

To whom it may concern,

My name is Rich Sherwood and I'm currently serving a 4 year sentence for a drug crime at the Parnall Correctional facility in Jackson MI. I am witnessing this Covid-19 pandemic from a position that nobody is talking about. "Trapped" in an environment where the virus is spreading rapidly, causing severe harm and even death to people who I was just walking laps with last week, while the prisons administration carelessly admits that they don't know what to do as they move directly from infected areas to uninfected areas within the prison and vice versa.

While watching this take place I listen to others worry about the same things that I do. How is this going to affect me and my loved ones, will we ever see them again? Is there any chance of being released early as other states are doing so that we aren't "sitting ducks?" As I watch the ambulance run in and out of this place I can't help but wonder who is in the back of it and who is next. As I'm sure that the rest of the world is also wondering, how is this disaster going to end?

I'd like to point out the one thing that doesn't matter from the position as a prisoner - money! I think that most people here would agree that LIFE is their number 1 concern. Everyone is entitled to their opinion but just like we aren't being looked at from out there, money and or politics isn't of much concern to us. At this point we also just want a chance at life.

I woke up at 2am, like I have been since the beginning of this Pandemic and I turned on my TV to watch the news. There was a segment about prisoners who meet a specific criteria, getting ready to be released from overcrowded prisons somewhere in the United States. Someone came into the picture with their opinion that it would be a mistake, adding that crime would spread like wildfire as soon as they were released. The feeling of being worthless and helpless, mixed with the assumption of being forgotten really hit me hard.

So far today I have spent the last 12 hours talking to other prisoner's in my unit about the Pandemic, just to see where their minds were at. There are some damn good people inside these fences, people who would give anything to go back and make better choices. People who would love to be helping the world that they once helped cripple. And to respond to the unforgiving person who I saw on the news early this morning; "People who are being released soon anyway!"

I personally have less than 8 months until I am eligible to be released. Would I like to be free? Absolutely! But here is my attitude towards this subject today. I have been putting myself in risky and potentially deadly situations since the age of the 13. From the minute I started using drugs, I have literally died more than once. I have fought for my life on many occasions and I'm still here. Because I have "burned the candle at both ends" for the past 28 years, I am sure that I have a compromised immune system like many of the people here. I will take whatever comes and I will fight because that is

what I do.

Unfortunately, not everyone here CAN or WILL fight. There are a lot of good people here who aren't going to be able to handle this virus when it hits them. People who made bad decisions or even just one bad decision, and who are going home soon anyway. Some who will leave next week if they survive, and some within a year. But all could end up with a death sentence or an emotional loss at the least. A lot of whom that were over sentenced because they committed crimes in smaller towns. Serving ten times the sentence as the prisoners with identical circumstances but was in a different, larger city.

Today I see a tremendous amount of good and diversity within this world, and although most people don't see it, I know that there are people out there that advocate for us and see us for more than what we are being portrayed as during these times. For this I am extremely grateful. I am grateful for anyone who reads this message and takes the time to share it.

Finally, I would like to point out the fact that I'm not seeing ANYTHING along the lines of hatred or separation due to race, gender, sexual preference, age or religion. These things seem to be consumed and over-ridden by fear, concern and love during this pandemic. I see it in here as much as I see it on TV. This is because we are people too. Our voices are just harder to find because of the "category" we are placed in, the category that doesn't get mentioned.

The purpose of this letter is to be the voice of those around me. All 160 of us who are packed in this 60'x100' pole barn waiting for hope and hoping that we don't lose everything before our chance at life. And that is just my unit, there are several of these units at this facility! We don't have the option of "social distancing" and are rightfully worried and scared. I write this not so I can ask for an early release for myself but so we can be recognized as people and maybe at least be considered as valuable lives, too. We notice how often "prison reform" is mentioned when it comes to budgets and funding but why is it so silent when it is about lives?

Thank you for taking your time to read this and please share our voice wherever possible.

Sincerely,

Vocational Village Unit at Parnall Correctional facility Jackson, MI

P.S As I was writing this letter I was told that "prisoner Earl" has passed away from Covid-19