

Bend the Bars 2019

Seven Strategies to Reduce the Numbers and Suffering of Michigan Prisoners

“The prisons and camps don’t contain only those inside them but also those outside them. All human beings are transformed into prisoners and prison guards.”

- Fredy Perlman, *Letters of Insurgents* (1976), 8

Greetings friends, comrades, and accomplices! As the epigraph indicates, we’re all prisoners, either that or guards, so greetings fellow prisoners! Today, I’m presenting you with seven strategies which, if effectively and aggressively carried out, are well within reach in Michigan, based on the rapidly evolving situation which has engendered the collapse of its school systems and roads, brought about in part by the massive expenditure of \$2 billion a year on its state prison system, give or take a few millions.

1. We need to stem the tidal wave of suboxone strips, i.e., sublingual film, flooding into Michigan prisons by campaigning to force the pharmaceutical corporation responsible to end its manufacture and distribution. See “The Weaponization of Suboxone Strips: An Evolving Situation and Tactic in the ‘Perpetual Battle’ For Control of America’s Prisons,” 17 July 2019.*
2. We need to push for the repeal of the “disciplinary time” laws (so-called “Truth-In-Sentencing (TIS)”) and a return to the law as it was prior to December 15, 1998 with the retroactive restoration of disciplinary credits, to be awarded for good behavior, which will result in an early release of a significant number of prisoners, the closure of prisons, and a huge savings to state taxpayers. See “The Good Time Bill Myth: Good Time Credits, Proposal B, Disciplinary Credits, and Truth-In-Sentencing in Michigan Prisons,” 23 May 2019; and “Open Letter to Gove. Gretchen Whitmer,” 21 June 2019.
3. We need to push for changes in the newly enacted medically frail prisoner parole laws (HB 4129, HB 4130, HB 4131, HB 4132), so that they will allow for *all prisoners* that are medically frail to be eligible for early release to hospice care, including the currently exempted prisoners serving Life Without Parole (LWOP) and First Degree Criminal Sexual Conduct (CSC1) sentences. These exempted prisoners constitute a significant number of aging, medically frail prisoners, with their early release to hospice care resulting in millions of dollars of savings to state taxpayers. See “Open Letter to Gov. Gretchen Whitmer,” *ibid.*; “Inside Michigan Prisoners: Overview and Analysis of Structure and Conditions,” *San Francisco Bay View*, December 2018, 15 (based on 7 July 2018 talk over phone to prison abolitionists, Lansing, MI); “A Journey to Death’s Door: The Last Stop for Lifers in Michigan Prisons,” *CURE: Life Long Newsletter*, February 2018, 8; and Willis X. Harris, “Aging Crisis in Prisons.”
4. We need to push for a bill or bills to be introduced to amend state law, in order to provide prisoners serving long indeterminate sentences, with minimums greater than 20 years,

* (Unless otherwise noted, all referenced articles are written by Rand W. Gould, and available for download and publication at: www.FreeRandGould.com)

with similar parole reviews, as currently provided to prisoners serving life, after serving 10 or 15 years (depending when sentenced) and every 5 years thereafter. This would afford them the opportunity to demonstrate their rehabilitation and readiness for parole. For more information contact: Willis X. Harris, Michigan Lifers Association, 4417 Second Ave, Ste. 211, Detroit, MI 48201, phone number 313-442-3629.

5. We need to push for the elimination of all privatization in the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC), including ending the current contract with Access/Keefe to run prisoner stores, which exploits both prisoners and their families, and, especially, the medical provider contract with Corizon Health, a company that has killed more Americans through medical neglect and deliberate indifference, than foreign terrorists. Corizon Health, until recently controlled by Chicago-based investment firm Beecken Petty O’Keefe & Co., is now controlled by global hedge fund Blue Mountain Capital Management. Taxpayers get fleeced for hundreds of millions of dollars and prisoners drop like flies. See “Back Through the Looking Glass: The Death of Brian Rodriguez and the Fake ‘Flu Quarantine’ at Gus Harrison Correctional Facility,” 25 March 2019; and “Fake Flu Quarantine Equals Real Lockdown in Michigan Prisons,” 7 February 2018.
6. Push for the closing of all MDOC cattlebarns (i.e., polebarns) originally opened as “Temporary Facilities” around 3 decades ago, promptly made permanent and double-bunked, which should be condemned, with leaking roofs, black mold-infested ceilings, crumbling foundations, *ad naseam*. Enacting the proposed law changes in paragraphs 2,3, and 4, *supra*, will reduce the prisoner population significantly and allow for the closing of these dilapidated cattlebarns at considerable savings to state taxpayers. See “Inside Michigan Prisons”, *ibid*, and “Open Letter to Gov. Gretchen Whitmer,” *ibid*.
7. Push for the introduction and passage of bills that would give the Legislative Corrections Ombudsman (LCO) real oversight of the MDOC, replete with the authority to enforce the laws, rules, policies, and procedures that apply to the MDOC and its employees, up to and including the ability to work with the state Attorney General to prosecute corrupt MDOC employees and administrators, especially wardens, in a public forum. N.b., last year a lame-duck legislature and governor quickly passed and signed into law, respectively, HB 6397, which amended MCL 4.359, and related statutes, to keep all LCO investigative reports and records hidden from the public, thereby stripping an already toothless LCO of its obligation and ability to report on MDOC misdeeds and criminal behavior to the public. This new law was precipitated by threat of the release of Jessica Zimelman’s LCO report exposing the racial and sexual orientation discrimination against prisoners, assaults on prisoners, and false misconduct reports by staff, at Gus Harrison Correctional Facility, as referenced by the court in *Griffin v. Condon*, 794 Fed. Appx. 925 (6th Cir. 2018) (HB 6397 was introduced on 9/26/18, after the decision was made on 8/18/18). See “Open Letter to Gov. Gretchen Whitmer,” *ibid*.

Considering the current state of the state’s budget and economy, plus the current penitentiary pendulum’s swing toward reform, all the above is winnable. As Assata Shakur says, “We have got to believe that we can win, and if we don’t believe it, we’re whipped before we start.” Sure, these are only reforms, but if we can keep the momentum up then we can push the pendulum all the way over to abolition and break it! N.b. We also need to start a campaign to bring Assata home and end the witch-hunt against her. Are you with me?

18 July 2019

Rand W. Gould C-187131
Central Michigan Correctional Facility
320 N. Hubbard St.
St. Louis, MI 48880
www.FreeRandGould.com