

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

Vol. 41-xx, No. 4

PO Box 1911, Santa Fe NM 87504

April 2016

Voting Rights & Wrongs

Nationally, about 5.85 million citizens are denied the right to vote because of felony convictions. Only two states, Maine and Vermont, allow those imprisoned to vote and they have no voting restrictions for released prisoners. The four states that have had the harshest restrictions have been Virginia, Kentucky, Florida and Iowa.

However, on April 22, the governor of Virginia signed an executive order restoring voting rights to more than 200,000 people with state felony convictions. One in five African-Americans in Virginia could not vote. The governor had previously restored voting rights to 18,000 people. Although he governor's newly signed executive order will not apply to those with felony convictions who will get out of prison in the future. He is reported to be planning to issue similar orders on a monthly basis to cover people as they are released.

Virginia's constitution has prohibited those with felony convictions from voting since the Civil War. The restrictions were expanded in 1902 when poll taxes and literacy tests were instituted.

Over the last twenty years, about 20 states have acted to ease their felony voting restrictions. Fourteen states allow people with felony convictions to vote after their prison terms are completed but while they are still on parole or probation.

In Maryland, the state legislature overrode the governor's veto and now an estimated 44,000 formerly imprisoned people who are on probation can register to vote. In Kentucky, the governor recently signed a measure allowing those with felony convictions to petition judges to vacate their convictions. If granted, this will enable them to vote.

* * * **BLACK LIVES MATTER** * * *

What's Real, What Isn't

Susan Martinez, the governor of New Mexico, did say some true things in response to questions regarding the abysmal state of health/medical care in the state's prison system. For example, she said: "the safety of those prisoners and the health care that is provided to those prisoners is extremely important." And she said some breathtakingly untrue things about the same situation--the headline read: "governor claims inmate care problems have been fixed." And so fast, too--the local paper had done a comprehensive exposé on the penal system's health care based on a six month long investigation, which came out on recent Sunday. The governor's solution was printed that Thursday. Amazing.

Not too much can be undone about the past--of about 160 care audits that should have been done since 2012, the department could only provide records of 20. In 2015, the department conducted only three audits the entire year, records showed, when it should have performed at least 40. The number of people assigned to monitor performance shrank from four medical professionals to one lawyer. There have been a number of prisoner lawsuits--at least 150--regarding quality of health care. The amounts of ten settlements over the past four years are not being released.

It will come as no surprise that NM health care for prisoners is in the charge of the country's largest a for-profit company medical services company: Corizon. Its current four year, \$156 million contract ends May 31. Its CEO says: "One of the most common misperceptions about our company--and indeed our industry--is that we somehow benefit from providing lower quality care." How *could* people think that?

There are approximately 7,000 imprisoned people in New Mexico.

RE SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Have you or a loved one ever spent time in solitary confinement in a New Mexico prison or jail? The ACLU of New Mexico is working to reform this inhumane practice in our state and wants to hear your story. Write to: Taina Colón, PO Box 566, Albuquerque NM 87103 or e-mail her at: tcolon@aclu-nm.org.

Vieques en Puerto Rico

El senador republicano de Oklahoma, Jim Inhofe, ha recomendado la reapertura de la base militar estadounidense en la isla de Vieques, en Puerto Rico, mientras el Congreso considera legislación para hacer frente a la crisis de la deuda puertorriqueña. Durante décadas, la Marina utilizó casi tres cuartas partes de Vieques para prácticas de bombardeo, juegos de guerra y vertedero de municiones viejas, dando lugar a daños ambientales permanentes. La Marina terminó las operaciones de entrenamiento en 2003 tras una campaña masiva de desobediencia civil.

WALK WITH US!

Voices for Creative Nonviolence

Chicago to Thomson IL: May 28 - June 10
Rally at Federal Prison at Tomson: Sat. June 11

The federal super-max maximum security prison at Thomson will hold prisoners in solitary there indefinitely. They may include some now at Guantanamo. Up to 400 cells are planned be Ad Max cells of extreme isolation like those at ADX Florence. Contact: **Voices** at 1249 W Argyle St #2, Chicago IL 60640.

To receive a C.P.R. Newsletter by postal mail monthly, send us up to 12 self-addressed, stamped envelopes (with the CPR return address).

Keep sending us address changes and renewal requests as we struggle to maintain the mailing list for the January holiday card/new calendar mailing as accurately as possible.

Also, note that the *only* address to use to be sure to reach us is: PO Box 1911, Santa Fe NM 87504. Some resource address listings are incorrect.

NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS OR LEGAL WORKERS, so, for our protection, please do not mark any envelopes sent to us as "Legal Mail."

Many, many thanks to the Real Cost of Prisons Project for making our Newsletter available on-line for free downloading and distribution. It is at: <http://www.realcostofprisonsproject.org/html> -- this is a GREAT site!

We depend on our readers' donations & thank you for your support! Mil gracias!

Some More Numbers

I. Number Incarcerated in U.S., 2014

1.5 million people at an annual per person cost of \$80 billion--approximately \$51,250 each. (A "free world" minimum wage of \$15/hr would come to \$30,000.)

II. Number Affected by "Felony Drug Ban"

Approximately 180,000 women in the 12 most impacted states have been banned from welfare benefits for life.

III. Number Disproportionately Imprisoned

In 2014, 6% of all African American men aged 30-39, 2% of Latino men and 1% of "white" men, were imprisoned.

IV. Disproportionate Numbers of Youth

In 2013, the commitment rate for African American youth was four times higher than for "white" youth, an increase of 10% over ten years.

V. Amounts of Prison Guards Salaries

The 29,000 members of the California Correctional Peace Officers Association will receive a 9% salary increase over the next three years. The base salary currently starts at \$63,000 annually and can range to nearly \$80,000. Guards can earn over \$100,000 a year with overtime at the state's 34 prisons. (see minimum wage number now being fought for in #I. above)

Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee

There have been reports of rolling work strikes in April at seven Texas prisons, resulting in lockdowns. There are five specific demands:

- > meaningful work time with "presumptive parole" if no strong reason to deny it,
- > repeal of the \$100 medical co-pay,
- > right to an attorney on *habeas corpus*,
- > creation of an oversight committee with the authority to perform walk-in inspections without giving any notice,
- > humane living conditions: nutritious meals, sufficient health care, limited reliance on solitary confinement, and summer air conditioning.

Resource: IWOC, PO Box 414304, Kansas City MO 64141; 816-866-3808.

Resource

The Michigan Lifers Report, 665 W Willis Suite #B-1, Detroit MI 48201

MICHELLE ALEXANDER SAYS

"Here are white men poised to run big marijuana businesses, dreaming of cashing in big--big money, big businesses selling weed--after 40 years of impoverished Black kids getting prison time for selling weed and their families and futures destroyed."