

August 21, 2018  
The Honorable Charles Baker, Governor  
The Statehouse  
24 Beacon St, Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Baker,

Bristol County for Correctional Justice (BCCJ) would first like to thank you for signing the Criminal Justice Reform bill. This bill will not only make a difference to those who have served their time and are moving on with their lives, but also to individuals who are just beginning their journey of recovery. Yet there is still much work to be done to improve our criminal justice system. One area requiring your attention is our county jails.

BCCJ writes to you today because we are greatly concerned for the welfare of the people that are incarcerated in Bristol County House of Correction (BCHOC) - that is, people serving sentences, pre-trial individuals (over ½ the population), and ICE detainees who are supposed to be housed separately, but in fact are mixed in with people with more serious charges against them. We are an ad hoc group of organizations and individuals who have been meeting together for over a year to figure out how to hold Sheriff Hodgson accountable for the practices and policies that have made this the worst jail in the Commonwealth.

Sheriff Hodgson is not performing his duties as sheriff. Based on the research we have done, BCHOC has the highest rate of suicide of all the counties here in Massachusetts. Roughly a quarter of all in-jail suicides in the state occurred here, which holds only 12 percent of the state's county jail inmates.

In theory, it should be difficult for inmates to commit suicide. Correctional officers are supposed to conduct checks on the suicidal individual every 15 minutes. The individual is isolated and placed in a paper suit. However in one of several recent wrongful death lawsuits, a mother charged that officers had not been conducting checks as frequently they were supposed to be on her son, who had been red-flagged as a suicide risk by a judge in Attleboro. She claims that a bed sheet was left in his cell which he then used to hang himself. We wonder about accountability in such situations. Who intervenes when anti-suicide protocols are not followed?

Yet despite the highest suicide rate in Massachusetts, BCHOC has only 3 mental health care personnel while Hampden County, with a similar size population, has 10. With these kinds of suicide statistics, why isn't the Bristol County Sheriff's Office (BCSO) hiring more mental health professionals? Why isn't any state official demanding that they do something to lower

their suicide rate? All we hear about is the Sheriff conducting his own internal investigations. That is not appropriate.

Gross medical neglect by the BCSO is one of the most common complaints shared with us by formerly incarcerated individuals. In the case of medication, if the individual's doses do not arrive with them, they must apply to see the doctor. Eventually, the individual is screened by a physician and a mental health person after which the individual may or may not get their meds. In one case a diabetic individual had to wait three weeks for their insulin. Seizure meds are routinely denied, resulting in seizures that have caused injuries.

In the most recent inspection on file, from 2016, ICE's Office of Detention Oversight found that detainees had a number of complaints about medical care, including finding that "in six of ten health records reviewed, the facility failed to obtain informed consent from detainees receiving psychotropic medications." Fevers and toothaches are ignored, resulting in much more serious health issues. One 22 year old had severe headaches for 5 days. He put in medical slips for help, but was ignored. The result: he suffered a stroke.

And there are many other accounts of people being denied medical care that resulted in their suffering harmful physical injury, or disfigurement; or people, lacking access to their psychological meds, begin acting out, and are put in solitary which for some, enhances their chance of committing self-harm.

Another disturbing issue that is commonly shared with us by former inmates is the lack of food provided in the BCHOC. Only 1700 calories a day is provided for each individual in the jails. To maintain body weight a man needs 2,500 calories and a woman needs 2,000 calories. The individuals at the jail are given two meals a day breakfast at 6:30 am and dinner at 4:30 pm and report being hungry between meals. The food they are served is often stale or unrecognizable. Their diets are lacking in nutrition as well. Fruits and vegetables are rarely provided, and the red the juice that is frequently given has a warning label stating it is carcinogenic.

Particularly alarming is the overall treatment of the individuals at the BCHOC by employees. Employees play cruel jokes on the individuals they are supposed to watch over. For example, calling "the last call for chow" after never announcing meal time, to begin with, does not give people enough time to eat their meals. Employees also antagonize the people keeping them in fear. Some employees encourage violence between incarcerated individuals. Often an individual is attacked by another prisoner and the aggressor is never held accountable as they should be by the employees. Ex-prisoners have told us that they prefer Plymouth County Jail as the employees operate as "professionals".

Solitary confinement is used as a punishment for small and serious infractions. It is inflicted on people with little regard for the serious harm this causes.

Sheriff Hodgson has signed with Securus, the nationwide prison telephone service, which charges very high prices for telephone calls, a price that falls heavily on families who tend to be low income. One woman, whose boyfriend was suicidal, couldn't afford to call him as often as she thought necessary to keep him stable. He became another suicide statistic. Yet Securus paid Sheriff Hodgson a "commission" of \$820,000 for signing on with their company.

Canteen prices are terribly inflated, and force people to go hungry because they can't afford to supplement their meager food with canteen products. Although we have gone through his budget with a fine tooth comb, we can't seem to find where this money goes.

Recently, during the week of July 27th, there was a hunger strike inside the Dartmouth campus that resulted in 250 people refusing food. It was led by ICE detainees, and many others joined in support. Their complaints focused on the extreme heat inside the jail, and the other issues we have cited above. According to our sources, officers were able to talk people into ending the strike by promising better food and conditions. So far we have not heard if these promises were kept.

Hundreds of these individuals need you to intervene and take up your responsibility as Governor to backup Attorney General Healey's request to Commissioner Turco and Secretary Bennett to thoroughly investigate BCSO. As far as the public knows, her request has gone unanswered. In addition we hope you would establish some form of oversight on this Sheriff so that we in Bristol County don't have to see "cruel and unusual" punishment inflicted everyday upon hundreds of people as we are currently witnessing.

Sincerely,