest to be the strongest, and he picked me and he picked YOU.

Thank you to all the people that stood by my side, thank you to all of you out there reading this.

The Dire Need to Have PCN Available in our Prison Cable Network

Harold Burton of SCI Phoenix

After reading the wonderful article written by Jill McCorkel titled "All Prison Libraries Are Not Created Equal," it gave me pause to think about the above captioned topic as, I believe, has a related impact with regard to the broader question of legal research. Many of my elders have informed me that, at one point in time, PCN was a channel available to the inmate population for viewership. The importance of the inmate population having the ability to view this station cannot be understated. From being able to watch the progression of House and Senate Bills to viewing PA Appellate Court Oral arguments in real time, places the inmate population in a much better position of being informed on topics which affects us immensely. I ask that any of my incarcerated Brothers and Sisters who read this article reach out to your family and friends and request that the PA DOC add this much needed channel to our current cable system.

Deaf, Dumb, and Blind

Gregory "Royal" Fann of SCI Pine Grove

Growing up I got in trouble for failing in history class, especially Black History. Yet, if someone else told me that I'd get 6 months in solitary confinement for Black History, I would've thought it was the funniest joke ever. And when I say Black History, I mean it: African Freedom Fighters, Black Abolitionist, Black Liberation, Black Activist. It seems that Black was some sort of offensive curse thrown at certain individuals in this prison, or any prison for that matter. In a time where unarmed black and brown people are being shot by police and the march along the old screaming how Black Lives Matter, me a black man am young punished for receiving black cultural publications in the mail.

And as you guessed, the punishment was handed down by a room of white men, who labeled these publications as "Security Threat Group" material and also that my possible request of them showed continued gang activity. I've heard it once before about how "Knowledge is power." I've also

heard the phrase "If you wanna hide something from a n*****, put it in a book." Yet, there are many who prefer me powerless and consider the knowledge in those books a weapon and a punishment for our wrongdoings in society, but when we try to change for the better, uplifting ourselves from a baser way of thinking we become dangerous.

Why is that? Why are we labeled a threat and placed in prison or while in prison placed in solitary confinement under the guise of being part of a program and our reasoning for placement false? Where is the rehabilitation? Where is the programming? Truth is, there is none, just a warning to stay deaf, dumb, and blind. How can I do better without pissing off others? How can I stop pissing others off and do better?

When I was young I saw something on the news; people were burning books, and I wondered how could someone do that? Then, I come to prison and witness the banning of books for unbelievable reasons. Which leaves me wondering, why? In prison our main escape from a harsh reality lies in the pages of books whether they're law books, novels, magazines, historical, or even comic books. In those moments, we are free, but when books concerning the history of my people whether it be Native or African American are banned, many seeking it for the better are denied knowledge of self and left to stay Deaf, Dumb, and Blind.

Fight for Your Religious Beliefs

Jamiel Williams of QJ0995

Thank you to those who read my article and responded to it, helping me as well as yourselves. As my fight is continuous, as I am doing this all alone, I am representing the Nation of Gods and Earths in SCI Huntingdon. Congrats to those who helped start the Native American Indian Sweat Lodge.

Me, at this moment, I'm still in court. I am also learning Media Journalism Writing from Prison Journalism Project (PJP) for a certificate and other writing opportunities, such as this one to navigate getting my writing published using the AP (Associated Press) style of writing.

Never give up on your rehabilitation because no matter who you are, you have a purpose in life to bring to a full bloom.

REQUESTS FOR RESOURCES

In lieu of a list, please request resources directly with this form. Please allow one month for a response.
Complete and mail to the Pennsylvania Prison Society:

Pennsylvania Prison Society
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230 South Broad Street, Suite 605
Philadelphia, PA, 19102

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If Applicable: Returning County for Re-entry Resources

Resource Description
Note: The Prison Society does not offer financial assistance

READER SURVEY

We welcome comments and suggestions from all readers. Please complete this form and mail it to the Pennsylvania Prison Society.

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230 South Broad Street, Suite 605
Philadelphia, PA, 19102

Name, ID Number, Facility

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