

# Correctional Forum

SUMMER 2009

A PUBLICATION OF THE PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SOCIETY

Promoting a humane, just and constructive correctional system and a rational approach to criminal justice since 1787

## TOWARD A WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Considering the Needs of Children of Incarcerated Parents

By Dee Johnson

Women are going to prison at a faster rate than men. Believe it or not, they constitute the fastest growing sect of America's prison population today. And if that isn't startling enough, consider that 80 percent of incarcerated women are mothers and 75 percent of them have children under 18.

Today, about 2.5 million children in the United States have a parent who is serving time. And, to make matters worse, most parents are held in institutions 100 to 500 miles from their homes.

According to a report by the U. S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, a majority of mothers and fathers in state prisons indicate they have never had a visit with their child(ren) since being incarcerated.

"Policies have not yet been developed to address these issues and respond to the needs of families impacted by incarceration," said Ann Adalist-Estrin, director of the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated and an advocate of the issue for more than 30 years.

### Serving a silent sentence

Consequently, children of the incarcerated serve a silent sentence of their own.

For instance, children who *can*

visit their incarcerated parents may suffer from the pains of separation or become traumatized by the conditions of prison. On the other hand, children who *can't* visit their parents



Ann Adalist-Estrin

while in prison may feel a sense of abandonment.

"Some children are left with foster caregivers who don't have an interest in getting them to a visit. Others are left with elderly grandparents who can't make the trip because they are physically unable to do so, or have no idea what to do with a 5-year-old when they take them into an institution," said Ceciley Bradford, Prison Society's Inmate Family Services program manager.

### Nationwide focus groups

To help improve relationships between incarcerated parents and their children, Adalist-Estrin is travel-

ing throughout the country leading focus groups with four different factions: caregivers, advocates, children of the incarcerated, and incarcerated parents and formerly incarcerated parents.

She is seeking input that will help develop solid policy recommendations which will strengthen communication between children and their incarcerated parents and help them maintain relationships during incarceration.

"My hope in doing these focus groups is that we can hear the concerns from each of the four groups and find ways to talk about policy recommendations that would address the needs of these groups and connect the systems that serve each of those groups," Adalist-Estrin said.

The Pennsylvania Prison Society sponsored one of these focus groups, giving local participants the chance to share their concerns, tell their sto-

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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR WILLIAM DIMASCIO'S ANNUAL REPORT MAY 5, 2009

## 222ND ANNUAL MEETING

*By William DiMascio*

Imagine for a moment that you're 17-years-old again. Only this time, you are thrown in a solitary jail cell — on death row! How would you cope?

What if you were kept in solitary confinement for the next three years? Try to imagine what that would be like.

One of our award winners today had just such an experience. Later, she wrote about it with searing eloquence. In the book, *"Doing Life"*, Sharon Wiggins used these words:

"It's like what I perceive blindness to be: you kind of lose your balance; there's nothing that steadies you. When you lose contact with other people, it leaves you in a kind of darkness, a limbo... There's no visual light, but, after a time, your imagination creates light for you. We all need an outlet from frustration and loneliness, so we create our own sense of light through our hopes and dreams."

In the struggle to survive frustration and loneliness, Sharon's deepest sense of humanity — the hopes and dreams and aspirations that kept her connected even while she was isolated — eventually lit the way for her emotional endurance. It gave her that sense of balance she thought she had lost.

There is no greater value that we at the Prison Society share than that abiding sense of humanity.

The great declaration of this nation refers to these rights of humanness — to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness — as "unalien-

able", taking precedence even over the Bill of Rights.

The dignity of humankind cannot be lost or stolen, cannot be ordered or legislated away. Nor can it be voluntarily surrendered by any individual no matter how grotesquely he or she behaves.

Some shrinking number of states still engage in the barbarity of capital punishment. And more constrict the freedom of movement of individuals who threaten the safety of others. Yet even in those darkest moments, the spark of life residing in the human heart retains the flame of hope.

Sharon Wiggins found it and it gave her a sense of balance. And thousands of other incarcerated men and women find it — some on their own, but many with the assistance of Prison Society volunteers and official visitors.

This is one way we see our values in action. It is one way we continue to affirm the relevance of our mission after 222 years of struggle.

During the past year we were confronted by serious financial challenges. At one point they seemed to threaten our very existence. With dedication to our mission, fueled by the knowledge that there are thousands of men and women like Sharon Wiggins who depend on us, we overcame the obstacles before us.

We endured ... as we have ... and as we must.

And, along the way, incidentally, 437 new members joined our ranks. We have other deeply held values as well. They include:

- Decent conditions of confinement and treatment of prisoners.
- Meaningful vocational and intellectual training opportunities to get inmates on a positive footing prior to their release.
- A sense of fairness in a criminal justice system that increasingly seems to give equitable treatment a back seat to legal process and political ambition.

Overcrowding has been a problem at state and county prisons for so long that it is becoming easily overlooked. But overcrowding is another major issue that tests our commitments.

Overcrowding is not about inconveniencing prisoners. It is about ratcheting up the levels of violence as tempers of both prisoners and corrections officers grow short in close quarters. It is about divvying up scarce resources into smaller portions. It is about the spread of contagions like the TB virus and MRSA. And, it is also about unsanitary conditions.

That leads me to a second example of the relevance of the Prison Society's values and actions.

At Coal Township — as at other facilities that have had to house more inmates than their capacity permitted — temporary dormitories have been established. Typically, these units are locked night and day and prisoners need to have guards let them out in order to get to restrooms, which do not exist inside the dorms.

We started getting reports that guards at Coal Township were refusing to open the doors in a timely fashion or were unavailable because of shift changes. As a result, inmates began relieving themselves in coffee cans and other containers. The stench in the dorm rose along with the number of complaints.

The ACLU heard the same reports and seemed to be threatening to sue.

We raised the issue with the local prison administrators and got unsatisfactory responses. We then took the matter to DOC headquarters and the day before Secretary Beard was to appear at our conveners' conference he personally visited Coal Township to inspect the facility and look into this situation.

At the conference we brought together an ACLU lawyer and the secretary. We learned that a guard was deliberately keeping the prisoners locked in so that they would file grievances because he personally disliked the temporary dorms.

The secretary ordered the officer reassigned and initiated plans to install restroom facilities inside all of the temporary housing units at all the prisons where they were being used. Additionally, he invited the ACLU lawyer to schedule an inspection visit at a time of her choosing.

Prisons have improved in many ways from the dungeons of past centuries. But it would be shortsighted to think that conditions of confinement are not problems that require constant vigilance.

In a democracy, when citizens give their government the power to take away the freedom of individuals, then those citizens have a responsibility for overseeing the conditions in which those individuals are being held.

In the Coal Township incident, the Prison Society played two important roles: first, we helped to get the problem resolved without litigation; and second, we opened a door for dialogue between the DOC and an important ally, the ACLU.

We perform tasks like these every day. Our staff does, to be sure, but our corps of volunteers does also in immeasurable instances in locations many of us have never heard of. (And by the way, that corps of volunteers is also growing; we added 21

new official visitors last year. We have a major project on the drawing board to enhance the training and performance of our official visitors, and to enlist those who are willing to help, with our policy reform efforts.)

And that brings me to the third element in this discussion of Prison Society values.

Trina Garnet was 13 when she was released from Allentown State Hospital where she had been treated for mental illness. She was sent to live with her older sister in Chester. In a matter of a few days, Trina had stopped taking her medications.

Then, while playing with a friend, she accidentally started a fire that burned down a house and killed two people.

Trina was convicted of murder and sentenced to life without the possibility of parole. When the trial was over, Trina was sent to SCI Muncy where she was raped by a member of the prison staff. At 15, Trina delivered a baby boy, which was immediately taken from her and placed in foster care.

Trina is now 47 and suffering from multiple sclerosis. On a recent visit, she asked me for help in filing for commutation of her life sentence.

*"How would you live on the outside?"* I asked.

*"I could get a job at McDonald's,"* she replied.

*"Could you do that?"* I said.

*"Well, only for a time,"* she explained. *"I'm not able to stand up for very long now."*

During my years at the Prison Society, I have committed myself to helping lifers get a fair hearing for commutation. In the case of Trina Garnet, I do believe it was a travesty of the highest magnitude for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to hold a 13-year-old, mentally ill girl

*continued on page 7*

# PRISON SOCIETY NEWS

## NEW STAFF



### John D. Apfelbaum

Volunteer

John is a businessman who volunteers his time to serve as an advisor

and mentor to reentry services program participants.

"Employment is the key to independence," he said. "I believe I can help clients with employment issues like how to present themselves for jobs, how to interview, and how to hold and advance in jobs once they have them."

John helps clients prepare resumes, teaches them interviewing skills, and instructs them in pitching their skill sets and story to potential employers.

A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania with a bachelor's degree in history, he owns one of the largest stamp auction companies in the world.

"I've worked with former offenders and know that many of them need only a little help getting started in order to lead productive and independent lives."

## FAREWELL, MR. BOWTIE!

### PRI Facilitator/Case Manager Retires

*[W]e wish you many blessings.*

*Sayonara, goodbye;*

*We'll never, ever forget our one and only  
"Mr. Bowtie"!*

—Excerpt from Mr. Bowtie by Pamela Superville,  
Reentry Services Program Manager

Charles Fleming, fondly referred to as Mr. Bowtie (because he always donned one), recently retired after six years of service at the Prison Society.

For the past two years, he served as Prisoner Reentry Initiative's (PRI) Criminal Attitude Program (CAP) facilitator and case manager, working with inmates at SCI Graterford. During his tenure, he also worked as life skills educator and reentry services case manager.

PRI, the first state program of its kind, starts working with inmates behind the walls and continues through their release. And CAP is designed "to get [inmates] to open up about their thinking and discuss their crimes," Charles said. "What you feed the mind, you feed the man."



Charles Fleming—Mr. Bowtie

"Mr. Fleming exemplifies the best work ethic and dedication to his job that his clients could possibly ask for," said Betty-Ann Izenman, program director. "He was tremendously loved by both the clients and the staff at the prison, and it has been a pleasure to know and work with him."

In retirement, Charles looks forward to embarking on some of the adventures he has had to put off while employed full-time. He eventually plans to relocate to Virginia.



**Men in bowties and brims:** In honor of his retirement, the Prison Society men don bowties and brims. (Left to Right: James Williams, Cameron Holmes, Charles Fleming, Anthony Singleton and William DiMascio)

## Congratulations and Best Wishes!

Darlene Little served as CAP case manager at SCI Muncy for the past two years. A Presbyterian minister, she has decided to follow a higher calling and accept a full-time pastoral position. We wish her Godspeed!

## EMPLOYEE OF THE QUARTER



### Theresa Clark

Family Visitation  
Coordinator

Since joining the Prison Society, Theresa has worked with the Family Transportation Services, Virtual Visitation and Parenting Skills Education programs.

She came to the organization three years ago as a work study stu-

dent and, today, oversees the Family Transportation Services program.

"Theresa is very involved in program logistics. To her, it's not just about running the bus program, it's about learning what to do to make the bus program run more efficiently," said Ceciley Bradford, Inmate Family Services program manager.

A senior at Temple University pursuing an undergraduate degree in

journalism, Theresa said her experience at the Prison Society has made her change her career focus.

"Before I started working here, I wanted to work for a big name magazine," she explained. "But now, I see myself in a position that allows me to continue my advocacy on behalf of prisoners, former offenders and their families."

## NEW BOARD MEMBERS

### Four new board members were elected at the 222nd Annual Meeting:



**Robert A. Cicchinelli**  
Co-Moderator, Prison Talk Online

Robert Cicchinelli co-moderates Prison Talk Online, a web community of more than 128,000 members, which discusses and addresses prisoner issues and concerns. The online forum was conceived in a prison cell, designed in a halfway house, and funded by donations from families of former offenders.

Bob holds an undergraduate degree in Psychology and Sociology and a graduate degree in Counseling and Human Relations. He has worked with head trauma patients and in secondary school counseling, post-secondary, and community education. He also served as a volunteer firefighter and an EMT for 16 years.



**Marcia Martinez-Helfman**  
President, Zia Business Partners, Inc.

With more than 20 years in human resources and employment law, Marcia Martinez-Helfman owns Zia Business Partners, Inc., a full-service human capital management consulting practice.

She has also served as faculty of the University of Pennsylvania's Fels Institute for Government and LaSalle University's Non-Profit Center, as well as president of the Hispanic Bar Association of Pennsylvania. She is currently a member of the Philadelphia Human Resource Planning Society and the Society for Human Resources Management.

Marcia received her undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Pennsylvania, and her Masters degree in Social Work from Washington University in St. Louis.



**Dianne E. Reed**  
Executive Director, CADE  
Dianne Reed is executive director of CADE, a non-profit organization providing public school children with anti-drug and anti-violence prevention education. She has also served as budget director for the City of Philadelphia, president of the MidAtlantic Employers' Association, and executive director of the Pennsylvania Economy League.

Dianne holds a Masters of Government Administration from the University of Pennsylvania and a Ph.D. in English from Stanford University.

Dianne holds a Masters of Government Administration from the University of Pennsylvania and a Ph.D. in English from Stanford University.



**Peggy Sims**  
Convener, Philadelphia Chapter Official Visitor

Peggy Sims has been involved as an Official Visitor of the Prison Society for more than a decade, and has *been awarded Official Visitor of the Year* for her outstanding service on behalf of prisoners.

Peggy is a staunch community activist and works with death row inmates at SCI Greene. She is also developing model programs for visitation. She currently serves as Convener of the Philadelphia Chapter of Official Visitors.

## KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Photo: Rebecca Savellov



*Dr. Ethan Nadelmann, founder and executive director of Drug Policy Alliance and Drug Policy Alliance Network, is*

*widely regarded as the most prominent proponent of drug policy reform in the United States.*

### **Ethan Nadelmann, Ph.D.**

At the 222nd Annual Meeting of The Pennsylvania Prison Society, Dr. Nadelmann explained the history of the drug war in America, the problems with its failed drug war, and the benefits of legalizing marijuana.

He likened the war on marijuana with prohibition and how ending prohibition increased government revenue and alcohol control. Legalizing marijuana could save billions in law enforcement costs and generate billions more in tax revenue, he said.

"We should have the right to put into our bodies whatever we want," Nadelmann says. Only when its use inflicts harm on others — like when reckless driving causes an accident — should you be held liable, he suggests.

He said he is pleased with the attention the issue is receiving lately: New Mexico has joined 13 states in legalizing medical marijuana, New Jersey is moving in that direction, Rep. Mark Cohen has introduced a similar bill in Pennsylvania, and Governor Schwarzenegger is encouraging discussion on the issue.

But, Nadelmann says, in order to create real change, marijuana users who live productive lives must come out of the closet, just as Harvey Milk did in the 1970s when standing up for gay rights.

To learn more, visit [www.drugpolicy.org](http://www.drugpolicy.org).

*"Who are we? We are people who love drugs. But we are also people who hate drugs. But we know that drugs are here to stay and prohibition and the criminal justice system is not the way to deal with it."*

# THE PUNISHMENT WE DESERVE

## How did the American penal system become abusive?

Cruel and Unusual: The Culture of Punishment in America Anne-Marie Cusac (Yale University Press)

By Noah Berlatsky

“Capital punishments are the natural offspring of monarchical governments,” Benjamin Rush wrote in 1792. Rush was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, the father of American psychiatry, an abolitionist, and a prison reformer, and he’s one of the minor heroes of Anne-Marie Cusac’s *Cruel and Unusual: The Culture of Punishment in America*. Cusac, an assistant professor of communication at Roosevelt University, singles him out as representative of a stream of reformist thought common among the Founding Fathers and their peers.

For Rush, opposition to cruel punishment was based on both Christian faith and patriotism. He saw American republicanism as uniquely free, uniquely Christian, and therefore uniquely humane.

As Cusac points out, things haven’t worked out quite as Rush hoped.

America is far from the forefront of prison reform. We still practice capital punishment, and our rates of incarceration are by far the highest among Western nations. Moreover, since Abu Ghraib we’ve become notorious not for humaneness but for torture.

How exactly did this happen?

Cusac’s book suggests a couple of answers. In the first place, she notes, the reform movement didn’t necessarily lead to humanitarian improvements. On the contrary, the effort to promote humane rehabilitation often resulted in the replacement of

one form of torture with another. One of the most popular “reform” punishments, for example, was solitary confinement. In lieu of branding or whipping, the state would enforce isolation and silence, so that wrongdoers would have time and space to pray and contemplate their sins.



“An artist of sorts,” Berlatsky writes ill-tempered criticism for the *Comics Journal* and the *Chicago Reader*.

But solitary confinement in practice doesn’t rehabilitate prisoners: it drives them insane. Cusac doesn’t connect the dots explicitly, but it’s fairly clear that the cruel use of isolation in supermax prisons today can be seen not as a refutation of the reformist vision but as an ironic fulfillment of it.

Still, the reformers can’t be blamed for everything. Once the cruelty of solitary confinement became clear in the early 20th century, America, like much of Europe, abandoned the practice. For that matter, until relatively recently, the

U.S. imprisonment rate was in line with imprisonment rates in Europe. It was only in the 1980s and ‘90s that incarceration rates skyrocketed and solitary came back into vogue.

Cusac traces the resurgence of harsher measures to cultural shifts that started in the 70s. During that decade, she writes, Americans reacted against the culture wars of the 60s and the loss of the Vietnam War by becoming more pessimistic about the future and about human nature. Conservative religiosity enjoyed a revival. Movies like *The Exorcist* assumed the reality of evil. At the same time, prison reformers and researchers began to argue (often based on erroneous research, according to Cusac) that rehabilitation programs weren’t working. The reformers hoped, with charmingly utopian naivete, that once rehabilitation was discredited fewer people would be imprisoned.

Instead, portraying lawbreakers as permanently corrupt led politicians and citizens to call for longer, harsher prison sentences.

It’s difficult to establish cause and effect for cultural phenomena like this. For instance, Cusac notes that until the 1970s local TV news broadcasts didn’t spend much time discussing crime. Then, all of a sudden, management realized they could make a mint by promoting the latest murder or rape. So... did local TV news increase people’s fear of crime? Or did increased fear of crime make reporting on it more lucrative?

Cusac seems to lean toward the first explanation, but the second—or some sort of mutually reinforcing feedback loop—seems just as likely. Cusac can show that attitudes towards punishment changed, and she can point to a spectrum of phenomena linked to that change, but she can't establish, say, whether increased pessimism provoked the religious revival, or whether the religious revival primarily fed, or fed on, movies like *The Exorcist*.

Cusac ends up going with an amorphous bottom-up model: culture changed for a bunch of interrelated reasons, and therefore the political and legal realities of punishment changed. People came to feel that prisoners were evil and needed to suffer, and therefore long prison sentences and even torture—Cusac discusses multiple instances of prisoners dying after being placed in restraint chairs, for example—became normalized in U.S. prisons. The most chilling paragraph in *Cruel and Unusual* is the one in which Cusac explains how thoroughly acts she witnessed in U.S. jails prepared her for the Abu Ghraib revelations. “When I first saw the photo, taken at the Abu Ghraib prison, of a hooded and robed figure strung with electrical wiring,” she says, “I thought of the Sacramento, California, city jail.”

Cusac's argument that Abu Ghraib was merely an extension of the U.S. prison system is depressingly persuasive. She points out that several of the people involved in the torture were former corrections personnel who'd also been implicated in incidents of prison abuse. At the same time, though, Abu Ghraib suggests the limitations of her bottom-up perspective. The abuses there occurred in a climate in which the Bush administration was actively advocating torture techniques. If Al

Gore had won a handful more votes, or Dick Cheney had suffered a debilitating heart attack before becoming vice president, it seems likely that Abu Ghraib wouldn't have happened.

(Not that the solution to prison abuse is necessarily more liberals in power—Cusac argues that Democratic antidrug crusaders like Jesse Jackson are plenty culpable for our current mess.)

Obviously, the Bush administration officials' personal attitudes towards torture and the death penalty were influenced by the rise of religious conservatism in society at large. But influence flowed the other way, as well. Focused on culture at the grassroots level, Cusac underestimates the extent to which politics at the top have affected the debate. Would we have the prison system we do if Republicans—and, for that matter, many Democrats—hadn't decided to use crime as a wedge issue for so many years? Would so many conservatives have so eagerly defended torture if the Bush administration hadn't made that the default Republican position?

America's fascination with control, punishment, and force is partially a reflection of our leaders' fascinations. It hardly seems surprising that the more we act as the world's policeman, the more we behave internally like a police state. For Benjamin Rush, remember, it was monarchical government that led to capital punishments, not the other way around. If we want a less punitive culture, the simplest way to get it might be to put less punitive people in power.

Let's hope we already have. ■■■

*This piece originally appeared in the Chicago Reader on May 7, 2009. Reprinted with permission. © Noah Berlatsky*

*Annual Report...  
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culpable of a crime worthy of a sentence of life without parole.

It is a sin against humanity to treat children so young, so incredibly harshly. Yet we do it in Pennsylvania more than they do it anywhere else in the world, which puts this state near the epicenter of injustice.

And, if that description sounds extreme, consider this: on a per capita basis, Pennsylvania uses the two harshest sentences available more than any of the states with the largest populations. One out of every 2,574 Pennsylvanians is on death row or serving life without parole.

And, in the group serving life without parole, we have more who were convicted while they were still juveniles than any jurisdiction in the world.

And despite all the proclamations about wanting to make our communities safer, we seem to take a crisis-to-crisis approach that lacks a clear, systemic strategy for improving public safety.

Still, we at the Prison Society refuse to allow frustration to dampen our commitment.

Fifty years ago, William Faulkner won the Nobel Prize for literature. He called on writers to stick with the “old verities and truths of the heart” lest they focus on defeats in which nothing of value is lost, and of victories without hope or compassion.

The values of the Prison Society *are* the old verities and truths of the heart. They are about fairness, not politics. They are about justice, with hope *and* compassion.

These are the elements that keep us balanced. These are the ideals that have helped us endure all these years. And these are the principles that will guide us in the decades ahead. ■■■

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**LEGISLATIVE**

**BILL NO.  
PRINTER NO.**

**DESCRIPTION**

**HR 203  
PN 1321**

Provides for a resolution to study the needs of children of incarcerated parents. *(See SR 52)*

**HB 1393  
PN 1714**

Allows for medical use of marijuana.

**HB 1414  
PN 1736**

Establishes the 2009 Pennsylvania Criminal Justice Commission as a sub-commission of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency to review the criminal justice system, propose reforms, restructure drug policy and more.

**HB 1567  
PN 2244**

Requires mandatory sentencing with post-prison intensive restriction for repeat violent offenders; further provides for adoption of guidelines for sentencing, re-sentencing, parole, certain recommitment ranges and sentences for second and subsequent offenses. Includes some juvenile offense history.

**SR 52  
PN 706**

Provides for a resolution to study the needs of children of incarcerated parents. *(See HR 203)*

**SB 383  
PN 381**

Provides for problem solving courts for treatment; may have a coordinator statewide; may establish an advisory committee.

**SB 650  
PN 705**

Provides employment incentive payments to employers that hire certain former prisoners.

**SB 827  
PN 964**

Provides for global positioning technology for certain convicted and paroled sex offenders. Costs paid by parolee unless undue hardship.

# HIGHLIGHTS

LEAD SPONSOR	ACTION STATUS	PRISON SOCIETY POSITION
Rep. Cherelle Parker (D-Philadelphia County)	Passed Committee on Children and Youth 6/2/09 (26-0). Passed House and adopted 6/3/09 (192-0).	<b>Support</b>
Rep. Mark Cohen (D-Philadelphia County)	Referred to Health and Human Services Committee 4/30/09.	<b>Support</b>
Rep. Kenyatta Johnson (D-Philadelphia County)	Referred to House Judiciary Committee 5/4/09.	<b>Support</b>
Rep. Brendon Boyle (D-Philadelphia County)	Passed Judiciary Committee 6/23/09 (16-6) as amended. In Rules Committee 6/23/09.	<b>Oppose</b>
Sen. Stewart Greenleaf (R-Bucks/Montgomery Counties)	Passed Senate Judiciary Committee 6/2/09, (14-0). Passed Senate 6/8/09 by voice vote and sent to Joint State Government Commission.	<b>Support</b>
Sen. Jane Orie (R-Allegheny/ Butler Counties )	Passed Judiciary Committee 3/10/09. Passed Appropriations Committee 5/5/09. Passed Senate 6/3/09 (49-0). In House Judiciary Committee 6/5/09.	<b>Support</b>
Sen. Daylin Leach (D-Delaware/ Montgomery Counties)	Referred to Finance Committee 3/19/09.	<b>Support</b>
Sen. Jane Orie (R-Allegheny/Butler Counties)	Referred to Judiciary Committee 5/1/09.	<b>Oppose</b>

## SENATE

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# 222<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting

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## 2009 AWARDS

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### MERITORIOUS SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENTS

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#### **Marsha Levick, Esq.**

*Deputy Director and Chief Counsel, Juvenile Law Center*

Marsha Levick was primarily responsible for bringing to light the injustices occurring within the Luzerne County juvenile system wherein thousands of juveniles were being unjustly convicted and incarcerated. For her efforts, she received The Pennsylvania Prison Society's 2009 Meritorious Service Award.

#### **Catherine McVey**

*Chair, Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole*

Catherine McVey received The Pennsylvania Prison Society's 2009 Meritorious Service Award in recognition of her leadership as chair of the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole. Since she has taken charge, she has worked diligently with organizations like the Prison Society, and a host of others, to improve the system and make parole a more positive and effective system that enhances public safety while helping people rebuild their lives.

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### PRISONER OF THE YEAR AWARD RECIPIENT

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#### **Sharon Wiggins**

*SCI Muncy*

In 1968, Sharon Wiggins was incarcerated at only 17 years old. She was awarded the Prisoner of the Year because during the past three decades of incarceration she has spent rising above the discouraging prison environment and making life better and brighter for herself and for those around her.

— **Sharon Wiggins** (from a 1996 essay in *Doing Life* by Howard Zehr)

*"I had to grow up in prison. So it took about 10 years to get in touch with myself and my surroundings, with the painful feelings that I had about being incarcerated, with the realization that the mistake I made is irreversible. It is not like you can say you are sorry and it will go away. So you have to come to some resolve about how you want to deal with that... You have to experiment and find ways that will not really compensate, but will atone for the past... I do believe good can come of a life in prison. Once you've had a chance to evaluate the things that brought you to prison and have come to terms with them, you can get something positive from this experience."*



**Top:** Marsha Levick

**Bottom:** Cathy McVey shakes hands with Prison Society Board president Ellen Greenlee as board member and former deputy superintendent Donald Vaughn looks on.

**Photo credit:** Rebecca Savedow

# Thank You

*Thank you to the following individuals or organizations who, through membership and financial contributions in fiscal year 2009 (June 1, 2008 – May 31, 2009), demonstrated their belief in the mission of the Prison Society.*

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Everyday the Prison Society opens its doors, justice meets compassion.

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Hope makes  
changes  
possible.

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**LEAVE A LEGACY**

Join others who have endowed the future work and mission of the Prison Society by naming the Prison Society in your will. Let us know so we can add your name to the **John Dickinson Circle**. Call the Development Office at 215-564-6005, ext. 106.

Every effort has been made to publish a complete and accurate list of donors. If we have erred, please let us know by calling the Development Office at 215-564-6005, ext 106.

*Toward a White House Conference...  
continued from page 1*

ries and help in developing these recommendations, which will ultimately be presented to the Obama Administration.

**White House Conference on Children and Youth**

Adalist-Estrin hopes these recommendations will be on the agenda of the White House Conference on Children and Youth, a platform for developing programs to ensure the health and welfare of our young and keep families together, and that provide a host of other important services for youth.

The White House Conference on Children and Youth, first established in January 1909 by President Theodore Roosevelt, convened every 10 years. But it has not been held for almost 40 years, since 1970.

Recognizing its importance, U. S. Senator Mary Landrieu (*D-La.*) and U. S. Congressmen Chaka Fattah (*D-Pa.*) and Jon Porter (*R-Nev.*) introduced legislation (S.2771/H.R.618) to reestablish the White House Conference on Children and Youth in 2010.

"We want to join forces with other organizations to have a presence in developing a White House Conference on Children and Youth, and to be sure that the needs of children of incarcerated parents are considered along with the needs of other children," Adalist-Estrin said.

**Barriers to communication**

Focus group participants noted several impediments to communication between children and incarcerated parents.

"Exorbitant telephone costs!" shouted one focus group participant.

According to the Center of American Press, costly prison phone

calls can cause some individuals to become estranged from incarcerated family members.

"Placement!" exclaimed another.

Most prisons are located in rural areas of the state. For instance, the two state-run women's prisons in Pennsylvania — SCI Muncy and SCI Cambridge Springs — are about four and eight hours from Philadelphia, respectively. Travel to most state facilities for men take from two to eight hours.

For families who don't own a car or drive, travel can be extremely complicated since major railways and bus lines get you only partway there. And van services, which will take you to your destination, can cost a pretty penny.

*"The time has  
come to recognize  
and honor the  
complexities of both  
families living with  
criminal justice  
involvement and  
the issues."*

Several participants noted that low-cost programs — like the Prison Society's Family Transportation Services (offering bus service to 24 correctional facilities for only \$25 round trip) and Virtual Visitation (making it possible for families to visit for only \$20 without actually traveling to the prison) — help them stay in touch with their incarcerated loved ones.

**Prison visitation policies**

Prison visitation policies can also serve as barriers to maintaining

relationships, participants said.

Prison visiting rooms are open only certain hours during weekdays, and are closed at least two days each week. On weekends, dogs are often used to search visitors traveling from mostly urban communities.

"They do a random search with dogs looking for drugs, and if you say you don't want the search, they won't let you visit," said Wysenia Williams.

Even after traveling for hours and being searched by dogs, Williams noted that families, sometimes, have to endure still more or wait even longer before the hour-long visit actually occurs.

Williams explained, as a Muslim, she is sometimes asked to remove her khimar. In those instances, she must wait an extra half hour for a female guard to search her.

And, when she and the children finally make it into the visiting room, guards can terminate their visit on a whim.

"Let's just say if you hug too long, they'll terminate your visit," Williams said. "They have a suggestion box, which I think I've filled up by now."

**Underage and unauthorized**

For some children, prison visitation policies are, simply put, harsh and unfair.

"My god-sister was willing to take me to see my father, but the prison wouldn't authorize the visits," said 25-year-old Pamela Abrams, a focus group participant. She was only 16 when her father was incarcerated.

"I came home from school one day [and] he wasn't there," she explained. "And, after a few more days went by and he didn't come home, I thought he was dead somewhere."

Nearly a week passed before Abrams learned that her father was in prison. Two more years slipped by

before she laid eyes on him again.

"I was 18 before I was able to see him [in prison]," she said.

Although her father had been raising her as a single parent since her mother passed away years earlier, the prison would not authorize the visits. That's only because she was underage and didn't have a blood relative to escort her, Abrams explained.

"The time has come to recognize and honor the complexities of both families living with criminal justice involvement and the issues," said Adalist-Estrin. "More and more people are acknowledging the impact of

incarceration on children, families and the community."

#### **You can help!**

Contact your legislators to say you support a White House Conference on Children and Youth, and that its agenda *should* include the needs of children of the incarcerated.

To learn more about policy recommendations concerning children of the incarcerated and 15 things you can do to help, visit the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated website at [www.fcnetwork.org](http://www.fcnetwork.org). ■■■



## CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

1. **I have the right** to be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest.
2. **I have the right** to be heard when decisions are made about me.
3. **I have the right** to be considered when decisions are made about my parent.
4. **I have the right** to be well cared for in my parent's absence.
5. **I have the right** to speak with, see, and touch my parent.
6. **I have the right** to support as I struggle with my parent's incarceration.
7. **I have the right** not to be judged, blamed, or labeled because of my parent's incarceration.
8. **I have the right** to a life-long relationship with my parent.

## 15 THINGS TO DO TO SUPPORT CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

1. **Know yourself**—the feelings, experiences and attitudes of everyone who interacts with them and influences the way children of incarcerated parents feel about themselves.
2. **Remember** that all children of incarcerated parents mourn the loss in some way.
3. **Raise awareness** and sensitivity through universal outreach. Children and families of the incarcerated are everywhere and they will notice if notices for programs and services for them are promoted to the entire community, school or organization.
4. **Display materials and articles** about children of the incarcerated on bulletin boards and in parent newsletters for *all* families.
5. **Help** children talk about their feelings.
6. **Provide** educational materials about the impact of parental incarceration on children.
7. **Form** support groups for children of incarcerated parents.
8. **Promote** the inclusion of books and materials about children of incarcerated parents in classrooms and libraries.
9. **Provide** training opportunities for clergy, health care providers, teachers and counselors on children of incarcerated parents
10. **Find** out about the *Bill of Rights for Children of the Incarcerated* and look for examples of community programs that put these rights into action.
11. **Advocate** for implementation of the *Bill of Rights for Children of the Incarcerated* in your workplace, community or state
12. **Bring** the topic to the public's attention by suggesting children and families of the incarcerated serve as a focus for programs and projects for service organizations and communities of faith in your community.
13. **Contact** your representatives in the United States Congress to express your concern about children and families of the incarcerated.
14. **Support** the proposed White House Conference on Children and Youth.
15. **Emphasize** the need to include children of the incarcerated in all policy conversations and initiatives about the state of America's children.

**"Injustice anywhere is a threat  
to justice everywhere."**

—Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr

# Correctional Forum

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Promoting a humane, just and constructive correctional system and a rational approach to criminal justice since 1787

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PLEASE VISIT [www.prisonsociety.org](http://www.prisonsociety.org) !

## Pardons Board Appeal Update

U.S. District Court Judge A. Richard Caputo of the Middle District Court ruled that the Prison Society has standing to file the challenge to the Pardons Board referendum, and that the referendum violated the ex post facto protections of the U.S. Constitution.

"This new ruling provides us with a major victory in this decade-long battle," said Bill DiMascio, Prison Society executive director. "Those whose crimes were committed before 1997 will be able to take advantage of the old three-vote majority to get their applications for commutation on the Governor's desk."