

Michigan Lifers Association, Inc.

MICHIGAN

Lifers Report

Newsletter

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2024

COMMUTATIONS OF LWOP SENTENCES

HOW TIME HAS CHANGED THE COURSE OF ACTION

Willis X. Harris

In 1995 at age 20, I had served nearly three years of a mandatory life sentence without the possibility of parole (Death-By-Incarceration) when I filed my first and only application with the Michigan Parole Board for commutation of sentence. I was housed at Marquette Branch Prison in Marquette, Michigan. Shortly thereafter, I was interviewed by Dr. Donald R. Thurston, who was the Lifers Examiner, who thoroughly reviewed my application and agreed that he could find no evidence to support a conviction of first-degree murder. He told me to expect to serve at least 20 years, but my file will be reviewed after the serve of 10 years and every three years thereafter.

Prior to the conclusion of my two-hour interview, Dr. Thurston suggested that I try to stay disciplinary free and to involve myself in available programming. During that period of time, there were numerous programs available for lifers and non-lifers, ranging from academic, therapeutic, vocational, recreational, first-aid, civil defense, Dale Carnegie and Harvey Stubenvol courses in leadership training, public speaking, Upjohn Medical Research, and volunteer therapeutic/psychological counseling headed by Judd Gildersleeve and Dr. Fred Pesetsky.

Shortly thereafter in the 1960s, college programs were offered to all prisoners who were high-school/GED graduates. I availed myself with as many programs as possible from ... (Cont. on p. 3)

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MICHIGAN LIFERS REPORT
NEWSLETTER

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INCARCERATED PROFESSOR TEACHES
COLLEGE CLASSES IN PRISON

By Jason Gonzales and Charlotte West
January 4, 2024

CAON CITY, COLORADO On a late-November afternoon, at the head of a cramped classroom, David Carrillo stood at a small podium and quizzed 17 students on macroeconomic terminology.

For the two-hour class, Carrillo, the adjunct professor teaching for Adams State University, mostly kept his hands in his pockets as he lectured students in green uniforms, some bright and others faded with time. His lecture came rapid-fire, allowing just enough time for students to answer questions or let them ask a question of him. One of the lessons on that day: banking.

Like his students at the Colorado Territorial Correctional Facility, Carrillo, 49, also wears green. He holds a position that is extremely rare in prison: He's an incarcerated professor teaching in a prison bachelor's degree program.

A new initiative at Adams State, one of the first of its kind in the country, focuses on employing incarcerated people with graduate degrees as college professors, rather than bringing in instructors from the outside. The program offered through the Alamosa-based university gives incarcerated graduates experience and training while helping to alleviate the staff shortages that can hinder prison education programs.

Carrillo knows firsthand the power of education, he was never supposed to get out of prison. But in December, Colorado Gov. Jared Polis granted Carrillo clemency for his role in a 1993 murder. Carrillo will walk free later this month after 29 years thanks in large part to his work to educate himself and find a productive way to do his time.

Carrillo, whose new prison nickname is Professor, wants his students to have the same opportunities that will help them restart their lives.

"To be able to help these guys realize that they are capable of doing so much more, that's a reward right there," said Carrillo, who earned his MBA from Adams State in 2021.

An idea almost unheard of in prison, The Adams State program began with an unusual proposal from Leigh Burrows, associate director of prison programs for the Colorado Department of Corrections. In 2022, she approached the university and asked: Would they be willing to hire an incarcerated professor to teach in their business bachelors program at Colorado Territorial?

Adams State staff jumped at the opportunity, on the condition that the instructor be paid the same as adjunct professors teaching on its main Alamosa ... (Cont. on p. 8)

SUPPORT

SECOND LOOK SENTENCING

ENDING JLWOP

GOOD TIME

END

MASS INCARCERATION
IN MICHIGAN

(Commutations of LWOP Sentences, from p. 1) ... 1959 to 1979 -- a 20-year period of studying and concentrating on the literature in those courses of study.

In 1978, I received a Certified Letter from the Parole Board letting me know that a Public Hearing has been scheduled for me with the date, time, and place. Keep in mind that I had been transferred to Jackson prison.

My central file (Lansing) revealed that I had taken and completed multiple courses, earned three associate degrees and a bachelor degree, had excellent work and block reports, and had multiple frivolous disciplinary misconducts.

At my Public Hearing, many correctional officials were present. Also present was the elderly granddaughter whose grandmother I was accused of killing. The chairperson at the Public Hearing asked a very important question: "Mr. Harris, will you explain to us the circumstances surrounding your conviction? What did you do?" That question alone will trap a liar or see if you are truthful. I gladly responded. I said: "I haven't done anything. I don't know anything else to say. I don't know who the woman was. I met her granddaughter coming to this hearing and helped her up the stairs."

No one said anything against me, but all invited persons spoke on my behalf. The Assistant Attorney General at the hearing asked three Caucasian female MSU students (not knowing they and I were correspondents over my articles in the prison newspaper called the Spectator): "Would you have a convicted murderer living next door to you?" The girls smiled and said: "Willie wouldn't have to live next door to us, he can live with us." Everyone laughed and clapped. The granddaughter of the victim said "I don't believe that boy killed my grandmother. Let that boy go."

Today's Parole Board is different. They do not answer questions. Their views seem to be both personal, political, and prejudicial. Do they consider facts that favor the lifer, or do they accept opinions of police officers and witnesses who were friends (not crime witnesses) of the victim.

The influence of former Governor John Engler still impacts our current Parole Board. He did all he could to punish lifers and prisoners in general. He had his legislative friends change the lifer review law from two or three years to every five years, having the affect of prolonging imprisonment.

Today, no one really knows what this Parole Board is doing. When writing to the parole Board, you will never get answers to your questions, only a pre-written, carefully worded response that ignores your specific questions.

The state legislature is the only government body that can change the law. Take commutation, pardon, and reprieve authority away from the governor and give it to the Parole Board.

The question now is: Will they do it?

COLLEGE IN PRISON For Some But Not All

Dwight Henley, MBA

After the RAND research report showed recidivism significantly dropped as prisoner educational levels increased, President Obama issued an executive order to provide funding for further research. Years later PELL Grants were re-instituted for prisoners, and now colleges all across America are rushing to provide prisoners degree programs. Yet not all correctional officials embrace this change.

Oakland University recently attempted to bring a degree program to Macomb Correctional Facility in Lenox Township, Michigan. Instead of embracing the college opportunity, a few Macomb staff showed resistance and spoke negatively about providing college at the prison. In response, Oakland University got cold feet ... (Cont. on p. 10)

TO: PAROLE BOARD, STATE OF MICHIGAN

FROM: SHARON TEVIS FINCH, SENTENCING JUDGE
CIRCUIT JUDGE, THIRD CIRCUIT COURT, MICHIGAN (RETIRED)
1300 Broadway, Suite 800
Detroit, MI 48226
313-204-2154
sfin2000@aol.com

RE: JAMIE L. MEADE, #A232516
APPLICATION FOR PARDON OR COMMUTATION OF SENTENCE

DATE: 8/7/2022

TO THE PAROLE BOARD:

I am writing in support of the Application for Pardon or Commutation of Sentence of Jamie L. Meade, #A232516. I was the Trial and Sentencing Judge on his case in 1993 in the Wayne County Circuit Court, 3rd Judicial Circuit. I retired from the bench in 2000. I have never forgotten this case because the outcome troubled me. The law was served, but fundamental fairness was not. Mr. Meade went to prison when he was 19 years old. He is now 48 years old. He has been in prison for 29 years.

This is the only time I have ever written to the Parole Board on behalf of an inmate. Mr. Meade's case was very unusual, and in my opinion, the sentence, though mandatory, was unjust. I had no choice in sentence under the law for the crime of Felony Murder. Felony Murder is a crime which occurs when someone is participating in a felony and another person dies, whether or not the defendant does the killing himself. In this case, Mr. Meade did not do the killing.)

Mr. Meade was young, and acted stupidly and impulsively. A young man was fatally shot and a young woman injured. Mr. Meade was NOT the "triggerman". The shooter, who testified that he shot accidentally first (the killing) and a second time in fear (the injury,) was convicted of a lesser offense and was sentenced to only 12 years in prison, though it was he who actually did the killing. Mr. Meade was convicted of Felony Murder (which I believe was a just conviction under the law though not in equity) and sentenced to life without parole. (As I recall, if he had any prior offenses, they were minor juvenile matters.)

I have been told that Mr. Meade's file (which I have not seen and am not entitled to see) may have an error in it, and may indicate in some document(s) that HE actually shot the gun and killed the victim. He did not. The "triggerman" was someone else, who has been out of prison for almost 17 years. If that error does exist in the file, it should be corrected, since it may be influencing your decision. PLEASE CHECK THIS OUT BEFORE YOU DECIDE THIS APPLICATION.

Since his conviction, Mr. Meade has achieved educational and in-house community service accomplishments beyond that of any inmate I have ever seen in my 25 years on the bench. He lists all this in his Application. He obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies with Concentrations in Criminal Justice and Legal Studies. He is currently pursuing a Master of Divinity in an online program from the Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS) through a unique collaboration between MDOC and CTS. His goals are to mentor troubled youth as an ordained minister, complete law school, earn a Ph.D., and teach criminology at the university level. Certainly few would understand these social challenges more.

In the last two years, he was admitted to divinity school on a scholarship and is studying long-distance to be a minister. In the midst of this COVID time, he maintains a B average, which I find impressive under his circumstances. Covid has prevented him from seeing his mother for over 2

years. She is getting older and this is a great hardship to them both.

He is remorseful, has taken responsibility and apologized to the living victim and the family of the deceased victim. He has had no misconducts for many years in prison. He has become an educated adult. He has never had a wife, a child, a home of his own. He worries about his mother, who is getting older, and wants to be able to support her so she doesn't have to work.

It is ironic that, considering the direction Mr. Meade was heading at age 19 when this crime was committed, he probably would never have achieved this level of education, focus, and aspiration in later life absent the crime and sentence. But life is like that. Things happen, and things --and people -- change. I think the time has come to change the sentence, though a judge would have no power to do so. Only you can perform this miracle for him.

At this point, he has served 29 years in prison. I believe that is more than sufficient for this crime, and I ask that his Application be granted. If I were sentencing today, had discretion, and was not bound by the mandatory sentence, I probably would have sentenced him to no more than his co-defendant, who was convicted of the lesser offense, and Mr. Meade would have walked out of prison 17 years ago. I was bound by the felony murder law. The Parole Board and the Governor, however, are not so bound, and you can right this injustice by recommending commutation.

Thank you for your consideration. I hope that you, the Parole Board and Governor, can see your way toward giving this now 48 year old man the second chance which he so richly deserves.

HE HAS PAID HIS DEBT TO SOCIETY. HE IS A CHANGED PERSON. HE CAN DO GOOD IN THE WORLD. I believe he should be given a chance to live a responsible adult life "on the outside." I hope you agree.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,


SHARON TEVIS FINCH P13420
CIRCUIT JUDGE, THIRD CIRCUIT COURT OF MICHIGAN (RETIRED)

SENTENCING JUDGE'S LETTER SUPPORTING RELEASE IGNORED BY GOVERNOR, PAROLE BOARD, AND CRIMINAL LEGAL REFORM ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

As the editor of the Michigan Lifers Report Newsletter, I was hesitant in publishing this letter from my trial and sentencing judge. Willis X. Harris encouraged me to include it in the January/February 2024 issue because of the recent turn of events of me resigning as the National Lifers of America National Board vice-chair. Willis was unaware of this letter's existence and only recently had the opportunity to read it. Willis was astonished the Governor, Parole Board, and advocacy organizations have ignored such a letter. "I've never seen a judge who sentenced someone to life without the possibility of parole write a letter stating their sentence was fundamentally unfair," said Willis. "This is concerning no Michigan advocacy organizations have pushed for your release," Willis further added.

WHEN EDUCATION BECOMES THE METRIC FOR CLEMENCY, SOME PEOPLE GET LEFT BEHIND

Not Everyone Has The Same Access To Educational Opportunities Inside

Charlotte West, January 10, 2024

The subject of my latest story, David Carrillo, an incarcerated professor who's teaching incarcerated students at Adams State University in Colorado, was granted clemency at the end of December. It was an exciting moment: Right before signing off for the holidays, I got a text from the director of Adams State's prison education program: DAVID GOT CLEMENCY!!!

I wanted to take a moment to talk about the role that education plays in clemency decisions. In the case of Carrillo, who was serving a sentence of life without the possibility of parole for a 1993 murder he participated in as a 19-year-old, educational and professional accomplishments played a role. Serving a LWOP sentence meant that clemency from Gov. Polis was the only way that Carrillo would ever get out of prison.

I've previously written about Johnny Dell Pippins fight for clemency in Illinois. Pippins waited for more than two years, through the pandemic and an election year, for Gov. J.B. Pritzker to commute his nearly 30-year sentence in order to start a PhD at the University of Iowa. Illinois is one of 16 states that abolished parole over the last several decades in favor of determinate sentencing, meaning that there are few options to get out of prison early except through executive action.

Clemency includes both pardons, which forgives a crime, and commutations, which reduces someone's sentence. Education can play a big role in both clemency and parole decisions, but there are some inherent issues of equity and access. Many people with long sentences are often excluded from most or all educational opportunities, while others are incarcerated at facilities that offer little in the way of programming. Those who are able to do things like earn graduate degrees, like Carrillo and Pippins, often have support from family to help pay for those programs, which in turn give them a leg-up in the clemency or parole review process.

I talked to Jennifer Soble, an attorney and executive director of the Illinois Prison Project, a nonprofit focused on getting people out of prison, about this when I first covered Pippins case two years ago. There are hundreds of thousands of people who are currently incarcerated, who are just as deserving of meaningful review, and who have poured their hearts and souls into their own personal growth and development, Soble told me at the time.

Pippins, who got out last May after receiving clemency from Pritzker in time to start his doctorate in criminology last fall, was also concerned about this issue. On a phone call from prison, before he got news of his own commutation, he said was concerned that if being accepted into a PhD from prison became the bar to get clemency, a lot of worthy people will be left behind.

But sometimes even being the first to do something unheard of behind bars isn't enough. Clemency decisions are ultimately at the discretion of governors and presidents. Republican Kim Reynolds, Iowa's first woman governor, has not issued a single commutation since she took office in 2017. She has systematically rejected clemency applications from lifers, despite favorable recommendations from the state's parole board. As of 2020, Iowa had around 1,500 people serving life or virtual life sentences (around 18% of the state's entire prison population), including Mary Kathy Tyler, who has earned multiple degrees and continued to take college classes well into her eight decade.

... (Cont. on p. 7)

(When Education Becomes The Metric For Clemency, from p. 6) ...

In Maine, Brandon Brown became the first person in the state to earn an advanced degree behind bars. In 2020, Democratic Gov. Janet Mills denied Brown's petition for clemency without explanation.

So what made Pippins a good case for clemency but not Brown? Illinois and Maine are both among the 16 states that don't have parole for most people in prison, both states have Democratic governors, and both men had earned masters and been accepted into doctoral programs. The truth is, we don't really know much about how those clemency decisions were made.

In most states, there's little transparency or accountability in either clemency or parole board proceedings. Last year, Beth Schwartzapfel of The Marshall Project reported and hosted Violation, a podcast that looks at the country's opaque parole system through Jacob Wideman's 1986 murder case in Arizona. She documents how parole has become an inherently political process, with governors appointing individuals who are given the monumental task of predicting whether or not someone will reoffend.

Parole boards are ill-equipped to provide meaningful individualized review and have little incentive to release people who committed serious offenses, according to a 2016 report from the ACLU. In at least 30 states, the severity of the crime is a factor that parole boards must consider, even though it's something that the individual seeking parole can't change.

Parole Boards look at what People have done, both their crimes and their rehabilitative activities inside. But there's little consideration for what they haven't been able to do because of lack of opportunity. And the original crime, which the person is already serving a prison sentence for, might weigh more heavily than anything educational they've accomplished behind bars.

Education can also play a role in sentence reduction through earned time, also known as good time, where people can shave time off their sentences for earning a degree or other credential. My colleague Jason, for instance, met Carrillo's cellmate Sean Mueller, who will be one of the first incarcerated people in Colorado to get a year off his sentence for completing an associate's degree. In Illinois, Pippins had his sentence reduced by a year for his bachelor's and master's degrees.

Finally, access to education might help people prepare for the clemency or parole process. I've had multiple people inside tell me they first started studying, sometimes on their own, in order to understand the words their lawyers were saying. In response to a recent LinkedIn post, one man said that education helped him articulate his remorse. Another wrote that his college classes helped him hone the writing skills he needed to confidently prepare his legal documents.

Looking critically at the role of education in helping people get out of prison should not downplay the impressive educational achievements of people like Carrillo and Pippins. But, becoming one of the first incarcerated professors in the country, or getting into a PhD program from behind bars, is out of reach for most people in prison. The extent to which these become the metric for clemency, or for parole, raises questions about issues of equity for the millions of people inside who didn't have access to the same opportunities.

EDITOR'S NOTE: "When Education Becomes the Metric for Clemency" was originally published in College Inside - A biweekly newsletter about the future of postsecondary education in prisons. Written by Open Campus national reporter Charlotte West.

CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH!

"Black theology is a theology of 'blackness.' It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism...."

--James H. Cone

(Incarcerated Professor, from p. 2) ... campus. The idea, hiring an incarcerated professor to teach incarcerated students and paying him outside wages, is almost unheard of in correctional settings.

"A lot of people thought we were insane," Burrows said.

Most people in Colorado prisons only make 80 cents a day, so it would take them around 17 years to earn the \$3,600 that Carrillo gets for a single class. Higher wages help incarcerated individuals build savings to help cover their basic needs when they are released. Poverty can often be a driver of decisions that land people back in prison.

A few other states are experimenting with hiring incarcerated faculty. In Maine, for instance, Colby College has hired an incarcerated instructor to teach an anthropology course on mass incarceration to outside undergraduates via Zoom. And officials from other state corrections departments have expressed interest in Colorado's program, Burrows said.

Six colleges currently teach in Colorado's prisons, including three public institutions that enroll a total of 311 students in degree programs. And college programs in prison are poised to grow over the next few years, especially since in July incarcerated students became eligible for Pell Grants, the federal financial aid for low-income students, for the first time in nearly 30 years.

But prison education programs face a number of challenges: Colleges sometimes struggle to recruit qualified faculty and correctional facilities are increasingly short-staffed. After several years of ongoing shortages, about 13% of Colorado's correctional officer positions were vacant, according to a Colorado corrections department spokeswoman.

Burrows idea of utilizing the talent that exists behind bars helps mitigate those issues. Incarcerated faculty are already on site, eliminating the need for correctional staff to escort outside professors. It also creates opportunities that allow incarcerated graduates such as Carrillo to put their professional know-

ledge and skills into practice, and earn a living wage while doing so.

Incarcerated students benefit, too, by having professors that understand their backgrounds.

Clinton Hall, one of Carrillo's students, said the opportunity to take a class from him is better than learning from other professors who have never been incarcerated. Hall and Carrillo live in the same pod, and it's easy to find Professor when he needs help.

"Anytime I got a question or I need some clarification on my work, or I just want to kind of dig in a little bit more, I can walk over," Hall said.

He also likes that Carrillo understands if students encounter challenges unique to being incarcerated. If there's a lockdown, for example, Carrillo works with prison staff to try and reschedule the class or get the assignment out to students.

And, education inside is proven to reduce recidivism. As of 2019, around one-third of people getting out of Colorado prisons went back within three years.

In Carrillo's case, the benefits of education also played a key role in getting out of prison. Polis said that Carrillo's journey to educate himself and work as a professor contributed to the clemency decision.

It is evident that you have put in tremendous work while incarcerated to change your mind-set and pursue educational goals, Polis wrote in a letter to Carrillo.

Carrillo's experience also highlights the importance of professional opportunities for people inside, said Lauren Hughes, the director of Adams State's prison education program.

"David cracked the barriers and we will continue working towards breaking them all down to get more people home through education and employment opportunities," she said. It's a one-person-at-a-time, slow movement-building kind of work, and as we expand this to more individuals I know we will keep seeing this kind of result.

Burrows said her goal is to hire two additional instructors by the end of 2024, beginning this summer ... (Cont. on p. 9)

(Incarcerated Professor, from p. 8) ... with having an incarcerated woman with a law degree teach business law in the Adams State's bachelor's at Denver Women's Correctional Facility.

In 1994, at the age of 20, Carrillo received a life without parole sentence for his complicity in a murder. The year before, he was present when someone was killed. Colorado law at the time considered him just as guilty as the other teenager, his brother who pulled the trigger.

"I've been in and out of the system since I was a kid, he said. I'm generational to this.

Almost a decade later, in 2002, Carrillo found himself in a solitary confinement cell barely the size of a parking space. He had spent years involved in prison gangs. As he sat alone, he decided he needed a change that had to start with him.

"My worldview was very narrow for a very, very long time," he said.

Although the 20-year-old Carrillo never would have imagined himself at the front of a classroom, the transition from student to professor wasn't hard. He had already led several self-help programs, and received plenty of support, including classes from Red Rocks Community College to get his adult education certificate.

Adams State hopes to eventually employ more graduates of their own programs in the future, said Hughes, the prison education director. Currently, Hughes said around 100 people in prisons across the country are working towards their MBA through Adams State like Carrillo did.

The 36-credit print-based MBA correspondence program costs \$350 per credit for a total of \$12,600, plus textbooks. And, there is no state or federal funding to assist with a graduate degree, so students have to pay out of pocket.

Last fall, Adams State received a \$150,000 grant from the Mellon Foundation that will be used to hire a program coordinator, develop a training curriculum for the incarcerated instructors, and create a new graduate program in the humanities.

Hughes, who is herself formerly incarcerated, said she was able to attend college for free while she was inside because of a privately funded prison education program in New Jersey. Many incarcerated people don't have the resources or family support to fund their own education, and she's hoping to do fundraising to be able to offer more support to their students.

The state also wants to help more incarcerated individuals earn high school equivalency diplomas so they can take college classes like the ones Carrillo teaches. But Colorado is facing an ongoing teacher shortage across its 19 state-run prisons.

As of December, there were 31 vacancies out of 148 teaching positions around the state, Burrows said. Some of those teachers retired, others have quit because they were conscripted to work custody positions when facilities were short on correctional officers, and facilities have faced ongoing recruitment challenges since the pandemic.

So Burrows is also working to build a pipeline to train peer teachers who could help people study for the high school equivalency exam on their own and then go on to college. As a result, we've had a number of individuals get GEDs who would not have gotten them otherwise because of their sentence length, she said. Traditionally, the more years a person has to serve, the lower they are on the list to take GED classes.

Burrows said she recently put out an ad on the departments television system announcing that they are going to be looking for individuals with everything from an associate to master's degrees to assist with peer tutoring and teaching. It's generated a lot of interest.

Now your students are your roommates... Initially, Burrows heard concerns within the corrections department that hiring Carrillo and allowing him to supervise other prisoners could create a power dynamic that allows for exploitation. But that hasn't turned out to be a problem.

"Back at the cell house, my friends, they still joke with ... (Cont. on. p. 10)

(Incarcerated Professor, from p. 9) ... me as always," Carrillo said. "They'll still throw potshots."

Carrillo said he doesn't mind that his students have access to him 24/7. In fact, there's one student Carrillo couldn't get away from even if he wanted to: his cellmate Sean Mueller.

The two have lived together for over 13 years. Even as Mueller struggled with his own education, he watched as Carrillo earned a paralegal certificate, then an associate degree, a bachelors and finally his masters.

Mueller said a short-term mind-set, pride, and greed got him into prison. Now, he's thinking about the long-term in part thanks to the influence of Carrillo.

Carrillo's class will help Mueller get one step closer to an associate degree and his release. Last year, Colorado legislators approved a law that deducts time off a sentence for prisoners who committed a nonviolent offense if they earn a college degree.

Mueller will be one of the first in the state to be able to take advantage of the new law after he earns his degree, he said.

Mueller will likely not be the last. Hall, Carrillo's podmate, said Carrillo's class is gaining popularity and momentum.

"We've got guys who are asking, How do I get into this class?" Hall said. Before Carrillo received the news that he'll parole on Jan. 31, he said he'd like to keep his job teaching at the prison if he ever got out.

"I didn't expect this," he said. "Once I was leading guys into this place. Now, I'm doing my best to lead guys out."

Jason Gonzales is a reporter covering higher education and the Colorado legislature. Contact Jason at jgonzales@chalkbeat.org.

Charlotte West is a reporter covering the future of post-secondary education in prison for Open Campus. Contact Charlotte at charlotte@opencampusmedia.org and subscribe to her newsletter, College Inside.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was originally published in College Inside Newsletter with the partnership of Chalkbeat Colorado and Open Campus on higher education coverage.

(College In Prison, from p. 3) ... and withdrew interest.

Macomb prison already has a college teaching non-credited (Inside-Out) classes at the facility, so why such staff resistance? Fear of change and oppression! Macomb is a ghetto-ran prison with a ghetto mentality, so to speak. Staff have become accustomed to doing the minimal and eating popcorn while watching the daily insanity around them. Staff have gained a sense of comfort with the current classes and the prisoners who assist with them. A new degree program would mean more prisoners taking classes and different prisoners assisting with the classes--prisoners with degrees. These changes would drastically alter staff's immediate environment as well as their oversight and expectations.

Ironically, many of the classes currently taught address social structures that cause oppression, and yet those involved with these classes perpetrate that same oppression. These Inside-Out classes teach that the traditional teaching method (lecture and memorization), called the "banking system," is broken, and the prisoner assistants down-play the value of college degrees. In the "ghetto" world of prison, college degrees may hold little value, but most prisoners will return to society. And in the real world, every year hundreds of thousands of people graduate with degrees, earn these degrees through the "banking system," and become gainfully employed because of the degree. The Inside-Out classes are not only providing Macomb staff a reason to resist a new college bringing a degree program to the prison, but they are also installing belief systems in prisoners that perpetuate oppression.

Although prisons across the United States are racing to provide prisoners college degree programs, some prison officials are still resisting. Macomb Correctional Facility is an example of such resistance and structural oppression at work. Instead of providing degree programs that prisoners can use upon release to obtain jobs, Macomb prison staff and prisoners cling to the status quo and a culture that perpetuates oppression. Even though change can be ... (Cont. on p. 11)

(College In Prison, from p. 10) ... difficult for many people, change is necessary to break the chains of oppression, and the change can bring real life opportunities for prisoners.

"LAST CHANCE"

By Mario Cavin

"They say ignorance is bliss, I say it's the root of all evil it causes misdirected hate and discrimination among the people.

It causes war on global scales, wares over blocks and prison cells it turns brothas against babymothas, now she's on the corner for sale.

But oh well... Who really cares? 'Cause ignorance is bliss I can knock your noodle loose just for the colors you represent.

Or the color of your skin, where you from, who you wit' aye right, ya hear me? Make that make sense.

But ignorance is bliss? Only from the inside looking out... Nowadays we condone it, we keep putting them in the White House.

One tried building a fence and the other can't remember it's 2022 and people still bitchin' over gender?

They say ignorance in masses is a threat to humanity and tragically, it'll be our downfall if you don't agree.

It's our last chance to get right, our last change to make a stand, our last chance to educate, unless you wanna repeat this all again."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Mario Cavin (#326204) is serving a 37-year sentence in the Michigan Department of Corrections and is housed at the Macomb Correctional Facility, 34625 Lenox Township, Michigan 48048. Mario is a Local Board Member with the National Lifers of America, Inc., Chapter 1012.

HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY

Remembering those you love and appreciate.

NOTICE

On Thursday, January 18, 2024, the Michigan Court of Appeals decided in People v. John Antonio Poole, No. 352569, that People v. Parks, 510 Mich 225; 987 NW2d 161 (2022), is retroactive to all defendants on post-collateral review. In Parks the Michigan Supreme Court held that mandatory life-without-parole sentences imposed on 18-year-old defendants are categorically disproportionate and thus unconstitutional under Const 1963, art 1, § 16.

The Poole decision was long overdue. Congratulations to all of you who are affected by this ruling. Michigan is finally catching up with the rest of the country.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

TO ALL READERS AND SUBSCRIBERS

The Michigan Lifers Report Newsletter has made some significant changes over the last couple of months that you need to be aware of.

First, the Michigan Lifers Report Newsletter will now be published bimonthly (6 issues per year). The cost of producing the newsletter just will not allow us to continue publishing every month (12 issues a year). We are sorry for the inconvenience. Subscribers who paid our previous yearly (12 issues) subscription will have the appropriate months added to your new subscription. All new or renewing subscribers starting January 1, 2024, will be under the new 6 issue subscription rate.

Second, the Michigan Lifers Report Newsletter is no longer affiliated with the National Lifers of America, Inc. I hope this does not affect your decision to continue subscribing to and reading the Michigan Lifers Report Newsletter.

As the editor, I will continue to do my best providing informative articles.

Jamie Meade, Editor

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

The expressed purposes of the Michigan Lifers Association, Inc. to publish the Michigan Lifers Report Newsletter are to educate and uplift the lifer population, to seek changes in laws that restrict clemency and parole, to educate the general public, and to encourage criminal legal reform, especially in corrections.

PRISONERS

PRISONER'S FULL NAME: _____ NUMBER: _____

NAME OF CORRECTIONAL FACILITY: _____

COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP CODE: _____

CIVILIANS

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____ APT. _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP CODE: _____

PHONE NO.: () _____ EMAIL: _____

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(All donations goes towards costs of providing free subscriptions to indigent prisoners.)

SEND SUBSCRIPTION PAYMENTS & DONATIONS TO:

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