

STATEVILLE SPEAKS

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE • SPRING 2017

JOHN HOWARD ASSOCIATION: A NEW LOOK AT AN OLD ORGANIZATION

By Evan Griffin

The first time I heard the name John Howard Association (JHA), it was a cold day in 1985. I was a seventeen year old kid who was just transferred to Statesville, from Cook County jail, after being sentenced to what I believed at the time, would be a life sentence.

I remember being asked by a guard to take out the garbage I had stuck between the bars of my cell. I responded angrily, "If you want it removed, do it yourself". He explained to me that "The John Howard Association will be touring the cell house". I remember other inmates talking negatively about John Howard and accusing them of working for the state. I didn't give much thought to it, but as the years went by, I began to learn a little more about this organization. One thing that was very clear to me was even with the little resources they had, they still found time and had the desire to help me and countless others, in various ways. I was also fortunate to meet some of the volunteers at JHA, who were clearly sympathetic to our conditions and would do all they could to improve them.

In 2012 after serving 29 years, I was released. Within months I found myself volunteering at the John Howard Association office. I was very impressed with the level of dedication these people had; working to ensure that ALL incarcerated men and women have access to medical and dental care, education and to ensure that no one was being mistreated.

As we all know, the wheels of justice turn extremely slow, and prison reform, at times, even



slower. Like many others who are frustrated with the system due to the bureaucracy and red tape, I sometimes felt that criminal justice advocacy organizations were just store front mannequins with little bark and no bite. I learned very quickly that in the case of JHA, it's simply not true. I watch these hard working dedicated men and women, many who are not getting paid, spend countless hours working to ensure that prison reform takes place and that ALL the incarcerated are treated fairly.

I gained so much respect and admiration for the John Howard Association, that when I was asked to consider a position as a Board Member, I jumped at the opportunity. Not only was I going to be

on a Board of a great organization but I would now be in a position to help guide JHA in a direction that can be more beneficial.

I am proud to say that I am an ex-convict who has taken advantage of the second chance opportunity. I found employment with a large power company and I enjoy giving back to my community and to those I left behind who struggle every day to get that "second chance." I spent 11 of my 29 years in prison on Death row, where I learned the true meaning of life and appreciation for the lives of others. That experience made me even more proud to say that I sit on the John Howard Association Board of Directors.

A few months ago I was at-

tending a JHA event in the downtown area. I was surprised to find a few picketers outside the event. I quickly asked fellow Board members what was going on and I was saddened to hear the picketers chanting that John Howard Association condones and supports torture. I wanted to know why there was a group of people that would say this. I came to find out that there were a few people who did not understand the position of the John Howard Association on HB 5417*, a bill to limit the use of solitary.

The fact is the John Howard Association did support HB 5417 and opposes the use of solitary, but voiced concern about language in the bill that could create some problems while trying to solve others. I learned that John Howard Association contacted the people who wrote the bill to work with them on changing wording to make sure that the concerns were addressed and improve its chances of passing and being effective. One problem was how the bill might affect those in general population, particularly those in maximum security prisons, who, as a matter of fact, could have ended up getting less out of cell time than people in solitary - which clearly would not be fair or work well. We also think it would be helpful if Illinois looks at solitary reforms that other states have implemented that have worked. For over a hundred years JHA has served the incarcerated to ensure meaningful prison reform for all, and we plan to continue doing that through opposing the use of solitary as well as in other ways.

I was very pleased to learn
SEE NEW LOOK, PAGE 5

ABOUT THE JOHN HOWARD ASSOCIATION OF ILLINOIS

Promoting public safety through cost-effective prison reform

WHO IS JHA?

- JHA is Illinois' only independent prison monitor and advocate for criminal justice reform.
- JHA is not a government agency. JHA is not a law firm. JHA is a citizen monitor.
- The reason we do what we do is because we believe that all people have fundamental human rights, which include the right to be treated fairly and with dignity.

WHAT DOES JHA DO?

- We visit over a dozen Illinois adult and juvenile prisons every year to observe prison conditions and to ask prisoners and staff how to improve prisons.
- We work for reforms to improve the prison system and to make prisoners' lives and public safety better. This includes working for better healthcare, jobs, education, and treatment programs.

WRITE JHA TO...

- Report an issue or problem. JHA uses the information you provide to learn about what is going on in prisons so that we can work to make the prison system better. As citizen monitor, JHA does not have authority over state government. So, as much as we would like to produce a fair outcome for every individual that writes to JHA, we cannot, because IDOC has complete control over its own operations. We encourage people to write JHA because letters we receive from incarcerated persons let us know what is going on behind prison walls. Also, prison policy and practices impact you, so you have the right to express your opinions as to operations and conditions.
- Ask a question about prison policies and practices: JHA will try to answer all prison and other criminal justice related questions to the best of our ability.
- Request information: JHA may provide publically available information such as copies of laws, court decisions, legal forms, pris-



on rules, JHA monitoring reports, newspaper articles, contact information for organizations that provide direct services to prisoners and their families, etc, to the extent that we are able. The general rule is that the information or documents requested from JHA must be able to fit into a standard 8.5 X 11 manila envelope for us to send them to you.

OUR ADDRESS

JOHN HOWARD ASSOCIATION
PO BOX 10042
CHICAGO, IL 60610-0042

Note: Write **"PRIVILEGED MAIL"** on the envelope and seal the letter, if you want the letter to be confidential. ■

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE C-NUMBER CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION

By Johnnie Khalif Veal

We commend the dedicated volunteers and former C-numbers associated with the C-Number Campaign Organization. Our entire community family sees you as the forerunners for an epic battle on behalf of the remaining 270 C-numbers. We encourage you to strive together and understand that our cause is a marathon and not a sprint.

You must not be discouraged with apathy and political missteps in our struggle for social justice and prison reform. The defeats and setbacks you have endured only strengthen your resolve for future encounters with prison reform. Your accomplishments have been many and well documented. Take pride in knowing that you have saved many C-Number inmates lives after decades of imprisonment and returned them to their families.

The death of Mr. David Saxner and Mr. James Yaki Sayles has been a great loss to our entire community. The legacy they left behind as dynamic leaders and fighters for justice must not be forgotten. The passion and vigor they displayed on behalf of social justice and prison

reform must be continued by us all. We are committed to carry the torch* and the vision of our original mission statement to return all C-Numbers to their families.

However, take a moment to breathe and revive your purpose as an organization. Make an assessment of your organizational needs and set a plan in place to address those needs. The uncertainty of your organizational existence and current effectiveness to address C-Number concerns must not be interrupted as a sign capitulation in this struggle. You must develop a media communication platform such as: a newsletter, e-mailing list, community news conferences, website content or forming a strategic partnership with like-minded organizations that publish their own newsletter. This will allow you to inform the community that has embraced and supported the C-Number dilemma.

The most pressing concern for C-Numbers is the legislative passage of the five multi-year set. The effects of this passage are basically a death sentence for this elderly class. So we say

with encouragement, "you are not beaten, you only have been knocked down" so stay in the fight and make a difference in social justice and prison reform.

(*A torch we see being held by Aviva Futurian, civil rights attorney and member of the JHA, who faithfully attends the Prisoner Review Board's C-number hearings.) ■

SUBMISSIONS WANTED

To submit an article, essay, letter, poem or artwork for publication, please see address on page 3. Please do not send original work, as we cannot return them. Please limit articles to around 500 words. Articles may be edited for length.

SPONSORS NEEDED

To make a donation to, or to sponsor an issue of, Stateville Speaks, please contact Dr. Cris Toffolo, NEIU Justice Studies Chair, at 773-442-4761.

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to this latest edition of Stateville Speaks, it has been long overdue and we thank you for your patience. No, we are not out of business, but having some difficulties staying out of the dumpsters at a couple of the Medium Security Prisons. We can only attribute that to new management teams that are unaware, or perhaps just do not care about proper procedures, constitutional law or even specific court orders- how ironic. We will continue to address this problem.

My biggest printed regret has always been in the past John Howard Association edition (Summer, 2012), which read like a press release, which for the most part, was. But, throughout their long standing, and vital changes in management over the last few years, it must be noted, they "ain't" your JHA of old. They have been very proactive and vocal against inhumane practices and laws involving IDOC and the criminal justice system in whole. They should be applauded for what they do, and we are applauding.

As you may know (or not), the Governor's Final Commission Report is out. It combines the Part I with Part II in the Final Report. Along with the Warden's copy of Stateville Speaks, we will be including a copy of that report for each of the IDOC adult facility libraries, so that you may read it in its entirety. We trust they will not be censored...

In the meantime, we ask you to stay safe, not to give up hope and keep those submissions coming. We have a whole new edition right behind this one filled with your amazing work. And for that we thank you. ■

HB 1764

Postpartum depression (PPD) and postpartum psychosis (PPS) are mental illnesses striking mothers. The depression has been known to trigger suicide in untreated, severely affected new mothers. Cruelly enough, psychosis has been linked to incidents of infanticide. Thankfully, since 2008, Illinois screens for both PPD and PPS. This legislation identifies mental health issues at time of birth.

In Illinois there are about 20 women serving long sentences convicted of infanticide brought about by PPD or PPS. The women had been suffering from these illnesses but were not properly diagnosed, thus they went untreated. Consequently, at their trial, their mental illness was not submitted as mitigation. Fortunately, these women have since been properly diagnosed and treated.

But, along with proper diagnosis comes the need for simple justice. HB 1764 can do just that. It provides for these women to petition the court to have evidence of PPD or PPS, diagnosed by a qualified physician, submitted as mitigating evidence. HB 1764 was approved in House by a vote of 113 to 0.

HB 1764 was sponsored by Representative Linda Chapa LaVia (D-83rd) and co-sponsored by Representative Jehan A. Gordon (D-92nd), Representative Robyn Gabel (D-18th), Representative Melissa Coneyears-Ervin (D-10th), Senator Toi W. Hutchinson (D-40th), Senator Mattie Hunter (D-3rd), Senator Cristina Castro (D-22nd) and Senator Patricia Van Pelt (D-5th). ■

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STATEVILLE SPEAKS

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Please do **not** send originals.
Please limit essays to around 500 words.

MARCH MADNESS COMES TO STATEVILLE

By Mom

Recently Stateville Correctional held their first ever "March Madness" basketball tournament. And it was quite successful.

Assistant Warden Nicholas organized teams from different cell blocks and over a few weeks the teams played one another, on the road to the championship. As the mother of one player, I found this extremely morale boosting and a positive in their lives.

Some of the inmates have been incarcerated for many years, but have never had this opportunity. I can only imagine how they felt being a part of his event and being able to interact with other inmates, as team players.

On Monday, April 17, 2017, the final was played with one team winning the championship title. The team picture and trophy are on display in the visiting room.

Ex-Bull player, Craig Hodges, was a spectator at the final games and awarded the 3-point contestant winner his award.

We've been told that more sports programs will be formed in the future, involving more of the inmates. I believe this is a positive for Stateville Correctional to be undertaking and giving these men the opportunity to build their self-esteem. ■



JHA IS HERE TO HELP



By Sal Barry

Most people involved in the criminal justice system have heard of the John Howard Association (JHA). However, not many know exactly what they do. And who is this John Howard guy, anyway?

John Howard (1726-1790) was an English humanitarian who was considered the father of prison reform. Howard was appointed as High Sheriff of Bedfordshire, a region in England, in 1773. Whereas most sheriffs delegated prison inspections, Howard – who was briefly a prisoner of war -- inspected the prisons himself and was horrified at the cruel treatment and unsanitary living conditions endured by the inmates. Howard visited hundreds of prisons across Europe, wrote three books about prisons and made it his life's work to push for better conditions and treatment for the incarcerated.

Established in 1901 as the Central Howard Association and renamed the John Howard Association in 1946, JHA is an independent prison watchdog group in Illinois. It is non-partisan, not-for-profit and does not receive any state or local funding. JHA monitors prison practices, policies and facilities, like the man who it is named after, advocates' reform for Illinois' criminal justice system.

One way JHA monitors adult and juvenile prisons is by touring them, talking with inmates and employees, and then reporting their findings. JHA then pushes for legislation to

Left: John Howard (1726-1790) was considered the father of prison reform.

improve prisons and serves on advisory boards of correctional agencies. JHA takes correspondence from inmates and their families and advises them on what support they may be able to provide. JHA also holds Legal Literacy Clinics inside of the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC) to educate juveniles, held in pretrial detention, who are facing adult charges. More detail about JHA's mission can be found on page 5 of this issue.

Based on your letters to Stateville Speaks, we asked their Executive Director Jennifer Vollen-Katz; to answer some of your most frequently asked questions:

SS: How was JHA chosen to be a watchdog of IDOC?

JHA: JHA was founded in 1901, which was the beginning of the organization's relationship with the correctional system in Illinois. The relationship between JHA and IDOC, and the role JHA has played as a watchdog, has evolved and changed over the years. JHA was not so much chosen to be a watchdog, as became one based on what the organization along with Illinois stakeholders thought was needed inside our prison system.

SS: Is IDOC a willing participant in the oversight?

JHA: IDOC is a willing participant, the Department allows JHA into the prisons for monitoring visits even though the organization is not a legislatively mandated state prison watchdog, monitor or inspection agency.

SS: Since the IDOC is given advanced notice, how effective are your visits?

JHA: We think unannounced visits would be helpful to our work. However, JHA is allowed into every area of the prisons and IDOC continues to allow us into all the facilities without having a legal obligation to do so and people continually bring issues within prisons to our attention. In addition to contacts on visits, prisoners can also share information with us through privileged mail, which is a way to alert us to problems or improvements. Additionally, JHA regularly hears from family members, friends, formerly incarcerated individuals, as well as staff, outside of visits. Seeing conditions inside prisons and speaking to those who live and work there is essential to our work.

SS: Does JHA have open or limited access to IDOC?

JHA: Limited access, we would very much like to have increased access to data, policies, and also the ability to visit prisons without advance notice being provided because we believe just the possibility of an outside party showing up at any time can have benefits in terms of system accountability and behavior.

SS: You are allowed to interview individual inmates, does this include those in segregation, solitary or AD?

JHA: Yes, we are allowed to interview individual inmates from every unit, including segregation, solitary and AD. Sometimes we are precluded from going onto a particular unit because of a specific safety or privacy concern staff may have that day.

SS: What are the most important changes JHA would like to see? Specifically, what policy or legislative changes would you like to see?

JHA : JHA would like to see many changes happen within IDOC, as well as in the Illinois' criminal justice system as a whole. Communities that send many people into prison need infrastructure support in order to divert people onto a different path at an early age. Law enforcement needs to build community trust and help communities, not tear them apart. Not every case should be pursued, and if a case moves forward prosecutors should be clear about their role in the system and in feeding mass incarceration in Illinois and throughout the country. The courts need to find other options for people that do not belong in jail or prisons, and to consider the actual sentence needed or deserved in each case in order to cut down on excessive prison sentences which increase overcrowding. For those people who end up in the deep end of the system, prison, our correctional system requires fixing from bottom to top; from the physical conditions inside Illinois prisons to increased rehabilitative programming, treatment, medical care, access to family, and reentry planning, to the overcrowding and having an effective grievance procedure. Illinois must use resources effectively to help prisoners become successful returning citizens when they come back to their communities and neighborhoods. Increased opportunities for rehabilitation are important for prisoners not only to be successful when released but also as a way to earn good time credit in order to shorten prison sentences. And Illinois must never lose sight of the fact that every citizen should be treated with dignity and respect for his or her human rights.

SS: What advice can you offer prisoners that are losing hope?

JHA: What we can tell you is that we have seen encouraging changes inside Illinois prisons in recent years; these include plans for more adult

reentry facilities in the past year, the creation of an Office of Juvenile Ombudsman for the juvenile system, recognition of need for mental health education and treatment, and efforts underway to limit the use of confinement. Community and legislative attention to criminal justice issues is increasing as more people in Illinois and throughout the nation reject the legacy of mass incarceration. JHA will continue to fight for reform and more improvements inside Illinois prisons. We believe that there must always be independent parties inside prisons and jails because the presence of outside parties has been shown to be valuable in curbing abuses, correcting problems, and shedding light on issues inside prisons to the outside world. JHA wants every prisoner to know that we will continue to act as a watchdog and push for changes to improve prison conditions, increase rehabilitative programming, treatment and medical care, and that we are available to hear your thoughts and concerns either on our visits or in a privileged letter to us.

Sal Barry is the Layout & Design Editor for Stateville Speaks. ■

JHA: OUR MISSION

The John Howard Association (JHA) independently monitors correctional facilities, policies and practices, and advances reforms needed to achieve a fair, humane and effective criminal justice system.

Why does John Howard Association fight for criminal justice reform?

- We believe that all lives matter
- We believe in second chances
- We believe in government accountability and transparency
- We believe that Illinois deserves a fair, effective and humane prison system
- We believe that an informed citizenry is essential to such a system

We are one of the most frequently quoted sources for reliable, independent information and commentary about Illinois' adult and juvenile prison system.

John Howard Association is a nonpartisan organization, and we receive no state or local government funding. Our funding comes from committed individuals and organizations interested in criminal justice reform. ■

NEW LOOK, FROM PG 1

that just recently the staff at JHA sat down with representatives from the group that worked on the original bill and had the opportunity to discuss the bill and explain their concerns – the group thought that these concerns made sense and should be addressed. Now they are working together to come up with solutions to make a bill stronger and better.

For a small group to say the JHA supports torture is ironic. As anyone who has followed prison reform can tell you, John Howard was instrumental in the closing of Tamm's. Our outrage at the treatment of Tamm's inmates was far beyond simple dissatisfaction. We were very active in not just closing down the place but in helping many receive needed mental health help upon their return to general population. We also pushed for ending the use of solitary in the juvenile prisons, now solitary is almost totally eliminated in those facilities and there have been positive changes to out of cell time that impact all the youth. We also are very active in supporting and helping C number inmates receive that second chance, as well as many other that we fight for on a daily bases.

John Howard wants to be sure that ALL the incarcerated benefit and that the benefit is real. John Howard Association is your Association. We will continue to work on issues that impact inmate's lives on a daily basis and to fight for reform for ALL of those incarcerated.

*HB 5417, Session Sine Die, 1/10/2017

Evan Griffith is an ex-IDOC resident and has a John Howard Association Board Member since 2016. ■

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reform efforts. Visit
www.illinoisprisonstalk.com
to learn more.

REFLECTIONS UPON THE CURRENT



By Carlton A. Nixon

Mental visions of a dispensation

A time when blackness stood in solidarity across the nation
Above and below the Mason-Dixon existed no divide in the struggle for equality

Today I question the substance of men and wicked ideologies
Please stop, take a moment of silence for murder victims of violence –
too great a number to count
More killing, then healing

Open scars upon hearts of children with fathers behind bars
Living to gamble with life as the odds

A high stakes game with no winners
Deadly beginners blowing holes into future generations
Influenced by substance which control broken souls
Pardon me for holding up a mirror

What I'm trying to see is me, however, the background reveals I may
likely be killed for being me – black

My own appears more enemy than the boys in blue
Hands up don't shoot, it's hard to know whose worst
Could it be he who pulls his gun first?

Kids killing kids, that's the KKK
Who introduced us to guns in the first place?

We were once considered three-fifths a man by he who stress the right to
bear arms throughout the land

He bears arms against us, never upon his own; we bear arms against self,
which act is a greater wrong?

Freedom of speech, peace talks killing my vibe
Damn near died over foolish pride gangbanging with tribes

Blood on my hands, still I'm not a lost soul
Praying I'll be able to embrace my victims at the crossroad

Why so much decadence amongst a people?
Why to live we must witness evil?

Could they be one and the same?
Check the spelling before you complain

Feeling like Bobby Seal before Cointelpro?
Where did our black pride go?

If black lives matter, stop the killing in the streets of Chicago
S.O.S., Save our sons

Please young brothers put down those guns ■

Stateville Speaks is generously
supported by Cynthia Kobel and the
Kenneth and Harle Montgomery Foundation.

THE SYSTEM OF JUSTICE AND THE PRISON LAW LIBRARY

By Herman B. Williams

In prison, there are innocent as well as guilty, with all types in between. Of all of them, there are those who, with passion and drive, litigate their cases, seeking freedom from a system of justice, which is so broken, it's nearly beyond repair. To them, the system wronged them; they were ignorant of the law and procedure. To them, their ignorance will never hinder their cause again, in their pursuit for justice. Right is right and nothing or nobody will tell them differently, especially the broken system that is justice. Sadly, the system has beaten down many. Innocent and guilty alike have given up all hope, accepting to live a life which is nothing more than an existence in what is a flesh warehouse. The broken system wins, sad but very true.

The broken system that is justice requires all prisons to have and maintain a prison law library. This idea is good! IDOC makes every effort to keep prisoners in prison. Not for security and to keep the public safe. It's job security. No prisoners, no need for prisons. No prisons, no prison staff doing the minimal amount of work for maximum pay. Due to legal liability restrictions, staff cannot help inmates with legal issues- understandable.

In prison, specifically in Stateville, there are some truly inspiring legal minds. Skilled and capable litigators of which most could most likely walk out of prison, take and pass the bar exam and be licensed lawyers, if the broken system of justice would allow it. It does not. They are called jailhouse lawyers. Many have excellent reputations as litigators. As with most everything, admittedly, like lawyers on the street, there are fakes, frauds and phonies.

Most all would think, even believe these jailhouse lawyers with above board reputations would be sought and assigned a law clerk to help aid and assist prisoners with their varied and numerous legal issues. Sadly, this is IDOC. Worse, this is part of a culture unique to Stateville. Here in Stateville, such isn't the case. Stateville prefers law clerks with limited to no legal skills, like the prison staff, lazy and self-serving. Those truly uninterested in helping inmates with their legal matters. Even worse, assign inmates who steal several thousand dollars of legal books to sell for pennies on the dollar. This isn't stealing from the law library. It's stealing from everyone imprisoned in the Stateville flesh warehouse.

Sadly, the Stateville culture often rewards incompetent laziness. The dedicated and hardworking become outcasts, especially those who go and continue to go the distance to help everyone seeking justice from the unjust system. Rumor and lies abound, mostly started by the incompetent ones assigned to the law library. In Stateville, there's nobody who cares especially those in power. After all, it's job security to keep us incarcerated. ■



FILM SCREENING AND ART SHOW

SATURDAY, AUGUST 19 FROM 1 PM TO 5 PM

3000 N. LAKE SHORE DR. CHICAGO IL

Join us on Saturday, August 19 from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. for a film screening, art show and barbecue.

Stateville Calling is a documentary featuring the story of elders, told through calls and visits between Bill Ryan, (who turns 83 on August 18) and four incarcerated people: Janet Jackson, Renaldo Hudson, William Peebles, and Paula Sims. Ryan and these incarcerated people have been friends for up to 25 years, beginning with the fight against the death penalty.

The Prison+Neighborhood Arts Project (PNAP) will also be exhibiting creative work produced by incarcerated artists, many of them elderly, serving long sentences. The exhibit will include several books by Joe Dole; illustrations by Arkee Chaney, Paula Sims and Alfredo Natal; and poems by Janet Jackson, Donald McDonald and many others.

Joe Dole, William Peebles and Arkee Chaney are all students at Stateville and Stateville Speaks contributors. Please come out and support them!

The documentary has been made by the fantastic Scrapers Film Group, who is sponsoring the fundraiser on August 19. There will be a sliding scale admission charge, but no one will be turned away.

Attend and spread the word. Mass incarceration will not end until we free people serving long sentences and stop excessive sentencing altogether!

-- Sarah Ross

Prison+Neighborhood Arts Project



Fair Justice
by Alfredo Natal

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Stateville Speaks is housed and creatively supported, **but not funded financially**, by the University. Stateville Speaks is free to inmates that cannot afford it. The \$10.00 subscription fee is appreciated and accepted from those that can help defray our publishing costs. Stateville Speaks can only continue toward positive reform with your support.

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POLITICAL 'TOON

BY ARKEE



PNAP ACADEMIC IS THE ONLY ONE WHO DEALS WITH EDUCATION. BUT IT'S NOT ENOUGH!



PEOPLE PAY TAXES FOR PRISONERS TO BE EDUCATED, REHABILITATED, AND TAUGHT WORKABLE SKILLS. TAX PAYER DOLLARS ARE SUPPOSED TO TAKE CARE OF PRISONERS MEDICAL NEEDS. NONE OF THIS IS TRUE. AND A NATURAL LIFE SENTENCE IS, IN FACT, A DEATH SENTENCE. THE DEAD ARE AMONG US.

BY ARKEE ©

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