



VANGUARD INCARCERATED PRESS

11th Edition

inside
Autumn

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Incarcerated Individuals Face Grim Future if Deported to El Salvador

Shawn Dustin Powell
Centinela State Prison

Jaime Caceres, incarcerated for 32 years, cherishes the moments he shares FaceTiming with his family and friends on his prison-issued tablet, knowing one day in the future he may not be so fortunate.

In less than five years, he may be found suitable for release by a parole board at which time he would be a free man.

However, for Caceres and other undocumented Salvadorians, this may not be the case.

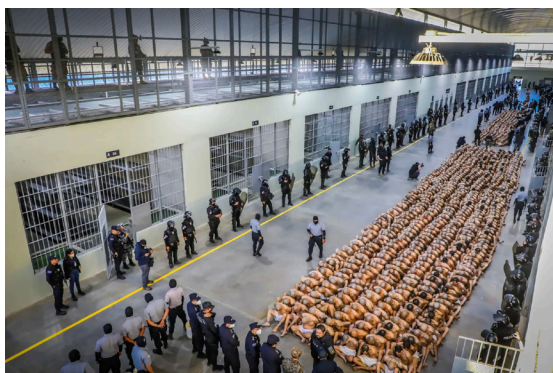
Incarcerated individuals who are not U.S. citizens can be sent back to their country of origin upon release, according to U.S. law. Those from El Salvador face even more daunting circumstances as they can be incarcerated indefinitely after deportation if found to be gang members, associates of gang members, or violent criminals, according to the research outlined below.

Starting on March 27, 2022, Salvadorian President Nayib Bukele declared an ongoing state of emergency due to gang violence. Because of El Salvador's Mano Dura, or Iron Fist, policy, anyone thought to be associated with a gang can be charged with a crime.

This policy has been ineffective and counterproductive while avoiding accountability for human rights violations, according to a 2024 ar-

ticle, "The Rise and Eventual Fail of El Salvador's Mano Dura" in the University of Miami Inter-American Law Review by Margo Jaijoura.

"This policy includes anti-gang laws that make gang membership a crime and allow police to arrest people solely based on appearance," Jarjoura said.



Inside El Salvador's Terrorism Confinement Center, built under President Bukele's orders in response to gangs (Britannica, 2026). Image from Presidencia El Salvador/Getty Images (2023).

Juan Vigil, a 45-year-old incarcerated individual and naturalized U.S. citizen, said he is concerned with being deported and de-naturalized because he was born in El Salvador.

"If I were to be deported to El Salvador, I would be booked as a deportee," Vigil said. "Even if they let me go, I would be under heavy surveillance.

If I was found to be associated or connected to gangs in any way, I could be held indefinitely pending investigation."

Since January 2025, the Trump Administration has pledged to arrest and remove as many immigrants lacking permanent legal status as possible in a mass deportation campaign, according to a 2023 article "The New Front Lines of Immigration Defense" in the academic journal Advocate by Maria E. Andrade.

"Noncitizens have minimal rights to immigration proceedings, as compared to the rights of afforded criminal defendants, because deportation is a purely civil action to determine if a person is eligible to remain in the country as opposed to criminal action," Andrade said.

Caceres, who came to the U.S. at 6 years old, said his parents were fleeing adverse conditions in El Salvador and were looking for a better life when they arrived in the U.S.

"I did not ask to come to this country," Caceres said. "My parents were concerned with struggling to survive and trying to make ends meet rather than the family unit. They were always working, and as a kid, I ended up being jumped into a gang at 10 years old."

Bukele's state of emergency, known as The Regime of Exception or the Regime, has proven to be successful in eradicating gangs. However, the individual rights of *(continued on page 4...)*

Contaminated or Conserved? The Ongoing Water Drama at Mule Creek

By D. Razor Babb
Mule Creek State Prison

They took my cellmate, Curly, out for a blood transfusion this morning. He only saw the tele-med doctor yesterday, so the quick transport for the procedure to an outside hospital is telling. The doctor didn't pull punches; he told Curly, "it's serious." He was diagnosed with a blood disorder that's corrosive and dangerous. The nurse on duty told him, "I'm so sorry. God be with you."

Four years ago when Curly was diagnosed with kidney cancer, it set off a chain of events whose effects are apparent to this day. We wondered how he had contracted kidney cancer, and looking around the yard, we wondered why so many others were suddenly being diagnosed with thyroid, liver, and kidney disease.

Initial research revealed that others with very

similar symptoms to Curly, and who had eventually been diagnosed with kidney cancer, were informed that drinking contaminated water was a highly possible suspect. As a reporter for the local prison newspaper I was scared to death to even touch the story, but I felt it would be journalistic malpractice to not report what I was discovering. This was cemented when I came upon a 7-part investigative piece in the Amador-Ledger, the county paper, into toxic water contamination and dumping at Mule Creek State Prison. The piece detailed multi-million dollar lawsuit settlements and court-ordered infrastructure improvements to the plumbing and wastewater treatment facilities.

It wasn't long until Emily Nonko of Empowerment Avenue joined the reporting and acquired funding

for the investigation. Two trips to California from New York, along with documentary filmmaker Sandro Ramani, over 100 interviews and case-after-case of contaminated wells, mystery illnesses, stories of cover-ups, and even death left little doubt

that Mule Creek has some serious water issues.

Yet, in the face of mounting evidence, including statements from current and former MCSP staff regarding attempts by

the prison to keep a lid on the problems, the prison and the Department of Corrections still deny any water issues while paying out millions in lawsuit settlements.

Many incarcerated individuals even parrot the prison's denials, refusing to accept or even consider there is a problem. *(continued on page 4...)*

"...case-after-case of contaminated wells, mystery illnesses, stories of cover-ups, and even death..."

Confronting Injustice: 20 Years of the Davis Vanguard

By Maxine Pollock

What is injustice? The word is thrown around a lot in the carceral system and in our paper, so, let's break it down. The "in" in injustice is a prefix meaning "not", therefore, injustice refers to the opposite of justice. The word's negative connotation and the intangible feeling of wrongness that pulls at heartstrings, violating our sense of morality when we hear someone speak of injustice, implies that we as human beings are entitled to justice and, when it is stripped away, we feel compelled to act.

Experiencing an injustice is markedly different from making a mistake. The notion of injustice shifts the responsibility away from the individual and towards someone or something else—the court system, the police, the warden. So, when we think about addressing injustice, the focus is on supporting the individual who had their sense of justice taken from them and confronting the person or institution that robbed a human being of their natural right to fair and just treatment.

In May of 2006, David Greenwald decided to do something about the injustices he witnessed as a resident of Davis, California. After attending a city council meeting where people were arguing against increased police surveillance in light of a recent conviction by the Davis District Attorney, David decided to start a blog to document this story and similar local cases. Through the work of dedicated defense attorneys like Matt Gonzalez, supported by David's advocacy and reporting, the defendant won her appeals process against the DA, the police chief resigned, and the Davis Vanguard was born.

20 years later, on June 14, 2026, supporters of the Davis Vanguard gathered together in Northern California to celebrate the organization's 20th anniversary and raise funds to bolster our future. The fundraiser was set in a charming California Spanish-style event space and as defense attorneys, former clients, Court Watch interns, and friends and family trickled in, afternoon light streamed through large arched windows.

Founder and CEO David Greenwald kicked off the speeches, stating, "If you had told me [20 years ago] that we would be here today doing all of the things we're doing, I don't think I would believe you." He thanked the public defenders in attendance, adding that they are fighting a "frontline battle against mass incarceration" and explained one of his foundational focuses: "everyday injustices." For David, "everyday injustices" are things that people encounter in court on an everyday basis that may not make the news, but can have life-altering consequences for the people involved. Absurdly high bail is an "everyday injustice" that is all too common and one that the Vanguard works to shed light on through the Court Watch program.

Matt Gonzalez, Chief Attorney for the San Francisco Public Defender's Office, and the fundraiser's keynote speaker, was next to take the stage. After starting a criminal defense firm with a former classmate in 2005, one of Gonzalez's first cases was the same case that prompted David to start the Davis Vanguard. Gonzalez attributed a large part of their victory in that case to David Greenwald. Matt Gonzalez concluded by reading a passage from the first article published on the Vanguard's Blog: "This blog will be the voice of truth for the city of Davis. This blog will be the source of hard-hitting reporting and news that you will not get from the Davis Enterprise."

Next, it was our turn to present. The Vanguard Incarcerated Press team—myself, Joan Parkin, and Mia Bella Rodgers—took to the stage with our Inside Editors, Jamel Walker and Razor Babb, on the phone. We each took turns speaking, but the message was the same: one of gratitude for our tight-knit team, the broader Davis Vanguard organization, and our loyal readers. Above all, we reiterated our steadfast commitment to providing a platform for marginalized voices and fearless reporting in a society that traditionally ignores and stereotypes incarcerated individuals.

In her speech, our director Joan Parkin emphasized the importance

of the VIP's work stating that our "publication is more than an opportunity to tell a story. It is a chance to participate in public discourse, develop professional skills, and challenge stereotypes."

Joan then introduced Jamel Walker who thanked the audience for caring about "speaking truth to power and amplifying the voices of those amongst us that hail from the marginalized and disenfranchised of our society."

Mia Bella Rodgers spoke to the importance and pervasive nature of our paper's mission adding that "the cause naturally embeds itself into every aspect of your life, regardless of what that spark is for you. It's very important to hold on to that and continue to fight for what you know is right."

Following Mia was Razor

Babb who gave an overview of mass incarceration in California, claiming that "prison is a twilight world," but it is "within these dark spaces [that] incarcerated writers and reporters struggle to shed the light of truth, illuminating the forgotten, dispossessed, and disenfranchised voices."

Finally, I concluded the VIP's segment by emphasizing the importance of our work in our current era where "the voices of all journalists are under attack, but incarcerated individuals have been subject to a particular kind of censorship for decades." Yet, "despite the threats that journalism is facing, the Vanguard has managed to not only survive, but prevail."

We all thanked the audience for their support in advancing our paper's cause and had many people come up to us after the speeches saying that the VIP's presentation was the most impactful part of the fundraiser for them, especially because, in having Jamel and Razor on the phone, we demonstrated exactly what we stand for: highlighting incarcerated voices.

The event's focus then shifted to the two Vanguard Justice Award recipients presented by Tracy Olson, the Chief Public Defender for Yolo County. The first winner of the Vanguard Justice Award was Dan Hutchinson, a public defender in Yolo County for 20 years and the lead attorney of the recent Carlos Dominguez case, where Hutchinson's fierce advocacy earned his client an acquittal of murder charges. The second winner was Jennifer Mouzis, recently appointed lead Public Defender for Nevada County and the attorney for Ajay Dev, a man who was wrongly convicted of rape in 2009 and sentenced to 378 years and 4 months in prison. Thanks to Mouzis's tenacity, a Yolo County Superior Court reversed his conviction and freed Mr. Dev in May 2025.

Rounding out the afternoon's speeches was Mr. Ajay Dev himself who was joined by his family in the audience. Dev spoke about the horrific realities of his incarceration from views blocked by razor wire to feeling frozen in time, to, most painfully "losing my fatherhood." With tears in his eyes, Mr. Dev said of his family, "they are the reason I survived" and "every breath of freedom I take today, I take for us." He spoke about his gratitude for his freedom, but emphasized the lasting effects of incarceration, "even after the prison door opens, part of the prison can remain inside the mind."

The 20th anniversary fundraiser for the Davis Vanguard was an impactful presentation of the organization's work and the revolutionary vision of justice that we strive to uphold: one that combats the traditional retributive approach that reproduces injustices and instead works toward a more restorative model prioritizing connection, education, and community. With employees, volunteers, clients, writers, and supporters all under one roof committing to work together, this vision feels tangible and possible.

Here's to 20 more years!



LETTER

— from the editor

Who We Are

The Vanguard Incarcerated Press (VIP) is committed to systemic change of the carceral state. We seek to accomplish this by providing both a vehicle and a platform, through our newspaper, to elevate the voices of incarcerated people. The practice of caging human beings is designed to isolate and dehumanize, leaving them with few resources to connect with the broader community. By empowering incarcerated writers and journalists to reassert their humanity, we create allies within our broader community who can see past the mainstream media's efforts of continued stigmatization and dehumanization of incarcerated people. So empowered, their writing serves as a means in raising our readers' consciousness of the importance of systemic change.

The VIP publishes hard-hitting news stories and commentary, written by incarcerated people, challenging inequitable, dehumanizing prison conditions and policies that oppress disenfranchised masses stories promoting efforts to dismantle the prison industrial complex (PIC), as well as stories offering a critique of the criminal legal system, its racism, barbarity, and absurdity and those that expose human rights violations. We are a small staff and are not lawyers, and do not have the resources or the expertise to accept claims of wrongful conviction. However, we remain inclusive of the vast array of voices across the carceral landscape. We work to amplify these voices within the larger conversation about systemic change of the carceral state, in solidarity with like-minded allies.

In seeking to expose Injustices lurking within America's PIC, empowering the community of incarcerated voices along the way, we enable these voices to be heard, without censorship, while creating a community forum where our writers can engage in civil debate, oppose the brutalities of the carceral state, and challenge the status quo, all in the pursuit of systemic change. If you share these goals, please provide a submission for consideration.

Disclaimer

The purpose of the *VIP*'s publication is educational, providing incarcerated writers with a platform to improve their skills as journalists and exposing our readership to a diversely sourced representation of authentic inside voices. For this reason, the *VIP* does not censor the content submitted by its contributors; the views and perspectives represented in articles from our contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the *VIP*, its affiliates or employees.

A Note on Language

We are staunchly committed to maintaining our anti-censorship policy, as outlined in our disclaimer. However, as of this issue, we are updating our policy on language going forwards: we will change all instances of the word "inmate" to person-centered language, such as "person in prison" or "incarcerated individual." We do this to acknowledge that many incarcerated people find these terms dehumanizing and to meet the current standards of other incarcerated journalism organizations, such as the Marshall Project. We ask that all of our writers uphold this new policy going forward, or we will edit this language in your piece for you before we publish it.

Announcements

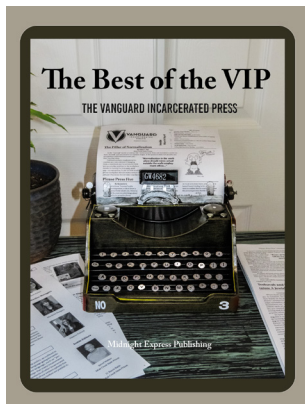


Image taken by Mia Bella Rodgers.

Graphic by Maxine Pollock.

The VIP recently released our book! Titled "The Best of VIP," it contains our past editions. Copies can be obtained at this link: <https://midnightexpressbooks.com/home/authors/vanguard-incarcerated-press/>

Additionally, we want to invite submissions about solitary confinement and institutional censorship. We are looking to broaden the range of topics we report on and these are two topics of discussion that we would like to bring attention to.

Finally, we want to share that we will be moving to a quarterly newsletter format. You can expect to receive our publication in Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer. We will also be revamping our website, providing more opportunities for our audience to be published!

Staff & Editorial Board

Editor-in-Chief



Joan Parkin

Production Managers



Mia Bella Rodgers



Maxine Pollock

Inside Editors



Jamel Walker

Mule Creek State Prison



D. Razor Babb

Mule Creek State Prison

"Incarcerated Individuals Face Grim Future if Deported to El Salvador"
continued

the people have suffered because of this, according to a 2024 article "The Mass Imprisonment of Possible Gang Members" in the Maryland Journal of International Law by Abigail Hartnett.

"The Regime of Exception has come at the cost of people's right to freedom of expression, freedom of press, freedom of assembly and due process under the law," Hartnett said.

Some weekends, Vigil shares laughs and refreshments with his family in the prison's visiting room. However, underlying the happiness of the experience, he still worries and cannot help but wonder how many more of these moments they will share together. At the visit, someone mentions a family friend who was incarcerated under Bukele's Regime—a grim reminder of what the future may hold.

"However, underlying the happiness of the [family visits], he still worries and cannot help but wonder how many more of these moments they will share together."

"One of my longtime friends, who was a pastor in El Salvador, is now in prison indefinitely pending investigation," Vigil said, "Someone reported that he was involved in criminal activity, and that is all it took."

President Bukele's state of emergency has resulted in a lack of accountability and transparency in constitutional guarantees and legal controls, according to a 2023 article "The War on Gangs" in the University of Miami Inter-American Law Review by Sanobar Valiani.

"As a member of the United Nations, El Salvador is bound by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty; freedom from arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence; freedom of movement and residence; and the right to peaceful assembly and association," Valiani said.

"El Salvador's newly modified Code of Criminal Procedure now allows for indefinite pretrial detention, directly violating the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," according to the article.

Caceres's first thoughts upon awakening in the morning are of his mother. If he does not call, she begins to worry about him, and he worries about her as well due to her age. When they talk, his mother tells him he is selfish and only thinking of himself if he goes to the Parole Board.

"Where others look at the Parole Board as possible freedom, my mom looks at it as death," Caceres said.

"Whether I was a gang member or not, I am not the same person I was 33 years ago. If I have paid my debt to society, why should I be incarcerated for no crime?" Caceres said. "My mom tells me not to go to the Parole Board because she thinks I will disappear if deported. At least here we can talk, and she knows that I am safe."

Vigil's mother and family worry about him being deported as well.

"One of my cousins was arrested in El Salvador," Vigil said. "Since his

arrest, my family has not heard from him, and my mom worries that the same thing will happen to me if I am deported."

Investigative journalists have exposed police officers in the forming of "death squads" that are responsible for homicides and human

rights violations. Police and military have also been involved in the torturing of suspected gang members and extrajudicial killings, according to a 2023 article "Crime, Violence, and Fear" in the Academic Journal Crime, Law & Social Change by Jonathan Rosen and colleagues.

"Bukele is justifying his tough on crime policies and contending that they are necessary as they have contributed to the recent decreases in violence.

While violence has declined in recent years, human rights abuses remain high," according to the article.

Another incarcerated individual—who is at risk of deportation to El Salvador and asked to remain anonymous for fear of retribution—said that there is no incentive for him to try and meet the criteria for parole, including good behavior, fearing that being found suitable for release by the Parole Board will end in deportation to worse conditions.

Salvadorian human rights organizations have condemned what they call a "suspension of fundamental rights." These organizations recorded 5,775 victims of human rights violations and 189 in custody deaths between March 2022 and September 2023. Victims identified members of the National Civil Police and Armed Forces in 90% of these cases, according to a March 2024 article "Bukele Consolidates Power" in a NACLA Report on the Americas authored by Lucrecia Molinari.

If he is found suitable for parole in the U.S., at least he will have paid his debt to society, Caceres said. He hopes that in the future, circumstances in El Salvador will change, but for now the future looks bleak.

"Due process does not really exist in El Salvador," Caceres said. "There are no rules that they follow, and that is very discouraging."

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"Contaminated or Conserved? The Ongoing Water Drama at Mule Creek" continued

This, of course, is the legal lynchpin. If the prison or the CDCR is "aware there's a problem" and don't do anything about it, they are legally liable.

Meanwhile, toxic runoff and dumping is ruining the health of nearby residents in Ione, CA, along with the environment. Ione residents attend town halls and have formed citizen groups to protest and battle what many feel are coverups and deliberate indifference.

On Tuesday, July 21, an announcement from the Mule Creek warden warned, "Do not drink the water or take showers, the water is contaminated." Guards came around and locked the shower doors. No equivocation, no doubt. Do NOT drink or BATHE in the water. Twenty to thirty minutes later, another announcement, this time they said it's a "conservation" issue. No showers until further notice. The water is safe to drink.

Skeptics and those familiar with CDCR rhetoric instantly recognized the dichotomy in the two announcements: officials provided completely different explanations for the same phenomenon, raising suspicions among one group, while validating the claims of the other.

Many believe that the initial warning was the correct one, that the warden certainly didn't warn of "contamination" on his own accord. And I believe Sacramento caught wind and immediately notified Mule Creek to revise their statement.

Others believe the water is just fine. One local resident tells me, "This is the best prison water I've ever tasted!" Others tell me that their doctors attribute

"Investigative journalists have exposed police officers in the forming of 'death squads' that are responsible for homicides and human rights violations."



Designed by Rikki Li.

their declining medical conditions to contaminated water, and warn, "I can't say anymore."

In a highly noticeable cosmic occurrence some consider a coincidence, three weeks ago, they began selling bottled water in the canteen. Twenty-ounces, 78¢. Some have offered that "IF" the water indeed was contaminated, the prison would have to provide bottled water, for free. When, seemingly, everything else related to CDCR is money-driven, could this be a consideration? Even when incarcerated individuals' health is concerned, would fiscal necessity trump the personal welfare of the incarcerated wards of the state?

Maybe Curly's blood transfusion will help, maybe the water is just fine, and maybe the tele-med attending nurse's empathetic plea is our best hope, God be with us all.

Note: For more on Mule Creek's water concerns, go to: theappeal.org/mule-creek-drinking-water

And: prismreports.org/2026-03/24/mule-creek-prison-water-ione-cancer/

*

California's Board of Prison Hearings Has a New Squishy Toy

Bruce Swenson

California State Prison, Corcoran

For half a century, our state Board of Prison Hearings (BPH) has relied on a particular review format to determine whether a prisoner has changed enough to pose no risk to public safety upon release. It used to be that the predominant area of measure for discerning positive change in a prisoner seated before them was what the Board called insight. If the candidate could explain who they were leading up to the crime, then describe who they are now, and further describe how they arrived at their change, that very internalization becomes the insight a panel wants to hear about.

In recent years, however, our BPH's long-standing sense of infallibility has managed to pull an additional reviewing lens out of thin air. They call this Impression Management (IM). As most squishy toys do, its effects pop up in hearing transcripts in the most unexpected places.

When Sociologist Professor Erving Goffman developed his theory of IM—the conscious or subconscious act of controlling how other people see oneself—in the early 1950s, he warned against overzealous abuses of it in job interview settings. However, he never thought his theory of social interaction could be twisted so as to be used against a prisoner pleading for another chance at freedom. The professor did not mean for his theory of self-preservation to be hijacked by a state prison board and used against one whose very liberty interests are at stake!

Impression Management was never intended to be used as a blunt instrument strictly for negation. Whereas the Courts have long recognized insight, Impression Management has not!

California's Board seems to be radically oversimplifying this theory of self-preservation, when commissioners narrowly view it to be something "a prisoner uses to attempt to control how they are perceived." There are two motivations for self-preservation. (1) A presentation meant to match one's own self-image. (2) A presentation meant to match audience expectations. Prisoners appearing before a board are subject to this second motivation. In such a coercive environment,

"The professor did not mean for his theory of self-preservation to be hijacked by a state prison board and used against one whose very liberty interests are at stake!"



Illustration by Gabriel Hongdsutit, CalMatters

anyone will inevitably tailor their presentation style to the presumed expectations of the individual reviewers whose perceptions they are concerned with.

Self-preservation is a personal style for conveying information about oneself to others. In the spirit of transparency, a prisoner may not be trying to control anyone. Their conscious method supporting their own disclosure may be on the wordy side, but this style should not be misconstrued as being manipulative. A prisoner can openly be trying to explain what makes them unique from others. One can be secure interpersonally, with no need to construct a facade to control or impress a panel of Board commissioners.

Abuse of this IM theory is somewhat new for the BPH. By toying with this additional filtering lens, a panel can choose to find fault in one's delivery style wherever they want to place it.

Alarming, armed with this new squishy toy, the BPH now deploys their own version of this inappropriately hijacked social theory, using it as a trapdoor when nothing else is available to them for a denial.

As an example, including "other people" in their reasoning while

"By toying with this additional filtering lens, a panel can choose to find fault in one's delivery style wherever they want to place it."

describing their criminal behavior can be frowned upon. The panel will claim they only want to hear about you, and not how "others" were a part of your criminal circumstance.

Providing context while describing a tragic event involving "other people" can be framed as circuitous and as victim blaming or minimizing. One's genuine effort to be honest and transparent can be dangerous and mischaracterized as deliberate manipulation.

When a hearing panel wishes to deploy IM against one who would otherwise qualify for a full grant of suitability, it is acting as an entity underground.

A lead commissioner can actually claim that there was not enough internalization, and consequently not enough "offender change." A prisoner's record can have no antisocial behavior, no write-ups of any sort, over 80 various rehabilitative acts with laudatory praise by staff over a span of decades, yet still at age 73 be accused of "wordsmithing," and then be given a three-year denial.

IM is used by the BPH as a tool of ambush when no other reason to deny is available. Their little squishy toy, pulled out of thin air, defies the very intent of a so-called "Structured Decision Making Format." California Courts will be looking at this objectively for what it is NOT. IM is NOT to be used against a prisoner's liberty interests when that person has proven themselves to no longer exhibit anti-social behavior, is elderly, and has impeccable parole plans. The BPH's hidden agenda and use of IM has become an additional cost to taxpayers under the false illusion of keeping our public safe!

*

Chicago Torture Survivors Memorial Groundbreaking

Joan Parkin

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.” —James Baldwin

In a climate of increasing hostility against Black civil rights initiatives, including attacks on DEI, unfair treatment of immigrants, and the Supreme Court decision on redistricting, Chicago’s Mayor Brandon Johnson and a community of organizers, lawyers, the wrongfully convicted and police torture survivors took part in a ceremony at Washington Park on King Drive, Chicago on July 8, to break ground for the Chicago Torture Justice Memorial. According to Jen Asche, Executive Director of the foundation for CTJM, “this will be the first public memorial in the U.S. dedicated to the honest remembrance of state violence at the hands of the police.” It exposes one of Chicago’s longest and darkest hidden truths—that a pattern and practice of police torture occurred from 1971 to 1991. The detective’s techniques included racially motivated torture, including electroshock, mock executions, suffocation, and beatings against 124 Black men, women, and Latine people. As I stood among torture survivors, lawyers, and organizers at the groundbreaking for the Chicago Torture Justice Memorial, I realized I was witnessing the culmination of a struggle that had shaped more than two decades of my own life.

One might expect the theme of the event to be trauma or even revenge, but the resounding theme at the park was truth. Ahra Baker’s powerful opening performance set the tone, giving voice to both trauma and resilience. Following her song, speakers acknowledged the Indigenous peoples who shed their blood on this land at the hands of British colonizers. That remembrance underscored a painful parallel: like Indigenous communities before them, the survivors of Chicago police torture were subjected to the unchecked power of those who saw them as less than fully human and showed them no mercy. For far too long, the truth of what happened to these men and women remained hidden.

The atmosphere was charged with the feeling that we were collectively embarking on something unprecedented. Joey Mogul, an attorney with many years involved in defending Burge torture survivors and co-founder and board president of the Chicago Torture Justice Memorial Foundation, stepped up to the mic and said, to exuberant applause, “Today we break ground! “These men tell what happened” (motioning to police torture survivors Gregory Banks and Anthony Holmes). Burge and his crew tortured over 120 Black men at Area 2 and 3 Headquarters, forcing them to suffer under the most egregious conditions by being beaten with a blackjack, mock executions, tormented with racist epithets, and finally forced to confess. In court, no one would believe them, and the confessions stood as proof against them. Today, that’s all changed. Their dirty secret is now common knowledge.

Another theme that resonated with the crowd was that of resistance. The story of the memorial is one of struggle. When torture victim Gregory Banks, a member of CJTM who was forced to confess in 1982, took the stage, he

announced that this is a historic day. For him, the memorial is a permanent reminder and a responsibility to shine the truth, and it is also a sign of resistance. He said, “When people come together with change, education,

and hope, we will continue to seek justice. We must never let this happen

again.” Gregory was followed by torture survivor Anthony Holmes, who was electroshocked in 1973. He reminded the audience that there was nothing to be sad about: “We’re winning,” he exclaimed.

The stage was set for Mayor Brandon Johnson, who, unlike his mayoral predecessors, supported the Memorial project and dug in, literally and figuratively! He said, “The memorial can’t undo the harm, but it can stop its being perpetuated.” Listening to Mayor Johnson, I was reminded of the youngest

Burge victim, Marcus Wiggins, who was picked up and electroshocked at the age of 13. He said in a world where every young Black man was considered a terrorist, the monument meant “a true place of peace.” He continued, “we can feel deep dark stuff that most people don’t understand.”

For torture survivor Stanley Howard who spent 16 years on death row for a crime he did not commit, the Chicago Torture Justice Memorial will stand as a “testament long after I’m gone that will endure.” He says, “it’s a simple message: you have to study the past in order not to repeat it in the future.” He noted that all three branches of government were involved in the torture conspiracy, so the monument is also a testament to the “struggle and fight” it took by the moms and activists to bring down Mayor Daley and State’s Attorney Dick Devine’s torture machine. Former National Organizer for the Campaign to End the Death Penalty, Alice Kim, knows that well. She sees the monument as a “symbol of all the labor and all the struggle to get justice and survive and more than that it’s a call to action.” We need to keep fighting!

The resources that made this possible came from the Johnson Administration, the Chicago Torture

Justice Memorial Foundation (CTJMF), and the city. The memorial is the final piece of the holistic reparations legislation passage in 2015. The holistic reparations legislation didn’t come out of thin air. It was spearheaded by a

multiracial, intergenerational campaign in 2014-2015. They chose reparations over lawsuits and decided they would have greater impact on communities if family members were included in the reparations instead of just receiving individual

“They chose reparations over lawsuits and decided they would have a greater impact on communities if family members were included in the reparations...”

checks. It demanded and received:

- A formal apology for the torture
- \$5.5 million Reparations Fund for Burge Torture victims
- Free college at City College for the survivors and their families
- Creation of a history curriculum in the schools
- Creation of Chicago Torture Justice Center
- And mandated the construction of a memorial

According to Joey Mogul, “this memorial is part of the reparations package.” And while it will be made of bricks and cement, Mogul believes it will be more than just a lasting structure: “It confronts, paints a history” that is uncomfortable. Aislinn Pulley, Executive Director of the Chicago Torture Justice Center and co-founder of Chicago Black Lives Matter, believes it will have a positive impact by “setting a standard of what is acceptable behavior by declaring that torture is unacceptable.” Many would still soon bury it. But this isn’t what’s happening. The monument stands for every single person who ever held a flyer or poster board and marched through the streets on behalf of the police torture survivors.



Alice Kim (left), torture victim and exonerate Stanley Howard (middle), and Joan Parkin (right)

“Another theme that resonated with the crowd was that of resistance. The story of the memorial is one of struggle.”

“Chicago Torture Survivors Memorial Groundbreaking” continued

Those that designed it also saw it as more than a building. Designed with input from the torture survivors’ family members and other CTJMF members, the structure is meant to reflect the survivors’ experience of torture and coerced confessions. The winning memorial design is titled “Breath, Form, and Freedom.” It was created by artists Patricia Nguyen and John Lee. In the words of its principal architect, John Gay, “we developed a concrete edifice with juxtaposed, swirling and undulating patterns to deliver a symbolic rhythmic ‘Vortex.’ The unapologetic expressions mirror the survivors’ experience.”

But the memorial stands not only as a reflection of past suffering; it is also the product of a long struggle to force the city to acknowledge that history. As the leader of the Death Row 10 campaign, the event held special significance for me. Over twenty years ago, the former Executive Director of the Campaign to End the Death Penalty, Marlene Martin asked me to leave the work I was doing against police brutality in New York and instead coordinate a campaign for a group of men calling themselves the Death Row 10. Burge and his detectives had tortured these men and railroaded them to death row on the basis of forced confessions. We modeled our campaign off the grassroots bottom-up campaign that preceded us and led to the forced retirement (with full pension) of Jon Burge. Flint Taylor of the People’s Law Office uncovered the conspiracy and supported the political campaign that led to Burge’s firing. I had the opportunity to speak with the producer and director, Peter Kuttner, of the documentary called *The End of the Night Stick* that documented that struggle and that became the blueprint for ours. Working with family members we helped create a movement that led to the release of three of the Death Row 10 (the fourth had another case to serve)

Watching the shovels break the ground, I found myself thinking of those who had fought alongside us but were no longer here to witness this day. I remembered the mother of the wrongfully convicted Frank Bounds, Costella Cannon, whose speeches could move an audience like few others, and sweet champion Louva Bell, the mother of torture survivor Ronald Kitchen. I thought of Darby Tillis, the Black street preacher who spent 18 years on death row for a crime he did not commit and devoted his life to exposing the truth about police torture and wrongful convictions. I also remembered the many victims of Illinois’ racist and corrupt criminal legal system who did not live to see this moment, as well as the countless organizers whose labor too often goes unrecognized.

This memorial belongs to all of them. It is proof that ordinary people, through persistence and collective action, can change the historical record. Long after today’s speeches have faded from memory, this monument will

“But the memorial stands not only as a reflection of past suffering; it is also the product of a long struggle to force the city to acknowledge that history.”



Chicago Torture Justice Memorial. Image by Chicago Torture Justice Memorials.

continue telling a story that those in power once tried to erase. It stands as a testament to James Baldwin’s words: “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

At a time when it is easy to feel overwhelmed by injustice, the groundbreaking of the Chicago

Torture Justice Memorial reminds us that history is not written by the powerful alone. It is also written by survivors who refused to be silenced, families who refused to give up, lawyers and organizers who refused to walk away, and communities that kept fighting until the truth could no longer be denied. Their victory reminds us that even the longest struggles can end in justice—and that when people organize, they can win.

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“This memorial belongs to all of them. It is proof that ordinary people, through persistence and collective action, can change the historical record.”

Reclaiming Humanity: Bridging the Gap Between Inside and Outside Communities

Norman Williams
Ironwood State Prison

After many years of seeking a way to reclaim my humanity, my goal was to do so by making amends for the harm I caused. I conceived of this idea and drafted it as a proposal for an “LWOP Walk for Life Walkathon” to benefit Shriners Children’s Hospital—honoring the institution that inspired me, as a child survivor of gun violence, to make my first \$10 donation. This effort was driven by my passion for helping children—an interest deeply rooted in my own trauma.

With the assistance of Valley State Prison’s Men’s Advisory Council and the approval of the Warden, I, along with a diverse group of LWOP men, came together with our newly founded LWOP group and sponsor, Sheri Rossi, Psy.D., who believed in our vision and abilities. She helped make it possible for us to partner with Northern California Shriners Children’s Hospital’s own Joe Wilson for the first annual “LWOP Walk for Life Walkathon,” held on October 16, 2024. This event became the second-largest single-day event in Valley State Prison history, behind the legendary entertainer Common’s Hope and Redemption concert.

With guest entertainment by the Dawny Reb Band and the presence of many restorative justice organizations—such as the Anti-Violence Safety and Accountability Project (ASAP), the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Drop LWOP, Made New Foundation, Legacy Alliance Outreach, and Families United to End LWOP (FUEL), as well as Frank Silver of the California Senate—Valley State Prison came alive with music and a festive atmosphere. Residents entered the main yard as if they were stepping into a neighborhood park. Each participant signed a media release form and received a wristband to track the number of laps they would complete.

“...outside supporters joined them with cheerful smiles, bring to life the motto: “We walk for you and with you.”

As residents approached the track, outside supporters joined them with cheerful smiles, bringing to life the motto: “We walk for you and with you.” For that day, the two communities merged in a shared experience of healing,

hope, and humanity—bridging the divide and restoring a sense of humanness within us all. VSP LWOP residents united incarcerated individuals, staff, and outside restorative justice supporters in a shared, impactful mission driven by purpose.

After completing their laps, residents lined up at the gymnasium

"Bridging the Gap Between Inside and Outside Communities"
continued



Photo from Onnie Bass, sent by Norman Williams.

entrance to experience the Expo. Inside, a variety of reentry resources were available, along with refreshments and pizza for participants. Each resident received a Shriners logo wristband inscribed with "VSP LWOP Walkathon for Shriners Children's." Many residents sat together, enjoying the music as if at a community picnic, while others continued walking alongside outside supporters on the track.

Jamilia Land, founder of ASAP, worked diligently to ensure this trailblazing moment was captured and documented, so the outside world could witness LWOP residents at their very best. The event provided an opportunity for participants to reclaim their humanity within a system that often fosters disenfranchisement, marginalization, and dehumanization in many aspects of life.

For individuals who often exist outside the awareness of society, this experience affirmed that they are not only part of the conversation, but architects and agents of change in the broader movement for rehabilitation and justice reform. Chief Deputy Warden Chanelo delivered a speech filled with encouragement and hope, while formerly incarcerated Valley State Prison resident Michael Baldwin of Legacy Alliance Outreach inspired the crowd with powerful words of transformation and possibility.

The day concluded with the LWOP Walk for Life fundraising event raising nearly \$4,000, with 100% of the proceeds benefiting Shriners Children's Hospital. The following year, October became "LWOP Walk for Life" Month—a powerful demonstration of mobilization, collaboration, and seamless coordination. LWOP groups across several CDCR institutions, with more than 17 prison yards answering the call, joined the cause and stepped into purpose throughout the State of California.

The momentum extended far beyond prison walls. LWOP Walk for Life 2.0 moved past the prison tracks and reached all the way to the



Photo from Jamilia Land, sent by Norman Williams.

California State Capitol. The walk fostered a profound sense of solidarity, hope, and healing, grounded in a shared spirit of community. It was more than a walkathon—it was a movement sparked by a single \$10 donation, nurturing human dignity and a genuine commitment to giving back.

At its core, the movement brought attention to LWOP individuals making amends through service to others while reclaiming their humanity. This shared purpose aligned deeply with outside supporters, and together, in unity, they created a pathway for LWOP participants to carry this vision forward into LWOP Walk for Life 3.0.

This continued growth would not have been possible without the dedication of LWOP supporters and sponsors, including ASAP, Rising Beyond the Bullet, Drop LWOP, Storyline Media, Davis Vanguard, and FUEL.

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This Too Won't Pass

Cameron Terhune

Correctional Training Facility

"I can't wake up happy

I just took a knife
to the strings that attach me
every day's passing
everyone's laughing
like JFK find my
brains in the back seat."

—Machine Gun Kelly

To the extent that I write about prison stuff, I usually aim to make the inside more accessible and understandable to those outside of it, to help span the vast distance separating us. I think that this time, it may be a bridge too far, but I want to give it a shot anyways. Digging around in the past brings up a lot of things long buried; this is my shovel.

The concept of solitary confinement has a lot of negative connotations— as a society we get that it is bad and possibly inhumane— but it remains abstract because nothing in the outside world compares to it. While I found it cute to see folks on TV cheekily refer to being stuck at home during the pandemic as "like being in prison," it wasn't.

I got arrested for murder with special circumstances, a designation which means my case was eligible for capital punishment. After "step out of the car and put your hands above your head," I went straight to the county jail's death row. As someone who had never been so

"[Solitary confinement] remains abstract because nothing in the outside world compares to it."

much as arrested before, this was a drastic change in my environment, on top of the great many other unpleasant experiences and realizations unfolding simultaneously.

Death row in Stanislaus County is called X Tier. It is a stretch of thirteen single cells in a row on the top floor of the men's jail downtown. Your living space is a narrow rectangle four feet wide by eight feet deep with a bunk, a sink, and a toilet. The walls are bare concrete. There are no windows. The wall with the door is all open bars, which lets in all the sounds of your environment: slamming doors, electric locks, prisoners shouting, police shouting, the blare of daytime television and commercials, and the rattle of the single pay phone on wheels being slung up and down the tier.

You are issued one canvas jumpsuit, one pair of orange flip-flops, two t-shirts, two pairs of socks, two pairs of boxers, one sheet, one wool blanket, and no pillow. None of them are new. Your bunk is a steel sheet bolted to the wall that measures exactly six feet long. If you are considerably taller than six feet, like me, your feet will hang off the end of your bunk, and your ankles will still hurt even decades later like mine do.

"This Too Won't Pass" continued

On X Tier there is no program; you spend twenty-four hours a day locked down, but you can come out for "yard" once a week for an hour. Yard takes place on the roof in a twenty-by-twenty cement area surrounded by chain-link fences lined with wooden slats so you can't see anything beyond. There is a basketball hoop, which always struck me as odd because I never saw a basketball.

When you step foot outside your cell, for any reason besides the four A.M. cold shower, you are placed in what's known as the black box. This is a special restraint that goes beyond waist chains and shackles. First, your wrists are cuffed in front of you, palms together. Then a chain is wound around your waist just beneath your ribs and the cuffs are secured to it with a black box to immobilize your wrists. If you put your hands together as if you were going to pray, then place your wrists at the base of your sternum with your elbows bowed wide, that is a fair approximation of the position the box puts you in. Being in such a pose for hours on end, like when you spend the day out to court, becomes torturous. Your ankles will also be shackled together so you can only walk by shuffling in your flip-flops.

Being in such isolation and restriction takes its toll. I entered jail with preexisting mental health concerns, so that toll only grew as

"Being in such isolation and restriction takes its toll. I entered jail with preexisting mental health concerns, so that toll only grew as the days passed."

the days passed. I spent sixteen months there, then I got convicted and shipped off to the state pen. As someone already not great around people, the impact of my time in solitary manifested in immediate difficulty living in a tiny prison cell's confined space with some random other person and their own issues. I managed for a few months in the reception center, during which we had yard only one time on a day when it was over a hundred degrees and otherwise remained on 24-hour lockdown. Then I tried to kill myself.

My efforts got me a hospital trip, 70-some odd surgical staples, and a jaunt to the prison psych ward. From there I bounced back and forth between the prison's suicide watch, the hospital's crisis bed, and the psych ward, all of which were 24-hour lockdown facilities. They hampered me with psych meds and said I had an adjustment disorder, but secretly I wanted to stay forever because there were no other people around.

Soon enough, though, they ejected me back into the general population. From there I was sent straight to the hole for refusing to live with anyone else. The thought of going in the cell with someone else evoked such overwhelming anxiety that I longed for the hole in solitary confinement. That too could not last forever, and eventually, I was transferred to another institution where they allowed me to live by myself for a year.

During that time, I managed to adjust to being around people, having conversations, walking around without being in chains or under armed escort, and I spent some time outside for the first time in almost three years. Prison has never been easy or pleasant, but compared to solitary, even such minor freedoms are a whole other world.

After being out of solitary confinement for fifteen years, I still strug-



From the series *Juvenile in Justice* © Richard Ross, richardross.net. Courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

gle with many facets of life. I never feel comfortable with someone else in an enclosed space, though I've had a cellmate those entire fifteen years. Lots of institutional sounds still bother me a lot—keys, banging doors, too much noise or too much silence—and the despair that once nearly consumed me entirely still haunts the edges of my awareness.

I feel broken in ways I have a hard time putting into words. I don't think solitary confinement achieved anything except making me feel even more separate from other people than I did already. Even so long after it ended, I still feel that way. Sometimes I wonder if there is truly a way back—not out of prison, I know that exists, but a way back to feeling human—and if I will ever find it.

I guess we'll see.

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Resources

The VIP team has been working to collaborate with prison-centered organizations to connect our audience with more resources that may benefit them. Below is information on how you can get in contact with Just Detention International and Prison Policy Initiative.

Just Detention International



If you or someone you know has been sexually abused behind bars, we can send you our Survivor Packet.

The packet includes Hope for Healing, our self-help guide for survivors as they rebuild their lives after an assault. The packet also includes contact information for local rape crisis centers and legal aid organizations, as well as information about how to report abuse and survivors' rights.

If you would like the Survivor Packet mailed to you, contact Leelyn Aquino, JDI's Operations Director, at laquino@justdetention.org or by phone at 213-384-1400 ext. 110.

People in detention may write to JDI via confidential, legal mail at the following address:

Cynthia Totten, Attorney at Law
CA Attorney Reg. #199266
3250 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1630
Los Angeles, CA 90010

We respond to every survivor who writes to us. Please note that we do not provide legal representation or counseling services. Our Resource Guide includes listings of service providers nationwide that can help survivors in detention.

Prison Policy Initiative



Prison Policy Initiative, PO Box 127, Northampton, MA 01061

The Prison Policy Initiative is a national organization that produces cutting edge research to expose the harms of mass incarceration. We send in a quarterly newsletter containing all of our publications and will mail incarcerated people any titles they would like to read. We also welcome requests for national or state-level data on a range of issues related to mass incarceration including (but not limited to) communication-related topics, probation and parole, prison and jail population data and demographics, and women and gender.

Highlighting CCWF

Good Laws Gone Bad

Jessica Hann

Central California Women's Facility

The origin of some of California's laws are sometimes the result of the adverse impact on an individual or group of constituents. A constituent sees the need for a change, and proposes solutions to their local legislator's office. Constituents can also advocate with others—in what is known as a coalition—and begin calling for changes in a law or to create new law. However, during this process, it is important that legislators work closely with constituents to ensure the original intent to remedy the harm identified in the law is addressed.

In recent years, the California Legislature has made a point of introducing good ideas for new laws, but without structure. For example, Assembly Bill (AB) 475: The Voluntary Worker Program, introduced in 2025, would have recognized an incarcerated person's right to work or to choose not to work. It would have also increased

"The California Legislature needs to go beyond the basics and be detailed in how to implement new laws. Preferably, with advice by the people whom bills are intended to impact..."

pay for incarcerated workers "according to local ordinances." However, that was as far as the bill went—leaving the remainder of work for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) to figure out how to implement said changes.

The California Legislature needs to go beyond the basics and be detailed in how to implement new laws. Preferably, with advice by the people whom bills are intended to impact, in the case of AB 475, that would be the incarcerated workers.

Details that should be considered include: an incarcerated worker can earn two and a half sick days and two vacation days per month, with the option to take unpaid days off without punishment, and the worker has the right to quit their job at any time, for any reason.

As important as it is to spell out for CDCR, the importance of these kinds of details are simple. First, to adhere to the goals of CDCR's mission statement that was updated in Penal Code (PC) 1170 states in part, the purpose of prison is rehabilitation and successful reentry to society. These kinds of details can make the work environment closer to replicating work in free society.

"For example, just because someone volunteers for a job, when they want to quit working they cannot, otherwise they would be issued a Rule Violation Report (RVR)."

up to fourteen days or more to actually get the sick time.

Finally, just because it is called the "Voluntary Workers Program" does not mean it will be implemented in that way. Leaving CDCR to implement a new law without instructions by default forces CDCR to follow current regulations in the Title 15. For example, just because someone volunteers for a job, when they want to quit working they cannot, otherwise they would be issued a Rule Violation Report (RVR).

The need for a consideration of the details is proven by what happened in Colorado. In a 2023 opinion piece by National Public Radio, it was reported that five years after Colorado amended their State Constitution removing the exception clause for slavery, the incarcerated population continued being punished for not working. Thus, California should learn from Colorado's mistake.

Secondly, even though there are laws already in place with Title 15 allowing an incarcerated person the opportunity to take sick time from work in subsection 3045.2 (c), this policy is a difficult process and takes time—



Illustration by Miguel Gutierrez Jr., CalMatters; iStock.

After speaking to some of the incarcerated population in Central California Women's Facility (CCWF), many agree if this bill passed, it would have gone badly for our incarcerated workers unless more details were provided. York, an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) worker at CCWF said, "Even if we were able to volunteer to work, we never would be able to quit. If we tried, they'd probably write us up if we did." What York says is true, because nothing in this bill would stop CDCR from doing just that.

Linda Carpenter, a former Yard Crew Worker, agreed that the lack of details in the bill "leaves the door wide open for CDCR to screw it up!"

Even though this bill died in committee, this issue of forced prison labor is a continuing discussion. So let's not be misunderstood, we do not wish to be forced to work. We would only ask our Legislature to be more mindful when creating bills for the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

Please ensure that you are structuring them so there is no room for misinterpretation. In the case of the Voluntary Worker Program, it would have only taken a little extra time and work on Assembly Member Wilson's part to turn it into a great piece of legislation.

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CDCR Takes Banning Books Too Far: Here's What You Can Do About It

Godzilla

Central California Women's Facility

In 2023, the California Legislature passed a Bill titled "State Prisons: Banned Books" intended to unify banning books in the prisons to ensure that the rejection of any specific book is based on actual policy. However, as of May 2026, there are over 3,000 titles of books and magazines on the Centralized List of Disapproved Publications—taking some of the reasons for disapproval to an extreme. Here are a few examples:

- The cult classic, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1963) by Ken Kesey, Penguin Random House Publishing, for alleged "violence or physical harm."
- A reentry book, *Life Beyond Prison Walls: Barz and Brusez* by Remy Red, independently published, for allegedly "lacking serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value."
- The Complete and Authoritative Guide: *Caring for your baby and young child birth to age 5* by Steven P. Shelov and Robert E. Hannemann, Bantam Publishing, for containing "frontal nudity."
- Additionally, copious books on the body, medical education, art/instructional drawing, and even Marvel comics are all listed as banned for containing "frontal nudity."

The policies persist despite research demonstrating the importance of literacy to rehabilitation. In *Reading Behind Bars*, Jill Grunenwald establishes that the historical practice of banning books is "contrary to the prominent and enduring tradition of literacy as a means of self-transformation." Additionally, in January 2026, there was an amendment to Penal Code § 5000.5 declaring the purpose of sentencing individuals to prison time must be

"...affirming that the library is an important aspect of rehabilitation. Yet, we are still denied access to these books."

Women Writers

“CDCR Takes Banning Books Too Far: Here’s What You Can Do About It” continued

for rehabilitation and successful reentry to society— and affirming that the library is an important aspect of rehabilitation. Yet, we are still denied access to these books.

The librarian for the Central California Women’s Facility (CCWF) had to remove 235 books from the shelves in May 2026, and then more in June and July. She also had to pack up recently ordered books before processing and shelving them because those titles were already added to the discontinued list.

CDCR has to follow specific guidelines spelled out in Title 15 - Rules and Regulations for the California Department of Corrections § 3006 (c)(15)(A) which defines “obscene text” as any text that:

“Taken as a whole, which to the average person, applying contemporary statewide standards, appeals to the prurient interest; depicts sexual conduct; and which, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.”

Therefore, CDCR is banning books on only a portion of the law, without regard to the full text, “prurient interest” [arousing sexual interest] AND depicting “sexual conduct.”

In addition, there is a subsection defining the parameters for sexual conduct in title 15, § 3006 (c)(16)(B)(2):

“The following sexually explicit images shall be allowed: Educational, medical, scientific, or artistic materials, including but not limited to, anatomy medical reference books or guides, National Geographic, or artistic reference material depicting historical, modern, or postmodern era art.”

Accordingly, all three titles mentioned above, along with many more on the Disapproved Publications List, should be allowed at all California Prisons.

There are many more disparities among the list of disapproved books of which can be challenged with the Office of Inspector General. Advocates, friends, and family can see the Centralized List of Disapproved Publications on CDCR’s website. According to the Office of Inspector General, CDCR posted the list on the tablets by SecurUs for people incarcerated to view. Here at CCWF, the list is located on the SecurUs tablets in the “FYI” application under the “General” file.

In 2023, Assembly Bill 1986 passed, allowing anyone, free or incarcerated, to submit a written request to the Office of Inspector General to ask them to review any title on the Centralized List of Disapproved Publications to determine if they concur with CDCR’s reasoning to ban the publication.

California Officer of Inspector General

Attn: Intake Unit

10111 Old Placerville Road, Suite 110

Sacramento, CA 95827

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California’s Invisible Population

Dana Gray

Central California Women’s Facility

It is no surprise that there is an absent framework of rehabilitative normalization for women in the criminal legal system, in particular, the prison system. The punishment of women objectifies them by requiring them to be sentenced by male standards, then expects them to rehabilitate without the advantages of certain programs and facilities. The punishment of offenders purports equal treatment for everyone.

Historically, women have been gender-groomed by the 13th century colonial practice of coverture which transferred a woman’s civic rights and identity to her husband. Women’s personhood merged into men’s. Colonial domestic law dictated that the husband controlled his wife’s body. The 19th Amendment that allowed women to vote wasn’t ratified until August 1920.

Fast forward to the concept of marital rape, where there were no American Statutes to protect women until the mid-1970s. If a man controlled a woman’s body, he could control her. For centuries, women have strived to remove all remaining forms of sex discrimination in law. It has been left to the succeeding generations to accomplish for themselves what the previous could not. Our work is still cut out for us.

The fallout from this traditional misogynistic mindset is oppression, marginalization, and the disenfranchisement of women. What masquerades as sociological knowledge about human behavior, is in fact, knowledge about male behavior. Is it a wonder why men’s prisons have rehabilitation advantages that women’s prisons do not? Women’s prisons are defined under male-based theories and principles because mainstream criminology studies in the 1990s were defined by objective focus. Not much has changed. A feminist methodology is subjective

and critical to understanding women’s journey through the entire system, including women’s life influences and experiences. Additionally, we need a consideration of the etiology of what makes women think crime is an acceptable way to cope—the biological mindset. The prison system caters to men because women have been taught it is a man’s world, so we are to expect less or none at all. There is no better example of this than to compare men’s prisons to women’s in California.

Allow me to present a snapshot of this male-dominated machine by comparing San Quentin State Prison (SQSP) and their Rehabilitative Center (SQRC), to the largest women’s prison in the world, Central California Women’s Facility (CCWF). Women at CCWF want to be treated as women with the same noteworthy programs as SQRC, not as a nebulous entity or “Inmate Person” (IP). It’s that simple. Incarcerated women in California are denied the dignity of equal rehabilitation opportunities and amenities, such as a working California Model that is comparable to SQRC, which includes better educational and vocational opportunities and facilities. Incarcerated women are the underserved population.

Women are denied gender equality in rehabilitation under the California Model precepts of SQRC as outlined in Legislative Analyst’s Office 2025-2026 budget report which includes the new Learning Center. Everything in the report seems catered to and designed in the interest of men. The fact that there are more men incarcerated than women makes a huge difference in funding allocation. The resources go where the population is and incarcerated women make up only 4%. Resources also go to the prison with the most notoriety, which has traditionally been SQSP because of its history.

On April 4, 2023, the Secretary of CDCR and the federal Receiver who oversees prison medical care issued a joint memorandum expressing their concern that prison environments (emphasis on the plural) can be unfavorable to the health and wellbeing of prisoners. The SQRC California Model was designed to reduce trauma and toxic stress, reduce recidivism and use of force, staff assaults, overdoses, self-harm, homicides, suicides, and other grievances. One component that is key to segueing into society for both men

“The punishment of women objectifies them by requiring them to be sentenced by male standards, then expects them to rehabilitate without the advantages of certain programs and facilities.”



Image by Lea Suzuki. The San Francisco Chronicle via Getty Images.

and women is normalization. The California Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) 2025-2026 budget report states, "CDCR reports various efforts to change physical spaces in prisons, such as incorporating more comfortable, home-like

"There was no incentive to move to the California Model or do better because no one wanted to live in that disciplinary unit."

furniture and bedding as well as adding gardens and murals." Regrettably, this great idea was never implemented for the largest women's prison in the world.

At SQRC, the California Model plan was to reduce

the number of prisoners housed there to concentrate the richer resources amongst the smaller population by creating single-cell housing. CCWF has 32 8-bed rooms per unit and currently runs at 107.5% capacity, while SQSP runs at 78%. The idea is that the richer programming will motivate men at other prisons to make more positive choices in hopes to transfer to SQRC.

When CCWF did have a California Model, it was put in the worst unit on the yard. There was no special bedding or furniture. The residents were not required to go to school, programming, or take any self-help courses. There was no incentive to move to the California Model or do better because no one wanted to live in that disciplinary unit. Had the Model been part of the Honor Dorm, it would have encouraged women to want to stay write-up free to move there. CCWF could have run the unit with the normal two officers instead of the four officers and one sergeant it took to run the California Model we had. It made no significant changes in the violence of our population and was a colossal failure. Perhaps if the CDCR had provided CCWF with the exact same model and funding, our California Model could have been on par with the SQRC.

Starting in June 2026, CCWF demolished every front yard/landscaping garden area on C-yard. That's 4 housing units of 256 beds each. The Honor Dorm had Victim Awareness honor gardens planted in the beautiful front yard alongside the succulents and vegetables. The bulldozer crushed them in minutes. The shock and heartbreak were palpable

"...there was never a Learning Center included in the deal. CCWF is still using an old education building with leaky roofs and no air conditioning."

and a marked depression followed. We were left with a landscape of moon craters and told it was because of the drought. However, there were no announcements of what the administration, IAC, or anyone planned to do. We are still waiting for them to tell us exactly what they plan to do now. We hear rumors of raised gardens, but it's been 2 months and it's still just dirt. Yesterday on my way back from SAP, a 1/8th mile walk, there was a slight breeze. Halfway back, I noticed I had dirt in my mouth. Currently, there are active gardening programs on some yards at other men's prisons in addition to the 9 Insight Garden Programs.

The money spent at SQRC for the men included 366.6 million for a new Learning Center, with 13 million for 2027-2028. Nowhere in the LAO budget report does it outline a CA Model budget for CCWF. Any funding that may have been allocated is undisclosed in the general fund. So, it is relatively safe to assume CCWF was not funded at all. Even when the CA Model was attempted at CCWF, there was never a Learning Center included in the deal. CCWF is still using an old education building with leaky roofs and no air conditioning. In the winter, we have to put trash cans in the classrooms to catch the water when it rains. Sometimes a huge piece of ceiling tile will break loose and fall on a desk. We have no librarians or special IT. This too is our California Model. The other little part of our CA Model is half of a porch in front of the Honor Dorm where we were able to save the plants that were part of our Victim Awareness Honor Gardens. We are building a small Victim Honor Garden there so we can hold onto our living amends with a few potted plants and succulents.

The goal of the CA Model is to reduce criminal thinking and behavior and recidivism through education and normalization. The LAO report also states "... if the administration believes that SQRC will help motivate positive behavior change throughout the system, then perhaps the degree to which people report actively working to earn transfer to SQRC and the number that are successfully transferring there from higher-level institutions could be an indicator of success." This vision did not extend to CCWF because there were absolutely no incentives to be part of a CA Model housed in a disciplinary unit that was right next to the Honor Dorm, which IS the indicator of successful rehabilitation. CCWF deserved the same level of the CA Model that SQRC received.

SQRC has regular visitors, including the Prince of Norway, but no one similar has come to CCWF.

No one came from the

governor's office when CCWF graduated its first cohort of women to receive their Bachelor's Degrees in the history of California. No one. Incarcerated women are truly the invisible population.

The California correctional system's story of the largest women's prison in the world deserves to be told. Society deserves to hear it. How we understand the history and current conditions in women's prisons helps us understand the moment that we are living in and makes it possible for us to see where we're going. As our understanding of the past constantly shifts, how we choose to retell our story matters. The mainstream historical narrative evolved to give us a story in which overcoming sexism was to become even more American.

Our state and nation is still evolving. Whether the story we tell ourselves can continue to evolve remains to be seen. Let's take care of young women, mothers, and grandmothers and stop the social reproduction of undereducated and low-socioeconomic populations. Mothers are the window to a child's world. Let's create a healthier future for women now. Let's work to produce the story of incarcerated women being given the same opportunities for education, transition, re-entry, prison facilities, amenities, and normalization, and work to lift women out of the shadows.

*

Double Slave Wages Are Still Slave Wages

By Jamel Walker

Mule Creek State Prison

On an ordinary day, as most days in prison are, a buzz began circulating throughout Mule Creek State Prison's E—Facility. Many incarcerated individuals expressed their excitement at the news that had just come down from the Secretary of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), Jeffrey Macomber. In the form of a Notice of Change of Regulations (NCR), followed by an official memorandum,¹ the edict read in part, "Our pay schedule has been the same for 30 years. Therefore, Macomber was "Pleased to announce wages will increase statewide for the incarcerated workforce beginning April 1, 2024." However, like most edicts, the devil is in the details.

While many were excited by the news announcing a wage increase, many others were disappointed once they realized that, despite the fanfare of the big announcement, closer

inspection revealed that Macomber's wage increase amounted to a doubling of pennies for some. For others, a slight increase. Still others, a pay decrease. D.

Chapman, for example, has

been employed for two years as a Stationary Engineer/Maintenance Mechanic. Before Macomber's announcement, Mr. Chapman was paid \$0.80 an hour. Expecting his wages to double, as indicated by the NCR, Chapman's wages decreased. He is now being paid \$.70 an hour. When asked how he felt about

"...Macomber's wage increase amounted to a doubling of pennies for some. For others, a slight increase. Still others, a pay decrease."

“Double Slave Wages Are Still Slave Wages” continued

Macomber’s announcement, Chapman stated, “Thank you for getting rid of slavery, but now you made us sharecroppers.”

Slavery persists in the CDCR. According to some California legislators, “The California Constitution has explicitly allowed involuntary servitude as punishment for a crime since 1849, more than 15 years before slavery was abolished in the United States; and, more than 150 years after slavery was abolished, correctional institutions continue to rely on the involuntary servitude exception in the California Constitution to demand forced labor from incarcerated people.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Although some incarcerated individuals did have their wages increased, Secretary Macomber’s announcement did not change the fact that any who refused to work for the extra pennies bestowed upon them would suffer serious consequences. For an incarcerated individual, refusing to work or quitting one’s job triggers certain disciplinary action. The California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 15, Division 3, prohibits incarcerated individuals from “refusing to work, pretending illness or otherwise evading attendance.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Those who do refuse are subject to a multitude of deprivations including, but not limited to, loss of privileges such as, denial of access to recreation, family visits, telephone calls. The most important deprivation, “forfeiture of credit earning,” (CDCR’s term for forfeiture of days an incarcerated individual has earned off their prison sentence), results in more time spent incarcerated than one would otherwise spend. Similarly, during slavery, refusal to work was met with serious deprivations as well, albeit much more serious, but deprivations all the same.

Moreover, in its June 27, 2024 passing of Assembly Constitutional Amendment 8 (ACA 8),^{iv} known as the End Slavery in California Act, the California Legislature declared, “forced labor has no redeeming qualities and is inconsistent with California’s respect for human dignity.” Speaking of respect for human dignity, R. Wilson has been employed as a Biohazard Porter since 2019. His primary duty, as his job title reveals, is to clean up biohazards in the form of blood that is possibly contaminated with Hepatitis A, B, or C, or HIV. Although Wilson was required to undergo training in the correct cleaning of blood—borne pathogens, his starting wage was a paltry \$0.18 an hour. After approximately nine months on the job, his wage topped out at \$0.32 an hour. With Macomber’s announcement, Wilson expected to earn \$0.64 an hour. However, he was extremely disappointed when he discovered that his wage had decreased to \$0.26 an hour. “You can’t have my job unless you take a test to get it,” said Wilson. In order to work as a Biohazard Porter, Wilson had to pass a test demonstrating his proficiency in not only cleaning up blood-borne pathogens, but also the proper containment and disposal of these and other biohazards. According to ZipRecruiter, an online job search site, the average pay in California, for a porter performing similar duties, is \$14.07 an hour, and some are paid as high as \$19.69 and as low as \$8.30. When asked what he thought about his pay decrease, Wilson replied, “It’s wrong to pay me what they do, let alone reducing my pay when they promised to give us a raise.” Wrong indeed. Sadly, Wilson has no recourse. Had this occurred while employed outside of prison, he could have quit and searched for a better-paying job.

The question is how have some incarcerated workers, after being told their wages would double, wound up receiving wage decreases? It turns out

the CDCR uses a sleight-of-hand trick. For example, according to Secretary Macomber, “In order to increase pay using existing resources, CDCR will change many full-time assignments to half-time.”^v This resulted in “75 percent of job assignments”^{vi} now considered half-time assignments. Thus, although some incarcerated workers received double their slave wages, 75 percent of them saw their hours cut by 57 percent, resulting in a net decrease in their wages.

P. Derosier and J. Peterson are assigned as the Computer and Related Technology (CRT) class Clerk and Teacher’s Aide, respectively. Both went from working seven hours per day to four hours per day. Prior to the announced “wage increase,” Derosier earned the Technician Level rate of pay, earning between \$0.15 and \$0.24 per hour. Although post-wage increase, he would have earned between \$0.30 and \$0.48 per hour; instead, his skill level was reduced to Semi-Skilled and he now earns between \$0.22 and \$0.36 per hour, resulting in a net wage decrease. Because of this sleight of hand trick, Derosier, Peterson, and many other incarcerated workers now receive less pay. Instead of earning a whopping \$30 to \$50 per month, they now earn a junior—whopping sum of between \$17 and \$28 per month.

Very few incarcerated individuals are aware that the CDCR had such a trick up its sleeve. The CDCR utilizes Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT) Codes to classify the various assignment categories. Located in §51120.7 of the CDCR’s Operations Manual (DOM), five job categories align with DOT Codes and are assigned varying pay ranges.

In order to perform their sleight of hand trick, CDCR can arbitrarily change

Pre-wage increase, they were :				
Job Classifications/Skill Levels	Min/Hr.	Max/Hr.	Min/Mo.	Max/Mo.
Leadpersons (DOT Skill Level 9)	\$0.32	\$0.37	\$48	\$56
Special Skills (DOT Skill level 7-8)	\$0.19	\$0.32	\$29	\$48
Technician (DOT Skill Level 5-6)	\$0.15	\$0.24	\$23	\$36
Semi-skills (DOT Skill Level 3-4)	\$0.11	\$0.18	\$17	\$27
Laborer (DOT Skill Level 1-2)	\$0.08	\$0.13	\$12	\$20
Post-wage increase, they are:				
Job Classifications/Skill Levels	Min/Hr.	Max/Hr.	Min/Mo.	Max/Mo.
Leadpersons (DOT Skill Level 9)	\$0.64	\$0.74	\$48	\$56
Special Skills (DOT Skills level 7-9)	\$0.38	\$0.64	\$29	\$48
Technician (DOT Skill Level 5-6)	\$0.30	\$0.48	\$23	\$36
Semi-Skills (Level 3-4)	\$0.22	\$0.36	\$17	\$27
Laborer (DOT Skill Level 1-2)	\$0.16	\$0.26	\$12	\$20

an incarcerated worker’s job classification at will. This is exactly what happened in the case of Wilson, Derosier, and many other incarcerated workers. In one day, many job classifications were changed, but their duties did not. In fact, in at least one case, because of the reduced workforce in the facility dining room, the remaining

workforce is now required to pick up the slack by performing the duties of the incarcerated workers who were downsized. It seems, in this case, double the pay equals double the duties.

Many of the incarcerated do not believe in coincidences. The timing of Secretary Macomber’s NCR was curious. Why would the office of the Secretary of the CDCR, after 30 years, be so magnanimous as to bless the incarcerated souls under its charge with the doubling of their wages?

After all, both our Federal and State Constitution deem the incarcerated “slaves of the state.” Based on the facts surrounding the decision to double incarcerated individuals’ wages, it would seem that pragmatism, rather than magnanimity, was a large part of the calculus. This pragmatism seems to have much to do with the passing of the End Slavery in California Act in September 2023. Less than 30 days after the California Assembly voted to send it to the Senate for concurrence, Secretary Macomber issued his October surprise announcement.

Few citizens of the State of California are aware that forced labor or involuntary servitude is constitutionally permissible for the incarcerated. Article 1, § 6 of the California Constitution provides, “Slavery is prohibited. Involuntary Servitude is prohibited except to punish crime.” It is this language, and several federal court rulings, that have conspired to deprive California’s approximately 90,000 incarcerated individuals of their status as “employees” that permit them to remain “slaves of the state.”

“Double Slave Wages Are Still Slave Wages” continued

The End Slavery in California Act represents a culmination of several attempts of California Legislators to address the issue of slavery and involuntary servitude of the incarcerated. Introduced by Senator Bradford (D—Los Angeles) in 2019, Senate Committee Resolution 69 (SCR 69) expressed the senate’s support for “fair and just wages” for all those incarcerated in California, by stating the following:

State law should be amended to address the unfair wage compensation and to provide incarcerated persons with base work protections by redefining prison labor as legal employment; now, therefore, be it Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly thereof concurring, That the Legislature supports fair and just wages for incarcerated persons working for the Prison Industry Authority, the Division of Juvenile Facilities, and the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.^{vii}

Three years had passed before the legislature sought to make its 2019 resolution a reality. In February 2022, Senator Bradford introduced Senate Bill 1371 (SB 1371). This bill intended to amend the California Penal Code, and would,

[R]equire the Secretary of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to adopt a five—year implementation schedule to increase the compensation for incarcerated persons engaged in work programs under the jurisdiction of the department. This bill would specify that the increase in compensation is required to, among other things, [allow incarcerated persons to] afford quarterly packages, purchase educational materials, and maintain family connections, as specified.^{viii}

Governor Newsom vetoed the bill on September 29, 2022. Thus, it would seem that with the knowledge of slavery and involuntary servitude’s continued entrenchment in California’s constitution, Governor Newsom’s appointee,

CDCR Secretary Macomber, felt safe to appear that he was striking a blow against slavery and involuntary servitude with his announcement of increasing wages, while not actually doing so. Why would he willingly treat those in his charge, other than involuntary servants forced to labor, under threat of punishment? According to Macomber, “Work assignments also keep our prisons running. Every prison operates like a small city, resulting in a diverse array of job opportunities.”^{ix} His statement represents an understanding that without the forced labor of the incarcerated, the small cities would cease to operate.

This understanding parallels the understanding of former Confederate government officials. In the aftermath of the Civil War, there was an understanding of the need to rebuild the former Confederate states. Lawmakers and government officials accomplished this with the passage of laws, called “Black Codes,” which essentially criminalized being black. Armed with the involuntary servitude exception in Federal and State constitutions, these officials forced the incarcerated to perform uncompensated labor. Moreover, Secretary Macomber goes on to state, “Every job is dignified, and workers should be paid for their efforts.”^x This statement is difficult to reconcile with the fact that he has failed to repeal CDCR regulations authorizing punishment of incarcerated individuals for their refusal to work for the paltry slave wages they are paid. Perhaps it is not so difficult to reconcile when one considers that the California Legislature found that, “more than 150 years after slavery was abolished, correctional institutions continue to rely on the involuntary servitude exception in the California Constitution to demand forced labor from incarcerated people.”^{xi}

However, there is hope that California’s 90,000 incarcerated individuals will finally receive a fair and just wage for their labor. There is word that the authors of the End Slavery in California Act resubmit the constitutional amendment in 2028, in time for the voters of California to have another opportunity to strike a blow against slavery and involuntary servitude for California’s incarcerated. By voting “yes,” California will align with seven other states: Colorado, Utah, Nebraska, Alabama, Oregon, Tennessee, and Vermont, that have already struck a similar blow, by ending slavery and involuntary servitude in correctional institutions a “yes” vote will prohibit the Secretary of the CDCR from punishing incarcerated individuals for refusing to work for slave wages. Voting “yes” would mean California’s incarcerated would finally be able to financially support their families, pay child support, provide timely restitution to their victims, contribute to the tax base of California, and provide a net savings to California’s taxpayers. In 2019, research conducted by the California Legislature found,

People in prison who earn a fair and just wage can contribute to the growth of the economy and to public safety. These contributions to their families, taxes, restitution, and themselves will support the rehabilitative mandate of CDCR and ultimately save the state money by reducing the number of times people reoffend, the number of children in need of social services, and the likelihood of people seeking government assistance.^{xii}

In the final calculation, not only would it be the fair, moral, and just thing to amend California’s Constitution by removing this last vestige of slavery in the state, it makes financial sense. Because, as many of us who know the old cliché so well, “If it don’t make dollars, it don’t make sense.”

i. Jeffrey Macomber, Incarcerated Worker’s Pay Memorandum, October 6, 2023.

ii. Assembly Constitutional Amendment 8, also known as the End of Slavery in California Act.

iii. CCR, Title 15 Section §3044

iv. See endnote ii

v. See endnote i.

vi. See endnote i.

vii. Incarcerated individuals were first labeled “slaves of the state” as a result of an 1871 Virginia Supreme Court ruling, *Ruffin v. Commonwealth*, 62 Va. 790, 796 (1871), wherein the Supreme Court made the following statement, “For a time, during his service in the penitentiary, he is in a state of penal servitude to the State. He has, as a consequence of his crime, not only forfeited his liberty, but all his personal rights except those, which the law in its humanity accords him. He is for time being a slave of the State. He is civiliter mortuus; [civilly dead] and his estate, if he has any, is administered like that of a dead man.”

viii. See, *Burleson v. California*, 83 F.3d 311, 315 (th Cir. 1936) *Hale v. State of Arizona*, 993 F.2d 1387 (9th Cir. 1993); *Gilbreath v. Cutter Biological, Inc.*, 931 F.2d 1320 (9th Cir. 1991) (finding incarcerated plaintiffs are not ‘employees’ under the Federal Labor Standards Act (FLSA)).

ix. Senate Committee Resolution 69 (2019)

x. Senate Bill 1371

xi. See endnote i.

xii. Id.

xiii. See endnote ii.

xiv. See endnote ix.

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Bettmann Archives/Getty Images/

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Join the Conversation

We have received a number of contributions on the Dynamic Security and Normalization pillars of the California Model. We appreciate all the insight and considerations submitted by our readers.

Moving the conversation forward, we now want to focus on another pillar of the California Model, **trauma informed organization**. According to the CDCR website, this pillar represents the CDCR's goal to "become a trauma informed organization." This means recognizing trauma, seeking responsiveness, and being aware of its consequences socially and personally. The CDCR website notes prioritizing growth, resiliency, and healing. This process requires multiple steps to implement across all institutions, beginning at the staff level and branching out to the general culture and universal acknowledgement, minimization, and prevention of trauma. The trauma informed organization pillar seeks to target trauma from both outside and within the walls. Of all of the pillars, could becoming a trauma informed organization—with its focus on reducing harm—represent the greatest impetus for deconstructing the harmful mechanisms by which prison is hardwired and equipping incarcerated individuals with necessary mental health coping skills? Or, does trauma informed organization merely shift responsibility for rehabilitation onto prisoners themselves as a blanket terminology while leaving broader structural conditions of incarceration intact? Does it aim to repress trauma or face it head-on? We ask our readers: Can trauma informed organization work, and if so, how? What efforts have you seen on this front where you are? Where is it superficial, and where do you see its possible merit? For our non-Californian readers: Do you desire trauma informed organization at your institution, and is it even possible?

Please send us your response to this prompt in 100 words or less. We value your perspectives and are eager for you to join the conversation. Let's continue to learn from each other.



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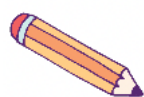
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The *VIP* accepts submissions, either as manuscripts or query letters, from currently incarcerated writers. We are interested in content covering prison and the experiences of the incarcerated.

All submissions making factual claims must include their sources and appropriate citations for referenced material; likewise, content which includes interviews with incarcerated people's names, likeness or quoted words must adhere to departmental requirements governing media interviews with incarcerated people.

Generally, we are looking for the following types of articles:

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Please send **your submission, a short bio, and your preferred pronouns** to the mailing address listed at the bottom of this page.

Note: We appreciate all of our writers for sending us their submissions. However, due to the high volume of submissions we receive, we apologize that we are unable to respond to every letter we receive. In addition, **do not send us the original copy of your submission if you would like us to send it back.** We are unable to send your submissions back to you. And importantly, **we do not pay for articles.** All our writers are volunteers. We are a small staff with a small budget, and we want to thank our writers and readers for being patient with us.

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