

# Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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## LOOK BEFORE WE LEAP

Movements to promote positive police, court and prison system change have a long history of false-hope improvements, starting with the Eastern Penitentiary in Philadelphia which was founded by Quakers in the mistaken belief that solitary confinement would "help" people. A more recent misjudgment was the rush toward the death sentence of Life Without the Possibility of Parole. There are many others.

And now we are faced by another step down the same path. The *College & Community Fellowship* (CCF) is a non-profit which approaches systemic change through national advocacy and technical assistance programs (contact information below). Their statement follows:

"CCF believes that the long-term effects of the First Step Act (S.3649) serve only to expand the power of the carceral state. Through its emphasis on using risk assessments, already proven to be based on racial bias, the Bill reinforces racial prejudice and ensures communities of color continue to be disproportionately impacted by the "criminal justice" system. Through its introduction of "e-incarceration" tactics like constant digital monitoring in the community, this Bill sets a precedent for an alarming expansion of surveillance in communities already devastated by mass incarceration. Its sentencing reform provisions will prove inadequate, relying on judges' discretion for the "drug safety valve" and replacing mandatory life sentencing with still-unfair 25-year sentences. The First Step Act provides for immediate relief to those suffering in federal facilities, in exchange for long-term control in prisons and in our communities."

From the CCF Director Vivian Nixon: "In our fight for just reform, we must consider the long-term impact of policy. It's tempting to support this bill on the merits of its effort to improve conditions of confinement. But these improvements mean little if they come at the expense of freedom for this and future generations. The First Step Act threatens our fight for justice by presenting e-incarceration

approaches as progressive; in reality, this is an insidious move toward expanded control and surveillance in our homes and communities. Only by addressing the root causes of mass incarceration, based in racially biased policies and procedures, can we make lasting change. Real reform means investing in people and communities, not in for-profit prisons and surveillance."

The First Step Act is proposed federal legislation. The current federal prison population is now approximately 180,000 people, about triple what it was three decades ago. It was during Clinton's presidency in the 1990s that congress passed the legislation creating long, mandatory minimum sentences for street drug and weapon charges. The federal House of Representatives has already passed another version of this bill.

Such dangerous, magical thinking is wide spread. A recent Sunday headline in the Santa Fe NM paper proclaimed: "A City Under Surveillance." The deputy police chief was quoted: "We're catching up with the times. We're doing stuff that's modernized. That's needed." That is, in fact: video surveillance in parks, monitoring Facebook and other social media and gathering digital information from cellphones.

Some states are seriously considering building more prisons. Despite having passed several "reform" measures in 2018, the state of Oklahoma is the "No. 1 incarcerator" in the world. Its incarceration rate is 990 people per every 100,000 residents. Until recently, Mississippi and Louisiana had higher incarceration rates. Idaho is being pressured into spending \$800 million to make more space for a growing number of imprisoned people some of whom are already being held in a for-profit prison in Texas. This is at a time when Texas claims the use of "more effective alternatives to incarceration" are resulting in its closing prisons.

Resource: College & Community Fellowship, 475 Riverside Dr, Suite 1626, New York NY 10115-0038.

**POETA Puerta Ricana Lola Rodríguez de Tió  
1843 - (en La Habana)1924**

Yo no me siento extranjera:  
bajo este cielo cubano  
cada ser es un hermano...

Cuba y Puerto Rico son  
de un pájaro las dos alas,  
reciben flores o balas  
sobre el mismo corazón...

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To receive the CPR 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 in order for us to maintain our *only* permanent mailing list--the one for our January holiday card/new calendar, as accurately as possible.

Also, note that the correct address to be sure to reach us at is: PO Box 1911, Santa Fe NM 87504. Some resource address listings are incorrect in this regard.

And still: NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS or LEGAL WORKERS; for our protection, please do *not* mark envelopes addressed to us as "Legal Mail."

Many, many thanks to the Real Cost of Prisons Project for posting our Newsletter on-line for free downloading and distribution. It is at:  
[www.realcostofprisonsproject.org](http://www.realcostofprisonsproject.org)--this is a GREAT site! Thank you for all your support!  
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## **SQ News Extends Circulation to Youth**

All four of California's prisons for incarcerated youth now circulate the *San Quentin News*: Ventura Youth Correctional Facility, NA Chaderjian Youth Correctional Facility, OH Close Youth Correctional Facility and Pine Grove Youth Conservation Camp. The bulk of the monthly newspapers printed circulation continues to go to 40 adult California prisons.

## **For-profit Prison Corporations**

This spring, Tucson AZ banned the privatization of its jails and detention centers. "While preventing private prison companies from getting jail contracts is only a small piece in ending mass incarceration, it does prevent these corporations from running dangerous facilities that result in crueler treatment of people they detain," according to the Quaker organization the American Friends Service Committee, which supported the ban.

## **LWOP for Youth Ruled Unconstitutional Again**

Washington DC and 20 other states have already so ruled. And in October, Washington State, in a 5-4 decision agreed. They also specified that no minimum term of life could be imposed for youth as that would mean a life without parole sentence for people convicted of committing a crime when they were younger than 18. Such sentencing "constitutes cruel punishment" and doesn't achieve the legal goals of retribution or deterrence. because children are less culpable than adults the court stated. It added that children convicted of crimes, including the highest degree of murder, are also entitled in Washington to special protections from sentencing courts when possible.

Earlier in the same week, the state's justices had ruled unanimously to strike down the death penalty, declaring its current application was in violation of the state's constitution.

## **More Border Agency Actions**

The Customs and Border Protection agency employs more than 60,000 people. Of them, more than 500 were charged with drug trafficking, accepting bribes and other crimes over the two-year period of 2016 and 2017. The most common arrests involved misconduct involving drugs or alcohol. Domestic or family misconduct was the second most common reason.

## **Women and Mass Incarceration**

In 2018 there were 219,000 women in prison in the United States. Incarcerated women are much more evenly split between state prisons and local jails. For the total incarcerated population state prison systems hold twice as many people as are held in jails.

Women's incarceration has grown at twice the rate of men's in recent decades--and is disproportionately been in local jails. A quarter of the women who are locked up have not yet even had a trial or completed a plea. Of the women under local control, 60% have not been convicted and are awaiting trial. In addition, state and federal agencies pay local jail to house an additional 13,000 women. Of them, roughly 5,000 are under ICE or the U.S. Marshals.

It is likely that the high number of unconvicted women in jails is that women have even lower incomes than incarcerated men and so have an even harder time affording cash bail--which is typically equivalent to a full year's income. About a quarter of convicted women are held in jails compared to 10% of all convicted.