

Inside/Outside

INSIDE ARIZONA'S PUNISHMENT SYSTEM:

Part 3: Surviving Perryville Women's Prison

DRAPETOMANIA COLLECTIVE 2021





Dragnetomania

COLLECTIVE

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AUTHOR NOTE

The Drapetomania Collective is an Arizona-based, inside-out, underground formation of formerly and currently incarcerated women and their impacted comrades on the outside. The following research series is the first public presentation since its formation in 2018.

Artwork by various artists currently and formerly incarcerated in Perryville and Lewis prisons. Please visit drapetomaniacollective.org to learn more.

For all of us

this instant and this triumph

We were never meant to survive...

Audre Lorde, A Litany for Survival

Introduction

Becoming property of the state is both a collapse and a crumble. From the moment we are in the clutches of the punishment system, we are crushed by an avalanche of force and dehumanization. We become numbers, last names and risk assessments. The longer we remain captive, our agency and self-worth are chipped away at, in routine and violent ways. We become cheap and disposable labor, captive consumers, experiments in state-sanctioned premature death (Gilmore 2007). The prison seeks to be an institution of total control through physical, psychological and sexual domination. As its subjects, we are expected to suffer in silence; there are consequences for advocating for oneself or others. But we refuse to stay silent. We communicate our shared struggles for survival in the tradition of *testimonio*, “bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure” (The Latina Feminist Group 2001, p. 2).

The following report, the third in our four-part series, is designed to take readers on a tour through life in Perryville. **Through our testimonies we make transparent that the intended purpose and function of the punishment system is not justice nor rehabilitation, but is to break the human spirit.** Moving through the corridors with us, readers witness state power expressed in both overt and nuanced ways. The state’s total power over us structures every second of our daily lives inside, from our ability to access clothing, personal hygiene, food, and medical/mental health care to the means of production vis-à-vis the exploitation of our labor. We conclude this report with insight into mothers’ resistance behind bars and in this way highlight that collective care is the antidote to state violence and the anchor of safety.

Prisons do not create safety, and though we are not safe here we work to create safety for one another.

This report also serves as an indictment of the normalization of this system and its practices of incapacitation. We share our struggles to reveal how power gets used to not only dehumanize us, but to make that dehumanization socially acceptable by not calling it what it is. As poet Aurora Levins Morales (1998) writes:

But just as intense heat makes ripples and waves that distort our view of the road and give us the illusion of water when there is only hot asphalt, oppression of any kind tugs at the culture around it, distorting our view of the naked exercise of power, normalizing it so that it appears natural and tolerable. Making it look like the reason we’re thirsty is not that we’re being denied water, but our own lack of initiative in the midst of plenty. (p. 11)

We charge our readers with the task of contemplating whether the daily fight for dignity in this system should be considered normal – including what is known and what we expose in detail for the first time.

Our hope is that this report inspires a public reevaluation of what justice, rehabilitation, and accountability mean. Our goal is to change the public discourse- which influences social and political practice. Though we reject reforms that expand the reach and scope of the punishment system, we advocate for measures that halt incarceration and actively decarcerate.

Welcome to the Mile

Within the first 48-hours of being sentenced we find ourselves on a big white bus embarking on an unknown journey. Our first splicing with the outside world has begun as communication and ties with families and loved ones are severed in that bus ride. As we enter the main gates of the facility, we become the next number added to the 42,000+ pool of people who have been castaway in Arizona prisons. The other women we are surround by will, at some point over the next decade, become our pseudo-family. At the Risk and Assessment (RNA) area, we are stripped of remaining dignity; here our mug shots are taken, we are subjected to invasive body searches, k-9 inspections, and personal belongings are revoked. We are then forced to undergo a series of intrusive labs and medical exams. **Like cattle we are then tagged with our new ADCRR identification number and assigned the label of “inmate.”**

After processing, we are shipped to a 23-hour lock-down RNA unit. Three or more people are assigned to a cell meant for two, for up to four weeks. Two of us will have beds, while the others create makeshift places to rest on the concrete surfaces of the cell. In the early 1990s at Perryville, RNA or intake housing was a “run,” which is twelve two-person cells, or 24 beds. Today, it spans an

entire yard, which is 96 two-man cells, totaling 192 beds for new arrivals. In warehousing people, ADCRR considers the floor and the counters as “bed space.”

We remain in locked down conditions until we can be ranked, prioritized and assigned to our warehousing unit. During this time, we undergo testing for 8th grade equivalency and complete a questionnaire that quantifies our mental health, drug score ranking, and the classification of our offense. We are assessed on age, crime, prior convictions, education, race, and even sexual orientation before being classified to a specific prison unit.

It is important to note that the testing we undergo happens at a time when we are under extreme stress and traumatized. The categorizations that are made based on these scores have consequences that stay with us for our entire time inside. **How we are categorized dictates what is and isn’t available to us—from housing to programming and beyond.¹**

1. Together, ADCRR Department Orders 811 and 809 dictate our initial security classifications and the means by which some people may “earn” access to increased opportunities, respectively. According to D.O. 811, the assessment process produces a “Corrections Plan” for the inmate, which is considered a “road map” regarding what work and program opportunities will be accessible, as well as what level security unit the inmate will be placed in. D.O. 809 outlines the “Earned Incentive Program,” which utilizes priority ranking to determine the degree of “priority” an inmate will receive in work and programming. Pitfalls of a categorization of higher institutional risk include placement in a unit with extended lockdowns, inability to access education, and far fewer opportunities for work. The Earned Incentive Program outlines a set of “phases” – 1, 2, or 3 – which correspond with graduated access to “incentives.” Incentives include access to outdoor time, programming, work, commissary/shop, additional phone calls and visitation time, and with the more recent implementation of phase-specific yards at Perryville, access to hot water and air conditioning. As we will discuss further under programming, the Priority Ranking system also dictates that the longer you are serving, the lower a priority you are – thereby categorically excluding those serving life sentences from most programming and work opportunities.

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The fear and reality of our new life begins to settle in with each iron door we pass through. As Riley recalled, "Once the door slammed behind me, the finality of my previous life hit me like a ton of bricks" (Riley interview, 2019). The trauma of arrest, county, sentencing, and then entry to prison come to bear on us—we live with unrelenting distress and we are stripped of all agency. Donna said:

People are just healing from things that happened to them and being placed in a room for years of your life with very little sensory [experiences] and being ripped from your family... you have no control [and it's] an unbearable thing... it's complete mental torment because you don't know what's going to happen next.

(Donna interview 2019)

The initial phase of the process of becoming property of the state is disorienting and dehumanizing. But the squeeze has only just begun.



RNA: Acquiring the Basics

Accessing the basics one needs to take care of themselves is an extreme challenge in Perryville. While public perception may suggest that taxpayer dollars and ADCRR's over \$1 billion budget pay for prisons and the resources therein, it is inaccurate. The present section corrects this assumption. Our testimonies regarding access to basic necessities interrogate the underlying rationale that perpetuates these conditions. Questions one might reflect on while reading this section include:

1. **Where does this budget go?**
2. **Is having to live under poor and abusive conditions part of our punishment?**
 - a. **Does it serve justice?**
 - b. **Does it increase community safety?**
 - c. **Does it serve our healing and rehabilitation?**
 - d. **Does it prepare for re-entry?**

We arrive to Perryville with nothing. Once we enter the main gates of our assigned unit, which can house anywhere from 175 to 1,200 women, we must quickly adjust to navigating our new surroundings. Immediately, we go to the state issue department to collect our bar of soap, tube of toothpaste, 5-inch comb, 1-inch toothbrush, and our bedding; that is, if they are available. The reality is that these basic items, hygiene and a bed roll, may or may not be issued. Here we are also supposed to collect our state issue clothing but rarely receive the allotment. ADCRR Department

Order 909 previously dictated that state issue should provide at minimum: 3 T-shirts, 7 pairs of underwear, 3 bras, 7 pairs of socks, 3 pairs of pants, 1 pillow, 2 sheets, 1 blanket, 2 towels, 3 washcloths, 1 pair of shower shoes, and 1 pair of boots. However, this policy was revised in 2020 and now simply states that incoming inmates are to be given "a standard issue of underwear, tee shirts and socks and one pair of pants."² The transition to this vague policy might reflect the demonstrated lack of these items in practice. **Almost every participant we spoke with had experienced the denial of state issue and legally mandated resources.**



2. https://corrections.az.gov/sites/default/files/policies/800/0809_112721.pdf

Riley shared her experience:

This time around though in RNA, we weren't provided with pads, so there were girls having to use towels. We also weren't supplied with toothbrushes. So, they told us again to use the corner of our towels. We weren't provided with sheets, so we were given two wool blankets. You only got like one shirt, one bra, one underwear, and a pair of pants. The rest you were supposed to get when you got back to your yard. There was one day in RNA, it was a Sunday, when I saw the lieutenant when we happened to be on our three hours out. So, I ran up and I complained about not having toothbrushes and said it wasn't acceptable. He asked me if I was really asking him that question on a Sunday, like there was something he could do about it. He said there was nothing he could do. And then after three days I was assigned to a yard, which was Carlos. Over there they didn't have a lot of new clothing, and they also didn't have clothing in my size, so I wasn't given any additional stuff. And I was told to come back at a later date. I went back at a later date. They still didn't have anything. (Riley interview, 2019)

Virtually all of the women who shared Riley's experience of not receiving adequate hygiene or clothing had been given used and stained underwear. "They don't even give you new undergarments when you get here. They give you used stuff" (Stephanie interview, 2019). Policy requires that when we purchase items of clothing, which are priced at markups that typically cost weeks' worth of work, we must return our old items.³ These items are then given out through state issue, even when damaged or in the case of intimate items like underwear and bras. When the state issue department doesn't distribute adequate necessities, it falls on us to look out for each other.

The other day when the new girls came in, they were telling them that they don't have state-issue underwear for them. I mean luckily, we kind of always try to help anybody in need, you know what I mean? And we can be penalized for doing that. But they're scared. They don't know anybody, and they're being told that they can't have underwear, bras, or soap. It's not right.

(Marlee interview, 2019)

The penalization Marlee is referring to is the policy that prohibits the sharing of resources. Providing basic necessities to women in need can result in a major disciplinary ticket.⁴ The refrain we hear

3. Through the Keefe store, current pricing for clothing items is as follows: socks - \$1.25; "men's" pants - \$12; "women's" pants - \$15; short sleeve t-shirts - \$5; long sleeve t-shirts - \$7.5; sweatpants - \$20; sweatshirts - \$20. Because Keefe's price lists are unavailable to the public, this information is from a participant inside Perryville and current as of summer 2021.

4. Department Order 909: Inmate Property states: "Inmates are prohibited from trading, lending, bartering or selling property to staff, a visitor, contractor, volunteer, or another inmate." https://corrections.az.gov/sites/default/files/policies/800/0809_112721.pdf

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when we raise concerns, as the state abdicates responsibility to provide for its “charges” is that “there is not enough money in the budget.” **They often blame the lack of available budget on the fact that they are “required to provide toilet paper, tampons, and pads.”** Such items should be required to supply a women’s prison. ADC staff and administrators resented the advocacy of Representative Athena Salman, the ACLU and supporters for increased access to feminine hygiene products and have found new ways to target and punish women for seeking these additional necessities. Stephanie explained:

So now, you know, they give you the two rolls a week. Well, if you go to the bubble and ask for more rolls, they take your name and room number. And when they go to do random searches, they go by that list to go hit people’s rooms, by the people that have gone and asked for more.

(Stephanie interview, 2019)

When Salman and others – including some of our recently released friends – testified to the lack of access to feminine hygiene products and the lengths of humiliation women at Perryville had to go through to access them, ADCRR generously offered to resolve the situation themselves without need for legislative oversight. **Not surprisingly, the policy changes carried with them more practices of targeting and retaliating against women seeking these resources, and access to products remained limited.** Thanks to the advocacy and testimony of our directly impacted sisters, the push to legislatively address the issue

succeeded in the passage of SB 1849, or the “[Dignity for Incarcerated Women](#)” Act, in Spring of 2021.⁵ Under this Act, ADCRR is now legally mandated to provide unlimited access to feminine hygiene products. On our end, time will tell if this law is followed at Perryville.

On our assigned yards, we are greeted with even more desolate conditions that assault our dignity. **The lack of basic clothing and hygiene is only the beginning of the systematic abuse of power administered by the Department of Corrections.** While our advocacy led to the public conversation and policy changes around feminine health in prison in Arizona, the testimonies reflected in this report identify a range of areas of desperate need and institutional exploitation.

5. For full text of the bill, see: <https://legiscan.com/AZ/text/SB1849/2021>

Hitting the Yard: Conditions of Confinement

The conditions in which we must serve our time are a cruel and unacknowledged form of punishment. Our research again begs the question: where is the ADCRR budget going?

We endure inhumane circumstances as our only option for shelter and hygiene. We share our concrete cells and dilapidated shower stalls with environmental toxins, excruciating heat, dangerous molds, and bugs. These conditions are, of course, covered up from public view, especially when journalists and advocates visit. We take you through these daily details to demonstrate the gravity of this invisibility. Those of us who have been forced to live here know these details well, as well as the psychological impacts living like this has on us. As we move through this tour of life in Perryville, we turn from this system's deprivation of our basic necessities toward its brutal disregard for our mental and physical well-being, achieved through the disgusting neglect of infrastructure and lack of recourse.

Perryville prison opened its doors in 1981. The living conditions have scarcely been updated since then. Perryville cells are 86x86 square feet and designed to house two people. Nothing but steel and concrete surrounds us. We live, eat, sleep, study, and release bodily fluids all in this small space. The windows seldom shut and air and dirt from the environment invade the area.

When the monsoon season dust storms roll through, Myra says, "You learn to barricade yourself in" (Myra interview, 2019). The doors lack weather stripping to prevent the harsh winters and summer elements from overwhelming us. The toilets are within an arm's reach away from our beds. "You're surrounded by cement and

metal and there's really no reprieve from any of it" (Myra interview, 2019).

Living in this place for years or decades is difficult to imagine; "There is no way of describing it: the bare walls, hard furniture, cold floors. It's such a lack of stimulation that really just makes your soul shrivel" (Donna interview, 2019).

In the extreme Arizona heat, our cells must reach above 95 degrees before officers will report broken evaporative cooling systems, which are decades old and dangerously insufficient. Despite the fact that it is illegal on the outside to leave elderly people and pets in this type of environment, we sustain these conditions all summer long. The 95 degree cutoff is not only inhumane, but counter to the court-mandated stipulations resulting from *Parsons v. Ryan*, the class action lawsuit regarding medical treatment in Arizona prisons. According to the courts, ADCRR must transfer inmates residing in buildings where temperatures rise above 85 degrees. We can say with certainty that this does not occur. In fact, according to a recent *Phoenix New Times* investigation, ADCRR submitted its own temperature logs revealing that "daytime indoor temperatures frequently exceeded 100 degrees in June, July, and August."

This unbearable heat is particularly dangerous for our elderly population and those with compromised mental and physical health.

ADCRR was required to report its temperatures because of these risks; "for inmates taking psychotropic medications, including anti-psychotics or antidepressants, that kind of heat could be fatal" (Id.). One of our neighbors who is 60 years old is on seizure medication and is

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prohibited from purchasing a portable fan for her room. The heat has severely impacted the amount of seizures she experiences in the summer months.

For the past five years, we have been told that air conditioning units are being installed, yet we have not seen them and summer months keep coming and going and we continue to suffer. Skin coverage is limited too, which can be dangerous on yards with no shade structures or trees. Myra names what we all know to be true:

It's like because I've committed a crime, I'm not worth protecting. (Myra interview, 2019)

Due to the age of the buildings and total lack of upkeep, there is significant damage to their structure that also affects our health. The foundation has shifted and there are numerous

cracks in the ceilings, walls, and stairwells. The roofing has also been impacted over the years; the buildings have been neglected and deterioration is apparent. Several women we spoke with shared experiences of their cells flooding and plumbing breaking. Many others live in cells with ceilings that are sagging with leaking water, dirt, pigeon feces, and debris. **We are forced to live constantly inhaling toxins.**

Norma filed several grievances to attempt to get her ceiling fixed. After being ignored, she begged the staff to move her to a different cell as she was having to be treated for Cryptococcus's, a potentially fatal fungal pulmonary disease. She explained, "I could not understand why this health issue was ignored by the sergeants and lieutenants... My grievances did not get any attention and I was nervous about whether or not I was going to get the proper medical care and move cells" (Norma interview, 2019).



The pollutants we breathe in these condemnable buildings are most pronounced in the showers. To maintain a modest amount of bodily hygiene, we have to expose ourselves to grime and more extreme temperatures that shock our systems. The inability to bathe ourselves with dignity compounds on the onslaught of reminders that our humanity is not respected here. There are 6 designated small showers stalls in each wing on our yard. Most of them are dilapidated and do not have piping or faucets. The ones that do work run poorly with very little water pressure or hot water. The showers are rotted out and the mold is consistently being painted over so that it is not visible when inspectors come to visit. Lanae has been in Perryville for fourteen years, during which she has not seen these conditions change;

The showers are broken. There's no hot water. There's bugs coming out of the shower vents as you're taking a shower.

(Lanae interview, 2019)

Zumaya has been advocating for improvements to no avail. She explained:

I have been here on the yard for over four years and have been fighting every winter to get hot water. I have written numerous inmate letters to administration and filed grievances and also contacted the media.

(Zumaya interview, 2019)

Withers pointed out that such advocacy often fails in this environment because the officers practice habitual gaslighting of women's concerns; "[An officer] comes to our yard and says, oh, you guys are just using too much of the hot water. If you guys would stop using so much of the hot water, then you would have more hot water when you needed it" (Withers interview, 2019). This exchange occurred after two weeks of zero hot water on her yard. "Everything that we have is broken. Everything that we have is under-maintained" (Withers interview, 2019).

In a place where our dignity is constantly degraded, we come to understand that our living conditions are another tool to maintain control over us, our minds, and our bodies.

Either these conditions are a result of an astounding degree of negligence or being held captive in these inhumane conditions is the unspoken and accepted actuality of what justice means in Arizona.

Sustenance and Profit

The sad state of food access in Perryville aligns with its decrepit conditions to produce a precarious setup for our livelihood. And with national equity firm H.I.G. Capital, owner of kitchen and commissary provider Trinity Services Group, set to bring in extraordinary profits year after year from its exploitative contracts across the country, Perryville has a vested interest in maintaining this dismal state of resources.

The privatization of food access in Arizona prisons goes hand-in-hand with the abysmal offerings from the state, such that incarcerated people and our families subsidize not only our own incarceration – but the massive profits generated by private corporations like Trinity and its subsidiary, Keefe. By providing kickback incentives to the state, Trinity has positioned itself as the monopoly provider of previously state-provided resources to a literally captive audience of consumers. And by providing both canteen food and commissary sales, Trinity simultaneously profits from its sickening kitchen meals to the store we turn to in order to avoid them.

To provide ourselves with some semblance of sustenance, we have no choice but to consume – at tremendous cost. This next section illustrates the appalling conditions of canteen food service that force us to turn to commissary purchases to sustain our basic access to food while incarcerated, all while holding up profits for Trinity and absolving the state of its responsibility to keep us alive.

The food in this place alone sends many women into lasting health problems, as we've seen, including anemia, thyroid problems, kidney failure, high blood pressure, high cholesterol,

severe vitamin deficiencies, blood sugar issues, and diabetes, in addition to generally increased weight and lowered immune system. The food at the kitchen consists mostly of carbs, starches, and breads enhanced with calorie boosters to meet the minimum mandatory caloric requirements. **There are no fresh fruits and vegetables available.** The closest thing we get is a few sparse processed pieces of iceberg lettuce and fruit cups filled with syrup. The total lack of available vitamin sources alone leaves many women with impoverished health.

Women are not only malnourished, but we are inconsistently fed. Brooklyn described what this feels like; “I ate at 6:30am and my meal was mainly bad carbs... potatoes and corn flakes with bread. I was so hungry by 1:00pm but did not get fed dinner until 7:50pm. I have to take medication 3 times a day and need food to take it with. I felt so hungry, skipped my afternoon meds because I did not want to get sick. This sort of thing, waiting on the food truck, happens all of the time” (Brooklyn interview, 2019). Food is served cold and regularly lapses more than 12 hours between meals.

The conditions of food preparation and distribution have sent many to the infirmary. In 2019, the Arizona Department of Health Services had to step in after a [salmonella outbreak](#) in Perryville resulted from these conditions and the food provided by Trinity. The kitchen workers we spoke with were not surprised by this; some of the packaging they have encountered clearly list health warnings and expirations but are served anyway. V, joining the whistleblowers who alerted the media in 2019, confirmed that packaging she handled read:

In black letters – big – it says ‘Not for human consumption. May cause cancer, birth defects.’ And that’s what they serve here every day. (V interview, 2019)

On another occasion, V explained that the turkey served had gone bad;

And the girls from complex took it to the officer and told him, this turkey’s no good, it’s rotten. And the officer’s response was, ‘well, just cut it off and just keep doing what you’re doing.’ (V interview, 2019)

Trinity's Use of “Surplus Food”

Reports of food marked “not for human consumption” were investigated by Trinity, who determined, unsurprisingly, that the allegations were false. A [New Times follow-up](#) however signaled that the company’s and state’s standards do nothing to prevent such occurrences. In fact, as Elizabeth Whitman reported, ADCRR’s contract with Trinity encourages the ample use of “surplus food,” including “utilizing produce/product from Institutions,” while not defining “Institution.” It then states that “The Department and Contractor shall work together to ensure surplus/donated foods are used to the fullest extent” in order to cut costs. In an odd twist, the contract stipulates that Trinity purchase all donated foods from the Department before selling it back to them, adding a financial incentive to utilizing all food, including food that is in poor condition and past its expiration date.

The Arizona Department of Health Services again investigated ADCRR in 2020, uncovering rampant bug and rodent infestations, blood and environmental toxins, and food contamination in state prison kitchens which were given

“satisfactory” ratings by oversight agencies.

[Jimmy Jenkins](#) revealed that “Twelve months of inspection reports conducted at all 16 state prisons in 2020, provided to KJZZ through a records request, detail filthy conditions, broken equipment, and frequent use of expired food.”

In Perryville, the main complex kitchen has had a mice infestation for years. Due to the lack of hot water, our trays are never cleaned properly. Health inspectors have only ever entered the facility during scheduled visits, allowing staff to make Band-Aid cover-ups to hide these issues. Nephritides used to work in the kitchen and shared: “The only time they bring the good stuff out is when the auditors are here. That’s when the good cups come out, the good trays come out, the good sporks come out, and as soon as they’re gone, the good China is gone” (Nephritides interview, 2019).

Even drinking water presents a health dilemma in Perryville. Staff are told never to consume kitchen food or the polluted well water provided to the women to drink. Those visiting Perryville have been instructed that water in coolers on the yard is not for drinking, because “it’s for the inmates.” As Withers shared:

The first and foremost thing that I don’t understand is there are signs outside that tell people don’t drink the water. Why then is nobody concerned? And why is nobody checking the water? And why don’t we understand what’s wrong with the water that we’re drinking? (Withers interview, 2019)

Such practices and written warnings reveal that ADCRR is aware of the glaring health risks

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associated with the conditions we are forced to survive. The constant precarity of our well-being and the lack of recourse, even when state agencies and media publicize these conditions, breaks us down mentally and physically.

Donna describes:

I mean, we sit here and look at our nails turned yellow and feeling lethargic, being more prone to sicknesses... Not having what you need to thrive and be healthy internally impacts so many things, the way your productivity is at work and then the fact that you are swimming in these slave trades of working long hours and getting paid so little, there's just no way to describe everything that people go through here.

(Donna interview, 2019)

Maximizing profit and minimizing cost to the state are the names of the game here, aided by the fact that the Trinity kitchens and Keefe commissary are staffed by inmate labor.

Because all of us who are able must purchase food and hygiene from the Keefe store and Trinity serves as the sole market provider, they can charge us whatever they want and get away with it. Trinity manages to institute price increases – sometimes up to 60% in one increase – on already far above market value prices. These changes are on top of the total lack of wage increases for either ADCRR or ACI contracted jobs.

We got a sense of the exploitative reach of Perryville's commissary from talking with women who worked there. As Stephanie explained:

Since I've been here, they've raised their prices at the store three times in the last three years... and we're still working for the same wages from 1989.

(Stephanie interview, 2019)

Price increase notices are supposed to be posted 30 days prior to the increase, but this does not happen. Often, notice is posted only days prior to going into effect in order to keep people from stocking up on items before their prices are raised. Profits are increased by the sales of items marked not for individual sale, which are sold far above wholesale cost to us. Withers used to work at the Keefe store, and illustrated this profit to us: "They will bring in up to \$32,000 a week just on this unit alone. A week. That's ridiculous." (Withers interview, 2019).



Investor Profits and State Kickbacks

The acquisition of Keefe by Trinity Services Group private equity owners H.I.G. Capital represents an enormous concentration of for-profit prison resource operators.

With no competition and significant kickbacks to reward the state for its contracts, private equity firms like HIG are uniquely positioned to benefit from the steady flow of incarcerated and desperate people.⁶ Tim Requarth, [writing for The Nation](#), explained how these kickbacks solidify their status by returning a portion of sales profits to the state: "To make a profit, the company has to charge the incarcerated and their families high rates. Some cash-strapped jurisdictions now depend on these kickbacks to fund facility operations and law-enforcement activities, and correctional agencies are clearly hooked on the extra hits of cash." Arizona Correctional Industries, the entity responsible for crafting "public/private" contracts for the state prisons, reports in their 2020 annual report that together Trinity and Keefe amounted over \$5.5 million in the last year alone.⁷ The actual revenue is difficult to measure; accounts suggest that the Keefe contract alone was valued at about \$43 million per year, 6% of which will bounce back to ADCRR.⁸

By outsourcing food supply to private corporations, ADCRR absolves itself of the duty to maintain these resources for its population, allowing the Department to extort incarcerated people and our families. With nowhere to turn to access basic needs of clothing, hygiene, and food, we have no choice but to feed into Trinity's profits. In terms of commissary food offerings, this looks like access to processed foods, canned meats, ramen, and instant oatmeal and rice. Cheese products that squeeze from plastic packages,

candy, and other snacks are filled with saturated fats and chemicals. Imagine feeding yourself with only items from a gas station. And yet, [the Prison Policy Initiative reports](#) that based on their research of three private state commissary systems, **incarcerated people – and their families – spent an average of more than \$1,000 per person, per year, mostly on food and hygiene. At .45 cents per hour, this amount would take over 2,000 hours to earn, or 55 weeks of full-time work.** Obviously, this is impossible to achieve alone, implicating our families' investment in our livelihood to stand in place of the state's, even while we are held captive and under its control. Where does the ADCRR billion dollar budget go? We agree with the message the PPI report asserts:

If the cost of food and soap is too much for states to bear, they should find ways to reduce the number of people in prison, rather than nickel-and-diming incarcerated people and their families.

The underlying reason for locking us up by the thousands is that it is lucrative.

6. See Tim Requarth's scathing analysis of the role of private equity in cumulatively steering an underground (and public) investment in imprisonment, and the modern format of prison privatization: <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/prison-privatization-private-equity-hig/>

7. For the full report, see: https://aci.az.gov/sites/default/files/ACI_AR_2020.pdf

8. See: <https://azcapitoltimes.com/news/2016/06/20/doc-considers-whether-to-replace-prison-commissary-contractor/>

Employment and Income

While residing in a place of chaos, women on the mile attempt to establish some sense of normalcy through work and programs, while the access to either is extremely limited. **Most of our working population hold jobs that are vital to the running of the institution.** The positions include responsibilities such as the kitchen, maintenance, yard porters, store workers, clerks, education tutors, and more. **The wages earned for these jobs can range anywhere from 10¢ to 50¢ per hour.** Privatization has also reached our employment, and there are several very profitable businesses taking advantage of us as a captive labor pool. Whether we work for ADCRR or an outside company, employment in Perryville consists of risks to our health and livelihood from dangerous conditions, a total lack of legal protection, and earnings that dramatically misalign with the fees we must pay for medical care, communication home, food, hygiene, clothing, gate and program deductions, and prison utilities – and even rent for our cells.

Getting by without work is nearly impossible, with so much that is our responsibility to pay to cover; this need paired with discriminatory policies and additional fees means we are damned if we do, and still more damned if we don't. This section focuses less on the privatization of prison labor in Arizona by ACI and its contracted corporations and more on the environmental and policy hurdles involved in being a prisoner laborer in Perryville.

Many of the women we spoke with described the ways their jobs present dangerous threats to their health and livelihoods. In the kitchens, oven mitts are provided but worn so thoroughly they fail to protect hands from the industrial oven burners. Boots are also scarce, through state issue or for sale, and falling on slippery floors is common. Stephanie, who has worked in the complex kitchen for two years, said:

They're more slippery than if you were to wear your tennis shoes in there, which a lot of girls do because the boots are so bad, you fall on your ass in there. But they make you wear them, and then they tell you that they don't have the right size and they can't afford it because they're - they're spending their whole budget on toilet paper. Like what? What do you mean?

(Stephanie interview, 2019)

In addition to the lack of supplies or respect from staff, kitchen workers, like maintenance workers, face environmental dangers in hot and dirty settings. **There are insects, pigeon feces, and rotted materials on the roof of the complex kitchen, which women working maintenance are expected to clean without proper safety gear to reduce inhalation of hazardous toxins.**

V gave us an example of a typical task for maintenance:

So, because there was holes in the roof, our boss didn't want us to wet it and wetting it helps us, you know. We got to bag up all this shit. And when it's dry, it's like the particles of the shit just kinda go in the air and it's a pit to where it's probably like eight or nine feet tall. There's walls that hold these coolers and the pigeons go in there and they lay their eggs. They go underneath the coolers, build a nest, sometimes you have dead ones in there, you have little baby ones. And we gotta bag them up.

(V interview, 2019)

On another job, V asked her boss to provide safety gear and was warned not to ask: "I remember telling my boss that I needed a face mask because there's asbestos, and his response to that was, say that word one more time and you're fired" (V interview, 2019). Maintenance workers are also asked to climb ladders and buildings without proper safety equipment.

Jobs with private contractors Hickman's Farms and the print shop have also been known to cause severe injuries. Women working with Hickman's are required to build chicken coops and administer antibiotics, both of which often leave their hands scarred and disfigured. The print shop requires women to work with heavy machinery that can malfunction and cause grave damage.

Exploitation through Tax Loopholes

Meanwhile, **Arizona designates all prison laborers as independent contractors, requiring them to pay a much higher proportion of their already meager wages through 1099 tax forms so that ADCRR gets a tax break.** This policy change occurred in 2016, when over 8,000 inmates were first required to pay taxes on their wages as independent contractors. ADCRR spokesman Andrew Wilder said that because inmates are "wards of the state," ADCRR cannot be their employer. In essence, as property we cannot be employed by the entity to which we belong. As [Craig Harris reported in the Arizona Republic](#), the rate for self-employment taxes reaches 15.3% of earned income, whereas "regular employees, unlike contractors, share those taxes with their employer." The incentive is clear. ADCRR does not face the same penalties for this practice as it might as a private corporation, but the fact that ACI straddles the public/private boundary allows a range of private corporations to take advantage of hiring imprisoned employees at an extra bargain: at "independently contracted" wages. This tax designation also produces the added hardship of categorically excluding us from *any* employment rights, including worker's compensation for injuries incurred on the job.

Private companies contracted through ACI at Perryville, including Hickman's Farms, Televerde, Aqua Chill, Papa John's, and the MVD provide a slightly higher pay scale, averaging 80¢ an hour. Televerde offers \$4 per hour, but only employs 120 of the population of over 4,000 women in total. Although the pay scale is slightly higher than jobs on the unit, these positions don't come without their fair share of subsequent rewards to the Arizona Department of Corrections.

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After subsidizing our own necessities and food and contributing our meager funds and labor to produce kickbacks for the Department, we have to pay rent to the prison for housing us.

ADCRR Department Order 905 dictates that any contract that pays more than \$2 an hour, known as a retention job, requires a mandatory deduction of 30% of earnings for "room and board" fees. Valentina worked for Televerde for seven years, during which time she paid, exorbitantly, for her half of a prison cell;

I have spent 28 or 30 something thousand dollars on my room and board and they will keep that money. We're talking about hundreds of women who are doing the very same thing. (Valentina interview, 2019)

Taxpayers pay an average of \$32,000 per inmate, per year – so where does this money go? The response from the Department is simply that this money is added to a "general fund." However, both we and the general public remain in the dark as to how this general fund is spent, and why our paltry wages contribute so much to it annually.

Mandatory Prison Fees

Additionally, D.O. 905 states that of our remaining wages, we must pay: 5% to "transition fees," 1% for "ITA fees," 20% for court ordered restitution (if applicable), 20% for "state filing fees," 20% for "federal filing fees," 10% for "escape apprehension," and a flat fee of \$2 for electricity. Department deductions come out of every paycheck, while "rent" and electricity are billed monthly.

With pennies remaining from the dollar, we are left to cover the costs associated with our livelihood. We must make impossible choices. Kirsten shared:

I work really hard in my position, but I am consistently struggling to take care of myself. I often have to choose between purchasing food or paying a \$4.00 fee for a medical check-up or even calling home to talk to my family. (Kirsten interview, 2019)

The costs of maintaining family bonds speaks again to the issue of privatization. **Securus Technologies is the private corporate provider of money transfers, email communication, and video visitation for ADCRR, while IC Solutions LLC provides phone services.** Emails to family members cost us 25¢ per page and 50¢ for photos or e-cards. Meanwhile, a typical phone call costs \$2.00 for a local 15-minute conversation. A long-distance call for those with family outside of Phoenix can cost up to \$4.00. Translated through our wages, this means that **hearing our families' voices for 15 minutes can cost up to 40 hours of work.**

We asked the women we spoke with to share how their hourly wages translate into monthly income, and how well that fares to support themselves. **The overwhelming majority said that without outside family financial support, they would be unable to provide themselves basic necessities.** "Eighty cents is what I get and if I do a full 90 hour whip, I get to bring home 64 bucks every two weeks," Myra said about working for print shop, the second highest earning job in Perryville. Stephanie makes \$36 every two weeks working 60 hours in the kitchen; "But out of that, every dollar

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I make, they take 31¢" (Stephanie interview, 2019). Riley agreed that her wages are excruciatingly low to begin with, and after Department fees, she is basically volunteering her labor to sustain her own incarceration. She said:

I mean, I wouldn't even be able to buy one bar soap after two weeks' worth of work... I just feel like we're not even striving to be the best that we can be in jobs, and in anything because... we're just doing free slave labor work. I mean, we run the entire prison. (Riley interview, 2019)

Riley's point is significant: while we sustain the prison, we are left unable to afford living here without burdening our families with undue expenses. "If you don't have anybody to support you from out there, you cannot support yourself in here. Like it's taken me a year in a job that I hate to be able to even marginally take care of myself," Stephanie said.

Those who cannot work, who are not employed, and whose income is less than \$12 a month are considered indigent, theoretically supported through ADCRR state issue clothing and hygiene and fed through the kitchen. These women are subject to a dire lack of resources and harassment by officers whose responsibility it is to provide them these basics, as discussed above. Additionally, they are left without the opportunity to communicate with their families at all outside of the two envelopes they are entitled to monthly.

Those of us who can, work to offset the cost of our incarceration on our families; we pay for our hygiene, food, rent, medical, and the prison takes a percentage itself, and we use what is left to communicate with our loved ones. Unless you are part of the very small percentage that is able to get a contract/retention job, the chance of saving for your release is slim to none. And in addition to the issues of working conditions and wages, many women are subjected to jobs that do not provide skillsets to help support their futures and/or with companies that will not hire them post-release. As we will discuss in more depth in our next report, the vast majority of us will be released one day, and the lack of preparation in financial stability and employability will cut us off at the knees before we even leave the gates. Meanwhile, our labor inside sits at the intersection of desperation and exploitation.

Programs

In order to remain consistent with anti-prisoner sentiment among conservative lawmakers, Arizona State has all but eliminated opportunities for growth in prison. **By hyper-focusing on appearing “tough on crime,” this sentiment is reflected in the revocation of most programming, ADCRR policies excluding those with long sentences, and punishment-oriented programs staff.** Further, if and when we reach a hearing for early release, we bear the consequences for failing to forge a way to access programs that aren’t there. Our programming affects our income and chance of release, not to mention mental health, while our sentence determines whether or not access to programs is possible. In 2019, the department re-named itself the Arizona Department of Corrections, Rehabilitation, and Re-Entry. Our experiences as documented in this research series underscore the hypocrisy inherent in this renaming. What happens behind these walls doesn’t have anything to do with rehabbing or preparing us for re-entry.

For decades, programming has been a concern for our population. And for decades, there has been stark attrition in programming available to us. Depending on which unit we are on, available programs also differ greatly; those with the least amount of time on the lowest security yards have access to the majority of what few programs are still offered. Moreover, most of the programs offered do not address root issues and experiences of trauma we endured that made us vulnerable to criminalization in the first place. Those that attempt to do so are a one-size-fits-all program and are typically disconnected from what we actually need. Discrimination and lack of quality programs are compounded for those of us trying to heal from extreme traumas by negligent and sometimes predatory staff.

When there is a program that we would like to participate in, it will not be available to all, or even most, of the women here. **The Department of Corrections established a system called priority ranking about ten years ago. This structure, based on age and amount of time, determines “whether you’re a priority or not, to be considered for any kind of programming or education” (Marlee interview, 2019).** One of our participants, Nephritides, explained how this system affects her access to education:

It’s for the people with shorter time or that’ll be leaving sooner. So if it’s something that I’m super interested in, I might have to wait about six, seven years until I could even be a candidate for the class.

(Nephritides interview, 2019)

Priority ranking has intentionally stifled the programming opportunities for thousands of women based on the idea that they are not worth investing in.

Where we rank in the priority ranking structure will also determine how much we are paid. In Arizona, a GED is required to earn anything more than 10¢ an hour, and yet the GED course is only accessible through priority ranking. Women with sentences over 10 years are rarely accepted into the GED course, leaving them stuck at 10¢ an hour and with limited job opportunities for their foreseeable futures.

Marlee shared:

There's so many people who are waiting to get their GED so that they can get that retention job, so that they can get into Rio Salado, so that they can do something with their time, but you can't do anything unless you have a GED and then you can't get into GED unless you're almost out.

(Marlee interview, 2019)

Withers described how this situation translates into financial livelihood for these women; "My bunkie has 32 years. I believe she has never had her GED. She's not on any priority list, she probably won't be on one for another 25 years, but now she's making \$11 every two weeks" (Withers interview, 2019). Despite such low income, Withers' bunkie does not qualify as indigent (defined as less than \$12/month in wages), and therefore has to figure out how to support herself on this alone.

The education and programs that ADCRR offers at Perryville are few and far between. Classes our friends have actually seen on the yard include only 8th grade mandatory equivalency, substance abuse groups, and sex offender therapy. More recently, Arizona State University has provided several class offerings, but the waitlists for these are always extensive due to far more demand than availability. Beyond these, church services for Christian-based denominations are consistent. Unfortunately, while some Christian services pair with re-entry preparation and even housing and support post-release, only Christian women can qualify. These programs are also highly competitive to get into.

The only other ADCRR classes our participants were familiar with were "Thinking for a Change" and "Cognitive Restructuring" – however, most participants remember these existing a decade ago. Other programs have ceased to exist along with the implementation of priority ranking. Several of the women we spoke to, including Lanae and Winter, only have ADCRR program certificates from classes which no longer exist, and reflect the last time they were allowed to take anything.

I have not received any programming from DOC other than being forced to take computer technology. I was forced to take that. However, I did have my own computer knowledge prior to becoming incarcerated, seeing as I did work as a loan processor... Those who are closer to the gate or to going home are offered the programs before anybody else, and with a life tail behind me, they feel that education would be lost on me. It's a waste of their money. (Lanae interview, 2019)

I recently was made aware of the fact that my computer classes that I did take and get degrees in are no longer applicable towards a bachelor's or towards an associate's degree. I can use them as electives, but I'm not allowed to use them [towards a degree] because there was a like a 12-year gap when I was unable to attend school or receive a scholarship or anything. So that's why I'm having to readjust all of the degrees and things that I'm applying myself towards because that whole gap of time was due to departmental policy changes.

(Winter interview, 2019)

Dixie was able to gain entry into a program for mental health, but once admitted, she reflected that it offered her very little;

There was a long waiting list. The only way that I was able to get into it was I really had to play up that I had severe anxiety so that I could get into it. I do have anxiety, but – it was coloring, it was her reading out of a book and making a journal. It was just kind of not what I had hoped for.

(Dixie interview, 2019)

If we are able to priority rank and access programming, it is often limited to ADCRR sponsored mandatory classes that reinforce pathologies, discrimination, and shame. On the contrary, the women we spoke with had lots of ideas about the programming they could actually use – and the ways it might differ from what's being offered.

I feel like they need more programs that work on your past and your emotional traumas. Like 99% of people here have been traumatized or victimized in some way, shape or form. Like that's a huge percent. But the only class they have here is cognitive thinking and thinking about what you're going to do before you do it. Well, most of life decisions are made in a split second, like you don't have time to think about. I mean some of them, yes, if you would have stopped and thought before you did it, then maybe you wouldn't have this outcome, but a lot of decisions are instant. (Stephanie interview, 2019)

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These classes are also often taught by punishment-oriented professionals who have been known to treat women in disrespectful ways, up to sexual harassment. Naomi experienced this in a mandatory sex offender therapy class;

As a woman who struggles with body image issues that are at the root of my crime, I expressed this to the therapist. He told me I had 'curves in all the right places' and suggested I show my naked body to another woman in the group as a remedy. (Naomi interview, 2019)

Recently, this therapist was placed under investigation and resigned after 10 years of working with the department following his verbal assault of a woman in a mandatory class. A woman who wished to remain anonymous reflected on her experience with this therapist;

Looking back, many of us have pondered on all of the little things – telling us to stay after alone, wanting to talk about sex scenes between the ladies on the yard, referring to women as cum buckets, talking about body parts – breasts/vaginas, and belittling women to make them feel less than.

Rather than rehabilitating and preparatory for release, **this predatory behavior situates us as survivors of abuse, by and large, right back in the dynamics of control and abuse where we started.** We are presumed to heed authority at all costs here, even in its most violent forms, as we will discuss further in the next section.

The power dynamic between us and the police remains evident in programming as well as on the yard. Even though this was an exceptionally abusive professional, we experience a range of verbal and emotional harassment that is accepted as normal from even our “rehabilitative” staff. We fear that seeking recourse for such treatment may just make matters worse, especially when it's our word against staff's. And because these programs are mandatory, once enrolled, we face disciplinary action for not attending or for disagreeing with the philosophies being taught. A disciplinary ticket can mean loss of job, visits, and sometimes mandatory re-classification to a yard with higher security and worse conditions.

In addition to state-provided and volunteer programs, higher education opportunities are inaccessible to those of us without outside financial support and/or priority ranking. Only a handful of the three dozen women we spoke with had been able to access any higher education, and doing so was at a high cost to their families. Marlee explained: “[As lifers] they will deny you every time for any kind of scholarship, so you can pay for it yourself at \$142 a credit” (Marlee interview, 2019). Most of us do not qualify due to our time. Myra was determined to get an education and had to get creative to do so, since she would otherwise have been blocked from it.

She shared:

I was able to get into Rio, had to be a little sneaky on that one. They weren't originally wanting to let me in due to priority ranking. Um, a friend of mine on Lumley was able to get me in because she knew somebody that knew somebody that got me on the list. (Myra interview, 2019)

While those of us with longer sentences are categorically excluded from programming through priority ranking, programs have also been known to discriminate by charge – even though doing so is counter to policy. Withers was put off from even attempting to get into higher education programming after her experience:

I think it was a Rio Salado distance learning room where I was using the restroom, and there was something posted on a door and it said something like, basically no first degree murderers, like people need not apply.

(Withers interview, 2019)

The severe lack of programs paired with the priority ranking structure have presented a significant challenge for those of us navigating the release process. **We are expected to demonstrate our rehabilitation through programs that either don't exist or from which we are categorically excluded.**

Winter spoke of the stress this has created for herself and her family:

I'm unable to take classes, I'm unable to participate in programs and that has left me on the outside of anything outside of church. I'm able to attend my church services and, you know, I do realize that I need to be able... especially now, I'm feeling the pressures of having to go in front of whatever board I'm going to be facing. And so I've asked my family to come to the table to do what they can financially to start to pay for classes. So I take multiple distance learning classes at a time in order to be able to have a degree or several degrees when I go to this board so that I can say that I've done something with my time. But that's been all family support. (Winter interview, 2019)

Valentina had to confront this gap in 2019. Incarcerated at the age of 14, she was sentenced as a juvenile to life without the possibility of parole. In 2014, she learned that she fell under the *Miller v. Alabama* precedent which granted her the opportunity to go in front of a parole board. She had already spent 20+ years behind these bars and received very few opportunities to attend a program; policy categorized her as a loss because she was never intended to have a release date.

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When trying to prepare to appear in front of the board members, she faced the challenge of having to fill the gaps of productivity in her story; she was able to illustrate her own growth entirely because of her own determination. Had she not advocated for herself for years and even created her own peer-to-peer programs, she may never have been granted parole.

Those of us coming up for Boards must prove our “rehabilitation” despite discriminatory prison policy that prevents us from engaging in programming. **We pay for the Department's failures with our lives.**

The trauma we have endured prior to our incarceration is not eliminated with a prison sentence. It is still there, and something we have to work through alone or with the help of our peers. But we remain human beings with talents, dreams, ideas—they don't go away just because we are incarcerated. The abysmal state of programs and policy at Perryville is enough to break a person. Nicole said,

All of it is surface level and in my opinion it's more for show and to say that they offer something than it is to actually help somebody. That was true 25 years ago, and it's true today. It's a rough environment. It can mentally break you down.

(Nicole interview, 2019)

Every human being that enters the prison should still be granted the opportunity to grow even if they never leave these gates. **We deserve dignified, accessible programming, free from discrimination and predatory staff. And we should not be penalized through the withholding of our wages and freedom as a result of ADCRR's failures to offer us meaningful support.**

Staff Abuse

Staff conduct is often unprofessional. **At best we are treated as if we don't matter.** There is no consistency in rule enforcement; if the officer likes you, your treatment is relaxed, but if he doesn't, you are susceptible to extra enforcement. We have to jump through hoops to appease officers' egos, acknowledging their power with respect. **At worst, we have to endure taunting, discrimination, sexual harassment, and physical and emotional abuse.** These dynamics exacerbate the traumas we have already endured, and frequently mirror abusive relationship patterns we had prior to our incarceration. Ample studies echo what the [Prison Policy Initiative reports](#): "Nationwide research conducted among women in jails found that a majority had survived or witnessed violence, including a shockingly high number — 86% — who endured sexual violence at some point in their lives." As we stated in our previous report, **every single woman with whom we spoke had a history of abuse prior to their incarceration.** Likewise, [recent Urban Institute research](#) states that over 70% of incarcerated women report struggling with their mental health.

The experience of incarceration itself compounds this struggle, and specifically, our participants said that staff exercise power in ways that are antithetical to their healing. Because we are powerless in relation to our "guardians," we have to practice acquiescence and meekness, rather than strength and confidence, lest we be perceived as a threat. The following accounts of interactions with staff at Perryville are pervasive; **every woman with whom we spoke had either experienced or witnessed some form of staff disrespect and abuse.**

Several of our friends discussed the extent of everyday disrespect that comes with living under the authority of officers at Perryville, and wondered why the drive for power among them seems so pervasive.

The disrespect is just, it's dumbfounding. I don't know if this is something that they teach them? Where do they find this caliber of people? Do they just come like the moths to the flame because it's just insane how disrespectful and how demeaning these people can be. The way that they treat people, the way that they treat people who maybe aren't all there, people who shouldn't even be here who need to be somewhere else. It's just the disrespect is just – It's insane to me. I was definitely brought up better than that. (Marlee interview, 2019)

Sometimes you have those officers, who I feel they genuinely care about people and they really don't want to be here, but it's a job to them, a way of supporting their family. But then there's others that take advantage of people. They take advantage of their authority that they think that they have, in some things that they do and how they talk to people – It's a crime out on the street. They would definitely have charges against them. (Zumaya interview, 2019)

The way some of the guards treat the women... We have several different officers here, especially some of the sergeants, that treat women like they're just trash. And it's really hard to digest and fathom that when a lot of people are here because of trauma that took place in their life. It's just a power trip. Everything's a power trip and I see the unequalness that women have in general to their men counterparts. And so that's been really difficult to watch.

(Donna interview, 2019)

Valentina brought up the ways this kind of treatment is normalized through the military influence on policing and corrections, which flows from the top down.

Following several escape attempts at men's prisons, Valentina reflected, additional restrictions were enforced that eventually created the modern distinctions in Perryville across security levels. These dramatically shifted the ability to move beyond one's room, work, and access programming. "But you have to remember," she said, "You have Terry Stewart at that point in time who was part of these transitions and you also had Chuck Ryan. These are the guys who were part of the construction of Abu Ghraib" (Valentina interview, 2019). Military influence affects officers' behavior as well, she argued, through an atmosphere of warfare against the women;

So depending on who's training them, if this [guy] is ex-military, then you're going to get officers that are gonna look at us as terrorists. And especially if some of those officers are ex-military, they're going to treat you as such. And you know, because they're the ones who are quick to bark. They're quick to slam you, quick to get up in your face... I don't know, you kind of just learned to accept that shit. (Valentina interview, 2019)

Officer disrespect often affects our ability to care for our daily needs, from seeking help regarding unhealthy conditions to calling our families. **In each of these settings, we have to negotiate between what we need and what it will cost us.** Even in the most mundane of situations, like submitting a maintenance request, officers seek power through dismissing and taunting us.

Punished for Challenging Authority

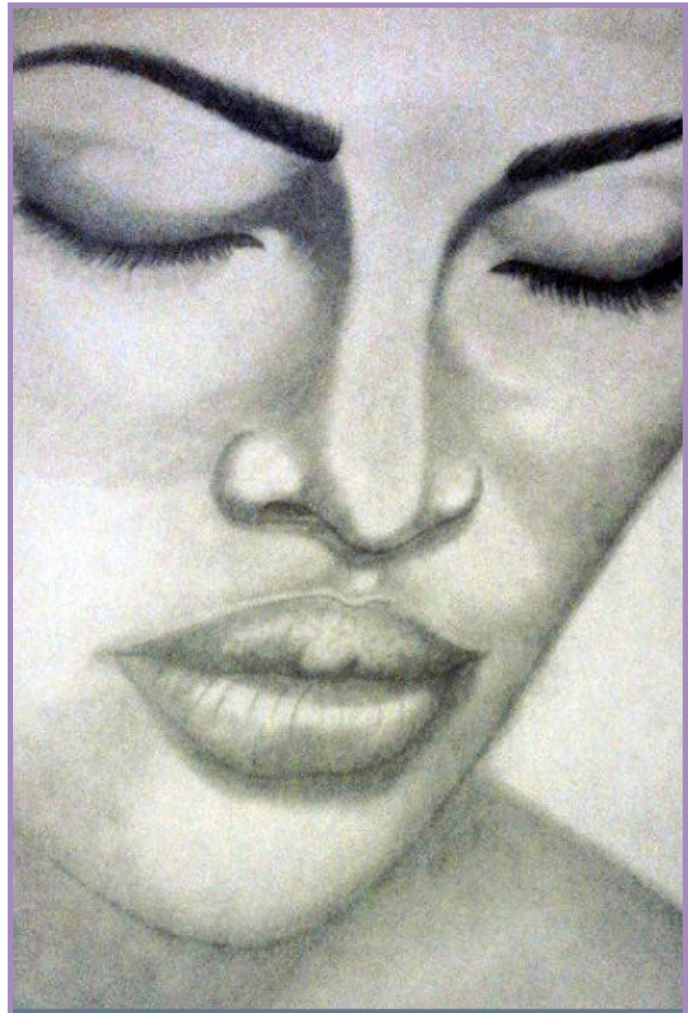
Research reported by NPR in 2018 found that “Across the country, women in prison are disciplined at higher rates than men—often two to three times more often, and sometimes more—for smaller infractions of prison rules.” Specifically, these infractions relate to “disrespect,” “disobedience,” and “being disruptive.” Officers have the authority to hand out arbitrary and emotionally-motivated tickets that can obviously have extreme effects on us, from limiting visits with our families to extending our sentences. Even if the threat of a ticket is not pursued, it serves to bully us into a state of submission and anxiety.

Withers shared:

You can't even get a work order half the time because they don't even want to put it in. If there's something wrong with your house, if there's something wrong with your plumbing, it's no concern of theirs. I spend a lot of time on the phone line. So I'm standing there and he's making a joke to one of the inmates. He said, 'Oh, you want to kick my ass? I'll give you five years.' That's not a joke. That's not appropriate. What is wrong with you? It's only getting worse to keep hiring these younger and younger officers, these idiots that want to come in and be cool and look cool and tell stories and, you know... They think it's a game. These are people's lives. (Withers interview, 2019)

In a women's prison, this treatment is also often sexualized. Moreover, the ways we must train ourselves to respond such that we don't offend the authority of male officers forces us to replicate patterns of survival learned through abusive relationships. Given that so many incarcerated women (and everyone with whom we spoke for this research) have a history of physical, emotional,

and/or sexual trauma prior to becoming incarcerated, this particular exercise of power is devastating. And it reflects the way officers seek to exploit our biggest vulnerabilities as the ultimate form of their power. We are, of course, powerless to stop them.



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Winter explained this dynamic as she has experienced it, as well as the ways it has stifled her ability to practice holding herself with the confidence and strength she has found since escaping her abuser:

It compounds my ability to stand up for myself. To the officers, I am never able to take that stand and there are so many times when they are so wrong. Because, you know, they'll come at us with typical abuse language, you know, they use the f word, they're constantly like 'I'm sick and tired of you fucking bitches.' Or you know, you just simply go and ask for your door to be opened, and then asking for your door to be open is literally you have to go through this whole sex thing, you know, like play playful with your name, and 'Oh, you want your door open? What else do you want?' And if I say, hey, you're out of line, you know, this is what you're here for. All I want is my door open.' Now I've targeted myself because you're angry because I've asserted myself... So typically a woman, especially an abused woman, who's been in a bad power dynamic and not knowing how to regain their own power or empower themselves and being in this type of a position. And so it's compounded the issue when they are disrespectful, whether that's sexually disrespectful, whether that's just verbally disrespectful. I don't have a way in which to apply the lessons that I've learned to stand up for myself. And so being a woman who's been abused physically, verbally, sexually, all of those things, it continues. It's really difficult to empower yourself, but then keep it to yourself! (Winter interview, 2019)

In addition to these kinds of interactions, we must endure the daily rituals of strip searches, cell shakes, and constant eyes on us and our bodies that make a particularly traumatizing experience for women. Visible and physical access to our bodies is normalized, but punitively being exposed and violated in this way is also a form of officers exercising their power.

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Riley shared the following experience with us, after she was taken for questioning regarding suspected contraband.

They told me I didn't have a right to a lawyer, and then they wanted me to sign a paper to go into LDU [investigation unit]. I told them I didn't understand what I was going to LDU for. They said that I had to be cleared medically and by psych to go to LDU, which I found out was an investigations unit. Because it was a Saturday, they didn't have medical or psych available. I get taken in transport over to this little building that I had never seen before and I found out that it was [suicide] watch. I asked why was in watch and they said that they just didn't have psych or medical available to clear me, so I had to sit in watch until Monday when they would be available. I get strip searched in the shower, I'm given my clothes back and I get put into a cell. When I went into the cell, the entire door is glass and there's a little trap door. But the cell was completely empty. There wasn't anything in it. It's just concrete floor, and then a toilet facing the glass door. They said I could have a book. A few hours later, Captain Passioni [sic] shows up at my door. He had his sunglasses on and he asked me why I had my clothes on. I asked him what kind of ridiculous question that was. Why wouldn't I have my clothes on? And he grabbed my chart and he was looking at it and shaking his head and saying, 'no, no, you can't have your clothes on.' And I was kind of laughing, thinking it was a joke. [I said] I was in there because I was under investigation. I really wasn't even supposed to be in watch. He said it didn't matter and I could either give them my clothes or they would physically come and take my clothes... There was also a girl to the right of me in a cell. She also was refusing to give her clothes. They had probably six or seven officers and they physically pepper sprayed her in her cell. They put her out on a gurney, strapped her down and cut her clothes off of her. They tried to get her into the shower. She refused. And so they just kind of wheeled her into that cell and let her lay there. So they came to me and I said, you know what, never mind I'll just give you my clothes. We don't have to do all of that... So I gave him my clothes. So now I'm starting to lose my mind a little bit. I haven't had a man see me naked in... I'm freaking out at this point. So I'm yelling like, you guys can't do this. Then Passioni comes back. He's asking me what my problem is. He still standing at the glass door talking to me with his sunglasses on. Telling me that I just have to sit in there for a few days. He put me on 10-minute watches. And again, I kept saying I'm not suicidal. I'm not in here for that. I'm supposed to be in LDU. And he just wouldn't even listen to me. I kept asking for sergeants, lieutenants... Asked for a CO IV to talk to my lawyer. Nobody would respond. And then a couple days later, psych came to see me. She immediately asked why I didn't have my clothes on. I asked her why I was on a psych hold. She said she didn't know, and that there was no reason for me to not have my clothes on. (Riley interview, 2019)

While officer and staff abuse rarely reaches the point of overt physical assault, it has been known to occur, and most often toward women categorized as SMI – an outdated department designation standing for “seriously mentally ill.”

As we discussed in our first report, Marcia Powell was a young woman categorized as SMI who was killed by officers at Perryville in 2009, after being held in a disciplinary cage outside in the May 107 degree heat for four hours. The disdain and neglect of nearby officers, ignoring her pleas for water, left her to die of heat exhaustion.

During the course of our research, members of our team witnessed another brutal “disciplinary” incident toward a disabled woman who narrowly avoided Powell's fate. Janette Alvarez was walking the track near her yard, talking and gesturing, when CO IV Tracy yelled toward her from about 15 feet behind her. Janette, still thinking out loud as she often did, turned and spat on the ground next to her feet. She didn't acknowledge Tracy and kept walking. From across the yard, Sergeant Ellis bolted directly toward Janette, reaching her, and slamming her to the ground, knocking her head against the concrete. She immediately began bleeding profusely from her head. Ellis cuffed her and left her unconscious and bleeding on the ground, where she remained for roughly an hour before an ICS (Incident Command System) arrived and carried her off the yard on a stretcher.

Janette survived the incident but received two major disciplinary tickets: one for assaulting an officer, and another for throwing a substance at an officer. No one on our research team reported the incident. One woman who will remain anonymous explained:

So even if we were to get people together to say that they witnessed the Janette situation, a lot of people would be reluctant because of the retaliation. No one could stop it. No one can save us, at the end of the day.

The harassment we face on a daily basis from ADCRR staff serves to break us down. The power dynamic that situates us as property of the state is reflected and enforced through the normalized abuse and lack of recourse we have from staff.

At the Mercy of the Guards

As reported by the Prison Policy Initiative, "The imbalance of power between inmates and guards involves the use of direct physical force and indirect force based on the prisoners' total dependency on officers for basic necessities and the guards' ability to withhold privileges." This relationship inherently disempowers us.

To be unable to have peace, to be always subject to predatory stares and threats, to have to entertain sexual comments, to know that our lives literally hang in the hands of our abusers, to fear disrespecting them lest they use that power. Our treatment prevents us from healing.

Staff abuse in Perryville exacerbates our traumas and trains us to believe we lack choice to be and do differently. But in a system designed to work this way, to achieve total control and submission, what recourse can we expect?

We hold no hope that further sensitivity training would change the way officers comport themselves, as we don't believe these would make a dent in the pervasive power dynamics that constitute the prison. What is in our control are our stories. We share them so that the public begins to understand the totality of the damage this system does – and decide if it measures up to commonly held ideals of justice.



Healthcare

The power dynamics inherent in our interaction with authority in Perryville reverberate dangerously in relation to our health, as evidenced by our exposure to inhumane conditions, exploitative labor, and sexual harassment; when we seek help for the damages this place does to our bodies and minds, the task is also fraught.

Medical care on the inside is treacherous.

In Perryville, women experience inaccessible costs, negligent care, a lack of preventative treatment which worsens existing conditions, demeaning providers, inconsistent record-keeping, resistance to providing reproductive care, and the looming threat of needless death. We have no other options for our medical needs and cannot seek second opinions. Advocating for one's care is often fruitless. The anxiety produced by relying on ADCRR for our survival is made most clear in our lack of access to medical care. So many of our peers have experienced the above issues that we have stopped seeking medical care unless critical.

Parsons v. Ryan

The *Parsons v. Ryan* lawsuit exemplifies the extent to which our lives are regularly left in danger at the hands of our only medical guardians. This class action suit was initiated in 2012 by the ACLU, Prison Law Office, and other advocates to address ADCRR's "broken health care system plagued by long-term and systemic problems that caused numerous deaths and preventable injuries." It also includes stipulations limiting isolation of prisoners struggling with mental health and necessitates improvements to the conditions of imprisonment. ADCRR and Corizon, our previous medical contractor, settled the case by agreeing to address these issues; however, ADCRR has been found in contempt of court twice – in 2018 and 2021 – for failing to do so. This lawsuit is ongoing and critical. Our research adds to its testimony.

The healthcare provider on which we must solely rely is chosen through a bidding process, and the vendor of choice will always be the most cost-effective. In June of 2019, due to an alarming number of complaints and *Parsons v. Ryan*, the ADCRR replaced Corizon with Centurion Managed Care. **However, the only change that occurred was in name; the same providers continue to offer us neglectful care.** These healthcare providers are severely limited in their scope of remedies. We see a very common trend in our community that Tylenol and water is an umbrella remedy for most health issues. The phrase gets laughably repeated:

'Take ibus [ibuprofen], drink water.'

Because this is often the common treatment for everything, a true diagnosis gets overlooked, sometimes for years. When an ailment grows in severity, it often progresses to a grave state here. The *Parsons v. Ryan* lawsuit verifies the numerous senseless deaths that have resulted from this system.

After initial intake, if medical attention is needed, it must be initiated by us through a healthcare needs request (HNR) form and each visit to see either a nurse or physician costs \$4. This might not strike many on the outside as a high number, but considering a wage of 10¢ per hour, it takes our sisters more than 40 hours of work to bring enough home to put toward this expense.

Imagine having to hand over a week's worth of your salary to have a check-up – forget about any necessary follow-ups, referrals, or continued care. Those who make \$4 an hour

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pay the same copay as those making 10¢ per hour, resulting in a stratified system where, much like on the outside, those facing the most severe lack of care are those who cannot afford it. Preventative care is non-existent. Women generally only see medical for extreme situations, often ones that have worsened due to this sustained lack of management.

Weaver came to prison under the care of a specialist and was receiving full treatment for rheumatoid arthritis. Due to the lack of routine maintenance in medical care in Perryville, the severity of her disease surpassed the strength of her current medication, resulting in severe pain. Weaver was bed-ridden. She cried, describing her frustration;

I put in over 15 HNRs in a span of 8 years requesting for specialists to re-adjust my medication... but they withheld that option from me, resulting in years of pain, joint deterioration, and now loss of kidney function. (Weaver interview, 2019)

Weaver's experience is not unique; **many of the participants of our research shared that they had suffered needlessly after relatively manageable conditions worsened and created new conditions.** While we remain inside, we have no choice but to seek care from the very system that led us to this point. Many of us understandably grow pessimistic. Withers shared her frustrations after her multiple conditions have been left untreated;

I give up. I'm done. I'll die. I'm serious. I'm done. They're humiliating. They minimize everything. I have real issues. I have a titanium cage on my bottom three vertebrae. I have titanium rods in my back. They refuse to even do a CT scan to see an image, to make sure that they haven't moved. I have an IVC filter. I have a lot of preexisting issues. And I'm supposed to be monitored every 30 days for Raynaud's disorder. They're not—I've seen them once... During the summertime, my left leg was swelling profusely. It was extremely hot. It was like burning. I've never seen anything like it. She put me on antibiotics like three different times and finally she just tells me that I have some [condition] basically where I retain fluid in my leg. And I said, 'well, what is that? What causes the rash? Is that what causes the high temperature?' She just kind of looked at me and said, well, I don't know, but that's what you have. And then sent me out. (Withers interview, 2019)

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Not only has Withers been refused preventative care and straight answers regarding her conditions, but she also shared that accessing her own medical records has been a battle.

I even tried to get my medical records to get them sent out and they told me that they lost them. They couldn't find them. How was that an answer? I was told that about five or six years ago they went from paper records to computer records, but apparently, they didn't enter the paper records into the computer. So basically, people only have records from about six years ago.

(Withers interview, 2019)

Some of the women with whom we spoke described interactions with medical staff as demeaning and dismissive, treating them as if they are always putting staff out or exaggerating their pain. Others shared stories like these that indicate a lack of professionalism and/or capability to provide care. Riley, whose testimony above recounted her violating experience interacting with officers who placed her in suicide watch, also experienced sexualized harassment with medical personnel. She described the disorienting interaction:

So I had been working a lot and I had a hernia, a bulge coming out of my right side. It was really painful. I couldn't sit up. I [went] to medical and the doctor, Dr. Johnson, laid me on the bed and he was pushing around on my stomach and he kept commenting on how muscular it was. I told him what I was there for, that it was burning like fire when I was trying to sit up just to change the channels on my TV. His response was [that I should] go do more sit ups every day because it would build my stomach muscles so strong that the hernia wouldn't poke through. And then he told me that if the prison was on fire and he needed someone to carry him through the burning flames, he would want that to be me. So I refused to see him anymore and I kept putting in HNRs to see a different provider. (Riley interview, 2019)

Interactions like Withers and Riley experienced illustrate the dilemmas in acquiring dignified treatment from medical professionals in Perryville. **In addition to dismissals and disrespect from providers, we are often forced to accept care without transparency regarding the reasons why or the consequences of treatments.** And because we have nowhere else to turn, no options for seeking second opinions, and our questions are often ignored, we are stuck.

As Stephanie's experience shows, we also face departmental consequences for both accepting or rejecting such treatment. She shared:

When I first got here, they put me on a medicine that I never ever would have taken if I would've known how getting off of it would have been. They put me on Effexor. It's like coming off heroin. And they started me off on a small dose and they kept doubling it up every 3 to 6 months and finally, I couldn't sleep at night anymore. And to go to [a minimum yard], you have to be on no kind of pills for a year. Well I go [to minimum] in two years. So I wanted to get off of it, and I just skipped pill call one day and I was so sick by the next day, by the time it was time to go up there, it was horrible. Like, I had the shakes and I was freezing cold and sweating and cramping. It was awful. I never would have taken that if I would've known what it was like to get off of it. (Stephanie interview, 2019)

Consent is a tricky thing in prison when we only have so much control over our own bodies, and when ADCRR staff and resource providers have the power to make other areas of our life harder, we must acquiesce. When the damage is done, of course, we have nowhere to turn except back to the same sources, so we suffer and endure.

Reproductive health care in Perryville is difficult to access. Routine preventative care is withheld even when a woman demonstrates pre-existing susceptibility to dangerous conditions. Serious reproductive health procedures are often considered too costly to the department.

Reproductive Injustice

Reproductive care is a fundamental right, and studies show it is especially critical for incarcerated women. A study by the National Commission on Correctional Health Care reported that "Rates of cervical and breast cancer are higher among incarcerated women, likely related to under-screening both before incarceration and while in custody (Brousseau et al., 2019; Pickett et al., 2018)." Another study the authors reference found that "up to 40% of incarcerated women had abnormal menstrual bleeding (Allsworth, et. al., 2007)." Our particular health needs coincide with the stressors of incarceration, inadequate nutrition, and unhealthy conditions. This form of care is critical to our female incarcerated population, and yet the prison negligently fails to provide it. Reproductive healthcare is sorely lacking in this industry built for men's bodies.

Marlee has been suffering from an untreated cyst in her vaginal wall that measures 2 inches in diameter; Corizon medical staff refused to conduct a biopsy, but insisted it is benign despite Marlee's family history of cervical cancer. She reflected:

To get cancer in here is basically a death sentence...you just pray every day that you're healthy enough to make it out of here and that when you get out, whatever issues you have are fixable by then.

(Marlee interview, 2019)

Over a period of 5 excruciating years, Mary's quality of life deteriorated from year after year of reproductive health neglect. Mary suffered from a rapidly enlarging growth on her uterus. After several visits and continuous denials for a hysterectomy, the doctor informed Mary that if the proposal was denied for a third time, it was due to the cost of the surgery.

Mary's frustration grew;

How the hell is my surgery not covered after all of these years? My medical needs are the responsibility of the Department of Corrections. It's a shame that my livelihood depends on an organization that doesn't care if I ever make it out alive.

(Mary interview, 2019)

The fears Mary expressed were shared among the women we spoke with, who echoed that "You hope that if something does go wrong, you don't find out about it when it's the final stage because it's going to be an uphill battle. We see it happen every day with friends" (Withers interview, 2019).

Falisha London, Karen Thompson, and Erika Kurtenbach are just three of the women we have loved and had to watch suffer needlessly as their lives ended in Perryville.

Falisha "was so full of life. Just smiles, just beautiful smiles. I don't think there was ever a time you'd see her that she wasn't smiling or joking about something. She was a G. She was funny and she was strong. She could be crazy – in a fun way. Beautiful. Kind" (Anonymous interview, 2019). For six months, Falisha attempted to get medical treatment for painful lumps in her legs and persistent fevers.

And every time she'd go to medical, they basically gave that standard answer, you know. 'It's nothing. Drink water. Take some ibuprofen. Walk the track. Exercise.' For at least six months... (Id.)

Eventually, a medical provider did bloodwork that led to her leukemia diagnosis. She had her first treatment and had to endure constant harassment from the staff who would accompany her.

I just remember her saying she couldn't get any sleep, she couldn't get any rest while she was going through treatment because, you know, the officers have to sit on you while you're in the hospital room. And they'd play the TV loud, they'd talk really loud, they'd yell back and forth... feel like they needed to be in the room when the doctors were discussing her medical issues... There was even a point in time where she would be so tired that she stuck the remote control of the TV underneath her arm, to keep the TV off so she could try to get some rest, and they would physically take the remote out from under her arm and turn the TV on. Eating, talking, just being rude as fuck. And she even – in her shackles – had to go into the bathroom and lay down on the floor in the bathroom, to get some sleep, because that's how rude they were. While she's sitting there fighting for her life...

(Anonymous interview, 2019)

Falisha never received her second treatment. She shared with her friends that she worried this might happen after she discovered that the cost of her chemotherapy medication had been dramatically increased. She was advised that her cancer could also have been treated using a bone marrow transplant or stem cell transplant,

neither of which looked hopeful. While her family members were trying to determine if they might be a match, they discovered that the Department of Corrections barred them from donating to Falisha. A stem cell transplant was also unavailable because her treatments were being conducted out of a Catholic hospital that refused the procedure.

Falisha was loved dearly. For the Cancer Walk, a regular fundraising event hosted at Perryville, the women on the yard showed her their support.

We had the cancer walk about a week before the Special Olympics came, and the girls in the cancer walk committee had made a banner for her to say, you know, FiFi, your fight is our fight. Everyone put their handprints on it with orange because orange was for leukemia, and her favorite color was actually orange. So she was really happy about that. And she wasn't going to come out, she wasn't feeling good, so as we walked around the track, she was standing at her door and we would wave and she'd wave back and she actually came out for a very short period of time and took a picture in front of it. (Anonymous interview, 2019)

The day the yard hosted the Special Olympics, Falisha told her friends that she couldn't breathe. "She was real shallow breathing, trying to catch her breath, and people would go to the bubble and tell the officer, 'hey, can you please call an ICS, call medical, she can't breathe,' and it was Officer Mims that was there that day saying, 'I wish I could, but Sergeant Hoptuit said that no one is to

come off the yard per Chuck Ryan'" (Anonymous interview, 2019). "Mims was very adamant that they needed to come get her, but her supervisor wasn't allowing it" (Id.)

Because the Director was there, as were numerous visitors, everyone was resistant to help Falisha. Eventually the pill call nurse brought her medicine and saw her breathing, and insisted they call 911. "So they quietly wheeled her to medical in a wheelchair. And that was the last time we saw her" (Id.). **Falisha passed away in the hospital from pneumonia. She was only 31.**

Karen Thompson (KT) was a beloved and respected friend. "The way I have always remembered her was very prideful. Strength mattered, and weakness was not tolerated. She always took care of herself. There was almost an elegance about her. She was confident" (Anonymous interview, 2019). We all knew she was developing dementia. You saw the decline in her personality, in how she looked, how she acted, but she would never go to medical to tell them because she was scared to death that they were going to put her somewhere else. We loved her through that and learned not embarrass her (like when she got an early birthday card for someone).

"She was failing, but then, what are you going to do? Go to medical and say, 'I can't remember things'? And then what are they going to do? [Tell you] 'Drink water and walk the track'?" (Id.)

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She wasn't feeling well, wasn't able to urinate or defecate, and began having chest pains. So she went to medical, where they took her vitals and then sent her back to the yard. She tried again and again over a week and a half and received the same treatment each time. A close friend of hers told the rest of her story:

A lieutenant on Maria told [medical], 'If she's breathing, she's responsive.' I would go in the room and there's vomit all over the wall, all over the bed. One officer did contact medical on day shift and again, medical was like 'Her vitals are fine.' Mr. Winbush and Muhano were trying to get something done. They finally called the Lieutenant, Kramer, and Sergeant Hoptuit. They came down and they went in the room, and made some smart-ass comments on their way out... Kramer compared KT to her dog and had said, you know, 'my dog had a lot of those same symptoms and she just ended up having an ear infection.'... That evening they took her out on a gurney to a van and Lieutenant Kramer expected her to climb into the van herself. They brought her right back that evening after lockdown. The next day I went to check on her again, still trying to get her to suck on some ice. People were trying to get her to eat. I asked her roommate to keep a journal about when she threw up, if she's drinking anything, if she's eating anything, if she's gotten up and used the bathroom... which was an awful lot to put on her bunkie at the time, but, her bunkie wasn't getting any sleep because she was watching her. She hadn't gotten out of bed for days and the [CO's] didn't seem to even give a fuck or notice. [Every day] I went in there, she was worse. Everyone was talking about 'she's speaking in tongues, she's speaking in tongues!' She wasn't speaking in tongues. What it sounded like to me was that she had had a stroke and she could no longer speak or communicate appropriately. I told her roommate, stop cleaning up the throw up. These fucking officers – please excuse my language – have to see this stuff. They have to see what the fuck is going on in here because we are literally watching her die in front of us. It was just disgusting. And I remember stopping officer Talao and telling her, 'You need to help me. I need you to go into this room.' And she threw her hands in the air and she said, 'Medical says her vitals are fine. She's still breathing. There's nothing I can do.' And finally, thank God an angel walked through our pedestrian gates: Lieutenant Manzur. And I ran up to him and I said, 'I need your help, you need to go look at Thompson and you need to look at her now because she's dying and nobody will do anything.' And within five minutes he had a camera down there, called the ICS and got her up to medical. Medical still refused to call 911. They had her up at medical through count until one o'clock. [Manzur] was arguing with them and arguing with them and arguing with them. Finally, they got her to the hospital, and she died shortly later from sepsis and pneumonia, which I'm sure that's all caused from aspirating on her own vomit. They found a DNR in her file.

During the time her friends were pleading with officers and medical to treat KT, both a prisoner and an officer were disciplined for trying to get help. Her friend received a disciplinary ticket for asking her family to contact KT's family to inform them about her condition. Officer Jimenez also chose to call an ICS and was written up by Sergeant Hoptuit for doing so. However, none of the officers or medical staff who saw her in the weeks leading up to her death were disciplined for their lack of action.

I'm angry at them and I feel like there should be repercussions for their inaction. You know, there's people that are sitting in prison for inaction, and are being held criminally liable for inaction. And I feel like they should be held liable, because she would still be okay. It didn't have to happen like that and she didn't deserve to suffer like that. You feel so helpless. There's literally nothing you can do. Once you've tried the two avenues you have, which is the CO's and medical, and nowhere to go from there. They're like God in this little world, you know, and... nothing! It is clear and evident that they killed her.

(Anonymous interview, 2019)

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Erika Kurtenbach, whom friends called Sugar, spoke with us when we first began this project in late 2018. She shared her own story.

When she arrived at Perryville, Erika's cholesterol was tested among other standard panels. It wasn't until three years later that she was informed that

it was higher than normal. She began taking Gemfibrozil, a medication to treat her high triglycerides. She took this for four years before a provider at Santa Maria told her she should not be taking it for that length of time as it could cause liver damage. She was taken off the medication for six months before being put back on it for another two years.

In January of 2019, Erika's blood work showed that she was anemic; she was prescribed eight B-12 shots, of which she only received six. By June, Erika reached out to medical again after developing severe edema of her ankles and feet, sometimes spreading to her calves and bloating them to twice their size. Medical told her to avoid sodium, and did basic blood work, which came out normal.

Erika's pain spread to her right side of her abdomen, under her rib cage and moving into her back when she ate. It wasn't until September that she was seen again by medical. Erika feared submitting an HNR sooner might jeopardize her enrollment in a plumbing class; as a lifer, it was likely a one-time opportunity to program – a necessary accomplishment to show her upcoming parole board. By September, she explained the pain in her right side to medical and her worry that it was her gallbladder. Her pain had not progressed significantly, though, as is typical for a gallbladder issue. Regardless, medical moved forward on this suspected diagnosis.

They conducted a urine analysis, which was positive for proteins, a sign of infection. The provider refused to prescribe her anything for the pain but told her to take a round of antibiotics for a presumed kidney infection. The antibiotics never arrived at pill call, and instead Erika was brought back to medical. A different provider told her it was surely her gallbladder.

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The next week, she received an ultrasound that revealed she had multiple masses on her liver. The provider assured her that nothing in her blood work was indicative of cancer. **She went out for a CT scan in October, which showed that almost half of her liver was covered in masses, ranging from 4.5-8.3 centimeters.** Her liver was biopsied in early November and returned the diagnosis: metastatic colon cancer that had spread to her liver. Her provider ordered a port to be placed, but Corizon denied it, asking that the oncologist send the order. Thankfully, the oncologist moved quickly, and Erika received her port placement the following week.

After the appointment to receive her port, Erika was brought to the Santa Cruz yard. Not 20 minutes after she arrived on the yard, she was called up to programs, where a COIII handed her a medical clemency application and told her to fill it out as soon as possible. Erika spoke to two more CO's before finally reaching some explanation. The Deputy Warden had instructed her to be given this packet because her cancer diagnosis was terminal.

Probably 40 minutes later, she called me back to her office and said DW Theodore said that medical told them to give this to you, and that you need to fill it out as soon as possible. I said, 'okay, thank you.' And lost it. Because again, I live in a butterflies and rainbows world sometimes, like ok, I got this, I don't necessarily feel sick. When you hear that someone has stage four cancer, they should be feeble. Not being able to walk around... Yeah, I get tired. But I muscle through it, and to me, stage four... I spit in the face of cancer. That's what I say all the time: I have cancer, but cancer doesn't have me. You know, in all reality they say stage four, that's terminal. It is. Have there been advances in cancer treatments? Yeah. But it's stage four, so its terminal. Because of the stage, it's going to be an aggressive chemo. And from what I understand, it's going to be bad. I'm going to lose all of my hair. I'm going to lose more weight. I will probably feel like I want to die from this treatment, but I can't. I refuse to give up.

(Erika interview, 2019)

Erika filed her application for medical clemency under reason of "imminent danger of death" within a week of receiving it, hoping to be granted the chance to spend what time she had left fighting for her life alongside her loving mother and daughter. Less than a week later, her application was returned to her with instructions to consider re-applying in five years. Because Erika was charged under the felony murder statute for first degree murder (for a crime during which she was held

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under the threat of her life), her A.R.S. code disqualified her for any type of early release prior to serving 25 years – even for reason of a terminal medical condition. At that point, Erika had been imprisoned for 20 years.

Her mother advocated for her fiercely, but the tragically inhumane system would not budge. Erika began cancer treatments in the Spring of 2019, and fought as hard as she could, separated from her family. She passed away the following year inside Perryville.

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We are stuck with no options, unable to seek medical advice from a party other than the one assigned to our unit, regardless of their lack of expertise. This sometimes looks like a previous provider on our yard who used to close the medical office on days when the internet wasn't working, because she wasn't able to Google our symptoms. Sometimes it is less ignorance and more malice, as in the providers whose disdain for us is clear as they refuse to give us life-saving care to avoid paperwork. In addition to the loss of our freedom, we lose control over our medical decisions and health. We are patronized and abused and have no choice but to accept it. Like the inhumane conditions and treatment we are subjected to, our lack of access to life saving medical care has become part of our punishment. A sentence of incarceration in Arizona prisons can be a death sentence.



Parenting from Inside

Becoming a ward of the state is a particularly devastating experience for mothers. **From facing the loss of our children for years of their lives to the very real threat of losing them altogether, we must fight to protect our right to parent.**

Women who have been sentenced with more than one year may have their parental rights severed, unless the woman has family members who can step up and take custody of the children. If a woman is pregnant with more than one year, her parental rights may be severed following a harrowing birth inside prison.

ASFA

These policies are part of the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997, which requires states “to automatically file a petition to terminate parental rights once a child has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months.” [According to the Prison Policy Initiative](#), “the law stacks the odds against incarcerated parents seeking to maintain their legal rights to their children” by adding another layer of punishment onto long sentences; “ASFA sets these mothers up to lose their children as soon as their sentences exceed 15 months.”

The loss of parental rights is almost always permanent. If parental rights are maintained, we must turn our fight to triaging the pains of separation. The mothers with whom we spoke as part of this research shared the depths of this trauma, the hurdles to maintaining bonds with their children and grandchildren, and the tireless work of resisting being torn from our roles as mothers and caretakers.

Zumaya shared with us what her battle to retain parental rights was like, and how she propelled this energy to supporting other women going through the same fight.

After I had my second son, I began to have to figure out how to take custody. And so I had to do that in here. They had what used to be the law library. So I got a job in there and I read everything I could read. I filed my own motions, I fought everything tooth and nail, and not one time I never lost custody. So that’s what led me to think, okay, I can figure this out, I can do this. And then I began to work in there and consistently help other women either get visitation or, you know, fight for their rights to keep their children. I don’t believe that anybody should be able to take your parental rights from you. You’re still a parent once you have given birth to a child. That’s always your child no matter what or where they are in the world. And so that’s what gave me that drive to continue. So I just put everything I had into that. (Zumaya interview, 2019)

The State of Arizona is administrating what they see as “just,” but the reality is more damage and trauma is inflicted through parental rights severance, creating layers of hardships for the children, parents, and grandparents. The legal tearing apart of families becomes a part of a prison sentence for far too many women.

A Disproportionate Burden on Mothers

If we fight for our rights, we must largely depend on others beyond our control; Hollins, Underwood, and Krupat (2019) point out that "For a family, navigating the Family Court and child welfare systems while incarcerated can be difficult to insurmountable. Incarcerated parents are completely dependent on gatekeepers to bring their children for visits and to 'produce' them to the court" (p. 21). The children of women who are incarcerated are disproportionately placed in foster care – up to five times more often than those whose father is incarcerated (Id.).

If we retain parental rights, our kids still suffer during our incarceration. The loss faced by our children is more than collateral damage. It is an immense burden that is an integral part of our sentences.

Dependent Children

Research by Fwd.us found that 53% of women imprisoned in Arizona have a dependent. Hollins, et. al. (2019) report that "the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated that in recent years, more than one-third of minor children with incarcerated parents, or 700,000 boys and girls, will reach the age of 18 years while their parent is incarcerated (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010)" (p. 7). Especially for children, but for the entire family unit, "Incarceration does not just impact the person who is sent to jail or prison, it reverberates into the lives of their loved ones with severe consequences for their financial security, health, and emotional well-being."

We are not sentenced to this hell alone, and we carry with us the suffering of our children while we often feel powerless to help ease their pain. This is especially distressing for those of us sentenced to decades apart from them. Nicole recollected the effects of this trauma on her children;

The fact that my kids don't have their mommy has been really hard on them. The fact that I've been gone so long. My youngest daughter was 16 months old when I got put into jail. She has no memories of us at all. When she was little, she would come to visit and my other two kids would be talking about memories that they had with me. And I remember watching her put her little head down and act like she was going to sleep because she didn't have any memories and it used to hurt me. So I would tell her memories of things that I remember her doing when she was little that she doesn't remember, you know. The fact that I wasn't there for them, for their graduation, for their marriage, for the first child being born in their life, for their first heartbreak. It's really hard on them, really hard... My kids slept with me, and [my mom] said that when I got locked up she had to sleep in my bed with my kids because my kids didn't know how to be without somebody to sleep with. And she said that when she would go to the bathroom, they would get up and be like, Nana Nana Nana! Where are you? And they would look under the door to make sure that they saw her because they were traumatized. They were traumatized at how I just disappeared. (Nicole interview, 2019)

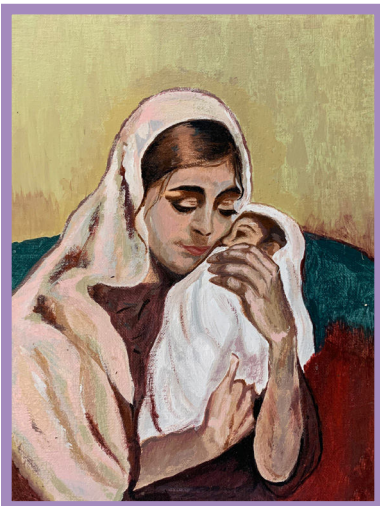
The hardship of separation weighs indescribably heavy on our children, while we carry their pains next to our own of not being able to be with them. We have to fight against our own depression so that we can be strong for ourselves and for them. This is an incredible task in the midst of our own isolation and degradation inside prison.

Fierce Mothers

Dr. Grace Gámez (2015) calls the strength forged through the struggle to mother within the punishment system “fierce mothering.” She writes: “To create a livable life, fierce mothers learn to live and mother unapologetically; they live, love and operate outside of the binary of good/bad mother scripts. They resist the social norms that label them “bad” mothers, they push back against de facto discrimination, and they defy imposed obstacles in order to claim their right to be mothers in spite of the state” (Gámez 2015, p. 167).

Fierce mothers like Nicole must constantly steady their resolve as they stay dedicated to their dignity.

If something is wrong out there, my whole world in here crumbles. I can't focus. I feel like I'm...I feel like I'm just no good to anybody because I can't help anybody out there that really matters. But I look at my kids and look at my mom and I know that my dad's in heaven and that he's watching over us and that he is hearing my pleas for him to help me to watch over my family. And when I say that, that helps me to continue with that hope because these people aren't going to take my spirit. They may have my physical self, but they're not going to have my mind. They're not going to have my soul. They're not going to have my heart. They don't have that, they can't. I'll never give that to them and they'll never take my title of mommy or nana from me. (Nicole interview, 2019)



While visitation allows some space for us to connect with our children, not everyone chooses to have their little ones visit. The pangs of separation and the brutal reality of the prison environment are weighed by mothers wanting to carve out space to mother in different ways. Stephanie shared with us that while she wants to protect her grandkids from having to enter the prison; she fears that this choice can't continue through the entirety of her sentence.

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I still haven't seen my grandbabies or my daughter here because I feel so conflicted about that. They're so little, I don't want them coming here and seeing me like that. But then again, I'm going to be gone for so long that I feel like eventually if they don't come and see me that they're going to forget me. (Stephanie interview, 2019)

Nicole has worked to become a mentor to other mothers at Perryville, encouraging them to find ways to push through these doubts imposed by the cruel environment in which they're forced to mother. No matter the cold institutional limits, she says, we can always find ways to assert our access to our children.

I've always told women, if you're a mother, reach out to your children. Keep that communication open. Call them. I know the phone calls are just 15 minutes. Call them, talk to your children, write them postcards, check up on school. If they come visit you, pull them aside, get some you and them time, because it's very important that as a mother we continue to follow that path, not let this place say what you can and cannot do. Because when I'm with my children at visit, this place doesn't exist. It doesn't because I'm still focused on them.

(Nicole interview, 2019)

Central to the testimonies we heard from mothers in Perryville was the sense that this institution does as little as possible to help retain these relationships. This systematic apathy is

most apparent when mothers enter the prison pregnant. **Prenatal care is virtually nonexistent, women have been shackled during childbirth, and post-birth care for grieving and recovering women is utterly absent.** Thankfully, the passage of the Dignity for Incarcerated Women Act now prohibits the use of shackling during labor and childbirth; up until this, the practice was common in Perryville. One woman we spoke with struggled to share how this devastating experience felt.

I had my son here and I... I mean, there's nothing that could even explain what I went through for that. At all. There's just, you can't. You can't explain it. It's still... It still gets to me after all these years. I think back to that day and it's like, how do you... How does somebody - meaning the state - how do you do that to somebody? Because - okay, I broke the law, but that doesn't mean that you take that away from a woman, having a child. And having to have your leg chained to the bed while you're giving birth and having male officers standing in the same room. In my mind, I felt raped because of that. They didn't care. They didn't care at all. You just go back to the yard. And your breasts are leaking, your baby's hungry. And you know that's something that no man could ever understand, you know, and they just don't care. And they don't help you. They don't help you to keep your family together. It's all about what they can do to separate you. We don't have that bond because when he was born, I didn't even get to hold him here. I never even held him for a moment. (Zumaya interview, 2019)

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From Zumaya's disturbing testimony to the limits of visitation, to barriers to financial support, we must constantly battle the bureaucracy of the prison to help our children navigate our absence. Furthermore, we must challenge actively confrontational administrators. Nicole shared with us how her personal interactions fighting for the right to send money to help support her children resulted in retaliatory policy targeting lifers like her.

Director Ryan put a halt on all retention funds going out until they revised the policy. When they revised the policy, the policy now said that anyone trying to use the retention fund must have children under the age of 18, which meant minor children. Now mind you, I had already been in prison 15 years by now, so my youngest child was going to be 18 years old, still going to school. So I filed a grievance [to the Director] stating that if President Obama can allow a parent to support their child or children up to the age of 23 years old while they were in school, how is it that the Arizona Department of Corrections will not allow me to pay for my mother's mortgage while my daughter is living with my mother? So what he did to retaliate against me was put into policy that, moving forward, anyone that had more than 10 years in prison could no longer work a retention job to send money out. (Nicole interview, 2019)

Now, not only can we no longer use retention funds unless we have minor children, but we cannot send money directly.

Prohibited from Supporting our Families

As dictated by Department Order 905, individuals may only use retention funds set aside from their wages to send money for immediate family needs directly to outside companies, such as for clothing, tuition, or medical providers, but may not simply send funds. Further, Department Order 903 stipulates that in order to be considered for an ACI-contracted position (capable of accruing retention funds), an inmate must be "within 10 years of earliest, valid release date." Such policies have the effect of further impeding our ability to help support our children and families. Especially for those of imprisoned here for decades during which time we could still be helping to contribute, our families pay the price. This burden is illustrated by [Fwd.us](#), who cite [research by Pew Charitable Trusts](#) on the collateral consequences of familial incarceration: "According to past research, two in three families (65 percent) were unable to meet basic needs such as food, housing, and medical care while their family member was incarcerated. For children, having a parent incarcerated has been shown to cause emotional stress and financial hardship, which leads to a wide range of problems and limits their future success. Numerous studies have also found that incarceration leads to less stable families."

Despite the immense obstacles imposed by the department on our capacity to mother, the women we spoke with demonstrated strength in their resolve to be present for their children. **Maintaining these relationships can be extremely hard, but our research revealed the lengths women go to despite time, isolation, and a lack of support.** Like everything else in here, we also support each other as we navigate mothering from inside.

Nicole organized and facilitated a class on parenting for other women on the yard and shared with us the number of children represented and the project they organized to reach out to them.

What we did was we collected a bunch of postcards for one of our group meetings. And in the parenting class we had 23 women which added up to 53 kids. That's not including mine, just the girls. On our last class, each one of those women got a postcard for each one of their children. And that night, 53 kids got a postcard from their mommy, saying those exact same things. I love you, I miss you, and I'm proud of you. Out of those 23 women in that parenting class, only seven of them are able to see their children. The rest of them don't come to visit. That's really sad. I was blessed to have a wonderful mom, a wonderful dad who raised my children, raised them good. (Nicole interview, 2019)

Family Bonds and Community Safety

Hollins, et. al. (2019) insist that "supporting the parent-child relationship through incarceration 'can be a valuable part of healing' (Adalist-Estrin, 2014). This is true not only for the child but for the parent as well" (p. 23). Likewise, Hairston, Rollin, and Jo (2004) write that "Family connections and other social networks impact not only families' and children's well-being but also the achievement of social goals such as the reduction of crime and the building of vibrant communities" (p. 3). These findings confirm what we know to be true: maintaining our family bonds is critical and promotes safety and healing for us and our communities. This should be encouraged, rather than hindered by this institution.

All of the women we spoke with shared the emotional toll the separation from family takes, and the ways they push through the strain of imprisonment.

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The following excerpts demonstrate the ways that we navigate mothering from inside:

My kids are with family, with my aunt. But I don't think it's as hard for me as it is for other people who just have no contact, that wouldn't know where their kids are or nothing. But it's really hard because I was so attached to my kids. That was my support system. They were everything that I had, you know? So it's hard. It's really, really hard. But my daughter was like, 'Mama I love you' and now that she's older, she stays in contact and we talk, and she understands. I don't talk to her about certain things because to me she's still a kid, but I mean it's just hard. You don't get nothing to [show you] how to be a parent in prison. You hear people talk about it. I have a lot of people ask me questions on how I do it. I don't even know how to do it, you know, I think I just stay focused for them, you know what I mean? (Nephritides interview, 2019)

I try to be just as transparent with [my daughter] as I can. I talk to her like I would my best friend. I don't know any other way... It's hard, it's hard, there's a lot of self-abuse that happens because you think maybe if you were there, it would be different. (Myra interview, 2019)

They're very protective of their mother. All they want is their mother's love. They want me home. They can't wait for me to come home. They wait for every call and they hold on to every minute they make things at home for me all the time they take pictures. I get tears in my eyes thinking about them because I spent half a year going to yard and collecting artwork for them... They know that I'm a fighter and so they support that, and I just try to tell them that good is going to come at the end of this tunnel. (Donna interview, 2019)

Through all the forms of cruelty and control we experience, the isolation from our families is the hardest. While Department policies and excessive sentences restrict our access to supporting our families, we persist, refusing to allow the state to eradicate our relationships. **Our ability to care, fiercely, is the antidote to this place, and its perverse idea of justice.**

Conclusion: Collective Collateral

Legally becoming property of the state means that almost every aspect of our lives is out of our control. We have to fight for basic necessities like clothing and hygiene; we work for cents on the dollar to produce massive profits for the prison; we cannot access education or therapy for our trauma; we live under horrifying conditions; we endure emotional, physical, and sexual abuse from the officers that have ultimate power over and access to us; we suffer at the hands of negligent medical providers; and we are separated from our families who are punished alongside us.

This constant state of uncertainty contributes to anxiety and ongoing trauma for many of us. **Throughout our research, all our participants spoke to the psychological impact of our conditions, which is on top of the prison sentence itself.** Many of us try to survive by keeping our heads down, especially those of us stuck here for decades. Lanae said; “The way I deal with it is to not deal with it and try not to think about it because if I allow myself to, it’s overwhelming” (Lanae interview, 2019). Withers has a similar perspective; “Honestly, it gets harder every year. Every year I distance myself just a little bit more because it gets so hard to watch people leave” (Withers interview, 2019). The pain of imprisonment is both general and nuanced, obvious and intimate; we are gaslit by the state to believe we are being helped, when in reality we are being harmed in every direction.

Many of the women with whom we spoke reflected on how counter-productive this environment is to actual healing and growth, something that is at odds with the department’s goal of “rehabilitation.” Withers pointed out: “I don’t understand why people

don’t realize that if you lay somebody down, it doesn’t make them sorry. It makes them sorry for themselves. You know what I mean? It’s a disastrous place to put somebody” (Withers interview, 2019). Lanae, Withers, and Winter are all serving life sentences and have been systematically discarded by the system. As lifers, these women are mentors and leaders to others on the yard, due to their own strength in the face of such extreme disempowerment. Winter and Withers describe:

I felt like, what can I apply myself to? I’m not allowed to apply myself to anything in here. I have no way of applying myself to anything out there. So all of this growth and beauty is for nothing other than, you know, a personal, spiritual relationship. It really goes no further than that. And that is an incredibly defeated feeling – to not be able to show anyone, your loved ones or your community or anybody. You no longer have a voice to show people who you really are.

(Winter interview, 2019)

I’ve been through some, a lot of really difficult circumstances. I want to pay it forward. Nobody has ever given me that opportunity. In fact, they tell me that I don’t even deserve that opportunity, and that’s what kills me. (Withers interview, 2019)

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The prison fails, though, at completely owning us. Our resilience in the face of each area of abuse we have outlined is evident in the ways we respond to care for one another. From organizing and making contact with folks on the outside to support policy change and research, to writing, to caring for ourselves and each other, we resist our dehumanization.

Collective Action

During the course of our research, we witnessed several moments of collective action unfold. First, in 2018 about one hundred women organized a store boycott in response to the most recent price increases on underwear, coffee, and packaged meats, all of which are considered necessary items. The “toothbrush strike” entailed these women purchasing nothing but a solitary toothbrush for one month’s worth of shopping. [An article explaining the action](#) drew public attention to Keefe’s regular price gouging on essentials alongside the lack of a change in inmate wages for the last three decades. Next, in May of 2019, [marking the anniversary of Marcia Powell’s death](#), women delivered a serving of coffee (Marcia’s favorite) to every woman on the unit before gathering at shift change on the yard for a moment of silence. Over 200 women joined, holding signs stating, “We will not forget Marcia Powell.” As officers wearily passed the peaceful demonstration, one sergeant stopped to stand alongside the group. No one was retaliated against for either of these actions.

The negligent and abusive environment we are in demands that we find ways to stand up for ourselves if we want things to change. We share the details of being incarcerated as a way to resist, and also to challenge what are commonly held beliefs about what time inside is like and so that the public can better understand the purpose and function of incarceration. Prison is a tool that punishes in diverse and totalizing ways, that creates and reproduces trauma that extends

beyond the person incarcerated to their children and entire families. It is our hope that by having this information the public can more deeply consider whether or not this is in the service of justice and safety. With the stories recorded here we challenge the system that would happily leave us to perish.

Key to not letting this place break us is leaning on each other and creating a community of care and collective accountability. This provides us strength especially when navigating, new and old, trauma in here.

There’s no place to talk about what happened with my childhood or my self-worth and whatnot. Nothing. The way I feel is it’s been 10 years of self help – reading books and talking to people who went through it too, finding people who support me, you know, who are rooting for me. Like, you can do this. (Rae interview, 2019)

When you have a passing in your family, it’s very important that people check up on you, especially your state of mind. I was lucky I had a lot of friends that cared about me who also checked up on me, but they don’t do anything to help with that grieving process for people. It’s really, really sad that nobody cares about us. If somebody dies in our family, they don’t care. They think that we’re robots, that we don’t have any feelings, but we do. We still care. We’re still human. Even though they don’t want us to be. They want to dehumanize us. (Nicole interview, 2019)

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The kinds of mutual care the women with whom we spoke describe center empowerment – of oneself and others. Prison is a devastating place to be; our histories of abuse are compounded here. And yet we find ways on our own to reclaim our dignity. The array of acts of care and support are awe-inspiring and borne out of necessity. As Withers described:

I've never experienced so much encouragement in circumstances ever. There's so much pain here that nobody wants to hurt each other. You know what I mean? For the most part, we just want to bring each other up. I can just avoid people for a few days because I have a tendency to go into a hole and read books and stuff, and you know, people come to draw me out, to make sure that I'm okay. I've never had that before. We do it for each other, and the truth is we don't trust anybody else at this point. We're here to do it for each other because we know it's not going to come from anywhere else. Especially when there's a big medical disaster. We have to be there for each other. It's so scary. I've never been so personally affected by what other people go through either, just because we're all in so much pain in here. And you just hate to see other people suffer, but everybody's suffering in here. Everybody, especially during the summertime, it's a 115 degrees. There's no relief. No relief whatsoever. People are suffering. People have breakdowns. It's inevitable. (Withers interview, 2019)

In a place of desolation, as Withers describes, we must care for each other, and we recognize our shared struggle against a common source of abuse. And by standing as collateral for one another, we protect each other. But we also model true community accountability which the outside could learn from. Those of us doing long sentences especially recognize the significance of our relationships to each other in everything we have learned and struggle to endure here. We grow up together, celebrate together, mourn together. This family also helps us to collectively claim the hardships and triumphs we have been through together.

The DOC doesn't get to take credit for who I became. They don't. No. My comrades do, the women that raised me. I lived through their lives. I learned lessons through their lives. I traveled the world through their lives. They gave me a bigger vocabulary, they gave me... they gave me them, they gave me the world. (Valentina interview, 2019)

I've done a lot of time, and I have a lot of friends who have done a lot of time. We've kind of grown up together in a sense... They want to stay in contact and they tell me that helps them. They remember. And it helps me, because it's not forgotten. (Angie interview, 2019)

There's a lot of beauty here. There's a lot of beauty and there's a lot of growth, and it's not being given by the department, but it's being given by whatever anybody believes in - it is absolutely being given. I believe in opposition in all things. So where there's darkness, there's incredible light. And if this is a very dark place, with that being said, it meets its match in light. (Winter interview, 2019)

Care is the antidote to this place, and those of us held captive here are the ones who keep it growing, keep the resolve to resist being made property of the state, keep our hearts strong with conviction that we are neither broken nor done fighting for ourselves, our families, and our communities. We share these stories, of the myriad ways the state attempts to dominate us and extract from us and how we resist, in order to raise an indictment of this form of justice presented as rehabilitation. **If the public wants accountability, it requires healing.** As incarcerated women, our voices are regularly silenced on multiple fronts, as "criminals" and as women, by those on both sides of incarceration discussions. We refuse to stay silent. We hope this report will generate realizations and outrage that lead to legal and policy changes, but primarily, we submit our testimonies to be heard.

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