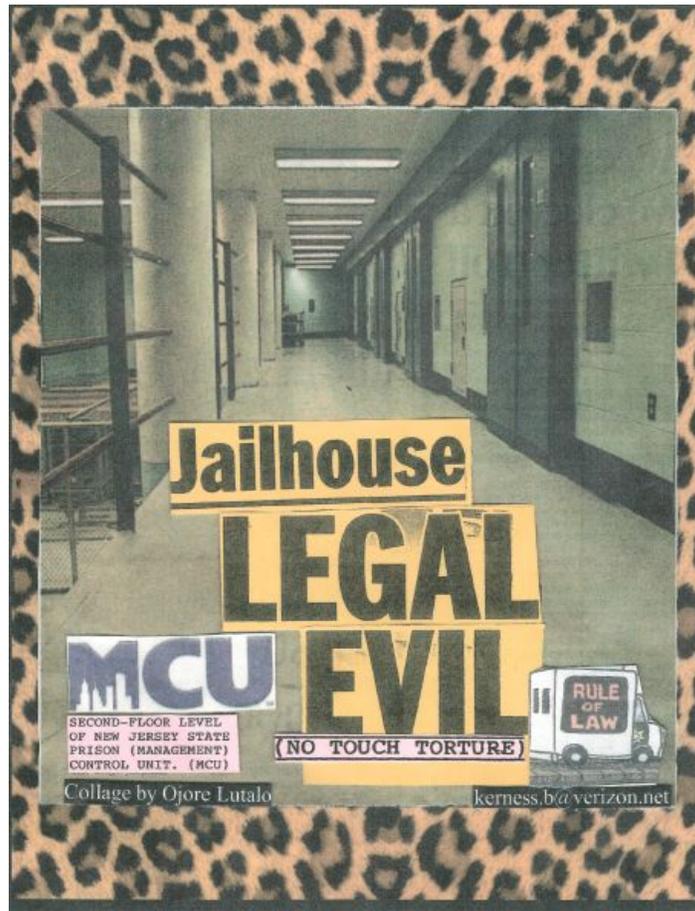


# “FROM THE INSIDE OUT”

A report by the  
Prison Watch Community Oversight Initiative

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Issue #1



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**American Friends  
Service Committee**

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Dear Friends,

This first issue of Inside Out: The Prison Watch Community Oversight Initiative, was suggested by the people confined in the NJ penal system a number of years ago to provide people in the community with specific examples of conditions in our state's prisons. Their feeling - and ours - has been that this kind of initiative will enable more people to better understand the prison system, which is expensive, dysfunctional and largely concealed sector of our society. We believe that such understanding will enable and motivate communication and collaboration in order to more effectively address the problems emerging from these inside reports. We also hope that the connections we create will enable us to eventually serve as an Emergency Response Network, with the capacity to counter individual as well as systemic instances of harm, when the need arises. We think that the information that we distribute should prompt formal legislation that decrees independent prison oversight.

The voices reflected in the reports below are those who have agreed to stay in touch with community-based advocates on a regular basis. They are giving us information regarding what is happening to and around them. Many of these people already communicate with us on an ad hoc basis, to request assistance for others as well as themselves, and to alert us to policies and practices of concern. With this effort we hope to amplify their voices and enhance the effectiveness of their reports. The examples below are illustrative of the kinds of communications we receive, but not the full scope of the problems reported to us. In addition to prisoners' writings we receive a variety of relevant legal documents, which help us understand the conditions and changes taking place within the prison system.

We use the information we receive from people in prison, to try to protect the rights of individuals and families, and mitigate individual instances of harm. What we learn from individuals in prison helps to effect change on broader levels. We work with other organizations including various justice groups, communicate regularly with the Department of Corrections, advocate at legislative hearings and participate in many public education events. Our hope is to increase the number of advocates who will work with us. If any of you have received testimonies to be shared please let us know. Because this effort is so new we are not wedded to the format or the name of the publication. If you have any suggestions for edits please let us know. We have cast a wide net in terms of our mailing list, so feel free to unsubscribe or suggest additional names. Feel free to share and forward this report to any communities you see fit.

In solidarity,

Bonnie Kerness and the AFSC Prison Watch Community Oversight Initiative

# UNTIL

A poem by Lydia Thornton (2016)

*Until you have sat in a cell and listened to the screams reverberate off the steel doors and not be muted by the concrete walls  
You cannot understand.*

*Until you hear the person next to you  
An 8 inch wall depth away  
Say they are going to kill themselves and then go silent  
You will not know Fear.*

*Until no matter how much you yell for the guards, there is no response until their next scheduled walk  
which is an hour from now  
You cannot fathom.*

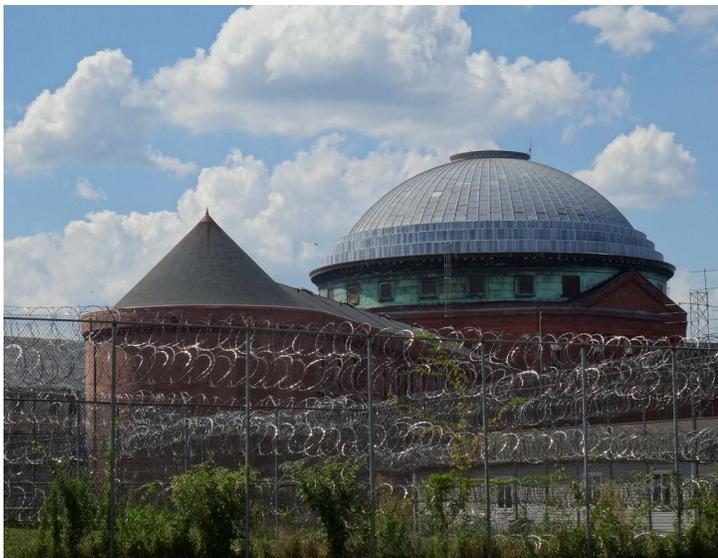
*Until you HEAR  
The despair - the crying - the screaming  
The talking to people and creatures only they can see  
You cannot believe*

*Until for hours you hear both sides of a conversation as their invisible (to you) friend answers back too  
In a different voice  
You cannot comprehend*

*Until you realize that a 10 minute visit to a cell door once a week constitutes mental health care  
You cannot accept.*

*Until you realize that the only human physical contact you will have for months is when the handcuffs are put on you to walk the 25 feet down the tier to your shower.*

*Then  
You too slowly  
But surely  
Give in to the darkness  
Surrender to the Solitude  
And talk to the people that YOU hear  
And hang on  
yVu@*



# East Jersey State Prison

The excerpts from these initial letters from East Jersey State Prison touch on some of the serious problems often reported to us: a crumbling physical infrastructure, poor medical care, and lack of legal access. In the context of continuing problems with the old and new grievance systems, EJSP administrators have insufficient will or capacity to respond to ongoing serious structural problems in the prison.

Initial	Date	Category	Testimony
S.	5/12/16	Medical Care/ Free Exercise of religion	“Refusal of food services personnel to implement medical orders, of long standing, that govern a special kosher diet.”
K.	10/14/16	Cruel and Unusual Punishment: Environmental Conditions	“The infrastructure of the prison is terrible... There is mold... It literally rains inside whenever it is raining outside. Some cells have broken windows, which presents an obvious problem in the winter.”
K.	10/14/16	Access to the Courts	“The law library is in terrible shape. Currently, there are two working computers, (three are not working). These computers allow access to Lexisnexis software, but you cannot download any cases from the Lexis for use on your personal word processor. Hard copies of cases cost ten cents per page. The computers do not have any word processor program. Paralegals do not readily assist inmates; In fact, paralegals work in an area that is separated from the law library. Basically, Rahway’s Law Library is a self service operation with very limited resources.”

# Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women



J has been in touch with Prison Watch for a number of years, often reporting on sexual abuse and other conditions of confinement. In early October, we received a call from a reporter for the Star Ledger letting us know that he was writing a story on a guard who had been arrested a year ago for sexual abuse. Twelve women had accused the officer of sexual abuse and his trial was imminent. He asked that we keep him abreast if any other information came in. We were able to share the name of the officer that J was talking about on 10/14/16. This will be included in his story.

Initial	Date	Category	Testimony
J.	10/11/16	Privacy	"I am sick a lot and when you go into the hospital, which is in the max compound, they strip search you. Sometimes you are being strip searched with other women, I find this very upsetting."
J.	10/14/16	Cruel and Unusual Punishment: Sexual Assault/ PREA (Prison Rape Elimination Act)	"They took another guard out of here in handcuffs the other day for having a sexual relationship with a prisoner. In this case, unlike other cases, the woman wanted to see him."
M.	11/29/16	Cruel and Unusual Punishment: Physical Environment, the Right to Medical Treatment	<p>The NJDOC has bought new vans to transport women to and from doctor's appointment, the prison hospital in Trenton (some 2 hours away) and the courts. Trips can take many hours, to pick up and drop off people at different prisons. M. describes the conditions in the vans which the prisoners call "dog pound trucks." Because of these conditions, people forego seeing doctors and specialists they need.</p> <p>"The inside is complete metal and the seats are 6" off the floor, which kills your bent knees, while the back wall leans in, so you have to keep your chin against your chest to avoid banging your head in a 3 to 8 hour trip. Your hands are cuffed and chained to your waist and you have shackles on your feet, so the lap seat belts don't protect you from being banged against the metal wall. You ride sideways, so people get van sick and the vans won't stop. There are no open windows and no food, no water, no prescribed medicines and no bathroom, but staff stop for food. (We can smell McDonalds and coffee.) The drivers race and bump around the state, and stop abruptly, so people may be flung around in the van. Recently, they painted the van windows black, so people have panic attacks."</p>

# New Jersey State Prison



New Jersey State Prison is the state's maximum security prison. NJSP isolates hundreds of people with solitary confinement, in 5' by 7' cells, in a crumbling building opened in 1836. People have spent decades in the prison's infamous isolation Management Control Unit, an inspiration for the supermax prisons that have sprouted around the country. Despite policies and lawsuits directing that people with mental illness not be confined in isolation, prisoners with severe illness still remain isolated, since mental health resources are insufficient to treat and care for the increased population of people who used to be committed to the psychiatric hospitals of the past.

Initial	Date	Category	Testimony
I.	9/12/16	Mail/ Access to the Courts/ Sexual Assault, PREA Violation	"My legal mail has been opened out of my presence over forty times in three years... I have had three separate officers touch me in an inappropriate way during a search three times."
J.	9/19/16	Censorship of Mail or Publications	"The prison officials withheld the June issue of Prison Legal News (magazine) from prisoners... According to a source, the magazine contained an article about Double locking in N.J. state Prison."
A.	10/14/16	Criminal Offenses (unspecified)/ Property/ Retaliation	"I have become a victim of a number of crimes starting with the total destruction of all of my property... because I got two C.O.'s in trouble... and now I feel that my life's in danger."
J.	10/25/16	Cruel and Unusual Punishment: Isolation/ Family/ Placement	Call from Involuntary Protective Custody Unit. Reports struggling with the isolation. Also reported that a number of people from southern prisons are requesting a change in status to protective custody in order to be moved closer to family. Once it is determined that they do not need PC, they are placed in Involuntary PC, which he is calling torture.
I.	10/27/16	Healthy Environment	"I am experiencing a very nasty chemical medicine taste in my food. I feel very tired and bad after I eat." (attached to an inquiry form)
D.	10/28/16	Searches	He reported that his cell had been "tossed" and was very upset. We called the Department and by Sunday (10/31) he had all of his possessions back and e-mailed to thank us and let us know. (An example of how outside activists reading this can successfully advocate.)
A.	11/1/16	Cruel and Unusual	From someone reporting on another prisoner in 2EE, a unit for people with mental illness: "R. who was on constant watch to prevent suicide, was

		Punishment: Physical Assault/ Disciplinary Procedures/ Isolation of a Person with Mental Illness/ Corruption/ Supervision	<p>challenged to a fight by a CO. The CO went into his cell and assaulted (him), without provocation, by correction officers.”</p> <p>R was placed on 7 wing, in a disciplinary segregation unit. R was not charged, which is unusual under the circumstance. Prisoners report that assaults by corrections officers are often covered up, by causing calling a suicide code to justify entering a cell without supervision by a Sgt., assaulting a prisoner and then issuing an assault code to justify the prisoner-victim's injuries. The alleged assault by the prisoner-victim then becomes the basis for a disciplinary charge against the prisoner-victim, who is subject to a kangaroo court hearing, sanctioned and then placed in a non-mental health solitary confinement cell without the proper clinician screening required by the Department's regulations.</p>
A.	11/4/16	Cruel and Unusual Punishment: Physical Assault/ Physical and Health Environment/ Medical Treatment	<p>“Officer Daniel assaulted me by punching me in the face, then I fell to the metal bed frame and assumed the fetal position to protect myself... I’m constantly in pain.” “The walls (of the cell) have dried spit, blood, and feces on them...”</p>
S.	11/8/16	Abuse of Power/ Investigations / Due Process: Classification/ Isolation	<p>Custody/SID has demonstrated a lack of respect and abuse of power. Placing this inmate on involuntary protective custody because of hearsay is unconstitutional.</p>
E.	11/29/16	Physical and Healthy Environment	<p>“The showers are never clean, you can actually see the mold on the walls and ceilings... Mice and rats running around at nights”</p>



## Northern State Prison

Despite the fact that we received several reports during the week of November 21st that a prisoner died inside Northern State, the Star Ledger reported on November 27, 2016 that, "An inmate died Saturday night [26th] at Northern State Prison." Patrick Lombardi, a spokesman for the Department of Corrections, said that "the cause is under investigation," and that "the male inmate's name was being withheld pending notification of next of kin... the inmate was found lifeless in his cell about 9:00 on Saturday." It should be noted that the date of death reported in the Ledger was different than the date reported by prisoners. It is possible that more than one prisoner died. One person said that the prisoner who died was 70 years old.

Initial	Date	Category	Testimony
E.	8/23/2016	Cruel and Unusual Punishment	"We were forced to lie, face first, in shorts, short sleeved shirts and skin contacting the hot blacktop, nothing short of torture. All the while, I heard staff standing around us laughing... Being forced to lay on the hot blacktop, literally burning, with gravel penetrating our skin... This behavior violates the very premise of the eighth amendment prohibitions to the U.S. Constitution."
E.	9/6/16	Grievances/ Supervision	"I submitted a remedy referencing my complaint. I however did not get any response... This is the norm here."
B.	10/2/16	Cruel and Unusual Punishment: Physical Condition/ Retaliation	"Not only have I been a victim of retaliation, and denial of communication; I have suffered from conditions such as being naked in a supervision unit/suicide watch cell with no mattress or sheets and blanket, 24 hour video surveillance, no toilet paper, no utensils for food, 24 hour lighting in a 24 hour air conditioned cell."
B. & T.	11/3/2016	Environmental Conditions/ Access to the Courts, Grievances, Supervision	"Thick black mold has accumulated in the cell, and the bunk structures are rusty... The mold in the cell was painted over, instead of removed... Rain still comes into the cell, primarily drenching the bottom bunk." The men are not being allowed access to the unit kiosk. B/T have tried to gain relief from this situation by speaking to the area Sgts. and the ombudsman, without response (yet). We have contacted the ombudsman about their situation. They are only allowed to submit grievances every 6 days (if the kiosks works).
W.	11/8/2016	Cruel and Unusual Punishment:	W. has served his 30 year sentence and is now being held without explanation. He was recently beaten by one or more guards and is now in the infirmary. We think that the prison is illegally retaining him in custody

		Assault/ Liberty	until his physical injuries from the abuse are less overt.
W.	11/14/16	Mail	"My mail is constantly intercepted by the Department of Corrections... None of my mail or legal mail was getting sent out by Northern State Prison...."
W.	11/14/16	Cruel and Unusual Punishment: Sexual Assault, PREA violation/ Supervision	"I was sexually assaulted by officers in administrative segregation and assaulted by officers and a Sgt...."
W.	11/14/16	Cruel and Unusual Punishment: Protection from Harm/ Classification/ Supervision	"A guy murdered his cellie after constantly asking to be moved."
W.	11/14/16	Cruel and Unusual Punishment: Healthy Environment/ Equal Protection: Race/ Retaliation	"Blacks were not being fed in N.S.P. (Northern State Prison) ad-seg and the Ombudsman at that time that worked ad-seg was pro police so if you wrote up a c.o. She would give it to the c.o. The c.o. would either break all the persons property or call the person out to a medical and take them in a blind spot and beat the inmate bad..."
W.	11/14/16	Healthcare/ Cruel and Unusual Punishment: Physical Assault	"I suffer from seizures and the left side of my body works when it wants to due to a stroke I didn't know that I had until examined by a doctor... I watched inmates get stomped out by the police various times in here and most of these nurses and doctors will cover the stuff up."
W.	11/14/16	Medical Treatment/ Classification/ Discipline	"I recently went to lock up for refusing to lock in a cell that is upstairs when I'm bottom bunk only and show[ed] the c.o. my paperwork, I was wearing a helmet and walking with a cane I was still sent to lock up. I have paperwork from a judge stating I am not to be housed in N.S.P. I showed it to classification they said judges don't have say over us."



## South Woods Prison

From South Woods State Prison Interoffice Memorandum: "If you qualify to participate in the Food Package Incentive Program please read. ....You may order up to two sub packages of any combination (from Shoprite). Once an order is placed from Shoprite, there will be no refunds. Please specify regular Cola or Diet Caffeine-Free soda. Qualified inmates for the program must be 1 year charge free and a 1 year state inmate. The only payment accepted will be through the inmate's account. Family or friend cannot purchase your package. If you are in detention your package will be....stored for a period of one week. After one week, if the items are still undeliverable, they will be destroyed with no reimbursement to you. If items are not ordered as per established procedure, they will be rejected without remedy."

Initial	Date	Category	Testimony
J.	10/14/16	Family	"This spot is the only spot in the state who doesn't receive a real food package ; but instead we can order two subs... This spot is the only spot in the State that we can not take pictures with our family."

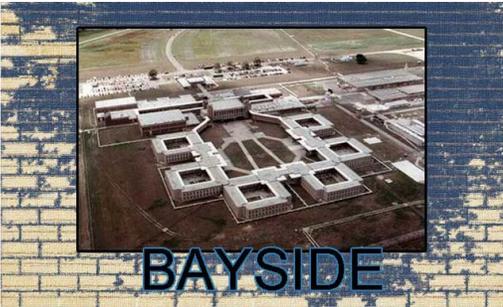


## Southern State Prison

The three massive New Jersey southern state prisons reportedly share a common culture of racism, fear and retaliation. We hear many reports of prisoners who are assaulted at Bayside State Prison and then transferred quickly to Southern State, where they are locked in and medically neglected.

Initial	Date	Category	Testimony
C.	10/23/16	Cruel and Unusual Punishment:	Quoted from a memo mailed to AFSC: <b>Bayside and Southern State Correctional Facility Public Notice 5/2016</b> "The Bayside State Prison Water Treatment Plant is required to monitor Wells 1-5 for volatile Organic

		Environmental Conditions	Compounds and Inorganic compounds. On February 22, 2016 the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) conducted a compliance evaluation and assistance inspection. The evaluation found that the facility failed to monitor for Inorganics and Volatile Organic Compounds during the Federal compliance period of 2014-2016.”
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## Bayside Prison

Currently we do not have any reporters at Bayside Prison. However, we have received many reports from family members and former Bayside prisoners about frequent assaults on prisoners at Bayside, racial discrimination, a carefully cultivated culture of fear, and retaliation for complaints. Therefore we are not surprised that the number of formal complaints received by the prison administration, reported through OPRA, is **suspiciously** and significantly lower than at other prisons.



## Central Reception Assignment Facility (C.R.A.F.)

This is the location where adult men are sent to determine what prison they will be assigned to serve their time in.

Initial	Date	Category	Testimony
A.	11/22/16	Cruel and Unusual Punishment: Right to Psychiatric Treatment	“I am having heart pain, nightmares, feeling like I’m getting raped all over again, and mostly important, I feel like I will die in prison.”



## Morristown County Jail

We are beginning to establish reporters in county jails.

Initial	Date	Category	Testimony
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I.	11/28/16	Access to the Courts	“The law library is inadequate, they have outdated law books, and there are no paralegals, or librarians on staff... The jail officials are labeling certain county prisoners as High Risk and once one is labeled as such, they get handcuffed and shackled on the way to and from the shower, and all other movements... I was found guilty of infractions and never even went to court line.”
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