

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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September 2020

Worse, But Nothing Brand New

FIRE

September 8, in Oregon. As part of the enormous fires up and down the west coast of this country, the government of Oregon finally responded by transferring 1,450 people, from a total of three different state prisons, to the Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP) in Salem. They were from Oregon State Correctional Institution, Santiam Correctional Institution and Mill Creek Correctional Facility.

The OSP had more than 2,000 people imprisoned before the evacuations and had reported at least 143 Covid-19 infections. The transfers brought OSP's population up to 3,300. This was an increase of 78% -- nearly a quarter of Oregon's imprisoned population of 14,923. The state's total population is just over 4.1 million.

Of course similar situations have occurred in other states, recently including California fire areas, where some people imprisoned were stuck behind bars in evacuation zones. The institution to which Oregon prisoners were transferred was known to be a hot spot; those prisons they were from, were not.

Even at this late date, the authorities are not taking the sensible obvious actions. Kate Brown, the governor, has stated that she would continue making release decisions on a "case-by-case" basis. Another analysis of potential early releases from the prison department is not due until September 18. The governor was taken to court months ago to force her to release a significant number of those imprisoned who were considered to be especially vulnerable to Covid-19. As of September 9, less than 1% of Oregon's prison population has been released.

On September 10, the entire population of Coffee Creek Correctional Facility -- the only women's prison in Oregon (holding 1,020) and an intake center (283 men) -- was evacuated because of fires. Stay tuned. More to come.

Resource:

Oregon Justice Resource Center;
POB 5248, Portland OR 97208; 503-944-2270

ANNIVERSARY

On September 9, 1971, the nearly 1,300 men being held at Attica Correctional Facility in New York united in their demands:

"We, the imprisoned mean of Attica, seek an end to the injustice suffered by all prisoners, regardless of race, color, or creed."

Today, almost 50 years later, the lessons from Attica remain as important as ever, and an enduring symbol of resistance and unity. We continue to deal with unacceptable conditions: massive overcrowding, extreme sentencing, gendered violence, and a health care crisis made much worse by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Incarcerated people are infected at a rate more than five times higher than the country's overall rate. Their death rate is also higher -- 39 per 100,000 as compared to 29 per 100,000.

Decades of extreme sentencing have resulted in older adults today making up a larger share of state prison populations than those aged 18 to 24. Older people in prison are at a higher risk of serious complications from Covid-19, more likely to be in poorer health, and, of course, have limited access to medical services.

"Mass incarceration" legislation, including "three-strikes" laws and "truth-in-sentencing" schemes have dramatically increased sentences for people convicted of felonies and significantly reduced eligibility for parole. This has resulted in the percentage of people in state prisons who are 55 and older more than tripling between 2000 and 2016 -- to nearly 150,000 older people incarcerated in state "correctional" facilities in 2016.

By August 21, nearly 160,000 incarcerated people and institution staff were known to have been infected with Covid-19 and at least 1,002 had already died. It has been admitted that the death rate has increased about 40% over the past six weeks. It is very likely higher, due to incomplete testing.

Resource:

Equal Justice Initiative; 33 Commerce St.,
Montgomery AL 36104; 334-269-1803

SEND US: HOLIDAY/CALENDAR CARD DESIGNS

Imprisoned Readers: Please send us a black and white drawing for the 2021 New Year's card & 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 artist's permission for use, and will be credited. Prize: As possible, eventually, book(s).

2020 U.S. Federal Executions to Date

- 07/14 Daniel Lee Lewis
- 07/16 Wesley Ira Purkey
- 07/17 Dustin Lee Henken
- 08/26 Lesmond Charles Mitchell
- 08/28 Keith Dwayne Nelson

We Mourn Your Loss.

THE LEAST READ PART OF THE NEWSLETTER

To receive the CPR Newsletter by postal mail monthly, send us a self-addressed, stamped envelope for every month's issue you are requesting, up to 12 at one time. Put the CPR return address on the upper left-hand corner of each envelope.

Continue to send us address changes to help us keep our annual calendar mailing list as accurate as possible.

NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS OR LEGAL WORKERS. Letters to us marked "Legal Mail" can hurt our access to the prison they come from.

Many, many thanks to the Real Cost of Prisons project, which posts our Newsletter on-line monthly for free downloading and distribution. All issues since 2009 are at: realcostofprisons.org - a great site.

BILLIONAIRES

THERE ARE NOW 643 IN THE UNITED STATES.

Virus Relief Checks

After Congress passed the \$2.2 trillion coronavirus rescue package in March 2020, checks of up to \$1,200 were automatically sent (as always, with Donald Trump's name on the front of each) to those people who had filed income tax returns for 2018 or 2019, including some who are incarcerated. A couple of weeks later, the IRS directed state correction departments to intercept payments to prisoners and to return them.

The IRS doesn't yet have numbers on how many payments went to prisoners. Kansas DOC intercepted more than \$200,000 in checks by early June. Idaho and Montana combined had seized over \$90,000. The number of jails and detention centers across the U.S. makes it difficult to tell how many are following those instructions. The IRS seems to have decided by itself to pull back the payments approved by Congress. (AP, July 25 2020)

COVID in California: los latinos

Los latinos que "mantienen al estado en marcha" con su trabajo tienen una tasa de mortalidad 5 veces mayor que la de otros grupos. En el contexto del actual aumento de casos y hospitalizaciones por coronavirus en todo Estados Unidos, las comunidades latinas se ven especialmente afectadas en lugares como California, donde mucha gente latina realiza trabajos esenciales en establecimientos agropecuarios y plantas empacadoras de carne. En California, el 100% de la mano de obra agrícola es latina. Es 100% inmigrante. Y probablemente del 60 al 80% son indocumentados.

Tuvimos la primera campaña de vacunación contra la viruela en 1803 en California en español. Éramos parte de España en ese entonces. Se han brindado servicios médicos en California en español por 251 años. Legamos a ser parte de Estados Unidos como un estado bilingüe. Es español era uno de los idiomas oficiales. Y, sin embargo, es menos probable que los latinos encuentren un médico que hable español. La escasez es tremenda.

No es porque sea un problema nuevo. Esto es California. Lo que hemos hecho durante 160 años es elegir dar la espalda a esta población, no permitirles el acceso a las inversiones que estábamos haciendo en otras poblaciones, ya sea para educación o asistencia sanitaria, y luego preguntarnos por qué hay un problema.

Los latinos de California, de entre 50 y 64 años de edad, han muerto a un ritmo cinco veces mayor que las personas blancas de la misma edad. California acaba de superar a Nueva York en el número de contagios, aunque tiene una cuarta parte de las muertes en ese estado - la comunidad latina se ha visto particularmente afectada.

WIDESPREAD AGREEMENT KNOWN

"There is no way to stop COVID-19 in prison" is the succinct statement of Don Specter, executive director of the Prison Law Office, located outside the gates of San Quentin prison in California. In China too, prisons have become a hotbed for the virus. Iran has had prison based outbreaks and is reported to have given temporary leaves to a quarter of its prison population.

In California the prison population was reported, in August, to have been reduced, in March, by about 10,000 people. For California prisons to be operating at just 100% of capacity, the population would have to be reduced by another 16,000 people. San Quentin would have to be lowered by 50% to stem transmissions, per a June report.