

# Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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## We Can Make It Better or Worse - And Do

First we have the alarmist report from New Mexico. See how many contradictions we can find in what the people running the prisons say. They open with the statement that staffing shortages and crowding leave "less space" for drug treatment and education programs. Which, they say, exacerbates violence and recidivism. They say that prisoner/prisoner assaults have more than doubled since last year. For many of us, with this description of the situation, steps to be taken to alleviate it seem obvious.

But then, those in charge say that the increased violence is because of efforts to reduce solitary confinement. It had been reported that the level of solitary confinement in New Mexico over the past several years was twice the rate as in federal prisons. The rate has varied, but currently is reported to be at about 7% of the prison population. About, in fact, the same rate as was reported in 2015. Hmmm.

Fortunately, there are some who know that "The reckless use of solitary confinement will produce violent behavior by the people who endure it....Unless we... improve the quality of life for prisoners and provide hope for when they are ultimately released, we can expect to see assaults on staff and on other prisoners."

What is the correct question? Perhaps: "How does the use of solitary confinement benefit those who run prisons?"

And, in contrast, we have the situation in New Mexico's neighbor to the north, Colorado. In 2013, at the time a new head of the state Department of Corrections took over, about 1,500 of Colorado's 20,000 prisoners (in contrast to the approximately 7,000 in New Mexico), were being held in solitary. Now, five years later, LESS THAN 1% are. Assaults on prison staff have reportedly dropped to their lowest levels in more than a decade. Two "super maxes" are no longer going to be used as such.

The use of solitary confinement, except for short periods in the most extreme circumstance has been eliminated. "Now the amount of time a man can spend in solitary confinement is 15 days, period." This

accords with the recommendations of the U.N. In addition, psychiatrists have been hired to develop a resident treatment program to reintegrate those previously kept in solitary. Additional privileges have been offered those reluctant to change their housing situation. There is also a "therapy dog" program and one in which prisoners provide support to each other. Also, there are de-escalation rooms where people can choose to go to relieve stress. The one in Cañon City has music piped in, a chalkboard to write on. The doors are not locked and people can choose when they leave. The changes are relatively cost neutral.

The corrections director responsible for these changes in Colorado has said he felt "prisons were manufacturing their own problems by creating or aggravating many prisoners' mental health issues....Now that inmates and guards have more contact, we've seen incredible improvement on both sides of the door. The staff enjoy their jobs much more now." Hmmm.

## Information Needed

We believe it is very important to maintain an accurate idea of changing mail and book restrictions in prisons across the country. Attempts will be made to tighten them and to further diminish the availability of information, personal contact, and reading material. In addition to the restrictions, it is often difficult to get accurate information about what the new rules actually are, as well as how they are being applied. The possibility of beginning law suits, often on first amendment, free speech grounds, seem to help delay these changes so far. But accurate information is the first and overwhelming requirement. Please tell us what you find out. Actual copies of official (new) policies are the most useful.

And, changes always raise new questions. In Pennsylvania, why not have incoming mail all e-mail and then copied to paper for each addressee? How much does this new system cost? How long is the contract for?

**SOLICITING HOLIDAY/CALENDAR CARD DESIGN**

Imprisoned Readers: Please send us a black and white drawing for the 2019 New Year's card and calendar. All designs must be respectful of our diversity: We cannot use any with racist, sexist, or religious symbolism. The deadline is December 15. Submission of a drawing serves as permission for use, and will be credited. Prize: If at all possible, book(s) by mail.  
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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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**The Book Title: WHAT WE KNOW**

It will be composed of essays, 2,500 to 5,000 words in length, by people formerly and currently incarcerated. Submissions should be focused on a specific, serious, well-defined suggestion for how to improve a particular aspect of any part of our current system and should contain elements of the author's personal story.

Selections will be based on:

1. Policy recommendation
2. Concept--new and progressive ideas
3. Feasibility & Impact and realistic
4. Readability and from experience

Postal submissions should be sent to:

Center for American Progress  
ATTN: "What We Know" Book  
1333 H Street NW, 10th Floor  
Washington DC 20005

If possible, they can be sent by e-mail: [smantoncrime@americanprogress.org](mailto:smantoncrime@americanprogress.org) under the subject: "What We Know Book" and in any case be received no later than Jan.4, 2019.

Additional information is available via either of these addresses. The organizations sponsoring the book are *The New Press* and the *Center for American Progress*.

**Huracán Michael arrasa Florida**

"Parece que hubiera estallado una bomba". De esta forma un trabajador de búsqueda y rescate describió la devastadora catástrofe que provocó el huracán Michael, la tormenta de categoría 4 que causó la muerte de al menos seis personas y arrasó comunidades enteras en el estado de Florida, en el sureste de Estados Unidos. Se trata de la tercera tormenta más poderosa que jamás haya golpeado el territorio continental de Estados Unidos, y los meteorólogos señalan que cobró mayor intensidad al tomar contacto con las aguas del Golfo de México, debido a que estas presentan una temperatura mayor de la normal. Algunas de las comunidades costeras de Florida, como Mexico Beach, fueron completamente arrasadas y muestran un panorama desolador con numerosas casas destruidas y botes de pesca que fueron arrojados a tierra por el viento, que alcanzó los 250 kilómetros por hora.

El día 11, el huracán Michael fue degradado a la categoría de tormenta tropical mientras atravesaba los estados de Carolina del Norte y Carolina del Sur, en la costa este. Además, tanto en Alabama como en Georgia, las Carolinas y Virginia se declaró estado de emergencia.

**Un estado cambio la pena de ejecución**

El estado de Washington, en Estados Unidos, se convirtió en el 20 estado en abolir la pena de ejecución, luego de que la Corte Suprema de Washington sentenciara que era inconstitucional "debido a que es impuesta de manera arbitraria y bajo prejuicios raciales". Conmuta la sentencia de ocho hombres sentenciados a ejecución a la sentencia de La vida sin posibilidad de salir de prisión ("parole" en inglés).

**Average Workers are Worse Off Now**

We need to look at how much an average working person earns--not the average earnings of all employed people to learn about actual changes in our standard of living. During times of rising inequality, as this is, employees at the top appear to raise the "average" earnings.

In addition, when average earnings data are adjusted for inflation, the illusion of progress evaporates. In real terms, the weekly earnings of a typical worker fell 1.9% (\$16.80) during the first 18 months of the current president's term.

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