

CITIZENS FOR PRISON REFORM NEWSLETTER

August 2018

More information can be obtained by searching for the bold headings on the internet. If you do **NOT** wish to receive the newsletter, contact Frank Dennis (fgdennis@msu.edu).

Michigan Legislation

HB 5377.nbsp. Objective parole – this would parole a prisoner following his/her first date of parole if he/she has behaved well during incarceration. To deny parole, the parole board would be required to provide objective evidence of risk to the public. Passed by the House 97-10 in May, may be passed by the Senate during this session.

HB 4101-03 and 55245.nbsp - Compassionate release – would permit release or transfer to medical facilities for mentally ill, elderly, and dying prisoners. Amendments exclude persons serving life without parole or first degree criminal sexual conduct -- a vast majority of the medically frail. Passed by the House by a large margin and by the Senate Judiciary Committee, but currently does not have sufficient votes to pass the Senate.

HB 4607, 4653, 4662, 4664, 4676, 4659, 4685. “Raise the age” – would raise the age of adult court jurisdiction from 17 to 18 years; 17 year-olds would be served by juvenile courts.

HB 4675, 4696, 4744, 4753, 4789, 4793. These bills deal with funding, offenses covered, mitigating factors, programming and oversight, if the above bills are passed.

HB 4677- 4678. Would establish a family advisory board within MDOC to advise the Department on strategies to improve family connections, reduce misconduct, and achieve successful reentry.

For more information, check: <https://www.raisetheage.org/youth-in-prison-package>

Books, Articles, Notes

Jones, Van. 2017. Beyond the Messy Truth: How We Came Apart, How We Come Together. Ballantine Books, New York, NY.

The author, host of CNN's prime time special *The Messy Truth with Van Jones*, suggests practical answers to problems such as rural and inner-city poverty, unemployment, addiction, and unfair incarceration. Under “fix the justice system” Jones proposes: dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline; eliminate overuse of fees and fines; abolish money bail; decriminalize addiction and mental illness; declassify low-level offenses to keep people out of prison; eliminate mandatory minimum sentences; abolish solitary confinement; increase access to prison education and visitation; ease collateral consequences and reentry; commit to jobs; restore voting rights for returning citizens. He cites the success of Texas in reducing incarceration by shifting funds from prisons

into drug courts, treatment programs and jobs. He presents a series of actions to end the addiction crisis, and to train workers for high tech jobs, without the need for a college education, to avoid unemployment in an economy in which persons are being replaced by technology. The appendices contain: a list of books, podcasts and movies that provide an understanding of the “other side”; a list of writers, educators, performers, etc., for a variety of takes on red-state America, and another for the same on blue-state America; and a list of political organizations that are working to solve America’s problems.

Ingham County voters to consider construction of a \$ 70 million justice complex on August 7. The current jail in Mason was built in 1964 and is the oldest jail in Michigan with a “large jail” designation; about 8600 inmates spent time there in 2017. Problems include insufficient lighting, and deteriorating electrical services, living spaces, and security measures. The proposed complex would include the new jail, the sheriff’s department offices, and the 55th District Court. The cost would be covered by an increase of up to 0.85 mil in the property tax over 20 years, which is expected to raise about \$ 6.2 million the first calendar year. (Lansing State Journal editorial, July 8, 2018)

August Ballot Has Another Proposal for Ingham County Voters: New Jail. By Chris Root. This article describes the problems involved in operating the current jail, including maintenance of the heating and air conditioning systems, lack of electronic locking and surveillance systems, lack of appropriate facilities for keeping young offenders separate from adult ones, and lack of access to sports or outdoor activities. Current capacity is 444; a new jail would house a few more. About half the inmates have not been tried, and 10 % are convicts from other counties; the MDOC pays the County \$ 35 per person per day for housing these prisoners – about half the cost. The new millage, if approved, would provide additional funding for community mental health, pre-trial services, community corrections, and educational and restorative justice programs. [East Lansing Info (ELI), July 16, 2018]

New personal recognizance (PR) bond procedure being tested at 55th District Court in Ingham County. Police officers will be issuing PR bonds at the time of arrest for a number of offenses, such as driving with a suspended license, and the offender will be told to appear in court at a specific time. If the person fails to appear, he or she will be issued a bench warrant and a second date will be set for appearance in court.

Family Members of Prisoners Needed for Interviews. Families provide a vital support system for their incarcerated loved ones. Alison Cox, a doctoral candidate at MSU’s School of Criminal Justice, is writing her dissertation on barriers (time, distance, cost, administrative and emotional barriers) to family visits to inmates in Michigan prisons. Her goal is to learn how family members navigate the visitation process and how they manage the barriers faced in doing so. To learn more about the project, or are interested in being interviewed, contact Alison at 512-923-6325 or acox@msu.edu.

Local phone calls from New York City jails to be free next year, and a Bill of Rights for the accused will be required, following passage of a bill by the City

Council. About \$ 8 million is currently collected annually from charges for phone calls. The Bill of Rights will require bond companies to provide documents that explain how much the accused will be charged, how to make a complaint, and other rights. This will prevent bail bond companies from stealing millions of dollars through illegal fees and withholding of collateral. (NYS_Prisoner_Justice, July 23, 2018)

Trial exposes inhumane conditions at for-profit Mississippi prison. A class action lawsuit was filed in 2013 by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), the ACLU and other organizations against the East Mississippi Correctional Facility, a for-profit prison, for holding thousands of prisoners with mental illness under brutal conditions and failing to provide safety, medical treatment, and sanitary conditions. Gangs run many aspects of the prison. A bench trial concluded in April, 2018, but a ruling had yet to be issued when the article was written. (SPLC Report, Summer 2018)

Ending perpetual punishment. By Natalie Holbrook, Director of AFSC's Michigan Criminal Justice Program. Two years ago AFSC supported development of a program created by and for persons serving long sentences in Michigan prisons; this is currently being used in two prisons in the state. AFSC also facilitates the Good Neighbor Project, a letter exchange program between prisoners and volunteers, termed a "co-mentorship." Both of these programs help inmates prepare for interviews and public hearings. (Quaker Action, Vol. 99, No. 2, Summer 2018.) More information is available at AFSC's Michigan Criminal Justice Program's website – prisoneradvocacy.org

For additional articles, see the webpage of the Vera Institute, <https://www.vera.org/research>.

Coming events.

Monday, July 30, 5:30-8:30 p.m. – Incarceration – The Ripple Effect. A Town Hall meeting consisting of two parts of panel-based discussion at the Lansing Public Media Center, 2500 S. Washington Ave., Lansing, MI 48910. The first part examines the role that county officials and policymakers have in association with arrest, sentencing and lockup practices, and the impact these experiences have on families and households. The second presents the various family support stakeholders and services that are helping to ensure equitable access to diversionary programs for defendants, and provide a greater standard of care for family and dependent household members. Panelists will include family members, and representatives from the faith community and public health and human care services. Meal offerings will include servings for standard, gluten-free and vegetarian preferences. Sponsored by The Michigan Power to Thrive (MPTT) Tri-County Caucus (Ingham, Eaton, and Clinton counties), Action, the ACLU, and several other organizations. For information, contact mptt3c@gmail.com. Register at Evenbrite <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/incarceration-the-ripple-effectr-tickets-47956221349?aff=efbeventitiLx>. or RSVP on Facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/events/2027269724028233/>

Saturday, August 18, 10:45 a.m. Monthly meeting of Citizens for Prison Reform.

Sharing circle about how incarceration has affected us and our families, discussion of further actions to pursue our priorities with the legislature, and election discussion.

Calvary Lutheran Church, 6301 Saint Joseph Hwy, Lansing, MI 48917.

<http://micpr.org@gmail.com>, <http://www.micpr.com>

Friday, August 10 and September 7, 2018: Safe & Just Michigan (SJM) is partnering with Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness (MCAH) to host a series of conversations on housing and criminal justice. Agency staff and service providers are invited to learn more about SJM and MCAH's collective next steps to break down the barriers to housing for the crime survivors and formerly incarcerated people you serve. **Please RSVP at:**

<http://bit.ly/HousingCriminalJusticeRSVP>

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Citizens for Prison Reform (CPR). www.micpr.org; micpr.org@gmail.com. 269-339-0606. P.O. Box 80414, Lansing, MI 48908. Sandra Girard, President. A grassroots family-run organization whose purpose is to educate, support and unify loved ones of prisoners within the state of Michigan. CPR is working to reform Michigan's prison system through legislation. Provides accurate information to encourage education of citizens, communities and elected officials, and help and advice to those trying to navigate the correction system in Michigan.

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