

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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September 2009

THE NORMALIZATION OF FOREVER TIME

A July 2009 report released by the Sentencing Project (514 Tenth St NW, Suite 1000, Washington DC 20004, 202-628-0871, www.sentencingproject.org), *No Exit: The Expanding Use of Life Sentences in America*, states there are 140,610 people serving life sentences in state and federal prisons (this is one out of every 11 imprisoned people). Of these people, 6,807 were juveniles at the time the crime they were convicted of was committed. Of those doing life sentences, 29%--that is 41,095 people--have no possibility of parole and 1,755 were juveniles at the time of the crime.

Currently in the United States there are 2.3 million people imprisoned. This is a 600% increase since 1972 and results in the U.S. having the highest incarceration rate in the world, That is, the number of people locked up considered as a fraction of the total population. Now in the U.S. that is over 750 out of every 100,000 people. And, as the Sentencing Project says, "Foremost among the changes affecting the prison population in recent years are laws and policies regarding the expansion of life sentences, particularly Life Without Parole Sentences (LWOP).

There are, as we know, overwhelming ethnic disparities in who receives these draconian sentences. Of all those sentenced to life, 66% are non-white; 77% of juveniles doing life sentences are non-white.

Four other major findings of the report are:

* In five states: Alabama, California, Massachusetts Nevada, and New York -- at last 1 in 6 prisoners are doing life sentences.

* In five states: California, Florida, Louisiana, Michigan, and Pennsylvania -- each have more than 3,000 human beings doing Life Without Parole Sentences. Pennsylvania has the most juveniles--345 juveniles with Life Without sentences.

* In six states: Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Pennsylvania, South

Dakota and the federal government-- all life sentences are imposed without the possibility of parole.

* The dramatic growth in life sentences is not primarily a result of higher street crime rates, but rather of policy changes that have imposed harsher punishments and restricted parole consideration. The number of those doing Life Without (LWOP) increased by 22% from 33,633 to 41,095 between 2003 and 2008. This is nearly four times the rate of growth of the parole-eligible life sentenced population.

The highest proportion of life sentences relative to the prison population is in federal court sanctioned California, where 20% of the prison population is doing life sentences, up from just over 18% in 2003. Among these 34,164 life sentences, almost 11% are Life Without.

People of Color receive a highly disproportionate part of life sentences. Of those with life sentences, an average of two-thirds are non-white. In New York state, 83.7% of the life sentenced population is non-white.

There are 6,807 juveniles with life sentence. Of them, 1,755--25.8%-- have Life Without. The United States is essentially the only country with this sentence for this age group. It is in violation of various U.N. treaties and covenants as a result. Of juveniles sentenced to life, 77% are youth of color.

Of the under 10% of prison and jail prisoners who are women and girls, 4,694 are doing life sentences. Of female prisoners, 26.4% have sentences of Life Without.

The Coalition for Prisoners' Rights stands with the Sentencing Project in calling for the elimination of sentences of life without parole, and restoring discretion to parole boards to determine who receives paroles.

The number of people in the U.S. officially in poverty is now 45 to 50 million. And we know who goes to prison.

VOICES FROM INSIDE

Eloy AZ June 15, 2009
Prisoner Paul Kay Coronell died at the Red Rock Correctional Center (CCA) in Eloy AZ on June 4, 2009. He was an active litigator, fighting for religious rights. I can only pray someone (from Hawaii) who reads this knows his family. For more information contact: Sherman Pitt, 1752 E Arica Rd, Eloy AZ 85231.

The AK DOC doesn't like the CCA kickback these days, s they are shipping us 850 AK prisoners to a state joint by September, either to MI, CO, or NV. Supposedly to increase the "rehabilitative programs" for the same amount CCA isn't providing them.

Delano CA June 15, 2009
Keefe Company and Access Securepak (10880 Lin Page Place, St Louis MO 63132) are one and the same. No matter how much one complains and provides the verification from the guards, Access almost never refunds or remedies.

Kincheloe MI July 6, 2009
We ask all who believe in and support "second chance" legislation for lifers to show their support by writing, e-mailing or otherwise contacting MI legislators. Urge them to act on and vote in favor of Senate Bills 173-176. Visit our web site at: www.secondchanceforyouth.com for further info, or contact: Herbert Lee Allen-Bey, 188620, 4269 W M-80, Kincheloe MI 49784.

This 2 page version of the CPR monthly newsletter will be included in all correspondence we send out. Others who would like to receive it must send us a stamped, self-addressed envelope (up to 12 at one time) for every issue they would like to receive. Many thanks to the Real Cost of Prisons Project for making it available at: <http://www.realcostofprisons.org/coalition.html>. Our debt is down to \$14,000, with an interest-free loan for half of that amount.

We are currently planning to send out our yearly holiday card/calendar to our updated, but not expanded, mailing list.

Keep your letters of support to Oprah (Harpo Productions, 1058 W Washington Blvd, Chicago IL 60607), and to us, coming

We have been truly heartened by the letters of support we have received as well as the amount of work readers have undertaken on our behalf. A couple of excerpts follow in the next column.

SHORT TAKES

CELL PHONE PENALTIES

According to the June 2009 issue of *California Lifer Newsletter* (PO Box 687, Walnut CA 91788), CA state Senate Bill 434 will make it a misdemeanor punishable by fines up to \$5,000 for possession of a cellular telephone or accessory by a prisoner, or by a prisoner's visitor *while being searched or going through a metal detector prior to a visit*, or by a person who intends to give it to a prisoner. The bill has been passed unanimously by the Senate

WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS REPORT

According to the August issue of *Graterfriends* (of the PA Prison Society, 245 N Broad St, Suite 300, Philadelphia PA 19107), the PA Commission on Wrongful Convictions will soon release its report, three years in the making.

For more information, contact: Pennsylvania Innocence Project, Temple University, Beasley School of Law, 1719 N Broad St, Philadelphia PA 19122, 215-204-4255, www.innocenceprojectpa.org

2009 WRITING CONTEST

Resilience Multimedia (contact: 511 Ave of the Americas, Suite 525, New York NY 10011, 877-267-2303 for more info), is sponsoring its second writing contest for those who were or are in prison and their loved ones. There are 3 possible topics, cash prizes, deadline: October 1

High Desert State Prison, California:

I got about 37 inmates to write Oprah about how your newsletter is the hope of many, how it is a big help in our lives by putting out information that we all can use to help ourselves or others, legally or spiritually. Some how, some way, the Coalition helps us all. Some of us wrote our families and friends, asking them to do as we did (and call as well). We are asking people every day to help us help you.

<http://prisonabolitionist.blogspot.com>:

This newsletter is definitely written with the prisoner audience in mind, and has never [since 1976] cost anyone but the Coalition a dime. This newsletter can't be allowed to die just like that. Their estimated total readership is about 50,000 per month. I don't know why not write John McCain [U.S. Senate, 241 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington DC 20510, 202-224-2235, &/or PO Box 16118, Arlington VA 22215]....