

AN ANONYMOUS PITSER

February 22, 2011

RE: The desperate need for
an Oversight Committee

Old Colony Retribution Center
One Administration Road
Bridgewater, MA 02324

Dear Advocate/Representative:

I am writing to ask for your help in making the public aware of the great injustice and deception taking place within the Massachusetts Department of Correction. Although my language is strong, I can assure you that it is warranted—what is taking place is nothing short of fraud. The litany of complaints that my fellow inmates and I have against the DOC has nothing to do with privileges or amenities that we are being deprived of, but the insidious and slanderous lies the DOC is feeding the public. The following example is indicative of the deception being perpetrated.

Every year, the DOC undergoes a 3-day audit by the ACA; for two weeks prior to the audit, hundreds of inmates are employed in “prettifying” the institution (i.e. scrubbing and waxing floors, painting, repairing showers, sinks, floor tiles, windows, etc.). Cell decorum that was neglected the previous 11½ months is suddenly enforced... they have even gone so far as to round up inmates to sit in normally unused classrooms to “pretend” they are part of some educational or rehabilitative program. What this means is that the prison that the auditors see during those three days bears little or no resemblance to the one that we live in year round. Even more telling, however, is the prison’s operation during those three days.

Mysteriously, everything runs on time; the food is much more adequately prepared and servings are proportionately sized; everything that is supposed to be open, is open (such as the school, gym, library, yard, etc.); and there are never any freeze-ups (these are the constant ½ – 2 hour lock-ups in response to fights, medical emergencies, safety drills, and general staff disorganization/incompetence). It is truly a marvel to behold how efficiently and effectively the prison runs during those three days, even more amazing to consider that there are no fights or medical emergencies, and never, ever any staff shortages. Yet for the rest of the year, with equally “inexplicable” regularity, there are fights, freeze-ups, medical emergencies, “eyeball watches”, suicides, cut-ups, inedible food, miniscule portions, delayed or canceled movements, and always, always, staff shortages. School, chapel, gym, barbershop, library... something will be closed, you can bet on that.

Clearly, the inmates do not have any vested interest in how favorable the DOC appears during these audits, which means two things: first, when it is convenient for them, the DOC can get spectacular results with their “insufficient” resources; and more importantly, when the DOC fails to get these results, it is *intentional*. Conspiracy theories, cynicism, and resentment cannot account for the sheer volume of evidence to support this assertion. The question then is not *if* the DOC is undermining rehabilitative efforts or manipulating the public, but *why* and *how*?

Simply put, as to *why*, the answer is job security and *greed*. If prisons functioned the way they were supposed to (and the way hundreds of millions of tax dollars should ensure) they would eventually render themselves extinct, and put thousands upon thousands of “correctional” staff out of work. So it is important to DOC personnel that the DOC not rehabilitate effectively. But there is an element

of greed as well. Despite having one of the safest and least demanding correctional environments in the country, Massachusetts C.O.'s are the second highest paid in the nation. Their benefits are astronomical, and their vacation/paid days off per year (52) are incomparable. This has engendered in them laziness, complacency, and a corrupt attitude of manipulation and deception—which brings us to the question of *how* they deceive the public.

Essentially, because prisoners do not have a voice, the DOC has a monopoly on the truth. The problem is that there is no truth involved. By keeping the public in the dark about what really goes on and fudging the numbers to provide “proof” of how hazardous their job is, they are able to continually demand more and more—and they do. But if you look a little closer, you can see through the charade. For instance, at least once per month, sometimes as often as once per week, each institution implements a new rule or regulation that further restricts inmate liberty. The DOC would have you believe that these procedures are necessary security measures, tweaks to close loopholes and address overlooked issues. Really? Is it possible that an agency that has existed in its current manifestation for over a hundred years is still trying to iron out its security wrinkles? If that's the case, perhaps they're not the people who should be entrusted with protecting the public. But since they are entrusted with that task, it makes their motives that much more insidious.

The DOC constantly creates new rules in order to manufacture “violations” of those rules. As new inmates come into the system and those that were already there grow accustomed to the current rules, new ones are necessary to create dissention, unrest, and—most importantly—violations. Those violations are the DOC's bread and butter; it's what they live on. It is the “proof” they use to show the public how incorrigible we are, how much of a threat we are. Not only does it help to dehumanize us in the eyes of the public (and therefore politicians and legislators), but it has the concomitant effect of creating hostility, tension, and resentment (decreasing the likelihood of rehabilitation). Furthermore, it teaches prisoners that lying and manipulation are acceptable forms of behavior, and that oppression, subjugation, and maltreatment of others is a respectable means to achieve one's goals—after all, society has appointed *them* to govern *us*.

The DOC's manipulation does not end at the arbitrary and capricious creation and altering of rules, it extends to almost every area of interaction with inmates. More than 90% of “assaults on staff” are actually assaults *by* staff. In fact, most *inmate on inmate* assaults are the result of and can be traced to staff harassment and inmate frustration with constantly worsening conditions. There is a consummate lack of professionalism by the majority of DOC personnel, and for most prisoners, the completely unreasonable and illogical decisions made to their detriment are infuriating (for instance, take the issue of higher education, one of the few measures proven to substantially reduce recidivism. In 1994, legislation was passed that made prisoners ineligible for Federal Pell Grants, the primary means by which inmates paid their college tuition. However, there was nothing in the law that prevented prisoners—the few who could afford to do so—from paying for their own education. Yet, the Massachusetts DOC adamantly refuses to allow inmates to be proctored for their exams, preventing them from furthering their education. There is no legitimate penological interest in doing so except that denying education helps to maintain an atmosphere of ignorance and negativity and significantly reduces the chances inmates will be rehabilitated. Even more telling is that no DOC official has *ever* been able to give a satisfactory reason for not allowing proctors).

When I set out to write this letter, I thought one page would be sufficient to lay out the claims against the DOC, yet two pages later I have not even scratched the surface of the department's

malfesance. The latest in a long line of dubious fabrications is that the DOC is "understaffed." As it stands now, the DOC employs approximately 5,400 staff to govern just over 11,000 inmates, a ratio of one staff member for every two inmates—the best private school in the world doesn't have such a favorable ratio. Although the staff to inmate ratio has remained constant for the past decade-and-a-half, the issue of being "short-staffed" was unheard of fifteen years ago. Yet today, not a single day goes by that some area of the prison isn't closed due to staff shortage (undoubtedly, an area related to inmate rehabilitation). All this in spite of the fact that there are now several less prisons, and dozens less rehabilitative and educational programs in the remaining prisons (welding, small engine repair, drafting, desktop publishing, HVAC, and countless other programs have been eliminated). How is that possible in a system whose budget has more than doubled to well over \$540 million?

Beginning less than two weeks ago, the DOC began locking down its prisons on Saturdays and Sundays at 7:00pm because of Governor Deval Patrick's refusal to pay overtime after seven. The claim is that without officers working overtime, there is not enough staff to run the state's prisons. Although I have not been afforded higher education, even I can tell you that their math does not add up. But that is how it works. Thousands of complaints have been lodged and tension in the prisons has increased. Now, the Massachusetts Correctional Officers Federated Union, one of the most powerful in America, will use that as their ultimate bargaining chip. They will insist that without overtime pay, more officers, and a bigger budget, a catastrophe is looming. They will cry wolf to the media that the only way this catastrophe can be averted is with more money—nothing else will do. And, as has been the case for twenty years, they will get their way... unless we get some help in exposing their fraud.

The same scenario played itself out last year. When Governor Patrick announced his plans to cut \$100 million out of the DOC's budget and considered closing several prisons to accommodate the budget cuts, the MCOFU's president, Steve Kenneway, claimed hundreds of murderers, rapists, and drug dealers would soon be wreaking havoc in society unless the governor's plans were scrapped. The result? Not only did the DOC not lose any money, they got more than the previous year. We need people to start asking why an agency with such an astronomically high failure rate continually gets more and more money? Why is so little of that money being used to rehabilitate, and so much being used for "security"? What is really going on inside these prisons that every taxpayer and citizen, whether they realize it or not, has a vested interest in? But we need to do more than ask these questions, we need to demand answers. Governor Romney did just that seven years ago when he formed the Governor's Commission on Corrections Reform—nearly a decade later no action has been taken to implement the GCCR's recommendations.

The public can no longer afford to be kept in the dark about what goes on behind these walls and fences. More than 95% of us will be released back into society whether the system is corrected or not. We have seen all too well in the case of Dominic Cinelli what happens when the system fails to rehabilitate. The only way we will ever be safe is to hold the DOC accountable. We can't do that without your help.

On behalf of all those desperately seeking change, I thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely, *AN ANONYMOUS PRISONER*