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Dedicated to James "Yaki" Sayles

TAMMS
YEAR TEN

STATEVILLE

SPEAKS

VOICES FROM INSIDE...

JULY 2008

House Bill 4154

Bill Ryan

A subject-matter-only hearing on House Bill 4154, Elderly Sentence Adjustment, was held before the Illinois House of Representative Prison Reform Committee on April 30 in Springfield. No vote was taken at this time.

Testimony in favor of the bill was presented by Bill Ryan and Ted Pearson (excerpts below); Mata Weber and Annette Scrum from Parents of Murdered Children; and David Domire, the Warden of Jefferson City Prison in Missouri. Warden Domire described the Impact of Crime upon Victims Class, a successful program operated in Missouri prisons. Weber, Scrum, and Domire offered to assist Illinois in implementing a similar program.

Opposing the bill were Jennifer Bishop Jenkins, of Illinois Victims.org, and two victims' family members. Each of these speakers detailed the pain experienced as a result of a loved one being killed. Jenkins maintained that victims should have been notified of this meeting and

should be informed about any future hearing. She stated support for Restorative Justice and other positive programs for prisoners. In opposing HB 4154, which she considers "bad public policy," Jenkins said, "I think it is important to state the obvious sometimes: the only reason we are all here, spending billions on prisons and on public and legal policy and processes dealing with criminals and crimes, and spending our lives in staggering victimization is because these human beings now serving long term prison sentences CHOSE to do unspeakable evil." She urged more attention to preventative programs and acknowledged that "there are innocent people serving LWOP, and there are innocent people serving long-term prison sentences . . . And there are probably more that are serving sentences too harsh really for what they have done. But their legal remedy is a post-conviction petition or commutation, not elderly release

through this method." Jenkins closed her presentation endorsing the hard work that established determinate sentencing and saying HB 4154 would "undo all that."

Below is an abridged statement given by Bill Ryan

Mr. Chairperson and Committee Members,

Today we continue Illinois's historic exploration of the criminal justice system, confronting difficult moral questions and fundamental matters of justice. The Elderly Sentence Adjustment Act, HB 4154, is one part of a larger movement to create a criminal justice system that is driven by hope, fairness, and rehabilitation rather than fear, arbitrariness, and cynicism. We are especially ready to rethink our process

Continued on Page 3...

hope / change / redemption

Coverage

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Hearings Held Regarding TAMMS Anthony Madrid



A very important step has been taken in the fight to secure humane treatment for the approximately 270 men at Tamms Supermax in downstate Illinois.

On Monday, April 28, 2008, a public hearing was held at Chicago's Thompson Center, in the heart of the city. The large conference space was filled to capacity and there was about three-hours of testimony. Many people stood in the hallway and listened through the open doors.

The proceedings were chaired by State Representative Eddie Washington. Sitting at the long table with him were more than a half-dozen other state representatives were in the audience. They listened to presentations from both sides of the issue, and had plenty of questions for each of the presenters.

From the reform standpoint, the representatives heard expert testimony from Dr. Terry Kupers, an independent psychiatrist who has a great deal of

experience with prisoners in solitary confinement. Dr. Kupers asserted that sensory deprivation conditions at Tamms represent psychological torture.

The Committee also heard from several lawyers actively involved in Tamms-related litigation. Alan Mills from the Uptown People's Law Center and Locke Bowman from MacArthur Justice had a great deal to say about severe lack of due process issues involved in transferring men to Tamms in the first place, and then having no apparatus for restoring them to the regular prison population.

Finally, family members and ex-prisoners of Tamms took the microphones and shared their experiences, including many dramatic cases of abuse, arbitrary justice and mental breakdown.

Meanwhile, representatives from the IDOC also has their turn. The general drift of their testimony was not that that

the reformist allegations regarding conditions at Tamms were necessarily false, but that closed maximum security facilities are necessary just the same—for safety's sake. IDOC representative Sergio Molina said the concerns being voiced at the hearing would certainly be looked into, and that the IDOC was more than willing to report back to the Committee about any questions it wished to pose.

The acceptability of the IDOC's standpoint was questioned by several members of the Committee. In many cases, the facts seem to speak for themselves: even Mr. Molina and the IDOC's medical director had to admit that indefinitely prolonged solitary confinement at Tamms could not conceivably be held to advance any kind of rehabilitative purpose, and are in fact quite likely to contribute in the long run to recidivism and violence.

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HB4154 Continued...

in Illinois, a state that has been at the forefront of a vital national conversation about the death penalty.

In preparation for the next hearing in the summer, I recommend that the Chair ask the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) to submit to the committee a list of inmates who would be eligible for Earned Sentence Adjustment under the provisions of this Act as well as a list of members of victims' families. The committee would then be able to notify the appropriate people about the next hearing. Victims of violent crime, who often feel alienated from the legal process, should be part of this review process. The aim of this bill is to minimize suffering and maximize justice—so if we fail to include victims or fail to respond to their needs, we will not have reached our goal.

The United States now incarcerates 1 out of every 100 adults in the country. Most of the imprisoned in the United States are poor, and they are disproportionately black and Latino. Our rate of imprisonment compromises our commitment to the democratic ideals of liberty and equality. Morally as well as legally, we are required to consider the history of perpetrators—their experiences of childhood abuse and trauma; the nonavailability of jobs and education in high-crime neighborhoods; the easy and tragic availability of drugs and guns. These facts are not excuses, but they are critical conditions.

A just and democratic response would also be alert to the history of the unequal protection of black Americans in the United States. We fool ourselves if we simply trust that the system is working fairly, that it gets most cases more or less right. Recent revelations about our capital system make perfectly clear the dangers of inadequate review and information about the legal process.

HB 4154 would enable prisoners who have served 25 consecutive years and who have reached age 50 to apply to the original sentencing court for a sentence adjustment. The power to adjust sentences would be in the hands of the original sentencing court—not a prisoner review board. Petitioners would have to demonstrate in a variety of ways, detailed in the



legislation, that they are fully rehabilitated. They would also be asked to document any relevant medical conditions.

A life without parole sentence is often called an “in-house death sentence.” The same concern for justice that has made visible wrongful convictions and a host of procedural failures in our capital system now motivates us to reflect on the lives of women and men who are growing old behind bars. The same concern for ongoing evidence of racism now motivates us to consider who has served more than

Continued on next page...

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HB4154 Continued...

twenty five years and how they came to be in prison. The same abolitionist belief that each human being is more than the worse thing he or she has done applies as well to people who have spent most of their adult lives in prison and who have been told by a court that they will die there.

As drafted, the bill would establish a program that has been successful in Missouri for almost a decade, entitled Impact of Crime Upon Victims Classes (ICVC). Victim families, prisoners and prison staff attest to the positive benefits of this program and have offered to assist Illinois in implementing the program. You will hear details from Warden Domire of Jefferson City maximum security prison and Mata Weber whose daughter was murdered and who spearheads the Restorative Justice section of the Missouri program.

The ICVC would not be mandatory for anyone applying for sentence adjustment. Rather, we have included the program in our bill because we believe so strongly in its mission—to attend to the needs of victims, to call offenders to responsibility—and because it shares with Elderly Sentence Adjustment a commitment to the difficult work of responding to wrongs and injustices.

This bill would establish a modest pilot program. The Illinois Department of Corrections' budget exceeds \$1 billion, which keeps 46,000 individuals in a prison system that is overcrowded, with overworked staff and no relief in sight. About 10% of the prisoners have sentences of 30 years or more, and this number will continue to escalate in the next years because of rigid, inflexible sentencing laws.

Article 1, Section 1, of the Illinois Constitution states, "All penalties shall be determined both according to the seriousness of the offense and with the objective of returning the offenders to useful citizenship." This Constitutional requirement makes clear that the objective of returning prisoners to the outside world applies to those convicted of serious as well as minor offenses. Both the death penalty and unreviewed life sentences

violate this requirement.

These questions are at the heart of the matter. Can people change? Does it matter if they do? What is the purpose of long-term sentences—to protect the public? To punish the guilty? Both? When these fundamental goals have been successfully met, does continued imprisonment serve a moral or even legal purpose?

HB 4154 achieves the same end as clemency but with a couple major distinctions: 1) a sentencing court, not the Governor, will make decisions; and 2) sentence adjustment is contingent upon clear and demanding criteria. This legislation empowers a sentencing court to consider release for men and women who pose no threat to others and who can demonstrate this. We can assure the public that people who are unsafe will remain in prison. This legislation gives the original court an opportunity to review long-term sentences after at least twenty-five years have passed. This seems entirely reasonable. And it is in keeping with the example of the European Union, which has no death penalty and has established a system for prisoners sentenced to life or long terms to earn their freedom.

We should be working toward a more humane and responsive criminal justice system. We can create a system that both responds to the suffering of victims and operates within democratic standards of decency. With legal scholar Hugo Bedau, I believe that a democratic society should operate according to a rule of minimum force; it should exert the least restraint possible to achieve its goals. Forcing elderly, reformed people, often with chronic and debilitating conditions, to die in prison is not using the least force. It is past time that we implement a review mechanism for long-term sentencing that upholds our democratic principles, complies with the Illinois Constitution, and assures the public that the criminal justice system is committed to public safety and human rights. ■

Hearings for TAMMS Continued...

After the hearings were adjourned, Representative Julie Hamos approached certain members of the Tamms Year Ten coalition, and suggested that the time seemed very ripe to draft legislation and to put it before the Illinois House in May. It is unlikely that any bill to close or reform Tamms will pass in its first 'run', but it is hoped that the publicity and consciousness-raising generated by the attempt will pave the way for the bill's being passed in the next session. ■

The Tamms Reform Bill

Stephen F. Eisenman

On May 22, Representative Julie Hamos (D-18th) filed with the clerk of the Illinois Legislature, House Bill 6651, intended to establish new standards and procedures for sending someone to Tamms supermax prison. Within a few days, thirteen prominent co-sponsors added their names in support. The introduction of the bill is an important event in the history of the Illinois prison system for two reasons: 1) It marks the first significant popular questioning of the lockdown regime begun at the Federal penitentiary at Marion, Illinois in 1983, and institutionalized with the opening of the state supermax at Pelican Bay, California, three years later; and 2) It indicates that the voices of prison reformers are beginning to compete for legislators' attention with the law-and-order and throw-away-the-key crowd.

Tamms supermax prison was built in 1998 as the result of an earlier House bill, itself the consequence of a recommendation by the Illinois governor's 1993 Task Force on Crime and Corrections, known as the

"Valukas Report." Modeled upon Pelican Bay, Tamms has now been operating for a decade, and though the Valukas report recommended that men at the new supermax be rapidly moved "in and out" (pg. 89), fully a third of the roughly 260 men currently at Tamms have been there since the prison opened. In addition, though the task force report explicitly stated that the prison was only supposed to house men who had committed acts of violence in other IDOC institutions, (pg. 88), non-violent offenders are among the prisoners at Tamms. Recognizing the apparent contradiction between Task Force intent and current practice, the *Year Ten Campaign*, an umbrella organization of mostly Chicago-based grass roots organizations, began a program of public education and legislative outreach. It has organized dozens of events in the past year, from letter writing to prisoners, to lobbying in Springfield. And it was this last activity, which took place on April 28, that led directly to the introduction of HB 6651. The thirteen co-sponsors of the bill are Karen A. Yarbrough, Eddie Washington, Elga L. Jefferies, Arthur L. Turner, Naomi D. Jakobsson, Annazette Collins, Greg Harris, Constance A. Howard, Kathleen A. Ryg, Maria Antonia Berrios, Esther Golar, Barbara Flynn Currie and Elain Nekritz.

The bill would do four things: 1) ensure that only violent prisoners are transferred to Tamms; 2) provide hearings to ensure fairness; 3) limit terms of solitary confinement at Tamms to one year (unless the prisoner committed another violent act); and 4) prevent mentally ill prisoners from being sent to Tamms. At the press conference on May 25 announcing the bill, the audience and press, packed into a hot room in the Thompson Center in Chicago, heard short speeches from Representatives Hamos, Washington, Yarbrough and Howard, as well as Year Ten

members, including Jean Snyder, an attorney who has litigated on behalf of Tamms prisoners. The mood of the

Continued on page 7...

Lost?

Wanna Help But Don't Know Where to Begin?



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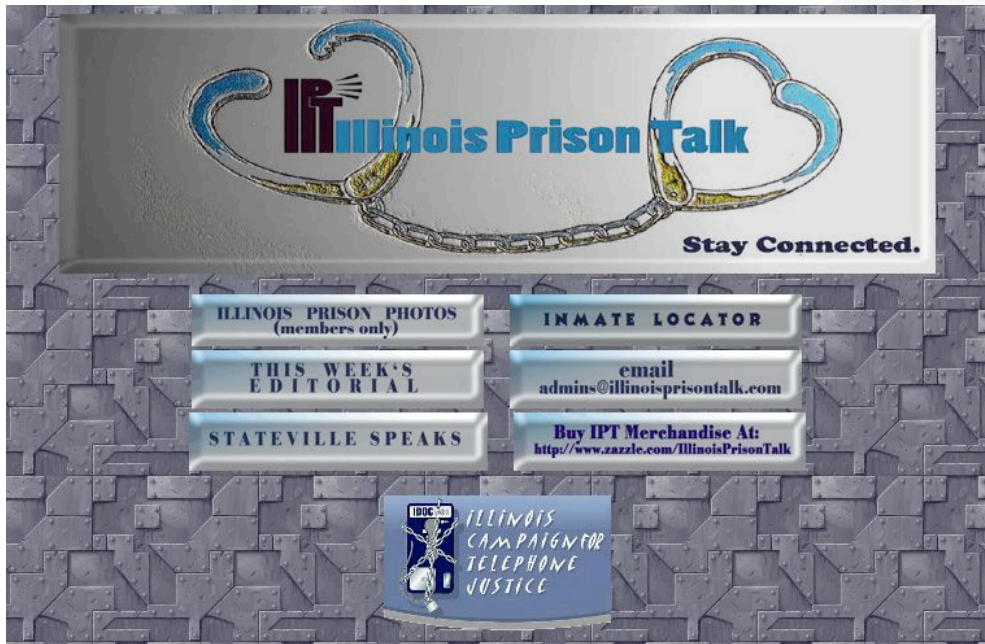
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Illinois Prison Talk Jacki Gansch

(illinoisprisonstalk.com)

Illinois Prison Talk is a website dedicated to providing support and information to families, friends, and loved ones of inmates. Established in 2006, our membership has grown to over 1500 members. Though the majority of our members have an inmate in an Illinois prison, we also boast members who are prison reform/prisoner advocates, attorneys, professors, students, legislators/politicians, clergymen, and members of the armed forces. They add welcome diversity to our membership.

The initial goal of IPT was to provide an open, uncensored public forum where advocates could discuss issues affecting inmates. As our membership and guest lists have grown, we have had to adapt to a changing readership. We are particularly careful to protect the identities of our members and also the inmates we support. Security measures have been implemented to safeguard those who prefer to remain anonymous (as most do).

In order to best meet the needs of our growing membership, we will be offering a board dedicated to the issues of the long-term inmate. Inmates serving LWOP, or de facto life terms, or life sentences (20+ years) face different issues than inmates facing shorter sentences. So do their families.

While the main board of IPT will still be the "go-to" site to obtain crucial information about lockdowns, visiting information, and other helpful information about the IDOC (including legal links, Illinois statutes, legislative bills affecting inmates, parole issues, what to do when your loved one enters prison, etc.) long-term prisoner issues will soon have a separate board for discussing concerns directly affecting them. A new organization, CORE, brings together members of several prisoner advocacy groups including IPT, Citizens for Earned Release, Long-Term Prisoner Policy Project (LT3P), Not in Vain (NIV), The "C" # Project, and DeathPenalty.org, in order to join forces and combine efforts. IPT will be the main source of communication for all of the organizations.

If you are an inmate facing a long-term sentence, it is imperative that you and your people on the street contact IPT and get involved! Send them a copy of this article and ask them to go to: illinoisprisonstalk.com. Membership is free; confidentiality and anonymity is strictly maintained.

Not every home has a computer or access to the Internet. But, community centers and public libraries have computers with Internet access available for public use free of charge. There are a number of legislative bills that have been introduced in Illinois, such as HB4154, known as the 25/50 bill for earned release of elderly inmates; and HJR0021 (Long-Term Prisoners Study), and HB4384, the Juvenile Lifers bill. Illinois legislators need to know there is public support for these bills! **GET INVOLVED NOW!** ■

HB 4154: Statement of Ted Pearson

(Abridged)

Co-Chairperson of the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression-Chicago

April 30, 2008

House Committee on Prison Reform

We support passage of HB 4154. It is a first step in correcting what is wrong with the Illinois criminal justice system. There are many things that need to be changed. Highest on the list of priorities must be the abolition of the death penalty. Capital punishment and prison sentences in excess of 25 years are not the norm among democratic countries. Abolishing capital punishment and reforming sentencing laws are not in contradiction; they are two parts of a whole. When all the tires on a vehicle are flat, fixing one is not a

Continued on next page...

Ted Pearson Continued...

step forward. The car won't go forward without fixing them all. Of course, we may be able to fix only one wheel at a time, but fixing one wheel and promising not to fix the others means that we remain stuck with a vehicle that's fundamentally broken.

A survey of those in Illinois Department of Corrections prisons¹ on April 5, 2008 shows that by January 1, 2009, 658 prisoners will be older than 50 and will have served 25 years. This includes 216 "C numbers" who are already eligible for parole.

HB 4154 allows for

- the possibility that people can change
- The possibility for offenders to understand the damage they have done through a process of restorative justice, reconciliation, and restitution.

There is one aspect of HB 4154 about which we in the NAARPR are not sure. The bill, as it is presently drafted, refers the cases of prisoners back to the original sentencing court for sentence review after 25 years. We see potential problems with this approach.

We believe that it is possible that, *when combined with a policy and practice of implementing a genuine program of restorative justice, including restitution, reconciliation and restoration of victims and offenders*, the current system of recommendations of parole by the duly constituted Prisoner Review Board may be fairer to all concerned.

The present system is not working. It is not protecting our families and our communities from crime. Recent reports from the FBI² show that in spite of the steady increase in the number of people in prison and the rate of incarceration, violent crimes continue to increase in number. Furthermore, prison does nothing to restore the

victims of crime or heal their families. Prison does nothing to rehabilitate offenders, as indicated by the very high recidivism rate among those who are released.

Lastly, crime wreaks havoc among the families of both victims and offenders. Losing a loved one to senseless murder is impossible to ever heal. But so is the pain and suffering caused by the offender to his or her own family. Family life is destroyed and resources exhausted for the families of offenders. While the emotional trauma of crime never ends for families victimized by violent crime, the emotional and financial trauma never ends for the families of offenders, whose resources are devastated by legal fees, outrageous charges for prison telephone calls, many hours and many dollars spent travelling often many hundreds of miles to visit loved ones, and the loss of the offender's income to his or her family while they are in prison. In addition, after their release, prisoners are almost unemployable.

The current system is based on a punitive model. Many studies indicate that punishment alone does not deter crime. Yet punishment is almost all the current system does.

Some representatives of police organizations and families of victims of violent crime oppose HB 4154. They have a right to be heard, and to be listened to.

The legislature should not, however, fall victim to corporate interests who have a huge stake in the multi-million dollar prison industrial complex, and who cynically encourage such groups to vent their anger and pain against reform. The contractors, suppliers, and construction companies that profit from the perpetuation of the current system are doing fine in the current system, at least in the short run. Our communities are not. ■

The Tamms Reform Bill Continued...

legislators and audience, despite the wilting heat, was joyful. It was the result of hope that the system for sending men to Tamms will soon become more transparent and that those prisoners left at Tamms for a decade may soon be transferred elsewhere.

¹ This compilation was made by downloading all the data sheets from the IDOC web site for prisoners in that database on April 9, 2008. On that date there were 41,998 people in IDOC adult prisons. Of them 4,709 have dates of birth prior to January 1, 1954. Of this 4709, 658 have custody dates prior to January 1, 1984. 177 of these 658 are serving sentences of natural life without possibility of parole.

² U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, "2006 Crime in the United States – Preliminary Semi-annual Uniform Crime Report" cited by Talvi, Silva J. A. in *The Nation*, January 22, 2007. ■

*Special
Announcement!*

Hearing
For HB 4154
August 20, 2008
10:00AM
100 W. Randolph

There will be a hearing on HB 4154, August 20, 10:00 AM at the James Thompson Center, legislative hearing room, 100 W. Randolph, Chicago. This will be a subject matter only hearing (no votes taken) before the House Prison Reform Committee, chaired by Representative Eddie Washington, chief sponsor of HB 4154. Please come and support change. If you need more information, contact Bill Ryan. ■

Essays, Letters and Insight

PROPOSALS AND PERSUASIVE EDITORIALS

Becoming A Transitional People

Diane Davis



To the many men who are incarcerated, this article is for you. I've come to realize the significance of being a voice. We've stood under the code of silence for a great period of time. "In fact, being silent was all we knew."

We can recollect countless occasions when that "old man" brought back taunting memories. That "old man" was no unfamiliar because he taught us all the wrong things which led us to where we are today. We were scripted into his many negative influences. We stood by silently as he whispered the enticing words "self centeredness" over and over until it was embedded into our consciousness. We began focusing on the "I" rather than the "we." We were taught how to become segregated rather than to be integrated. We were made to believe that it's genuine to win over something even if it's at the expense of another person's life. We've even become deceived into the mediocrity of leaving our children in an abrupt world of chaos rather than being there and supporting them along their most needed and crucial stages of development.

The apple of change is a fruit much needed in our communities today. We are that change. Yes, of course, there is the reality that anytime one of us is freed from the branches of self centeredness, then we can become susceptible to taking on the demands of others, but this is not always the case. When we've become freed from this "intergenerational ruler," we no longer sit back and let that old and corrupt man play his foolish games. We sum up the God-given strength to begin closing the doors on negative influences and opening new and better doors that will bring gracious opportunities. After all, what's wrong with circling our attention towards others' welfare when we've been selfish for a great deal of time.

For the many of you who have consumed this article, you have taken your first step to becoming a transitional person. You have taken the initiative to move far past the silence and into the true character that has been invested into you. Now let's begin paving the new way for others. ■

NAARP Report

Ted Pearson

The response to the Prison Medical Care project of the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression-Chicago has been so great that the Alliance is months behind in responding to all the letters received. The NAARPR Steering Committee requests that people who have written regarding medical problems, wrongful conviction issues, or any other matters of concern be patient. The Alliance will answer every letter, but it takes time because we are so far behind.

Meanwhile, in a case of a medical problem requiring immediate attention please ask a family member or friend to call the NAARPR -Chicago office at 312-939-2750 and leave a voice mail. Someone will call back within 24 hours in most cases, and the case will be moved to the front of the queue for attention.

The NAARPR-Chicago regrets that we cannot accept collect calls. Also, we that people NOT send letters via Certified Mail, since there is often no one available to receive them and they get sent back.

Open Letter to Governor

An Open Letter to Governor Rod R. Blagojevich has been sent by a Coalition for Answers Regarding Executive Clemency. The letter urges the Governor to "adopt a policy that petitions [for Executive Clemency] will be reviewed and acted upon by your office within 3

Continued on next page...

NAARPR Report continued...

months after the recommendations of the PRB have been delivered to you.” The letter notes that the Governor’s office reported on February 19, 2008, that there are 1,571 such petitions on his desk with recommendations from the Prisoner Review Board, waiting for his decision.

The Coalition is asking for an urgent meeting with Governor Blagojevich to discuss how this matter may be expedited. “These petitions concern current prisoners, ex-prisoners on parole or mandatory supervised release, and ex-prisoners who have completed their parole or MSR” the letter notes. “In all cases their ability to support themselves and their families and re-integrate into their communities is affected by this delay. In addition, many prisoners do not know the status of their petition; letters are delayed, are lost, or go to attorneys who are not always prompt about conveying this information to their clients. Since a new petition will not be considered by the PRB for at least one year following the denial of a previous petition, this leaves these prisoners and their families in a state of limbo and despair. This is especially true when these petitions are based on strong cases of wrongful conviction and a breakdown in the criminal justice system.”

Prisoners, ex-prisoners, family members, religious, community, youth and trade union leaders are all urged to add their names to the more than 200 people who had signed the letter as of April 1, 2008. People wishing to sign should send a note by mail or email to the office of the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression-Chicago, Suite 105, 1325 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago IL 60605, email: info@naarpr.org.

The Coalition was initiated by the NAARPR and the Men and Women in Prison Ministries, and was signed initially by a dozen people, including seven men and women who have been exonerated and released from prison but who cannot find employment or social benefits because their petitions for clemency are being ignored. Many petitions have been on the Governor’s desk for many years. ■

Value of Health

Elizabeth Tolbert

Sicknesses take over in the prison population. On many occasions I see women treated unfairly. Myself, I have been very sick for 7 days, unable to breathe or sleep, constant cough, spitting and blowing out the blood, etc. I went to sick-call since my asthma/bronchitis was getting worse and was told I was o.k. and that everybody sick just has to deal with that. The nurse was complaining that she was sick too and had to work. The doctor saw me at work/gym area the day before and saw how sick I was. I was shocked at how I was treated. I had no voice; my throat was sore. We pay \$2.00 per visit to sick-call.

The noise level is awful which causes stress. My friend Eve died after 20+ years of incarceration. I want all of us to go home healthy to our children and grandchildren. Help us to bring about a positive change!

Most of us in the system spend everyday behind bars with the “what ifs.” What if I had done this or that, or this and not that? Speaking for myself, I go all the way back to the age of 13 with the choices I’ve made in my life. The reality is we don’t change what has already taken place, but we can change ourselves and our futures. I feel it is

unrealistic that a first-time offender should spend 25 years or more in prison for a terrible mistake that would never happen again. So now we become victims of the system and the public with the mentality of “lock them up forever.” We watch people come and go all the time, a lot of people 3 or more times, yet here we long-termers sit, losing our health, without a chance to give back to society and make up, or at least try to make up, for our part. ■

Dear Readers of Stateville Speaks:

I am pleased to share that we are continuing our positive efforts; in fact we just had the first in the state “Hot Topic Workshop” at Lawrence Correctional Center.

I would like to thank the staff at Lawrence for the positive efforts that allowed the program to occur without any problems, and to the participants, thank you because it was your conduct that gave us the momentum to continue promoting the need for these efforts, not just here but across the state.

The topic of our workshop hit on the subject of “Dealing With Your Cellie.” I’m sure most can relate to this subject. Five residents led the discussion covering self assessment, approaches, compromise, territory and communication. Concepts shared came from one of the leadership classes taught at Lawrence. We talked about the problems so many of us must deal with in a cell, from a cellie that farts all night long, to the simple issues that make us mad as prisoners.

Continued on next page...

May 11, 2008

Jail-House Teachers

Joe Dole

In Illinois' maximum security prisons especially, society has abandoned us, stripping us of educational and vocational courses. But just because society has given up on us doesn't mean that we should give up on ourselves. Rather it should motivate us to succeed in the face of that adversity.

If we want to convince society that parole can be reinstated without us being a threat to the public, we need to show that most of us wouldn't commit another crime if released. At present, this argument faces strong opposition when recidivism rates are astronomical. While this is certainly a failure of society and shows both our legislators' shortsightedness and voter vindictiveness, it is also a failure of ours. We fail to use our time wisely and to work to help each other succeed.

The next time you go to yard or chow, look around. One out of every 5 inmates you see can't read. Two out of every 4 can't read and write well enough to write a letter explaining a billing error. Seven out of every 10 never completed high school. We can't allow this to stand. When we let each other walk out of prison after 20 years still unable to do basic math, unable to read, or without a G.E.D., college degree, marketable skills, etc., we are deliberately indifferent to one another's plight. When the pro-bono lawyer proved largely a myth, we provided our own in the form of the "jailhouse lawyer." Now we are equally in need of some "jail house teachers."

If the state won't rehabilitate us, we need to rehabilitate each other. If you're good in math, teach those who aren't. If you've taken the G.E.D. test, help prepare those who haven't. If you're proficient in law, teach those who aren't. If you can speak a language other than English, teach it to those who are willing to learn it. A second language is a valuable skill to possess when released. And most importantly if you need help in learning something, don't be embarrassed to ask. Trade tutoring lessons: tutor someone in a subject they're having trouble with for help in a subject you're struggling with or would like to learn. If you order workbooks, don't write in them, use scratch paper. That way you can give them to others who can't afford them or donate them to the library.

Lifers and long-termers must take a leading role in this endeavor. We must first educate each other, and then work to educate the guys passing through. We have time to perfect our own programs and lessons. We'll give more meaning to our own lives. And the more educated you are the better chance you'll have of going home one day and succeeding when you are finally released. We can help to bring the recidivism rate down and convince society it's not so risky to let more of us out. ■

*Dear Readers of Stateville Speaks
Continued...*

I'm not the best person to state how well things went, but 90% of the people I spoke with thought it was great.

There were nameless surveys posted and out of the 40 participants, there were only two negative comments, so I thought that was a good sign. If I could leave you with anything it would be, always be proactive and never fight a war that isn't worth winning.

Renaldo Hudson ■

Dear Bill:

Being at this facility has saddened me in some aspects since I am always surrounded by kids doing short time, such as nine months to a couple of years. They do not fully understand the principal or concept of being locked away for any length of time.

After so many years an individual realizes on his own that he must change. Nobody has to tell him or force him, but he comes to this conclusion all on his own accord, which unfortunately these young short timers have no clue about. We understand that being in prison is not a badge of honor but a curse of shame upon our family. We are no longer the golden child our families used to brag about to their friends and relatives. Now we have our family hang their head in shame when we are asked about, for where is the greatness of bragging that we are incarcerated for selling drugs, shooting someone, or holding up the local Mom and Pop store? These kids have to understand how selfish they are and how much their actions affect others around them, especially their loved ones.

Unfortunately, because of what time does to an individual, it takes that twenty years to make you appreciate all that you had before; no matter how little or how much you had, you appreciate every little morsel of it. This is why the recidivism rate is so low [for older prisoners] – we do not want to come back and lose what we fought and prayed so hard to get – a second chance! These chances are hard to come by and an individual isn't going to blow it, nor ruin all those relationships rebuilt and constructed during trying times. You learn what it means to be a contributing member of a society

Continued on next page...

Creative Corner

WHEN INSPIRATION HITS...POEMS WRITINGS CONNOTATIONS...



Day of Remembrance

Joel Davis

In this edition of *Stateville Speaks*, we in Stateville respectfully ask that our readers join with us in remembering the many incarcerated men and women who have passed, yet we retain them in our memory. Please pause for a moment of silence at a time of your choosing.

We ask that you be mindful of these men and women who are worthy of our affection and recognition. We also ask that you not only reflect on their accomplishments with effort and determination, but that you also be heedful of the positive contributions that they have made to our struggle for justice, freedom and truth. If it's possible, also consider the well-being of the men and women who are still with us, as they did.

In memory of
Clifford "Andy" Anderson
William Bracey
James "T-bone" Foster
Anthony "Montana" Harris

Ernest "Booner" Morris
Dino Tetone
Kenny "Kay=Kay" Townsend
Lydell Zarakiyah White

Day of Remembrance will be a regular feature in *Stateville Speaks*. Please submit names of woman and men who pass to an editor or Bill Rvan. ■

There's a Fire in my Soul

Victor Safford

There's a fire in my soul
burning to be free,
Burning to see me fulfill
my Holy, Divine Destiny.

Burning to see me succeed,
burning to see me win,
Burning to find a life so
I can learn to love again.

There's a fire in my soul
burning to see me free,
Free from the company of
rejection, failure, and misery.

Burning all of my impurities
burning all of my insecurities,
Burning like a hot, blazing super nova
sun
all of life's obscurities.

Burning in my soul ladies and

gentlemen
just burning to be free,
Burning up everything that stands in
the pathway
of my Holy, Divine Destiny.

Its flames never fickle
they illuminate my mind,
Its flames burn forever
weathering the storms of time.

Burning like Hell
burning to please God,
Burning to see the day when my life
will have a brand new start.

There's a fire in my soul,
Lord knows it keeps me alive,
There's a fire in my soul
that inspires me to survive.

It inspires me to strive like a Phoenix
when it does rise, rise, rise,
There's a fire in my soul and if you
look close
you can see it burning in my eyes. ■

Dear Bill Letter Continued...

which carries out to the real world.
Some things, sadly enough, are only
learned and come to enlightenment
through doing mass quantities of
years in a personal hell. That's why
these kids come out like they do -
they haven't learned through doing
time because what they have done has
had no lasting effect as compared to
an individual who has done twenty or
more years.

I am hoping you gain huge success
with this and if nothing else, I thank
you for not giving up on us who are
doing these long death sentences.
Hang in there and keep up the fight
and gosh darn it, I love you for it.
Good luck and God bless. ■

Don't Mouth Words of False Comfort, Please

Rita Moran

*a member of the Compassionate Friends,
Miami. Reproduced from Parents of Murdered
Children, St. Louis area-wide chapter
newspaper.*

Please—don't ask me if I'm over it
yet. I'll never be "over it."

Please—don't tell me she's in a better
place. She isn't here.

Please—don't tell me you know how I
feel, unless you have lost a child.

Please—don't say "at least she isn't
suffering anymore." I haven't come to
terms with why she had to suffer at
all.

Please—don't ask me if I feel better.
Bereavement isn't a condition that
"clears up."

Please—don't tell me "God never
makes a mistake." You mean He did
this on purpose?

Please—don't tell me "at least you
had her for 28 years." What year
would you choose for your daughter
to die?

Please—don't tell me God never gives
you more than you can bear. Who
decides how much another person can
bear?

Please—just say you are sorry.

Please—just say you remember her if
you do.

Please—just let me talk if I want to.

Please—let me cry when I must. ■

Old Men and Women in Prison

Author Unknown

This is for the old ones
the wise ones
the grey heads
the old legs
that make it up out
of the bunk
stiff as a steel slab

in the then dusty light
of another day.

This is for the old ones
the quiet ones
the ones who know
when to speak out
and when to keep their own counsel.

Long pain-filled lives
no perks
no bribes
no easy jobs
no cigars
perfume
brandy
pizza
or braised beef sandwiches.

This is for the old ones
the plain ones
without fancy metaphors
or flash alliteration
The ones whose mail dwindles
year by year
who wake up one cold prison
morning to find that the
young ones call them "Pops"
or "Grandma."

This is for the ones
nourished by their own muscle
sinew
soul

This is for the steadfast
This is a love poem
for those
so full of heart. ■

Hands of Time

Anonymous

There is a song that says "If I could turn
back the hands of time. . ." I not only
want to turn back the hands of time but I
want to take the knowledge and laws of
the present and put parts of them in the
past.

It's 1986. There is a new law regarding
domestic violence, but the police don't

know how to implement it, so it is
ignored. I would give them today's
knowledge. There are no shelters for
battered women in my area. I want to
change that to what is being done in
my area today; to take back to 1986
the shelter I write to and mentor.
Marriage counselors advocate mostly
for men and sticking it out. I'd change
that to give them the domestic
violence statistics and what happened
on a dark night in late November
when my husband's life was taken.
Yes, if those changes were made, then
I could change that too.

But it's 22 years later. 22 years I've
spent in prison for his murder under
accountability. I've changed; I've
grown. I've learned I was mentally ill,
suffering from battered woman
syndrome and severe sleep
deprivation. I got the treatment I
needed. While in prison I've tried to
live a life that shows I can be
responsible and a life dedicated to
bettering the world here and outside
for other people. I lived in the honor
cottage and sat on the boards of two
service-based organizations (Jaycees
and MECCA). I walked for hunger in
all the prison CROP walks and raised
over \$100 each time. I taught knit and
crochet classes and did Bible studies.
I write for the newspaper here and for
[Stateville Speaks](#) where I am one of
the Editors. I participated in Do Paul
Poetry classes and Stillpoint Theater.
I earned my Bachelor's Degree from
Lewis University, graduating summa
cum laude. I have a sanitation license
and a paralegal certificate. I work in
the law library. These are lessons
learned, progress, small gains.

As I have grown older, I've lost some
of my health. I am 53 years old. I take
high blood pressure and high
cholesterol medication, pain pills, and
medication for vertigo. Each year I
take a few more pills and creak a little
more, small losses.

Continued on next page...



The Search Eternal

Andre Patterson

“You have no personality of your own, Dog, that’s why you imitate everything I do! I think you secretly want to be me.”

This biting harsh analysis was one side of a heated exchange between two cellies. It caught me off guard because usually when you hear an attack on someone’s character, it’s usually with less insightful words, like “goofie!” or “lame!” Rarely, do you hear these attacks framed with thought.

“You have an undesirable personality,” or even, “You have no personality at all.” How do you respond to that? My response, was an introspection of an investigation into my own personality...or lack thereof.

I delved into my memory recall to see if I had a working definition of personality. From my study, I believe that it is something that develops on this plain of existence; the ephemeral realm of time and space. Something that distinguishes one human from the other is what defines you as a person.

More formally, according to the dictionary, “Personality is the collection of emotional and behavioral traits that characterize a person.” So, personality manifests itself as the way you conduct your being, the way you react consistently in certain situations. All these things determine the way the world perceives you and receives you.

Further investigation into the etymology of personality shows that it derived from the latin word: persona, which means mask. In ancient greek theatre, the actors wore masks, which indicated whether they were comedic or tragic actors. They were meant to invoke certain emotions in the audience, preparing them for either laughter or tears. How relevant is the root meaning of this word today? Do we all just walk around wearing different masks, changing them according to how we want people to see us? How do we determine what character we will play, whether we act out a drama or a situational comedy on our life stage. Psychologists say that we learn early on as children what types of behavior will draw us the most attention, be it positive or negative. We carry this knowledge through adolescence and into adulthood; watching, absorbing, determining which

mask will attain us the most desirable results. Psychologists also say that we develop most of our personality traits from our peers, outside influences; these traits are not innate. So, is anyone’s personality truly their own or do we constantly borrow from other actors, donning the costume that fits the scene, acting our hearts out in hopes of connecting with the audience? Hoping to be accepted.

I am one of these actors, unsure of my personhood and in question of my individual value in comparison to other persons. I’m almost convinced that personality is the superficial momentary self, so I discard my mask and begin to journey deeper in search of a self that is constant and eternal. ■

Hand of Time Continued...

But there are losses that can never be regained or restored. I lost my daughter and my life. My husband’s family lost a son, a brother, and an uncle. They also lost a granddaughter and a niece as my daughter was raised by others and has no contact. My husband lost his daughter, his family, his life, and his future – losses that can never be restored.

I cannot change what has happened. The pain I have caused goes without saying. It is a raw wound and always will be. His family hurts, I hurt, and although I did not commit the murder, it is my actions that led to this. Just to say “I’m sorry” is inadequate but I am within every fiber of my body and will continue to be. It was my actions that led to the taking of a life. There is no absolute reason that is valid. Being mentally ill does not negate my actions or the outcome of my actions. I take full responsibility for my actions and would do anything within my power to heal this wound.

All I can do is try to lead my life the way God has given me and to say once more how very sorry I am. ■

James

Shaena Fazal

It is with great sadness that I write this article about my good friend and colleague James “Yaki” Sayles, who died of cancer on Friday, March 28, 2008.

After his diagnosis with cancer in late 2007, Yaki was surrounded by family and friends who visited him often and continued to check up on him and be with him until the moment of his death. I personally was with him one hour before he died, and his wife and stepdaughter were by his side when he passed on.

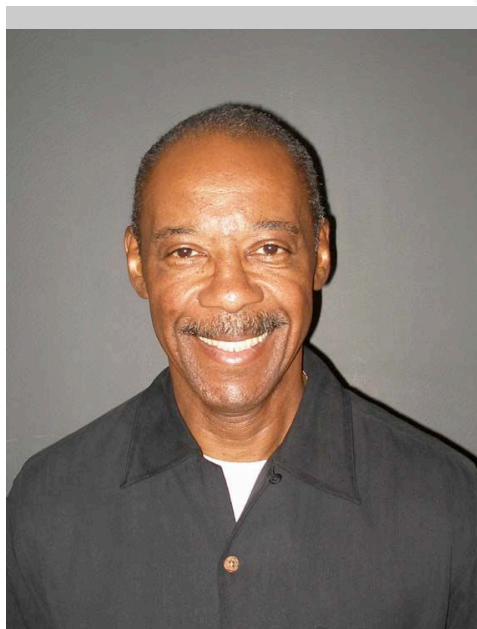
Those of you on the inside who knew Yaki will remember him as someone

who was a revolutionary thinker, politically astute and a

jazz aficionado. He was also an extremely pragmatic person with a passion for what’s right and a loyal friend. He was a father, a husband a colleague and a beacon of hope for a lot of people. During the three years of post-incarceration freedom, Yaki earned the respect of so many people from different walks of life; he was a living, walking example of the philosophy that people can and do change for the better.

For those of you on the inside who didn’t personally know Yaki, you should know that he was fighting for your rights too. He was selflessly committed to the cause of the C# prisoners, stepping into the shoes left empty by David Saxner’s sudden and unexpected passing a year and a half earlier. He chaired the Campaign in Support of C# Prisoners, helped direct the C# Representation Project and

“Yaki”



Sayles

responsibly and with great attention to detail, notwithstanding that he had little training or experience in many of the activities he was called upon to undertake. Yaki took over responsibility for assisting inmates with questions, problems and complaints. He guided former inmates as they returned to look for work and places to live. Yaki represented the Association before community groups and outside organizations. He never failed to impress upon those he met his own basic decency and desire to help others. He worked well with everyone including staff and administrators at the Illinois Department of Corrections

whom he met on visits and over the

In Loving Memory

provided mentoring and guidance to advocates representing C# prisoners at their parole hearings. Although it may seem that he was dedicated only to C# prisoners, it was clear to all of us who knew him that Yaki was also committed to truth and justice for all prisoners.

Yaki was also a prolific writer, and had published three lengthy articles on Frantz Fanon, an activist, philosopher and writer whose works were the preeminent force behind anti-colonial liberation movements for years to come. Yaki was a thoughtful person, who appreciated his solitude.

At the time of his passing, Yaki was a Program Coordinator for the John Howard Association of Illinois, a position he held for over three years. Initially he took on administrative responsibilities which he handled

telephone. Yaki’s driving work centered around the “C#” Campaign and obtaining release for those who served decades of time behind bars.

With the death last year of David Saxner, Yaki took on his shoulders primary responsibility for organizing the Campaign’s events and activities and advocacy.

Around the Christmas holidays Yaki became ill with what seemed to be pneumonia or possibly emphysema. We were not so lucky, and in the last several weeks his condition he deteriorated rapidly. We miss his presence and the hopes we had of sharing more time with him.

Wherever he is now, he is still with us in the struggle. ■

“Light from Inside: Art from Illinois Prisons”

Chicago Cultural Center August 11-
September 28

Cynthia Kobel

Chicago, June 19, 2008 – Inmate art has interested psychologists, sociologists, writers, and sympathetic artists for decades and now that creativity is open to the general public who can view an exhibit of art created by inmates from Illinois correctional institutions. “Light from Inside: Art from Illinois Prisons” will display approximately 100 works in a variety of techniques and media at the Chicago Cultural Center, August 11 through September 28, 2008, sponsored by the John Howard Association of Illinois, the State’s only reform group.

“Light from Inside” features artists from the most restrictive Illinois prisons including Pontiac, Dwight, Menard, Stateville, Lawrence, Pinkneyville, Western, Hill and Tamms Supermax facilities. Most of the artists are long-term prisoners and “lifers” who are self-taught and have worked at their craft without the usual tools of an artist.

Members of the Art Committee of the John Howard Association, with the help of the Illinois Department of Corrections, gathered the art work from visiting prisons, meeting the prisoners and bringing the art to Chicago. “It is fascinating to visit with the artists and get the story behind their work. The work represents more than the vision; it represents an escape into another realm for the incarcerated man and woman. Many of the artists must be inventive with the medium they use since few of the prisons have art supplies,” said Cynthia Kobel, a member of the Committee.

Cornelius Ames has built a three-dimensional sculpture of a miniature fortress with bricks made out of newspaper and water, using newspaper and toothpaste for mortar. Others have used bed sheets and discarded paper as canvases. In the past, many artists used soap to create pieces of sculpture, but were ultimately prohibited from using it because the Department of Corrections deemed the use of soap “destruction of state property”. Other inmates have created art using plastic mirrors etched with staple points. Some have pieced together envelopes to create poster-size paintings. At Tamms Supermax prison the only tool for creating art is a four inch flexible ink pen tube, but men there have found that they can use Jell-O and candy to create color.



George Goodman

An opening reception will be held on August 11, 2008. Tickets may be purchased for \$30.00 per person at the door or \$25 beforehand through the John Howard Association by phoning (312) 782-1901. Wine, beer and refreshments will be served. Friends and family of the prisoners will be on hand to walk visitors through the exhibits.

“Light from Inside: Art from Illinois Prisons” will be on exhibit at the

location of the John Howard Association’s Annual Luncheon on September 18, 2008 at noon.

Jeffrey D. Colman, Esq. will be the speaker at the John Howard Association of Illinois’s Annual Luncheon at noon on September 18, 2008 at the Chicago Cultural Center. Mr. Coleman is well-known as an attorney with Jenner and Block, where he has represented small and large corporations, partnerships, and class action litigation. He has represented African-American home purchases in discrimination litigation and has litigated death penalty cases in Georgia and Illinois.

Mr. Colman is currently a key member of the team of lawyers defending prisoners confined by the United States government at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba.

The John Howard Association of Illinois provides oversight of the state’s prisons, jails and juvenile correctional facilities. As it has for more than a century, the Association promotes fair, humane, and effective sentencing and correctional policies, addresses inmate concerns, and provides Illinois citizens and decision-makers with information needed to improve criminal and juvenile justice. ■

*Prisoner Art
Exhibit & Luncheon
09.28.2008
10:00AM
78 E. Washington*

Presented by John Howard Association
Call: 312-782-1901 for more
information

Important Announcements

2nd Annual PEACE FEST 2008

Organized by 22 ENT and Mustafa Afrika

Saturday, July 26, noon-8:30pm

115th and Halsted (in Roseland)

A huge gathering of people, businesses and community organizations to recognize the impact of violence in our community and remember the lives lost to violence, and to celebrate life. Featuring a Car & Bike Show, 3 on 3 Basketball Tournament, Taste of the South Side, Music and a lot of information about how to work together to make life more humane for the prisoners in Illinois.

"There are two primary choices in life; to accept conditions as they exist, or accept the responsibility for changing them."

Waukegan Coalition Offers Free Transportation to Prisons.

The Waukegan Coalition to Reduce Recidivism with support of State Representative Eddie Washington (D60 Waukegan) will provide free rides to prisons. The Coalition recognizes that staying connected to family while incarcerated helps in decreasing the possibility of recidivating due to family support. We also recognize that because of financial issues and lack of transportation, families are unable to stay connected with their loved ones who are incarcerated hundreds of miles away. With this in mind, the Coalition initiated this project to provide free transportaton. For additional information contact Sherry Murray at 847-244.4900 or via email at smages@msn.com.



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