

# MUTUAL AID MONTHLY

*In loving memory of Comrades KT and Gary*

December 2024

## A Note on Abolition

*Neither prison nor capitalism can be reformed*

Subcomandante Jade

Prison abolition (as opposed to prison reform) demands an end to incarceration. It entails an overhaul of how we understand justice, approach conflict-resolution, and address harm. Reform, often uplifted as a re-direction from punishment-centered approaches to rehabilitation and correction, fails to address the carceral state at its roots. At best, reforms offer relief from day to day annoyances. At worst, reforms further enforce state power, expand police capacity to surveil via new technology, and even exacerbate mental health issues of those who are incarcerated under the guise of “rehabilitation” (for more on this point, see the other two pieces in this newsletter).

Mass incarceration is the result of the capitalist state’s need to control “surplus populations”: segments of the working class (disproportionately people of color) who are unemployed or unemployable and who may act in desperation or sell black-market items to make ends meet. This is done by deeming their actions “illegal,” confining them out of sight, stripping them of agency to move and access resources as they please, and creating great profits by forcing them to work for little to no wages. As it turns out, the “criminal” most in need of correction is the capitalist state itself. Capitalism, with its incessant greed for profit and complete disregard for human survival, is the monster which creates the conditions that lead people to desperate measures in the first place.

Disposing of people by locking them in cages can no longer be tolerated. Abolitionists demand a better world where issues are addressed at their roots, not funneled through a bureaucratic system where access to enough money can reduce the severity of punishment. As abolitionists, we must promote actions that encourage understanding, healing, and growth; objectives which prisons will never be able to meet.



## “Long-Term Restrictive Housing”: When Does It End?

*Program does not achieve any goals; amounts to torture*

Comrade Anonymous

*This piece is written by an incarcerated individual regarding the Long Term Restrictive Housing Program at the Iowa State Penitentiary. The program is forced upon individuals deemed to have behavioral issues by prison staff and involves long-term solitary confinement. It is designed to last three years, but many people remain indefinitely:*

Des Moines (Iowa DoC headquarters) is approving this program to go on and I know of five people who have come back, been restarted, or set back within the last 6 months alone. More people are going into the program. There are not any one-on-one’s with the counselors, there are no support groups, and their excuse is that there isn’t enough staff. This is not acceptable. People have been to SSIP (suicide and mental health watch) multiple times, mentally deteriorating and breaking, and as long as people are taking up the bed space, they (at the top) get paid, so it doesn’t matter.

The state of this prison is very bad and the community needs to know, especially those who have loved ones being painted as problematic. People have been in this program for over 8 years, and if this is a program to help, isn’t it hard to believe everyone is failing? At what point do you say we are being failed? I am moving through the months with no reports, but I am mentally drained because when I speak I’m being told I’m correct, “but....” There is no “but” in the “justice” system, is there? When do you rise up? If standing for justice puts my health at risk, at least the truth will be heard because there are way too many who are afraid of retaliation with the price of oppression. As Les Brown says, “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.”

# Reform and Rehabilitate?

*Give me a break already*

Comrade Anonymous

Why do prisons get a light shed on the injustices when a prisoner dies? People send letters to their people every day, they call home, file grievances, and speak up daily, but nothing is done until someone dies.

This should be a reality to the taxpayers who fund these institutions, who have so much faith in the system and who are being lied to just to be blindsided. Prison reform is a cliché, not a reality. Rehabilitation is a loosely used word that's really loaded and really saying, "Give us money to misuse while you think we actually care about these pawns, these 'criminals.'" A crime is only a crime once it's noticed. Until then, it's only some act being done. No one becomes a criminal until they are caught for the act they've been committing all along. I say this to say just because something is being done in the dark doesn't mean there isn't a problem. It only means the problem is being done by the one who has more influence on the masses.

How can justice be served by injustice? You can't say "That's how prison is," then say, "It's here to help." What's right is right, what's wrong is wrong, no matter who says or does it. Don't let death be the reason the community stands for those who are being mistreated in the hands of a crooked system.



This flyer is a production of Des Moines Mutual Aid, which is a local network of anarchists, communists, and socialists building community autonomy from capitalism and the state. Below are our points of unity - basically, the political and social outlook which binds us together.

**o. We believe in working shoulder to shoulder and standing in solidarity with all oppressed communities.** We ourselves are oppressed, and our mutual aid work is a fight for our collective liberation. We do not believe in a top-down model of charity. Instead, we contrast our efforts at horizontal mutual aid, the fostering of mutually beneficial relationships and communities, to dehumanizing and colonizing charity.

**1. We believe in community autonomy.** We believe that the communities we live and organize in have been largely excluded from state social services, but intensely surveilled and policed by the state repressive apparatus. Capitalism is fundamentally unable to meet people's needs. We want to build self-sustaining communities that are independent of the capitalist state, both materially and ideologically, and can resist its repression.

**2. We are police and prison abolitionists.** Abolition and the mutual aid that we practice are inextricably linked. We don't rely on capitalist institutions or the police to do our work. We believe in building strong and resilient communities which make police obsolete, including community systems of accountability and crisis intervention.

**3. We work to raise the political consciousness of our communities.** Part of political education is connecting people's lived experiences to a broader political perspective. Another component is working to ensure that people can meet their basic needs. It is difficult to organize for future liberation when someone is entrenched in day-to-day struggle.

**4. We have open disagreements with each other about ideas and practices.** We believe there is no formula for resolving our ideological differences other than working towards our common aims, engaging with each other in a comradely manner, and respecting one another, whether or not we can hash out disagreements in the process.

If you want to get involved, let a volunteer know. For more information, including how to donate, visit <https://iowamutualaid.org/>.