

CITIZENS FOR PRISON REFORM NEWSLETTER

February 2019

More information can be obtained by searching for the bold headings on the internet. If you wish to be added to, or removed from, the mailing list for the newsletter, contact Frank Dennis (fgdennis@msu.edu).

=====

Books, Articles, Notes

Natapoff, Alexandra. 2018. Punishment Without Crime: How Our Massive Misdemeanor System Traps the Innocent and Makes America More Unequal.

Basic Books, New York, NY. Natapoff, a law professor, exposes large-scale judicial misconduct in the U.S. misdemeanor system, from arrest through prosecution and punishment. The system is huge, decentralized and complicated. Many defendants have committed no crimes, have no legal counsel or jury trial, and are sentenced in a few minutes. Poverty and race play major roles in arrests. Public defenders are overburdened, some carry over 2000 cases per year. Jail fees are exorbitant for the poor, and financial incentives lead judges to high rates of conviction; 97 % of misdemeanor convictions result from guilty pleas. These conditions drive the poor further into poverty, and block access to employment.

Judge Kathleen Coffey and the Homeless Court. Judge Coffey runs the Homeless Court – the only one of its kind in Massachusetts. It convenes once per month to deal with problems faced by persons without permanent mailing addresses who have warrants and outstanding court fees, which can exceed \$ 500, but are too poor to pay bail. The judge often waives court fees, and connects defendants with agencies that provide housing, educational programs toward a G.E.D., drug and mental health assessments, and assistance in finding jobs. Boston Bar Association – www.dacierstake.bbablogs.org/tag/judge-kathleen-coffey.

New attorney general joins the fight against debtors' prisons in Missouri. By Tony Messenger. Matthew Mueller, the senior bond litigation counsel for the Missouri State Public Defender's Office, files appeals for clients who can't pay their jail bills, which may be as high as several thousand dollars for 90 days in jail. The ACLU files amicus briefs in support of such appeals, arguing that the practice creates debtors' prisons. The Missouri Supreme Court soon will decide if hundreds or thousands of prisoners can be jailed because they are too poor to pay these fees. (St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 8, 2019). See also "In for a Penny: The Rise of America's New Debtors' Prisons." American Civil Liberties Union, October 2010.

Concern about mail delivery to Michigan prisoners. Citizens for Prison Reform is concerned about the time taken for non-legal mail to reach incarcerated persons. Relatives and friends are asked to record the date of mailing, and prisoners are asked to record the date of receipt. If the interval exceeds 4 days, excluding weekends, the

writer should send the information to CPR (micpr.org@gmail.com). (Mail returned because of insufficient or incorrect address should be excluded.)

New Director of Safe and Just Michigan. Laura Sager has retired after serving for 5 years as Executive Director of the organization. John Cooper, who was associate director of policy and research, succeeded her as Director on January 1.

Homecoming Project in California. Following their release, incarcerated persons need immediate, stable housing, which is often difficult to obtain. Impact Justice of Alameda County, California, has begun a pilot project to provide housing for parolees who have served at least 10 years in prison and are ready for semi-independent community living. Community hosts will receive a daily subsidy in exchange for housing such returning citizens for a maximum of 6 months in extra living spaces, in a program similar to the Airbnb model. <https://impactjustice.org/homecoming-project/>

NYC Books Through Bars. By Alexandra Bautze. Congress ended Pell Grants for prisoners in 1994, and correctional facilities have been cutting library funding. This organization, staffed by volunteers, provides donated books in response to inmates' requests, which total some 700-800 each month. Because many prisons require that books be sent directly from a bookstore or publisher, a local bookstore serves as the organizations mailing address. Books are sent to prisoners in 40 states, with Texas accounting for about half of the recipients. Dictionaries are in high demand. Requests are screened for books banned by certain states. In 2018 NYC Books Through Bars helped repeal a NY directive that allowed prisoners to receive packages from only 6 vendors, who were offering a total of only 77 books. www.dailygood.org; <https://booksthroughbarsny.org/about>.

ACLU of Michigan Seeking Faith-based and Community Groups Committed to Reducing Mass Incarceration. The goals of this project are to recruit a network of allies in Michigan House and Senate districts across the state who will learn about ways to end cash bail, reform sentencing laws, etc., and then contact their legislators, hold public events and/or do grassroots advocacy during the 2019-2020 legislative session. To learn more, contact Rodd Motts at rmotts@aclumich.org or call 313-578-6830.

Looking for a job ? State needs 700 corrections officers. By Ann Zaniewski. The Michigan Department of Corrections is seeking to fill about 700 corrections officers' positions at 30 prisons. The MDOC is losing about 50 officers each month, primarily because of retirements, although promotions and turnovers are also involved. This has resulted in increased overtime costs; in 2017 \$ 69 million of the Department's \$ 2 billion budget was spent on overtime. To encourage applications, recruiting efforts have been increased, and eligibility requirements reduced. Officers currently earn from \$ 17.67 to \$27.06 hourly. (Lansing State Journal, January 6, 2019.)

Who saves cash in court consolidation ? By Kyle Kaminski. Plans are being made to consolidate Ingham County's three district courts in Lansing, E. Lansing and Mason into one by November 2019, following the lame-duck state legislation that would make

this possible. Supporters of the plan believe that consolidation of three courts into two will reduce both staffing and costs; initially, annual savings on personnel costs were estimated at \$ 750,000. Travel time and expense for many residents might also be reduced if all three courts were in Lansing and E. Lansing. However, critics of consolidation question whether expenditures would be reduced, citing a survey indicating that most of those who use the courts are satisfied with things as they are. Some believe that consolidation would reduce the chances of persons of color being elected to the bench. Meanwhile, plans for consolidation remain under discussion. (City Pulse, January 16, 2019)

For additional articles, see the webpage of the Vera Institute, <https://www.vera.org/research>, and the fall newsletter of Safe and Just <http://bit.ly/SJMFall18> .

Coming events

Wednesday, January 30, 6:15 p.m. – Policing the Police. A frontline documentary film that examines the relationship between Newark community members and law enforcement, use of force, and police reform efforts. The film will be followed by a panel discussion on use of force, moderated by Jennifer Cobbina, Associate Prof, MSU School of Criminal Justice. Panelists will include: Andrew Bouck, Ingham County Undersheriff; LaShawn Erby of Black Lives Matter; Rev. Gill Ford, former Director, NAACP National Headquarters; Carol Siemon, Ingham County Prosecutor; Scott Wolfe, Assoc. Prof., MSU School of Criminal Justice; and Michael Yankowski, Lansing Chief of Police. Room A133 Life Sciences Bldg., Michigan State University.

February 1 → May 19, 2019. States of Incarceration. This exhibit, put together by Rutgers University, is currently on display at the Michigan History Museum in Lansing. It includes a panel about the history of incarceration in Michigan. The program plan includes several movies and discussions. Cost is \$6.

Wednesday, Feb. 6, 6:30 p.m. Prisoners in Christ is hosting a conversation with Michelle Warren, author of *The Power of Proximity* and a coordinator for Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) Locked in Solidarity initiative. Contact Carol Rienstra (616-724-6772; carolrienstra@gmail.com) for more information. Church of the Servant, 3835 Burton St., SE, Grand Rapids.

Saturday, February 16. 10:45 a.m. Citizens for Prison Reform monthly meeting. Kirstin Eidenbach, co-founder and director of ATLaS Justice Center in Arizona will describe the work of this organization, a non-profit that teaches life skills and goal mapping to returning citizens. She will discuss her work on the impact of long-term incarceration on inmates and how this effects their success during reentry. Calvary Lutheran Church, 6301 W. St. Joseph Hwy., Lansing, MI 48917. www.micpr.org; micpr.org@gmail.com.

Wednesday, March 5, 8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m. Day of Empathy. A national day of action to generate empathy for millions of Americans impacted by the criminal justice system. Breakfast, an in-depth discussion with many formerly incarcerated individuals, and meetings with legislators to promote clean slate legislation, dignity for incarcerated women, and raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction from 17 to 18. Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency, 1679 Broadway St., Ann Arbor, MI 48105.
<https://www.mccd.org>.

Wednesday, May 29, 9:30 a.m. – 4 p.m. Citizens for Prison Reform’s 8th Annual Legislative Education Day at the State Capitol in Lansing. Presentations by legislators and persons representing organizations devoted to improving the criminal justice system and conditions for prisoners and their families, and opportunities for meetings with legislators. Details later.

=====

Citizens for Prison Reform (CPR). www.micpr.org; micpr.org@gmail.com. 269-339-0606. P.O. Box 80414, Lansing, MI 48908. Lois Pullano, President. A grassroots family-run organization whose purpose is to educate, support and unify loved ones of prisoners within the state of Michigan. CPR works to inform legislators and create awareness as to the need for greater prison reforms.

All content provided in this newsletter is for informational purposes only. The editor makes no representations as to the accuracy or completeness of any information on this site or found by following any link on it. The editor is not liable for any errors or omissions in this information or for the availability of this information, and will not be liable for any losses, injuries, or damages from the display or use of this information.