



Transforming Society's Response to Homicide.

September 28, 2016

Commissioner Thomas A. Turco, III
Massachusetts Department of Correction
50 Maple Street, Suite 3
Milford, MA 01757

Dear Commissioner Turco;

It has come to our attention that the Massachusetts Department of Correction is considering changes to the Code of Massachusetts Regulation relative to visiting procedures at state institutions (103 CMR 483). The Louis D. Brown Peace Institute opposes any policy that limits the number of visitors and any policy that excludes visitors of who are not on a pre-approved list. Visits are lifelines between loved ones. Maintaining strong relationships with one's support network through communication and visitation is essential to an incarcerated person's well-being and a decisive factor in a person's successful transition back to the community after their sentence.

The Louis D. Brown Peace Institute is a center of healing, teaching, and learning for families and communities impacted by murder, grief, trauma, and loss. We are best known for serving families in the first 24-72 hours after a homicide happens so they can lay their loved one to rest with dignity and respect. We also serve families on the other side: families of people incarcerated for murder at DOC institutions. Visits are an integral part to maintaining family and community connection. A strong connection to the community is public safety asset.

The Peace Institute runs the Intergenerational Justice Program (IJP) with our partners at VISIONS Inc. and SPAN Inc. IJP provides coordinated support and guidance to families of murdered victims and families of people arrested and incarcerated for murder in order to create opportunities for healing, reconciliation, and accountability. IJP fills a major gap in the field with its survivor-centered approach and explicit focus on family engagement and community involvement to address the impact of homicide. The purpose of IJP is to ensure that all families have what they need to live in peace after a homicide. For many families, that includes contact and connection with their incarcerated loved one who will one day come back to the community.

Incarcerated people depend on their support network while they are in prison and once they return home. We help IJP participants maintain support networks that include family, friends, clergy, neighbors, fellow congregants from one's parish, mentors, advocates, former and potential employers, and program coordinators. Different people in our lives fulfill different needs; receiving visits from a range of people who care about what happens to you is crucial to incarcerated people's health and safety.

Center of Healing, Teaching, and Learning.

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This is especially true for IJP program participants who are doing long sentences; often for crimes they were convicted of when they were very young. Visitors to these individuals may naturally shift and change over time; the restrictions the DOC is proposing would require that an incarcerated person delete family from the list so that other supportive individuals can apply to visit. Such a process is an unnecessary burden and detriment to families – especially those planning for re-entry –when they are already faced with so much shame and stigma on top of logistical barriers like housing and employment.

There is no reason to limit a person's visitor list to the 5, 8, or even 10 people proposed in the amendment to 103 CMR 483. There is even less reason to restrict visitors to a pre-approved list, as such a list would inevitably delay or deny needed support. The proposed limits on the number of visitors are harmful and counterproductive to the goals of eliminating violence and victimization.

My son Louis was murdered in 1993. I understand the instinct to harshly punish those who cause harm. However, that instinct only leads to more violence and suffering. I had the opportunity to build a relationship with the mother of the man convicted of killing my son; we live in the same neighborhood. I also had the opportunity to visit her son in prison. I told him I did not want him to come home from prison and hurt anyone else or end up dead. I asked his friends to visit him in prison to prepare him to return home, knowing he had the support and resources to live a peaceful life. The man convicted of killing my son is out on parole and doing well.

As a survivor of a homicide victim, I have witnessed firsthand how strong family and community relationships are keys to interrupting cycles of violence. The Louis D. Brown Peace Institute strongly opposed any limits on the number of visitors and any policy that restricts visitors to a pre-approved list.

Thank you.

In service,

Chaplain Clementina Chery

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