

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM?

MR. KAMAURI A. YOUNG #753006

As a physically confined prisoner within the Michigan Department of Corrections, I often find myself wondering, what is the purpose of the criminal justice system? Are there levels to the justice/ rehabilitation system that has demanded that us prisoners that have scarred the eyes of society with our depraved actions be punished continuously? At a point in time in my life, ignorantly, I thought my actions were justified or at least the more reasonable ways to handle situations and confrontations. Still, this whole "Department of Corrections" is a sham. I have come to learn from experience that not only is the MDOC an institution designed to warehouse convicted felons, but it is a double punishment because you are sent here as a punishment and then punished because you are here. So, my next question would be, is this the "justice" that ultimately leads to the road of rehabilitation that is promoted to society to fund these institutions with their tax dollars? **Justice** is defined in Websters Dictionary as the administration of law; fairness. **Rehabilitate** is defined as to reinstate; make good or usable again. Individuals are sentenced to the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections under the belief that they will "create a safer Michigan by holding offenders accountable while promoting their **success**." (Michigan Department of Correction Mission Statement) this is what is being promoted. When that is the furthest thing from the truth, this institution could genuinely care less about the goal of rehabilitation. Dehumanization, degradation, humiliation, abuse of power, racial inequalities/ bias/ insults, and an extreme lack of accountability are among the levels of mental, physical, and emotional abuse that resides within the chain of command and fuels the staff corruption within this institution .

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Now of course prison is not supposed to be a hotel or a comfortable setting because it is meant to be a punishment for crimes committed, but the purpose, I would have thought, would be to provide a safe structured environment of discipline in order to rehabilitate individuals for the sole purpose of mental and behavioral modification.

According to the Policy Directive (PD) 02.03.107 Code of Ethics and Conduct referring to the behavior and training of staff within the facility they are " To provide all employees of the department with a clear understanding of the behavior expected of them and to prevent improper conduct that may adversely affect the department, staff-client relationships, the public trust or confidence." With that being said, I am going to venture off onto some topics that will hopefully assist me in painting a picture to give society a view of what they are currently funding.

Personally, I would not say to remove the system of the penitentiary altogether, but, I will say that it should be drastically reimagined "IF" the ultimate goal is to rehabilitate people who have drifted into the dark side for whatever reason. I learned from a (voluntary class) that I took while incarcerated, which was through Chance for Life (C.F.L), that in order to change the behavior of a person you must first change their thought process which will shift their belief system ultimately influencing the change that will be their behavior, this is rehabilitation.

Education and Employment Conditions

There is a saying that goes, "If you knew better, you would do better." This is so true, but the only way to actually "know better" is to be able to properly educate yourself. Opportunities for education within the MDOC are often either limited to prisoners who are within 24 months of their earliest release date, limited to prisoners in lower levels who can afford to have their

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families or loved ones pay the cost or limited to prisoners who have to either be a certain amount of months to a year ticket free (which is easier said than done and will be discussed much later). The learning opportunities of trades and specific skill sets that were offered at a point in time years ago have been removed from most facilities, which leaves prisoners sometimes in all levels with nothing to do, and they have gained no skills to take home upon their release that will assure their success. The classes that are required for certain prisoners to take to be released on time are usually full requiring a waitlist that often pushes prisoners past their out date. In my opinion, the classes are not that effective but the MDOC allows the classes to continue because they receive funding for having specific programs at their facilities. It is common knowledge that mental health is a crucial component in behavioral modification, so doesn't it make sense to produce more classes that teach conflict resolution, empathy, de-escalation techniques, effective communication, anger management, substance abuse, stress management, coping skills, leadership skills, and incorporate trades to go hand in hand with mental progression. If an individual can be confident in their knowledge and skillsets, they will most likely commit to their craft, especially if it can be taught visually, with hands-on training gaining valuable work experience.

With confidence within themselves, they will be able to take care of themselves and their families hence the phrase "if you know better you do better," or at least that is my thought process. The employment conditions in prison run hand in hand with the educational system. I have been to quite a few facilities within MDOC, and the job opportunities are scarce. If you can be lucky enough to get at a facility that has a factory on the compound, your chances of getting around the prejudice and bias to actually get the job are unfortunately slim to none.

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If somehow you do get in, you can make a minimum \$150 per month or more that is enough to take care of the necessities in here and send some home. The next highest paying job that I have seen is a shoe shining job. I, as well as most prisoners, consider this job extremely degrading to have an officer pretty much looking down upon you as you shine their shoes. Most prisoners do not have the patience and mental capacity to endure some of the officers' actions in comments in order to even deal with that type of job. The overall majority of the remaining jobs are for less pay, with some starting off at 0.17 ½ cents a day, which is little to nothing if you're talking about survival on a day to day basis. This type of situation creates a crisis for prisoners, their families, and other love ones; because if they actually are there supporting you, they are going to want to help you, which means sending you money in order for you to survive. The pay rate for jobs do not match up with the increase in the prices of food and hygiene items that can be purchased on the prisoner's store. It often feels as if they are trying to break our families for supporting us. How else could you explain the fact that prisoner's pay rates have not increased since the late 80s or early 90s, but the prices of food and hygiene items have gone up some monthly and yearly?

The DOC is using financial oppression as a weapon against our support systems, they are suffering tremendously, and this is not right. Still, it is food for thought into the conditions of the Michigan Department of Corrections.

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Physical and Psychological Survival

Contrary to belief, prisons nowadays are more psychological than it is physical more so because of what is being taught to the newer staff members who are becoming correction officers, kitchen workers, and mostly all positions coming into this environment. I have had staff that will remain nameless, tell me after I have had conversations with them to bring them back down into the reality of where they are at that they are trying to get us to fear them and that they do not have to show us any respect, but they must demand it from us.

They are taught during training that we are all manipulative, looking to get over at every opportunity and extremely untrustworthy. They are taught that we are all thieves, and the first chance we get, we will rape or assault one of them. Now, this was told to me by a correctional officer when I was trying to understand why she was being so disrespectful, and though I was aggressive with my tone of voice initially, I was able to show her that I was intelligent enough to articulate my discontentment with how she was unreasonably conducting herself which made her look at me differently. I was not trying to manipulate her at all or get anything out of her but some common decency, which after a while, she understood. Now that mindset or "training" coupled with some officers who may be racist(because it is a large amount of them), or to some staff members that feel they have a point to prove or really believe that this is the way to conduct themselves professionally, you will have a recipe for disaster.

This is when staff members use the written misconduct process known as "tickets "to threaten prisoners. Sometimes the tickets that are written are deserved and justified, but a lot of the time prisoners are lied on within the tickets. Some tickets are written by staff in retaliation of

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prisoner complaints, and in some instances, tickets have been written on behalf of other staff members that may not like a particular prisoner or prisoners. The psychological effect of this is heavy because not only could the wrong ticket get you wrongfully placed into segregation, you could end up with a new case which is more time in prison, or you could simply lose all of your liberties (i.e., privileges). The ticket review process is run somewhat like a judicial proceeding without the benefit of representation and rarely does a prisoner get found "not guilty" of the charge. Often the process is abused, which causes stress, anger, resentment, and bitterness towards the staff in authority, which results in a hostile environment. As I previously stated "IF" the actual purpose of prison is to rehabilitate individuals in order to return them to society to be productive members than this entire process needs to be reimaged and the restructuring needs to start from the top of the chain of command all the way to the bottom. Currently, the psyche in this environment is that prisoners should be in a cowardly state of mind and just "stay out of the way of staff and keep your head down." I shake my head in total disbelief even as I write these words because I have made complaints to staff as well as my psychiatrist, and this was the advice given to me. For the sake of staying on topic, I will suppress the urge to truly voice my opinions and feelings on that part, but needless to say that the expectation is extremely farfetched and probably will never happen. That just all falls so perfectly into the hurdles we face as prisoners to survive psychologically when you have a system built like this against you, it shows they do not care, so living in this environment daily how could you expect more from us when the people who run the institution and work within it have a depraved thought process as well?

My mother always tells me that the only difference between prisoners and the overall majority of the world, including the staff, are we got caught for the wrong we did.

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The physical aspects of survival are made up of a combination of lack of quality food, improper nutrition, the potential hazards of prisoner on prisoner or staff on prisoner assaults, the mediocre prisoner health care system, and the willful disregard of prisoner health by corrections officers. Each of these plays a factor in the physical survival of prisoners, and at any given time, when in action, they can be severely detrimental to the physical health of prisoners. The food provided by the state, as well as the items that we are able to purchase from the prison store, are extremely unhealthy and cause problems from high blood pressure to obesity. There are catalogs that are available that have cheaper food with some better quality and healthier options, but the MDOC has allowed the system of Keefe to monopolize the market and only allows us to purchase the expensive, poor quality items from there. This speaks volumes in regard to the Department of Corrections intentions, and this goes back to the topic of employment conditions whereas the generic unhealthy expensive options are forced upon us, but there has been no increase in prisoner pay to match up with the continuously growing prices of the products that we need. Prisoners would actually deal with the horrible uncooked (at times) state food and be able to survive without going to the prison store if we, as grown men, were not fed childlike portions and expected to not be hungry still, which is absurd. Being in this environment there is always some sort of high tension situation, one, because God never intended for the human species to be held in captivity especially in such close proximity, for so long, not to mention it is not normal nor the intended purpose of life to be confined with the same sex, it in itself, is the definition of inhumane and cruel conditions.

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However, there are so many factors that can contribute to the already negative energy in the prison atmosphere to cause detrimental conditions to one's physical survival, for prisoners and staff as well. You will have prisoners having a hard time dealing with their time, personal / family issues, staff creating an unnecessarily hostile environment for prisoners simply for entertainment, prisoners stressing working on their cases, staff bringing personal problems into the facility, and taking it out on the prisoners, substance abuse issues, gang-related violence, and those who choose to prey on the weak. Ultimately there are various ways to handle any of the above situations depending on the circumstance, but I have seen situations in here get extremely dangerous, and people get severely hurt, including staff. I have seen a few instances where prisoners have been killed by other prisoners, but that was due to a lack of care on behalf of staff, not taking room complaints seriously. Sometimes people just cannot jail together, and even though this is not a hotel, certain situations should not be forced. The inadequacy of the prisoner, health care system, is just as sad because if you are not visibly bleeding or have some type of visible deformation, it could be interpreted as you are not in pain. And chances are that they are going to stall you out and tell you to drink some water, and their favorite line is "take some Tylenol or Motrin." It is just too much to get the care that we need and the proper medication. For some of us who could actually need physical therapy, it is extremely rare that we would get it, and unless we actually go to the hospital, chances are our health is going to be neglected if MDOC does not classify it as a necessity to be addressed.

Last on the list is the willful disregard of prisoner's health by corrections officers and administration. Currently, we are going through a global pandemic where 3.4 million Americans have contracted this deadly virus COVID-19, and there have been more than 130,000 deaths in

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the United States alone. The CDC has stated that social distancing and wearing a face mask can help prevent the spread of the disease. As of July 17, 2020, the facility I am currently incarcerated at has officially gone under quarantine due to the carelessness of the corrections officers, which have brought COVID-19 into the facility. Many prisoners as well as myself have made multiple complaints concerning the staff through the chain of command in regards to the officers, not social distancing and not wearing masks, but as to be expected they have had no consequences or repercussions and the severity of the situation has put the lives of the entire population at risk. If we as prisoners, do not social distance, or wear a mask, we are threatened with segregation and written misconducts where we lose all privileges and liberties. Still, the staff who are supposed to keep law and order and keep us safe are the ones who are causing the biggest threats to our lives due to their willful neglect. The only human interactions we have are with each other, and the staff seeing how visits are currently canceled. Therefore, the only way we can get sick from a virus that is outside of prison is from the staff. They are completely and willfully negligent in their duties to keep us safe by NOT following the same protocol that has been outlined for all prisoners to follow. I have seen officers openly sneeze and cough and not take the necessary precautionary measures to sanitize the area to ensure that they are not spreading any germs. The fact that this has been reported to higher ranking staff members and they are not, at a bare minimum holding one another accountable for their actions shows me clearly that our lives mean nothing to the Department of Corrections. This lack of accountability is the same thing that we watch on the news with officers and individuals in positions of authority not being held to the same standards as everyone else.

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Yes, I committed a crime to come to prison, but I did not kill anyone, so does the fact that I am a prisoner mean my life has no value? Does the fact that the 13th amendment states that "Neither slavery or involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime where of the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." mean that I am destined to travel back in time to be treated less than human and that the "rehabilitation" is just a word to sugarcoat the illusion of justice so the "criminal justice system" can tap back into the roots of this country's forefathers? For the sake of society in progress, I would hope not.

My intentions with this correspondence was to specifically paint a vivid picture of my reality as my heart bleeds through this pen, and this pad soaks the tears of the many cries for help. I know and acknowledge the fact that I have wronged society with my actions, and with the most, in serious, and sincere pieces of my heart, I am remorseful for my actions. I am not asking to be let out of prison early, all I am humbly asking is for the public to be able to see what is going on honestly within the walls of the Department of Corrections. Men like myself strive daily to be better ourselves in an environment designed to tear us down, and some of us have actually obtained the invisible goal of rehabilitation and are simply being patient until we can have the opportunity to prove ourselves. Prison did not make me a better person; if anything, it generated resentment, aggression, and rebellious thoughts. My growth came from a conscious decision to not want, but need, to do better not just for myself because I deserve more than what

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I was previously allowing myself to have, but for my family and everyone who truly loves me and has many days and years of heartache that I have caused yet they still continue to sacrifice for me, for my victims and the families of my victims who I have caused mental emotional, physical and financial pain not due to ignorance but carelessness. I want to show them that I am not who they thought I was, and if it is anything I can do to make amends for my actions as a man, I am willing to do it. If words alone meant anything and held weight, then the fact that the Michigan Department of Correction promotes a structured environment of discipline to encourage rehabilitation it is probably believable, but I would personally prefer action to speak on my behalf. On that note, I ask you again, what is the purpose of the criminal justice system? With that thought in mind, I leave you as I came with peace, mind, body, and soul.

Respectfully submitted,

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