

A Journey to Death's Door: The Last Step for Lifers in Michigan's Prisons

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On Oct. 13th, I was taken for a long ride, with two corrections officers (C/Os) and another prisoner, to the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) Duane Waters Hospital (Waters) in Jackson to have laser tomography (a sort of layered photo) of my eyes to see how far my macular degeneration has advanced. This road-trip, my first in about three years, revealed lots of road reconstruction, but none of it completed. Every road traveled was broken-up into a bumpy, pot-holed mess, lined with hundreds of dead ash trees, boarded-up homes and businesses. Michigan is really hurting, and it shows. This is what happens when people let the big corporations take the money and run, with the bankruptcy scam Governor Snyder and the banks ran on Detroit a mere foreshadowing of what is to come.

My trip was the result of two grievances I filed against the MDOC healthcare provider Corizon, Inc. for its refusal to provide me with the tinted glasses and OcuVite vitamins I'd been getting for years due to my long-diagnosed macular degeneration (MD). Corizon somehow managed to get one of its subcontracted "optometrists" to claim my incurable MD had been cured. It took a while, but it finally dawned on some MDOC drone they couldn't argue a miracle MD cure in court, so I got my tinted eyeglasses back and this trip to Waters, where it was concluded I should be taking OcuVite for my MD. In sum, Corizon cancelled my decade-long OcuVite and tinted-eyeglasses prescriptions in order to pocket the \$100 or \$200 they cost a year and wound up costing state taxpayers thousands of dollars for my half-day trip to Waters.

When I finally arrived at the now-mostly-abandoned Jackson prison complex, I was greeted by an air of foreboding, typical of most old prisons, along with a definite aura of death and decay. Surprisingly, after a multi-million dollar renovation over a decade ago, the old prison walls and gun towers were already crumbling and exposing the rebar, like the bones of a rotting corpse.

Not having ever been to Waters, I was shocked to my core by the soul-chilling horror show waiting within its walls. Stepping across the threshold of this particular Death's door, I was greeted by the spectacle of ancient and sick prisoners in wheelchairs, being rolled silently through the hallways, looking like so many ghosts in some haunted asylum. Especially the white guys – pale doesn't even begin to describe them, more like see-through. The black guys were a bit more corporeal, as they were only a sickly yellow. A spectral panoply of forgotten men rolling back and forth before my eyes.

What's the point of keeping guys locked up that are so ill and weak they cannot get in and out of wheelchairs on their own? For that matter, what's the point of keeping prisoners for 50, 40, even 20 years, good health or bad? No point, except to waste \$2 billion or more per year of taxpayer

money in order to keep it from being spent on the care and education of children. Children now designated by the masters, i.e., Scum In Charge of the Kleptocracy (SICK), as surplus population destined for the school-to-prisoner pipeline – more ghosts for the wheelchairs. I suppose the money could also be spent on Michigan's crumbling infrastructure – roads, bridges, etc. – but there's not much point in maintaining a fossil fuel-based infrastructure when it's feeding the global climate change rapidly making the earth uninhabitable for most animal life. A sad reality, indeed, but a more immediate sad reality is the majority of the men that I saw will die, miserable and alone, inside this hellhole just the other side of Death's door.