

STATE OF DESPAIR: Afflicting the afflicted

by: Crandell Ojore McKinnon, California

In an attempt to prevent California prisoners from successfully taking their own lives, the state installed an ineffective "Guard One System," throughout its Security Housing Units (SHU) and Administration Segregation Units (Ad-Seg). The Guard One System, implemented four or more years ago, requires a C.O. (Correctional Officer) walk each tier every 30 minutes and clock each cell with a pipe like gadget that must be connected to a sensor that's attached to every cell's tray slot; when properly connected it registers with a beep. This security check is to ensure every inmate is alive and well. The problem with this system is, it hasn't prevented suicides nor any attempts within San Quentin State Prison (S.Q.), death row/East Block unit. Thus, what is the purpose or reasoning behind the system?

The C.O.s find the protocol to be a nuisance and a waste of their time, because anyone desiring to commit suicide will do so within that thirty minutes window. Some use the pipe as a tool to disturb and annoy prisoners, banging the pipe with force against the sensor day and night; those who complain are instructed to write it up (inmate written grievance).

The psyche of the state is so problematic and sadistic it finds fault with those condemned persons desiring to escape the psychological torture and inhumane treatment of death row. In some cases, the state finds it necessary to issue a CDC 115 Rule Violation Report, to those prevented from committing suicide. If the state's goal is to murder the condemn, why punish them for attempting to take their own life? At the end of the day death is accomplished. Or is some insidious, sinister, sadistic plan being prevented from playing out? Because the state fails to hold C.O.s accountable when they brutalize or murder prisoners confined throughout the penal system.

The state is not working to prevent suicides out of some sense of moral, ethical persuasion to preserve life. But to impose their barbaric and antiquated form of justice. To permit the condemned to usurp and bypass justice is an affront to justice and, let the state tell it, denies the victims' families the retribution and "closure" they long for.

In California, "closure" for the victims' families is of no concern of the state; they're too entangled in matters like obstruction of justice, procedural and administrative dysfunction, and the refusal to expand the pool of attorneys, the cause of lengthy delays. Matters that essentially strip the death penalty of its punitive, retributory, or deterrent purpose. Instead, acting more as a lingering psychological threat.

Since the reinstatement of the death penalty in California, San Quentin's death row has experienced more suicides than actual executions. For some, languishing on California's death row in a state of despair for decades, brings about distress from the oppressive, subjugated, deprived conditions, that drive many to inflict harm on themselves. One individual driven to the edge rammed two plastic pen-casings into his eyes; he would later go on to strangle himself. The last person murdered by the state was not only the oldest, but blind and unable to walk; three months earlier he suffered a heart-attack, and some time after that, he told the medical personnel, if he has another attack, let him die. Prison officials were instructed, not to grant that request. Others have overdosed on drugs (prescriptions/illicit), slit their wrist or jugular and bled out, but most individuals usually hang themselves. All in an attempt to escape this debilitating environment of S.Q; and the long suffering wait that is the horror of lethal injection.

I can't even imagine what is going on in the minds of those who choose to inflict such pain and harm on themselves, and fear even attempting to dwell on it. Thus I question the state's motives and rational in preventing them from killing themselves?

From my stance on Maa, a voice from Death Row.

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