

Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC)

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Dear

We're writing this general letter to give you a brief MPAC update. You are welcome to share this with others if appropriate.

Since our last correspondence, we met with Commissioner Ponte in December and have another meeting scheduled for early February. We also met in December with Dr. John Newby, head of CCS, and tentatively will see him again in early Feb. We'll also be meeting with some members of the Criminal Justice Committee. If you have matters of concern to bring to any of these sources, please send MPAC a letter by January 28th.

MPAC's next meeting, open to anyone interested in advocacy goals, is Saturday, February 2nd, 9:30-12:30 (doors open at 9 am) at the IBEW Hall, 16 Old Winthrop Road, Manchester ME. This is a couple of miles from Augusta. *(Please note that mail shouldn't be sent to the IBEW address – only to MPAC, PO Box 873, Ellsworth, ME 04605.)* If you have matters for the agenda, please send to us by January 28th.

We were surprised by Warden Patricia Barnhart's sudden dismissal from MSP. We've heard many back stories about this and are sharing those speculations with people who might have more facts. Right now we are hearing mostly from prisoners' family members since, as of the above date, your letters haven't had time to arrive. MPAC knows and has some experience with the acting Warden, Rod Bouffard, through the strategic planning committee meetings over two years where he has directed the move to bring more humane interactions – through training – into the prison environments. We don't know the individual who will be sharing responsibilities with him.

Hopefully the changes in the MSP library will mean more hours of availability, though we hear this still isn't the case at the moment. We continue to advocate for more computers, doors open as required and needed, and helpful staff. We understand that there are additional changes in the education department, but haven't heard how this is influencing accessibility.

The DOC public database is still unchanged, yet we are still assured this will happen in the near future. Along with other changes, the head of "IT" with the DOC moved to another department, and this has slowed down database revisions. We'll report to you when changes are made.

The 126th Legislature opens soon. To our knowledge there may be a parole bill submitted. If

so, MPAC will help on that. As of now MPAC isn't submitting a bill to at this session but we will support or oppose bills that are suitable or not. A bill submitted by the MDOC: *LR 374 – An Act to Prohibit Prisoners from Filing Protection from Harassment Complaints against Corrections Personnel*, would require inmates to file harassment complaints against staff through the department's administrative process rather than through the courts. MPAC doesn't want prisoners to lose the legal right to file harassment complaints in the courts. We've already written to a few of you to ask for short statements about this idea. We can then turn your thoughts into a statement from MPAC to send to legislators or read at the Hearing. If you wish us to attribute a statement to you, using your name, please tell us and we can read it at the Hearing.

As for privacy and anonymity, MPAC doesn't use names if we speak to the MDOC about issues people write to us about – unless you ask us to do that. We often can speak to the MDOC about individual and general issues without using names, leaving out identifying information.

We heard a few months ago that a dietician would be hired by MDOC to improve nutrition at the prisons and oversee the kitchens. Yet we're hearing that fruit juices haven't returned, and that food has a lot of filler. Are there improvements anywhere?

Do you have specifics to share with us about whether medical services have improved, stayed the same, or worsened since CCS took over? MPAC would like to see a follow-up healthcare review from OPEGA at some point and we're gathering information. It seems that reviews should always happen with such important reports.

MPAC has asked CCS to reconsider plan to rotate therapists every 12 months (they say it's every 12 months rather than 6). CCS Directors told us they would continue to discuss this policy as to whether it should be changed. Please keep us informed.

On December 28th the FCC filed a *Note of Proposed Rulemaking in the Matter of Interstate Inmate Calling services*. The public has 60 days to respond for or against the petition. This has the potential to lower phone rates though there are no promises it will affect Maine. If you would like more information about how or where to send your response or opinion on why rates should be lowered, please first ask the civic groups within your facility since they may have a copy of the document. If you can't get the info, write to MPAC.

As always we continue to advocate for a long list of prisoner rights, yet also need to remind people that MPAC isn't able to help with individual good time issues, or with legal matters such as original convictions, appeals, or court filings. We appreciate hearing from you and welcome your input on everything. MPAC's direction and plans come from your communications.

Good wishes for the year ahead.

Sincerely,

Judy Garvey and Jim Bergin, for MPAC