

I n v i t a t i o n t o M . C . O . F . U

In the Summer/Fall issue of Mass Prison Voice, there were several articles written regarding MCI Shirley, that focused on policies and conditions of the Health Services Unit / Skilled Nursing Facility (HSU/SNF), and the foolishness of isolating prisoners and/or punishing someone for being sick. The articles author's; Joe , Mike and myself, primarily focused on not allowing sick, dying men to see their friends from the general population. The feedback we received among fellow prisoners was one of encouragement and affirmation. Every prisoner I spoke to expressed their gratitude and appreciation for writing about something they wish they could write — but can't.

The only negative opposition came from the guards and staff themselves. Three nurses were overheard talking about the issue and one of them said, "...they should be punished for writing that." One guard said to me, "freedom of speech, huh." Most of the other guards mainly spoke about it among themselves but were animated enough to be overheard. The officers who are a part of the Massachusetts Correctional Officers Federated Union (MCOFU), are upset because we're complaining about valid issues that reflect a prisoner wanting to maintain his dignity as a human being. Apparently, to them, we're less than.

The truth is, I can look in the mirror each morning and know that I am an A-hole for all the things I have done in my life: the murder I committed, the untold lives I changed because of it, and all the other crosses one must have to bear in doing a life bid. My question is, "can you?"

My best friend in the whole world, William , died at the age of 74, on September 9, 2013. In the time leading up to his passing, it was the guards who went to the superintendent to have us separated as cellmates. It was the guards who then put him in the "HOLE" for four months because of it. And in the last six months of his life, it was the guards who enforced the policy of denying everyone access to go see him. Granted, most of them disagreed with the policy, but not one of them spoke out about it. Where was MCOFU then?

Another friend of mine, Frank , is dying alone in the HSU/SNF and is not allowed to go to religious services, programs or see the men in general population, Will MCOFU challenge this absurd policy? Of course not, yet, your mad at us for speaking out about it. When Marc Feinstein, over-dosed in the HSU, a lieutenant snidely remarked, "oh well, I guess I get to give another single away today." But I am the bad guy...imagine that.

In a conversation I had with a staff member, I asked, "is there anything you can do to prevent one of your loved ones from becoming a victim of a crime?"

He thought about for a minute and answered, "No. I have no control over whether someone decides to get behind a wheel drunk or if some addict chooses to do a stick-up."

On the contrary, you see, you get mad at me for wanting to effectuate change in the prison system; for bringing to light

absurd, and torturous policies that are killing people; for wanting something more, than accepting to die alone.

You see, I am trying to protect those that I love and those that you love, from becoming the victim of crime. What are you doing? You work for an agency, where your job is to "correct deviant behavior, not encourage it. When was the last time MCOFU spoke out about cutting funding to prisoners for education? When has MCOFU advocated for vocational training for prisoners, so that when they leave prison they will be better prepared to handle the transition, which in turn would protect public safety? As a matter of fact, if prisons worked, there would be fewer. So, when was the last time MCOFU came out publicly to close prisons or want to curb recidivism?

They have'nt. MCOFU's existence is predicated on people coming to prison. In effect, our attitudes pay your salary. The more murders, rapes, kidnappings and robberies and addicts, the better it is for your wallets. No wonder your mad at us. MCOFU is more concerned with more jobs, hiring more recruits, getting more over-time, and warning the public about how dangerous it is in here. Don't get me wrong, there are times when you are definitely put in harms way and for that you will get no argument out of me. However, how many times could those instances been avoided? How often could a little communication or understanding prevented an altercation? But instead, let's single out the guy's who are trying to change the dehumanizing ethos of prison. Let's get mad at the few men who have the courage to stand-up and speak-out about the direction the DOC is going in. Let's retaliate against the men who want to change the cycle of prisoners leaving prison unequipped to live in society as law abiding citizens, all because of some imaginary "blue code".

The irony of all this, is that you bust our balls everyday over stupid crap. confiscating water bottles, clotheslines, "ID's out", "no white t-shirts in the building", late movements, closing the church, cell decorum, patting people down for milk or bread... and for what? This is how you protect public safety? This is the "Master Plan" of curbing recidivism and aiding rehabilitation? All this is designed for, is to create climate issues. We take it on the chin everyday, yet, "it's not you, it's the administration". **THEN SPEAK UP!** We do, and then we're labeled the bad guys by you.

Keep getting mad, just as you're going to get mad at this article. Someone has to protect public safety because it certainly is not you. That is, of course, unless you want to... In any event, you can prevent those ones you love from becoming victims of crime.., you just have to care enough to prevent it. It starts with actually caring about what happens to a prisoner. It starts the moment you punch the time-clock and it begins the second you start speaking up and not speaking out.

Told To

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