

# Are We Being Punished?

(Of Course Not... Well, Yeah)

It's astonishing how, if you peel just a layer or two off many questionable decisions by prisons, you soon unearth an ugly truth; that everything they do is punitive, even if undeserved.

If you've been reading my essays during the COVID-19 pandemic, you know I have documented how, for at least 110 days, USP Tucson has locked COVID-19 negative inmates in cells, treating them as if they're on punishment: no phone calls, no outside movement, showers every other day in filthy shower cells, no canteen, very limited paper and envelopes - all the things you do to inmates on punishment.

But we've done no wrong. As of today, February 10<sup>th</sup>, we're the last 103 inmates of the 1300 who are still COVID-19 negative. Yet, all those who tested positive was able to call their families, spend the maximum amount in canteen, go outside and everything else we'd normally do.

Why are we being punished? We've done no wrong!

We ask every officer and staff member over the last few months - none is telling us why we're suffering so much. They swear we're not being punished, that this isn't malicious, but it's to "protect us from the risk of catching or spreading the virus".

Bull! If 92% of the prison has tested positive, you've failed miserably to protect anyone. And I can write volumes of how incompetent staff has been when it comes to the CDC protocol. So no, I'm not buying it. Forcing us to spend 99.5% of 110 days in a cell is not helpful in preventing the spread of the virus. To put in numbers, of the past 2,600 hours, we have only been out the cell about 12 hours - all for showers only. This is punitive.

Punitive: Inflicting or aiming to inflict punishment (American Heritage Dictionary, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. 2012).

So, what's going on? Why are we, who are COVID-19 negative, being treated so unfairly? I have passed 10 straight tests, why am I being treated like a leper? Staff claims our dorm is on quarantine.

Quarantine? How can clean inmates be on quarantine?

Quarantine: A condition, period of time, or place in which one suspected of carrying an infectious agent is kept in confinement. (American Heritage Dictionary, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., 2012).

How can we be suspected if we've passed 10 straight tests? It's like arresting an innocent man, trying him 10 times, and still suspecting him, even though he was found innocent every time. This →

isn't right, they're not being honest with us - until my cellie pointed out one specific line on the Special Housing Unit Record, which is taped on every door in here. The so-called record is supposed to keep track of the meals, showers, exercise and other details.

It's bogus; they don't accurately record it. I personally did a '40-meal fast/protest'; they missed many days. But, one line says something surprising and revealing: "Violation or Reason": COVID.

The reason we're being treated like violators is because of COVID. But this isn't clear at all. Are you saying we have COVID - because that's false. We don't have it; we're clean! We can't even be suspected of having it, if, by definition, to quarantine means you have to have a suspicion. What kind of suspicion could you have if we pass TEN straight tests?

So, could it be a violation? Are we being punished on a false violation? If we don't have COVID, why punish us? Yet the punishment is clear; they won't let us out, while everyone else is out.

Violation: The act of violating or the condition of being violated (American Heritage Dictionary 5<sup>th</sup> ed 2012)

Violate: To break or disregard (e.g. a law) (American Heritage Dictionary 5<sup>th</sup> ed 2012)

We're being punished because of COVID, but we are clean. But because we are, USP Tucson prohibited us from calling our families since October 21<sup>st</sup>. That includes Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day, and even the Superbowl. No one on the compound suffered nearly as much as we have. Yet, they all say it's not punitive nor malicious.

Malice: A desire to harm others or to see others suffer; spite (American Heritage Dictionary, 5<sup>th</sup> ed 2012)

Punish: To subject to a penalty for an offense or fault (American Heritage Dictionary, 5<sup>th</sup> ed 2012)

So... if we, who passed 10 straight COVID-19 tests, are locked in a room for 110<sup>+</sup> days, with no calls, no canteen, very little paper and envelopes to write home, while the other 92% of the population who did test positive has all their privileges restored - what then is this? Are we being punished??

"Well, of course not... well, um, in a way... well ok, yeah, you're being screwed!"

Funny, I felt that was the case months ago. Why not just put us in a noose, this feels about the same -