



NC Citizens United for Restorative Effectiveness  
 P.O. Box 5013  
 Kinston, NC 28503  
 northcarolinacure@gmail.com

NC-CURE

program (see November 2020 OTW for description), 3) those in MAPP (Mutual Agreement Parole Program) and others who can be reinstated or restored into post-release supervision. The State also agreed to a) provide vaccine incentives for people in prison, b) implement an anonymous complaint system for prisoners starting in mid-March, and c) notify emergency contacts when someone is seriously ill with COVID.

NCDPS leadership is cascading general information about the settlement to inmates via information sheets, Town Halls, and posts on the website. Staff are dedicating time to expedited review of prisoners who qualify for the above programs, and so are unable to provide specific information about an individual prisoner's status to loved ones. If an inmate qualifies for release, he/she will be informed directly.

## COVID-19 Update



## No Stimulus Payment? Here's what to do

If you did not receive the money you qualified for but did not receive for the first or second stimulus payments issued by the government, **you must act by April 15, 2021!** You must file for a Recovery Rebate Credit (RRC) on a 2020 1040 tax form.

Unfortunately the IRS did not process all of the claims they received in 2020, even those sent on time. So if you did not receive the payment, you need to file for the RRC on the tax form. Prisons have been instructed to post IRS guidance in all facilities and make 1040 forms available ON REQUEST.

*Note: Incarcerated people can qualify for RRC, and you do not need a job or earnings above a certain amount.*

# On The Wire

March, 2021 Volume 7,

### Issue 1

On February 25, NCDPS agreed to fast-track the release of 3500 prisoners over the next 6 months. This is part of the settlement of a lawsuit filed by NC NAACP, NC ACLU, and Disability Rights NC that began 11 months ago. NC-CURE participated in this lawsuit over prison conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic by filing a Friend of the Court brief as part of the appeal process. Considered a landmark settlement, it is one of the largest prison releases in the country.

Already, NC has a record-low number of people in its prisons, and with these releases the population could be as low as 25,000. It is expected that at least 1500 will be released in the next 90 days, and the rest will be released over the next 90 days. These releases do not count those who are already within 14 days of their planned release, or the over 1,000 already transitioned by ELC.

Systematic review by NCDPS of 3 groups is in process: 1) those who can be awarded discretionary sentence credits moving them to the mandatory minimum sentence sooner in 2021, 2) those qualified for the ELC (Extended Limits of Confinement)



- Prisoners again eligible for Pell

## Let us be your VOICE Write to NC-CURE at our

**new address:** P.O. Box 5013

Kinston, NC 28503

northcarolinacure@gmail.com

### NC-CURE Executive Director's Report

This is my first report to you as NC-CURE's Executive Director. I'm very excited and hopeful about the mission of NC-CURE—to advocate for the humane treatment of people in prison, and to be your voice to the outside world. I am thankful that Ms. Elizabeth Forbes continues to train me in this position, and is staying on board as Senior Advisor. I implore you to write us about what you see going on in the prisons—both good and bad—so that we can be an effective advocate for you. We want to connect with you and your loved ones. Although we can't solve all the problems, we can tackle systemic concerns and sometimes, we can address your individual issues. Our goal is to support you whenever possible.

It has been my great pleasure to continue the NC-CURE tradition of collaborating with state agencies and other advocacy groups. I am overwhelmed that so many people have come forward to work for the mission—to do “anything I can do to help.” The 2021 Board of Directors is made up of twelve volunteers who come from all over the state and have a variety of professional backgrounds and experience. Each has a passion for protecting your rights. We will all work together to carry out this calling and make a difference.

We know that COVID-19 is causing great distress right now among inmates and staff. We and many other organizations are advocating for the incarcerated who are a special population experiencing the rampages of this virus. According to the CDC, stopping a pandemic requires using all the tools we have available. Wearing masks and social distancing help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others, but these measures are not enough. Vaccines will work with your immune system so it will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. All COVID-19 vaccines currently available in the United States have been shown to be highly effective at preventing COVID-19. Experts believe that getting a COVID-19 vaccine may also help keep you from getting seriously ill even if you do get COVID-19. So, we encourage you to get the vaccine.

Note that we have a new email address, northcaroli

*(Continued on page 3)*

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#### Special points of interest

- What to do if you didn't receive stimulus payment
- New NC-CURE mailing address
- Second Chance Act went into effect December 1, 2020

nacure@gmail.com and a new mailing address: P.O. Box 5013, respond to as many as we can.  
Kinston, NC 28503. The mailing address has been changed to  
my region so that I can more readily access our mail.

*By Dr. Sandra Hardee, Executive Director*

Thanks for your letters and emails. We read each one, and

*“I knew that I needed to make a decision on which way I wanted to go to in life.”*

## In the Spotlight: Inmates to Entrepreneurs

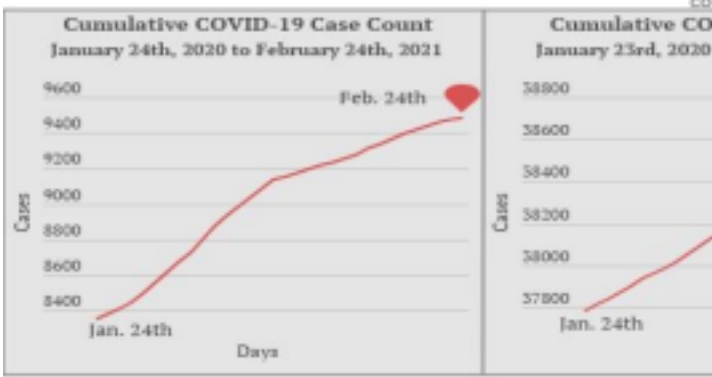
As a boy, Brandon Lowery was skipping school and hanging out with the wrong crowd. By the time Lowery was 19, he had been sentenced to 5+ years in prison. “It was the lowest point in my life. I knew I had hit rock bottom. I also knew that I needed to make a decision on which way I wanted to go to in life,” Lowery explained.

It was the wake up call Lowery needed to better himself – starting by making changes in prison. With help from a mentor, Lowery took advantage of free prison classes and eventually obtained his GED and 36 college credits. “When I got my GED, I felt I could accomplish things. I got confidence for the first time. I used to think I wasn’t worthy enough to have the things that others had, so I didn’t try.” Upon his release in 2012, Lowery was doing millwork but wanted to start his own landscaping business. “I made flyers at the library and started passing them out. I put flyers out in the neighborhood and word of mouth spread,” Lowery commented. “I wanted to have more control in my life, and I wanted to work for myself.”

In 2013, after hearing about Inmates to Entrepreneurs, he came to an event. Inmates to Entrepreneurs, founded 28 years ago by entrepreneur Brian Hamilton, is a NC based non-profit that helps those with criminal backgrounds start, run, and grow businesses. Lowery became an instructor with the organization to give back. “I wanted to teach others that you can be successful after prison. I wanted to share my steps for success. I now have businesses making money and providing for my family the legal way. People just don’t know they can do it. Once I saw that I could start one business, I wanted to start another one. I get an idea and then I do it.” In 2015, Lowery started a mobile detailing business and shortly after decided to make his own clothing. “I now make clothes for myself, my family and even my employees. I keep my money in-house as much as I can. I also like to do all the design work for my own business cards, logos, flyers, and websites myself.”

Lowery continues to inspire others to start businesses through Inmates to Entrepreneurs and is now on the board. “Find some thing that you are good at that you can charge for. Surround yourself with people you want to be like.” *Inmates to Entrepreneurs’ free course, Starter U, is available online and on Edovo tablets in prisons throughout the country. For more info. about Inmates to Entrepreneurs: [www.inmatestoentrepreneurs.org](http://www.inmatestoentrepreneurs.org) [info@inmatestoentrepreneurs.org](mailto:info@inmatestoentrepreneurs.org)*

# COVID-19 Prison Fa North Caroli



How do COVID-19 statistics among prison residents compare to the general population?

Case Rate



290.04

Prison Residents



81.01

General Population

Rates per 1,000

5.00%

The reduction in prison population from Dec 31, 2019 to May 1, 2020.

Prepared by the COVID Prison Project  
<http://covidprisonproject.com>

@covidprison

## Prison Rape Elimination Act

NCDPS has zero-tolerance for behavior by anyone incarcerated or staff or volunteers that is unduly familiar or sexually abusive. Sexual acts between a prisoner and departmental staff, correctional agents, agency vendors or volunteers violate The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) of 2003, and is punishable as a Class E felony.

If you experience pressure from or have been sexually abused by another prisoner, DPS employee, community work site supervisor, treatment provider or agent, please report this abuse immediately. Reports may be made (but is not limited) to the following:

- ◇ Prison facility or judicial district office
- ◇ Officer-in-charge or probation officer
- ◇ Facility or division administrator ◇ Correction employee
- ◇ Division director's office
- ◇ Dept. of Public Safety Communications Office 1-800-368-1985
- ◇ PREA Administration office (919) 825-2754 or [prea@ncdps.gov](mailto:prea@ncdps.gov)

NCDPS also has a zero-tolerance policy for retaliation towards someone incarcerated or an employee who reports offender sexual abuse. Reports of retaliation should be submitted to DPS PREA Office at 214 W. Jones St., Raleigh 27610.

Write NC-CURE for brochure on "Sexual Abuse Awareness for the Offender", or if your reports of sexual abuse or undue familiarity are not accepted.

Speak up: Report sexual abuse in the prisons!



## RESOURCES



**Inmates to Entrepreneurs Program Brian Hamilton Foundation**  
**Hamiltonfoundation.org**  
**Contact: info@brianhamilton.org**

Free on-line courses, NC founder "The extreme difficulty for those with

**Just for laughs.....**

An elderly woman just returned home from her Bible study when she realized there was an intruder in her house.

## Stimulus Payments (continued)

(Continued from page 1)

If the IRS sent you a debit card for the second stimulus payment, you can mail it home for a loved one to process funds back through JPAY, or send it back to IRS and file for an RRC.

For the first stimulus payment, the IRS was allowed to take out child support, and prisons were allowed to take out restitution or other debts. The second stimulus payment generally should not have had child support, restitution, or other debts taken out.

The IRS generally has not given permission for loved ones on the outside to file a tax return for an incarcerated person. You can contact the IRS or a tax professional for information specific to you and for questions about power of attorney.

If you have questions you can contact the IRS at 1-800-919-9835 (general information about RRC) or 1-800-829-1040 (taxpayer helpline).

Root & Rebound Reentry Advocates has created a FACT SHEET. NC-CURE will send this sheet to you upon request.

Seeing that he was in the act of robbing her, the lady yelled loudly “Stop! Acts 2:38!” Hearing this, the robber froze and stood dead in his tracks.

The woman calmly called the police and explained what was going on. They responded at once.

As the officer was cuffing the burglar, he asked “Why did you just stand there and not escape? All the lady did was yell a Bible verse at you.”

“Bible verse!!” said the burglar. “She said that she had an axe and

## Thoughts from a New Board

### Member

a criminal background to find employment is expected to persist. We want to resolve this issue by helping people start, run, and grow their own business.”

**Prison Fellowship**  
**44180 Riverside Parkway**  
**Lansdowne, VA 20176**  
**www.prisonfellowship.org**

Christian organization founded by Chuck Colson. Online and email resources for friends and families of men and women in prison.

**Victorious Living Correspondence Outreach**  
**P.O. Box 328**  
**Starke, FL 32091**

KJO Ministries provides letters of encouragement, quarterly Bible teachings, and a personal subscription to *Victorious Living* magazine to every inmate who writes to them.

#### DISCLAIMER

*NC-CURE (Citizens United for Restorative Effectiveness) does not endorse or promote any third party information via internet sites or publications. We assume no responsibility for the reader's interpretation, its intent or application of any information originating from such content provided in this publication. The information we provide for the reader is intended to be informative and/or educational.*

This last year has seen unbelievable realities resulting in a present day that no one could have imagined. There is no joy or accomplishment in pointing out all the issues that my opinion would identify as problematic so I will not bore you with that. I will instead take the path of future optimism and express my profound adoration at the opportunity to be a part of this change agent, called NC CURE. We have witnessed the effects of poor communication and no communication; the results of voices falling on deaf ears and the consequences of words spoken in lieu of action. While NC-CURE continues to commit itself to change where change is needed and demand for fairness and integrity where they are expected, it is not an easy undertaking.

The organization has been an inspiration over the years to the incarcerated, to the conscientious public and to families of justice-involved people in NC. As someone who has spent most of my adult life in public service working in the Adult Prison setting, I have firsthand knowledge that people's station in life does not determine their value or worth. Like a watchman, standing, watching, and listening to those within the prison system, I have seen the positive impact of advocacy groups like NC CURE. These groups, including and especially NC-CURE, have led the way for improved conditions for the inmate population and by way of community, better conditions and situations for the staff and vol

unteers that are also present within the prison setting. Consequently, being humane usually requires integrity without putting yourself first. Not easily accomplished and rarely the sole mission of most everyday people. Luckily, our organization has and continues to work hard in accomplishing this mission and I feel incredibly grateful to be a part.

Gratitude is much more easily felt than it is earned. I find it challenging and daunting to spend some of the second chapter of my life being a part of an organization and a movement dedicated to change. Although I will not judge others as my own faith allows no one to judge me, I will continue to fight for what seems right. I will forever be appreciative for the lessons learned in my life, taught by people from all walks of it. These lessons have fueled my life's mission to educate those who do not understand or accept that the Criminal Justice system is made of real people. People who are the family, who are personnel, who are the victims and who are justice-involved themselves. All these people deserve our commitment to integrity. As I see it, change is needed everywhere if we are to emerge into a better tomorrow. In the end, haven't we run out of people to blame for what could or should be? I choose to say yes, we have, and I choose to join NC CURE in the fight for a better way! Please join me!

*By Bianca N. Harris, Program Director, Master of Art Degree in Criminal Justice, Meredith College*

## Update on Second Chance Act

Major provisions of the transformative Second Chance Act, which breaks down barriers to jobs, housing, and more for those with criminal records, went into effect December 1,



2020. Nearly 1 in 4 North Carolinians has a criminal record; this landmark piece of bipartisan legislation will allow hundreds of thousands of people with criminal records to have their records expunged, thereby granting them access to opportunities they were previously denied.

Hundreds of thousands of people will become eligible for expunction under the new law, including those with multiple misdemeanor convictions from seven or more years ago. Those with a felony conviction can now petition to expunge dismissed or 'not guilty' charges, and district attorneys can petition for expunction of dismissed and 'not guilty' charges on behalf of a person.

On December 1, 2021, dismissed and not guilty charges will be expunged through an automated process. A provision that allows for the expunction of certain juvenile convictions obtained before December 1, 2019, is already in effect.

From [www.secondchancealliance.org](http://www.secondchancealliance.org), accessed 12/1/2020

*Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*

## Introducing new director of NCPLS

I found my passion for prisoner rights when my brother was incarcerated for a federal drug crime. I felt helpless as I received the brush off time and again from my brother's appointed attorney. She advised my brother to plead at their first meeting and told me at one point that I had "no idea what I was talking about" when I asked for more information about her advice. I vowed then, and vow to you to always uplift the voices of those facing the overwhelming power imbalance in our criminal justice system.

As of September 2020 I am the new Executive Director of Prisoner Legal Services (PLS). I am thrilled to be serving in this position and want to share my vision for the organization with you. In 2021 we will build stronger relationships with our clients and their families through increased presence in the communities we serve. Despite coming to the organization during a global pandemic, I have seen my vision take shape as we strive to build relationships with community partners such as NC CURE.

NCPLS is a state-wide nonprofit law firm dedicated to ensuring incarcerated individuals have meaningful access to the courts. PLS is staffed by a dedicated team of 19 attorneys and 15 support staff. This team serves the entire incarcerated population in North Carolina (28,647 individuals). Our office consists of two teams: the Post-Conviction Team and the Civil Team. The Post-Conviction Team reviews trial and appellate level cases for errors. We then take any errors found to the trial district attorneys for resolution through negotiation or litigation. The Civil

Other organizations advocating for the incarcerated include:

The **NC Second Chance Alliance** is a

statewide alliance of people with criminal records, their family members, service providers, congregations, community leaders and concerned citizens that have come to

Team addresses conditions of confinement. These include asaults, medical treatment, religious access, and failure to protect. We provide self-help assistance, direct representation, and class action litigation for our civil clients.

Our intake system runs on letters from our incarcerated clients. If your loved one has a case to be reviewed or an issue of confinement to address, please write to us at NCPLS, PO Box 25397, Raleigh, NC 27611. The issue will then be directed to the appropriate team and will receive a response from our staff.

We are privileged to be able to serve our clients and their families, and I thank you for this opportunity. Please reach out to me via email if you have ideas on how we can better serve your families and your incarcerated loved ones at [bthomas@ncpls.org](mailto:bthomas@ncpls.org).

*By Beth Thomas, Executive Director of NCPLS*

### Other Advocates

## Cooper pardoned five wrongly convicted men

gether to address the causes of criminal records and the barriers they create to successful reentry.

The **Sentencing Project** works for a fair and effective U.S. criminal justice system by producing groundbreaking research to promote reforms in sentencing policy, address unjust racial disparities and practices, and to advocate for alternatives to incarceration.

The **Vera Institute of Justice** works to drive change, and to urgently build and improve justice systems that ensure fairness, promote safety, and strengthen communities.

**Emancipate NC** was founded on the knowledge that mass incarceration On December 17, 2020, Governor Roy Cooper issued pardons to five men who spent years in prison for crimes they didn't commit. "We must continue to work to reform our justice system and acknowledge when people have been wrongly

and structural racism harm all of us. They are dedicated to shifting the narrative on racialized mass incarceration through community education and mobilization.

**Prison Policy Initiative** is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that produces cutting edge research to expose the broader harm of mass criminalization, and then sparks advocacy campaigns to create a more just society.

The **Innocence Project** exonerates the wrongly convicted through DNA testing and reforms the criminal justice system to prevent future injustice.

## In-Person Kairos Reunions being held in Florida

One prison in Florida is allowing Kairos to have two Kairos

convicted," Cooper said in a statement. "I have carefully reviewed the facts in each of these cases, and while I cannot give these men back the time they served, I am granting them Par dons of Innocence in the hope that they might be better able to move forward in their lives."

Ronnie Wallace Long was convicted in Cabarrus County in 1976 of rape and burglary and was sentenced to life in prison. But the 4<sup>th</sup> US Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in August that prosecutors withheld evidence in the trial, and a federal judge then vacated his conviction, releasing him from prison.

Teddy Lamon Isbell Sr. pleaded guilty in 2003 to conspiracy to commit robbery in Buncombe County and was sentenced to 66 to 89 months in prison. He was still behind bars in 2015 when a judge ruled that he had shown he was actually innocent of the crime and ordered him released.

Kenneth Manzi Kagonyera pleaded guilty to a second-degree murder in Buncombe County in 2001 and was sentenced to 12 to 15 years in prison. Following a hearing by a NC Innocence Inquiry Commission, a three judge panel ruled in 2011 that Kagonyera had proved that he was innocent of the crime.

Damien Miguel Mills pleaded guilty in 2001 in Buncombe County to second-degree murder, attempted robbery and conspiracy to commit robbery and was sentenced to 10 to 13 years in prison. A judge ruled in 2015 that he had shown he was actually innocent of the crime and order him released.

Larry Jerome Williams Jr. was 16 in 2002 when he pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in Buncombe County and was sentenced to 8 ½ to 11 years in prison. A judge ruled in 2015 that he had shown he was actually innocent of the crime and ordered him released.

*From WRAL News, December 17, 2020*

inside the prison! The prison administration realizes the importance of Kairos and wants to ensure volunteers stay connected with our Kairos Graduates and ensure they are staying on God's path. Let us praise God for this wonderful blessing and pray that other facilities allow Kairos Volunteers through their doors soon.

## Prisoners again eligible for Pell Grants

At the end of 2020, Congress voted, with bipartisan consensus, to lift the 26 year-old ban on Pell Grants for people in prison. This means that incarcerated people will once again be able to access federal Pell Grants to pay for college courses. It is part of a sweeping package of higher education policies attached to the pandemic relief bill that Congress passed, and President Trump signed.

Studies have shown that incarcerated felons enrolled in education programs enjoy better employment prospects and higher wages upon release. They are also 43% less likely to return to prison within 3 years than those who do not take classes. Federal Aid for Financial Student Aid (FAFSA) forms are available on the US education website.

### Your letters are important to us!

Please let us know about problems you're facing and what resources you need. Although we can't respond to each one, we read EVERY letter. We do not have legal or medical exper



tise, but we will recommend re sources, and intervene when we can.  
 \*Try to be concise, limiting your letters to 2 pages.  
 \*Don't send documents that you need to be returned please.  
 \*Feel free to connect your friends and loved ones with us by sharing our email address,  
 northcarolinacure@gmail.com

## *Join today and let NC-CURE be your VOICE for CHANGE*

NC-CURE is membership driven and operated by volunteer staff. Annual membership dues help to offset the high cost of printing and postage for our publication *On The Wire* (OTW). The newsletter provides news and resources members need to better understand the criminal justice system. If you would like to 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.

### **2021 Membership Application**

Name (Inmate and OPUS #/Family Member/Supporter/Organization)		Date
Mailing Address		
City	State Zip	Telephone
Family Member relationship to Inmate/OPUS #		Email Address
<input type="checkbox"/> Inmate (\$3.00) Indigent inmates may send stamps for membership providing they are not violating prison policy. Otherwise membership dues are waived.	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual (\$25.00) <input type="checkbox"/> Family & Inmate (\$30.00) <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Supporter (\$50.00) <input type="checkbox"/> Organization (\$100.00)	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 northcarolinacure@gmail.com



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 for Restorative Effectiveness  
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 P.O. Box 5013  
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Email: [northcarolinacure@gmail.com](mailto:northcarolinacure@gmail.com)  
[www.nccure.org](http://www.nccure.org) (under construction)



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*"The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons." Fyodor Dostoyevsky*

## WHO WE ARE WHAT WE DO

NC-CURE is a grassroots 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that advocates for the humane treatment of people in prisons in North Carolina. Its members are people incarcerated, their families and friends, and others interested in speaking up for those behind bars who have no voice. We need to better understand the North Carolina prison system.

Educate members and the general public by providing the resources they need to better understand the North Carolina prison system. Educate the general public about the need for adequate medical care and nutrition.

Call attention to prison practices that deny people in prison dignity and respect as human beings and

Proactively advocate for change in NC prison policies to protect the human rights of prisoners.

Advocate for safe and humane conditions of confinement. Provide hope and encouragement to people in prison and their loved ones.

Collaborate with criminal justice reform agencies to promote the fair treatment of people incarcerated.