

# CITIZENS FOR PRISON REFORM NEWSLETTER

## September 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 ([fdennis805@gmail.com](mailto:fdennis805@gmail.com)) [note change in address]

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### **Books, Articles, Notes**

**Slavery gave America a fear of black people and a taste for violent punishment. Both still define our criminal-justice system.** By Bryan Stevenson. Several years ago, Stevenson's non-profit organization, the Equal Justice Initiative, was fighting for the release of Matthew, a black man who had been sentenced, at the age of 16, to life in prison for a non-homicide offense. Matthew was one of 62 such children serving life sentences, some of whom had been behind bars for nearly 50 years. Almost all had been sent to Angola penitentiary – one of our most violent and abusive prisons. A case Stevenson argued before the Supreme Court led to a 2010 ruling that banned such sentences for juveniles. He discusses the history of racial disparities in laws dating from the arrival of enslaved Africans in Virginia in the 1600s until the present, as well as the current situation, where black children are still being sentenced to life for crimes that would have drawn much shorter sentences for whites. Although he is encouraged by progress made, he is worried, given the fact that “we are at one of the critical moments ... when we will either double down on romanticizing our past or accept that there is something better waiting for us.” (*New York Times Magazine*, August 19, 2019.)

**ACLU of Michigan Smart Justice gatherings are being organized around the state** to discuss the impact of cash bail, harsh sentencing laws and prosecutors on mass incarceration in Michigan. These small group, hour-long sessions lay out specific steps people can take in their communities to help the ACLU cut the prison population by 50% and end racism in the system. Meetings are scheduled in Traverse City on September 10 and 13. Contact Smart Justice Field Organizer Anna Dituri for details at [adituri@aclumich.org](mailto:adituri@aclumich.org), 231-590-1602. Subsequent meetings are being planned around the state. For more information on hosting a gathering or getting involved in advocacy in your community, contact Anna or the following Smart Justice organizers: Rick Griffin in Grand Rapids - [rgriffin@aclumich.org](mailto:rgriffin@aclumich.org), 616-840-0064; Rick Speck in Metro Detroit – [rspeck@aclumich.org](mailto:rspeck@aclumich.org), 313-648-2606, or for more on the Smart Justice campaign, Rodd Monts - [rmons@aclumich.org](mailto:rmons@aclumich.org).

**U-M Prison Creative Arts Project sells \$ 27,000 in artwork.** The 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan prisoners was held at the University of Michigan March 20-April 3, 2019. It highlighted the work of 575 artists from 27 MDOC facilities. Exhibits included 672 paintings, sculptures and 3-dimensional works from the 2300 pieces submitted, including landscapes, portraits, prison scenes and political statements. Half of the pieces on display were sold within 2 weeks, with proceeds going directly to the artists. Senior curator Janie Paul, an emeritus professor at the U of M, and her husband, Buzz Alexander, started the annual exhibition in 1996. This year's exhibit was

supported by the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs and the Art for Justice Fund, a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors. [pcapinfo@umich.edu](mailto:pcapinfo@umich.edu); <https://lsa.umich.edu/pccap>.

**What's behind the population boom in rural Michigan jails ?** By Ted Roelofs.

Alpena County's jail's budget has risen 40 % in 5 years, and the average daily jail census has risen from 47 to about 57. Similar changes have occurred in many rural and urban jails, and is the reason for the appointment by Governor Whitmer of a Joint Task Force on Jail and Pretrial Incarceration, and the collection of data by the non-profit Pew Charitable Trust. Between 1978 and 2013, the proportion of Michigan inmates held in rural jails increased from 15 % to 24 %, while the percentage in urban jails dropped from 34 to 19. One of the reasons proposed for the change is that rural areas have fewer mental health and drug treatment programs than do urban areas. Police departments in Kalamazoo, Kent, and Oakland Counties now offer Crisis Intervention Team training for police officers, but most departments do not. The Joint Task Force hopes to gain a better understanding of what is driving local incarceration. (*Bridge*, August 23, 2019.)

**State task force will track incarceration data.** By Danielle Nelson. Representatives from Kent County are part of the task force formed by Gov. Whitmer to review the state's jail and court data to expand alternatives to jail, reduce admissions and length of stay, and improve the effectiveness of Michigan's justice system. Approximately 26,000 persons are booked into Kent County each year, about 5000 are convicted and the average number of inmates in the county jail is 1300. Kent County commissioner Jim Talen believes that about 60% of the inmates are awaiting trial and most have been unable to afford bail. Those who are bailed out can use their Medicaid benefits; those who remain in jail cannot, and the jail is responsible for them. Thus they receive poorer care. Michigan taxpayers spent \$ 478 million on county jail and corrections costs in 2017 -- the third largest statewide county expenditure, behind health and welfare and public works. (*Grand Rapids Business Journal*, August 2, 2019)

**Michigan Corrections addresses 'crisis' in employee mental health.** By James David Dickson. Two studies conducted in the last four years indicate that Michigan prison staffers, particularly those who work with inmates, are in a state of crisis regarding their mental health. This involves elevated levels of anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol abuse, depression and suicidal thoughts, which are believed to have led to 16 staffer and retiree suicides since 2015. The MDOC now has a wellness team to address these issues. Lynn Gorski has been hired as an employee wellness manager; she is visiting work sites in the state, and hopes to establish a peer support group. Two employee wellness coordinators have joined her to date. Gorski considers the corrections field to be in a state of crisis nationally, with complaints about "petty" discipline by superiors and mandatory overtime. The MDOC currently has about 605 open positions, and doesn't expect to be able to fill all of them. (*The Detroit News*, August 18, 2019)

**New Hampshire repeals death penalty after lawmakers override Republican governor.** By Eli Watkins. On May 30, the state legislature repealed capital punishment by overriding Republican Gov. Chris Sununu's veto of the measure. The Governor expressed his disappointment, indicating that he was "incredibly disappointed." Persons convicted of capital murder will be sentenced to imprisonment for life with no possibility of parole. New Hampshire is the 21st state to abolish capital punishment, leaving the remaining states, the federal government, and the military with the death penalty. (*CNN Politics*, May 30, 2019)

**Second chance granted: Program hones inmates' skills to survive on outside.** By Christine Ferretti. Second Chance for Life was started by three former prison inmates to provide prisoners with tools to keep them from going back following their release. The organization, formed 27 years ago, provides leadership, critical thinking and mediation skills to inmates and ex-offenders, and offers parolees mentors, housing and job placement services, mental health and substance abuse counseling, and aid in family reintegration. Currently, 1400 prisoners are involved at nine Michigan prisons. Core groups of inmates are trained in critical thinking, leadership, diversity skills and mediation, then act as instructors for others. Classes run from 6 to 9 months. The primary source of funding is the Detroit Wayne Mental Health Authority, which has supplied \$ 250,000 for the program over the last four years. (*The Detroit News*, August 22, 2019; [chanceforlifeonline.org](http://chanceforlifeonline.org))

**Ending the War on Drugs.** By Nicholas Kristoff. Seattle is decriminalizing the use of hard drugs, and is relying more on the public health toolbox and less on criminal justice. In 2011 a program called Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) was started. Instead of arresting drug users for narcotics or prostitution, police watch for the non-violent who want help and divert them to social service programs. The program was a huge success; rearrests dropped 58 %, participants were nearly twice as likely to find housing, and 46 % were more likely to be employed. LEAD isn't cheap, costing about \$ 350 per participant per month, but is less expensive than jail, courts and the costs of homelessness – or the cost of the ineffective War on Drugs. (*The New York Times*, August 25, 2019)

## Coming events

**Citizens for Justice monthly meetings.** This organization provides encouragement and information to reform current laws and policies regarding sex offenders, and provides support for them and their families and friends. Monthly meetings are held on the second Saturday in Ann Arbor, and on the last Sunday in Kalamazoo. Information: [wash@micitizensforjustice.com](mailto:wash@micitizensforjustice.com), <https://micitizensforjustice.com>.

**Wednesday, September 4, 6-7:30 p.m. "Educate and Advocate, Gun Violence 101"**, 6 – 7:30 p.m. Delta Township District Library, 5130 Davenport Dr., Lansing. Sponsor: The Michigan Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence.

**Wednesday, September 18, 7 p.m. The New Ingham County Jail: Serving the Community and the Inmate.** Sheriff Scott Wriggelsworth will discuss plans for the new jail, scheduled for completion in 2021, and the services now available for inmates, which will be expanded. Edgewood United Church of Christ (EUCC), 469 N. Hagadorn, E. Lansing. Sponsors – EUCC and Citizens for Prison Reform. Contact: [fdennis805@gmail.com](mailto:fdennis805@gmail.com)

**Saturday, September 21, 10:45 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Monthly meeting of Citizens for Prison Reform.** Jennifer Baker will describe the current projects Michigan Protection and Advocacy Service, Inc. (MP&AS) has taken to assist in addressing the rights of prisoners with disabilities across Michigan. CPR meetings are free, secular and open to the public. Calvary Lutheran Church, 6301 W. St. Joseph Hwy., Lansing MI 48917. [www.micpr.org@gmail.com](http://www.micpr.org@gmail.com). 269-339-0606.

**Thursday, October 10, 6:00-8:30 p.m. Making Second Chances a First Priority.** Annual dinner meeting of Safe & Just Michigan with speaker DeAnna R. Hoskins, President and CEO of JustLeadershipUSA, a recognized leader in criminal justice reform. State Rep. David LaGrand (D-Grand Rapids) will be presented with the Gov. William Milliken award for his work on criminal justice and bail reform. The event will be hosted at the Radisson Hotel, 111 N. Grand Ave., Lansing. Tickets available for \$ 25 per ticket at [https://app.etapestry.com/onlineforms/SafeandJustMichigan/2019annualmeeting\\_tickets.html](https://app.etapestry.com/onlineforms/SafeandJustMichigan/2019annualmeeting_tickets.html) or \$ 250 for a table at [bit.ly/SMJ2019Tables](http://bit.ly/SMJ2019Tables). A limited number of complementary tickets are available for those who may find the price a hardship; contact [info@safeandjustmi.org](mailto:info@safeandjustmi.org) for more information.

**Saturday, October 12, 5:00 p.m.- Citizens for Prison Reform Annual Dinner Meeting and release of MI Documentary: “Locked Out: The Impact of Prison on Families,”** followed by interviews with director and videographer Bryce Mackie and former prisoner Cindy Shank. \$ 15 per prison and silent auction at 5 p.m. and movie screening at 6:30. Scholarships available. CPR meetings are free, secular and open to the public. Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Lansing, 509 S. Pennsylvania Ave., Lansing. Co-sponsors UU Committee to End the New Jim Crow. For info, contact [micpr.org@gmail.com](mailto:micpr.org@gmail.com) or call 269-339-0606.

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**Citizens for Prison Reform (CPR).** [www.micpr.org](http://www.micpr.org); [micpr.org@gmail.com](mailto: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.

