

SAVE THE DATES October 31 & November 1, 2015

Oct 31 – Justice & Incarceration Forum regarding Deaf, hard of hearing & deaf-blind inmates. The forum will be led by Talila Lewis, Exec. Director of HEARD.

Nov. 1 – Talila will be our keynote keynote presenter

“Bars Barriers &/or Justice”

Some people are aware of the various challenges Deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind (D/HOH/DB) people face in our ‘outside’ world. What most people do not know are the extreme conditions and isolation that D/HOH/DB people experience when incarcerated. For many of them, those difficulties begin when arrested and charged. Their nightmare begins with trying to obtain some level of justice. To be sure, many of these individuals have committed serious and destructive crimes and earn sentences comparable to what others receive. However, many are arrested for the wrong reasons, can’t communicate effectively with their lawyers, and then are unjustly convicted.

Talila and “**HEARD** (Helping Educate to Advance the Rights of the Deaf),... promotes equal access to legal system for individuals who are deaf and for people with disabilities. HEARD primarily focuses on correcting and preventing deaf wrongful convictions, ending deaf prisoner abuse, decreasing recidivism rates for deaf returned citizens, and on increasing representation of the deaf in the justice, legal and corrections professions. HEARD created and maintains the only national database of deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind detainees & prisoners.”

Please save both Oct 31 and Nov 1, 2015, and become involved in these timely issues of justice, massive incarceration, solitary confinement and explore further how we should treat inmates. Find out what happens to D/HOH/DB people in the frightening and secretive world. Since the 1970’s, and with a crime rate that has either declined or remained the same, our inmate population has grown by almost 700%, including county, state and federal jails. Pennsylvania had 7,000 State inmates in the 70’s to over 50,000 today. This massive ‘industry’ now has its own unions and profiteers who have a stake in keeping it growing. We are called to examine incarceration and use our hands and voices to lead it to be a more fair, humane, and rehabilitative system. As Fyodor Dostoyevsky said,

“The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.”

The United States has, by far, the largest number of prisoners (over 2.4 million). It also has, by far, the highest incarceration rate of all other countries (far ahead of China, Russia, Iran, N. Korea.), except one very small country, Seychelles, which has only 768 inmates We have 5% of the world’s population and 25% of its prisoners.

Tell DOJ to Provide Guidance on Inclusion of & Protections for Deaf Incarcerated Persons

For many deaf prisoners, the traditionally grim ordeal of incarceration is transformed into a nightmare of extreme language deprivation, physical and sexual abuse, and depressing isolation.

Deaf prisoners often are denied interpreter services, deprived of access to medical and mental health services, denied access to education and reentry programs, and are cut off from access to even the most basic human interaction. Deaf prisoners miss out on daily activities including meals, counts, classes and recreation because notices in prison are auditory with no complementary visual component. Deaf prisoners are frequently punished for "failing to obey verbal commands," and routinely receive additional time for these "infractions." In fact, deaf prisoners often attend their own disciplinary hearings for these "infractions" but are unable to defend themselves because prisons so frequently deny interpreters and other language access services.

Deaf prisoners are often targeted for physical and sexual abuse, with many deaf prisoners reporting that incidences of assault are the direct result of filing complaints about lack of communication access in the prison. Following these attacks, deaf prisoners frequently are placed in solitary confinement "for their own protection," where their mental health rapidly declines.

Also of concern is the lack of accessible telecommunications that would keep deaf prisoners connected to their loved ones and ensure that deaf prisoners can effectively communicate with advocates and attorneys. Instead, only seven prisons across the nation are equipped with videophones, and thousands of deaf prisoners have absolutely no telecommunications access while living in what advocates call a "prison in a prison."

The Department of Justice can help bring an end to this abuse by providing up-to-date training for departments of corrections and by providing oversight that ensures that prisons are complying with federal laws that protect the rights of people with disabilities, like the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act.

Sign this petition to Attorney General Eric Holder to help bring an end to the abuse.

ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN: Helping Educate to Advance the Rights of the Deaf (HEARD) created the #DeafInPrison Campaign to raise awareness about abuse of and discrimination against deaf prisoners across the nation. The Campaign, which officially launches on June 27th, aims to start a national conversation about these concerns and to compel corrective and preventive action.

