

CITIZENS FOR PRISON REFORM NEWSLETTER

September 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 (fdennis805@gmail.com).

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Michigan Legislation

Family Advisory Board (FAB) bill (HB 4677) – This bill is currently tied to the bill to Raise the Age from 17 to 18 years. Efforts are being made to separate the two bills, given general support for the FAB, while problems have arisen with Raising the Age.

The proposal to eliminate gerrymandering will be on the November ballot, having obtained sufficient signatures.

California Legislature. SB 10 – Ends bail for awaiting trial. This has been signed by the governor, and limits money-based bail as an option for release from jail prior to trial. Instead, counties will evaluate risk assessment before release. Although this sounds good to those who oppose the bail system, it is opposed by both the bail bond industry, for obvious reasons, and by the ACLU, who believe that it would increase the jail population and give judges more power.

Books, Articles, Notes

Power of the Prosecutor: Reformer district attorneys are changing criminal justice in ways legislatures can't. By Maya Wiley. Philadelphia's district attorney, Larry Krasner, has been dismantling the prosecutorial practices that resulted in the city's record for highest incarceration rate among major metropolitan areas nationwide. On his 3rd day in office he dismissed 10 % of the city's career prosecutors, then told those remaining to stop demanding cash bail for minor infractions like marijuana possession, and released more than 50 people charged with this offense. Several other cities, including Albuquerque, Denver, Houston, Jacksonville and Tampa, have elected prosecutors who intend to change the system. Legislatures have been slow to pass legislation to reduce prison populations and costs, leaving families with members languishing in jail. In 2006, Craig Watson, a black defense attorney in Dallas, organized a "Conviction Integrity Unit" (CIU), a team of prosecutors who examine past cases looking for wrongful convictions. Ken Thompson, Brooklyn's first black DA, exonerated 21 people in two years. Studies of cases handled by the Manhattan District Attorney's office and misdemeanor cases in Wisconsin revealed that prosecutors were biased in favor of white defendants in asking for probation or jail time; this is understandable, given that 95 % of US prosecutors are white, while 81 % of prisoners are people of color. But times are changing. Currently there are 33 CIUs nationally, and the number of exonerations has risen from 68 in 2008 to 171 in 2016. (The New Republic, June 2018).

Peace Officers: How One American City Chose to Tackle Crime, Combat Racism, and Reckon with the Legacy of Police Brutality. By Ben Austin. The police department in Rockford, Illinois, started a new program to help cops put down roots in high-crime sections of the city. Rockford is a rust-belt city 90 miles northwest of Chicago with high unemployment and high crime rates. Most of the police officers live outside the city, and only 60 on the force of 300 are of color in a city where only about half of the 150,000 residents are white. Only 2 officers – both African-American – were persuaded to live in high crime areas for 3 years rent-free, with the simple mission of being good neighbors. Known as “resident officer community keepers” (Rock Cops), their assignment was not arresting people, but dealing with the underlying conditions that breed crime. As they rode their bicycles around the area, they interacted with community members, talked with crime victims, and dealt with domestic disputes, the mentally ill, the homeless, the drug-addicted and the unemployed. They sponsored social events, such as Halloween parties. Nationally, only 25 % of 911 calls have anything to do with crime, and only 5 % of arrests are for violent offenses. Community policing is often dismissed by rank and file policemen as “women’s work” or “pussy policing,” but the author believes that it may eventually yield better results than does “broken windows” or “getting tough on crime.” (The New Republic, July/August 2018)

Why Michigan is Closing Ojibway Correctional Facility in the U.P. By Paul Egan. The MDOC plans to close this prison in Marenisco, in the western Upper Peninsula, on December 1 in order to meet a cut of \$ 19 million in the 2019 MDOC budget . The prison once housed up to 1800 lower-security prisoners, but closing of units has reduced this to about 800, with 203 employees. The decision to close Ojibway was based on the difficulty of hiring qualified employees for mental health counseling and drug treatment, as well as its distance from many prisoners’ homes. MDOC closed West Shoreline Correctional Facility in the Muskegon area earlier this year, as the prison population dropped from 51,500 in 2007 to below 40,000 today. (Detroit Free Press, August 14, 2018)

Horace, Matthew and Ron Harris. 2018. The Black and the Blue: A Cop Reveals the Crimes, Racism, and Injustice in America’s Law Enforcement. Hachette Books, New York, NY. An unforgettable account of the racism and crimes that permeate America’s law enforcement – and a blueprint for change. Horace, an African-American, was a law enforcement officer at the federal and local levels for 28 years, and worked in every state in the country. He presents an insider’s examination of police culture and policies, concluding that they are an “archaic system” built on “a toxic brotherhood.” He dissects some of the nation’s most highly publicized police shootings and analyzes issues that cause disproportionate numbers of black men to be killed by police and incarcerated in cities such as Ferguson, Baltimore, Cleveland, New York, Tulsa and Chicago. The book sheds light on what truly goes on behind the blue line. Examples are given of decreases in crime when new police chiefs discharged or reprimanded cops known to be corrupt, encouraged treating offenders courteously, raised salaries, instituted frequent training programs, and/or scheduled regular meetings with citizens to hear their concerns. Among the authors’ conclusions is that “What departments are discovering is that while, yes, there are bad police officers, the real

problem is bad systems – inadequate training, reward and promotion issues: lack of community engagement; and mismatched expectations between what patrol officers see as their jobs and what the communities see as the police officer’s responsibility.”

Incarceration – The Ripple Effect. This Town Hall meeting on July 30 was organized by Michigan Power to Thrive and several other organizations. The purpose was to illustrate the effects of incarceration on prisoners and their families. Panelists included representatives of the Ingham County Sheriff’s Department, law firms, the prosecutor’s office, and organizations providing services. Topics covered included raising the age; plea deals; conditions for family visits; care for children, who are often traumatized; inability to pay for bonds, thus limiting employment while awaiting trial; the high cost of such bonds; the dearth of free legal services and public defenders; lack of educational programs during incarceration; alternative courts for offenses related to drugs, alcohol, and mental and veterans’ problems; assistance following release or parole; and the disproportionate number of prisoners who are African-American or Latino.

The program began with a film about the experiences of Martin Cato from Detroit, who attended the meeting. He was sentenced to 7 to 10 years in prison as a teen-ager for crimes he did not commit, but eventually became director of prison education at Spring Arbor University. The meeting was recorded and a full report will be used as a basis for additional forums.

Bail Reform campaign – A handout prepared by ACLU’s Smart Justice campaign describes efforts to require pretrial release within 24 hours of incarceration, without having to pay a cash bond, if defendants present no threat to the public or are not likely to flee. Information is available at www.aclumich.org, hgarrettson@aclumich.org, or kbuddin-crawford@aclumich.org.

Marshall Project reporter request– Julie Christie Thompson, a national reporter for the Marshall Project, is seeking family stories on loss of visits to inmates in Michigan prisons. If you have lost visiting rights for substance abuse tickets or for administrative rules that allow such rights to be taken away, contact Julie at : Cthompson@themarshallproject.org

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

Coming events.

Friday, September 7, 9:30 a.m. - 12: p.m. 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. Location to be announced. **RSVP at:** <http://bit.ly/HousingCriminalJusticeRSVP>

Saturday, September 15, 10:45 a.m. Monthly meeting of Citizens for Prison Reform. Kyle Kaminski, MDOC Reentry Administrator, will share information on MDOC's current reentry efforts, including providing programming for all prisoners, and increasing programming and supports for greater family inclusion. Calvary Lutheran Church, 6301 Saint Joseph Hwy, Lansing, MI 48917. <http://micpr.org@gmail.com>, <http://www.micpr.com> , phone 269-339-0606.

Sunday, September 16, 4:00 – 5:30 p.m. The Bail Trap: American Ransom, a video produced by Brave New Films dealing with the role that cash bail plays in mass incarceration, and its disproportionate effects on people of color. Angela Waters Austin from Black Lives Matter of Lansing will discuss her work with the Ingham County Prosecutor's Office to perform "racial equity analyses" and plans to improve several pre-trial and trial systems, as well as provide an update on the "Mamas Bail Out" effort in Lansing this spring. Edgewood United Church, 469 N. Hagadorn Rd, East Lansing. Sponsored by the Racial Justice Task Force at Edgewood.

Sunday, September 23, 3 p.m. – Concert Across America to End Gun Violence, featuring primarily young people to honor and amplify their voices, raised in response to attacks in schools. Donation appreciated. Sponsored by the Michigan Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence. Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Lansing, 5509 S. Pennsylvania. Lansing. For additional information, contact Linda Brundage, michigancoalition2preventgunviolence@gmail.com.

Wednesday, September 26, 7 p.m. – What's New in Corrections ? Drug, Sobriety, Veterans and Mental Health Courts. A report on how these courts divert offenders from jail and prison terms, presented by persons responsible for their operation. Edgewood United Church of Christ, 469 N. Hagadorn Rd., E. Lansing, MI 48823. For additional information, contact Frank Dennis, fdennis805@gmail.com. 517-332-5181.

Saturday, October 20, 6 p.m. Citizens for Prison Reform (CPR) film screening and annual meeting. The documentary film, "The Faces of Mass Incarceration", reveals stories from across the U.S. of families -- including a CPR family -- who were forced to support their incarcerated loved ones. Unmerited shame, embarrassment and fear are associated with the prison family, causing them to withdraw from the community. Pizza provided. Donations appreciated. Lansing Public Media Center, 2500 S. Washington Ave., Lansing, MI 48910. RSVP to <https://cprfilmscreening.eventbrite.com>.

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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.