



NC Citizens United for Restorative Effectiveness NC-CURE
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On The Wire



Two classes of Field Ministers graduate in 2023

Bachelor of Arts in Pastoral Ministry is offered through the Nash County Extension Center, Southeastern Baptist Seminary of Wake Forest, and Game Plan for Life (a nonprofit organization founded by Joe Gibbs) and supported by NC Department of Adult Correction for qualifying men at Nash Correctional Institution. This program introduces students to the knowledge and skills central to the work of pastors through classes in pastoral ministry, discipleship, counseling, and Bible exposition. The major also provides students opportunity for additional classes in biblical and theological studies. The program is designed to begin the formation of the student's life for pastoral ministry and prepares students for continuing studies in the Master of Divinity.

Twelve students were awarded the BA in Pastoral Ministry degree in December of 2022 (delayed because of Covid); 13 students (plus one posthumously) graduated in June of 2023. Graduation speakers at the ceremony included Coach Joe Gibbs and Reverend Danny Aiken, President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Family members, loved ones, correctional staff and community supporters (including NC-CURE leaders) attended the graduation and enjoyed a catered lunch.

Field Ministers are deployed in eleven facilities in the NC prison system to provide emotional and spiritual support to incarcerated individuals when requested. The Field Minister program has just begun at NCCIW. To find out more about how you can support the work of the NC Field Minister Program, contact Prison Programs at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 919.761.2291, prisonprograms@sebts.edu.

Legislative Updates

We are aware of two bills favoring incarcerated people that were submitted in the 2023-24 Session of the NC House of Representatives.

House Bill 126, the Prison Resources Repurposing Act was filed on February 16, 2023, and referred to committee; no further action was taken. HB 126 sought to expand the MAPP to allow for the parole of inmates sentenced to life imprisonment without parole.

House Bill 836, the Reentry Reform/Modification act was filed on April 20, 2023, and referred to committee; no further action was taken. HB836 sought to fund stipends to individuals recently released from incarceration, to fund five new Local Reentry Councils, remove the requirement that 12 months pass from the completion of an individual's sentence

before they can petition for a Certificate of Relief to mitigate collateral consequences, and change the state law to prohibit occupational licensing boards from denying an applicant a license because of a conviction of a nonviolent crime.

Both HB126 and HB836 were proposed by Democratic legislators. Bills sponsored by Democrats in a predominantly Republican legislature are getting very little attention these days.

NC First Step Act—Limited reconsideration of sentences: December 1, 2023 deadline

Effective December 1, 2020, the NC First Step Act creates a “safety valve” that allows courts to depart from the mandatory minimum for some drug trafficking offenses and instead impose a sentence that is within the state’s structured sentencing guidelines based on the classification of the offense.

Important for incarcerated people, there is a way for some who were sentenced for drug trafficking before the bill’s effective date to file a motion for appropriate relief (MAR) if ALL the following conditions are met. 1. The motion is filed within 36 months of the bill’s effective date (December 1, 2023).

2. The person has no prior felony drug convictions.
3. The person is convicted solely for trafficking, or conspiracy to commit trafficking as a result of drug possession (no sale, manufacture, delivery, transport, etc.).
4. The person was convicted of drug trafficking or conspiracy to commit drug trafficking of only the smallest drug amounts that trigger mandatory minimum sentences. The person did not already receive a reduction in sentence for providing substantial assistance in the identification, arrest, or conviction of any co-conspirators.

If you or a loved one believes that you qualify for a reconsideration of your sentence under the First Step Act, you should contact the public defender’s office or an attorney and seek legal help.

KUDOS

Correctional Officer O. Williams and Correctional Officer Flowers of Moore-1 were recognized by a woman at Anson CI for being kind, professional and trustworthy. She also recognized Assistant Warden Rynolds for his help escorting her to an appointment.

Warden Mark Fleming , Captain Parker, and Mrs. Corrie Mills from Administrative Services are acknowledged for “making a difference” for inmates at Pamlico CI.

Sergeant Randall at Nash CI is heralded for a heroic measure of saving an inmate’s life from choking. She is actively seeking to help people all the time. He reports, “She’s a legend around here now.”

NCDAC honored its top prison employees and volunteers on May 3. Exemplary volunteers are Jerry Campbell (Central), Billy and Cindy Garris (Eastern), Evelyn Scott (South Central) and Dan Quartuccio (Western). Officer Jermaine Burns of Scotland CI was named Correctional Officer of the Year.

NC-CURE recognizes Kim Grissom, Program Director and Robert Harp, Case Manager at Hyde CI for their congenial and professional responses to our advocacy efforts.

Never let the sense of past failure defeat your next step.

-Oswald Chambers

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Executive Director's Report

As you've probably realized, the April 2023 issue of *OTW* was not published. First, we had extreme difficulty getting the January 2023 issue to you through Text Behind's mass mailing option (expensive and time-consuming) so we had to find another way. We also heard that there were delays at the facility level. This issue of *OTW* is being mailed to you as individual pieces of mail. We hope your receipt of it has not been delayed. Second, NC-CURE's meager volunteer staff have been overwhelmed with some efforts to advocate for systemic change. We were surprised and informed by your responses to the October 2022 NC-CURE survey. A majority of you told us that advocating for legislative and prison wide policy changes should be a priority for us. Limited by time and resources this spring, we couldn't publish an *OTW* and work on those changes. We've altered the format of this newsletter also, to reduce the time required for desktop publishing.

So, what have we been working on? Three major issues.

NC-CURE sent a Report on the **Administrative Remedy Process** to Secretary Ishee's Office and the Inmate Grievance Resolution Board (IGRB) on March 27, 2023. You may have seen coverage on this topic in the *Charlotte Observer and NC Newsline*. To prepare this report, we carefully studied the NCDPS Procedure, we collaborated with ECU Department of Criminal Justice to prepare a qualitative analysis of your letters to us, and we reviewed the FY21-22 reports from the IGRB. The qualitative analysis of your letters identified 3 overarching themes: 1) Grievance procedures are not followed by DPS staff, 2) Grievance appeals are ineffective, and 3) People in prison fear retaliation or retribution. Our analysis of the FY21-22 IGRB reports showed:

Roughly 27,000 grievances officially entered Step 1. Of these, approximately 50% were resolved at Step 1. The 14,000 grievances that proceeded to Step 2 were resolved by intervention by the Facility head in less than 30% of cases. Of the approximate 11,000 cases that reached Step 3, approximately 30% were dismissed by the IGRB due to lack of supporting evidence, inability to substantiate, and lack of merit; 44% were resolved by action at the facility level; and 25% of cases resulted in IGRB staff intervention. In summary, of the 14,000 grievances appealed at Step 1, 11,000 were appealed at Step 2, and only 2,700 of the cases were overturned and resolved at the IGRB level.

Our conclusions were that there are problems at the facility level and the IGRB level. We recommended changes in the Administrative Remedy Procedure with emphasis on these issues: 1) Improving the methods of investigating grievances at all levels and enabling grievants to participate in collecting and providing evidence, 2) Enforcing staff adherence to procedures and eliminating retaliation, and 3) Increasing system transparency and accessibility of reports to the

incarcerated population and the public. (The full report is available on our website, www.nccure.org.) The significance of the report and its recommendations were supported by Disability Rights of NC, Meredith College Department of Criminal Justice, NC Conservatives for Criminal Justice Reform, NC Prisoner Legal Services, and The Wilson Center for Science and Justice at Duke Law.

Although NCDAC objected to several of our claims, the IGRB reviewed it carefully and has made some preliminary (and we believe significant) changes to the Procedure. Full approval of the revisions will take a while. Once the revised Procedure is finalized, we will let you know. Although it's not perfect, NC-CURE believes that this is a victory on your behalf!

Secondly, NC-CURE worked collaboratively with Disability Rights of NC, the Duke Wilson Center, NC Justice Center, Emancipate NC, Conservatives for Criminal Justice Reform and NC Department of Adult Correction to suggest legislative

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changes on the statute, **Medical Release of Inmates**. A new statute is hopefully on the way to approval. If and when the statute is final, we will announce it to our membership.

Lastly, we are leading the planning of a conference in collaboration with some other organizations. **Restoration Matters: Proven Solutions for Prison Reform**, will be held in Raleigh this fall. The OBJECTIVES of the conference are:

- 1) To motivate thought leaders and stakeholders in NC state prison oversight and management to identify proven solutions for prison reform that can be implemented in NC.
- 2) To educate participants in the strategies used in other states and countries to improve the prison environment, reduce violence, and promote dignity and well-being of the state's incarcerated people.
- 3) To illustrate the link between prison reform and correctional staff wellness, training, and input.
- 4) To identify the barriers to prison reform in NC and steps that can be taken to overcome these barriers.
- 5) To stimulate a call to action for prison reform from all stakeholders.

Speakers will include Mississippi Commissioner Burl Cain, former North Dakota Director of Prisons Leann Bertsch, leaders from One Voice United and State Employees Association of NC, and Secretary Ishee of NCDAC. Opportunity will be given for interactions with the speakers, networking and brainstorming among attendees to identify workable solutions for NC prison reform. Invited participants will include officials from the NC Department of Adult Correction, NC legislators and state government officials, community leaders and representatives of state criminal justice/prison advocacy organizations and the media.

We are still actively working to make this conference happen. It's a lot of work! We will share the outcomes from this conference in a newsletter at the end of the year. We are excited and hopeful for a very positive impact!

So, don't look for an October issue of *OTW*. We're spending countless hours advocating for systemic changes on your behalf. As we've written to many of you, it will help if you start each day with positive thoughts and a grateful heart. *By*

Sandra Hardee, PharmD, Executive Director

Encouragement from a Field Minister-in-training

What do Socrates, Romeo and Juliet, the 47 ronin, and Marilyn Monroe all share in common? They all decided to commit suicide.

Although suicide can seem tragically glamorous, people choose self-demise for diverse cultural and situational reasons. One may argue that in their fatal-quake, what's left behind is a cascading potential slew of transgenerational victims. Indeed, suicide is a traumatic event for a multitude of parties, rippling through time and affecting people beyond national and linguistic borders. A loss of meaning, a lack of purpose, a vibrant flower without rain or sun surely wanes and perishes.

Contextually, as a universally shared humanity, we prisoners have accountability, a noble cause to help one another in troubled times. When thoughts of suicide are voiced, intervene. When dismal signs show themselves, be a good neighbor. Let us nurture one another, share compassion, and defy the Hollywood-convict stereotype.

Through our kindness we find meaning. In our interconnectedness, strength emanates as we discover our virtuous purpose.

By Albert Ramos, Nash CI

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What impact does NC-CURE have on the incarcerated and their families?

NC-CURE has the greatest impact on the incarcerated because they are willing to go the extra mile when no one else will. NC-CURE is there when no one else can be, as well as when all hope is lost for the individual. The impact is great because when we need a voice to advocate, NC-CURE is there ready to help.

NC-CURE told me that they are here to help, even when Society says NO, they are there to say YES. When things get hard and hopeless, they are there to share the light to be hopeful. Prison is a place where society does not understand, and NC-CURE is advocating because they do understand. They allow us a chance to be redeemed for hope.

I am a member of NC-CURE today because they give me a voice and a chance to speak when no one else would. I am a member today to advocate for inmates that need a second chance and want better for themselves. We need more programs and assessment to allow this to happen. Positive encouragement, love and support go a long way. *By David Scott, Pender CI*

New NCCHC Position Statement on Nutrition

The National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC) adopted a new position on "Nutritional Wellness in Correctional Settings" at its January 2023 meeting.

Access to a nutritious, palatable diet is essential to personal well-being, a medical necessity, and a fundamental human right. To advance the nutritional wellness of incarcerated people, NCCHC recommends that correctional administrators:

1. Provide a healthy daily diet that is based on nationally recognized nutrition standards, based on age, gender, and activity levels.
2. Provide food that is palatable and reflects the cultural and demographic preferences of the facility's population.
3. Obtain input from incarcerated people as to menu options.
4. Provide ready access to potable, palatable drinking water.
5. Ensure that access to food or provision of types of food is not disciplinary in nature.

6. Provide education on nutritional wellness to promote health literacy during incarceration and upon return to the community.
7. Offer a variety of labeled, healthy commissary choices and provide education on healthy commissary selections.
8. Implement wellness programs that include behavioral management strategies and exercise programs for managing weight gain, access to dietitian expertise to inform programming, and education on the prevention and management of obesity.
9. Address potential food insecurity concerns as a core component of reentry planning for individuals returning to their communities.

It is said that no one truly knows a nation
until he has been inside its jails.

A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens,
but its lowest ones.

-Nelson Mandela