

# Inside The Box

By Matthew Hattley

## Ours Is A Broken Prison System



Matthew Hattley

I realize that when I critique the prison system, the average person reading my words believes I am doing so merely because I am incarcerated. Allow me to prove you wrong.

According to the article "Captives Outside Prison Walls" by Errol Louis [Daily News, 5/29/14], he stated: "As ex-NYPD Commissioner Bernie Kerik once told me, the three years he spent in prison (for tax fraud and making false statements) were like 'dying with your eyes open.' A man who walks through the prison gates and back into society is, in many ways, reenacting the biblical tale of Lazarus, raised from the dead and exiting the tomb."

Those words — "dying with your eyes open" — are from an ex-top cop who society respected, trusted and viewed as a strong man. Yet if a mere three years could make him feel like "dying with his eyes open," just imagine what it is like to do ten, twenty or even thirty-plus years under such conditions. Not a pretty picture, is it?

This is why the current laws surrounding the prison system MUST be restructured — immediately! We Americans are quick to point a finger at other countries and comment on how harshly they treat their own citizens, yet we refuse to openly accept, admit or even acknowledge the injustice that is actually happening right here at home. How much longer will we deny and/or hide the truth about the broken prison system?

Then we have to deal with legislators like LaValle and Thiele, who have a strong desire to "increase from twenty-four months to sixty months the time for which reconsideration for parole for a violent felony offense shall be determined." Is the initial 15-25 years — which we received from the sentencing judge — not adequate enough?

Why would anyone consciously yearn for an opportunity to give a person who is eligible for parole an additional five years? That's a sentence in itself. Plus the current two years is already too harsh. This is all simply a reflection towards those who break the law, an unprofessional way to view the situation.

For those who honestly believe that a person who just completed 15-25 years of incarceration is "not enough," I personally challenge you to do just 90 days in this environment with the general population — not protective custody. Doing "time" is not as easy as many would like you to believe. The high suicide rate alone speaks volumes.

I guarantee you this: The majority who could physically experience this would view us (incarcerated individuals) in a different light — a more humane one. It takes a very strong and determined person to endure twenty-five years in here while maintaining their sanity and moral foundation in the process.

Even Newt Gingrich and Van Jones weighed in on the broken prison issue. They discuss their opinions in "Prison System is Failing America" [CNN covered the story on May 21, 2014]. Here are several of their quotes: (1) "The current system is broken beyond repair. It's a human, social and financial disaster. We need a radical strategy of replacement of these huge bureaucracies that lack any meaningful oversight." (2) "We need to rethink prisons, parole and probation for the 21st century." and (3) "Technology should revolutionize more than just the prisons' rehabilitation programs.

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It should completely transform the corrections and criminal justice system."

They further state: "The incarceration industry has grown into a billion dollar industry, with corrections being among the most expensive budget in many states, increasingly outpacing what they spend on higher education," and "When a typical bureaucracy does its job this badly, it wastes money, time and paper. The corrections bureaucracy, in failing to correct the large majority of inmates in its charge, not only wastes money, but also wastes lives, families and entire cities." [visit: [www.gingrichproductions.com](http://www.gingrichproductions.com)].

Why does society continue to support a system where the primary objective is to administer vengeance on its own citizens? When we commit a crime, we should be offered some sort of rehabilitation — not a series of punishments for decades on end! Under these circumstances, there is no differentiation between the person who committed the crime and those administering their punishment.

If an individual is unable to develop positively — to where they are able to function productively in society after ten-plus years of incarceration — then it's obvious that the broken system failed society and New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) is simply misappropriating several billion dollars annually. At what point is a rehabilitated person forgiven for his/her transgression(s)?

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## Letters

### Believes Our Prison Column Too One-Sided...

Having worked in a maximum security facility for more than twenty years, I feel I need to respond to the columns "Inside the box... a prisoner tells his story"

First of all, he always refers to himself as "prisoner" never inmate or convicted felon. The word prisoner implies an INNOCENT person being held, as in a kidnapping victim. He writes about COs only writing misbehavior reports and suggests they instigate assaults when they see the opportunity to get a free ride on compensation. Really?

Inmate Hattley says not all prisoners are rotten to the core, (I agree) most of us just made a simple mistake. This man is a convicted murderer: he took a life! He calls this just a simple mistake? Inmates can get a free college degree while incarcerated, yet most of us law abiding citizens cannot afford to send our kids to college. Seniors can't afford their medications. Veterans are dying waiting for health care. What is wrong with this picture?

I believe the public has the right to know what goes on inside a prison; after all it's their tax dollars supporting these felons. So when are we going to see a column called "Behind the walls... a CO tells his story"?

Nancy Anthony  
Napanoch

*Editor's Note: The Shawangunk Journal has run such columns and welcomes more...*

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# A Clarification Of What I Am Changing Terms Mean A Lot To People

By Matthew Hattley

The following is a reply to Nancy Anthony's letter regarding my monthly column. Her words appeared in the August 7 edition of the paper, in the letters section.

Yes, in the past I have referred to myself as a "prisoner," the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision now labels me an "offender." However, after being enlightened by the Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions, I now refer to myself as an "incarcerated individual." It is time to remove the stigma associated with those of us who enter the prison system to serve a sentence.

Regardless of what you may believe, the crime of which I was convicted — second degree murder — does not define me as a person, it is merely a section of the New York State Penal Law under which I was sentenced. Individuals should not be ostracized for something they did over twenty-plus years ago. Especially if said person has made significant progress to become a better person since. Why should only a select few receive a second chance and/or forgiveness? Would you feel the same way about a person convicted of criminal negligent homicide, vehicular manslaughter, or DWI?

Also, before you label me a "murderer," I strongly suggest that you acquire all the facts surrounding my case. Once you acquire them your perception of me will change — for the better. It is easy to label a person, especially one you do not know personally. Without prior knowledge of me or my crime, you are merely speculating.

Furthermore, I never referred to my case as a "simple mistake" — it was a terrible tragedy which should not have occurred. Unfortunately, I am unable to turn back the hands of time. I genuinely regret that a man lost his life, something I will have to live with for the rest of my natural life. Yes, I am capable of feeling compassion. Furthermore, what I did say was that, "A lot of us are in here simply for making a mistake." We are not career criminals.

When I write about correction officers writing fabricated misbehavior reports and instigating assaults to simply take advantage of the slack compensation system, I make it crystal clear that I am only referring to a very small number of the security staff. The majority of the employees simply do their eight hours and go home to spend quality time with their families; they have a life outside of their job.

The "free" college degree you mention does not cost taxpayers a single cent. The cost of our higher-education

is completely covered by private donations. Fortunately, there are still people out there who strongly believe incarcerated individuals deserve a second chance at living a normal, law-abiding life in society. By providing us with a higher education, our chances of committing a new crime upon our release are greatly reduced. The statistics on this are clear.

Anyone who has been employed by DOCCS for twenty plus years knows that everything I have revealed is factual. Yet there are those who prefer to keep what occurs within these prisons a secret, keep society blind to the truth, especially when there are billions of dollars at stake. The more society fears incarcerated individuals, the easier it is to hide the truth — and misappropriate large sums of money. If we were as dangerous as the propaganda would have you believe, the state would require more morgues than prisons. The level of violence in New York State prisons is actually decreasing with each passing year.

The only thing I do agree with you on is this — There is definitely a serious problem with seniors not being able to afford their medications, and veterans dying while waiting to receive adequate health care. These individuals should be treated with more dignity and respect. Unfortunately these are all political issues, as is the prison system. As long as the people of this state continue to re-elect the same people to represent them, the longer the problems will remain the same. Stop being afraid to make the necessary progressive changes, your quality of life can only improve. Sort of like the lottery, you have to be in it to win it!

When individuals have an opportunity to make a difference by voting, and choose not to exercise this particular right, then they should not complain or become upset when the results are not what they desire. Society has to stop believing that "one person cannot make a difference." Start viewing situations collectively — this is where the power exists. Doing nothing serves no logical purpose — other than to accept defeat. Unfortunately, humans are habitual by nature, which makes changes that much more difficult to achieve. Yet instead of concentrating on creating a higher quality of living for themselves and their communities, some simply prefer to criticize individuals such as myself. I guess I'm more interesting and/or popular than their local politicians.

No further clarification required.