THEY HAVE NO VOICE

PRINCIPLES TO USE WHEN REVISING THE “CORRECTIONS CONUNDRUM” IN GEORGIA

Immediate steps are needed to change the trajectory of Georgia’s prisons. 2020 will be a record year for inmate deaths, not merely because of the failure to address and manage Covid-19, but also because of record numbers of homicides and suicides.

8th Amendment

The number of inmates that is manageable is “that which the state can secure and protect.”

Food

The number of inmates that is manageable is that “which the state can afford to feed a diet that meets the minimal Medicaid meal nutritional requirements, including calories, proteins, carbohydrates, and fats, no trans-fats, essential vitamins, fiber, and macro-minerals, utilizing grades of ingredients no lower than those used for Medicaid meals.”

Medical

The number of inmates that is manageable is “the number for which the state can provide medical care, dental care, and mental health care, at no less frequency and quality that is available to the general public, without denying access to any prisoners.”

Safety

The number of inmates that is manageable is the “number who can be safely and securely managed using the current ABA Standards for Criminal Justice: Treatment of Prisoners.”

Staffing

The number of staff that is adequate is “that number required to safely and securely manage the inmates in the care and custody of GDC, without denying prisoners of their Constitutional 8th Amendment rights.”

Who’s there?

Reduce the number of inmates so that the inmate population consists of people we are scared of rather than people who broke rules.

Security

All cell doors, cell house doors, dorm doors, building doors, CGI doors, and so forth in the GA DOC state, private, county, and other facilities “must be secured with locking systems that do not rely upon exterior padlocks to secure prisoners while opening automatically to protect prisoners from loss of life in case of fires.”

Fire Them

Make the practice of “popping the locks” a firing offense in GDC. Several inmate deaths have been documented that were the direct consequence of staff having “popped the locks.” See the deaths of Damion MacClain, Shannon Grier, and Eddie Gosier, to name a few.
Torture

1. End the manufacture and use of cages used for the torture of prisoners. Remove all cages previously installed in all GDC facilities where they are deployed and used, so that use of these cages is never again an option. Sell or scrap all such cages stored, installed, or used in GDC facilities, including private and county prisons. Demonstrate in no uncertain terms that the state of Georgia does not mandate, support, or contribute to the utilization of cages as torture devices.

2. End the practice of utilizing “exercise yards” nominally for those in Administrative Segregation “for punishment” of inmates in any other type of housing. No individual is to remain in an outdoor “exercise yard” longer than one hour. No inmates shall be locked in exercise yards during meal times, nor should they miss a meal as a result of being in an exercise yard or be denied access to potable water while in the exercise yards. Progressive discipline shall be utilized whenever this principle is violated. See the death of James Mitchell.

3. End the practice of locking inmates in showers for periods longer than thirty minutes. End the housing of inmates in showers in GDC facilities; that is, “inmates shall not be locked in showers or any other rooms without access to toilets, potable water, or toilet paper for longer than 30 minutes. No inmates shall be locked in showers during meal times. They should miss no meals due to being in a shower, nor should they be fed while in the shower.” Progressive disciplinary action shall be utilized whenever this principle is violated. See the death of Christopher Heath.

Gangs

The impact of gangs in Georgia prisons cannot be overstated. It must be addressed and measures implemented that provide and sustain peaceful conditions in GA prisons. Gangs are social and societal problems outside a prison setting. Behind the walls, gangs are responsible for a myriad of issues, from violence to criminal enterprises operating from prisons, on to gang leaders in prison directing criminal behavior including homicide and extortion of both civilians and rival gang members out here. It may be impossible to stop, but it must be addressed and effectively minimized. There is a broad acceptance among inmates of the use of segregation of civilians (unaffiliated inmates) from gang members, and segregation of gangs from each other.

Cameras

1. The video surveillance in the prison must to be audited to ensure that visibility is comprehensive. All video cameras must be monitored 24/7, even if done remotely. In addition, all officers and contractors must be required to wear body cams at all times while they are on facility grounds or accompanying inmates off-site. Each body cam must be inspected prior to use to ensure functionality at all times. There are grants available for body cams and likely for fixed video cameras and systems, too.

2. Related to the issues of cameras and video surveillance is that they are monitored at all times. In addition, there need to be emergency call buttons or boxes in all living spaces and the related call centers staffed so that Corrections Officers (COs) can be dispatched with trouble occurs.

Urgency

Every GDOC facility shall be staffed such that timely responses to accidents, injuries, illnesses, and violence. All facilities housing at least 500 inmates shall have an adequate level of medical staffing 24/7/365. At no time shall facilities housing 500 or more inmates be without on-site medical staff.

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