

Reply ID:  
hma8

Dear Patricia,

May 22, 2020

I'd like to start off by expressing my most sincere gratitude to you for taking time to respond. Being incarcerated is difficult, even under the "best" of times (is there such a thing?), but being locked up during a pandemic takes stressing out to a whole new level, so again, thanks. Getting mail, whether from a stranger or someone you love and care about, is always a welcome sight in a place like this, especially right now.

With that said, I, too, served a brief period of incarceration in Florida's Department of Corrections (DOC). When it comes to stupid laws, Florida's a pretty tough state, so I ended up serving almost 5-years for something that, in most states, wouldn't have even been a crime, or if it was, it would have been a misdemeanor, at best. Either way, between my current term, and my former term in Florida, I believe I can speak with complete confidence about how things are being run down there.

As far as your belief why he's not telling you of his fears and concerns, at first, I was a bit hesitant to speak on this, but after giving the matter a great deal of thought, I've come to the conclusion that I'd actually be doing him, and anyone else in his predicament, an incredible disservice by not speaking about what I know.

With that said, you're probably correct when you say that you think the reason he hasn't discussed his fears with you is because he doesn't want to worry you. Keep in mind that, in prison, you're often judged solely on impressions. Do something, anything, no matter how large or small that gives the impression that there's a weakness, and you can rest assured that someone's going to do their best to find a way to exploit it. We live in constant fear of our words, our actions, even our very thoughts, being used as a weapon to harm, not only us, but those we care about, and not just by the inmates in here, either. Trust me when I tell you that the guards won't hesitate to take advantage of a perceived weakness, if the opportunity arises. I can't tell you how many times I've seen someone loitering near the phones, trying to "ear hustle," trying to obtain something they could use to take advantage of the person making the call, which is why many people choose to communicate to each other through the mail, but sadly, even that's not as safe as it would first appear. Mail is frequently misdelivered, especially when the inmate is moved. It's also stolen from the outgoing mailbox, and just as bad, I've had guards come up to me to discuss contents of my outgoing mail with me. For all of these reasons, and so many more, guys in here will frequently shut down when it comes to their feelings, which can only make things worse. And in many cases, you're right. We're holding back because we naively believe we're somehow protecting the people we care about by not sharing with them. Sadly, their imagination, and mainstream media's portrayal of the prison system, often make things far worse than any truth ever could.



As far as how things are going in his particular prison, there's no one, simple, answer. Some prisons don't seem to have any infections at all, while others see their infection rates spiraling out of control. Notice, however, that I used the word "seems." I did this for a reason. A lot of prisons are actively going out of their way to cover up what's going on in here, and there are a number of ways to do this. The main one is to avoid conducting any COVID-19 tests unless absolutely necessary, by which I mean the situation is so bad that hospital care is required. No tests means that there aren't any results you're legally required to provide.

As far as why they'd go so far out of their way to avoid conducting any tests, keep in mind that prisons are a HUGE industry, with astronomical profits. When you start talking about things that impact the number of people in the system, you start talking about people losing their jobs, and not just the staff who work there. There are all kinds of support services that are required to operate a prison. People have to provide electricity and water to the prisons, which means an income and job for the people doing so. Someone has to bring in the food for the inmates to prepare, which, again, means an income for someone and jobs. Even the local gas stations, mini marts and fast food joints all rely on visitors going to and from the prison for their income. Reduce the number of inmates in the prison system, and you have a trickle down effect on the jobs in your local economy, and don't even get me started on the private, for profit, prison industry. EVERYTHING there is based on making a profit, which means that performing a test that costs \$250 per pop is the LAST thing they're going to want to do.

I don't know what your loved one is incarcerated for, but at the end of the day, we're all entitled to certain basic human rights, one of which is a little common decency. It infuriates me to listen to people arguing about why inmates shouldn't be released from prison, and then, in the same breath, argue that these inmates are there because they failed to show their victim(s) any compassion. Putting aside, for the moment, any issues of guilt or innocence, that may be true. We may have failed to show our victims the compassion we should have, but that doesn't mean our mistakes should condemn us to the very real possibility of death. We've all made mistakes, some worse than others, and at the end of the day, shouldn't we all be shown compassion? Not because we necessarily deserve it, but because the very act of expressing compassion makes the person showing it a better person, makes the world a better place to live, sets an example for others to follow, and maybe, just maybe, brings the sort of impact needed to make the person compassion was shown to a better person themselves.



Anyway, if I were you, I'd reach out and try to find some law firms who've already begun to push for the reduction of Florida's prison population, and ask them how you can help. I'd follow this up by reaching out to local activists and seeing if there are any protests planned. If so, show up with everyone you can get in touch with, all while practicing safe social distancing, of course, and make your feelings known, but don't just protest at the State Capitol, take your protests to the Warden's house, the director of the prison system, etc. In many states, these people have the power to release people on their own, they just need to know that, when they exercise this power, they're not going to suffer any repercussions for doing so. Another thing I'd do is consider coordinating a protest all across the state, with a huge group of protestors outside the homes of each one of your State representatives. Democracy is all about our elected leaders doing what it is that we want, not using their position to carry out their own personal or political agenda, so, in theory, if you show up in force, with their constituents, and make it known that, if they don't take immediate action to do something, you'll vote them out in the next election, there's a pretty good chance that they'll take you seriously. ESPECIALLY if you all make it known that you're no longer going to support 1 of the 2 main political parties, but plan instead of electing an Independent.

If I may be so bold, I'd like to take this opportunity to make a general observation. For years, inmates and their advocates have argued about the dangers of isolation, and for years, people have fought us hook, tooth and nail, saying that it wasn't anywhere near as bad as we've made it sound. Trust me when I tell you that, the isolation people in the free world are dealing with is NOTHING compared to the isolation we've had to deal with on a lockdown, in the hole, or worse, in the SHU (Security Housing Unit). In the free world, you get to make your own food, use the phone anytime you want, go out for a walk, play video games, take virtual tours online, play with the kids, make love to your significant other and so much more, but in prison, you have NONE of that. In prison, being on a modified program, in the hole of in the SHU usually means there's absolutely **no contact whatsoever** with **anyone**, unless you count screaming and yelling from one cell to another as "contact." If you're lucky, really lucky, you'll have a book, but not much more.

I make this observation, not because I think this is something you've failed to consider, but because there are no doubt many people reading this who haven't made such a consideration. It's my hope that, even if this doesn't immediately change their mind, it will at least plant the seed for change.

In regards to walking out of the prison gate, I now have just a few days over 5-months left. In theory, I should be thrilled about what the future holds, but the truth of the matter is that I honestly don't believe I'm going to make it, not with the way they're running things in here. Trust me when I tell you that this place has given **every** indication that they're actively **trying** to spread the virus to as many inmates as humanly possible. As of this writing, there are currently 713 confirmed cases of COVID-19 throughout CDCR's 35 prisons, and 454 of them are in here. 7 people in this prison have died from COVID-19 so far, and there's at least one more they're not counting, because they released him from prison 2-days before he died. We now represent more than 10% of this county's TOTAL number of infections, which is saying something, considering that, physically, this is the largest county in California.



About 2-weeks ago, they tested every single inmate in this prison. What do you think they did with the cellmates of the guys who tested positive? At first, no one was moved. Both the infected person and the noninfected person stayed in their cell, with the door to their 6x8 foot cell locked. Then, almost a week later, after having given the noninfected person plenty of time to become infected, they decided to move them to a different cell where, instead of continuing to remain on quarantine, they were allowed to mingle with everyone else. Until tonight, the COVID-19 positive patients have used the showers, phones and dayrooms in the middle of the day, with everyone else being forced to use them immediately afterwards. Keep in mind that we have no ventilation in here whatsoever. And then, this evening, they decide to move all of the COVID-19 guys to the bottom floor, where they've set up a mister fan, spraying water droplets into the path of a fan. So, as you can see, I genuinely believe they're trying to intentionally infect as many people as possible with COVID-19.

I'm spending as much of my time as possible in my cell, with the door closed, in the hopes of avoiding an infection. Sadly, all it takes is that one time to slip up, that one time to touch my nose or rub my eyes, and I'll be infected. I was supposed to earn some additional time off of my sentence, but the COVID-19 crisis means that we can't participate in any of the programs we'd normally be participating in, which in turn means that my sentence has actually been extended as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. In this, however, I'm not alone. We're ALL having the same problem, but the amount of time I was able to earn is counted in mere weeks, while others would have counted that time in months.

If you really want to do something to help your loved one, might I make a few suggestions? Look into getting him a subscription to a newspaper, preferably something with a decent sports page. This will give him something to look forward to on a daily basis, and instead of getting a lengthy subscription, look for the trial offers. USA Today usually has a trial offer of several months for something like \$20. Try it, and then cancel it when the trial is up and find another trial subscription, until you find the one that meets his needs, and your budget. Also, send him a book or two from time to time, in a subject that not only truly appeals to him, but which is written in a manner that will actually teach him something. So many of us focus on what we've lost, instead of trying to turn this into an opportunity. Many in here either cry and complain about the injustices they suffered, or they get wrapped up in things like playing sports, gambling, etc., when what they should really be doing is using this to prepare themselves for their release, to educate themselves, to mend their relationships. Books are a great way of helping bridge some of the gaps, so find out what he's truly interested in and send him something from time to time.



And let's not forget the importance of things like letters and pictures. You have no idea the power a well written letter has, the importance of a thoughtfully taken picture. These are, quite often, our only means of keeping up-to-date on what's going on out there, so, more often than not, no detail is too small to be shared. His buddy just bought a new truck? Take a picture and send it to him. His neighbor just remodeled his house? Send a picture. These are the things that will allow us to keep up-to-date on what's going on, the things which will bring us some sort of normalcy, if there is such a thing, anymore.

Before I close this lengthy response up, I just wanted to say, again, that I sincerely appreciated the fact that you took time out of your day to post a response. As you might imagine, it's incredibly boring, and even lonelier, so seeing something in the mail is a welcome diversion. Good luck with your situation, and I hope my advice was helpful. Should you wish to contact me again, please don't hesitate, either by leaving a response here or at the address listed below.

Shawn L. Perrot CDCR# V-42461  
CIM C-Del Norte Upper: 246L  
P.O. Box 500  
Chino, CA 91708