

COVID-19 in California Prisons

Transcript of Testimony Recorded by Prison Radio

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My name's Ivan Kilgore and I am the founder of the United Black Family Scholarship Foundation. And I'm calling you from Solano State Prison in Northern California.

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Let's go back to March of 2020. What's happening in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. At this particular time, what the department is doing is they're issuing memorandums to the public and in the prison population basically saying that they are providing us with social distancing, soaps, infectants, things of that nature/ Which someone who's been incarcerated for over 20 years and actually in prison reading this stuff, I'm like, okay, where is this stuff? They weren't passing out none of that.

And so what happened uh, eventually, I was contacted by the administration and informed that- that had been a VICE News video that was made. I guess it received, you know, three, four thousand reviews, and they were basically saying that, okay, we got you on this video. And this video, what it shows is basically CDC is not holding up on the end of the bargain in terms of social distancing and all that.

So what happens as a result of this whole issue- instance with this video? We start to see the staff retaliate in my particular case. And what they do initially was they go throughout the pod that I live in and they searched like 10 Mexican cells. Now, I don't know if people understand the nature of race relations in the California prison system, but when they did this on top of it, they said, hey, we did was searching this cell on account of Kilgore filming a video in the prison. So you can imagine the type of blow-back they created in terms of racial tensions and things of that nature within the prison.

And this is a common practice of the prison administration when they want to retaliate against an alleged whistleblower. So fortunately I was able to defuse that situation, and when that situation didn't work out to the likings of the department, the next thing I was issued a disciplinary ticket for possession of a cell phone, which was never found in my position or my cell or anything to that effect. And as a result of being found with accused in a cell phone and being found guilty of a write-up I'm now being put up to transfer to a COVID hotspot in Imperial Valley, which is on the other end of the state. Again, this is how the California Department of Corrections operates with regards to whistleblowers.

Now the good thing that came out of this whole situation, apparently this video on VICE

News caused a lot of statewide controversy within the Department of Corrections at the headquarters. And they immediately stepped their game up at this prison, which is Solano. And we saw in the aftermath of that release of that in video, they'll come in through passing them out masks, disinfectants, soap, social distancing, and even going to the extent of making the officers wear a mask and enforcing that. Of course, you know, behind these things, a lot of people get lax with that.

Outside of that, the COVID situation here at this prison has, it's not like San Quentin where they had that major outbreak. And I say it's not like that because again, you had that initial instance back in the beginning of April with this VICE News video that kind of sounded the alarm and put a lot of spotlight on this prison. So they're pretty much ahead of, you know, keeping, keeping the COVID outbreak under control. So we see medical staff that are coming through here and regularly doing temperature checks. We're seeing isolation know in here for any individuals who may show COVID symptoms, and we're seeing the administration enforcing both staff and prisoners to wear masks.

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