

6/7/2020

Dear Carceral State Project,

Enclosed please find my written testimony I hope this will be helpful. There was alot I felt that I could have wrote for hours about so if you would like me to elaborate further on anything please dont hesitate to ask. Also I wanted to make you aware that since I first reached out I have received a parole and I am excited to report I will be released from prison on Aug 18, 2020! I plan on still fully participating in this project along with others through prap upon my release. So anyway I can be involved once I'm released please let me know. I included my address on the consent form and I will be sure to send my e-mail and phone number once I am able to.

Thank you
Ken Tello

Testimony

Background:

My name is Ken Tello. I was born in Jackson, Mi. on June 19th 1983. I was raised in Jackson by my mother and father. The world outside my family unit varied because of the different neighborhoods that we lived in. My family was low income and when we moved to certain areas it was like my family wasn't welcomed. It was as if we were looked down upon or as if we were the outcast and didn't belong. This was always weird to me

Cause my mother is white. My father is Mexican so I could never figure out if that was why or what it was. To this day I can only guess but it definitely led to me finding trouble throughout these areas with neighboring kids I'm pretty sure I got into a fight with every kid in the neighborhood. My father was no stranger to the legal system so my perception of the cops/legal system wasn't good as a kid. I didn't like the police cause everytime I had an interaction with them it was because they were being called on me or my family and I knew when the police came my family always left. (jail) I remember one time the police was called on us cause we were burning leaves in the backyard in a barrel. The fire department showed up before the police and my family ended up getting into a fight with them because of the way they were talking to my mother. The police showed up and my cousin and dad went to jail.

My first interaction with the police I was actually set up. My brother and I had got into a fight with the neighbor kids and their parents called the police. When they showed up I took off running cause I know when the police show up "we" always go to jail. Once the officer caught me he walked me back to the car. We was in an alley behind the house so that's where the police car was we walked passed a pair of old rusty scissors that's probably been in this alley for years he picked them up said he seen me throw them when I ran

and charged me with possession of a dangerous weapon. I was 12 years old. I knew for sure at that point not to trust the police.

Incarceration:

What is incarceration like for me? This varies. Now that I am 70 days from my release it's a little different than when I was 16 years old serving 20 years. There is a lot of differences between them two stages but the one thing that has never changed and is very evident daily is that I'm not looked at as a human being. And the feeling of helplessness has always been there. At times these feelings are more intense than others but your never really allowed to forget it. Even if today nothing inhumane was done to me these actions have definitely been done to another incarcerated individual which is a constant reminder that it could happen to me next.

To me living in prison feels like I'm tied up with duck tape on my mouth and my intelligence and intelegect is traped in my head with no way to release it.

living in a cell is something that I've been thinking about alot lately because I'm approaching my release, but I'm in a cell with an individual that is serving life and I look around at the possessions that we both have in order to make our stay as comfortable as possible and it's disheartening. Everything I own is in this cell. My cell mates possessions out weigh mine because he is clearly doing more time but when I was serving 20 years I had

an abundance of frivolous items. We have to save and hoard the weirdest things for the possibility of further use. Everything is done in one small space which is shared with another man and has to be done around each others schedule because moving around at the same time is next to impossible the cell is too small.

The living conditions in prison varies as well depending on what part of the state you are in. The further up north (upper peninsula) you are the worse it is. The treatment by the C.O.'s is way different up north the disrespect and blatant disregard for the rules and policies overwhelms you and this is a perfect scenario that intensifies the feeling of helplessness. On top of that the violence from incarcerated individuals is heightened because nobody wants to be there at these facilities so they figure that getting in trouble is worth the transfer to another facility. These facilities are often used as a punishment for getting in trouble at another facility so they end up being filled with alot of gang members which leads to more violence. The worse the facility is ran as far as the administration, programs, rec activities, and other variables usually determines the amount of violence at that facility. With that being said there is still some facilities in the lower peninsula that are extremely violent. I think for the most part thats because of the reputation of that facility. Some facilities are known for the violence that it has so it just continues.

No prison is desirable but the ones that have more desirable qualities are usually the ones that are the least violent and have better living conditions. From the way the C.O.'s treat people and what type of property your allowed to have.

The conditions at this current facility for me has it's pros and cons as do most facilities. This facility has alot of programs some through UofM, PCCP and several other groups so in that aspect it is alright but as far as rec activities, food, health care, and the administration it's not good. We dont get as much yard or movement as other level 2 facilities, the food is horrible (everywhere) and health care just mixed up 108 covid-19 test. They placed 54 guys in the covid unit that were negative. They were told they were positive when in fact they werent and the guys that were positive was left in General population after two days they realized they made the mistake so they came and got the other guys. But definitely exposed the negative guys to other positive ones. The administration continuously keeps cross contaminating us with the corona virus it's a sad display of decession making.

The community in prison is sad. While I understand the attitudes and outlooks cause I once had some of them. The failure to be able to dream and see outside of being a criminal is a larger part of the population. My community isnt like that I dont think like that

and don't entertain these type of conversations, I said it's sad because it's not these guys fault it's the conditioning that we've been subjected to that keeps them from seeing themselves as something/someone productive. If only they could understand why they think like that but this environment don't promote change it perpetuates the conditioning.

How I survive in prison is different today than in the past, once again the stages of life and sentence. One thing that has always been a release for me is writing. From poetry to songs and plays and short stories to books and movies. I've always been able to find joy in my writing. Also the reflection on my growth is another way I find joy. Envisioning myself being successful in the world and making my mom proud. Last but not least working out is key for me in my incarceration it is a stress relief. It's a form of escape for me when I work out I'm happy because I'm not here.

What my incarceration means to me is pain, suffering, growth, and maturity. I believe that it's the pain that you endure that makes you who you are the adversity is what builds character not the easy times. From this pain is where the appreciation grows. Also pain and suffering causes bitterness, hatred and more pain your response is key.

My incarceration affects me in many ways both positive and negative. Prison perpetuates violence and

me at 16 coming to prison in fact made me become more violent early on. I was placed in a level 4 prison yard to fend for myself nobody to tell me how things work. What to do and what not to do no handbook nothing. I had to fend for myself and protect myself to make sure that I didn't become a victim of any acts of violence. The thoughts of the unknown heightens the anxiety which led to me becoming violent quicker because I thought/felt like that's what I had to do to stay safe. It wasn't till many years later that I could relax a little bit and start being who I really am and start my transformation. Prison is not a place for rehabilitation and anybody who thinks that, is out of touch with reality. I know that's what the hope is by the public and the message from the MDJC. But when your worried about living how can you start working on yourself. I served 20 years and ~~I~~ wasn't given the opportunity to participate in any anger management, substance abuse or any other self help classes until my last year of incarceration. If the idea of my sentence is to rehabilitate why wait till the end to offer some "help."

Respectfully
Ken Tello