

# TIME / CUT

**A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER ON INDIANA PRISON ISSUES**

vol. 1 issue 1  
january 2020

a publication by IDOCWatch

## Highlights from Fall 2019

Art created by our currently and formerly incarcerated comrades on display at the Bloomington Art Show:



*Kevin "Rashid" Johnson*



*Anastazia Schmid*



*Joshua McQuaid*

### **Bloomington Art Show**

Power Plant Gallery  
November 2019

With two showings and dozens of visitors, we raised over \$700 for artists' commissary and to support IDOCWatch's post-release efforts, mailings, and other prisoner support initiatives. We thank all of the artists who participated, Power Plant gallery for hosting us, and everyone who came out to the show. One of the contributing artists, Charles "Tony" Hardy says, "it exceeded my expectations and I thank you and everyone involved. I appreciate every experience and letting me be a participant of the Art Shows that your organization puts together." Look out for more shows in the future.

### **Holiday Toy Drive**

December 2019

This December saw the third year of our Holiday Toy Drive. This year, we collected over 250 gifts for nearly 80 children who have loved ones, caretakers, and parents incarcerated by the state of Indiana. A HUGE thank you to Tatjana and VOCAB who raised many of these gifts through their monthly open mic at White Rabbit Cabaret in Indianapolis. Fundraiser shares and donations also helped us purchase and deliver gifts across the state. In supporting our loved ones and challenging this carceral society, we are more powerful together!

TIME/CUT is a publication for Indiana prisoners and their family and friends. It includes news, thoughts, and helpful resources from inside and outside the walls and around the world. The articles in the publication do not necessarily reflect on its contributors, creators, or distributors. Its contents are for informational purposes only. TIME/CUT does not provide legal assistance or romantic arrangements.

This publication depends on the interest and participation of prisoners in Indiana and their loved ones on the outside. Please send us any of the following to the address below: responses to TIME/CUT and its contents, helpful tips for navigating prison, sharing your experiences, and more. Please state explicitly if you would like your contributions to be considered for future issues and if you'd like your name published with it. TIME/CUT, PO Box 3246, Bloomington, IN 47402

Please write us for a catalogue of other articles and texts related to surviving prison. This publication is free to friends and family prisoners in Indiana. If you do not already receive it but want to, please write us and we will add you to our mailing list. If you wish to stop receiving it, write us and we'll take you off.

If your incarcerated loved ones would like to receive an inside version, please send us their address. Thanks for reading!

## MOVEMENT NEWS

### Hundreds of Oklahoma inmates freed, the largest mass release in US history

Joshua Bote (*reprinted from USA TODAY*)

More than 400 inmates in Oklahoma [were] released Monday [November 4, 2019] after a law signed this year retroactively reduced the sentences for individuals who committed low-level crimes.

The Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board approved the commutation of 462 inmates unanimously, and on Friday, Gov. Kevin Stitt's office has processed the recommendations for final approval. It is the largest mass commutation – or reduction of a sentencing – in U.S. history. President Barack Obama

released 330 federal prisoners on his last day of office.

In 2016, referendums passed in Oklahoma made simple drug possession a misdemeanor instead of a felony and raised the threshold of felony property crimes – including theft, vandalism, shoplifting and robbery – up to \$1,000. Earlier this year, Stitt, a Republican, signed a law that would apply these changes retroactively for current inmates.

“This event is another mark on our historic timeline as we move the needle in criminal justice reform, and my administration remains committed to working with Oklahomans to pursue bold change that will offer our fellow citizens a second chance while also keeping our communities and streets safe,” Stitt said in a

statement Friday.

The board considered 814 eligible cases, and 527 were recommended for a lesser penalty given the severity of those crimes. Sixty-five of those individuals are still held on detainers.

“With this vote, we are fulfilling the will of Oklahomans,” said Steven Bickley, the executive director of the Pardon and Parole Board. “However, from day one, the goal of this project has been more than just the release of low level, nonviolent offenders, but the successful re-entry of these individuals back into society.”

Oklahoma will save nearly \$12 million by releasing these low-level offenders, as opposed to keeping them incarcerated.

### Hondurans Are Fighting for a Future Against the US-Supported Dictatorship

Laura Carlsen (*reprinted from The Nation*)

On September 15, social media accounts showed images of armed forces advancing on protesters with machine guns and tear gas. Youths with T-shirts wrapped around their faces hurled rocks at the security forces deployed in cities throughout the country. In the capital, police attacked the podium as speakers and the crowd shouted for an end to the dictatorship.

The mainstream press, on

the other hand, recounted the day's activities with color spreads of “The Prettiest Baton Twirlers in the Parade” and glowing accounts of skydivers floating onto the field during official festivities in the National Stadium. The president's speech—received with great applause, the media reported—ended with his arms benevolently outstretched and the words “God bless this prodigal land where I was born.”

Welcome to Independence Day 1984—uh, 2019—in Honduras.

Weeks earlier, President Juan Orlando Hernández, or JOH as he's commonly known, had issued Decree #35024: obligatory attendance of all teachers, students, and public employees at the official Independence Day event; strict prohibition of signs, clothing, slogans, accessories or any other shows of political or party content outside that of the “Patriotic Parade.” And insults or attacks on the image and honor of the authorities (especially the ubiquitous cry of “Fuera JOH!” or “Out with JOH!”) would be banned and punishable by a one-year suspension of salary, mandatory transfer, or firing.

“This is a dictatorship with no compassion that savagely represses all social expression,” Rafael Alegría, peasant farm leader, former congress-

man, and a founding member of the National Front for Popular Resistance, told Radio Progreso as he wiped tears from his eyes. “What we want is real independence, tranquility, democracy, and development in the country, but the dictatorship absolutely doesn't allow any social and popular mobilization of the people.”

Grassroots resistance in Honduras has flared at each new step toward authoritarianism and the private takeover of public goods. Hondurans have survived a coup regime perpetuated through electoral fraud and exclusion, as well as some of the world's most extreme experiments in neoliberalism, like the introduction of “Special Economic Zones” that exempt investment areas from legal protections against corporate plunder. The country suffers savage forms of extractivism that take water, land, and territory and assassinate defenders. Opposition at the polls has been met with fraud, as in the reelection of Hernández in 2017, and opposition in the streets faces repression by brutal security forces and a criminal justice system that punishes those who stand up against the interests it serves.

**Illinois Prison Phone Rates Are Lowest Following Grassroots Activism—**  
Brian Dolinar (*reprinted*

*from Truthout*)

“There were a lot of times my sons tried calling me,” recalled Annette Taylor, who regularly receives calls from her two sons in prison, “but there was no money on the account.” Those were some of the “hardest calls,” she said. “I would worry something was wrong.”

Families of those incarcerated have long complained about the high cost of phone calls from prison. A national campaign pressured the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to intervene in 2015, but the agency's regulations have since been reversed by the Trump administration.

In Illinois, the price of prison phone calls was just drastically reduced, making it much easier for Taylor and others like her to stay in contact with their loved ones. Just a few years ago, Illinois had the most inflated rates in the country. According to a renegotiated contract, the cost of a call from prison is now just under a penny a minute. Illinois is now the state with the lowest costs in the country.

Taylor's group, the Ripple Effect (Reaching Into Prisons with Purpose and Love), a prison pen pal project located in Champaign, Illinois, was involved early on in the campaign to reduce the rates. “It's such a blessing for my family,” Taylor said. “Now, one of my

sons calls too much!”

There are approximately 40,000 people incarcerated in 29 prisons operated by the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC). Among them is Flonard Wrencher, who is incarcerated at the Southwestern Illinois Correctional Center. “These days, there are longer lines for the phones,” Wrencher said.

His wife, who he talks to once or twice a week, first told him about the drop in prices. Wrencher also makes calls to his sister and son, and corresponds regularly with Matt McLoughlin, director of programs at the Chicago Community Bond Fund. More people are signing up for phone accounts, he said, although there are still costly additional fees. He was “fuzzy” about why the change took place. But those on the inside see a “big difference, and they appreciate it.”

In 2016, a bill was passed in the Illinois legislature and signed into law cutting the cost of phone calls from prison in half. Previously, a call that lasted 30 minutes cost \$4, now it costs only about \$2 under the new bill. Shortly after the bill went into effect, however, IDOC renegotiated the Securus contract to include the penny-per-minute rates.

Previously, the state was collecting the highest rate of commissions in the country, at \$12 million a year. Commissions are

a percentage of the calls given back to the state as part of its contract with Securus Technologies, one of the nation's two largest prison phone services providers. This practice, which activists call “kickbacks,” is common at many prisons and jails across the country.

The bill was led by the Illinois Campaign for Prison Phone Justice, a grassroots effort that brought together those incarcerated and their families, with prison activists in Chicago and downstate Illinois. It was led by the Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center, a community center established in 2000 as an outgrowth of the indymedia movement following the 1999 “Battle in Seattle” World Trade Organization protests. State Rep. Carol Ammons, who is based in Urbana-Champaign and who began her political career as a community organizer working to reverse the local impact of mass incarceration, championed the bill as well.

The new law took effect January 1, 2018, setting the price of calls at seven cents per minute. While the law capped phone rates, it did not eliminate the millions in commissions. The IDOC quietly took bids for a new contract, which was won by Securus Technologies. According to the renegotiated contract, which began July 1, 2018, rates are listed as .009 per minute,

less than a penny. Additionally, commissions are no longer being paid out. Illinois is now the state with the lowest costs in the country, cheaper than New Hampshire and West Virginia.

The campaign was successful because it involved those incarcerated and their families. Spokesperson for the campaign Wandjell Harvey-Robinson first heard about the effort at a letter-writing party hosted by Taylor's Ripple Effect group. After her parents were incarcerated when she was in the third grade, Harvey-Robinson grew up talking to them over the phone. She quickly became involved with the prison phone justice campaign, traveling to Washington, D.C., to testify before the FCC, and lobbying legislators in Illinois. She was pleased to hear about the penny-per-minute rates in her home state. "It's amazing that for once," she said, "the voices of people rarely listened to are finally heard."

Other states have followed, passing legislation in recent years to lower the cost of phone calls from prison, but jails lag far behind. As a new study released by Prison Policy Initiative shows, most county jails across the United States still charge exorbitant rates, where dollar-a-minute rates are still common. There are many opportunities for activists to confront the

high cost of phone calls at the local level. Activists can learn from Illinois by involving those incarcerated and their families in campaigns to address the everyday impacts of mass incarceration. The people most affected can best articulate the need for regular communication between those on the inside and those on the outside for building strong, resilient communities.

The newly reduced rates were implemented with no official announcement from the IDOC. The Chicago Tribune reported the news, without pursuing why the rates had been dropped well below the state's new mandate of seven cents per minute. In response to an inquiry, IDOC Spokesperson Linda Hess said "The change was due to a state law that went into effect January 1, 2018."

Why the prison system, however, relinquished millions of dollars in commissions is still unknown. Perhaps it was bad press to be extorting money from some of society's most vulnerable families. Maybe authorities now believe that, as studies have shown, regular phone calls help reduce recidivism for those getting back on their feet after a period of incarceration.

Joseph Dole, an incarcerated writer and activist held in Illinois's Stateville prison, said nobody there knew why the rates were

lowered so drastically, but that they were glad nonetheless. Dole said that there was a "rumor" circulating in Stateville that prisoners were supposed to get tablets from GTL, the nation's largest prison phone services provider, and Securus's major industry rival. Wanting to "stay competitive," Dole suspected that Securus offered the one cent calls.

Alan Mills, executive director of the Uptown People's Law Center, which litigates for better conditions in Illinois prisons, questioned the IDOC's explanation. "The idea that this was 'spontaneous' is misleading. The legislature mandated reduced rates, but in the end, it was the tireless work of grassroots advocates over more than two decades who are responsible for the IDOC rates being among the very cheapest in the nation," he said.

The state legislature was, no doubt, responding to growing national concern over private companies profiting from those incarcerated and their families.

Ultimately though, Paul Wright, director of the Human Rights Defense Center, says that the extremely low costs in Illinois only reveal the hefty profits prison profiteers are still able to make. "Prison telecom companies buy telephone time for fractions of a penny per minute and can make massive prof-

its by allowing calls for a penny a minute, in part because they gouge family members with ancillary fees including charging them to pay their phone bills and similar tactics."

## LOCAL NEWS

### Indiana Prisoners Must Unite & Struggle to Change Conditions!

Aaron Israel Isby

Indiana prisoners need to acknowledge that they have a common cause and struggle. Until we have come to a mutual agreement that ALL OF US have a common cause and struggle, there will never be any progress by Indiana Prisoners! This objective cannot be reached by Indiana Prisoners without education on the prison movements and struggles that have taken place in Indiana prisons since their inception. Most Indiana prisoners do not know the history of the many struggles that took place in these prisons and the lives that have been lost so that many of those who are coming in here now can have basic rights and entitlements. The history of our prison struggle and movement in Indiana prison system is important and this new generation of prisoners need to know it.

Indiana prisoners are faced with a generation who has no structure and

no political education. The white power structure that operates these Indiana prisons has learned to use this new generation of prisoners' ignorance and misguidance against them. The poor and inhumane conditions that exist in these Indiana prisons are more the prisoners fault, because we have the power to change our situation but we stand by and allow our human dignity to be denied! Aramark do not feed us nothing! All we get is soy, which is not real meat. Our commissary prices are steadily going up and most of us cannot afford to buy this commissary. The phone calls are too high and we are being overcharged! The medical care system in here is substandard and prisoners are dying due to medical neglect!

My name is AARON ISRAEL AKA AARON ISBY. I am Hebrew Israelite political prisoner being held captive in the Indiana prison system. Prior to winning my release from solitary confinement in a civil suit I filed (Aaron Isby-Israel v. James wynn, et al, no. 2:12-cv-00116-JMS-MJD) with the United States District Court in Indianapolis, challenging my indefinite placement, I spent 28 years under this oppressive regime! My indefinite sentence to solitary confinement was used by prisonrats as additional punishment for two wrongful attempt-

ed murder and battery convictions that I had obtained while in prison in 1990. I was charged for defending myself from white aggression, in which racist white prison guards at the Indiana State Reformatory [now Pendleton CF], instigated and staged an attack to end my life. This attack against me was carried out on October 12, 1990, while I was being held in their segregation unit. I was shot with a four hundred pound pressured fire hose, subjected to k-9 dog attack and tear gassed, while I was in my cell. I ended up being convicted and sentenced to an additional forty years by a state circuit criminal court in Anderson, Indiana, on September 30, 1992, under case #48C01-9011-CF-139.

For 28 years in solitary confinement, I was housed alone in a parking space size cell, with no windows, under constant illumination, 23 to 24 hours each day. My showers and recreation outside my cell was restricted. I was restrained and shackled and escorted when let out my cell.

My stay in solitary confinement became a fight for my life and others who endured this psychological violence. I could not touch my family, I was essentially deprived all contact or social interaction with other human beings. All visits with family or friends was

only permitted on a small video monitor screen. My mail was routinely read, copied, and searched to and from my family and friends. My books were censored, and I remember I could not have any books while being held captive in the Westville Maximum Control Complex (MCC), from 1991 to 1996. I was not allowed to possess my Hebrew TORAH there at that time. I was subjected to all forms of attacks on my bodily integrity and privacy. It was brutal. My food was intentionally reduced as a method to weaken and control me. I was always hungry there. These food deprivation tactics that was used against me by captors, became a standard operation of procedure, and I suffered substantial weight loss. The guards would not allow us to save our food for later. If they found food in our cells, they would confiscate. While in solitary I had no access to vocational, work, or educational (college) programs offered to general population prisoners.

These inhumane conditions of confinement lead to a hunger strike beginning on September 23, 1991, that was launched by me and fifteen of my comrades. This was a protest by US to call local, national, and international attention to these human rights abuses and the mind/thought control pro-

gram that Indiana Department of Correction, was committing against All prisoners including US at MCC!

We was successful in gaining support from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. A class action suit was filed and won following a settlement, this settlement entitled "Agreed Entry", was upheld by the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals in AARON ISBY v. EVAN BAYH, 75 F.3d 1191 (7th Cir. 1996).

Our hunger strike in 1991 lasted thirty seven days, until the state Agents within the IDOC obtained a court order to force feed US. I was not coming off this hunger strike, so, I was force fed in a prison hospital at westville called A2-South. Tubes was inserted in my nose and pushed in my stomach and I.V.s was stuck in my arms by prison medical staff to force feed me. I stayed in this condition for three additional days. On this 40th day I ended my food strike and the tubes and I.V.s was taken out of my stomach and arms.

There has been a book entitled "Cold Storage", that was written and released in 1997 by Human Rights Watch, that explains our experience at the Westville Indiana Maximum Control Complex ("MCC" aka "WCU"). My courageous stance and my tenacious

writ writing exposing the racist prison and court system in Indiana, has created for me some enemies inside the system, which has caused me to suffer unusually harsh deprivations and retaliation at the hands of my enemies. I am now in general population at the Miami Correctional Facility in a town called Bunker Hill, Indiana. My being in general population, is the result of my lawsuit I won in the Federal courts on my challenge of indefinite solitary confinement. I was granted an Injunction that forced IDOC officials to put me in general population. The federal Judge in my case is monitoring my injunction for Two Years. I am not in general population by the Indiana DOC's grace, or because they felt sorry for me: if it was up to the DOC I would not have never seen general population.

The state's attorney, David Arthur, who represented the DOC Appealed my case to the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago. They are tried to get my entire ruling overturn. I have set a Precedent in Indiana Prison system, and my case is an obstacle that is in DOC officials' way. Their practice of indefinite solitary confinement of Indiana Prisoners is now in jeopardy and the overuse and misuse of holding Indiana prisoners indefinitely in solitary

confinement, is not going to be tolerated due to my ruling. The state and IDOC want my case to go away.

**WE MUST STAND TO ENSURE THAT MY CASE (Isby-Israel v. Wynn, et al.) IS UPHOLD! MY CASE IS VERY IMPORTANT TO THE MOVEMENT TO ABOLISH THE PRACTICE OF CONFINING INDIANA PRISONERS IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT AND THIS WHY PEOPLE IN OUR STRUGGLE MUST COLLECTIVELY SUPPORT AARON'S FIGHT WHICH IS ALL OUR FIGHT!**

[IDOC dropped its appeal of Aaron's ruling, so his case is now fully and finally won. The ruling found that the way the DOC was doing (really, failing to do) reviews of prisoners' confinement in segregation units (solitary confinement) violated prisoners' Constitutional rights to due process. Now there is a precedent in case law for challenging indefinite solitary confinement, which is a huge victory for the fight against solitary]

I am currently being housed at Miami Correctional facility, in general population. I arrived here on 4/30/19. This prison is leaking with many Hidden Human Rights Violations. This prison is unlike any prison I have done time at. It houses

over Three Thousand Prisoners. Prisoners here are subjected to the practice of double bunking, although these cells are designed for one person. To worsen this problem, prisoners are forcibly placed in incompatible cell assignments, that serves no penological purpose, and in fact creates only more problems for the prisoners who have not consented to this incompatible cell assignment. I will give you an example, a prisoner who I know but will not mention his name, came to me when I first arrived to F-House and complained about not being able to be in a cell with someone he was compatible with. He had told me he had been intentionally placed in a cell with an individual, who never cleaned the cell or cleaned up after themselves. He said this person that he celled with snored and kept him up all through the night and he couldn't sleep. He said the person in his cell never left out the cell to give him a peace of mind or any privacy. This behavior by the cellie was so disturbing, that he said when he took a dump on the toilet his cellie would not leave the cell regardless of how bad it smelled. I responded to this, by telling him that maybe smelling Human feces was a fetish that his cellie had? This person told me he was losing patience and he went to

the counselor on the unit, seeking a bed move, but, the counselor kept telling him to work it out and she wasn't going to move him to another cell. This situation only got worse and my friend and his cellie got into arguments after arguments and this was about to escalate into physical violence, but, he got moved out of that situation to a more conducive cell situation. This has not always been the case and these incompatible cell assignments have turned into prisoners getting killed!

It is inhumane and clear International Human Rights Violation to double bunk prisoners. Cell assignment should be by consent from both prisoners; this way the prisoner can pick a compatible cellie and not be forced in a situation that would lead to physical violence.

The water we are forced to drink at this prison is contaminated. I have been told none of the prison guards drink the water at this prison, and there is written memos telling the staff that work here not to drink the water here and if they drink the water it will be at their own risk. The water here has been contaminated for years. I can attest that something is wrong with this water, because it is causing me skin irritation. Every time I take a shower in it I start experiencing an itching sensation and I scratch my skin and scalp a lot? It

feel like bugs are crawling all over my skin! I know the difference between hard water deposits and bad water, and this water here is contaminated!

There is a food issue here. Prisoners here do not receive three hot meals. Monday thru Friday two hot meals, breakfast and lunch, and at dinner prisoners are fed cold cut sandwiches. On Saturday and Sunday prisoners only get two hot meals, one at breakfast and one at dinner. There is no reason to deny prisoners three hot meals each day at this prison, so, why is this practice in place? Is someone in food service at this prison misappropriating funds?

The medical care system here is not providing proper healthcare. There is an older black man at this prison that I know (I won't mention his name), who has type two diabetes. His condition can be properly treated, but the medical staff here refuse to afford this man the right diet and medication he was prescribed on the outside before he came to prison. They never give him his insulin shots on the right time schedule and it appears these officials are trying to harm this man instead of helping him get better. This man is not cared for. I was told that these nurses here at MCF are not ensuring this man has something to eat after

they give him insulin shots? The other day this man almost fainted after getting an insulin shot. I had to get this brother some food to eat. This man is faced with a serious medical illness which if he is not being treated properly for, and he could die as a result of these neglectful medical staff. This brother was a good friend of my mother and this is why I am taking a personal interest in his case.

We have recently been told MCF officials have issued a policy that prohibits the prisoner law clerks that work in the law library, from aiding other prisoners with there legal matters. This policy is clearly unconstitutional and violates the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in Johnson v. Avery, which held Jailhouse lawyers or prisoners have a right to assist other prisoners with their legal work? The administration at this prison is really overstepping their limits! 90% of the prisoners in here have no legal know-how, and without help from prisoners who know the law they are lost.

I have been experiencing attacks from various elements within the ranks of these officials since I been in this prison. It is unclear whether these attacks are by design or whether they are merely the result of official

indifference or incompetence. My legal property laid dormant in the property room for at least two months, awaiting to be delivered to the mailroom to be mailed out, and although it was taken to the mailroom on July 3, 2019, I still have no confirmation that my four boxes of property has been mail yet. My family has told me they have not received my boxes as to date. I also had to struggle for two months to get my kosher religious diet card although I been on this diet since 2016! I was denied my kosher food because I did not have my card and on one occasion I was not fed because I did not have an I.D. card. Is this is a policy here: if you do not have this card they will not feed you?

Support Aaron Isby-Israel by writing to him and sending him money via web.connectnetwork.com, through the ConnectNetwork app on your phone, or by sending him regular mail to: Aaron Isby-Israel #892219, 3038 West 850 South, Bunker Hill, IN 46914-9810

### **Indiana Prisons Engage in Suicidal Malpractice**

Kevin "Rashid" Johnson

As a captive population, prisoners have no choices about what, if any, medical and mental health care they receive. And, in most cases in U.S. prisons, any care given is substandard

at best.

But even under these conditions, the courts have long found unacceptable and banned as unconstitutional the use of prisoners as mental health and medical staff or as guards, which were common official cost-cutting schemes up until the mid-to-late 1900s, when the courts finally began considering prisoners' lawsuits against the barbaric conditions pervading U.S. prisons.

The courts have long found unacceptable and banned as unconstitutional the use of prisoners as mental health and medical staff or as guards, which were common official cost-cutting schemes up until the mid-to-late 1900s.

Under these challenges, the uses of prisoners in these specialized roles was uniformly found to be dangerous, irresponsible and outright deadly.

So imagine how disturbed I was to find the practice alive and well upon my Nov. 1, 2018, transfer into the Indiana prison system. Worse still is Indiana prisoners are used as mental health staff and guards precisely in situations where the lives of prisoners in need of professional care and supervision are most at risk.

Specifically, the Indiana Department of "Correction" (IDOC) and its

private corporate medical and mental health contractor, Wexford of Indiana, use prisoners to supervise, monitor, report and assess other prisoners who are actively suicidal – and many times also mentally ill.

Indiana prisoners are used as mental health staff and guards precisely in situations where the lives of prisoners in need of professional care and supervision are most at risk.

My first exposure to the IDOC and Wexford endangering prisoners' lives in this manner occurred while I was confined for two weeks at the IDOC's Reception and Diagnostic Center, where I was witness to at least 10 instances of this practice.

One example was a suicidal prisoner named Byron January, who was housed a couple of cells away from me. He was placed on suicide watch and strip cell status after a suicide attempt on Nov. 15, 2018. He was also quite obviously mentally ill.

Over the next several days on the suicide watch status, a series of prisoners were tasked to pull four-hour shifts sitting directly in front of January's cell with a clipboard in hand, watching and recording his every activity inside his cell. If the prisoner on the watch status does anything untoward, the prisoner monitoring him is to

immediately report it to guards.

In my nearly 30 years in prison I have never seen anything like this. I'm still trying to wrap my head around it. One doesn't need a court ruling to recognize this practice to be plainly wrong on just too many levels.

If it were exposed to loved ones, the public, or challenged in court, that prisoners on this so-called suicide prevention status, which is practiced throughout the IDOC, seriously mutilated or killed him or herself, the IDOC and Wexford could not begin to explain their practice of leaving the supervision, care and safety of an actively suicidal, often mentally ill prisoner (and one who in many cases had just attempted suicide) in the hands of another prisoner, instead of guards and properly trained mental health staff.

After December 2018, I questioned one particularly duplicitous Wexford mental health worker, John Purdue, who works at my present place of confinement, on this point, and he was at a loss to justify it.

If exposed to the public or challenged in court, the IDOC and Wexford could not begin to explain their practice of leaving the supervision, care and safety of an actively suicidal, often mentally ill prisoner (and one who in many cases had just

attempted suicide) in the hands of another prisoner, instead of guards and properly trained mental health staff.

It is bad enough that prison guards admittedly don't receive adequate training to know how to treat mentally ill prisoners humanely. Worse still is these prisoners are generally persecuted by other prisoners, who have even less sensitivity to their conditions, symptoms and needs. It is thus gross endangerment to place the care and supervision of a mentally ill person who is actively suicidal in the hands of other prisoners.

This says nothing of the multitudes of conflicts of interest that exist between prisoners, that officials in every circumstance frequently cite as the basis for needing to subject them to heightened scrutiny to protect them from one another, such as racial and so-called gang rivalries and other social intolerances which prisoners aren't apt to reveal to officials.

I've discussed this peculiar suicide precaution status with numerous IDOC prisoners, and many tell of prisoners who've instigated and even assisted others in self-harm, who they were monitoring on this status.

I've discussed this peculiar suicide precaution status with numerous IDOC prisoners, and many tell of prisoners who've instigated and

even assisted others in self-harm, who they were monitoring on this status.

Then there's the fact that prisoners documenting and reporting other prisoners' behaviors to officials is literally snitching, which places these prisoner "monitors" in the line of fire from their peers and further discourages a suicide monitor from being completely candid in what he reports and documents.

And IDOC officials definitely took their lead in using prisoners in this fashion from the old stool pigeon manual, since they incentivize prisoner suicide monitors with time cuts – a common inducement offered prisoners to snitch on others. And they know it's snitching and is seen as such, because IDOC officials are compelled to frequently publicize via televised memos that reporting others' behaviors to staff isn't really snitching.

And let's not forget prisoners' right to have their mental health related issues kept confidential from those who aren't mental health professionals.

What the IDOC's practice boils down to is the economics of expediency and exploitation. Prisoners are slaves – literally.

Slavery is an exploitative economic condition where the enslaver seeks to make as much wealth as possible while minimizing to the greatest extent

the cost of the slaves' upkeep. And where, as in U.S. prisons, the slaves are readily replenished from an inexhaustible supply of human bodies, the enslaver cares nothing about their physical or mental health.

Prisoners are slaves – literally. Slavery is an exploitative economic condition where the enslaver seeks to make as much wealth as possible while minimizing to the greatest extent the cost of the slaves' upkeep.

This is why it took court action to ban the use of prisoners as medical and mental health workers and guards. Apparently the IDOC didn't get the memo.

Dare to struggle, Dare to win!

All power to the People!

Send our brother some love and light: Kevin "Rashid" Johnson, 264847, Pendleton Correctional Facility, G-20-2C, 4490 W. Reformatory Road, Pendleton, IN 46064.

### **Security Does Not Mean Safety: #1 Stevie (reprinted from Abolitionist Study)**

As an incarcerated penal abolitionist, I'm often asked by other prisoners: what do we do about murderers and rapists? When this happens, I acknowledge the fears that people convicted of these crimes might harm others, but I ask the questioner what their real concern is.

Invariably and resoundingly, it's safety—for themselves and their loved ones. They don't want to be harmed. I ask if they believe the present system of policing and imprisonment make them, their families or their communities safer. Again, the answer is no. It's at this point that I encourage the questioner to think about what they want, safety, and what they often get, security.

I remind them that as prisoners, we live in a very secure environment. But security doesn't mean safety. There are barbed-wired fences, concrete walls, locked doors, cameras, gun towers and officers with riot gear, shock shields, tear gas and metal batons. But are we safe? This gets them thinking about what safety is and what it's not. Being incarcerated, we know firsthand that policing and surveillance might create security, but they don't create safety.

Once the distinction between safety and security has been made, I ask the questioner about what makes them feel safe. When and where do they feel safe? With whom? Why? Invariably, the answers center on times, places and people with whom they have good relationships. They feel safe in situations where they feel connected to and cared for by others. I ask if the police had anything to do with those situations. I ask if prisons had anything to do with those

feelings. The answer is always no. It's at this point that I ask: if policing and prisons don't make us feel safe, why do we continue to look to them for solutions when harm occurs? Isn't it time we try something different?

In conversations like these, I emphasize the point that safety from harm, including homicide and sexual violence, is achieved through right relations. Right relations lead to safe communities.

I remind them that it is broken relations that enable harm. I stress that creating and maintaining safety requires developing and sustaining right relations. Because policing and imprisonment are about caging and exiling people, making the creation, development and maintenance of right relations impossible, they can never effectuate safety. Disappearing people precludes safety.

If we want safe communities, we have to repair relationships that have been broken by harm. Where there is no relationship, we have to create one. In cases of serious harm, the formula doesn't change. We think it does. The PIC lulls us into dichotomous thinking: worthy and unworthy; deserving and undeserving; valuable and disposable. The PIC wants us to believe there are some people not worthy of right relations. It's not true. The only way to achieve safety is to repair harm as much as possible and working to ensure

it doesn't occur again.

The answer to what we do about murderers and rapists is: practice transformative justice.

I convey to the questioner what Common Justice and the Vera Institute relate in their report "Accounting for Violence." When harmed parties were asked what they wanted most essentially, they said, "they don't want the person to hurt them or anyone else ever again." The report goes on to state:

The fundamental need for safety should not be equated with an appetite for incarceration. Even though incarceration provides some people with a temporary sense of safety from the person whom harmed them or satisfies a desire to see someone punished for wrongdoing—or both—many victims find that incarceration of that person makes them feel less safe. For some, this is because they fear others in the community who may be angry with them for their role in securing the responsible person's punishment. For others, it is because they know the person who harmed them will eventually come home and they do not believe that he or she will be better for having spent time in prison; to the contrary, they often believe that incarceration will make the person worse. [p. 13]

After sharing what harmed parties want most, I ask the questioner, who has the power to


give them what they want most. Is it the police? Is it the prosecutor? Is it the courts? the prison administrators? the parole board? These figures become involved only after a harm has occurred and been reported. So who can give harmed parties

what they want- safety? Who can really make sure the harm doesn't happen again? We, those of us behind the walls, have the power to effectuate safety. We can make sure it doesn't happen again. This ability lies within all of us, those convicted

of homicide and sexual violence included. This work, learning to create strong, healthy relationships and repair broken ones, is the work we need to do right now to enable a better future for ourselves, our loved ones and our communities.

This work is how safety is achieved. In Solidarity, Stevie  
Send love to Stevie here: Pennsylvania DOC Stephen Wilson, LB8480, SCI Fayette, PO Box 33028. St. Petersburg, FL 33733

### UPCOMING EVENTS


**ABOLITION COMMUNITY DISCUSSION**  
**ASSATA: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY**  
Chapters 7 & 8

Christ United Methodist Church  
201 W Ridge Rd, Gary, IN 46408  
Saturday, February 1 4-6 pm

**Discussion questions:**  
[shorturl.at/yXY78](https://shorturl.at/yXY78)

**Find a free copy of the text here:**  
[shorturl.at/cfkIM](https://shorturl.at/cfkIM)

**Listen to the audiobook for free here:**  
[shorturl.at/yzCKP](https://shorturl.at/yzCKP)



**Radical Reads: Freedom is a Constant Struggle**  
Evansville-Vanderburgh Public Library  
200 SE Martin Luther King Jr Blvd, Evansville, IN  
Free copy of the text: [shorturl.at/ejU15](https://shorturl.at/ejU15)

IDOC Watch is tabling at the monthly Poetry Slam Friday, February 7 at 8:30pm at The Bishop in Bloomington. Come by and see us!

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**POWER TO PRISONERS**