

Michigan Lifers Association, Inc. and National Lifers of America, Inc.

Michigan

Lifers Report

MARCH 2022

Newsletter

IS PAROLE A RIGHT OR A PRIVILEGE?

(THE FACTS)

Willis X. Harris

Prisoners around the country are writing to both Cure Lifelong, Inc. and the Michigan Lifers Association, Inc. claiming that their Parole Boards are violating their civil and constitutional rights by denying them parole when they become parole eligible. I continue to remind them, they are eligible only for "parole consideration."

Prisoners claim to have completed various programs, attended church services, are active members with the Jaycees, HASTA (Hispanic Americans Striving Toward Advancement), NAACP, Lifers Groups, and have received good-to-excellent block and work reports. They also claim to have been issued no misconduct reports.

The above-listed program involvement and completion do not translate into parole. The length of sentence and time calculation determine your readiness for parole consideration which may or may not turn into parole.

Parole is not a right and never was. It is an earned privilege based upon the nature of your offense and surrounding circumstances, length of time served, data from your PSI (Pre-Sentence Investigation) Report, psychological and medical reports, program involvement and completion, work and block reports, prior criminal history and the nature of those offenses (both juvenile and adult), grid scores, and other file data you may not know Parole Boards have on or about you.

When it comes to lifers who have earned public hearings and are still denied parole or a commutation of sentence recom- ... (Cont. on p. 3)

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A LEGAL UPDATE FROM THE EDITOR...

On Wednesday, March 2, 2022, the Michigan Supreme Court (MSC) heard oral arguments in *People v. Stovall*, *People v. Poole*, and *People v. Parks*. On March 3, 2022, the MSC heard oral arguments in *People v. Taylor*. The rulings in these 4 cases could affect over 2,000 prisoners who were under the age 25 when they committed their offenses and who are serving life without the possibility of parole (LWOP), life with parole, and long-indeterminate sentences.

Fortunately, corrections officials at the Macomb Correctional Facility streamed live oral arguments in *People v. Poole* on channel 3 (facility movie channel). Mayo Menlo, attorney for Poole, opened her argument to the Court with the new brain science referring to the amicus brief filed on behalf of leading neuroscientists, psychologists, and criminal justice scholars that consensus dictates raising the age to 21. Justice Richard H. Bernstein, Justice Megan K. Cavanagh, and Justice David F. Viviano were the only 3 Justices who posed questions to Ms. Menlo and appeared conflicted with the science and age the brain stops developing at.

David Shapiro was given 8 minutes to argue on behalf of the Roderick & Solange MacArthur Justice Center at Northwestern University. Mr. Shapiro focused on the history of Michigan's Constitutional language cruel "or" unusual punishment being more protective than cruel "and" unusual punishment.

Timothy Baughman, Assistant Prosecutor for Wayne County, argued on behalf of Kim Worthy. Mr. Baughman's argument solely focused on the question whether the MSC should be making this decision to raise the age. He argued it should be left to the legislature not the Court. When Mr. Baughman was asked about the science, he said he "did not disagree or agree with the science". He also said the SCOTUS ruled in *Miller* to put the age at 18 although the defendants were 14 so the MSC could go to 25 if the Court wished.

Ms. Menlo was asked by the Justices if she was arguing to abolish LWOP. Ms. Menlo answered that she was not trying to abolish LWOP, she was merely arguing to stop it from being mandatory on individuals 25 and under.

Personally, I believe the MSC will raise the age because too many national organizations have staked interest in Poole and Michigan. What age they will go to, I cannot say. The Adolescent Redemption Project (TARP) vice-president and attorney Laurel Kelly Young, who also filed an amicus brief on behalf of TARP arguing the court should raise the age to 25, believes there will be a compromise between the Justices and the MSC will probably raise the age to 21 with a decision of 4-3.

(Is Parole A Right, from p. 1) ... mendation, it is because when questioned by the Parole Board, they equivocated, outright lied, tried to make all negative public officials' investigation reports false, causing both Parole Board members and, in some states, the assistant attorney general, lose confidence in releasing them. Simply being honest and truthful could have been a successful public hearing.

In view of rising crimes of rape, robbery, assault, elderly abuse, and murder, Parole Boards everywhere are on the edge of their seats fearing political backlash and/or removal from office if they release anyone in their states who may re-offend and return to prison for any of the above listed offenses, causing hostile and negative media, radio, and television coverage and exposure. It is difficult to believe and accept the fact that released lifers are highly unlikely to return to prison for another offense.

We all must face and accept facts, whether we like them or not. We are now living in an era when ourselves tell the truth on ourselves. There are no more holes to crawl in and hide.

I know, call, and write to many former Michigan Parole Board members still living in Michigan and some now living in Texas, Tennessee, and Florida. They are mostly in their 90s. We discuss many correctional issues, including lifers. They tell me everyone who knew me were amazed how I turned out, and that I was still out 42 years later.

I recently told former Warden and Parole Board member Charles E. Anderson that "I never was a criminal, am not one now, and never will be one."

Now they all believe me at the age of 82.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK OF THE NLA CHAPTER 1030 (MTU)

John Halcomb

In the midst of this global pandemic, desk messages slowed, National Lifers of America (NLA) meetings were suspended, and motivation dwindled. Yet, that did not stop the NLA National Board with collaborating with The Adolescent Redemption Project (TARP) to co-host an NLA/TARP Criminal Justice Reform Rally To End Mass Incarceration In Michigan at the State Capitol. Notwithstanding the pandemic, a president's duty to provide its membership information should also not be impeded.

Since the beginning of program restrictions, our chapter has become innovative in ways of maintaining communications with our members who are separated in other units. We established relationships with prison advocacy organizations and legislators who have agreed to send updates on correctional reform issues. Also, we're regularly reviewing SADO's Criminal Defense Newsletter, Lawyer's Weekly, MI-CURE Newsletter, CURE: Lifelong Newsletter, etc., for newsworthy tidbits. We then compose a monthly or bi-monthly informative news page for distribution throughout our community so our members stay connected during our facility's battle with COVID.

Over the decades of imprisonment, I have learned a person's strength is measured by his or her own perseverance toward achieving a personal or a common goal. I encourage all presidents to create new ways to build and maintain community to effectively serve members and the prison population. It is during these hard times when good leadership is needed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: John Halcomb (Prison No. 191295) is serving a life sentence in the Michigan Department of Corrections and is housed at the Richard A. Handlon Correctional Facility (MTU), 1728 Bluewater Highway, Ionia, MI 48846. John also sits on the NLA National Board of Directors. John has been an upstanding member of the NLA for over 20 years.

THE GENETIC FACTOR: UNDERSTANDING NO REMORSE

(Excerpted)

Richard Althouse, PhD

What Is Remorse?

The word "remorse" comes from the Latin roots *re* ("again") and *mordere* ("to bite"), as if your past action is "biting you back," making you "feel" regretful. Consequently, remorse is popularly defined as "a distressing emotion experienced by an individual who regrets actions which they have done that they come to believe are shameful, hurtful, or wrong" (Wikipedia). A shortened definition is offered by Oxford Dictionaries, "Deep regret or guilt for a wrong committed."

The vast majority of us think that being able to feel and willingly express remorse is a desirable human trait since anticipatory remorse--along with sympathy, empathy, compassion, and anticipatory regret--can inhibit a hurtful action or wrong-doing before it is done. So seriously do we take the absence of remorse that it is a criterion in the DSM-5's description of an Antisocial Personality Disorder (2013, p. 659). Perhaps that is why the ability to authentically express remorse is often considered a measure of offender recidivism risk treatment programs, and considered a desirable ingredient in the restorative justice process.

Remorse In Criminal Justice Settings

Since we often assume that individuals who do not readily exhibit remorse potentially pose a continuing threat to our social order, we often search for remorse during offender interviews, trials, sentencing, and parole hearings, and use its apparent presence or absence as a measure of an individual's future risk to public safety. Consequently, we can become anxious, fearful, and/or angry when we don't see it when we believe we should, as in Derek Chauvin's or Kyle Reittenhouse's case, and our conclusions can sway public opinion regarding the moral or ethical character of an individuals. However,

despite its widespread use, few of us have given much thought to the complexities of remorse, its vulnerabilities, when the term should be used, and the degree to which our continuing search for and beliefs about remorse are warranted.

Separated into its component parts, remorse is the end result of a complex set of genetically organized neurological processes that overlap with, but are somewhat distinct from, those of empathy, sympathy, or regret. Remorse involves a combination of both reconsidered judgement about and emotions about a past behavior, and is thus vulnerable to circumstantial and interpretative variations.

The Genetic Factor To Remorse

Advances in neuroscience research have shed additional light on the relationship of brain functioning and the ability to feel compassion, empathy, and remorse. For example, neuroscientists have discovered that there are distinct neurophysiological differences between the brains of those able and unable to feel or express remorse (e.g., sociopaths and psychopaths), particularly in the anterior insula, anterior midcingulate cortex, the somatosensory cortex, the right amygdala, and the hippocampus (Frontiers, 2003; Schweitzer, 2016).

Conclusion

Being able to feel and express remorse is admittedly a socially desirable component of human interactions, public safety, and social order. However, remorse is a multidimensional concept subject to circumstantial and genetically modulated neurological contingencies that should moderate both our understanding of and responses to those contingencies, particularly in social and criminal justice settings.

More thought and research may assist us in better under- ... (Cont. on p. 8)

THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON THE GOALS OF CORRECTIONS

AN ETHNOGRAPHICAL VIEW

Jamie Meade

"[C]reat[ing] a safer Michigan through effective offender management and supervision in our facilities and communities while holding offenders accountable and promoting their rehabilitation" is the mission of the Michigan Department of Corrections (see MDOC Policy Directive 01.01.100 Mission Statement). Theoretically, corrections has four goals: Incapacitation, Deterrence, Retribution, and Rehabilitation. For corrections to be effective, all four goals must be applied and fulfilled.

It has been 2 years since the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the United States and, specifically, Michigan. The Macomb Correctional Facility was the first facility in the state to be ravaged by the virus in February 2020. Two years later and approximately 150 prisoners dead, the question remains: What is being done differently by the MDOC and the Governor to protect one of the states most vulnerable populations while fulfilling corrections' purposes to protect society and to rehabilitate offenders?

Correctional facilities across the state remain on COVID-19 protocol restrictions, some more restricted than others. Once a facility experiences a few new positive COVID-19 cases, corrections officials start moving prisoners cell-to-cell and unit-to-unit and start imposing tighter restrictions--of course all in the name of "science" and "COVID-19 protocol"--increasing the spread of the virus throughout the facility. With an incubation period of approximately 3 days, prisoners who test negative and who were in a cell with a prisoner who tested positive are immediately placed with another prisoner who tested negative, only later to likely test positive infecting the prisoner who was truly negative.

Nevertheless, RG&C required rehabilitative programs (i.e., programs required by the Parole Board for parole and only provided to prisoners within their Earliest Release Date) are restricted, if not denied; GED classes are restricted, if not denied; college programs are restricted, if not denied; religious services are restricted, if not denied; visitation with family and friends is severely restricted, if not denied; law library access is severely restricted, if not denied; outdoor and indoor recreation (fresh air and exercise time) is severely restricted, if not denied; self-help rehabilitative programs (i.e., Chance For Life, AA/NA, Inside-Out Program, Alternatives to Violence Project-Michigan, etc.) are completely denied and have been for 2 years; and the general library has been closed for 2 years. It appears the MDOC and the Governor have reversed 40 years of progress in valuing the principle of rehabilitation--that has guided our state's correctional philosophy--in the name of COVID-19 protocol, returning the state to warehousing its prisoners.

The effects of warehousing prisoners is starting to be seen inside and outside of prison. Inside prison, serious assaults (prisoner-on-prisoner and prisoner-on-staff) have noticeably increased, substance abuse and overdoses (with deaths) have remarkably increased (yes, without visitation, the place where corrections officials say drugs enter the prison), and suicide attempts have dramatically increased.

Outside prison, society is witnessing soaring crime rates, especially, violent crime. Recidivism rates are rising and offenders are reoffending at higher rates than pre-pandemic. Has society become less safe? Can these be the effects of COVID-19 on the goals of corrections?

Safety of society and offender rehabilitation are primary purposes of the MDOC. With 2021 behind us and 2022 in front of us, one aspect of our lives we can not change this year is COVID-19. The only change we are assured of ... (Cont. on p. 8)

DESERVING OF A SECOND CHANCE

THIS ISSUES FEATURED LIFER: KEITH RAPPUHN

Keith Rappuhn (Prison ID No. 135856) has spent the last 49 years of his life in the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC). In 1973, at the age of 22, Keith was out drinking and partying when he got into an argument with a friend. The argument led him to beating and stabbing the person to death. Keith was charged, tried, and convicted of first degree murder. He was sentenced to life without the possibility of parole (LWOP), better known as, "Death-By-Incarceration".

Shortly after entering prison, Keith started reading books on psychology and human behavior trying to understand why he would commit such a violent crime. Keith learned that he may have had what is called Repressed Aggression, meaning he kept things bottled up inside. This was later to be held true by professionals years later.

Knowing how he came to commit such a violent act, Keith sought the necessary tools so he would never commit such a violent act again. Keith worked to better himself every single day for many years. Along the way, he completed high school and went on to obtain an Associate of Science degree. Keith has also completed over 40 self-help rehabilitative programs and/or classes. In addition, he has completed MDOC vocational certifications in Food Technology, Building Trades, and Building Maintenance. In addition to his educational, rehabilitational, and vocational achievements, Keith has completed the Inside-Out College Program, Restorative Justice Program, and a 12-year Siddah Yoga Meditation Program. Keith is a Core Member of the Chance For Life Organization and the Next Step Christian Recovery (faith-based substance abuse) group. For the past 6 years, Keith has been participating in the Leader Dogs For The Blind program at the Macomb Correctional Facility raising and training puppies for the blind.

Since his incarceration, Keith has never been issued a misconduct ticket for any kind of violence or alcohol. His last major misconduct ticket he was issued for violating any rules was 26 years ago in 1996. Keith is a model prisoner.

As he approaches his 50th year in prison, statistically, Keith Rappuhn has less than a single percent recidivism rate. Meaning, he is highly unlikely to commit another crime in his lifetime. Keith remains hopeful that he will one day be allowed to return to society and be given the opportunity to contribute as a law abiding citizen. Keith Rappuhn is deserving of a second chance.

HYPOCRISY IN AMERICA, MICHIGAN FRONT AND CENTER

Dwight M. Henley, MBA

Countries across the world enter into constitutional treaties (legal agreements) with one another. One reason they do so is to ensure governing nations treat its citizenry with the basic fundamentals of humanity. The United States is no exception. In fact, America many times assumes a leading role in international treaties. Asserting its position as a world leader, the United States entered into a treaty with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). Now the United States finds itself in violation of the treaty,

and the IACHR's finding and American's response thereto has far-reaching implications for our standing in the world.

In November of 2021 the IACHR ruled that the United States violated its Constitutional agreement because of how Michigan's criminal justice system treats juveniles. The November ruling, Report 448121, found Michigan violated fundamentals of humanity for sentencing juveniles to life without the possibility of parole, for failing to provide appropriate protections for detained ... (Cont. on p. 9)



Citizens for Prison Reform

The Family Participation Program (FPP) operates under Citizens for Prison Reform (CPR). FPP provides family to family advocacy assistance to justice involved families across the state of Michigan.

FPP aspires to carry out CPR's mission to engage, to educate, and to empower families as strong advocates.

FPP holds regular monthly virtual meetings for families to address the concerns they have and to work with them to develop advocacy strategies so they can best support their loved ones on the inside. FPP helps provide resources and assistance with medical and mental health emergencies, loss of visitation, parole hearing readiness, reentry support and resources, and general questions and/or concerns.

FPP hopes to grow a network of families that will work to support each other as we navigate this difficult journey together. FPP invites families and allies of the National Lifers of America, Inc. and Michigan Lifers Association, Inc. to join our network and reach out to us.

FPP is excited to announce the expansion of the FPP Program in 10 prisons this year. Posters promoting the Family Participation Program are currently at the 10 participating pilot prisons within the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC). The pilot prisons currently participating are Alger Correctional Facility (LMF), Charles Egeler Reception & Guidance Center (RGC), Chippewa Correctional Facility (URF), Gus Harrison Correctional Facility (ARF), G. Robert Cotton Correctional Facility (JCF), Ionia Correctional Facility (ICF), Oaks Correctional Facility (ECF), Macomb Correctional Facility (MRF), Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility (WHV), and Woodland Correctional Facility (WCC).

Through our work with families, we realized many of them, along with their loved ones on the inside, have never heard of the Standard Medical Release Form (CHJ-121). We want to take this opportunity to be sure you are aware of this vital document. It must be signed and submitted annually by prisoners for the MDOC to share important information about medical and mental health issues with their families. If you have an advocate on the outside, we encourage you to complete this Form as well as establishing your advocate as your emergency contact.

We have important information and resources on our website. Please encourage your loved ones to visit us online for more information at <https://www.micpr.org/>. You can also reach us by mail at Citizens for Prison Reform, P.O. BOX 80414, Lansing, MI 48908; Phone (269) 339-0606; and Email micpr.org@gmail.com.



(The Genetic Factor, from p. 4) ... standing the ethical and moral parameters of assessing someone given their ability to feel or not feel remorse, how best to manage the differences, and decide whether or not our current search for and emphasis on the importance of remorse is warranted.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Althouse, PhD, is a licensed psychologist with 37 years of clinical experience in correctional and forensic settings in both staff and supervisory capacities. He can be contacted at 5129 Oleander Drive, Suite 101, Wilmington, NC 28403.

(The Effects of COVID-19, from p. 5) ... is the next mutated variant to spread throughout the state. Unfortunately, COVID-19 is a virus we are simply going to have to learn to live with. But how do we do this inside prison where social distancing is impossible and offender rehabilitation is a primary goal?

GOVERNOR WHITMER, PLAYING POLITICS?

Dwight M. Henley, MBA

Governor Whitmer recently commuted the sentence of Tracy Cowan, a female who had served approximately 18 years for drugs and weapons convictions. Michigan news stations highlighted the Governor's actions and many prison reform advocates commended her for commuting Ms. Cowan's sentences. However, a deeper look at this commutation suggests it was politics, not compassion, that drove her decision.

The timing of this commutation raises eyebrows. Most governors do not commute sentences until the last few months of his or her term. Governor Whitmer had yet to take any substantive measures to address prison reform let alone grant any commutations. In addition to this reality, Governor Whitmer also faces an upcoming election and many of her former supporters are displeased with her performance. Citizens are troubled over how the Governor has handled COVID, how inflated prices for food and gas are crippling low-income families, and how housing price increases have undermined the American Dream. Prison Reform advocates have had no reason to support the

Governor. Clearly Governor Whitmer has the motivation to play politics, but did she?

After canvassing the facts of Ms. Cowan's case it appears as if the Governor is playing politics. Ms. Cowan was close to becoming eligible for parole. She had already served 18 years, reached 60 years in age, and established a good prison record. Given these circumstances, the Parole Board would have unquestionably granted Ms. Cowan a parole in the near future.

Unfortunately, politicians often manipulate the public to win public office. This is not to say Governor Whitmer commuted Ms. Cowan's sentence to deceive prison reform advocates and demonstrate herself to be a compassionate person to gain support for the upcoming election. Governor Whitmer's future commutations, or lack thereof, will tell whether she played politics. But the timing of Ms. Cowan's commutation and the facts of her case suggests the Governor was most likely playing politics.

MISSOURI PRISONER WITH A 240-YEAR SENTENCE WINS A SECOND CHANCE AT FREEDOM

Willis X. Harris

The Missouri Department of Corrections Board of Probation and Parole has given a second chance to a prisoner who, at the age 16, was sentenced to a term of 240 years for multiple offenses less than murder.

Bobby Bostic #526795, housed at the Jefferson City Corrections Center in Jefferson City, Missouri, has been incarcerated since 1995 on charges of robbery (3 counts), armed criminal actions (3 counts), assault, 1st degree, and kidnapping facilitating a felony.

On December 9, 2021, Bostic received a letter from the Board of Probation and Parole stating, "You are scheduled for release from confinement on November 9, 2022."

The Board of Probation and Parole declined an earlier release date stating "Release at this time would depreciate the seriousness of the ... (Cont. on p. 10)

BOOK REVIEW

FOR US IN PRISON BY BRUCE MICHEALS (ISBN: 978-1-9838-4265-8)

Reviewed by Jamie Meade

Do you want to work your way out of prison? If so, read this book.

For many years my friends and I have had this idea that we can help one another achieve incredible accomplishments, and over those years we have helped one another develop prison programs, raise tens of thousands of dollars for tuition, win scholarships, earn college degrees, publish books, gain paroles and commutations, and much more. Our circle of friends is a tight bunch, but we welcome anyone to join us if they are serious about changing for the better and getting out of prison. Perhaps the best invitation and orientation to this idea that we have can be found in the book *For Us in Prison* (ISBN: 978-1-9838-4265-8) by Bruce Micheals.

In this small book, Bruce explains why and how we can help one another out of prison. He is on his way out of prison in a few years, and many of our other friends have already gotten out. The mentality and techniques that we promote work. The question is who is going to adopt them next? *For Us in Prison* was written to explain the challenge that lifers and long-indeterminate sentenced prisoners are facing, to equip them with the methods to start working their way out of prison, and to provide them with over 200 resources (actual addresses and contact information) to people and organizations that can help them.

I'm a lifer. I know how it feels to be stuck in prison, wanting desperately to get out. The reality, however, is that we have to work our way out of this mess. Bruce and our friends and I have spent decades piecing together a system that works, and I don't know of any other system that works better. Sometimes that is just the way life is: there is one good way to do something, and you either do it that way or you don't. I have tried many other ways to get myself out of prison, but I am closer now than ever.

If you are serving a large sentence and you are not making great progress toward getting out soon, please read this book. Of Bruce's 12 published books, this one is the best place to start on your journey to freedom. He keeps it simple and direct. If you read *For Us in Prison*, you will learn about our basic philosophy and approach to getting out of prison, and from there you will be able to start traveling on the journey with us.

This process, as you will find, is a team effort. In the Acknowledgements section of the book Bruce thanks over 50 people. If you work with us, you will find that your social network will expand dramatically too, and you will help others as they help you. As Bruce likes to say, "We are here to help each other." Read *For Us in Prison* to learn how you can start helping (and being helped) too.

(Hypocrisy in America, from p. 6) ... juveniles, and for failing to provide incarcerated juveniles adequate educational opportunities. According to the IACHR, Michigan's criminal justice system violates Treaty Articles I (life, liberty, and security), VII (special protection for children), XI (preservation of health and well-being), XII (education) and other Articles as well. The IACHR reasoned that life without parole undermines the rehabilitation and reintegration of children into society, housing juveniles in predatory

adult prisons lacks protective measures and results in sexual and physical victimization, and insufficient educational opportunities contravenes development.

Michigan currently faces an opportunity to address one of the IACHR's Constitutional violations and set an example for the world. In the latest legislative session, Senate Bills 848, 849, 850, and 851 were introduced to end the practice of sentencing juveniles to life without parole--something a large majority of states have already ... (Cont. on p. 10)

(Missouri Prison, from p. 8) ... present offense based on circumstances surrounding the present offense."

During his 26 years of incarceration, Bostic has completed multiple rehabilitation classes and programs. He has earned an Associate of Science degree from Adams State University. Bostic has written several children books and mentored fellow prisoners. He is currently working on a bachelor's degree from Adams State.

Bostic has been an on-going correspondent with both Michigan Lifers Association, Inc. and CURE Lifelong, Inc.

There were only two parole stipulations placed on Bostic: no contact with victims and no alcoholic beverages.

He thanks the Board of Probation and Parole for believing in him and giving him a second chance to redeem his life and become a law-abiding and productive member of society.

(Hypocrisy in America, from p. 9) ... done. Michigan faces a major choice because its decision will impact America's influence in the world. Passing the Bills will give our country standing to make claims against China for inhumane work conditions and against Arab nations that limit the rights of women. Conversely, failing to pass the Bills will send a message to the world that the United States is a nation of hypocrisy, a pseudo-democracy. Since international treaties lack a compulsory component, Michigan maintains the autonomy to choose its own path. What will Michigan do?

If the United States wants to maintain its credibility and position as a world leader, Michigan must pass the bills and end the practice of sentencing juveniles to die in prison. How can America claim China mistreats people in the workplace when the United States sentences children to die in prison and allows them to be physically and sexually exploited while detained? If Michigan doesn't pass the bills and abide by the treaty, why should other countries abide by the IACHR's treaty or any other treatise for that matter? Make no mistake about it, the world is watching to see what Michigan does and, subsequently, who the United States is as a nation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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A SIMPLE SOLUTION TO THE MDOC'S STAFF SHORTAGE

Jerry Metcalf

Today I read an article in the Detroit Free Press written by Annabel Aguir of the Lansing State Journal, titled: Prisons in Crisis Amid Staffing Shortages.

Ms. Aguir reports that the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) currently has 770 prison guard openings, a 40% nursing vacancy, and that food service workers are also "badly needed." She cites these staffing shortages as a crisis, and I agree. Where we disagree is the reasoning for why these jobs are available, and the possible fixes for this crisis.

Ms. Aguir interviewed people from the MDOC administration and two guards who work inside Michigan prisons. But she failed to interview anyone from our side (I am incarcerated in Michigan), so I decided to insert a little balance.

Let's start with the guards. The MDOC has a budget of roughly 2 billion, and that number hasn't really changed in a decade or so. It's been a tad higher and a tad lower, but mostly it hovers around 2 billion. The vast majority of that money goes to paying employee salaries.

The MDOC claims it can't retain or hire new guards due to things like COVID, budgetary constraints, and forced mandatory overtime. What it did not explain was how many of its newest hires (mostly white millennials) are duped into working for the department with catchphrases about "making a difference" and "helping currently incarcerated people to rehabilitate themselves." These young people (and I've met and discussed this with many of them) then report to work and are disillusioned almost immediately.

They quickly discover there is little to no actual rehabili- ... (Cont. on p. 11)

(A Simple Solution, from p. 10) ... tation taking place in Michigan prisons. That Michigan prisons are all about warehousing people (mostly of color) until their release date, then dumping those people back into society without making any real changes to their thinking or mentality. This disillusionment is a big part of the exodus from the prison guard ranks. Ask almost any guard working today (off the record) and they'll tell you their job makes little difference. Track down some of those millennials who've quit, and they'll tell you the same thing. They'd wished to be a part of the solution, but keeping their job turned them into part of the problem, so they moved on.

The issue with the nursing vacancies is very similar. I think we can all agree that the majority of men and women who pursue nursing careers are by nature a more emphatic lot. Yet, when they arrive at work in a prison and discover the subpar healthcare being doled out, it sours their stomachs. Sure, some of them stay, many for years at lower-than-average wages, trying to "fix" the system, but the system is so systemically broken that it cannot be fixed, at least not from the bottom up. And when a nurse finally realizes this, she or he cuts their losses and moves on.

The issue with the food service workers is simple. The food isn't fit for human consumption. Not anymore. It used to be, but once they allowed the private companies in, they basically destroyed our menu. And the state, having learned what we incarcerated individuals are willing to accept, continued with that subpar food after firing the private companies. How bad is the food? Well, the guards used to eat the same food we do, but not anymore. Seldom is a guard seen eating prison food. So that is the real issue at hand. How would you like to come to work and be in charge of feeding thousands of incarcerated people (many in for violent crimes) subpar food not fit for human consumption? No, not I, that's for sure.

So, from an incarcerated person's point of view, what's the solution to all this?

Let's try looking at this with fresh

eyes. The Michigan Corrections Organization (MCO) is calling on state legislature to increase the budget for new guards and recruiting staff, citing that the MDOC spent 82 million in overtime last year alone on prison guards. Their solution is the same as anyone who's not spending from their own pocket: Throw more tax dollars at the problem. Never mind that Michigan schools are short teachers and funds, or that Michigan roads are the worst in the nation. Never mind that Michigan prisons have the oldest prison population in the nation, or that we serve the longest sentences on average. Never mind that we've had more people exonerated in the last few years than any other state. Never mind that it's a proven fact that longer sentences do not deter crime, but do destroy our communities of color and wreak havoc on their children.

No, what's needed is not more money. At least not for prison guards. What's needed is some common sense and simple math skills. Let's close some of these decrepit, structurally-unsound and overcrowded prisons. Let's release some of these incarcerated people (like me) who aren't sentenced to like in prison, but have already spent decades behind bars. Let's stop keeping people locked up past any reasonable duration of time simply because politics demands it. Let's follow the science.

Easier said than done, the MCO would say. Not true. Dozens of organizations across Michigan have been working on this problem, and lawmakers are starting to agree. The Michigan Justice Advocacy group (mijustice.org) and Senator Jeff Irwin introduced Senate Bill 649 (the goodtime bill) which would accomplish everything that needs accomplishing. It would save the state hundreds of millions of dollars, it would solve the MDOC's staff shortage crisis, and it would propel Michigan into the modern era where prisons are concerned. No longer would we be the only state in the nation not offering any form of good time to its prison populace. No longer would we be spending billions of tax dollars that didn't need to be spent.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Jerry Metcalf (Prison No. 251141) is serving a 40 to 60 year sentence in the MDOC and is housed at the Thumb Correctional Facility, 3225 John Conley Dr., Lapeer, MI 48446. Jerry is a contributing writer for The Marshall Project News Inside. Jerry strives daily to make the world a better place. You can follow Jerry on social media at [Facebook.com/JerryMetcalfJr1](https://www.facebook.com/JerryMetcalfJr1); [Twitter@JerryMetcalfJr1](https://twitter.com/JerryMetcalfJr1); and [Instagram.com/jerryametcalf-artist.writer](https://www.instagram.com/jerryametcalf-artist.writer).

THE POET'S CORNER...

"Sanctity"

My name is Prisoner Sybil.
You've never felt my pain.
But, you've heard of my name.
I live with constant shame.
I'm glad you all came.
Even though, people think we are
ALL the SAME.
Oh, if I had the opportunity,
I would create a new fame.
Now, I walk with a cane.
Peers and Staff see me as lame.
Thank God I'm tamed,
A redeemed Prisoner Jane.

By: Sybil Padgett #325532
@ JPAY.com
Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility
3201 Bemis Road / HU#2B-103L
Ypsilanti, MI 48197

NOTICE

The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) is now searching for new BOP leadership. The BOP is in crisis. Both the current Director and Assistant Director will retire at the end of May, 2022

If you know any civilian qualified with good leadership ability, please contact Charlie Sullivan at National CURE, P.O. Box 2310, Washington, DC 20013 or Email him at charlie@curenational.org.

Do it now!

--Willis X. Harris

NOTICE

The Michigan Lifers Report Newsletter (MLR Newsletter) has grown significantly since our first issue. The March 2022 issue is our fifth. We are grateful for all of you who have subscribed and donated. We use every penny we receive to copy and distribute the Newsletter. Our idea was to provide a voice to the voiceless--those forgotten lifers and long-indeterminate sentenced prisoners. The MLR Newsletter is yours to express yourself through and to be heard.

Willis X. Harris has been receiving letters from incarcerated men and women addressed to other men and women incarcerated. Mr. Harris and I agreed we would not forward any correspondence to circumvent MDOC mail restrictions of prisoners corresponding with prisoners. We do not want the MDOC to start restricting the MLR Newsletter. We want the MLR Newsletter to become a valuable source of information for those incarcerated in the MDOC.

--Jamie Meade, Editor

NOTICE

While we are very grateful for those of you who send donations and subscribe to the MLR Newsletter, we have been receiving Subscription Forms and letters with checks that we are finding difficult to read. Please print legibly on the Subscription Forms and checks so we can assure you or the person you are paying for a subscription for will receive the Newsletter.

--Willis X. Harris

As the Editor of the MLR Newsletter, I am deeply sorry for forgetting to send blessings on Saviors' Day (February 26, 2022) in the February 2022 issue.

HAVE A BLESSED SAVIORS' DAY!

HAVE A BLESSED LENT!

HAPPY ST. PATRICK'S DAY!

**SUPPORTING THE
FAMILY & FRIENDS OF
INCARCERATED PEOPLE**

Overwhelmed?
Need Information?

Helpful info about prison for you & your loved ones

Open discussion & support for incarcerated individuals' families & friends

Prison Resource Guide (FREE at micpr.org)

Empowering and educating families

Share our information!

If info sheets, attached below, are no longer available, please contact us:

Family Participation Program

Providing help and hope for families and friends of incarcerated individuals

familyparticipationprgram@gmail.com

micpr.org

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419-742-3550



SUBSCRIPTION FORM

The expressed purposes of the Michigan Lifers Association, Inc. and the National Lifers of America, 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 justice reform, especially in corrections.

PRISONERS

PRISONER'S FULL NAME: _____ Number: _____

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