The following statement was presented to Governor Walker on December 17th, 2013 by 100 members of the 11X15 Campaign. The 11X15 campaign is part of WISDOM, an interfaith coalition, and is dedicated to reducing Wisconsin’s prison population by half (from 22,000 to 11,000) by 2015.

WISCONSIN NEEDS TO FOLLOW THE LAW FOR LONG-TERM PRISONERS
Make Parole Possible for Those Who Are Eligible

There are hundreds of men and women in prison in Wisconsin who are, as a matter of law, eligible for parole. Many of them have been in prison for more than 20 years. They were sentenced to prison at a time when judges allowed the Parole Board to determine when people convicted of crime could safely return to the community. In 1999, the law was changed: under the new ‘Truth in Sentencing’, parole was abolished, and people sent to prison must do every day of the sentence imposed by the court. That is now the law, but for hundreds of men and women still in prison, the law was different and the assumptions of judges were different. The law and judges recognized the possibility that some people could and would change in positive ways while in prison. That’s why the law allowed for parole.

But the law is not being followed for those convicted prior to December 31, 1999. Parole has virtually stopped. Many of the men and women legally eligible for parole have not had their case reviewed for years at a time. When their cases are reviewed and the Parole Board develops release plans, the Department of Corrections refuses to implement the plans. The system has broken faith with the judges who imposed the sentences, with the men and women who serve the sentences, and with their families.
It has also broken faith with the taxpayers of Wisconsin.

If ten people who are legally eligible to be released were returned home, the state would save more than $300,000 a year.

If 100 people who are legally eligible to be released were returned home, the state would save more than $3 million a year.

If 1000 people who are legally eligible to be released could be returned home, the state would save more than $30,000,000 a year.

If those savings were reinvested in alternatives to prison, to provide better community based mental health and drug treatment, as is done in Minnesota, the state could save an additional $60 million dollars a year. Most importantly, our communities would be safer. Today we are not asking that any specific person be released, but we are demanding fundamental fairness for men and women who were sentenced to prison long ago and have been forgotten.

We are calling on Governor Walker to order the Department of Corrections and the Parole Board to conduct a substantive review of every parole-eligible inmate at least once a year to determine if they can be safely released.

We are calling on Governor Walker to order the Department of Corrections, outside the normal program review (PRC) and the movement and classification process, to immediately implement any treatment and training that is recommended by the Parole Board so men and women who are legally eligible can go home as soon as possible. The Parole Board has been entrusted with the responsibility of determining when and how these men and women should return home. No warden, lower ranking security officer, or social worker should be able to frustrate that decision.
We are calling on Governor Walker to appoint an Ombudsman, selected by the Chief Justice of the Wisconsin Supreme Court, with the authority to insure that those people who are eligible for parole are not lost, lingering and overlooked in an expensive and unjust bureaucracy. Within six months, the person appointed shall issue a public report on the number of people legally eligible to go home and the progress that has been made in reducing that number.

Today we are not asking that any one person be released from prison. Some people who are in prison need to be there. But those people in prison who are legally eligible to be released, and who have used their time in prison to change, need the fair chance to come home as the law allows.

YES, FINALLY, there is real hope for a sea change in the way old law prisoners are treated. The above statement was presented to Governor Walker last December. “HOME BY NEXT CHRISTMAS” is a slogan being bandied about by some 11X15 “in-prison” working group members. Sounds good doesn’t it!?

After only about a week’s notice, WISDOM was able to gather 100 of its members for the Madison December 17th presentation of the above old law statement to Governor Walker’s staff. Many people made statements testifying to the injustice of the present no-parole system, and afterwards the leaders received a letter of thank you from Governor Walker’s office. We expect a response from the Governor’s soon and more general actions will be decided upon, contingent upon that response. In the meantime, outreach to the media and to sympathetic judges is planned. David Liners, director of Wisdom, will be gathering names of Wisdom people who are interested in writing to old law prisoners (FFUP will supply plenty of choices for any wisdom member who chooses to write) and other strategies are being developed. This group is well run and serious.

The 11X15-working-group gathers via phone conference. This is a fast paced one hour session and it takes place every two weeks. Much is decided in these sessions and there are about 12 people at each session. Marvels of modern technology! The members also have group meeting at their local member churches however FFUP’s access to 11X15 is mainly through these phone conferences and it is important that our campaign for parole as well as our segregation reform efforts should be as much in sync with Wisdom efforts as possible. I believe our piece in the parole puzzle is education and outreach.

This newsletter will go out to only 200 prisoners so please share as you can. Here we announce the launching of this campaign to our general readership, include a few announcements, and will include many pages of wonderful prisoner’s submissions. Soon we will put out a newsletter with full blown campaign strategies, complete with pamphlets and petition and an agenda. This will go to old law prisoners and concerned citizens who wish to help with the campaign. This all takes time as the campaign is still gathering and we need to coordinate with other groups to be successful.

NOW for a few pages asking for specific help. We all know that this is still a long and torturous process but there is real hope now and we must make the most of this opportunity.

A) OLD LAW information:

The DOC has told us they do not know the number of “old Law prisoners” they hold. A 2002 Milwaukee Journal article on old law stated: “At the end of 1999, 94% of Wisconsin's adult prison population had a set parole-eligibility date. Now just 4,812 inmates, or 22% of the total population, remain sentenced under the "old law." This means they are eligible for discretionary parole after serving 25% of their sentence, and must be released after serving two-thirds of the sentence.”

So in 2002 there were over 4000 old law prisoners. The WISDOM article talks about “hundreds.” We need to know who you are, how many and also details. Using input from several inmates, FFUP has put together this list of questions. If conditions allow you can combine efforts or you can take a page for your own. Answer as many of these questions as you feel comfortable answering .

1) Inmate name and number
2) current prison
3) date of conviction
4) offense description
5) A&E Assessed program needs
6) MR/PMR date
7) original parole eligibility date
8) Number of parole deferments
9) official reason for denial/deferment
10) do you have a verifiable support system?
11) do you need help finding placement for after release?
12) Do you have a family member or friends who might help with your release or general campaign by putting out pamphlets or getting signatures on our petition, doing an hour of web work or helping with strategies? Is there someone you know on the outside who would like to be help strategize or help spread the word to the media? infinite possibilities. You can have them contact us: Peg Swan c/o FFUP; 608-536-3993; pgswan3@yahoo.com, or send us their contact info and we will contact them.

I sent out a few rough drafts of this newsletter and have already received quite a few lists and some suggestions for improving the information gathering. Here are a few suggestions:
1) Feel free include reports on conduct reports you have received/briefly sketch the story and whether you feel they were fair.
2) Include information you think we should know—skills you have learned, hardships and handicaps, points in your favor. Etc.
3) We do have several parole blogs and they will be shared and used. You can take a few pages for your story. Write neatly and FFUP will post as is, without typing. Always a picture is good. Know that it will take time to get back to you with photo etc.

Remember, however, our first task is to get the numbers right. Everyone wants to know:

“How MANY OLD LAW PRISONERS ARE THERE ANYWAY?”

B) We need help from family members and friends on the outside to help give prisoners a human face as we must counteract the incessant demonization that has driven the prison boom. We are planning a media campaign, with radio interviews, articles in all forms of media, petitions pamphlets etc. and will be coordinating all this with the 11X15 campaign, with Prison Action Milwaukee (PAM), Voices Beyond Bars (VBB), the Demeter foundation, and friends and family members we have worked with over the years. This will be a gathering of forces. NOONE knows better than you prisoners how hard this will be- We are moving against decades of lies and if this old law parole campaign this goes well, we have lots more work to do.

NEEDED:

1) Artist and writers: we need posters, pictures for display stands that will hold our pamphlets, petitions and reading material. One idea: bulletin boards are usually crammed so we could use 8 ½ X 11 posters to which is attached an envelope holding our pamphlets and petitions. Let FFUP know if you want to help with artwork, writing or strategizing. Also, we have several short articles for internet and web posting but will need more. I am hoping we can get ideas flowing through use of a regular mini newsletter. Also: what would an effective old law parole newsletter for the general citizenry look like?—big print, lots of sound bites and pictures?

2) Internet help—do you have a family member or friend that could spend a few minutes a week helping us on our facebook page or web? This is all set up, is easy to do—just needs someone with internet and moderate skills.

3) Do you know someone who would put out our pamphlets in libraries and their church, post on grocery store supermarket bulletin boards etc.? Send me their contact info and I will see they get the next newsletter with campaign packet. Also, we have been gathering lots of short and long articles for posting in various media—needed are people willing to post one of these or one they write in their local newspapers and online media.

4) We need help with calling churches, justice and service organizations and others. These outfits need to be told of the campaign and asked to put the campaign materials out. We have found that especially in this day of emails, texting and super busyness, personal contact is necessary to spur action.

5) An important element is radio and media interviews of Ex-prisoners and family and friends of prisoners. I realize this is for the really brave and committed. A few people have volunteered already and I will be setting up interviews with WPR, WORT and UWUM and others. These are some ideas—yours are welcome.

From One Old Timer, To Others

In my communication with FFUP and other prisoners, one of the issues that continues to surface in our discussion is the lack of support we as prisoners have. Have you heard that also!? Well, it’s time for us to get off our backside and stop complaining to each other and waiting on someone-else to act on our behalf. We all know what the problems are and can articulate them with the best. Now let’s use some of that complaining, crying energy, understanding and knowledge we have to help ourselves.

In many religious beliefs, I have heard or read about praying on it, I know one form says something about the Creator won’t change the conditions of a people until the people change their condition. Another speaks on the Creator helping those who help themselves and I recently read
Remembering Mandela: Prisoner #46660

“I am not a Saint, unless a Saint is a sinner who continues to try.” - Mandela

I once read a poem called “Blessed are those who struggle” and it reminded me of all the Brothers and Sisters who dedicated and sacrificed their lives to the righteous struggle. And it is without questions that Nelson “Madiba” Mandela will be remembered amongst the highest pantheon of true freedom fighters.

Mandela lived an extra ordinary and exemplary life of service to and sacrifice for his people. Madiba was born of noble lineage, kinship to the regent king of his village. And after a disagreement with the regent king over an arranged marriage that Mandela wanted no part of, he fled his village and later settled in the city, Johannesburg. While he was living Johannesburg he met local political activist Walter Sisulu who took the young Madiba under his political aegis. Mandela became politically active himself and was later appointed the local leader of the “ANC” youth wing. At a gathering of the ANC his comrades got a glimpse of the young Mandela’s ambition and audacity. During a speech in front of the ANC elders and leadership, Madiba proudly proclaimed that he would be South Africa’s first Black president. What may have sounded like youthful arrogance to the senior leadership of the ANC back then, now appears to have been more prophetic than hubris.

Mandela knew from a young age that he was being called to greatness and so he humbled his self and pursued a cause greater than himself: to free his people and his country of the abominations that was white supremacy, racism and apartheid. He became public enemy number one in South Africa and was eventually captured by the South African Security forces and sentenced to life in prison, where Madiba would spend the next three decades. Most of those years he was called camps) and grant us a parole. I think we and society should hold DOC accountable/ responsible as they have taught us to be responsible for our actions. So get off your ass, I mean YOU- and contact someone and let’s work to change our situation and conditions. Who is with me? I believe in us, now believe in yourself.

In closing don't set and criticize me and the writing of this letter in an effort to motivate you into action. Write a letter make a phone call. Let get busy. Old Timer. By anonymous
unwavering faithfulness and loyalty to his cause and unbreakable resilience, Mandela was released from prison. He walked out of prison amidst thousands of cheering Africans with his wife and fellow freedom fighter, Winnie Mandela by his side. With his clenched fists raised in triumph, he went on to become his people’s greatest liberator and to inspire generations to come.

On December 5th, 2013, the world lost Nelson Mandela, one of the greatest freedom fighters of the 20th century. Madiba was an extraordinary and exemplary leader who transcended African politics and influenced people’s struggles for freedom and human dignity all around the world- from Africa to Northern Ireland, from South America to Palestine, Madiba served as an inspiration and icon.

Mandela was an exceptional leader because he was able to bring about the social and systematic change that his people needed at that time. Instead of seeking revenge and retribution upon the former regime for years of dehumanizing treatment (which would have been understandable) he chose to steer the ANC and his people away from vengeance and towards focusing their energy on rebuilding his beloved country and uplifting his people from their wretched conditions. He wasn’t motivated by his hatred for his enemies; he was driven by his love for his people, by his love of justice, his desire to be free and his belief in true egalitarianism. And in this era of politicians who promise change but fail to deliver any real change and whose words rarely coincide with their actions, where politicians are unable to challenge the system because they are part of the system and the problem, it will be generations before a people will be blessed with any leader /freedom fighter/ liberator/statesman/political thinker/revolutionary the likes of Mandela.

The world both morns and celebrates the loss of Nelson Mandela. His legacy of uncompromising struggle and of never giving up is a guiding light that can never be extinguished. He sacrificed for a cause greater than himself as an individual and dedicated his life to better his people, his country and humanity. And for this, God rewarded him with 95 years of life to live for his cause. Madiba was truly an anachronism, a throwback from a different era. He was one of the last of his kind—an authentic revolutionary in a world full of greedy, power driven reactionaries. And now he belongs to the ages.

It is reported that while doing years of hard labor, breaking stones on Robbin Island, Mandela was afflicted with an ailment that would prevent him from ever being able to shed a tear again for the rest of his life. And so when it rained hard on the day of his memorial service, it felt apropos. It was as if God was releasing all the tears of joy and pain that was denied Mandela in life back to the people and country that he loved. It is an old African Proverb that says that if it rains when you die, that it is a sign that the gates of heaven are opening up for your return, because all men souls are ‘immortal but only the righteous man’s soul is divine. And that’s why Mandela will live forever: He was righteously divine.

I would like to close with a quote from Mao Tse Tung: “every man must die, but death can vary in significance. To die for the people is weightier than a mountain. But to die for the exploiters and oppressors is lighter than a feather” and Nelson “Madiba” Mandela will be remembered as the Mt Everest of Freedom fighters. So rest easy, Madiba, you’ve earned it.

Blessed are those who struggle.


“When A man has done what he feels is his duty in life to his country and to his people, he can rest in peace.: Mandela

Editor note: suggested reading: LONG WALK TO FREEDOM by Nelson Mandela

FOLLOW ME

How does crime affect victims and communities?

Such a question is hard to answer, when in my community the victims usually become offenders, who in turn, create more victims, who then turn to offending to cope. Follow me?

If so, then you are starting to see a part of the cycle that crime creates, as it devastates a community. It turn a person of good character into a bitter, torn and un-trusting individual.

I am speaking of both the offender and the offended.

It is easy to see (once your eyes are open) how crime affects the person being offended, the tears of families and the pain that the devastation of crime causes. You have to do and not just try to do the right things. Devastation of crime will then be on its way to being a thing of the past. That will be justice for all the victims. I would say victims of the past, but a victim will be labeled one for life. For life! They will live with their experience for life! What sort of justice is there for that, I ask you?

Since there is none ....one must face the fact that nobody has the right to inflict such an injustice .. no matter what!

I have seen the cycle first hand and the effects have been the eye-opener to my new level of consciousness about my responsibility to the community. It's time for more people to be upstanding and uplift their community, thereby influencing more people to become upstanding and uplift their community. Follow me?

Submitted by Jeremy Greene on 10/17/04
Open Letter to My Father, Dan Lee Brown

Hey Pop,

I know you’re somewhere “surviving” off the radar how you like it. I tried several times within my control to reach you since we lost touch when I needed money in obtaining a driver’s permit. That was 12 years ago but who’s counting? Oh yeah, I passed that test easily thanks to you.

I’m taking my sunglasses off so you can hear me and hoping this reaches you so you can get a sense of the man I am becoming. I now regret I took for granted those sporadic times I spent with you throughout the years. Because you didn’t instill the values in me, I followed the lead of others, making bad choices and as a ripple effect I was indirectly involved in a murder and convicted. The times we struggled in Louisiana with no lights, gas, water on sometimes, “our stuff being repossessed; the t.v., furniture, refrigerator, and the fishing trips of what we caught we ate. Man, POP, I miss fishing with you. You remember me being scared to unhook the catfish because of the special way you have to retrieve the hook without being cut, so I would just snap the hook in the catfish mouth? We lost plenty of hooks dealing with me. I inherited your facial hair that I wanted so bad when I was little but don’t like shaving and my roof’s missing like you/George from your show “Seinfeld”. So I’ll be using fitted hats like you, but I do embrace my Michael Jordan look.

Well, how you turned them hard times into teachable moments at a time I wasn’t trying to listen was a work of art despite where I’m at today. Because those times you told me to have patience and learn to live without, enduring that pain/embarrassment laid the foundation of being able to continue on to change my situation and be on a better path that I had chosen. Also, I stand on the values/morals I took from those experiences even in this environment where you have to be conscious of not being criminalized. I treat people with respect and I’m honorable. I hope you accept my late apology for acting out to what I wasn’t used to and embrace my appreciation for the “manup” upbringing of getting out of the state of mind of complaining to create another way.

Thank you! Love always! Devin Brown #471237; GBCI; PO Box 19033;Green Bay, WI 54307

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MY SENTENCING DAY by ibn Malik Shabazz

My heart changed, but my appearance didn't; so to my past they see no difference.

The ones I was close to are now the ones with the most distance...

How can I move forward when I'm still stuck in the same position?

Couldn't carry it no longer so I lost my past weight. Can't make your- old past your new today!

Even whiteout doesn't work for every mistake.

They look at who I was instead of seeing who I am, it's always the blind ones who claim to see what you can.

If you was listening, how come you didn’t hear what I said? They gave me one shot with no possibility of a second chance.

You can't make my bed for me then expect me to lay; you're not helping me by putting me in a' place I don't want to stay!

The tough love you give is pure pain! Your decision could leave me with a permanent change.

There's anger and hurt when the other side says my name;

I wish I could take it back but there's some things you can't change.

Even though it was a grown act, it was because of a child's brain.

If the shoe was on the other foot I bet you'd be walking a different lane.

My growth to them means nothing because I'm still viewed the same.

Thought my life seemed picture perfect in a cracked frame.

Fighting for my freedom with no help. They judged a book by its cover while still on the shelf.

Labeled as the worst and praised for being the best; judge laid me down but it wasn't to get rest.

Picked me apart til it was nothing left; I took a plea to save my life but he wished he could have sentenced me to death.....
**Personal Blame**

I’m so lonely in this state if mind I’m in. So much suffering so much pain in this life of sin, this confusing life that’s compared to a living hell. All I can do is dwell on losses in this lonely cell. Claustrophobia strikes again and again forcing me to give in, but my will continues to grow stronger as I strive to win.

The enemy demands me to surrender—snatching me off my feet. Leaving me face up, is this really defeat?

Entertaining thoughts of a hopeless way of living, I close my eyes seeking an answer, asking my higher power to bring, bring his promise of salvation and strength into this place, this place of so much agony and sour tears I can taste.

How could I be so blind and find my way back to this place of so much misery, asking God once again to open my eyes so I can see, see the silver lining of all this pain I must bear witness. Realizing how much I’ve lost in this ridiculously stressful process.

In the end I find myself all alone, broken hearted and afraid, afraid of having to face this life in solitary once more, taking with me nothing but personal blame.

**BY Anonymous**

**DON’T**” EVER GIVE UP, JUST SHAKE IT OFF AND TAKE A STEP UP!

By Muslim Mansa Lutalo Iyapo a/k/a Rufus West 225213, October 18th 2013

Recently my Brother named T.D. gave me this Drawing that, at first glance, appeared to be just a bird eating a frog. Above the drawing was a caption that read, "Don't Ever Give Up." After a closer observation I noticed that even though the Bird had half of the frog's upper body in its mouth, the bird was unable to swallow it because the frog had both of his hands around the bird's neck. The message that I drew from it was the frog was determined to refuse to succumb to what most would consider a certain death. An appropriate drawing for almost every trial and tribulation that I’ve encountered where, even when the challenge seemed insurmountable, I didn't give up on myself by surrendering to my lower self.

There's a chorus to this song called, "He Saw The Best In Me," by a Brother whose name I'm unable to recall. The chorus goes, "He saw the best in me when everyone else around could only see the worst in me." That "best" in me will always conquer that part in me that wants to give up and be swallowed by life's struggles by grabbing them by the throat with both hands. The challenge is not only channeling it in the heat of the moment, but sustaining it throughout the endeavor. It's easy to give in to the systematic, psychological traps that are designed to control via self-defeatism. If a person can control you mentally by defining who you are, that person has nothing to fear from you no matter how much you exercise or how many weapons you have because encoded within that definition is a glass ceiling. Unfortunately, sometimes there has to be a break down before there's a break through. When a blacksmith has to make a sword, he starts with a clump of deformed metal. He heats it with fire then bangs it with his hammer, cools it with water, and then repeats the same thing for hours until what's left is the shape of the sword. He then sharpens the edges and then polishes it. That's what the "best" in us is capable of: turning negatives into positives. In George Jackson's book, "Soledad Brother," Jackson expresses that in order to survive he had to revolutionize his thought process so that he could be in a better position mentally to control his physical response to his oppressors' tactics. To him, this meant emotionally detaching himself from everything tangible inside his cell so that they could not be used by the staff to obtain control over him. In weakening his attachment to materialism he strengthened himself mentally by showing that he is not defined by what he has but by whom he believes he is. He didn't give in to allowing his oppressive environment define who he was. His letters share an insight into how he had to find a way to shake off the dirt of oppression that was thrown on him and utilize the experience to strengthen himself mentally.

When we give in to the dirt of negative stereotypes associated with racism, penitentiary politics, religion, sexism, culturalism or any other type of isms, we are giving up on ourselves by allowing others to figuratively bury us alive instead of shaking the dirt off and using it to stand on with two feet and ten toes.
SHAKE IT OFF AND TAKE A STEP UP! by Unknown
One day a farmer's donkey fell down into a well. The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally he decided the animal was old and the well needed to be covered up anyway, it just wasn't worth it to retrieve the donkey. So he invited all his neighbors to come over and help him. They grabbed a shovel and began to shovel dirt into the well. At first, the donkey realized what was happening and cried horribly. Then, to everyone's amazement, he quieted down. A few shovel loads later, the farmer finally looked down into the well and was astonished at what he saw. With every shovel of dirt that hit his back, the donkey was doing something amazing, lie would shake it off and take a step up. As the farmer's neighbors continued to shovel dirt on top of the animal, he would shake it off and take a step up. Pretty soon, everyone was amazed as the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and trotted off!

Life is going to shovel dirt on you, all kinds of dirt. The trick to getting out of the well is to shake it off and take a step up. Each of our troubles is a stepping stone. We can get out of the deepest wells just by not giving up! Shake it off and take a step up!

DON'T JUST TAKE MY WORD FOR IT (CELL SEARCHES)
by Muslim Mansa Lutalo lyapo; September 1, 2013
Sometimes when we hear things that we are ignorant of we tend to reject it solely because it came from a prisoner. So, this section I've coined, "Don't Just Take My Word For It," which will be preserved for topics that have a paper trail. The subject that I want to break ground with is an issue that affects all DOC prisoners: Cell searches. The primary Department of Corrections rule that governs all searches of cells is "DOC 306.16 Search of inmate living quarters," which states:

(1) Staff may conduct a search of the living quarters of any inmate at any time. Entry into the living quarters of an inmate by a staff member to retrieve state property does not constitute a search of the living quarters of an inmate.

(2) The institution shall maintain a written record of all searches conducted under sub, (1), which shall include:
   (a) The identity of the staff member who conducted the search;
   (b) The date and time of the search;
   (c) The identity of the inmate whose living quarters were searched;
   (d) The reason for conducting the search. If the search was a random one, the report shall so state;
   (e) Any objects which were seized pursuant to the search; and
   (f) Whether any damage was done to the premises during the search.

(3) Before staff seize any property or damage any property pursuant to the search of an inmate's living quarters, staff shall identify the property to the inmate in writing. The institution shall reimburse the inmate for damage to any property that is not contraband. The institution shall value any property which is damaged at its fair market value, not replacement cost.

(4) In conducting searches under this section, staff shall disturb the effects of the inmate as little as possible, consistent with thoroughness. Staff shall read only that part of the inmate's legal material as necessary to determine that the item is legal material and does not contain contraband.

More FFUP notes: Meditation guide available
We are very grateful for the gift of a meditation guide written by a prisoner in SCI. It is well done, clear and good for beginners and for experienced meditators who want to try something new. It is specifically crafted for those having trouble in seg but is good for anyone. Meditation is a tool for finding your inner center; can be used anywhere. For a copy of this 10 page (5 sheets) guide, write FFUP and include an SASE and your request will be promptly filled.

FFUP continues its work on segregation issues and now has a new ally in the 11X15 campaign. We will be press to raise the funding of mental health units throughout the system patterned after the units now in operation at Taychedah Correctional Institution, (which were mandated by the courts) and with prisoners are developing a comprehensive list of changes needed. UP til now almost all improvements in prison conditions tend to the result of lawsuits instigated by prisoner litigators. As the public's awareness of conditions grows, this will change and prisoners will no longer be the only outcasts.

legal network. Because of the large volume of requests for legal aid, the ending of the legal route and raising of embossed envelope prices, and etc, our legal network has become increasingly unreliable. Our efforts have to evolve and we need to be realistic. FFUP can supply teaching tools, do some copying and supply some postage, connect applicants with inmate guides who can write suggestions, but applicants must learn the law and do the actual work and writing. To this end, a couple of dedicated prisoner litigators will help put together a legal network newsletter which will be filled with good law education articles and updates on important cases. We are redoing our legal net form to include a listing of available beginner law guides and handouts written specifically for the WI prisoner. I apologize to those whose letters requesting help languish in my “in” pile.
When the news broke years ago that U.S. forces were using torture on prisoners at Guantanamo Bay detention camp, many politicians and the public expressed appropriate horror. There was shock and disappointment that our country would resort to such inhumane, abusive actions against our fellow human beings, most of whom then were innocent victims of bounty hunters in Afghanistan.

With this frame of reverence in mind, it is unfortunate that many Americans do not contemplate -- or are simply unaware of -- blatant torture occurring in prisons every day right here in the United States. This form of physical and psychological violence is called many things: "isolation", "administrative segregation", "control units", "secure housing" and by its most well-known designation, solitary confinement. This practice of imprisonment is widely used across our nation with disturbingly little oversight and restriction. The full extent of the use of solitary confinement is truly alarming -- it is most certainly a human rights abuse and a blight on our national character.

Imagine yourself being locked in a small windowless room for days, weeks, or years... perhaps even for the majority of your life. You receive food and water through a small slot and have little-to-no human contact -- you might go days or weeks without speaking to another person. You are allowed out for perhaps an hour a day for some exercise. This is the living reality for tens of thousands of Americans in our prison system. Self-mutilation and suicide attempts among those in solitary confinement are far too common. Not surprisingly, studies have shown that the majority of prison suicides are inmates who were being held in solitary.

Many more studies have shown that solitary confinement has a severe psychologically damaging effect on human beings. For prisoners already suffering from mental illness, it exacerbates their problems. Senator John McCain wrote of his experience in solitary confinement as a P.O.W. in Vietnam: "It crushes your spirit and weakens your resistance more effectively than any other form of mistreatment."

Journalist James Ridgeway calls the use of solitary confinement "a second sentence." The first sentence is, of course, being sent to prison. The second sentence is totally decided by the warden and guards without appealable criteria. As such, the act of disobeying instructions or vaguely interpreted prison rules or the whim of the warden can warrant a lengthy stay in solitary. The lack of accountability in this area is notorious and critical. For many prisoners, a stay in solitary is a death sentence.

The United States is the world leader in locking people up. There are currently about 2.3 million imprisoned people in the United States. About 25 percent of them are there for nonviolent drug offenses, victims of the insatiable "prison-industrial complex" which costs taxpayers billions of dollars every year. Of these millions of inmates, it is estimated that as many as 80,000 are being held in solitary confinement according to Solitary Watch. Prisons are not required to provide data on how and when they use this highly questionable method of incarceration. Over 40 prisons are considered "supermax" facilities where the majority of cells are solitary units. These prisons alone account for about 30,000 people.

Imagine how things might change if more ordinary Americans had access to inspect the prisons their tax dollars pay for. A precedent for this exists. In Great Britain, "Independent Monitoring Boards" offer a unique civic perspective on regulating what happens inside prison walls. Ordinary citizens are able to volunteer to be these independent monitors. Volunteers are allowed unannounced access to prison facilities anytime, day or night. The volunteers are free to tour the prison, speak with the inmates, sample the food, and inspect the clothing and the state of medical care.

Here's a bold suggestion that might move the needle. All nine members of the United States Supreme Court should spend 48 hours in solitary confinement. Imagine how quickly the treatment of our incarcerated population would change if those at forefront of our judicial system had a small taste of what it is like to be locked in a tiny cell, alone, with no human contact for such an amount of time. Just
48 hours! There is precedent for some state judges actually spending time in prison years ago.

Too many people overlook the plight of prisoners, deeming them criminals and not concerning themselves with the plights of people they feel have no place or say in our society. There is little recognition of wrongful convictions and the role of rehabilitation that has worked in other western countries with far less recidivist rates then in the U.S. This mindset is a major obstacle in drawing attention to the inhumane treatment inmates often receive in our justice system.

UNBROKEN MAN

From birth, with the odds stacked against me,
Through childhood, guided by the misguided
   Feeling soulless and empty,
I could never be counted amongst the broken men.
With steel in my hand and blood on the ground,
   Some of it theirs, some of it mine
The most foolish test of manhood to be found,
   I took that test time and again,
Declared victory in a zero-sum game, impossible to win.
   A fleeting vision of what life could be,
   A fleeting vision of what a man should be,
   Visions that are quickly
   shelved
To muster the strength necessary to deal with reality,
   Leaving optimism to the optimist
   Who were dealt a better hand than I,

But never count me amongst the broken men
   I would rather die!

I shed tears for the loss of comrades and brothers,
And shed tears for the pain that I visited upon others.
I shed tears for shedding tears
   A clear sign of my weakness,
Couldn't see it then, though I see it now That weakness could have saved me.
Could have shed light into the darkness of my heart
   Activating a dynamic mind from its sleep,
   Raising me to see me, independent and unique.
   Capable of love, desiring to be loved,
   An escape from dejection,
   A shield from rejection.
   The materialization of an alternate fate, an alternate path,
   A heart and mind tuned to seize it,
   I can see it now, but can't seize it now,
Been gone from home so long I feel my soul bleeding out.
   Should be no more tears to be shed
   I've discovered manhood now.
Here I bear my burdens and make my last stand,
   I've discovered the cruelties of God and the duality of man.
   It makes me wanna leave this world,
   But I must not be counted amongst the broken men.
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