



COVID-19 Behind the Walls

Prisoner Reports Dated May 6-7, 2020

Actual date written unknown; this report dated May 7:

To the CURE: Hello, my name is Judy Pickens, and I am currently incarcerated in WERDCC – Vandalia prison.

I am one of many falsely accused and wrongfully convicted women here. Daily I fight alongside my family to clear my name and to bring attention to the prosecutorial misconduct of the Missouri criminal justice system and the jurists as well as the other officers of the court, who have not done their jobs. They have used false witness more times than we can talk about. In most cases, you see where experts were used who have been found to perjure themselves. Such was the case in my situation where the medical experts used were found to be lying, and when that was pointed out to Judge Garvey during my evidentiary hearing, he then said it did not matter and that it wasn't important.

Now I ask you how is it that one of the state's main experts found to be lying not important? That is the question that I am still waiting to be answered. Let me be clear and in an effort to drive this vital and necessary fact home.

I am one hundred percent innocent of all the charges I was convicted of, and I can honestly say with a clear mind I did nothing wrong. For more information, please go to justice4judyp.com or to blogtalkradio.com or to change.org and check out my story and the latest updates on the efforts being made to free me and clear my name, plus find out ways you can help us on our quest for justice and full exoneration.

My chief and primary reason for writing was to speak to you about the COVID19 pandemic and, more to the point, the steps the Department of Corrections has taken toward ensuring the safety and health of every human being in this prison. We are people; we are mothers and daughters; we are wives, sisters, grandmothers and friends. We matter, and we should be treated as such. The prison has done very little to make sure we are safe.

Daily they tell us that there are no positive cases in the State of Missouri as it relates to the prison system. Sunday April 19, 2020, roughly mid-afternoon, Captain Thomas and Lieutenant Seymour came to three house and went wing by wing informing us that we have a positive case of COVID-19 in the prison. He told us it was a staff member; however, he did not give us the staff member's name.

If I may, let me backtrack – it was either the 15th or the 16th of April that they issued every offender a sub-par mask, some of which were damaged and even had holes in them. The masks were one-ply of white broadcloth material. This material was so thin that in most cases you could see through them. We were told to wash them first before wearing them, and once many of us laundered our masks they tore up. Some of the ladies asked would the masks be replaced and they were told no and sent on their way. Most of the staff members here inside the prison do not wear PPE at all. Some may wear gloves and some might wear a mask occasionally, but almost all of them are inconsistent and behave as if there is no

pandemic. We find out most of our information from CNN and each other. On April 21, 2020, we were told by the kitchen workers that we had on that day 185 people (offenders) under quarantine. When asked how they knew it was 185 people, they said because they had to take food to them in Styrofoam containers. Offenders asked custody about those who were being quarantined, and custody's response was that the 185 people were only being observed, but none at that time had been tested. We were told that no one would be tested unless they started having symptoms. Many of the ladies, myself included, are afraid and don't understand why it seems like no one cares about us.

Some of the staff members have chosen not to work here because of the staff member who tested positive. The ladies who work at MVE, which is the clothing factory, are forced to work in an environment where social distancing is not being observed. We are made to stand literally shoulder to shoulder so that the officers can count us with ease. Other work sites have modified their staffing schedule and in some cases stopped their workers from working; such was the case for work release. Even education and the VoTech classes have been modified. Many of the aforementioned groups are moving under the 10 or less guidelines recommended by the CDC. MVE, however, is operating under no such standard.

Even one of the supervisors has chosen not to work as long as the virus is present in the prison.

To add insult to injury, the JPay system, which is meant to give us a form of communication by way of email, has been faulty and fraudulent when it comes to sending and receiving emails. Many of the ladies here have had countless issues with either receiving emails or sending them. Some have filed trouble tickets, but have gotten little if any resolution. Our complaints have fallen on deaf ears.

As of April 23, 2020 three additional wings including the one I am currently living in have been placed on quarantine. So here are the wings quarantined: 1A, 1B, 2A, 3C, 6B and 8-house. Every decision made today in this COVID-19 pandemic will pave the way to our future, and dare I say hindsight has no place in this conversation.

Here is what I know: The state can do something, must do something in order to save lives because, simply put, all lives matter. Please don't leave us behind.

Judy Pickens

5/6/2020 KB ERDCC:

MDOC had originally put out an email to all prisoners and some of our families to the effect that, to stem the spread of COVID-19, no new admissions would be accepted from city/county jails around the state. However, ERDCC has continued to accept new admissions from city/county jails, and they are periodically releasing them into the general prison population at ERDCC or transferring them out to other prisons. This is yet another spigot through which the virus can travel throughout the prison system. Remember that virtually no prisoners are being tested.