

Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (M-PAC)

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Greetings,

This is a report from the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (M-PAC), and is an effort to keep everyone informed of, and involved in, our current endeavors as we work together to bring positive and humane changes to Maine's prison system.

Organizational Highlights for Fall 2010:

- **The Call:** The Fall edition of M-PAC's newsletter has been published and distributed. Please note the address when sending submissions: ~~The Call, P.O. Box 10962, Portland, ME 04101.~~ Please send a change of address if you move to a different facility, or are released. We also welcome new subscribers. *The Call* is free to inmates; \$10 per year to others. Copies can also be read at M-PAC's website. *The Call* is published as funds and volunteer help allows.
- **Statewide Strategy Session:** M-PAC members from throughout the state gathered together Oct 16th to share ideas on how to strengthen this organization. The meeting resulted in the formation of several new working groups. These groups will work on drafting legislation to address ME prison conditions, raising public awareness and applying political pressure, and organizing grassroots actions. Many former prisoners and their families are involved in this work. When you are released, we will welcome you at the physical meetings. If you're inside, we continue to follow your suggestions and direction for prioritizing work and goals. *Next meeting, Nov 20th, 16 Old Winthrop Road, Manchester ME, 9:30 am.* Please invite anyone who can assist in these goals.
- **NAACP Symposium:** (see reverse side)
- **Rapid Response Team:** We have formed a rapid response team to address incidents requiring immediate action. If an incident occurs that puts the immediate health or safety of an inmate in jeopardy please write to us immediately, include as many details as possible (date, time, names of staff and prisoners involved or present, etc) and indicate whether or not we can use your name when referencing the incident.
- **Victor Valdez's death:** Prisoners and advocates have denounced the findings released Oct 28th from the Maine Attorney General's Office, which concluded that alleged abuse by MSP guards was not responsible for the November 2009 death of Victor Valdez. *M-PAC is planning a protest action at the State House Hall of Flags on Nov 17th at 10:30.* Please invite family members and friends to attend if you are unable to be there.

"Apologies": Due to the large volume of mail that we receive we are, unfortunately, not able to respond to most letters at this time. Exceptions are if there is an immediate incident of health or safety, as occurred with Victor Valdez last November. We are also unable to provide legal help.

Please continue to send submissions of artwork, poetry, and essays for possible publication in *The Call*, to share your thoughts on how we can best move forward, in unity, to affect change in Maine's jails and prisons. And please know that even if your letter did not receive a response, the insights, the experiences, and the struggles that you have shared are guiding the work that will one day bring justice to Maine's criminal "justice" system.

In Solidarity,

Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (M-PAC)

November 8, 2010

NAACP Symposium "Corrections, Community, and Reentry," Oct 15, 2010 in Portland:

Bringing together, for the first time, state agencies and human rights groups, participants in this event were a number of high-placed officials in the corrections business, as well as, thanks to the Portland NAACP, a variety of progressive groups, prisoners, and individuals. These included members of M-PAC to provide an alternative voice and represent the concerns of prisoners. Naturally, the most practical and honest presentations came from present and former prisoners themselves.

Added to this mix were some university-based "experts" who provided well fashioned research to reconfirm for attendees what they, to a large extent, already know.

Be that as it may, most of the data presented was something we could generally agree on. Yes, reentry should start at the point of sentencing, including many more alternatives to prison time. Many, perhaps most, attendees agreed that the "corrections system," from courts to prisons, is generally counter-productive to rehabilitation or reentry.

During most of the second half of the symposium, advocates' and activists' voices were heard, along with prisoners (on video) and former prisoners, getting down to the basics of reentry. It's no rocket science that to have half a chance of making it on the outside there are a few primary elements that must be in place, i.e. jobs, housing, transportation.

We heard the very good news that Massachusetts just passed legislation called "Ban the Box," which eliminates the "CORI" box on applications. Employers can no longer ask that prejudicial question legally.

The final presenter was the famous defense lawyer F. Lee Bailey who advocated passionately for business leaders in the community to hire ex-prisoners, and credits a decisive decline in recidivism where businesses do this.

As a symposium jointly sponsored by the NAACP and the DOC, the intent of this first gathering was to simply bring everyone to the table and have a public airing of goals. Yet, activists used their allotted time to voice concerns, such as when an M-PAC panelist brought up the unanswered questions surrounding the death of Victor Valdez and the ongoing concerns about abuse in the SMU.

There was hope taken away from this special gathering after hearing from a diverse group of participants on all sides of the "correction" debate, especially the large numbers of young people and activists attending and pledging their help toward assisting prisoners with reentry. This symposium, thanks to the NAACP, allowed for a great sharing of ideas and networking among Maine's ever-expanding numbers of prisoner activists.