

## Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (M-PAC)

maineprisoneradvocacy.org

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Dear

In the interest of responding to your important mail, we're sending this letter with a few updates.

In update letters we write about general matters, and try to get points across without many details. This is to keep M-PAC's goals somewhat confidential and, most important, to protect inmates' privacy. We hear from a few people that M-PAC sometimes sounds naive about what's really happening in the prisons. That's surely true, but also we're just reporting to you what we hear – in general terms. When we write about something that's been mentioned to M-PAC we hope you can compare that to what's actually going on.

Some people might be concerned that occasional information we share with MDOC administration in Augusta – when looking for solutions to problems – could reach prison staff. We always ask permission from prisoners before sharing a name or problem with the Commissioner or others. Even if that's given, we ask the MDOC to protect inmates' confidentiality and protect them. If anyone has encountered problems from certain staff as a result of M-PAC bringing concerns to Augusta, please let us know. We don't want attempts at advocacy to make things worse.

A few folks mentioned that our handwriting at the bottom of update letters is nearly illegible :-). We'll attempt to do better; sometimes we add personal notes on lots of letters!

Even when you don't hear from us we're responding to immediate individual and general issues. If there are urgent matters, we often send these concerns to the MDOC (which can be done without using names) and we consult with other advocacy groups, too. As you can imagine, there are many more issues than M-PAC, or other groups, can deal with, yet we all do our best. It would be wonderful to have ten people working full time on these essential matters.

M-PAC's last meeting in Belfast was helpful to all. Following the general meeting a few of us met with Dr. John Newby and Dr. Robyn Hodges, managers of Correct Care Solutions (CCS). We're glad to have communications open and have been sending important medical issues to them. They're asking for a little more time before inmates and advocates reach a final decision about whether medical services are improving. We let them know that opinions are mixed and many inmates are not hopeful about improvement.

M-PAC's next meeting is December 1<sup>st</sup>, 9:30 am – 12:30 pm (doors open 9 am) at the Belfast Library, 106 High Street, Belfast. Please invite your friends and relatives and send suggestions for the meeting agenda.

*Natural Causes Killed Victor*, the folk opera by George Swanson about the life and death of Victor Valdez has been postponed until early 2013 because more rehearsals are needed. The cast has been chosen and are enthusiastic about the production. We'll send you the date for the Bar Harbor premiere when it's announced.

There are many burdens for incarcerated Mainers at the moment, including high prices on canteen and phones, inconsistent service on phones, proposed changes in personal property and classification policies, people being transferred from minimum security facilities, access to

library and computers, discrepancies in good time and salaries, slowdowns in movement, access to programs, housing transfers if leaving certain programs, more people in cells and dorms, food portions and quality, fluctuating heat and water temps, difficulties with medical care, and much more. M-PAC, co-cooperating with prison civic groups and outside advocacy groups, advocates for positive outcomes. Sometimes small things get worked out, such as bringing back crucial washers and dryers at The Women's Center.

M-PAC continues to express grave concerns about certain staff using their positions of power in problematic ways, rather than modeling behavior and methods learned in training and written in new policies. We also hear about staff people that, thankfully, improve the environment by treating prisoners fairly. It's discouraging to hear about problematic staff people that hold back progress and make things worse. To avoid additional punishment, we hope incarcerated people stay calm during any such interactions, even if they're in the right.

The MDOC says they're looking for a Keefe pricelist from a system of similar size to Maine. The list we supplied from Massachusetts had lower prices, according to the MDOC, because there is more buying power in larger states. Nevertheless, M-PAC advocates for lower costs on phone calls and canteen simply *because it's the right thing for the MDOC to do, even if profits are lower*. If anyone locates additional pricelists, we'll be glad to get a copy.

If you experience or observe a violation of civil or human rights, we can forward a list of addresses where you might consider sending complaints. As you already know there are usually no fast answers from these sources, but it's important to keep sending reports and requests.

We're sorry that M-PAC can't work on legal matters, straighten out good time, or help with individual classification issues. We also can't help with requests to do research or send other information. There just aren't enough hands.

Here are some ways to help M-PAC with better communications: 1) If you're getting released and have an hour or two a month to help out in the Ellsworth area, contact us! 2) If you know folks on the outside who have a little time, encourage them to get in touch, too. 3) Ask outside people to send contributions to M-PAC (we don't want prisoners' donations since your income is limited). Contributions to M-PAC from now until mid-December will be doubled by Sparkplug Foundation!

With good wishes from everyone,

Jim Bergin and Judy Garvey, Co-Coordiators, for M-PAC members