



NC Citizens United for Restorative Effectiveness  
 NC-CURE  
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January 2023 Volume 9, Issue 1

## Encourage your lawmakers to visit NC prisons

NC-CURE is working with the national organization, Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM) to get as many NC lawmakers to go inside and talk with people incarcerated in prisons. The mantra is, “You can’t know until you go!”

**Step 1:** Find out who your NC Senators and Representatives from your hometown district are. Anyone with internet access can get their contact information from [www.ncleg.gov](http://www.ncleg.gov) or <https://famm.org/visitaprison>. Or you can write NC-CURE and give us your hometown address, we’ll send you the information you need.

**Step 2:** Write a letter or email. Introduce yourself, where you live and your hometown. Make a clear ask—invite your lawmaker to come and tour your facility and to meet with you specifically. Share a little bit about your story without going into too much detail. Some suggested wording: *My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am serving \_\_\_\_ months/ years inside (facility) in (city), NC. I am inviting you to tour my facility at your earliest convenience. My hope is that when you come and visit our facility you will see that we are people deserving of a second chance.*

**Step 3.** Make sure that your letter is clear and readable. Send it to the lawmaker’s office. In Raleigh.

**Step 4:** If you hear back, let NC-CURE know by writing us. Our advocates may be able to join in on the visit.

## DRNC reacts to report of increased suicides

An attorney for Disability Rights of NC (DRNC) responded to a report of increased prison suicides in **The News&Observer**.

**Don’t let another NC inmate die. Enact these reforms to stem the surge in suicides.** Nine people have died by suicide in NC prisons this year, more suicides than any year except 2018.

Each death is devastating and traumatic for the deceased, their loved ones, prison staff, people who witness the loss, and who later learn of it. Excessively high prison populations, severe understaffing, and lack of prison mental health resources fuel an increasingly dangerous environment. Reforms must be implemented.

Why? NC’s community behavioral health system is broken and results in many people

*(Continued on page 6)*

### Inside this issue

In the Spotlight .....	2
Director’s Report .....	2
Lawsuits .....	4
New parole law?.....	6
Membership .....	8

### Special points of interest

- How you may help save a life
- Reentry Checklist
- Parenting from inside
- Note from Anthony Willis



## We want to be your VOICE

Send us your stories—the good, the bad and the ugly. We advocate against the wrongs, and share good news too. We read every letter and respond to as many of you as we can.

## NC-CURE Executive Director's Report

Welcome to 2023! I'm praying that each of you will find meaningful life behind the walls of prison this year. This issue of OTW has several articles about how men and women in the NC prison system have found purpose despite their limitations. As Ebony Thomas-Yakout said, "You are behind bars, but your minds are not confined!"

Thank you for the overwhelming response to our member survey. We are now analyzing your responses so we can be more sensitive to the needs you have. We would like to address all your issues, but please remember that we have limited resources and power to affect change. As you know, change in a system as large and complex as the Department of Adult Corrections is going to be slow. Yet, we do our best to help one person at a time and address systemic issues we see.

NC-CURE is in great need of financial donations so that full-time staff can be hired. If you know someone with deep pockets who

would support NC-CURE's mission, please let us know!

After you're released, if you would like to volunteer for NC-CURE and continue to receive OTW, you can complete an application or simply write us with your new address. We could use more volunteers as Board members, public speakers, fundraisers, and for many operational tasks.

Thank you for your holiday greetings and letters of appreciation. It's difficult for us to evaluate the impact of our advocacy work sometimes. Knowing that what we do is important to you is very encouraging.

Many times when I'm frustrated and mad at the world, I find it helpful to think hard and long about whatever good things I can think of—anything excellent, praiseworthy, pure, lovely, commendable. For one thing, you can know that we at NC-CURE care about you. *By Sandra Hardee, Executive Director*

## A new opportunity in the transportation business

Known to some as a "Queen Pin", she loves to tell her story. Ebony Thomas-Yakout now owns and manages VM Transportation Service, LLC in Charlotte. Once a drug dealer, now a 6-figure entrepreneur, she gives credit to God, her new friends and hard work.

Ebony is often invited to speak to youth about her experiences. Raised in a close-knit "good family", she recounts being molested as a child. Keeping this trauma a secret, she harbored bitterness, hatred and pain. She took a destructive path that landed her in prison as a 23-year-old. But that didn't stop her from continuing to sell drugs. At age 36, an habitual felony charge left her facing a 10-12 year sentence. Once incarcerated, she was forced to deal with her childhood trauma. She started "peeling the onion". After 2 years of anger and hopelessness, she finally asked God, "Why?" He revealed that she had 10 years of cleaning up that He had to do for her. The Queen Pin wants kids to know that they don't have to keep secrets about abuses they experience. They can avoid the painful years she went through.

To Ebony's surprise, she became a "missionary" in prison. God kept her busy teaching other prisoners to read, how to overcome problems with their families, and how to accept God's love. She followed the advice of her case manager and took many courses like cosmetology, culinary, printing, business. She wanted to be transformed, and she wanted proof for society. A "model prisoner", she eventually achieved honor grade and a transfer to Center for Community Transitions for Women in Charlotte. Because she loved her work in the prison salons "doing hair", she started work in a private hair salon while she was there. A financial literacy course helped her get her bills paid off and her credit score up. When she was released in 2019, she had \$15K to buy a car and find a place to live. Confidently unafraid to ask for help, she went to local churches for assistance with things like furniture and job interviews. However, getting a job as a felon was nearly impossible. Four months after her release, a friend offered to show her the ropes in the transportation business. That's when her training in perseverance and hard work paid off. Three years later, she has two vans, several ex-felon drivers, and a business in nationwide hauling, local contracted jobs, and private luxury transportation. She's proud of herself. Every time she drives her sprinter van, it gives her joy to realize she had invested in herself and succeeded.

Her advice to people transitioning out of prison? Use your time of incarceration wisely. Do not let the time do you! Change your narrative and prove yourself worthy to society. Realize you've been disconnected, so find a way to get re-connected to society. Seek out churches with godly people who want to help you. It's your responsibility to make changes you need. You are behind bars, but your mind is not confined! Get ready for hard work to overcome barriers. Opportunities may show up in unexpected places. Most importantly, get and stay spiritually connected.

## Tips for getting a work release job

NC-CURE frequently gets letters asking for help with work release jobs; we have no part in this process. However, there are numerous employment opportunities available within NCDPS. Many remain unfilled, some because the application process is not properly handled. Here are some basic guidelines to help you successfully procure a work release job.

### Job Candidate Requirements

Minimum Custody level 3, or approved for work release by the courts or Prisons personnel

Within five years of release

No infractions in the last year and no pending legal or disciplinary actions

Willingness to work hard. Best demonstrated by inside work record

No physical or mental restrictions that prevent successfully performing the available job

*A positive referral from staff is helpful*

### How to Determine Job Availability

An inmate, his case manager, or program director must contact the work release coordinator at the institution to inquire about available work release jobs. Once it has been determined that a position is indeed available, the inmate can apply for that position. The inmate or case manager fills out a DC-190 and submits it to the NCDPS Work Release director for approval. Once the form is approved. Arrangements can be made for transfer to that facility to start work.

Your effort will be greatly improved by working closely with your case manager, program director, and work release coordinator. We wish you success! The income you save from your work release job really helps your reentry process.

*By Ron Capell, Chairman, NC-CURE*

## How you may help save a life

If you're in prison long enough, it is very likely that someone you know will consider the idea of suicide. Prison Fellowship's *Prison Survival Guide* offers these pointers.

### Beware of warning signs:

**Nonverbal:** giving away prized possessions, sleeping too much or too little, lack of interest in personal appearance, friends, or usual activities, boredom, restlessness, lack of concentration

**Verbal:** No one cares about me. Life isn't worthwhile. People are better off without me. Everything seems to be going wrong. I don't need this anymore.

**Do:** Get involved. Be available. Show interest and support. Be direct. Talk openly about suicide. Be willing to listen. Accept the feeling. Offer empathy—seek to understand. Offer hope that alternatives are available. Take action. Seek support. Report to prison officials

**Don't:** Be judgmental. Dare the person to do it. Make decisions for the person. Tell the person to act differently. Act shocked. Be sworn to secrecy.

Please know that if a friend in prison does commit suicide, you are not responsible! No matter what steps you take, no matter what "signs" you might have missed, the final choice--which is outside your control--always lies with the person.

## Reentry Checklist

### Things needed or to do

Place to stay/housing

Food

Food stamps

Clothes

Work

Transportation

To work, by employer/others

At home, bicycle/other

Public transportation

### List of places to go/things to do that take up time

Food

Doctor

Worship

Friends (Stay away from old friends)

Rehabilitation plan

Drugs

Alcohol

Training/education

Discuss what caused you to go to prison, and plan to stay out

### Need to get:

Identification card from DMV

Driver's license

Social security card

Social security benefits

Disability

Birth certificate from City Hall in city where you were born

Take care of previous charges/tickets

Begin process to expunge previous charges

*Submitted by Rabbi David Winer, Lumberton Reentry Council*



## Resources for Reentry

Arise Collective (formerly Interfaith Prison Ministry for Women)  
www.lpmforwomen.org  
112 S. Salisbury St  
Raleigh, NC 27601  
919-829-0311

Benevolence Farm (women)  
PO Box 1313  
Graham, NC 27253  
[www.benevolencefarm.org](http://www.benevolencefarm.org)  
336-639-8436

Abounding Grace Ministry (women)  
PO Box 361  
Rutherfordton, NC 28139  
[www.aboundinggrace.org](http://www.aboundinggrace.org)  
828-429-0289

Changed Choices (women)  
PO Box 34367  
Charlotte, NC 28234  
[www.changedchoices.org](http://www.changedchoices.org)  
704-332-6388

New Beginning a New Way of LIFE  
PO Box 501  
Fairmont, NC 28340  
980-339-0416  
[www.newbeginningsanewwayoflife.org](http://www.newbeginningsanewwayoflife.org)

Hope Restoration  
PO Box 1656  
Kinston, NC 28503  
[www.hoperestoration.org](http://www.hoperestoration.org)  
252-560-7507

Exodus Foundation  
13016 Eastfield Rd, Ste 200-222  
Huntersville, NC 28078  
[www.exodusfoundation.org](http://www.exodusfoundation.org)  
704-947-9090

Crossroads Reentry Ministries  
PO Box 861  
Huntersville, NC 28070  
[www.crossroadsreentry.org](http://www.crossroadsreentry.org)  
704-499-1332

## Parenting from the inside-a life story

According to the Children of Incarcerated Parents Library, nearly 3 million children in the US have a parent in prison. These children are six times more likely to end up in prison themselves. As parents we can empower their resilience to break this cycle.

My son was eight months old when I was incarcerated. Kye is now 19 and a sophomore at Clemson University majoring in Criminal Justice. Through outside support, personal growth and creative outlets I have been blessed to build a solid relationship with my child and contribute to his success as an adult.

OUTSIDE SUPPORT plays a major role in this parenting process. Thankfully Kye's mother decided soon after my incarceration to help Kye know me as his father. Making amends with his mother's family and my own resulted in positive relationships. There is always that "one" who is the backbone of family. For me, it is my Aunt Mabel. For over a decade she made many out of state trips to unite father and son.

Reaching out to those present in Kye's life helped me learn more about him. This included creating a dialogue with his friends, their parents, teachers, and coaches. Even if I had to communicate through a third party, I could establish my role as a parent who encourages as well as disciplines. However, for this to work people had to recognize my ongoing and sincere effort to become a better man and parent.

I really wanted PERSONAL GROWTH and change, so I took advantage of the limited resources available. This included educational classes such as Father Accountability programs and Human Services Technology, and reading books like *Parenting from Prison* by James Birney. Sharing certificates of my achievements with my son encouraged him to succeed and showed others I was actively seeking change as well.

Mail, visits, and phone calls are the outlets we have to parent from prison. The key is to BE CREATIVE! My hobby in arts and crafts gave me a way to create fun, educational and meaningful items for my child. I made a number board, an apparatus to teach him to tie his shoes, drawings, cards, necklaces, even business plans to encourage entrepreneurship. I was able to send him books that we both liked. Discussions about these books gave me opportunities to speak greatness into his life.

Visits are proven to reduce the trauma and guilt children experience due to the incarceration of a parent. Kids can see other children visiting and not feel alone or so different. For Kye and me, visits meant quality time. We played games, shared laughs, and just talked. Coming up with interactive games like table-top football is a way to impart positive life lessons while making kids feel relaxed.

Of course, there are moments to be stern. When Kye got into trouble, I eventually learned when and how to address it. Immediately after is best, especially to share in the discipline with his mother. If too much time had passed, the tone and way I addressed it affected his response—to open up or shut down.

Visits have the greatest impact, but the phone is more accessible. I call my son daily. Even if we do not talk, it is still a comfort for him to see that his Dad called. Kye is eager to share his day or an interest such as playing an instrument with me. I could help him with homework too. Regular phone calls give me a real presence in his life. It was difficult to not be there for special events. Scheduling a call before or after an event to

(Continued on page 5)

## Parenting (continued)

*(Continued from page 4)*

encourage and congratulate him helped. Sometimes I would call during a game; one time I heard his name right after he scored! This meant so much to him. Again, shared laughter is essential. I also learned to limit my questions on school and personal issues unless it was necessary. Instead, I focused on his interests—especially our shared interests like working out. I always wanted to try reading him bedtime stories but phone access in the evenings was limited. I encourage parents with small children and access to tablets to try this adventurous activity.

I hope I've shared some ideas that will encourage other incarcerated parents. If you want to parent well, it's essential to avoid

restricted housing so you can be consistent with visits and phone calls. Reject the prison "norms" that discourage personal growth; instead use your time for educational pursuits and focus on being a better parent. Above all, build a spiritual relationship as an ongoing foundation for change and growth. I encourage all parents to share prayers with your children and others, and watch those relationships grow strong.

Let's break this cycle together!

Grandchildren are the crowning glory of the aged; parents are the pride of their children. *Proverbs 17:6*

*By Jeffrey A. White, Scotland Correctional*

## Kudos to Prison Staff

A writer from Anson wrote, "Thank God for Ms. D. Williams, Facility Compliance Manager. She's not playing about this PREA."

Another writer praised Program Manager Ms. Hall at Orange for standing up for an incarcerated man falsely accused of an infraction.

In December, four facilities received accreditation by the American Correctional Association (ACA)—Carteret, Columbus, Orange, and Forsyth. Congratulations to all the dedicated staff who made this possible.

***Believe you can and you're halfway there.***

***Theodore Roosevelt***

## Surviving frivolity review in a Section 1983 Federal civil rights lawsuit

Our mission at NC Prisoner Legal Services is to assist those being held in NC prisons with accessing the courts. We do this through direct representation (as our resources allow), pro se guidance, and informal advocacy to assist clients in settling issues outside of courts. In the last NC Cure newsletter, I shared information about filing a lawsuit in federal court under Section 1983 in a previous newsletter. In this article, I will write further about what happens after you have filed your federal lawsuit.

After you file your lawsuit, the judge will review it to make sure that it is not frivolous, malicious, or that you have not failed to state a claim on which relief can be granted. If a judge finds that the claim of the lawsuit is one of these things, the lawsuit will be dismissed. A lawsuit that is frivolous if it "lacks a basis in law or a basis in fact." *Netzk v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325 109 S. Ct. 1827, 104 L. Ed. 2d 338 (1989). This means that your complaint and request for relief must have violated an existing principle of law. A lack of "basis in fact" is when a complaint contains "wholly irrational or incredible factual allegations." *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 32 112 S. Ct. 1728, 1733, 118 L. Ed.2d 340 (1992). A judge could find a lack of basis in fact if he or she does not believe that the alleged actions could have happened as they are alleged to have happened. Malicious claims are those that are filed for the purpose of harassing a defendant. A judge can also find a claim to be malicious if the demand for relief is clearly excessive. Failure to state a claim is when the facts that are alleged in a lawsuit are not violations of existing law.

Once a lawsuit survives this initial review which is commonly called the "frivolity review" is service of process. This is when all of the defendants in a lawsuit are served with notice of the lawsuit. The United States Marshalls serve the defendants notice under Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 4(c)(3). If the Marshalls are unable to serve the defendants within 90 days, the judge can dismiss the lawsuit without prejudice. This means that you can still refile the lawsuit, but will also have to pay the filing fee again. Providing the court has much information as possible to identify the defendants and their addresses is very important so that you do not have to re-file your lawsuit and pay the filing fee a second time.

In the next newsletter, I will write about responsive pleadings and the discovery process. If you have further questions or need examples to use as go-bys, please write to us so that we can help at: NCPLS, PO Box 27611, Raleigh, NC 27611. Please also feel free to write me directly with ways we can better serve you. We have been privileged to serve you in 2022 and look forward to building together in 2023.

*This article is written by an attorney and is intended for informational purposes only, and does not create an attorney/client relationship.*

*By Beth Thomas, Executive Director of NCPLS*

## Resources for Incarcerated Parents and their Children

### **Proverbs 22:6**

3122 Fincher Farm Rd, Suite 100-531  
Matthews, NC 28105  
980-221-5595  
<https://proverbs226.org>

### **Our Children's Place of Coastal Horizons**

PO Box 13073  
Durham, NC 27709  
919-904-4286  
[www.ourchildrensplace.com](http://www.ourchildrensplace.com)

### **National Center for Homeless Education-Children of Incarcerated Parents**

5900 Summit Avenue #201  
Brown's Summit, NC 27214  
800-308-2145  
<https://nche.ed.gov/coip>

## Newer Books Written by Criminal Justice-involved People

### **Sins of the System**

by Regina M. Griego, PhD

### **A Convict's Perspective**

by T. Lamont Baker

### **From Prison Cells to PHD**

by Stanley Andrisse, MBA, PhD

### **But for Mercy**

by Howard Isom

### **Take It Up, One-Year Devotional**

by Cynthia A.Y. Rupel

*Let us know about others.....*

## New parole law? Not so much

The North Carolina General Assembly recently made a change to the law that establishes the Department of Adult Correction's authority to release people to manage the prison population, North Carolina General Statute § 148-4.1. The change, however, was only to update the names and titles of the state agency and its secretary that were renamed with government reorganization. There are no changes to parole eligibility.

The statute, titled Release of Inmates, was first made law in the 1980s as a solution to manage prison overcrowding. Currently, per Prison Administration, our prisons do not have an overcrowding problem, and no releases being considered under this law.

Additionally, parole laws only apply to certain sentences. Parole eligibility is limited to people serving sentences with offense dates prior to 10/1/1994, some juvenile first-degree murder convictions, and DWI. All other sentences fall under the Structured Sentencing Act. Under Structured Sentencing, a release date will move between the minimum and maximum sentences based on behavior, employment, and participation in programs and classes, but there is no parole and no way to be released earlier than the minimum sentence.

*By writers from UNC School of Law*

*Note: Name changes were also done in other laws, all effective January 1, 2023*

## Suicides (continued)

*(Continued from page 1)*

with disabilities landing inside our prisons. The rates of mental health disabilities in our prisons (15%) are much higher than in our communities (5%). Once in prison, far too many are subject to psychologically damaging solitary confinement.

Five of the nine people we've lost to suicide in 2022 were in solitary. People in solitary usually lack adequate mental health care. Those who receive care often continue to have serious symptoms because they remain isolated. NC prisons must expand programs like Therapeutic Diversion Units (TDUs) that remove people from solitary and offer rehabilitation and treatment. TDUs have been shown to reduce rule violations, self-harm, and time spent in acute psychiatric units. They are promising alternatives to solitary confinement for people with mental health disabilities.

The scientific consensus is that solitary is mentally and physically harmful. The Governor's Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice (TREC) recommended ending the use of long-term solitary confinement, especially for those with mental health disabilities. Other states have safely reduced their use of solitary. Our state must do the same.

Prisons are supposed to keep people alive and safe while they serve their sentences and release them better than when they entered. Yet, chronic staff shortages have exposed people to unbearable physical and mental conditions. Rehabilitation efforts are largely shut down, making productively rejoining communities difficult for the nearly 20,000 people released from NC prisons each year. We must do better.

Many people in NC prisons are sick, disabled, or elderly and can be safely supervised at home. Compassionate releases will save money, make prisons safer, and improve outcomes. We must restart this sensible program immediately.



# 2023 Annual Membership Application

NC-CURE is membership-driven and operated by volunteer staff. **Annual** membership dues help to offset the high cost of publishing and distributing our publication *On The Wire* (OTW). The newsletter provides news, resources, and encouragement for members. **OTW is distributed by TextBehind mail to incarcerated members**, and by mail or email to other supporters. Quarterly issues come out in January, April, July, and October. If you would like to join NC-CURE and receive OTW by mail or email, please tear off and complete the form below, and mail it to **NC-CURE, P.O. Box 5013, Kinston, NC 28503**.

Make checks or money orders payable to NC-CURE.

Inmate Name and OPUS #		Today's Date	
Correctional Facility		Date of Birth	
Family Member/Other supporter: Name and Address			
City		State	Zip
Relationship to Inmate (if any)		Email Address	
<input type="checkbox"/> Inmate (\$3.00 or stamps) Indigent inmates may send stamps for membership providing they are not violating prison policy. <b>Otherwise membership dues are waived.</b>	For those NOT incarcerated: <input type="checkbox"/> Individual (\$27.00) <input type="checkbox"/> Individual + Inmate (\$30.00) <input type="checkbox"/> Other supporter (Donations of any amount welcome)		For those NOT incarcerated: PLEASE CHECK ONE: I prefer receiving OTW by <input type="checkbox"/> Direct Mail <input type="checkbox"/> Email
<input type="checkbox"/> I would like to serve as a volunteer for NC-CURE in the capacity of:		Contact NC-CURE at	

Disclosure: A member may withdraw his/her membership at any time with written notification to NC-CURE. Membership dues/contributions are nonrefundable. NC-CURE reserves the right to cancel memberships of those who do not support the organization's mission and advocacy work.

## WHO WE ARE

NC-CURE (Citizens United for Restorative Effectiveness) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) grassroots prisoner advocacy organization established in 2007 and staffed by volunteers. Its mission is to advocate for the humane treatment of people in North Carolina prisons. Its vision is that North Carolina prisons will restore, rebuild and resource incarcerated individuals so they are prepared for successful reentry into the community.

## WHAT WE DO

**SUPPORT:** Encourage and provide hope to people in prison and their loved ones

**CALL ATTENTION:** Intervene when prison practices deny people in prison dignity and respect as human beings, adequate medical care and nutrition

**ADVOCATE:** Proactively advocate for change in NC prison practices to protect the human rights of prisoners

**EDUCATE:** Provide resources that members and the general public need to understand the prison system

**COLLABORATE:** Team up with criminal justice reform agencies to promote fair treatment of people incarcerated in NC prisons