Opinion
News



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South Carolina's Lee Correctional Institution was the site of a deadly riot last April 15. The riot and the underlying prison conditions sparked a national prisoners' strike that occurred across 17 states. It also resulted in harsher treatment of prisoners in South Carolina's maximum-security prisons.

The inmates continue to be in lockdown, denied use of the telephone and even showers. At Lieber Correctional Institution, the corrections officers covered all the prison windows with metal plates so no daylight enters the facility.

I get regular emails from the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee and one of them describes conditions at Lieber. Here's what those prisoners are asking for:

- To be let off solitary confinement;
- To have our windows uncovered;
- Access to books, magazines, phone calls, showers and recreation;
- Access to the law library and our legal cases;
- Single person cells for any person serving more than 20 years.

Wages are low and the work of corrections officers is dangerous. But covering up all the windows seems to me to be pure meanness. Inmates are held in the care of the state. Harsh sentences that are meant to punish criminals carry the obligation of offering opportunities for rehabilitation. But at Lieber, all the programs like restorative justice, anger management and getting one's GED diploma have been canceled.

Lieber is designed to hold 1,193 inmates. I imagine that after the riot at Lee, Lieber is overcrowded because Lee is damaged and can't operate at full capacity. A Lieber inmate, Derrick Furtick, 31, died Monday, Nov. 12, apparently from violence.

The inmates are asking us to call Warden Randall Williams at 843-875-3332 or 803-896-3700, and Gov. Henry McMaster at 803-734-2100. I didn't get anyone to pick up at the prison, but the governor's ombudsman listened, asked me my source, wrote down my name, and promised to relay my concerns to the governor, especially about those covered windows.

My call is a very small action, a drop of water, but I did make the call.

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