

CHARNEL HOUSE: No Vacancies

by: Crandell McKinnon, California

“There’s no talk in the Legislature about fixing the death penalty.”

C.S.Ct. Chief Justice Cantil-Sakauye

In 2015 California’s State Legislatures approved a special funding proposal put forth by Governor Jerry Brown, to expand death row by an additional 100 cells. The special funding is to be included in the state budget, estimated to be \$113 billion, \$3.2 million will be allocated to expanding death row.

Yes, Ladies and Gentlemen, death row has “No Vacancies.”

California’s San Quentin State Prison houses all condemned male prisoners, where the expansion will take place, once comprised of three units: East Block (E/B; Grade-A inmates) - 524 cells; North Block (Grade-A special privilege housing) - 68 cells; and the Adjustment Center (A/C; Grade-B inmates held in the hole) - 102 cells.

The \$3.2 million is scheduled to improve security in South Block (or Donner/D Section), initially reserved for Reception inmates or non-death row prisoners. Of the five tiers, the first two tiers (50 cells on first and 54 on second) will be upgraded to hold the condemned Grade-A overflow. East Block and D-Section are connected by a vestibule, making for a short walk for those Grade-A inmates who attend the (6) E/B yards or the (32) Walk Alone cages. The security upgrades, as told to me, consist of adding tray-slots, for inmates to receive meals and be restrained before exiting cells; adding security gates to the showers; adding security railings to the second tier; adding wire mesh to all cell bars; and adding phone lines and connections to the tiers for telephones. In addition to, according to reports, increasing staff. Assuming all this is true, the \$3.2 million is an unnecessary expenditure, simply because all the materials needed are in house, the work will be completed by inmates, and staff already man those tiers.

On January 12th, 2016, some (10/15) inmates – those who volunteered and others randomly chosen – from E/B were called to transfer to D-Section. Over the course of four days other inmates with Grade A status stuck in A/C were likewise transferred to D-Section.

There are 750 inmates condemned to California’s death row, thus the expansion of one-hundred cells at San Quentin is only a temporary fix, being such counties like Los Angeles, Riverside and Fresno are fixated on seeking the death penalty for crimes that don’t meet the threshold of “the worst of the worst”, ensuring the need for more cells will continue. As it stands, no executions have been carried out since 2006, forty-nine death row prisoners have died from: natural causes, suicide and/or other causes. A result of years spent languishing on death row due to ongoing appellate delays, lack of legal representation and the dysfunction within the Legislature and the California Supreme Court. New death row arrivals must wait on average five years or more before being appointed State Appellate counsel and State Habeas Corpus counsel. At this time, I have been awaiting appointment of State Habeas Corpus counsel for 17 years, others in my situation have been waiting up to 20 years.

Attention California residents: The \$3.2 million of “special funding” is a part time fix, failing to address the dysfunction that plagues California’s death penalty system. Thus, as it stands at the moment, “Charnel House” still has No Vacancies.

From my stance on Maa, a voice from DEATHROW!

OJORE DHORUBA KHAFFRA AJAMU

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