

PRISONERS LIVES MATTER TOO!

Greetings Comrades,

Despite America opening back up slowly, but surely again, I'm almost certain you're not getting out as much these days like most people. As we all try to adjust to this serious threat outside, it makes me wonder ... What types of jokes are allowed during this quarantine? Aha! If you're corny like me and guessed "INSIDE JOKES" (*get it?*), then let's high-five in spirit for keeping our sense of humor during this unprecedented time. After all, since there's no official vaccine or cure right now, laughter may just be the best medicine yet! Especially for those of us inside. No pun intended on that one.

You see, back in February, when I first became aware of the Coronavirus, I joked that I wouldn't take it seriously until I started seeing folks drop dead from it and people wearing hazmat suits. Ironically, since then, I've witnessed through the news BOTH things and now find myself in a situation where I'm trying to fend off infection while being housed inside of the prison industrial complex where contagion has spread like wildfire. Experts had predicted that prisons and nursing homes were places the virus would do tremendous damage due to the fact that, in these types of facilities, there's no such thing as social distance. As it turns out, those experts were right.

I admit. They have lackadaisically tried to implement the six feet away rule when going to the chow hall and even made us some flimsy facemasks to wear, but other than that, we are STILL mingling in bunches on the rec yard, the canteen line, and most definitely in the dorms. Across the country and here in Florida, there have been numerous cases of multiple deaths occurring within these facilities because of the highly contagious nature of the pathogen and the close living quarters creates the perfect scenario for the virus to thrive. Statewide, close to two thousand prisoners and staff have contracted Coronavirus and several inmates have died. I can't even keep up with the latest nursing home statistics down here, but to see the damage in my close vicinity has me more nervous than a postman at a dog show that I could possibly fall victim to the virulent menace, too. Here at Cross City C.I., it appears that Covid-19 is contained, but to say that I'm creeped out by what's transpired doesn't come close to describing how it feels to come in such close proximity to death. I can only compare it to the fear one might have after discovering they had been intimate with someone who recently died of AIDS.

The craziest thing about dealing with this pandemic is that when I try to talk to other inmates here about staying safe, some of them think that I'm losing my grip on reality for being overly concerned and tell me that I'm becoming paranoid. Even officers say don't worry, but that's easy for them to say considering that nearly everyone I talk to on the outside is quarantining alone or with a few other people. It is an entirely different story when you're trying to duck a fatal illness while locked up in a unit with 200 people. Unfortunately, though, these are the circumstances that those of us who are incarcerated find ourselves facing. We are forced to protect ourselves as much as we can inside buildings that are ideally situated for us to lose the struggle. The administration does not give us any cleaning supplies to sanitize surfaces constantly, so we are forced to buy bleach or wipes under the table from medical orderlies, if you have the funds to do so. In a sign of prisoner solidarity, some of them are now taking books of stamps if you don't have the canteen, because not everyone has a support system out there. Thankfully, I have a

great, yet small support network of likeminded friends, but I've been sacrificing both canteen AND stamps just so I can keep my cell and person clean with these supplies. I mean, what would YOU do in my situation? I'm scared! And hearing about inmates being hauled off in body bags only heightens my anxiety.

The most frustrating aspect of the situation is that, in spite of the crisis and rising death toll, the leadership within the Bureau of Prisons and the Department of Corrections are reluctant to address the issue by allowing inmates early release because of the concern they have of someone dangerous slipping through the cracks. Sadly, their cautiousness was given validation after a man released from the county jail due to overcrowding and the Covid-19 outbreak, committed murder the second night he was freed (*Insert facepalm here*). Though that was, indeed, an unfortunate occurrence, what I hope the decision-makers over at BOP and DOC realize is that no solution implemented will be perfect. While a single case of someone with evil intent did occur, it shouldn't stop the powers to be from using the release of inmates at their disposal to save the lives of thousands of RETURNING CITIZENS who were NOT given a death sentence and who should be given the opportunity to avoid life-altering injuries, illness, or death. Especially if they are low risk inmates without violent records like myself. Under normal circumstances it could be argued that the risk may be too great to take. I can OVERstand that. However, with lives in the balance and time being of the essence, (* What? With the threat of the virus coming back even MORE prolific in the fall? *) something needs to give. For now, I personally ask for all prayers, solidarity, and whatever support you can offer me out the kindness of your heart. Please contact my network leader, Karyn, at ... time4change4444@gmail.com ... for tips on how you can help. Or reach me directly at ...

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If you prefer using email, you can set up an account on jpay.com, selecting Florida, & entering my DC#228036. You will need to buy Jpay stamps, however, they are cheaper than USPS stamps, 40¢ vs. 55¢. I welcome correspondence and will respond. I enjoy hearing from people and gain strength and encouragement from people who write to me.

Thank you and remain safe out there. ~Ezzial

