

PRESS ADVISARY

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HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS SIGN APPEAL FOR TREATMENT OF HEP C FOR MUMIA ABU-JAMAL & 10,000 PA PRISONERS

APPEAL SENT TO GOV TOM WOLF, SECTY OF HEALTH, SECTY OF CORRECTIONS

An Appeal signed by healthcare providers was mailed today to four Pennsylvania officials: Governor Tom Wolf, Secretary of Health Karen Murphy, Secretary of Corrections John Wetzel, and Superintendent SCI Mahanoy John Kerestes.

The document calls on state policy makers to allow political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal and the estimated 10,000 other prisoners in PA infected with Hepatitis C to receive proper health care, including treatment with new direct-acting, anti-viral medications, which has a 95 percent cure rate. A protocol for treating prisoners suffering from Hepatitis C is reportedly being hammered out by officials from the PA Dept of Corrections and the PA Dept of Health.

Hepatitis C, if left untreated, can lead to diabetes, heart disease, liver failure and even death. The issue of untreated Hep C in the state's prisons affects the broader population outside of prison. A 1997 study estimated that 29 to 43 percent of all people infected with HCV passed through a correctional facility. Called a *"silent epidemic,"* Hepatitis C has a disproportionate impact on impoverished communities and people of color.

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a renowned political prisoner currently being held in SCI Mahanoy Prison. Amnesty International and other human rights organizations say he was unfairly convicted in the 1982 killing of a Philadelphia policeman. The Appeal states: *"Given the extensive evidence of Mumia's innocence (which was never allowed to be heard in court), wrongful incarceration in solitary confinement on death row for nearly 30 years, his life-threatening medical crisis, and the prison medical system's failure to diagnose or treat him properly, we add our voices to the international call for the immediate release of Mumia Abu-Jamal."*

Abu-Jamal is suffering from Hepatitis C, but he is not alone – thousands of other prisoners in this state are also infected with HCV. Dr. Joseph Harris, a signer and expert on HIV and HCV who has examined Abu-Jamal's medical records, stated *"It is not rocket science to understand that Pennsylvania prisons represent a very important place for treatment of these diseases to start as part of public health policy."**

High drug prices are not a legitimate excuse to deny treatment. *"Pharmaceutical companies are given government grants, tax breaks, and other incentives to conduct medical research. In return, the public has a right to benefit from that research without outrageous price gouging,"* said retired union leader

Suzanne Kelly and appeal signer.

Another signer, retired Philadelphia psychiatrist Berta Joubert-Ceci, said *“Pharmaceutical companies claim they have intellectual property rights to new medicines and can charge whatever they want to cover costs and make a profit. However, health care is a human right that should take precedence over intellectual property rights when it’s a life or death issue.”*

“Denying medicines and proper medical treatments to prisoners is inhumane. It is the illegal imposition of punishment, humiliation and torture on prisoners. For Abu-Jamal and other prisoners infected with Hep C, it is a death penalty by medical neglect”, said signer Suzanne Ross, a Clinical Psychologist.

The Appeal was initiated by the International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal and the International Action Center.

The Appeal and list of signers follows:

APPEAL FOR TREATMENT OF HEPATITIS C FOR MUMIA ABU-JAMAL & 10,000 OTHER PENNSYLVANIA PRISONERS

To: Karen Murphy, PA Secretary of Health; John Wetzel, PA Secretary of Corrections; John Kerestes, Superintendent SCI Mahanoy; Tom Wolf, Governor of Pennsylvania

As health care workers and professionals, we are responsible for promoting healthy lifestyles, preventing injury and disease, and assuring the safe delivery of quality healthcare for all. This responsibility extends to the healthcare of those held in prisons. Most prisoners eventually return to society. Consequently, inadequate prison health care can lead to medical crises for their families, communities and public medical institutions.

In Pennsylvania, prisoners are being denied the human right to adequate treatment of hepatitis C.

For instance, Mumia Abu-Jamal (#AM 8335) has been severely ill with symptoms of active hepatitis C for at least the last six months. According to a private doctor who was allowed to see Mumia in the prisoner visiting room, treatment by the prison infirmary has contributed to Mumia’s many painful, debilitating, life-threatening conditions. He nearly went into a diabetic coma on March 30, which resulted in his hospitalization. But the most distressing of all is that the prison system is refusing lifesaving treatment for hepatitis C, for his painful skin condition, and for anemia.

New direct-acting, anti-viral medications exist for hepatitis C with a 95 percent cure rate. Refusing to provide him with this medicine is a case of willful medical neglect, which could, if not addressed, lead to Mumia’s death. By withholding that medication, the Pennsylvania Department of Correction is illegally imposing a death sentence on Mumia.

But Mumia is not alone. There are an estimated 10,000 other PA DOC inmates, many of whom are over 60 years old, who have Hep C. Called a “silent epidemic”, hepatitis C has a disproportionate impact on impoverished communities and people of color. A 1997 study estimated that 29 to 43 percent of all

people infected with HCV passed through a correctional facility. With the prison population skyrocketing over the last 20 years, these numbers would be substantially higher today.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) adopted protocols in June 2015 mandating treatment for Hepatitis throughout the federal prison system. The American Liver Society and the BOP have both recommended immediate treatment for everyone but especially for those like MAJ who have “extra-hepatic” symptoms such as the skin rash, anemia and diabetes. Proper treatment for hepatitis C is expensive, but will prove less costly over time than, if left untreated, ministering piecemeal to the related illnesses.

The drug war fiasco has resulted in the mass criminalization of communities of color through discriminatory law enforcement policies. In addition, inadequate funding of education has created a school-to-prison pipeline. Refusal to properly treat prisoners’ health care needs compounds the impact of these genocidal policies against Black and Brown communities.

Given the extensive evidence of Mumia’s innocence (which was never allowed to be heard in court), wrongful incarceration in solitary confinement on death row for nearly 30 years, his life-threatening medical crisis, and the prison medical system’s failure to diagnose or treat him properly, we add our voices to the international call for the immediate release of Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Furthermore, if the DOC refuses to humanely treat prisoners with Hep C, we call for the release of all prisoners experiencing Hep C symptoms, including Mumia, so that they can receive the treatment they are entitled to in accordance with basic human rights and the Eighth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

As physicians, nurses, medical workers and other healthcare professionals, as well as health care unions and organizations, we urge you to give these issues high priority.

Signed,

Toni Arenstein - RN, BSN, CDE (Certified Diabetes Educator)

Dr Ricardo Alvarez - San Francisco

Dr. Nancy C. Arvold - PhD, MFT, member steering committee, Psychologists for Social Responsibility; member Prisoner Hunger Strike Support Coalition, CA

Amanda Bean

Dr. Gabriella Beckles-Raymond - Lecturer in Womanist Theology, Philosophy, and Culture; School of Humanities, Christ College London (Woolwich)/ Canterbury Christ Church University

Janet Brooks - Midwife, Nurse, Mother, Advocate

Hillel W. Cohen - Dr., PH, MPH, epidemiologist

Aisha Dixon-Peters - Psy.D., Licensed Clinical-Community Psychologist; Senior Adjunct Professor, PsyD Program in Clinical Psychology, University of La Verne; Member, Steering Committee, PsySR (Psychologists for Social Responsibility)

Tabbatha A. Dobbins - PhD, physicist

Phebe Eckfeldt - LPN, Visiting Nurse

Sharon Eolis - Nurse Practitioner, retired

Sharon Feldman - MSW

Judy Greenspan - former Director of the HIV/HCV in Prison Project of California Prison Focus

Charlotte N. Harris - M.S., Counseling Psychology

Dr Joseph Harris - Internist, HIV/HEP C Specialist

Sue Harris - Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist
Molly P. Hauck - Ph.D., clinical psychologist
Berta H Joubert - MD, psychiatrist (retired)
Daniela Kantorova - Psy.D., Postdoctoral Fellow at the Wright Institute, Steering Committee Member, Psychologists for Social Responsibility
Susanne D Kelly - Sec-Treas, OPEIU local 334 (retired)
Tandiwe Kone - RN, Houston, TX 77047
Judith Cashin Lerma - RNC MSN CCM
Barbara Louise - MT (ASCP), SEIU 1199, retired
Shadia Marji - LMSW
Caleb Maupin - Journalist and Political Analyst
Janet R. Mayes - Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist
Adele Meyer - BSN, RN
Luke Patterson - MSW; Activist/School-based Social Worker in Brooklyn
Lucha Perez - RN
Marc Pilisuk - Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, The University of California
Anne Pruden - 1199SEIU counselor (retiree)
Psychologists for Social Responsibility
Elise Rackmill - L.C.S.W., Retired Delegate 1199/SEIU
Clark Rector - M.A.; Psy.D. Candidate, The Wright Institute
Lucha Rodriguez - RN
Suzanne Ross - Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist
Clyde L. Smith - MD, MPH, DTM&H, FACP; affiliation Doctors for Global Health
Megan Smith - Clinical Psychologist
Stephen Soldz - Ph.D.; Director, Center for Research, Evaluation, and Program Development; Boston Graduate School for Psychoanalysis
Alice Sutter - RN, retired Family Nurse practitioner, specialized in HIV care, NYC
Mark Lewis Taylor - Professor of Religion & Society, Princeton Theological Seminary
Caro Torrez - Emergency Room Technician, member District 1199J, National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees, AFSCME/AFL-CIO
Mazeda A. Uddin - NYC CFB (VAAC) Member; Founder /President (SAFEST)Action Voice "JAGO COMMUNITY" Queens, 24th City Council District Senior Taskforce Chair
Bonnie F. Walker - RN, BS, LNC
Catherine Zeitz - retired RN