

The Other Death Penalty Project  
Prisoner Organizing Kit

The Other Death Penalty Project  
P.O. Box 1486  
Lancaster, CA 93584  
[www.theotherdeathpenalty.org](http://www.theotherdeathpenalty.org)

May 11, 2009

A personal message from those of us making this happen...

It has been an exciting and surprising first year of operations for this project. In a nutshell, after reading an article written by a LWOP prisoner a close friend and outside supporter suggested that we prisoners needed to organize ourselves and tell our stories to change this other death penalty. We are tremendously grateful to this friend, and we are committed to making a positive impact in the lives of LWOP prisoners.

We are lucky enough to have secured adequate funding, so we don't need your stamps or donations. This may become necessary in the future but for now, save your resources to actively participate in our upcoming campaigns.

In your Prisoner Organizing Kits (part 1), you have received lists of opinion editors and news editors of some of the biggest newspapers in the country. (We hope to expand your resources lists in the near future to include the internet.) You have also received some examples of prisoner opinion pieces and letters to the editor that were published, as well as instructional materials on how to write these kinds of things. Before too long, you will receive messages directing you to write to specific places. It may be news outlets, public interest organizations, or politicians. Until then, take some time every day to practice your writing skills. And encourage your free world friends and family to participate. (Save up your stamps and writing materials now!)

On a deeper level, we are convinced that we prisoners must take responsibility for our lives and our position in the world. The vast majority of us are not innocent. It is important for us, as long term prisoners and human beings, to become forces for positive change in this world of ours: prison. We need to work to create opportunities for all prisoners to rehabilitate themselves, to give back to the community, to change perceptions and, most importantly, to experience the kind of personal transformation necessary to transcend our worst moments.

It is very important for all of us to remember this is going to be a long march. If you are going to get involved, be prepared to go the distance.

Now, let's all get to work to change the other death penalty, to make it just a bad memory.

Take the best of care and strive to be happy. Peace...

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## **MISSION STATEMENT**

A sentence of life without the possibility of parole is a death sentence. Worse, it is a long, slow, dissipating death sentence without any of the legal or administrative safeguards rightly awarded to those condemned to the traditional forms of execution. It exposes our society's concealed beliefs that redemption and personal transformation are not possible for all human beings, and that it is reasonable and just to forever define an individual by his worst act. Life without the possibility of parole is wrong and should be abolished.

The Other Death Penalty Project's immediate goals are to raise awareness of the basic unfairness of the life without parole sentence and to organize the tens of thousands of men and women serving "the other death penalty." Our ultimate goal is to see the permanent end to the use of this form of state-sanctioned execution (along with all other forms), resulting in all life term prisoners having, at least, the possibility of parole.

The Other Death Penalty Project is led and comprised solely of prisoners serving life without the possibility of parole. We are thankful to those free people who have offered us their invaluable help.

The Other Death Penalty Project

## **WHAT DO WE NEED?**

1. In his famous, many times replicated experiment, Stanley Milgram proved that everyone is only six degrees of separation from everyone else. This means we all know someone, who knows someone, who knows someone, who knows someone, who knows someone, who knows President Obama! Out of the 33,000+ life without the possibility of parole prisoners in this country, we are confident many of us know important, influential people. The Other Death Penalty Project is asking for referrals and contact information.
2. Our collective hundreds of thousands of years of prison experience means that collectively we have seen everything, read everything, and heard everything. The problem is most of this information is disjointed and not systematized in any rational manner, which effectively disempowers us in our struggle to undo the other death penalty. The Other Death Penalty Project is asking for copies of great cases, useful law journal articles, historical data, and any other helpful materials. (Sorry, can't return anything so don't send us your only copy.)
3. No doubt, we all have stories to tell. For those of you who are great writers, we are interested in collecting your stories for possible inclusion in a forthcoming book-length collection about our experience. The Other Death Penalty Project would like to read your stories. . (Sorry, can't return anything so don't send us your only copy.)

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## **POSTCARDS INFORMATION**

In your Prisoner Organizing Kit, you have received three stamped, pre-addressed postcards. Here's what to do with them:

1. One is a change of address postcard. If you need to, please use this one, so we can keep your correct, updated address in the database. Thank you for printing.
2. One is to provide additional LWOP prisoners, as well as family and friends, for our database. Again, please print and be exact so materials will make it to their intended destination. This is your chance to participate in the organizing campaign so select some high-quality, motivated people.
3. One is for our First LWOP Prisoner Survey. Please list the three most important things you think The Other Death Penalty Project should be doing in the coming years to undo this sentence. Take some time to think about this because what you write will matter. We are strongly committed to a genuine grassroots movement, and we want your involvement.

**I MAKE THE FOLLOWING THREE SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OTHER DEATH PENALTY  
PROJECT SURVEY:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE ADD TO DATABASE:**

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**LWOP PRISONER:**

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**FREE WORLD FRIEND:**

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**E-MAIL ADDRESS:**

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**PLEASE CHANGE MY ADDRESS TO THE FOLLOWING:**

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## **OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

The Other Death Penalty Project is proud to list the following accomplishments, up to June 1, 2009:

- Placement of 12 ads in magazines and newsletters aimed primarily at prisoners
- The creation and activation of our website, [www.theotherdeathpenalty.org](http://www.theotherdeathpenalty.org)
- The creation of our ever-growing database of over 1,000 prisoners and many of our friends and family members
- The successful placement of our founding document, "The Other Death Penalty," by Kenneth E. Hartman, in 4 publications
- One mention of The Other Death Penalty Project in a mainstream media publication, the Santa Fe Reporter
- The creation and launch of a fully downloadable PowerPoint® presentation, found at our website, that effectively exposes the truth and cruelty of the other death penalty
- A mass press release that went to over 10,000 mainstream and alternative media outlets, formally announcing The Other Death Penalty Project and its goals and intentions, on May 20, 2009
- A very successful and ongoing fundraising campaign
- The release of the first part of our Prisoner Organizing Kit
- The launch of our first survey of life without parole prisoners, and their families and friends, to gain a better understanding of what is desired and needed, and is a testament to The Other Death Penalty Project's commitment to grassroots participation

## The Honor Program Advocacy Campaign: An Example Of Effective Prisoner Organizing

The Steering Committee for the Honor Program was founded in June of 2000 by Kenneth E. Hartman, a life prisoner housed at the California State Prison-Los Angeles County (CSP-LAC). Ken wrote the original proposal that started the Honor Program. The purpose of The Steering Committee is to provide a platform for motivated prisoners, most of whom are serving life without parole sentences, to actively shape the agenda of the prison system to one in which rehabilitation is possible. The crisis of failure in the prison systems of this country, particularly in California, is largely the result of the disempowerment of prisoners. Massive programs are instituted, vast amounts of funds are distributed, and legions of experts are deployed, but outcomes remain dismal. The Steering Committee believes this is due to the failure to include the most vital constituency – prisoners themselves. So-called “stakeholders” meetings are convened with not a single prisoner in attendance.

The Honor Program, by contrast, was conceived wholly by prisoners. Not surprisingly, it has demonstrated exceptional success. Based on the principle of incentivizing positive behavior and holding individuals accountable for their actions, the purpose of the Honor Program is to create an atmosphere of safety, respect, and cooperation, so that prisoners can do their time in peace, while working on specific self-improvement and rehabilitative goals and projects which benefit the community. Prisoners wishing to apply for the program must commit to abstinence from drugs, gangs, and violence, and must be willing to live and work with fellow prisoners of any race. Objective, measurable results were immediate and dramatic – in the first year alone the results on the ground showed measurable positive gains, including decreases in weapons related offenses of 88% and decreases in violence related offenses of 85%. In the eight years of the Honor Program’s existence, there was not a single, serious mass violent incident, a record unmatched in any other of our prisons. Fiscal savings to the taxpayers of California surely are in the millions of dollars (with over \$200,000 of documented savings in the first year alone). More importantly, this program demonstrated that positive outcomes in our troubled and dysfunctional prison system are possible. Equally as important, the program enabled the expansion of prisoner participation, of prisoner motivation to take control of their own destiny, and of prisoners’ sense of empowerment.

The power structure of the prison system, based on a model of prisoner disempowerment, has resisted this political and social awakening. On numerous occasions, efforts have been undertaken to dismantle the Honor Program. At these moments of crisis, the Steering Committee has served as the primary organizer of positive resistance. Partnering with a growing group of freeworld supporters, and campaigning tirelessly within the prison, every attempt to end the Honor Program has been thwarted. Most recently, after supportive elements of the prison staff alerted the Steering Committee to a plan to transfer all the Honor Program participants to various prisons – an obvious attempt to demolish the program – the committee released a comprehensive handbook (*The Honor Program: Road to a Rehabilitative Prison System*, January 2007) detailing how to save the Honor Program and codify it into the rules and regulations of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). (In collaboration with dedicated freeworld supporters, a highly effective website, [www.prisonhonorprogram.org](http://www.prisonhonorprogram.org), was also launched, and a moving multimedia presentation created.) Upon receiving a copy of the handbook, CDCR officials placed Steering Committee Chairman Ken Hartman in Administrative Segregation (the hole), but the well thought out strategy of the committee to simultaneously deliver the handbook to every member of the California Legislature, the leadership of the Judiciary Branch, the leadership of the Executive Branch, and close to 200 media outlets, forced his release after two weeks.

The proposal was the catalyst for legislation (SB (Senate Bill) 299) introduced by State Senator Gloria Romero (D – Majority Leader) that sought to codify the Honor Program and expand it to all Level III and Level IV prisons in the state. Hundreds of supporters were motivated by the Steering Committee through its many contacts and supporters, which resulted in strong attendance at multiple hearings and thousands

of letters, e-mails, and phone calls in support of the legislation. Ultimately, even traditional opponents of prison reform (such as the guards' union) voiced support. Although the bill passed by wide, bi-partisan margins in both houses of the legislature, Governor Schwarzenegger ultimately vetoed it, stating that "a law was unnecessary because the CDCR already has the authority to implement Honor Programs administratively." As of the time of this writing, the CDCR still has not done so.

In May 2008, former Inspector General Matthew Cate was appointed Secretary of the CDCR, replacing James Tilton, an outspoken opponent of the Honor Program (as evidenced by his statement during a Senate hearing: "I don't like the word 'honor' associated with prisoners.") This has provided nothing less than a golden opportunity for the Honor Program. Mr. Cate (and the new Inspector General David Shaw) are serious proponents of prisoner rehabilitation and reform of the CDCR, and the Steering Committee has been able to make positive connections with these influential individuals. These connections resulted in a visit by David Shaw to the Honor Program in August 2008. On January 30, 2009, Mr. Shaw returned to the Honor Program, this time accompanied by Secretary Cate, CDCR Deputy Chief of Staff Lee Seale, and Prison Law Office Director Don Spector. During this visit, they met with Steering Committee members, prison administrators, correctional officers, and community supporters. This visit provided the Steering Committee with an unprecedented opportunity to advocate directly with Mr. Cate, the decisionmaker, to ensure the survival of the Honor Program. Within days of the visit, Secretary Cate instructed the prison administration to develop an Action Plan for immediate implementation of the Honor Program. At the time of this writing, the Action Plan has been submitted to Secretary Cate, and, while awaiting his response, the Steering Committee continues to advocate through a grassroots letter writing campaign and outreach to elected officials and others of influence by prisoners, their families and friends, and freeworld partners and supporters. The Steering Committee's goal is that the Honor Program be codified in the Title 15 Regulations as a permanent part of the CDCR, and ultimately expanded to prisons statewide, creating fundamental change in our ailing prison system.

## Fundamental Elements of a Prisoner Grassroots Organizing Campaign

1. Involve fellow prisoners in your cause. Seek their input and suggestions. If possible, form a committee that meets regularly so that the strengths and talents of diverse individuals can be consistently utilized.
2. If possible, find and develop relationships with prison staff who are supportive of your cause. This can be extremely important in enabling your work to continue in spite of the standard interruptions that are part of prison life (e.g., lockdowns).
2. Form strong collaborative partnerships with individuals/organizations in the free world to facilitate access to information and to carry out activities which are not possible to do from within prison (e.g., creating and maintaining a website; sending mass e-mails; publishing and distributing handbooks and other written materials). Freeworld partners can also carry out in-person advocacy activities which are impossible from within prison.
3. Obtain and update mailing lists of legislators, media, organizations, and other stakeholders of influence.
4. Create compelling written materials which can be distributed to your mailing list.
5. Launch an interactive website.
6. Create ancillary materials such as multimedia presentations, CDs, etc.
7. Time the release of publications, website, and other materials for maximum effect.
8. The primary purpose of all of the above is to find an influential and important champion for your cause, who actually has the power to make things happen (such as through legislation, executive order, or other means).

# Op-Ed Articles: How to Write Them

If you want to raise awareness of an important issue (such as abolishing life without parole sentences), writing an op-ed article for a newspaper or elsewhere is an important tool. Such an article can reach millions of readers, swaying hearts and changing minds. It can help reshape a public debate and affect policy. It also can bring you considerable recognition for less effort than it takes to write a professional monograph or journal article. Moreover, effective op-ed articles reflect well on both the author and the cause, which is why The Other Death Penalty Project encourages participants to reach out to this important market.

Here's how to get started:

## **Track the news and jump at opportunities.**

Timing is essential. As a former *New York Times* op-ed page editor wrote: "When people like Saddam Hussein and George Bush go on the warpath, op-ed editors don't like to hang around waiting to see what next week's mail will bring. And they can't imagine that people will read an article, no matter how wonderful, that bemoans the perennial budget mess when all anybody can think is: 'Does he have the bomb?'" Our experience with prison reform advocacy work reflects this; authors are most successful when they track the news.

## **Limit the article to 750 words.**

Shorter is even better. Some authors insist they need more room to explain their argument. Unfortunately, newspapers have limited space to offer, and editors generally won't take the time to cut a long article down to size.

## **Make a single point - well.**

Make a single point (life without parole is the death penalty and should be abolished) clearly and persuasively. If you cannot explain your message in a sentence or two, you're trying to cover too much.

## **Put your main point on top.**

You have no more than 10 seconds to hook a busy reader, which means you shouldn't "clear your throat" with a witticism or historical aside. Just get to the point and convince the reader that it's worth his or her valuable time to continue.

## **Tell readers why they should care.**

Put yourself in the place of the busy person looking at your article. At the end of every few paragraphs, ask out loud: "So what? Who cares?" You need to answer these questions. Will your suggestions help reform our disastrous prison systems? Save taxpayer money? Improve public safety? Explain why. Appeals to self-interest usually are more effective than abstract punditry.

## **Offer specific recommendations.**

An op-ed is not a news story that simply describes a situation; it is your opinion about how to improve matters. Don't be satisfied with mere analysis. In an op-ed article you need to offer recommendations. Why should this country abolish life without parole sentences, and how can this be accomplished? You'll need to do more than suggest that opposing parties work out their differences.

## **Showing is better than discussing.**

You may remember the Pentagon's overpriced toilet seat that became a symbol of profligate federal spending. You probably don't recall the total Pentagon budget for that year (or for that matter, for the current year). That's because we humans remember colorful details better than dry facts. When writing an op-ed article, therefore, look for great examples that will bring your argument to life.

## **Use short sentences and paragraphs.**

Look at some stories in a local or national newspaper, and count the number of words per sentence. You'll probably find the sentences to be quite short. You should use the same style, relying mainly on simple declarative sentences. Cut long paragraphs into two or more shorter ones.

**Don't be afraid of the personal voice.**

When it comes to op-eds, it's good to use the personal voice whenever possible. If you are a prisoner serving the other death sentence, describe what this feels like on a daily basis. If you are a friend or family member of an LWOP prisoner, to help argue your point explain how your loved one's sentence has affected you.

**Avoid jargon.**

If a technical detail is not essential to your argument, don't use it. When in doubt, leave it out. Simple language doesn't mean simple thinking; it means you are being considerate of readers who lack your expertise and are sitting half-awake at their breakfast table or computer screen.

**Use the active voice.**

Don't write: "It is hoped that [or: One would hope that} the government will . . ." Instead, say "I hope the government will . . ." Active voice is nearly always better than passive voice. It's easier to read, and it leaves no doubt about who is doing the hoping, recommending or other action.

**Avoid tedious rebuttals.**

If you've written your article in response to an earlier piece that made your blood boil, avoid the temptation to prepare a point-by-point rebuttal. It makes you look petty. It's likely that readers didn't see the earlier article and, if they did, they've probably forgotten it. So, just take a deep breath, mention the earlier article once and argue your own case.

**Make your ending a winner.**

You're probably familiar with the importance of a strong opening paragraph, or "lead," that hooks readers. But when writing for the op-ed page, it's also important to summarize your argument in a strong final paragraph. That's because many casual readers scan the headline, skim the opening column and then read only the final paragraph and byline. In fact, one trick many columnists use is to conclude with a phrase or thought that they used in the opening, thereby closing the circle.

# How to Write a Letter to the Editor that Gets Published and Read

We've all read bang-up letters to the editor focused on a recent event or issue covered by a publication or TV or radio coverage. More recently, letters have been crafted in response to websites and e-newsletters. It's much more likely that your cause's letter will run than it is to place an op-ed piece or get your nonprofit covered in a feature article.

Unlike news stories, letters to the editor enable your cause to state an opinion, offer an alternative viewpoint, heap praise, or move someone to action, in your own words. That means there's a much smaller chance that the facts will be wrong or that your message will be twisted or diluted as it might be in a news or feature story written by a reporter.

The benefits for your cause include:

- Keeping its name in front of the public.
- Raising its profile.
- Getting your share of news ink.

But writing an opinion letter that gets published and has the desired impact is both an art and a science. Here are 10 practical tips for writing a letter to the editor that gets published and read:

- **Identify your target publications and programs**

Select five to 10 venues to focus your opinion letter placement efforts on. Don't forget trade publications, and community and weekly newspapers. Depending on your audience, those venues can have greater influence than an opinion letter in the New York Times. And it's easier to get letters to the editor published in these smaller publications.

Once you have your target list, you're ready to respond when an opportunity surfaces.

- **Research the letters policy for each venue on for your target list**

Most publications and programs publicize what they want in a letter to the editor, and how and to whom to send it. Examples include:

The New York Times – maximum of 150 words

The Washington Post – letters must be exclusive to the Post

- **Reference a recent print or broadcast article**

Write your cause's letter as a direct response to recent coverage, building on the focus presented or emphasizing how your cause's perspective wasn't presented (and presenting it clearly).

- **Respond as quickly as you can.**

If there's an issue or news story that's getting a lot of attention in the press, draft a letter or at least key message points so your cause is prepared to finalize and submit your letter pronto.

- **Hone your opinion letter writing style, before you're on deadline to submit it.**

Read letters in your target venues on a regular basis to learn how to write the most effective letter.

- **Be Concise.**

Include a maximum of 200 words. The publication will shorten your letter to fit its format. The more it has to edit, the less control you have of what gets printed.

Include two to three paragraphs, each with no more than three sentences.

- **State Your Point Early and Clearly**

Use the inverted pyramid scheme, leading with (and maintaining focus on) your most important point.

- **Include Your Contact Information**

Your contact information is a prerequisite for most publications to print your letter. Include your full name, cause name, address, phone number and email (indicate that as a prisoner you do not have a phone number or an e-mail address) at the top of the page and sign the letter at the bottom.

- **Don'ts**

- Don't write too often. Once every three months is as often as you should write.
- Avoid being abusive or strident.

- **Follow Up**

Have someone in the free world make a follow-up phone call to the editor in question to make sure your letter has been received. It's best for them to keep calling until they get through, rather than leaving a voicemail message.

# Los Angeles Times

TWO CENTS

## We need more honor in the prisons

The governor should not have vetoed the highly successful Prison Honor Program  
By Kenneth E. Hartman

October 23, 2007

Governor Schwarzenegger's [veto of Senate Bill 299](#), which would have mandated Honor Programs throughout the dysfunctional California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, is a mistake that illustrates all too well the failure of this state's leaders to understand what needs to be done to rescue the prison system.

In my 28 continuous years of incarceration, I have not ever served time on a more productive, more positive or more rehabilitation-friendly yard than [here in the Honor Program](#). You see, the sad truth is California's prisons are worse than a mess, they are a catastrophe. Costs are spiraling, thousands of guard positions are vacant, violence is pervasive, and the federal courts are about one hearing away from [seizing control of the whole disaster](#). Recidivism rates are so bad that many of the 174,000 prisoners are actually parole violators.

But down here on Facility-A at California State Prison-Los Angeles County, hidden up in the high desert north of Los Angeles, a remarkable thing has happened over the past few years. Prisoners, some forward-thinking staff and a cadre of selfless volunteers have worked together to create an island of relative calm in the storm. The facts are compelling: violence is way down; drug and alcohol abuse is down. In fact, the difference between the Honor Program yard and any other in the state is so dramatic that administrators from other prisons come here to see it with their own jaded and unbelieving eyes.

The program works because it rewards positive behavior; encourages prisoners to make serious, transformational change; it holds individuals accountable; and is voluntary. The prison system, as a whole, fails because it uses only negative reinforcement, blocks all efforts to make positive change, uses group punishment and forces prisoners into ill-conceived programs, regardless of need or desire. Simply affixing the label "rehabilitation" onto the same old system of force and coercion won't work and, as recent history has shown, it hasn't worked.

The governor, in his veto message, stated that SB299 was "unnecessary because the California Department of Corrections (CDCR) already has the authority to establish and expand honor programs administratively." While the governor is technically correct, the bill was necessary because the CDCR has not established, or formally implemented, any Honor Programs. What we have done here locally has been resisted, bungled and undermined by the leadership of the prisons for the past eight years.

So, another real opportunity to actually bring rehabilitation into the prison system has been squandered. Perhaps the prison bosses have persuaded the governor that they are working to make things better, that they don't need to be compelled by legislation. If so, I'm afraid that still another governor has been duped.

One thing I am certain of is that the work we have done to bring reform and sanity into this system will, eventually, come to fruition. The desire of human beings to live as human beings is irrepressible. The Honor Program isn't going away; all good ideas have a power that carries them on.

*Kenneth E. Hartman, C-19449, was instrumental in the founding of the Honor Program at California State Prison-Los Angeles County, and serves as the chairman of its steering committee. For more information, visit [www.prisonhonorprogram.org](http://www.prisonhonorprogram.org).*

## OPINION

My Shawshank Redemption

# The prison system is broken. But the Honor Program works. Save it.

*By Dortell Williams*

from the November 10, 2008 edition

Lancaster, Calif. - Next September will mark my 20th year in jail. It is not an anniversary I'm particularly proud of. I was convicted of murder and hopelessly sentenced to life without the possibility of parole.

When I arrived at the infamous Pelican Bay Prison, I was shocked right out of my criminal-minded circuit of stupidity. The flow of in-house narcotics profits didn't appeal to me anymore. My drug-dealing days had already brought me to terrestrial hell.

Like the majority of prisoners on the yard, I just wanted to do my time as trouble-free as possible. I simply wanted to build on the better part of me, redeem whatever part of me was possible.

As the cycle of drug abuse, negative peer pressure, and unfettered rebellion roiled around my years of confinement, I began to long for something better. I wanted to be productive, do something better.

That desire to build on the better part of me swelled, but with little comfort and no outlet. With fervent disillusion, I came to see the California Department of Corrections (CDC) as nothing more than an empty shell.

It's a colossal department with two overriding modes of operation: 1) behavior control with a heavy stick as its main prod; and 2) the fostering of survival of fittest, thus encouraging a cut-throat atmosphere of criminal cronyism. In other words, if you don't join a clique, you could be swallowed up as a loner in the predatory food chain.

Scarce are the rewards for positive behavior, especially for lifers. Still, I managed to remain disciplinary free for 14 consecutive years (dodging the racism, prison-styled hazing, and violent clique initiations), in spite of the pervasive violence, negativity, and hopelessness.

Ironically, it wasn't until I found myself in trouble (for being too friendly with a nurse), that I was transferred to the state prison in Los Angeles County, host of the Prison Honor Program.

Suddenly, my lack of cognitive stimulation and productivity was turned on its head. There was such a wide array of self-help opportunities to choose from, I didn't know where to start: yoga, creative writing, critical thinking, painting, and many other classes and activities.

I also experienced a different type of peer pressure. My first day out, I was approached by a succession of other prisoners, echoing the same guidance as the first guy: "We don't 'bang' here; we don't play [prison] politics, racial or any other kind; and we respect every one, including the guards." That speech has been an indelible part of my daily living for the past six years.

I later learned that the program was initiated in 2000 by other reform-minded prisoners. Prisoners who also had an avid desire for inner growth and change. With the support of open-minded staff, peer-instructed classes were allowed, using inherent individual talents to sharpen the masses.

To my amazement, not a single class was racially segregated. Everyone interacts and we've come to understand one another better. On the yard, all races play and exercise together, a freakish sight after years of being programmed the other way. Graffiti is nowhere to be found, replaced instead by colorful, creative murals and other works of art.

Since I've been here, racial riots, rapes, work stoppages, and the wide range of other wickedness are all memories of the past. I believe this is the only facility in the states that can make such a positive claim.

The success of the Honor Program cannot be denied. According to a study conducted by prison staff, the Honor Program saved the CDC (and taxpayers) more than \$200,000 in its first year alone. Meanwhile, weapons infractions decreased 88 percent, and violence and threatening behavior dropped 85 percent.

In a state that features one of the nation's highest recidivism rates – two-thirds of California's offenders return to prison within three years – such tangible evidence of behavioral correction is welcome indeed.

The secret to this is that it is a completely volunteer program. To our dismay, our success has earned only partial and inconsistent support from the institution and past secretaries of the department at headquarters in Sacramento.

Sadly there is still a school of thought that doesn't believe in incentive-based programs or rehabilitation. For members of this camp, continuation of the failed model is sufficient. They want the stick and nothing but the stick. Sadly, the violence, deaths, and costly court interventions don't help them see the light.

My hope is that the new secretary of the department, Matthew Cate, will see the light and help move corrections out of the shadows of the dark ages.

It would be a shame to see such a proven success – and a single tree that could yield a much fuller set of branches – go by the wayside.

- *Dortel Williams is an inmate at California State Prison, Los Angeles County.*

## Letters From Readers

we eat and the clothes we wear.

Steve Blank  
Pearblossom

### Running for the border

It is time for the Antelope Valley to have its own police department to serve the needs of our citizens, who are being victimized by not only the native-born criminals but also the illegal-alien population.

The Sheriff's Department doesn't seem to be able to handle the crime wave. They don't even have an auto fraud division. Nor do they seem to have the resources available to follow up on crime reports.

I was forced to move out due to the constant break-ins and the vandalizing of my motorcycle and van, which I needed for transportation. Arson eventually made living there unsafe and unhealthy.

Both I and my landlord were assaulted when we reported that the individuals in the front apartment were fighting with knives and fists while drunk. Most of the individuals were illegal aliens; a few were native-born thugs. Drugs were sold out in the open, and stolen cars were abandoned on the property.

Sheriff's Department response times ranged from two hours to more than 36 hours. I went out and got some pepper spray since I am 54 years old and disabled. I learned to depend on myself since the Sheriff's Department seems more inclined to write revenue-gathering tickets than to provide protection and solve crimes.

I am moving out of state before I am further victimized by the thugs who run the streets in the Antelope Valley.

James Hux  
Lancaster

### Prison biz booming

Imagine a prison system where inmates turn to the idea of positive programming, as opposed to the current status quo of chaos and

violence.

Safer prison environments (for inmates and staff alike) create an atmosphere where rehabilitation is possible — parolees re-entering society not as a threat but as individuals capable of making positive contributions; declining rates of recidivism; millions of taxpayer dollars saved each year.

An idealistic dream. Now imagine that you have stock in the business of incarceration. The dream becomes a financial nightmare — millions of dollars taken from your business each year.

It is no wonder the guard's union has channeled millions of dollars to keep laws aimed at sending people to prison for minor infractions and nonviolent crimes, not surprising that parole officers have a disturbingly broad range of discretion to determine parole violations.

All of this is good for the business of incarceration.

Prison overcrowding is a godsend. It creates tension among inmates, which escalates into eruptions of violence that, in turn, creates excessive overtime hours.

The accumulation is considerable: defusing and containing violent incidents; written reports from every correctional officer present (these reports must then be edited to ensure overall accord before final drafts can be signed); days to weeks to months of searching for weapons in every cell on every yard in an entire prison compound; time-consuming hours of fruitless interviews with inmates.

In such an environment, rehabilitation is impossible.

If Californians are interested in saving wasted tax dollars and would like to see convicted felons rehabilitated in preparation for re-entering society, then they need to support California's only existing honor program. Located at Facility-A in California State Prison Los Angeles County in Lancaster, the program is the state's only serious rehabilitative effort.

The honor program operated

without serious incident for nearly six years. Opponents of the honor program have been frustrated by its continued success. The administration has repeatedly infiltrated the yard with inmates who do not meet the criteria for the program for the sole purpose of disrupting and undermining it.

Recently, the first serious incident, which involved an inmate-on-inmate attempted assault, occurred, the direct result of calculated undermining.

The Department of Corrections has made public its plan to convert CSP-LAC into a reception center. No plan for the relocation of the honor program has been offered.

Peaceful prison environments are not conducive to the business of incarceration. Violence and chaos are at the root of financial security. It would be better for the business of incarceration if the idea of an honor program would simply fade away. Is this the best thing for the people of California?

John Purugganan  
Lancaster

### Council AWOL

The no-show by City Council members at the City Hall meeting in Lancaster is yet another slap in the citizens' faces. The lame excuses are ridiculous. And life goes on in the Antelope Valley.

Gary L. Christensen  
Lancaster

### Pockets will jingle

The new 2007 \$1 coins are being placed in use to save \$500 million a year replacing paper dollars, which wear out 20 times as fast as a coin. The dollar coin types are used all over the world — but not in the United States. Will a \$2 coin like Canada or Mexico uses help? We are too fat to lug around pounds of coins — or would that help to trim off a pound or two?

F.M. Schermerhorn  
Rosamond

By Bruce Tinsley

THE N.E.A:  
"WE RESOLVE  
TO RESIST  
BEING  
TESTED..."



TO HOLD FORTH  
AGAINST "MERT PAY"  
WHO ARE YOU TO  
EVALUATE US?...

PAY YOUR  
TAXES, AND  
THEN GO  
AWAY...

TINSLEY 1/0

### About Your Let

The Antelope Valley Press invites you to express your views in the Readers column. Letters should be short — 150 to 200 words — and edited for length. Shorter letters will be given preference.

Letters sent by fax or mail should be typed and printed for legibility. If you send a letter by e-mail, please include the e-mail document; do not send attachments. All letters — MUST include your full name (no initials) address and phone number. Send letters to:

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Antelope Valley Press  
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## On early release

With all due respect, as a prisoner and citizen, I find issue with the editorial, "How Dumb is Massive

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Prisoner Release?" (Dec. 22).

I'll begin by clarifying the fact that the hiring of the sheriff's "1,000th recruit" will not curtail early releases. Such releases are predicated more by a dearth of bed space than staff shortage, the latter of which only amounts to more lockdown.

At 172,000 to 174,000 prisoners — more than ever in the state's history — we're simply relying too much on incarceration.

Most prisoners, as the editorial concedes, are nonviolent. Almost half are in for drug-related offenses. The humane approach to the ailment of addiction is rehab, not prison.

It should also be noted that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is not "planning ... the most massive release in American history." It is just a proposal — one of many. (California released several thousand prisoners in 1977 under SB 42 — due to a malfunctioning parole board similar to what we have now.)

The editorial reads, "The gover-

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nor wants to put people at risk to compensate for his own bad policies." Might I remind you that these potentially released people will get out within 20 months anyway, according to the proposal?

It seems you don't have a lot of confidence in the state's \$10 billion "correction" system. Is the editorial insinuating that our corrections system is a colossal failure for its 300,000 prisoners, parolees and youth wards?

Perhaps it's time society demands a fix in what is obviously so broken. The truth is, you only get from people what you invest in them. If you arrest broken people and only warehouse them, you should only expect to have broken people released.

Yet the Honor Yard, with all of its offered opportunities, has proven again and again that everyone is not incorrigible.

Dortell Williams  
Lancaster

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