

## November Outreach of the Month Citizens for Prison Reform Michigan



The November Outreach of the Month is Citizens for Prison Reform (CPR) Michigan. To support this outreach, you can contribute using the DONATE button on the ULC web page ([www.ulcel.org](http://www.ulcel.org)) or send a check to ULC. Include *Citizens for Prison Reform* in the memo.

ULC has been working with Lois Pullano for several years now. The Advocacy and Community Outreach (ACO) Subteam of the ULC Racial Justice Team first became aware of Open MI Door/Citizens for Prison Reform MI via Michael Anderson. He told us that Pat Lee had invited Lois to ULC to discuss these prison reform issues several years ago. In June we attended their

Legislative Action Day on the lawn of the state Capitol urging legislative action to end the use of segregation in Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) facilities. We are currently working with the ULC Council to garner support from area congregations. Below is a short interview with Lois.

### **1. How did you get started with Open MI Door and how did you come up with the name of the campaign?**

In 2019 we learned of the national Unlock the Box campaign at a conference. We were asked to apply for funding to begin a campaign in Michigan. They were aware of my personal experience of my minor son in solitary and that CPR assists families who have loved ones in solitary. We know the State of Michigan often uses MI in naming programs and projects they initiate. We felt we had the perfect opportunity to play on words with a clear powerful message of what needs to occur.

### **2. What is the history of segregation/solitary confinement in MDOC facilities?**

The MDOC considers segregation to be anyone in a cell 22 hours a day and 387 individuals have been held from six months to 35 years. The model for modern-day solitary confinement has been traced to the Quaker society beginning in 1829. Despite the Supreme Court acknowledgement in 1890 that it violates the Eighth Amendment, this practice has continued nationwide. While Michigan's system has made attempts to reduce the number in segregation in 2012 with a pilot program in the upper peninsula, the numbers of those held in segregation have continued to rise in recent years. They have begun numerous pilot programs with new names, but the conditions and punitive measures continue which has led to numerous deaths and emotional scarring of those held and staff over the years. For administrative segregation, the most restrictive level, the time an individual will serve is undetermined when they are placed there. We believe rehabilitation and programming cannot occur with two or less hours out of cell a day and the Open MI Door and Unlock the Box campaign's definition of solitary confinement is anyone housed in-cell 20 hours per day for more than 15 days.

### **3. Is segregation applied equitably regardless of race? Do you have statistics that would help us understand your answer?**

No, segregation is not applied equitably. There are great racial disparities. In 2020 we requested data from the MDOC of those held in segregation/solitary confinement. We found there are over 3,200 being held in a cell for 20 or more hours a day. MDOC reported 1,284 individuals being held in cell 22 or more hours per day. Of those, 836 were Black or African American, 17 were American Indian or Alaskan Native, 420

were white and eight were unknown. Of the 387 who have been held for six months to 35 years, 65 percent are Black or African American.

**4. How does Open MI Door/Citizens for Prison Reform utilize our donations?**

Donations are utilized to support coordination of the campaign, events, printing and mailing supplies, building an online presence and to build a coalition of faith-based organizations, solitary survivors and their families. We do communicate with those inside solitary, seeking their stories, solutions and assisting with their circumstances as much as possible. We provide some stipends and emotional support for those who share their stories if they were directly impacted by this traumatic experience.

**5. If I am unable to donate at this time, is there anything else I can do to support your initiative?**

Go to our website [micpr.org/open-mi-door](http://micpr.org/open-mi-door). Click the button to sign the petition that will be sent off to the Governor and legislators as soon as we reach 10,000 signatures. Share it with your friends and family. Think of organizations who would endorse the campaign and share the position statement with them to sign. Tell people about the campaign. Sign up to get our mailings of upcoming events and further actions you can take as we build out the campaign. We are also looking for volunteers to assist with incarcerated individuals' mail and letter writing.

*Thom McCurdy*