

PA Prison Report - Monday, March 28, 2011.

Prisoner activist returned to solitary confinement: On March 1st, Jerome Coffey was transferred to SCI Forest from SCI Greene, where he had spent 9 years and 4 months in solitary confinement despite remaining misconduct free for an extended period of time. On March 12th, he was finally released into general population. Six days later, he was back in solitary confinement after his failed attempts to get help adjusting to human contact led to an altercation with prison administrative staff.

According to reports by prisoners at Forest, Mr. Coffey's requests to be housed temporarily in a single cell were denied by his Unit Manager, Ed Heberling. He was immediately forced to share a cell with another man, despite the well-known debilitating effects of long term solitary confinement upon survivors' ability to be close to, or share space with other people. Mr Coffey was also not seen by a prison psychologist upon his release from nearly ten years in isolation.

After six days, Mr. Coffey filed a grievance with prison administration and in while in G-Unit yard he approached Deputy Superintendent Overmeyer about his need for a single-cell status. Mr. Coffey reports that the deputy called him a "nigger", and that he then struck the deputy in the mouth and was given a 90-day sentence of solitary confinement. The Pennsylvania State Police have interviewed Mr. Coffey and have vowed to press formal charges against him.

Jerome Coffey is a prisoner-activist who has been a long time member and vocal supporter of the Human Rights Coalition, a factor that may have contributed to his long-term solitary confinement. Earlier this month he wrote, "With every bone in my body I will never submit to slavery. I hate it. It's wrong. My mentality will always be resistance to oppression, institutional racism, white supremacy, sexism, homophobia, capitalism. . . . I refuse to be a slave."

Jailhouse lawyer removed from treatment unit in retaliation for lawsuits: Damont Hagan, a human rights defender at SCI Cresson, reports that he was recently moved to the Restricted Housing Unit from the Secure Special Needs Unit (SSNU) in retaliation for filing grievances and assisting other prisoners in advocating for their rights. The Secure Special Needs Unit is a form of solitary confinement for prisoners with diagnosed mental health needs and was originally designed to provide mental health treatment. Hagan was not issued any misconduct prior to being moved, but was told he was being put on a "time-out." The Restricted Housing Unit at Cresson, like others across the state, does not allow for any substantial access to mental health care.

Removal from the treatment unit followed weeks of escalating harassment and threats of retaliation. In one instance, after overhearing Hagan discussing a lawsuit he intends to file against Cresson, Sergeant Dow confiscated paperwork from Hagan and terminated his access to the law library. Other prisoners in the unit have reported that guards deprive mentally ill prisoners and those who file grievances of food, bedding, personal

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