

Criminal Justice Policy Coalition

A Quarterly Newsletter

Fall 2009



CRIMINAL JUSTICE POLICY COALITION

Collective Action for Humane, Healing, and Effective Criminal Justice Policy in Massachusetts

CJPC Presents a New Format

Welcome to our new format

CJPC is happy to introduce a new format for our newsletter that still contains the substantive information our members have come to expect.

In the last year, the board has undergone small changes, bringing in new members from our community to work with the long serving, dedicated people who have kept the coalition running.

The result is a fresh, enthusiastic board eager to continue the wonderful work of all those who preceded us. One of our first goals was to modernize the look of the newsletter, while retaining the important reporting it always provided.

The first change is frequency. We used to publish the newsletter every month.

While it was great to have such frequent information delivered to our members, the output resulted in less in depth information. By deciding to publish the newsletter on a quarterly basis, we can now take the time to develop analysis in reporting we were unable to provide before. Instead, for quick links and simple articles, that information will be found exclusively on our website. The newsletter will be reserved for submissions by board members, volunteers, and anyone interested in reaching our organization.

The Second change is availability. The newsletter will now be available on-line in its entirety. You can view the newsletter at your convenience. And, it will always be available in archives so that if you want to see something we wrote about long ago, it will be available. For our members who still want to

receive a hard copy, or for those who cannot access the internet, we will still make the newsletter available in hard copy by mail.

Finally, we are introducing segments that will appear in each newsletter. For example, in each edition, we will try and profile a member of our board. The one exception is this edition, in which we briefly profile the entire board. Each edition will have a brief message from the Chairman. And there may be additional segments we introduce.

We are grateful for our loyal members-- some of the most loyal and smartest members any organization can have. We hope you find this new look satisfactory.

- Eric Tennen (Chair)



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24 Hours

by Fred Smith

It was 6:30 pm and I was next in line to declare my presence and to be “processed” into MCI Norfolk, the largest prison in Mass. for male offenders. I was scheduled to speak to the Lifers Group inside Norfolk at 6:00 pm and had been waiting in line since 5:30 pm. Finally the moment arrived and I, along with an assortment of bible study leaders and educational tutors, was screened, searched and escorted through two sally ports, and into the old auditorium adjacent to the visitors center. Greeted warmly by the President of the Lifers Group, I found myself, alone (not a single correctional officer was in sight), in the old auditorium with 150 members of the Lifers Group. Made up of men serving first and second degree life sentences, the Lifers Group, an incorporated organization within the prison, strives to improve conditions both in and out of the prison system.

Speaking before this group is, arguably, the most difficult speaking gig to get. An invitee must be approved by the Superintendent and the subject matter of the talk must be related to issues of release and rehabilitation. The process of “getting in” to Norfolk took all of six months. I was there to bring the message of hope and inspiration regarding the services provided by my employer, St. Francis House, a large day shelter and rehabilitation center in Boston and an important resource for individuals leaving the prison system. I was also there to bring the message of hope through the work of the Criminal Justice Policy Coalition on whose board I sit. At least two members of the Lifers Group have a long history of working with the CJPC in developing white paper research and legislative initiatives. As a matter of fact, one of our Board Members is a member of the Lifers Group.

Interacting with the lifers was educational, inspiring, sobering and transformational. It will certainly fuel my commitment to change the criminal justice system especially as we advocate for the elimination of “life without parole” sentences and, hopefully, as a transitional measure, instituting medical/humanitarian releases. I left MCI Norfolk at 8:15 pm.

Exactly 24 hours later, I found myself at another podium. The event was the 25th anniversary celebration of the founding of my employer, St. Francis House. I was asked to stand in for the Mayor of Boston to present a proclamation to our guest of honor, an ardent and generous supporter of St. Francis House. In the ballroom of the Copley Fairmont Hotel were 400+ individuals, most of whom had spent \$250 for the privilege of being there. It was also an inspiring event as several guests of St. Francis House were honored for their own courageous battle to leave homelessness, addiction and incarceration behind. One of the honorees was a former member of the Lifers Group at Norfolk who I had met ten years before, the last time I had spoken to the Lifers Group. Coincidence? An invisible hand?

I’m not sure, but what I do know is that, as I juxtapose these two 24 hour apart experiences, there was a common thread. Despite the vast difference between the two audiences by any social, economic or influence measure, and as wildly divergent were the two groups’ opportunity for freedom of expression, movement or social interaction, nevertheless, the common humanity of these two groups was profound. The fact of the matter is the Lifer’s Group and the 400+ supporters of St. Francis House had much more in common than they had differences. Thus the imperative: The work of the Criminal Justice Policy Coalition must continually promote education and reform of the criminal justice system in a humane and healing way.



The CJPC Board of Directors

Eric Tennen--Chairman

Eric Tennen has been a practicing attorney for Swomley and Associates since 2004. His work focuses on trial and appellate practice, with a focus on criminal defense and civil liberties. Eric joined the CJPC Board of Directors in 2009.

Walter Stone--Vice Chairman

Walter Stone is the longest serving member of the CJPC Board of Directors. Walter served four years with the United States Air Force. He then graduated from the seminary. Walter is an ex-prisoner who served on a Legal Advisory group. Walter brings tremendous life experience, and a long institutional memory of CJPC history and accomplishments.

Joel Pentlarge--Treasurer

Joel Pentlarge was born in Boston. He established a civil legal aid program in Ware, MA as a VISTA Volunteer and worked as a legal aid lawyer for five years. He experienced the other side of criminal justice system as prisoner for 5 ½ years. For the last several years, Joel has served the board in various capacities including Secretary, Interim Executive Director and, now, Treasurer.

Arthur Bembury

Arthur is the co-founder of several residential treatment facilities for disadvantage youths in Southern California. Currently, Arthur serves as the Volunteer & Community Liaison with Partakers, Inc., a Boston area non-profit organization. As an ex-prisoner, Arthur brings unique experience to the organization, helping address issues of recidivism and the need for rehabilitative and educational programming in Massachusetts prisons. Arthur joined the CJPC Board of Directors in 2009.

Helen Credle

Helen Credle was appointed to the position of Director of the Mature Worker Program for the Urban League of Eastern MA (ULEM) in September 2006. In her capacity as Director, Helen focuses primarily on the improvement of workforce development initiatives that enhance education and instruction in the career enhancement and employment-readiness arenas for men and women 55 plus. Helen joined the CJPC Board of Directors in 2009.

Fred Smith

Fred is the Director of Program Development, Research and Evaluation for St. Francis House, Inc., New England's largest Day Shelter located in downtown Boston, MA. Fred helped develop and, since 1995, direct the highly regarded St. Francis House Moving Ahead Program (MAP), an intensive life skills, career development and addictions treatment program that has been recognized by city and federal officials for its quality and innovative programming. He brings 20+ years of experience in policy development, program design, implementation and training in the field of vocational rehabilitation. Fred joined the CJPC Board of Directors in 2008.

Thomas Neumeier--Intern

Thomas is a first year law student at Boston College Law School and a 2009 graduate of Boston College's School of Arts & Sciences. In the summers before law school, Thomas worked for the Moving Ahead Program at the St. Francis House, developing research and analytical tools for the shelter's guest population. Thomas' policy interests are in poverty relief and the just sentencing/treatment of drug offenders. He is in his first year of working for the CJPC as an intern.



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And Still We Rise!

This year, we are delighted to host a performance by “And Still We Rise”.

“And Still We Rise” is a theatre performance group comprised of social justice advocates and ex-prisoners. Their mission is dedicated to delivering a powerful message of social change. Each of their performances tells the real-life stories of the group’s actors, touching on issues of domestic abuse, addiction and incarceration. They have brought their authentic and inspirational show to venues across Massachusetts and, most recently, New York, where they performed at the Capital Repertory Theatre in Albany. We are excited and thankful to have them perform at our Fall Event!



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From the Chairperson...

I am delighted to be a part of CJPC and the new changes we are undertaking. The newsletter is the first of many improvements the Board is undertaking to make our wonderful organization more accessible to all our members and all who support our cause.

We have great ideas for the coming year, including our annual meeting in the Spring. In the meantime, we have revamped our website and continue to use it as a valuable tool to disseminate information and news on criminal justice developments. Additionally, our newsletters are now all available on line.

I look forward to a bright future for our organization.

Eric Tennen

Board of Trustees

Eric Tennen — Chair

Walter Stone — Vice Chair

Joel Pentlarge--Treasurer

Arthur Bembury

Helen Credle

Fred Smith

Tom Neumeier — Intern

Contact Us: info@cjpc.org

Visit Us on the Web: www.cjpc.org

CJPC is an all volunteer organization and is funded through the gifts and dues of its members and supporters. Have you paid your dues for 2010 yet? Do you wish to contribute to continue the work of CJPC? Please mail your dues or tax-deductible contribution to:

15 Barbara Street
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

Board Notes:

- We are actively working on trying to help pass legislation on compassionate release for medically ill prisoners
- We are already planning our annual meeting in May
- We are working on a formal issue statement on the status of "life without parole"
- We are looking to continue expanding our board membership