

# MOSES



Madison Organizing in Strength, Equality, and Solidarity  
**for Criminal Justice Reform**

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## WISDOM's Big Plans for State Budget

By Katie Mulligan

**W**ISDOM has embarked on an ambitious campaign to add major funding for criminal justice reform to the state's budget. More than 40 people participated in a ZOOM meeting on Jan. 12 to learn about the budget process and how to advocate for WISDOM's priorities.

"The budget is extremely important," WISDOM director David Liners said. "It controls spending for departments and agencies for two years, beginning in July." Advocacy about this budget is particularly urgent because Gov. Evers has directed heads of state departments and agencies to reduce spending by three percent from the previous level.

### Public hearings

The Governor will present his budget to the public on Feb. 16. It will then go to the Joint Finance Committee, which will conduct hearings around the state. WISDOM will provide information about how to register and speak at those hearings.

More opportunities for advocacy will arise when the Assembly and the Senate consider the budget. "Each legislator is important," Liners said. "It isn't necessary for your legislator to be a member of a particular party or on the Joint Finance Committee for you to have an impact."

### Justice Reinvestment Act

A major focus of WISDOM's advocacy will be a Justice Reinvestment Act, which would establish a Justice Reinvestment Fund. Liners pointed out that three state prison institutions are good candidates for closure: the Green Bay Correctional Institution, the Waupun Correctional Institution, and the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility.

Closing any one of them would enable the state to direct \$50 million per year into a fund that would support programs such as the Treatment Alternatives and Diversion Program, transitional jobs and housing, and other efforts that build communities and reduce the chances that Wisconsin residents will be imprisoned.

### Close a Prison

This is an optimal time to close a prison, Liners says, because the current census in Wisconsin's prisons is about 2,500 fewer than last year. The Department of Corrections plans to implement changes that will decrease the number of people sent back to prison for "crimeless revocations." It will also increase the capacity of the Earned Release Program, which could shorten the time in prison for thousands of people each year.

### Executive Committee

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 Jeanie Verschay  
 Racial Justice for All Children  
 Barbie Jackson  
 James Morgan  
 Public Safety  
 Gloria Stevenson-McCarter  
 Tina Hogle

### MOSES Caucus

Faith Leaders Caucus  
 Joan Duerst  
 Michael Marshall

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## Organizer's Corner

By Mark Rice, MOSES Community Organizer

I have focused a lot on rest, recovery, and self care over the last few months and was on vacation from Dec. 21 until Jan. 3. I had a good vacation, and now I feel recharged and ready to have a major impact on advancing the mission of MOSES in 2021.

I spent much of my time at work over the last few months developing my goals for 2021. I have met with numerous members of MOSES to ensure that my plan is aligned with the goals of MOSES and its numerous task forces. My top priority in 2021 is to support the needs of MOSES members and MOSES task forces. I will be communicating frequently with the chairs and members of MOSES' teams and task forces, to ensure that I am providing the assistance needed to advance the crucial work that is being done.



Mark Rice

### DOC town hall

A recent highlight for me was attending a Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) Town Hall on Violation Response and Revocation. Although the DOC appears to be working to maintain the status quo in numerous ways, it has also begun to make some of the policy changes that members of MOSES and the WISDOM Post-Release Issues Task Force have been advocating since 2015. The DOC has dramatically reduced the use of holding people in county jails and prisons in response to alleged violations of supervision, and it has begun moving some treatment programs from prisons to community-based settings. In addition, the DOC announced some policy changes that could result in a reduction in incarceration for crimeless revocations. It will be critical for members of MOSES to scrutinize the implementation of these policy changes in the coming months and years.

### Sentencing events

One of my main projects has been assisting the JSRI Diversions group and the Events Operational Team with developing a few important events on the topic of sentencing. These events will take place in March. Marquette University Law School Professor Michael O'Hear, who wrote the book *Wisconsin Sentencing in the Tough-on-Crime Era*, has committed to doing a keynote

presentation during the first event that will lift up some of the key findings of his book. After his presentation, there will be a panel discussion that will include directly impacted people and public officials who have power over the sentencing process in Dane County. The second event will be a Dane County judicial candidates' forum. See "Mark Your Calendar" on page 4.

### State budget activities

I have also been very active with the numerous WISDOM state budget activities. There will be many ways for MOSES members to get involved with state budget advocacy in the coming months. We have a great opportunity to move our issue work forward through this process. We will need MOSES members to step up and get involved with the upcoming Joint Finance Committee hearings, where members of the state legislature will listen to the concerns of Wisconsin residents. We will also need MOSES members to step up and provide strong leadership for WISDOM's Madison Action Day on April 15. More details about these events and other WISDOM state budget meetings and trainings will be coming out soon. ■

## MOSES Madison Mission

Our mission is to build collective power to dismantle the systems of mass incarceration and mass supervision and to eradicate the racial disparities in our community that contribute to them.

### We envision:

- an end to the systems of mass incarceration and mass supervision;
- an end to systemic racism;
- a reallocation of resources to create racial and economic equity;
- a just society without discrimination in which all people thrive.



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Justice reinvestment is an idea that has proven its worth throughout the country for more than a decade. See the two articles on page 7 in this issue that describe its origin and implementation in other states.

For more information about how you can affect the budget, access WISDOM’s School of Democracy. Just click [here](#). On the site, you can sign up for a series of ZOOM meetings running through the first week of March. WISDOM is also launching a social media campaign that will include brief items that you can post on your accounts. ■

## MOSES Website Volunteer Needed

MOSES needs a volunteer who is willing to keep our website up to date. This person would work with or be part of the Communications Team, to determine what to post. Need to be familiar with WordPress or willing to learn. If you’re interested or would like more information, please contact Alison Mix at [alisonbmix@gmail.com](mailto:alisonbmix@gmail.com).

# New MOSES Task Force Takes Shape

By Barbie Jackson

On July 18, 2020, the MOSES Leadership Board approved the formation of a new MOSES task force: Racial Justice for All Children (RJAC), co-chaired by Barbie Jackson and James Morgan. Its purpose is to eradicate the childhood-to-school-to-prison pipeline via strategic supports aimed at reducing the generational deprivation that children of color and children in poverty experience, due to systemic racism. RJAC focuses on the root causes of the pipeline, with an emphasis on racial justice support for families and schools in Dane County.

The inspiration for RJAC comes from the Honorable and Reverend Everett Mitchell, who in June shared his discernments about the pipeline and his suggestions on how we might proceed. Judge Mitchell advised us to study the legal and trauma aspects of the pipeline and shared a substantial slide presentation he had prepared for a University of Wisconsin Law School class. His presentation outlines the legal intersections between the child welfare and the juvenile justice systems.

## Lens of trauma

Our first step in educating ourselves was to form a small team, led by Elvice McAlpine, to review Judge Mitchell's slides and expand our research. We began by examining matters through a lens of trauma, with subsequent study planned through lenses of race and poverty. Dr. Lynn McDonald contributed substantially, with presentations to task force members about trauma and adverse childhood experiences.

To further our education, in early December, over half the task force members and other MOSES members attended anti-racism training provided by Pastor Marilyn Miller, the chair of WISDOM's Racial Justice Core Team, and her partner, Dr. Joyce Caldwell.

In the six months since its formation, RJAC has expanded from 17 MOSES members to 25 active participants. These participants are spread among a core task force, an Education Improvement focus group, and an emerging group that is considering how best to meet the basic needs of children and families.

## Wide range of issues

Sandra Brown leads the Education Improvement focus group, which began by establishing a relationship with Dr. Carlton Jenkins, the new Superintendent of the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD). This focus group is deepening connections with MMSD leaders and has established program evaluation criteria and a measurement tool for assessing the suitability of programs in support of our Black and Brown children and children in poverty. It has also identified many of the programs that we will evaluate in the coming months, including those addressing trauma and those targeting improved literacy.

The group considering how best to meet basic needs of children and families is nearing a decision on its initial focus. This group has been evaluating a wide range of issues, including housing, early childhood development, mental health, the child welfare system, foster care, and the minimum wage. The group expects to make a selection and create an issue proposal for consideration at the March meeting of the MOSES Leadership Board. Once approved, it will become RJAC's second focus group. Attention will then turn to pertinent research, relationship building, and development of recommendations for MOSES advocacy.

Meeting dates are posted in the [MOSES Calendar](#). Contact [Barbie Jackson](#) for Zoom links. ■

## Mark Your Calendar for Two Forums on Sentencing Reform

Sentencing practices impact our communities in several ways. These practices are important for determining the size of the incarcerated population in the jail and prison systems. They affect the safety of our communities; surprisingly, longer periods of supervision might actually decrease community safety. It also is clear that these practices have strong impacts on the lives and families of people who are incarcerated. Sentencing practices are local. Similar cases have different outcomes in Dane County than in, say, Milwaukee County.

**MOSES will host virtual forums on March 16 and March 23 at 6:30 p.m.** to consider sentencing policies and reform and to hear from people affected by them.

On **March 16**, we will begin with a presentation by Professor Michael O'Hear, author of *Wisconsin Sentencing in the Tough-on-Crime Era*. This presentation will be followed by a statement of MOSES positions and testimonials by people directly impacted by incarceration. The session will close with a panel discussion by impacted people and criminal justice officials.

On **March 23**, we hope to hear from candidates for eight seats on the Dane County Circuit Court that will be decided by the April 6 election. We will ask them to tell us why they should be on the court and to explain their judicial philosophies.



# MOSES Joins Candlelight Vigil at Governor's Mansion

By Cindy Lovell



On the evening of Dec. 21, WISDOM (of which MOSES is an affiliate) shed light, literally, on a dark subject. About 100 people held candles in front of the Governor's Mansion during a vigil on the darkest night of the year to remember the 23 people held in Wisconsin prisons whose deaths were attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many speakers, including the Rev. Colier McNair, formerly incarcerated activist Shannon Ross, and WISDOM Director David Liners, offered prayers for inmates with deaths related to COVID-19, those sick with the virus, and those at risk of contracting it – essentially anyone employed or held in a Wisconsin prison. Prayers were also said for family members who worry about their loved ones in prison, and for the leaders who have the power to slow the spread of coronavirus behind bars.

In addition, speakers shared facts about how alarmingly fast coronavirus is spreading in Wisconsin prisons. Almost 50\* percent of inmates and 20 percent of Department of Corrections (DOC) staff had tested positive for COVID-19, as against only 10 percent of Wisconsin's general population. Speakers expressed their frustration with Gov. Tony Evers, whom they had supported in the 2018 election. Evers and aides have been courteous and say they are "studying" the situation, but have not followed through with action, speakers said.

Social distancing is all but impossible in overcrowded or even at-capacity correctional facilities. The World Health Organization warns that prisons and jails are breeding grounds for this highly contagious virus. In addition to the risks for those behind bars, research is clear that as rates of COVID-19 increase in prisons and jails, so do the rates in surrounding communities.

Fortunately, there are known ways to stem the transmission of coronavirus in prisons. The most effective way is by large-scale release and decarceration. Closer to home, research led by John Eason, a sociology professor with the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Justice Lab, indicates that decarceration is associated with fewer cases of COVID-19.

*"MOSES will continue to remember those who have died, to advocate for those who are sick, and to intercede with those who have the power and responsibility to care for the people in our prisons."*

Some governors have used their authority to release people from prison through clemency and commuted sentences. In Wisconsin, however, Gov. Evers has yet to take these life-saving steps. Over the last nine months, WISDOM and its affiliates, such as MOSES, SIP (Supporters of Incarcerated People), and EXPO (EX-incarcerated People Organizing), have tried to educate and compel Evers to action through letters, a petition, multiple contacts with the DOC and legislators, a "drive to decarcerate," and a month and a half of sit-ins at the Governor's Mansion.

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WISDOM and its affiliates have recommended a number of steps that Gov. Evers could take. He has the authority to direct the DOC to process the elderly and vulnerable for compassionate release, to cease incarcerating people for “technical” parole violations, and to immediately release all people in Wisconsin prisons who are scheduled to be released within the next six months.

Gov. Evers’ inaction affects especially communities of color, which are overrepresented in our prison system. If he continues to ignore the authority he has to slow the rampant spread of coronavirus in the prisons, more people will needlessly die. MOSES will continue to remember those who have died, to advocate for those who are sick, and to intercede with those who have the power and responsibility to care for the people in our prisons.

*“Speakers expressed their frustration with Gov. Tony Evers, whom they had supported in the 2018 election.”*

*\*As of February 1, 2021, nearly 55 percent of Wisconsin prisoners had tested positive for COVID-19, as well as 2,431 staff members; at least 25 prisoners had died of it. ■*



*Immediately above: Shannon Ross and David Liners*

## Public Safety Task Force Update

*By Tina Hogle*

The MOSES Public Safety Task Force (PSTF) has met monthly since its inception in September 2020.

The focus of the meetings has been on building relationships as a team, developing a definition of public safety, and creating a common understanding and language for entering into discussions about this complex, and often controversial, issue. We will be spending upcoming meetings on continuing to increase our understanding of current Dane County policing and other law enforcement practices, developing a vision for a safe and just community, and brainstorming about possible allies with whom we can join to move toward making our vision a reality.



Some areas of concern about our current systems are: racial disproportionality in policing and

arrests; use-of-force policies and practices; predictive policing as a decision-making strategy; and whether public resources that are used for expansion and militarization of law enforcement might be shifted to supporting the economic and social development of under-resourced communities. ■

The PSTF meets on the third Thursday of each month from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.. If you have an interest in becoming a member of the PSTF, please email [Tina Hogle](#) or [Gloria Stevenson-McCarter](#).

# Texas Shows Justice Reinvestment Works

By Katie Mulligan

**W**ISDOM has proposed a form of justice reinvestment that links savings from closing prisons to investment in programs that make prisons obsolete. The idea is simple and sensible. In fact, it has a history going back more than 10 years and has produced remarkable results.

The idea gained attention in Texas in 2007. The state had a prison population of 155,000 people and a projected need for 17,000 additional prison beds by 2012, at a cost of \$2 billion. Two causes of the problem will be familiar to us in Wisconsin: revocations to prison were expanding, and parole boards were slow to release people from prison.

Legislators heard testimony from prosecutors and judges that low-risk nonviolent offenders often ended up in prison because effective alternatives were lacking. There were lengthy waits for drug court and mental health court options. For those in prison, the chances of parole were thwarted by a lack of programs that would enable them to reduce their sentences and prepare for successful transitions.

A bipartisan team, Sen. John Whitmire (D) and Rep. Jerry Madden (R), turned to the policy experts. Madden said he learned quickly that very conservative think tanks and very liberal think tanks agreed on a lot of things: “Many of those agreements had to do with treatment: treatment of drug addicts, of alcoholics, and treatment for people on parole or probation who were having problems.” And Whitmire observed that “[a] bunch of right-wing folks got behind us because everything we do is very conservative. What’s more conservative than preventing the next crime?”

The result was a \$241-million justice-reinvestment package. Front-end reforms included more than 800 new residential substance-abuse treatment beds and 3,000 outpatient slots. New limits were put on the length of probation for drug and property crimes. Policies concerning sanctions were reformed. Nearly 3,000 substance-abuse treatment beds were added in prisons to help people prepare for a successful release.

These changes mitigated the growth in the state’s prison population by about 9,000 and saved the taxpayers an estimated \$443 million. With further reform, the state was able to close three prisons, lower its recidivism rate by 25 percent, and enjoy the lowest rate of crime since 1968.

The successful outcome also spurred the formation of Right on Crime, a national organization supported by conservatives that advocates for many criminal justice reforms familiar to MOSES members. The Tommy G. Thompson Center on Public

Leadership offers a Wisconsin example of how conservatives and liberals can agree on policy changes that create a more just and humane society and reduce taxpayer burden. ■

## Justice Reinvestment: State Snapshots

By Katie Mulligan

WISDOM’s advocacy for a justice-reinvestment strategy is based on the successful experiences of the 35 states that have participated in the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI), a public-private partnership that includes the U.S. Justice Department, The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Council of State Governments, the Urban Institute, and other organizations.

Since 2007, over half of the U.S. states have reformed their sentencing and corrections policies through JRI. In 2016, the Urban Institute reported that such initiatives had already generated more than \$1.1 billion in savings or averted costs. Below are examples from two states:

- Oregon’s incarceration rate was increasing at four times the national average in 2012. A new prison seemed likely. Instead, legislators created a justice-reinvestment grant program. Grants were awarded to counties for work release and transitional leave programs, specialty courts, and reform of the sanctions system. By 2016, the need for more prison beds had declined. Building a new prison became unnecessary, and the state saved an estimated \$250 million.
- Louisiana enacted legislative packages in 2011 and 2017 in response to the highest rate of incarceration in the country. The state reduced sentences, decreased the number of technical violations, created a transitional housing project, improved jail programs, and enacted other reforms. Success from the first wave of reform helped legislators and the governor push through the 2017 bills in a bipartisan effort. Seven of the 10 bills were authored by Republican legislators. According to state projections, the 2017 bills will reduce prison and community supervision populations by about 10 percent over 10 years and avoid \$262 million in spending. ■



# Meet Returning Citizen Floyd Wells

By Pam Gates

Floyd Wells has been through a lot in his 61 years. Born and raised in Madison, he grew up in a household where alcohol was used. He received guidance growing up, he says, but not always in the right context, and he developed dysfunctional behaviors and attitudes due to the family situation. He didn't do well in school, and thus in spite of being a good athlete he was ineligible to play in his senior year.

He got discouraged, dropped out of school, had a daughter, and married the mother. Eventually they had a second daughter, but theirs was a "using" relationship, including cocaine, and he forged checks to support the habit. That led to a prison term. When he got out, he returned to the same using environment with his wife and friends and ended up backsliding, forging more checks, and returning to prison. He repeated the cycle, in spite of getting treatment in prison, because, he says, he wasn't ready to change.

By then he had been married a second time, to a woman with three daughters. But when he got out of prison, he found himself homeless; no one in his family wanted to deal with him. That was probably his turning point. He sought help at the North Bay Treatment Center, after which his sister and her husband decided he could stay with them. He continued to get as much help as he could at Journey Mental Health.

"I started practicing empathy, honesty, courage, et cetera," Floyd recalled. "My second wife and I got remarried. I felt I needed to share my experience with young people, and I developed a program called 'Winning Characteristics,' which I brought to the MMSD [Madison Metropolitan School District]."

After being "clean" for only one year and a few months, Floyd became a behavioral education assistant, with "Winning Characteristics" as a pilot project at East High School. The funding for the project ran out after a year, but he spent the next two years at Badger Rock Middle School and then

a year at West as an education assistant. "The MMSD opened doors for me," he says.

Floyd's next project was "Mentoring to Success LLC," through which he mentored youths ages 11 through high school by engaging them in community activities. Eventually he found that he couldn't continue this work because of health issues.

He used the help of Wisconsin's Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, got his commercial driver's license, and now drives a school bus, taking kids who need help with remote learning to Frank Allis School for assistance. He has done some construction work in the past and is currently on the Tenant Resource Center's board of directors. He's also established good relationships with his kids and grandkids – "sometimes too good," he grins.

"I'm glad to share things I've learned about making good choices and thinking things through," he says. "I can talk them through things without misunderstanding. I emphasize that they have to be willing to change the quality of their life, to have some type of spiritual-awareness component to keep them focused.

"My choices and decisions are based off that awareness that continues to lead me with a purpose," he adds. "I never had a purpose or a dream [when I was growing up]. That's a dead end.

"My mother didn't understand. Back then, when you had questions, the response was flight or fight: 'I don't wanna hear it. I taught you better.' They weren't as informed on how to deal with certain situations. One thing they had that's not here today, though – butt whuppings!"

Floyd's big project – and realization of a dream – is "Seeds of Vision," transitional housing for men just out of prison with innovative services, which Floyd says means anything they need help with.

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Floyd Wells

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“My brother wanted to invest in housing, and I suggested housing for a cause,” he said. His brother agreed. He talked to James Morgan of JustDane, and they formed a partnership to go forward with the project. Now they’ve incorporated and put together a board. James Kilgore advised them to go with an established organization as the fiscal agent. Morris Waxler is drawing up an overview to present to a fiscal agent, probably JustDane or Pastor Colier McNair’s Blackhawk Church.

*“I’m glad to share things I’ve learned about making good choices and thinking things through.”*

“We still need to figure out what employee positions are needed,” Floyd continued. “We’re getting pretty close. As long as I let the Lord lead, I think it will happen. I have to be patient and recognize how incrementally things have to fall in place. I’m learning that anything you rush isn’t going to be productive. You’ve got to take your time.

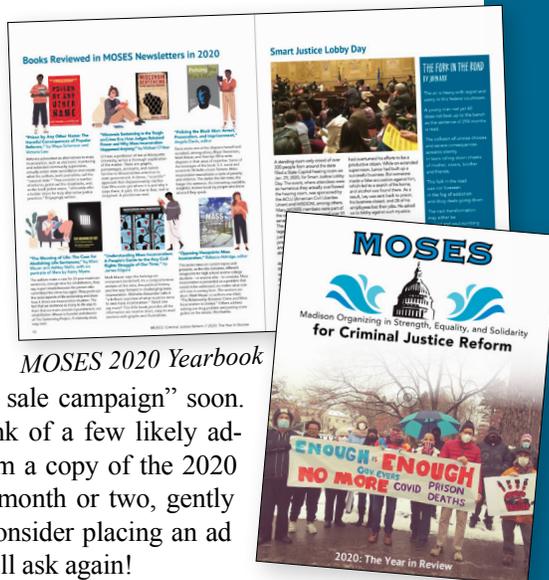
“This project keeps me accountable and focused. I am constantly learning and growing, mentally, psychologically, and spiritually. Whenever I can share my experiences, it fills me up. It’s important to have a purpose or a dream.”

In parting, Floyd offers us one last piece of wisdom: “I tell my kids that you can never get the past back; you can only go forward. Your past makes you who you are today. I spent 27 years either incarcerated or on some form of probation or parole. But I wouldn’t trade those experiences, because I wouldn’t be able to help [other] people who are in this situation.” ■

## Let’s Approach 2021 Yearbook Advertisers Now!

By Mary Anglim

I’ve been thinking that we don’t take enough advantage of our MOSES Yearbook when it is newly published and fresh. I’d like some of us to try to do an “early ad sale campaign” soon. Each of us would think of a few likely advertisers and send them a copy of the 2020 Yearbook in the next month or two, gently suggesting that they consider placing an ad in the fall, when we will ask again!



If you would like to work on this project by reaching out to a few (no more than five) potential advertisers in March or April, please get in touch at [mtanglim@gmail.com](mailto:mtanglim@gmail.com) or (608) 213-8923. We’ll do some strategizing!

Editor’s note: To obtain hard copies of the MOSES 2020 Yearbook please contact Cindy Lovell ([foxtrotlovell@gmail.com](mailto:foxtrotlovell@gmail.com), (608) 512-5411) or Ann Lacy ([annwilsonlacy@gmail.com](mailto:annwilsonlacy@gmail.com), 608-213-4469). ■

### Upcoming MOSES Meetings

#### General Membership

- Sunday, March 7, 2:30 p.m. via Zoom
- Sunday, April 11, 2:30 p.m. via Zoom
- Sunday, May 7, 2:30 p.m. via Zoom

#### Leadership Board

- Saturday, March 20, 9-11 a.m.

#### Task Forces

- MOSES Racial Justice for All Children, March 2, 4-5:30 p.m.
- WISDOM Conditions of Confinement, March 9, 4-5 p.m.
- WISDOM Prison Prevention, March 9, 5-6 p.m.
- MOSES Justice System Reform Initiative, March 11, 6:30-8 p.m.
- WISDOM Old Law, March 13, 8:30-9:30 a.m.
- MOSES Public Safety, March 18, 6-7:00 p.m.
- WISDOM Post-Release, March 25, 7:30-8:30 p.m.

## Why I Am a Sustaining Member

By Mary Anglim

Procrastination works! That's one of my life mottos, and sometimes it's true. Sometimes the meeting where I was supposed to give a long report gets cancelled, or a library book I thought I lost turns up before the due date, or some more serious conflict or obligation miraculously sorts itself out without my intervention. But sometimes procrastination doesn't work – sometimes the things I could have done in just a moment sink to the bottom of the to-do list and turn sour but never completely go away. The thank-you note or birthday card I should have sent, the project I could have helped to push along, the encouragement I could have offered, can turn into long-term regrets.

Fortunately our high-tech world has solved one problem: the I-meant-to-send-a-check problem. Just as I could never go back to the old days when I had to pay my utility bill, my insurance premium, and my rent "by hand," I can now also have the pleasure of having my bank send regular contributions to organizations I want to support. "Sustainerships" are safe, easy, and low-cost. I feel like the sorcerer who could snap his fingers and have an apprentice do all the work (without the flooding).

I've been a member of MOSES, through my faith congregation, for five or six years now. I know from my own experience that people in WISDOM, MOSES, and the other Wisconsin affiliates contribute selflessly over the long term to the work of an organization that reflects the moral imperatives that I share. I grew up in Chicago in the '40s, '50s, and '60s. Although sheltered, I was well aware of the racial disparities and frictions in my part of town, and I was taught to believe that people should help one another, especially the poor. To be honest, these facts all remained somewhat theoretical, however. I wasn't educated about the

realities of policing and criminal justice until much later, when the Dane County Jail project began to be studied. I have learned so much from MOSES about these issues and am deeply grateful for the experience. I think I owe MOSES some long-deferred tuition for that education, as well as for the work that so many have contributed to bring the facts of incarceration to public and governmental attention. Writing this essay has taught me that I am still procrastinating more than I knew!



Mary Anglim

Volunteers are the heart of an organization, but they cannot sustain the structure indefinitely without regular staff, who can coordinate, encourage, educate, share information, and handle mundane but indispensable tasks. Amazingly, such staff almost always need and deserve to be paid a living wage. And then there is rent, office supplies, publicity, travel, and the other expenses that give us a visible role in the community. We have some very able grant-writers providing their talents to help us stay solvent, but grants are always chancy, especially in these days of pandemic and organizational uncertainty. MOSES needs reliable income, which sustained monthly giving helps to provide. What they say is true – you won't miss a small contribution if you never see it, and it's fun to see how much it adds up to over a year. ■

### Please Consider a Monthly Contribution to MOSES

Download the form from the [MOSES website](#), fill it out, and mail it with a voided check to MOSES, PO Box 7031, Madison, WI 53707. If you have any questions, direct them to [treasurer.moses.madison@gmail.com](mailto:treasurer.moses.madison@gmail.com).

### Thanks to MOSES Sponsors



# American Prison: A Reporter's Undercover Journey Into the Business of Punishment

By Shane Bauer, New York: Penguin Press, 2018

Reviewed by Pam Gates

In 2009, journalist Shane Bauer and two companions spent two years in Iran's Evin prison, much of it in solitary confinement, after straying too close to Iran's border on a tourist visit to Iraqi Kurdistan. After his return to the U.S., Bauer felt the need for something to help him deal with the experience, something to anchor him. He began corresponding with people incarcerated in his home state of California and eventually visited the Pelican Bay prison. Meeting prisoners and learning their situations led Bauer, a reporter for Mother Jones magazine, to research the American prison system, which eventually led to this book, which he dedicated to "the prisoners in America."

## MOSES BOOK REVIEW

Bauer decided that the best way to really learn about American prisons was to work in one. He applied for a job as a guard with the Corrections Corp. of America (CCA). He chose CCA, he said, to examine "how the profit motive has shaped America's prison system for the last 250 years." Several CCA prisons offered him a position. The sloppy hiring process made it obvious that all they were seeking was a warm body.

Bauer chose Winnfield, outside Winnfield, La., because it was the oldest privately operated medium-security prison in the U.S. He left the job after four months, when it became clear that it was having an adverse effect on his psyche and his relationships.

Bauer does an excellent job of relating his tale of employment with the CCA. He alternates chapters on his job experiences with chapters on the history of incarceration, chain gangs, and slave labor on prison farms and in mines, mostly but not entirely in the South, before and after the Civil War. His research revealed that there was no time in American history – not even before the Revolution – when either business or government wasn't trying to profit off of other people's captivity.

Bauer is an excellent writer of vivid prose. If books were rated like movies, I think this one would get an "R" for

its explicit descriptions. He writes matter-of-factly of what happened, whether in history or during his shift at Winnfield the previous day. Anyone who still thinks "that's not who we are" after reading this is hiding from the facts.

Bauer's footnotes are thorough. He's not making any of this up. His CCA experience indicates a grim situation for both guards and prisoners. The guards get minimal pay: \$9/hour. No effort at rehabilitating prisoners is made; rather, those incarcerated are ignored, disrespected, and sometimes brutalized. They, in turn, manipulate staff when they can and sometimes brutalize staff or each other.

Bauer juxtaposes CCA's rosy claims of rehabilitation with descriptions of what actually happens at Winnfield. The Louisiana Department of Corrections is in charge of the CCA prisons and makes supervisory visits, but visits are prearranged and thus of course can be planned for and staff told what to say. Understaffing is one clear problem, which means education cannot be pursued and outdoor exercise is available only sporadically and on a very limited basis. Counseling and medical care are available only minimally, again, apparently, to keep costs down.

Here is one example of the copious information *American Prison* provides on our history of locking people up: In 1968, a group of Arkansas prisoners sued the state. They protested the working conditions on their prison farm, the poor food, and the inadequate medical services. Prisoners had been threatened with whippings, chained to fences for several days at a time, and shot at, at close range, with birdshot. In 1970, a federal judge declared Arkansas's entire state prison system cruel and unusual punishment.

*American Prison* is engagingly written and well worth the reader's time. I highly recommend it. ■

