

Dying with my Eyes Open

Terry C. is a forty-one-year-old African American male, serving sixty years at Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Bonne Terre, MO. In 2017, he surpassed the twenty-year mark of that sentence. During that time he has earned his G.E.D. and enrolled in several college-level courses, and has adjusted well to prison life. His record of conduct is categorized as a "number one," which is the highest rating possible. In the past twenty-one years in various maximum-security facilities, Terry hasn't had a single major conduct violation.

Like many others serving similar sentences to his, Terry has spent the entire time he has been incarcerated in twenty to twenty-two hours a day lockdown status. In fact, since his incarceration as a juvenile more than twenty years ago, he has not spent more than a few hours a day among other human beings except in forced proximity to a cell mate.

Terry's only request is that the Missouri Department of Corrections take into consideration his behavior and accomplishments and move him to a lower level facility where his elderly parents can visit him and support his continued growth. His record speaks for itself, and he feels he has earned this opportunity. Furthermore, after more than two decades of living in inhumane conditions of being caged in permanent confinement in a tiny cell, he is now beginning to fear for his mental stability. He reached out to Missouri CURE in 2017 seeking support.

Dear Missouri Cure,

"In 2001 or 2002 the former director (Lombardi) stopped allowing inmates with long sentences to reside at lower level prisons, which means if you have 30 years you have to be on 20 plus hours a day of lockdown for a minimum of 21 or 22 years (Editor: This is the norm in maximum security). Then if they decide you can be sent to a lower level then you can go, which may take another year! Part of the problem with inmates coming together or building a positive movement is because we're all on lockdown. I believe there should be a system in place (like it used to be) such as no major violations, have a G.E.D. and be in a maximum security prison (level #5) for at least 10 years then we would be able to sign up for a lower level prison. I've been on 20 plus hours of lockdown a day for nearly 22 years (since I was a juvenile) and I can now feel my sanity slipping away.

It hurts so bad and I'm doing everything in my power to stop it and I can't. I'm beginning to no longer feel as if I am human and I'm hurting.

For the past 3 months or so I've been sending the new Director (Anne Precythe) certified letters (6) asking to be sent to the lower level prison in Pacific, MO. For the reasons above and the following...

*My parents who have been together for nearly 50 years are elderly and their health is not good! My mother is on oxygen and my dad just had heart surgery, which means they cannot travel long distances. The director can approve what is called a hardship transfer or they can give me an override transfer which only means my adjustment and prison record is good. I fall under or qualify for both because my prison conduct is a "one" which is the best it can get and has been for at least fifteen consecutive years. I have no major conduct violations in 21 years. No violence or threats towards staff. Why am I not allowed to go to a lower level prison? I believe I have earned that much and so have others. Missouri DOC should re-install this policy. **Before it was ended, prisons were much calmer because everyone was working towards something positive!***

*Last month, State Representative Bruce Franks Jr. called my mom and told her he would meet with the director and see if he could get the move done. I'm asking you guys to contact Mr. Franks on my behalf and help push this through. He's on the Corrections Committee and he said he would help and also this would open the door for others! **I pray that you all can help me because I'm dying with my eyes open. I'm seeing what's killing me and I can't do nothing about it.***

Missouri CURE has been actively involved in the pursuit of justice and providing support for those suffering from Human Rights violations since 1990. Since 2014 Missouri CURE's Prisoner Health Committee Coordinator has focused on documenting prisoners' concerns and bringing them to the attention of the Department of Corrections, requesting that state law be honored and seeking redress, also working with Rep. Bruce Franks Jr. and other state representatives in an attempt to bring at least a degree of relief and justice behind prison walls. Terry's call for help surpassed the (for a volunteer organization overwhelming) 200 mark of prisoners who reached out to Missouri CURE.

It coincided with a change in MODOC leadership which prompted cautious optimism that conditions might improve as new DOC Director Anne Precythe had relayed her philosophy on how 'Corrections' should work:

- treating everyone "the same, whether they are staff or prisoners."

- "holding people accountable",
- "empowering staff to be good role models," and
- "empowering prisoners to make good decisions when released."

The new director's proclaimed philosophical changes to department policies would represent a direly needed sea change for the Missouri Department of Corrections. For now, prisoners like Terry continue to suffer from inhumane policies **that are counterproductive to rehabilitation** and in fact, are more akin to mass human storage. As of July 2019, Terry's request for a hardship transfer to MECC in Pacific MO has not been approved. He is still being confined under maximum security conditions at ERDCC in Bonne Terre MO.