

# feedback

inside & outside, voices from the jail struggle  
Durham, NC ~ april 2017 ~ volume 28

## **‘The prison system is a modern-day slave ship’**

To whomever it may concern:

I am a P.O.W. (Prisoner of War) that's being held at Durham County Jail (for a ransom). I just want to share my thought with the public about our criminal justice system and the Corporation of North Carolina and the Corporation of the U.S.A. in general.

First off, we got to understand that all crimes are commercial and profits is being made from it. The ones who benefit are the lawyers, state attorneys (DA), judges, etc. Also, the prisons which is a Business Industrial Complex, and you also have a lot of private factors that are also fattening their pockets. So, I would think that it's fair to say that it's going to be a lot of systems put into place so that crime will continue to grow, and more prisons will be built, because so many have sacrificed 8 years of their life in the study of law to make dollars.

Now, let's deal with facts and statistics. America's power structure is built off of racism and white supremacy, "correct"? Alright. It's a known fact that we (Blacks) are the majority of the governed body of the prison population in the United States. In a 2010 census we were at a 67 percentile. (I might be off a little bit but not much if memory serves me correctly.) Latinos somewhere in the 30% and whites 5% or 10%. Something is very wrong with that picture!!!! And this was 2010. It's more than likely higher or the same now.

So if we make up the majority of the prison populace, then to the American power structure there's nothing wrong with the system because it's putting Blacks, "Black men at that," back where they supposed to be — in slavery. The prison system is a modern-day slave ship that sits on land, not water. Also... back in 1865 the powers that be made vagrancy laws or the infamous Black Code where they made petty offenses major felonies, and this was set up for Black people just like the 1994 Crime Bill that was put in place by the Clinton administration that targeted the Black communities with the 100 to 1 ratio for selling crack, also the mandatory minimums and the gun law and a year for each bullet. Them laws created the mass incarceration you see today. How in the world a person can get 7 years 10 and 15 years for drug offense crimes that's non-violent.

As a people we must wake up. Peace for now.

Sincerely, *The Black Holocaust*

## Break the jail. Now.

*The following was written by a very young supporter of Inside-Outside Alliance at a recent meeting:*

People should help break the jail. One reason is they say they put bad guys in there, but they (jail staff) do bad things, like you only eat certain things. Another reason is some cops just want to be mean and do not care about you. They do not have a life so they come when they want. We will break the jail. If not, we will keep fighting.

What we want to do: Break the Jail.

When: Now.



*Tearing It Down*

### **What is Feedback?**

**Feedback** is a publication of Inside-Outside Alliance (IOA), a group of people trying to support the struggles of those inside (or formerly inside) the Durham jail, and their families and friends. We recognize that any of us can be outside one day, inside the next -- the revolving door of incarceration. We also participate in struggles against police harassment and brutality. IOA maintains a website called Amplify Voices Inside ([amplifyvoices.com](http://amplifyvoices.com)) that publishes the words of Durham jail inmates and former inmates talking about conditions inside and outside and how they see the world.

The name Amplify Voices Inside comes from something a brave and rebellious inmate wrote in the fall of 2012. This publication, *Feedback*, is a sampling of recent contents of the website. When something amplified is redirected at the source of the sound, the effect is called feedback. That is what this is: the voices that have been amplified to the outside world being re-broadcast inside the walls of the jail. *Feedback* is also distributed on the outside and sometimes includes 'outside' voices. Unless a person requests use of their real name, then writers' initials have been changed to protect identities and minimize repressive attacks and harassment.

**To contribute words or art, write to: IOA, PO Box 1353, Durham, NC 27701.**

You may be able to reach us by phone at 919.666.7854

Or, if you are not in jail and are able to, send an email: [insideoutsidealliance@gmail.com](mailto:insideoutsidealliance@gmail.com)

**\* Se habla español. \***

## ‘What a screwed-up system!’

Thanks for your letter. I was surprised and glad to receive it...

I’ve heard some views about bail reform and I hope something positive comes about. These bonds are ridiculously high in Durham County. I just don’t get it. I was very happily surprised last month to hear I had a visitor (I don’t normally get them). I walked into the room and there was IOA member -. He asked me about the court date I had for the week of Feb. 6th, but I did not go. It turned out my lying lawyer again failed to file my motions to dismiss and to suppress in January as promised. Such motions are typically heard during the first full week of the month but must be filed during the previous month at least 5 working days in advance.

I have gone through this b.s. with Woodrena Baker-Harrell every month since last May and I finally got fed up with it...I filed a motion asking to remove and replace her...

Court-appointed lawyers typically use a cookie cutter defense to fix the most clients—the tool of plea bargaining. If the client adamantly insists on going to trial, it pisses Assistant D.A.’s and court appointed lawyers off and you wind up sitting in jail a l-o-n-g time, I believe, as punishment, to force you to acquiesce to some lame-ass plea that in no way is a deal to anyone but the state.

I have no idea when I go to superior court again. Now time is being wasted having to wait for a court date to remove this incompetent lawyer; then get another lawyer and wait for him/her to get up to speed, then have them file motions to dismiss/suppress, and go from there. What a screwed up system!

You guys take care and again, thanks to all of IOA for all you do for all of us in here!

— J.P



*Defending visitation at a recent Commissioners' meeting. Read more on pp. 10-11.*

## **‘There is a word for what they are doing, It’s called price-gouging.’**

Thanks for checking in on me. It’s crazy to think an entire year has passed sitting in this jail! Nothing much has changed since the last time I wrote. At one point the jail was censuring my mail and refusing to give me certain letters, but those issues were straightened out a while ago after addressing the matter with Major Collins. It seems as if the Detention Officers sorting through mail were going above and beyond what they should have. The mail service here has really struck a nerve recently though. Apparently the jail has recognized several days as holidays that are not considered state holidays. As a result mail was not distributed or sent out for 6 days. This not only interfered with communication with family members over the holidays but also directly impeded our access to the courts. I know several individuals who prepared letters to be sent to the courthouse but that was halted until the Detention Officers felt like coming into work and doing their jobs. You are telling me that not a single officer in the entire jail could collect the mail and send it to the post office in that 6 day time period? Come on!

I did catch the “Night Without Detentions” protest on the news where individuals shut down the entrance into the jail by shackling themselves together. I’m glad people on the outside have the courage to

draw attention to the rights Detainees are supposed to have.

I’m also surprised the Human Relations Commission expressed concern about the private companies profiting so much from Detainees. There is a word for what they are doing, it’s called price-gouging. And unfortunately it’s not just the private companies fault, but the jail’s too. From what I understand ARAMARK has won the new contract for canteen/commissary, they aren’t going anywhere. However, the jail charges ARAMARK to sell their products here. Part of the reason prices on canteen are so high is to balance out what the jail charges to even sell the items. We are a captive audience and have no choice but to pay these ridiculous prices on items and ARAMARK knows this. I don’t blame ARAMARK for trying to make money, but there really needs to be boundaries on how much they can inflate these prices!

As for the Human Relations Commission recommendation to abolish bail, seems a bit far fetched to me. I do agree that bail in Durham is excessive in many cases, to the point that not even a wealthy man could post bond. Simply, the point of bond and detention is to make sure you come to court. I would assume many people have all intentions of coming to court, but I know some are going

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to flee any chance they get. For that reason part of me agrees with bond, but something that is reasonable at the very least. Of course everyone who is being detained is going to support the contention of abolishing bail. That would mean we wouldn't be detained any longer. However, I know this jail brings in a lot of money to this city (over \$21 million) and many jobs, all of which would suffer if bail was abolished. The state and county would never let that happen.

I know IOA has worked very hard and has made substantial progress with the jail. What I would like to see is the same progress with the DA's office. I have had the pleasure over the past year to witness a lot of questionable behavior come out of that office. And the Assistant District Attorneys have perfected every under-handed trick in the book to delay, keep you from getting a bond reduction, add more charges months down the road to railroad you and further enhance your bond, mishandle evidence, and did I mention they delay your case? I have heard the prosecutor make every excuse imaginable to continue or delay my case from "I was on vacation and need more time," to "my child was sick and I haven't had a chance to look at the case," and my favorite "I want more time so I can offer a plea bargain he probably won't accept." But yet somehow they always are able to prevail and get a continu-

ance to the next month, sometimes 2 months. With all that said, I'm hoping to move on to trial soon. It only took 14+ months to get to this point. Oh, I forgot to mention I had a court hearing the first week of January, and yes, it was continued to February. I think this excuse tops them all. Over the past year my attorneys have easily whittled away at the state's case and 2 separate search warrants were found to be defective. Which translates to Durham police officers violating my 4th amendment rights and numerous North Carolina statutes repeatedly. Judges ruled in each instance police officers conducted an illegal search. At the court hearing in January, the prosecutor wanted a continuance so they could now go back and search the same place that they had illegally searched to begin with. This is or would be an illegal search again in an attempt to exploit information that a judge has already suppressed. Basically, the prosecutor asked for a continuance so they could conduct an illegal search! Crazy. But nothing surprises me here in Durham anymore. And they got the continuance, hopefully they think twice before acting though.

Alright that's enough ranting – thanks for the letter and updates. I look forward to hearing from you again soon.

– ———

## Death to Imprisonment!

Hello, my name is Brandon Sutton but my friends call me Sutton (Remember that name) and I'm an inmate who is currently on work release from this Zoo called Durham County Detention Center. I'm here incarcerated on a DWI charge, my third one actually. I was fortunate enough to hire a lawyer to reduce what could've been a 3 to 4 year sentence down to 8 months with a few other stipulations given once I'm released. I'm contacting you because they're others like me currently serving time in here. Non-violent/non-accidental prone offenders who have several DWI's but didn't have the means to afford an attorney so they settled for a Public Defender. They put their trust and faith in the Justice System, not looking to get away scot free but in hopes of having a reasonable judgement. The legal minimum for a 3rd time DWI offender is 120 days (especially for a non violent) but because of MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) each one of them has been given the maximum sentence of 36 months which is unfair and unjust. Once sentenced you would think they would be D.O.C but each one of these VICTIMS serve active time here in Durham County. With no drug-treatment program that allows them eligibility of early release.

Speaking of programs, there is barely any here. I spoke with a Captain Spencer, March 13th around 9pm about this issue and how they should

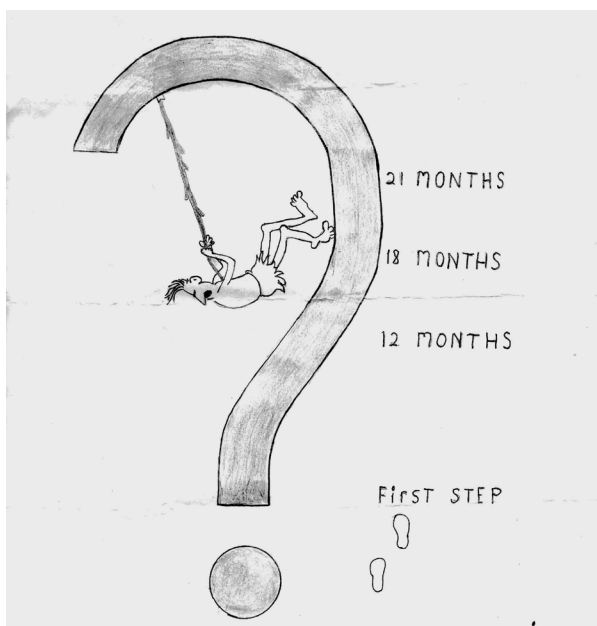
take the Video Visitation funds and invest in educational programs for the inmates because we all know if you don't give us something constructive to do, then we're obviously destructive. She and the other D.O's caught an attitude and said there is a GED program (eligible for teens to 24 yr old) that's been here for years and successfully (and I quote) graduated 2 people!!!

To make matters worst Thelma and Louise (Spencer and other D.O.) stated that this is a short term facility and people other than the ones awaiting trial don't stay longer than 90 days! Meaning that they have no knowledge of the inmates that are 3 time DWI offenders who have to spend their years in Durham County Zoo.

This place is a mad house, majority of the staff are incompetent and unintelligent who barely have high school diplomas. And given the recent experience I've had with the Justice System, it is a money scam that seems racially bias (I say that because all the white offenders with the same number of DWI's I've talked to have lighter sentences with the exception of one individual)

PS: I want to shoutout Ms. W. Cogdell Bell who was the first to talk to me like a human being. I ride for her, she's my Beauty Queen.

- and WE should start a campaign against MADD.



*21 months...*

*18 months...*

*12 months...*

*first step*

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### **‘DCJ: Same shit, different toilet’**

What’s up IOA? Thanks for writing. I’m hanging in there. Can’t really complain, God let me wake up. But as far as DCJ goes, same shit, different toilet. They find a way to make our lives worse by the day. The pod that I’m in has had a problem with our kiosk for damn near a month and the jail has still failed to fix it. Every time we ask a guard about it we get a dumb-ass remark like “The jail has nothing to do with it, talk to Pam.” I mean, damn, we can’t even put in sick calls to medical or to Ms. Kelly. They’re too damn lazy to go get the paper forms, but those wouldn’t work anyway because they never pick them up. So at the end of the day, we fucked. We have spoken to damn near everybody and all they do is sit on their asses. Three officers have tried to help, Hawkins, Crews and Burnett, everybody else could care less. I’ve talked to a couple of people in the pod about the feedback and what you guys do, and they said they plan to write and I hope they do because we need to stand up and fight for what’s right!

I’m not with having my visit on a damn computer. Shit, I hate the glass, but I don’t want to give that up. Thanks for writing, and to King Fox, Rex, Tanna and my baby Bubbles, hold ya head, it ain’t ova. And to Ms. Melanie Battle, I loved your poem, you got skills.

—*Ghost*

## Why would someone facing prison time quit TROSA?

Just short of two months in the TROSA (Triangle Residential Options for Substance Abusers) Program, I walked out the door. I'm facing 30-48 months with three years probation. I took time in TROSA. Now, we've all got our reasons why we're looking for a solution and answers to our drug addictions, alcoholism and other habits that cause us harm. I'm a drunk and I was looking for help.

I couldn't take any notes while at TROSA because they were always going through my things looking for notes because of who I am and that I'm with you guys (I had asked for drawing paper early on when I was there, and shown someone there a picture I drew of the sheriff and never got it back), but I've got lots to say. They're smart and rich and have fooled so many for so long. I have seen so many people's lives that TROSA has destroyed and they can't do nothing about it.

But the truth about TROSA is this: Out of 570 people or so giving time there this year in TROSA, probably 500 of them work an average of 10 hours or more a day 6 days a week, probably around 400 of them work completely for free. But TROSA is getting paid. The other 70 or so are doing jobs that help maintain TROSA housing, by cooking, cleaning, grounds maintenance, and more. Not only are these 400+ working 60 hours a week, around 70 of them besides these long hours are also making TROSA money cleaning up after

ball games each week. Oh, they do get tips, a cold small pizza at 2 am and then back to work! As in, back to work if you make it back to your sleeping quarters by 2, you still wake up at 5:30, then take your shower, dress and eat breakfast and get on a bus by 6:20. Just you and about 250 others guys in line to eat...

For people such as myself who worked for lawn care, we work at least 2-3 games straight before getting a break and guess what, after 90 days TROSA will help you get your license as long as it's not more than \$1,500 in fines or other suspensions. So, remember, they're helping you at TROSA by paying to get your license—so you may work more hours and be more valuable to TROSA! That's what it comes down to. A while ago in California, I was in a Christian group home where we ran the food bank for the community. Well, we also offered free labor, but we wouldn't work more than 8 hours a day, 5 days a week. And we took donations for our food bank and for upkeep, and for the residents as well! Never was anyone questioned about taking tips, not like TROSA where you can't live and they threaten you and ask you to leave if you take a \$2 tip, point blank! No sending their tips to their kids or other family members. They might have back child support, but forget it.

It took me a while to see TROSA's colors, but I would never be so stupid as to ever put my faith in a pro-

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gram as I tried to in TROSA! They call themselves a therapeutic community, but they are no more than a way to con people for profit. I know they say they're non-profit--I'm sure their bookkeeper is so honest! Any-

way, there was no therapy, or talking about our addictions. Just their classes for the first thirty days, and then work, work, work. They won't let you go to church, draw, exercise, or more. They claim they do, but they don't. Don't get tricked by them. You'll see

it's nothing but a con by pros who don't give a shit but about their hunger. I am one of TROSA's victims and I'm writing this because I truly feel these people (from Kevin McDonald on down) need to be exposed and should be held accountable for their actions and give back to the community they have robbed.

-T. P.



## 'I think they wanna control every aspect of each inmate's life'

Ms. ----,

Everybody know that DCJ is the worst jail in NC and now they are going to cut out face to face visits.

I think they wanna control every aspect of each inmate's life. I understand that this is jail but it is very cold in here even in the summer. I don't know why they feel it has to be this way!

Canteen has gotten so bad. That you might get it. Hardly ever do you get everything you order. They need to stop holding people for ransom then maybe they can get everything back on track. I never been one to complain but this jail is just getting bad. Used to be some kind of order now it's just chaos. I thought there was some kind of menu to go by. Seem they just serving everything.

As always feedback made my day. Thank you, Ms. ---- You give us hope when we have none. -Andre

"Everybody know that DCJ is the worst jail in NC"

## VOICES OUTSIDE

### ALL OUT TO DEFEND VISITATION!

On the evening of Monday, March 13, we joined dozens of other Durham community members in bringing the issue of jail visitation to the county board of commissioners meeting where chair Wendy Jacobs was to give the annual state of the county address. We did this because we believe that the state of our county must be measured not from above, from the perspective of strategic planning and public policy documents, but from below, from the jail cells where Durham locks up those whom it finds inconvenient for the sort of economic “development” that that planning and those documents are designed to serve, who are predominantly poor people of color, many of whom are immigrants and members of religious minorities, far, far too many of whom are children. The state of our county is measured best in the maggot infested potatoes they were served last year, the unpaid labor (otherwise known as prison slavery) that was extracted from them on the work pod, and lousy, overpriced medical care that was given to them in the past year, just as it has best been measured, in previous years, by the lockback policy that kept detainees in their cells an average of 23 hours a day and by the murder by medical neglect of Matthew McCain. The picture of the state of the county

that came from Wendy Jacobs’ bully pulpit, the illusion of a corporate paradise fit for bougie hipsters of every race and creed, is an illusion that is maintained by pretending that prisoners’ lives are superfluous, their suffering invisible, and their voices unheard. We came to break the power of that illusion, to call it out for the vicious lie that it is. Prisoners’ lives do matter - to themselves, their friends and family on the outside, and to the wider community of which they and we are a part - their suffering is seen on a daily basis by those who go to the jail to visit and support them, and their voices ring out in grievance forms and letters and poetry and countless other forms of testimony that resound in a thunderous revolt from the inside.

One of the key ways that the County as a whole and the Sheriff’s department in particular tries to hide this state of the county from view is by keeping those detained in the jail as isolated as possible. This is why the Sheriff’s department is notoriously nontransparent about such basic items as their grievance process and whether and how they are cooperating with ICE. It is also one very important reason why the jail is now starting to take away the ability of those it detains to visit with their loved ones. Right now, visitation takes place through a plexiglass window at the jail. If the Sheriff gets his way - and if the

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county commissioners let him - the only "visitation" at the jail will take place through a computer screen, and family and friends of those locked up at the jail will no longer be able to see them face to face. The sheer inhumanity of this arrangement ought to be obvious to anyone who has the naturally human capacity for love, but, for those to whom it isn't obvious, the Durham Human Relations Commission has expressed grave concern on the effect that denying detainees visits from loved ones will have on their mental health and well being. The HRC has also expressed concern that handing over visitation to a private company, Global Tel Link, will open the way to profiting off of it. GTL's own proposal to the county touts video visitation's capacity to "generate revenue" for themselves and for the county. Denying detainees face to face visits with loved ones on the outside is not only profitable indirectly, by protecting the "state of the county" from disrepute, but it is, now, profitable, or at least potentially profitable, quite directly, by turning visitation into just another over-priced company-run service at the jail.

When we went to the commissioners' meeting, we and a number of others read from a script of testimonials from those directly impacted by the decision to move to video visitation.

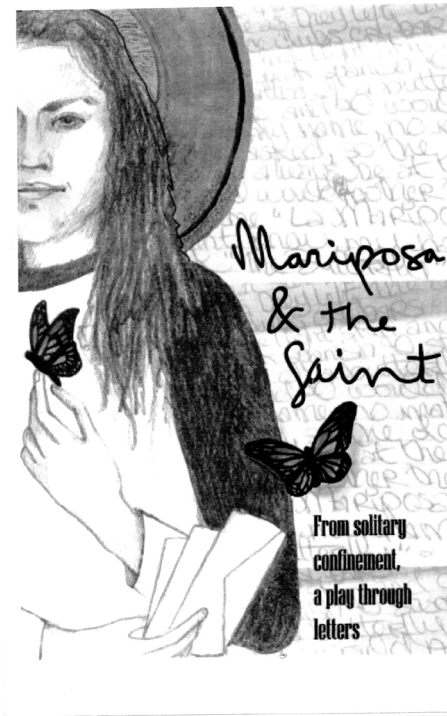
As each person read these testimonials, they were asked to leave the room by a Sheriff's deputy, and

did so. After all of the testimonials were read, we chanted "we will be back" and left as a group. When we got outside, however, a line of Sheriff's deputies was waiting for us and proceeded to physically attack us. They grabbed several of us and threw us to the ground. When one of us asked for the deputies' badge numbers, they were arrested. The deputies encircled the group, and, when they ordered us to leave and we complied, beginning to back away, they began to make more arrests, arresting five of us in total. While we intend to fight the bogus charges the Sheriff's department booked us for, that is not the point of this statement. What must be emphasized here is that this is how scared and angry the Sheriff's department is about the possibility of an open debate about video visitation - a debate that we and others organizing with Inside-Outside Alliance intend to have and mean to win. They know how they will look in such a debate - like a callous bureaucracy whose chief end is to dehumanize those in their tender "care" and profit off of them whenever possible - so they wish to keep what they are doing in the dark. Yet, as we know from the campaign for Justice for Matthew McCain, "what's done in the dark will be brought to the light!" They dragged us to jail, but we will drag them - kicking and screaming if need be - into the light of day.

In struggle,  
Greg, Mia, Le'Andre, Joe, Rann

## Mariposa and the Saint

On Saturday March 4, The Pinhook in downtown Durham hosted the traveling play Mariposa and the Saint: from solitary confinement a play through letters. A creative collaboration between Sara Fonesca and Julia Steele Allen, the play came about after Fonesca was sentenced to 15 months in the Secure Housing Unit (solitary confinement) at the California women's prison in which she was incarcerated. The two had been corresponding for about seven years, but when Fonesca (aka Mariposa) was put in solitary, she really needed a creative outlet, and the idea for the play was born. Although Mariposa is still incarcerated, the play has been performed in a number of states and continues to bring attention to the horrors of solitary confinement and incarceration, and to the extraordinary creativity of those this nation chooses to imprison. Inside-Outside Alliance partnered with All of Us or None and the playwright to bring this performance to Durham.



### Solitary Confinement by the numbers:

- Individuals held in isolation in U.S. prisons, on last count: 81,622
- Approximate number held in long-term solitary in the UK: 57
- Estimated number in long-term solitary in supermax prisons: 25,000
- States that practice solitary confinement: 50
- States with supermax prisons designed to keep people in isolation: 44
- Percentage of prison suicides that take place in isolation: 50%
- Average size of a solitary confinement cell, in feet: 7 x 10
- Average size of a parking space, in feet: 8 x 16
- Hours a day people in isolation spend inside their cells: 22 to 24
- Hours they are allowed to exercise in a fenced or walled "dog run": 1-2
- Percentage of people sentenced to solitary confinement by a judge and jury: 0
- Percentage placed in solitary by corrections officials: 100
- Average cost of keeping a person in U.S. prison for a year, in dollars: 25,000
- Average cost of keeping a person in solitary for a year, in dollars: 75,000
- Percentage decrease in prison violence through the use of solitary: 0

statistics provided by Solitary Watch  
([solitarywatch.org](http://solitarywatch.org))