

RESIST VISITING RESTRICTIONS

TESTIMONIES FROM PEOPLE IMPRISONED IN NEW YORK STATE MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISONS

In early 2017, New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo unsuccessfully attempted to limit visiting at New York State's 17 maximum security prisons to three days a week instead of the current seven. The proposal would have impacted more than 20,000 prisoners as well as their families and thousands of loved ones, and would have led to increased reliance on weekend visits—something prisoners already refer to as “limiting,” “noisy,” “overcrowded,” and “chaotic.”

In response to the Governor's proposal, Critical Resistance-New York City solicited testimony and analysis from subscribers to *The Abolitionist Newspaper* who are currently imprisoned in New York State maximum facility prisons. To protect against potential retaliation, we have only included respondent's first name and location, when preferred, or their otherwise requested title.

CRITICAL RESISTANCE STOOD FIRMLY AGAINST THIS PROPOSAL. WE STAND AGAINST ANY ATTEMPT TO FURTHER ISOLATE PRISONERS OR EXTEND THE SCOPE OF THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX.

We hope this collection of testimony will be used as a tool in the fight against limitations and cuts to visitation today and beyond.

WHY DO YOU OR WOULD YOU OPPOSE THESE PROPOSED VISITING CUTS?

JOHN, UPSTATE

It's a sad day when a mother has to ride four hours then wait an additional two or three hours in a crowded waiting room just to visit her son. Even more tragic, is that after four hours of visiting time the visit may be terminated early for others to gain entrance. I would oppose this because of the children and families who are already denied access to their loved ones enough. I would oppose this for the wives who are harassed and degraded almost every time they come to see their husbands. I would oppose this because visitors already wait three or four hours in adverse conditions, just to enter a facility with an oppressive environment. All in an effort to see loved ones who are incarcerated.

DAVE, WENDE

YOUNG CHILDREN FIND IT VERY PAINFUL TO HAVE A PARENT IN PRISON. THE BEST, MOST HEALING ANTIDOTE COMES FROM WHEN THE ABSENT PARENT CAN CONTINUALLY EXPRESS AND REAFFIRM HIS OR HER LOVE FOR THE CHILD. VISITING IS ALREADY VERY DIFFICULT FOR FAMILIES.

STEPHAN, ATTICA

SLOWLY THE STATE IS TAKING MORE AND MORE FROM STATE PRISONERS.

IYANLA, BEDFORD HILLS

I oppose these cuts because it is a Band-Aid to a greater problem of mass incarceration. This would be a travesty to not only the women incarcerated (or the men in other facilities) it would be a harmful act against the well being of our children, innocent bystanders in this unfortunate situation and they are not to blame. Children tend to try to blame themselves for being separated from their parents anyway. This would exacerbate their feelings and separate them from mommies more than necessary. Such a budget cut would be an unnecessary restriction and will not cure the state budget problem. Depopulating the prisons is the answer.

REGINALD, ATTICA

OUR FAMILIES ARE OUR LIFELINES TO NOT ONLY SOCIETY, BUT TO OUR SECURITY FROM AN INSECURE, UNNATURAL ENVIRONMENT.

VICTOR, FIVE POINTS

I oppose the cuts because unification is bred through the visits. People only have three means of communication with the outside world: mail, phone, and visits. The latter is the most sentimental. It also tames a lot of prison violence. That's the most appropriate, yet blunt, way to put it.

JOHN, CLINTON

My mother and family will not come on the weekend because it is too crowded. They would have to stand in line for hours. My mother is over 70 years old. She has major medical issues that would prevent her from standing or sitting for hours. What about children and young kids? How is it going to be expected to keep them quiet for hours? The visiting process area is often referred to as a "zoo". Knocking off four days of visiting would make it unbearable. As it is now, my mother cannot even come to see me in Clinton because she lives close to Rochester, way too long of a distance for her to travel at one time. Our visitors spend their money and time to come see us. It is just not right that they have to suffer because they love a prisoner. Visits are too important to us.

DARRYL, UPSTATE

New York State prisoners who are in maximum security prison have eight years or more to do in prison, and most of them will lose a loved one while in prison, so the more opportunities that they get to see their families and loved ones the better. NYS has one of the worst re-entry programs in the United States. They give you \$40.00 and say good luck. They are setting you up for failure so that they can keep the police and the Department of Non-Correction and Corruption and Community Separation in Business.

ANTHONY, ATTICA

PRETTY SOON THEY'LL TRY TO TERMINATE ALL VISITS. THERE IS AN OLD ADAGE: WHEN YOU DO TIME, YOUR FAMILY DO TIME TOO.

DARRYL, UPSTATE

EVERYTHING THAT WAS FOUGHT FOR IS BEING TAKEN AWAY. NEW YORK STATE PRISONERS CAN'T EVEN WEAR HOODED SWEATSHIRTS ANYMORE.

REUBEN, GREAT MEADOW

I OPPOSE ANYTHING THAT NEGATIVELY AFFECTS THE MOST NEEDY.

LUKE, EASTERN NY

Maintaining visiting hours is paramount to the healing and resiliency of prisoners and their families. One of the only things that prisoners have to look forward to is visitation. Mail and packages are oftentimes secondary to the presence of one's son, daughter, sibling, along with Matriarchs and Patriarchs. To remove this "Quality Time" only ensures that DOCCS is not concerned on any level with rehabilitation. Simply because no one else is there, family is the rock. When all others have written you off, family usually stands by their loved one. When no one else believes in you, family inspires, guides and leads by example with unconditional love. It really takes a sadistic, evil, barbaric person or "person(s)" to want to separate family members from another without provocation, rhyme, or reason. I oppose oppression, racism, and injustice every time they raise their nasty heads. I also have been a diligent observer of all the tactics, corruption, and assaults by prison staff for the past two decades. If only the taxpayers knew where their tax dollars are going and not going.

MIGUEL, WENDE

Honestly speaking, by reducing the number of visits in maximum state prisons not only would it break up families even more but from the inside I know first hand what will happen in a max prison if the visits are reduced to 3 days like it's done in a medium security prison. This would definitely cause serious security problems and safety problems. In the last ten years how many medium and minimum security prisons in New York has Cuomo closed? Many. Now how many maximum security prisons did he close down? The answer is none. If Cuomo really wants to help taxpayers save money then why does he allow for people to be incarcerated for long periods of time?

MALCOLM, EASTERN NY

I oppose the Governor's attempt to limit visitation in maximum security facility first and foremost because of the unnecessary hardship it will impose on families who—due to work or other obligations—may be unable to take weekends off to visit their incarcerated loved ones. Also, as noted by the Governor's budget spokesperson Morris Peters, "weekend visits are [already] the most popular." However, what Mr. Peters fails to mention is how overcrowded prison visiting rooms are on weekends. Therefore, to limit visits solely to these "popular" days—thereby causing an even greater number of families to have their visiting time cut short—would be negligent and detrimental to both the incarcerated person and his/her family.

**ARMANDO, GREEN HAVEN
WE NEED OUR FAMILIES.****FRANK, EASTERN NY**

I strongly oppose the cutting of the visiting days because first and most importantly, I get to see my three-year-old son twice a week during weekday visits. I grew up without my biological father in my life, so having a strong bond with my son and maintaining that bond are of the utmost importance to me. Getting to see him twice a week literally keeps me going and provides me with the strength to keep enduring this living hell. Secondly, the weekday visits allow me to also see my wife twice a week, which helps us to maintain our marriage under these very adverse conditions. Thirdly, taking away the weekday visits takes away all flexibility in someone wanting to come visit you. Not everyone has off from work on weekends. Fourthly, weekend visits are terrible in my opinion, and not an enjoyable experience for the visitors. To me, they serve as more of a deterrent for the visitors than as an experience that promotes maintaining "family ties." The weekend visits are way too crowded. It is noisy and chaotic and depending on where you are seated, you might not be able to hear your conversation with your loved ones (or yourself for that matter). Processing of visitors takes a lot longer on weekend, which is not conducive to visitors with infants/toddlers or the sick/elderly.

JOHN THE BUDDHIST

I've gotten married, and I see my wife every week, and my parents every few weeks, they come from NYC on their days off mid-week. The weekends are terrible, very overcrowded. I rely on mid-week visits. Seeing my loved ones regularly keeps me sane and positive, gives me an incentive to live and work toward the future. When I was 350 miles from NYC, it was too expensive and time consuming for my family to visit more than once or twice a year. I was very depressed, enraged, I would feel hopeless, that I have nothing to live for, I wanted to die, I would get into fights and arguments often, I was alone.

MAXIMILIAN, CLINTON
WE ARE ALREADY BEING PUNISHED ENOUGH AND TO LIMIT VISITING DAYS IS ONLY GOING TO CAUSE MORE UNNECESSARY PAIN AND SUFFERING FOR PRISONERS AND THEIR FAMILIES. A CHILD WANTING TO SEE HIS FATHER WILL NOT UNDERSTAND WHY HE OR SHE CAN'T.

THEODORE, GREAT MEADOW

It creates more of a threat to prisoners from staff whereas they'll be able to pin point timing of their abuse and when family will have access to see their loved ones. Visits give us a sense of hope, belonging, peace, and love. Any time out of this prison life spent with a loved one is a great and beautiful time. Visits help me remain firm to withstand the nonsense permeating itself within these walls.

DENNIS, GREEN HAVEN
TO MAXIMUM-SECURITY PRISONERS EVERY WAKING HOUR BEHIND BARS CAN BE A REMINDER OF OUR HOPELESSNESS. SOME OF US ARE IN ISOLATION TWENTY-THREE HOURS A DAY WITH LIFE SENTENCES. FOR US, ANY OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT WITH FAMILY, LOVED ONES, OR FRIENDS MATTERS DEARLY, AND LIMITING OUR VISITING DAYS WILL JUST IMPOSE MORE UNDUE HARDSHIPS.

ELIOT, GREEN HAVEN

What happens if your visitor comes to visit you with your kids after an 8-10 hour drive only to be told you cannot have a visitor because the visiting room is full to capacity. You know how hard it is seeing your family leave, your kids especially in this environment, how much work and effort I had to put in to raise a son and daughter from behind these walls? Is it difficult talking to them but it would be more difficult seeing them much less. If this policy takes affect, it's going to change many lives. I have been incarcerated for almost 25 years, I am well aware of what occurred in Attica in the 70s, now everything is starting to take a step back once again, many things are being eliminated, taken from us.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO SHARE YOUR PERSPECTIVE OR EXPERIENCE?

LUKE, EASTERN NY

It is important to share my perspective as an example to new and younger prisoners who are trapped in these cities of hell and are subjected to the injustices that I have persevered through for twenty years of incarceration. There needs to be true solidarity. People at liberty need to back prisoners and encourage prisoners to stand-up to the “powers-at-be.” As long as we accept these injustices, DOCCS will happily dole them out! It’s what they do! Visiting doesn’t jeopardize the safety and security of prisons. Correction officers do!

MIGUEL, WENDE
ME BEING IN PRISON ALL THESE YEARS, I KNOW FIRST HAND WHAT’S BEHIND THE CURTAIN.

VOICE OF FREEDOM

The cuts are nothing less than an extension of the indisputable genocide that is mass incarceration. This is contrary to creating humane conditions and the ability to assist individuals with reentry. I know how vital it is to share my perspectives because there has never been a narrative sufficiently mindful of the absolute moral authority we prisoners possess in denouncing these depravities, and pursuing economic, political and public relations strategies to end them.

JOHN, UPSTATE

IF I DON’T SPEAK, AND OTHERS DON’T SPEAK, WE’LL REVERT BACK TO 1970’S CONDITIONS LIKE BEFORE THE ATTICA RIOTS. SLOWLY, DOCCS HAS BEEN STRIPPING AWAY EVERYTHING THOSE PEOPLE, GREEN AND BLUE, DIED FOR.

ANDRE, EASTERN NY

I know it is important for me, a prisoner in a maximum security prison to share my perspective because of two reasons: Men in Attica died for the visits; men who are not and who never served prison time are making decisions not knowing the importance of visits. To illustrate the essential role visitation has had on my road to becoming non criminalized, I will share my experience. When I started my sentence, I had a 20 to life sentence, being 23 years old at the time my life seemed over. However I was just entering a phase of awareness. My family visited me frequently, giving me self-esteem, self-respect, and hope. I sought to make them proud. On the visit floor I would see visitors come in and dream of the day I would be free to start my own family. If visits are taken away from maximum security prisons, prisoners will depend on the prison to enrich our humanity, the very prison that needs us locked away separated from society.

FRANK, EASTERN NY

It must be kept in mind that many prisoners serving time in maximum security facilities are serving long terms of incarceration. Cutting their ties or limiting their visit time is cruel and inhumane, as their family/friends may be the only source of love and support that they have. We are suffering in here and we may complain amongst each other, but our perspectives and experiences are not being shared enough with people who care about changing this oppressive corrupt system. Maybe if enough perspectives or experiences are shared meaningful change can come about.

STEPHAN, ATTICA

YOU NEED TO KNOW HOW IT AFFECTS ME AND MY FAMILY. A VISIT LETS ME KNOW I'M NOT FORGOTTEN AND AM STILL LOVED BY MY FAMILY. GETTING A VISIT MEANS THE ADMINISTRATION KNOWS THEY CAN'T ABUSE YOU AND GET AWAY WITH IT. YOU CAN'T GO ON THE VISIT FLOOR ALL BRUISED UP.

ANTHONY, ATTICA

YOU ALL MAY NOT FEEL THE EFFECTS OUT THERE, BUT WE DO.

THEODORE, GREAT MEADOW
IT'S IMPORTANT TO SHARE MY PERSPECTIVE WITH YALL BECAUSE OTHERWISE WE DON'T REALLY HAVE A VOICE IN THE MATTERS THAT CONTROL AND DICTATE OUR LIVES, AND THAT'S NOT A GOOD POSITION TO BE IN.

MAXIMILIAN, CLINTON
MY PERSPECTIVE IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE I LIVE IN PRISON 24 HOURS A DAY AND I KNOW HOW THIS ENVIRONMENT FUNCTIONS. THE NEGATIVE IMPACT ON NEW YORK PRISONS WILL HAVE A RIPPLE EFFECT IN THE WORST WAY IMAGINABLE. PRISONERS' MENTAL HEALTH WILL SUFFER.

MICHAEL, ATTICA

It is important for me to not only share my perspective with Critical Resistance but also to share it with the community from whence I come, as it to said community that I hope and look forward to returning to. The world needs to know what's going on in these prisons across the nation.

WHY IS MAINTAINING VISITING HOURS IMPORTANT FOR US AS WE KEEP BUILDING TOWARD A NEW YORK THAT DOESN'T RELY ON IMPRISONMENT AND POLICING?

IYANLA, BEDFORD HILLS

I oppose these proposed cuts in visits as an answer to budgetary issues, because it is not a solution. The solution is to release aging persons in prison who have served 20 years of their minimum mandatory sentence. Clearly it is evident that warehousing too many people for too long is the budgetary problem. Lessen the prison population and you need less money to run prisons and there would be no need to attempt to try to justify in our hearts the unconscionable deprivation of contact with visits with prisoners and their families.

JOHN, UPSTATE

Why not cut executive salary bonuses? Why not stop the brutality, abuse and corruption that cause billions of dollars in lawsuits? All of these would be better alternatives than slashing the budget of visitation that helps to promote peace and a content happiness amongst those who visit with their relatives and loved ones.

MALCOLM, EASTERN NY
OUR GOVERNOR SHOULD BE SUGGESTING IDEAS FOR HOW TO MAKE VISITATION AT MEDIUM SECURITY FACILITIES ALIGN MORE CLOSELY WITH MAXIMUM SECURITY FACILITIES; NOT VICE-VERSA.

DARRYL, UPSTATE
IF THE GOVERNOR TRULY WANTS TO SAVE MONEY HE CAN CLOSE SOME PRISONS.

MICHAEL, ATTICA

To rely on imprisoning people, and boosting up the way police are out in society does nothing more than make the governed believe that it's "perfectly normal" to live in a "police-occupied-state." Such a thing is horrifying, for as we know: police states are often relative to the ways of fascism.

JOHN, CLINTON
THERE ARE SO MANY OTHER AREAS IN MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISONS WHERE EVEN MORE COULD BE SAVED. STOPPING THE ABUSE AND BEATING OF PRISONERS WOULD SAVE UNTOLD MILLIONS IN OVERTIME, MEDICAL, AND LAWSUIT PAYMENTS.

ANDRE, EASTERN NY
IMPRISONMENT AND POLICING DON'T SOLVE PROBLEMS. PROBLEMS ARE SOLVED BY UNDERSTANDING AND LOVE.

MIGUEL, WENDE

Governor Cuomo states that reducing the visit days in New York State max-prisons will help save taxpayers billions of dollars, this is absolutely false! For our taxpayers don't pay for peoples' loved ones to come see them and they don't pay for transportation, gas, or food that prisoners' loved ones buy from the vending machines, everything is paid for by the prisoners' loved ones. What taxpayers are paying for is paying to keep us locked and fed so that the government could rack up the money. The prison complex generates revenue on the sweat, blood, and tears of prisoners and their loved ones. Politicians always make the claim that it will save taxpayers millions but what the government don't tell them is that in return the government makes billions and billions of dollars. Where then is all that money going? It's definitely not going to better our schools or neighborhoods, or to help people get health insurance. I would like to make a note to all the readers; we need to come together in full force to bring this bull down by the horns.

JOHN THE BUDDHIST
SEEING MY LOVED ONES KEEPS
ME POSITIVE, TAKE THAT
AWAY FROM ME, AND I WILL
HAVE NO REASON TO PUT UP
WITH THE INHUMANITY OF
PRISON LIFE, NOTHING TO HOLD
ME BACK, THAT'S HOW MANY
OF US FEEL IN HERE.

LUKE, EASTERN NY
THERE NEEDS TO BE A CALL TO
ACTION FROM ALL PRISONERS
STATE-WIDE CONCERNING NEW
YORK TO SIMPLY LOCK-IN THEIR
CELLS, SIT DOWN, READ A
BOOK AND LET DOCCS
EMPLOYEES DO ALL THE WORK
UNTIL THEY REALIZE PRISONS
ARE RUN BY PRISONERS.

FRANK, EASTERN NY

I'd like to expound on one more thing, and that is the expanded use of video conferencing. This is something that should only be used to supplement regular visits. The usage of video conferencing as a substitute for regular visits is unacceptable. By themselves, they are impersonal, and nothing compares to being able to physically touch your loved ones and show affection to the people that matter most to you in this world.

NELSON, GREEN HAVEN

I have been in prison for seven years now and, although I am speaking from personal experience, I must logically assume that there are many prisoners who share the same mentality as I. It is my express belief that in the prison system, conventional forms of punishment only work to promote bitterness and resentment toward the institution and society itself.

ABOUT CRITICAL RESISTANCE

We are a member-led organization with volunteer members and supporters across the country. Our mission is to fight against the interlocking systems of policing, imprisonment, and surveillance that make up the prison industrial complex (PIC).

Critical Resistance envisions genuinely healthy, stable communities that respond to harm, violence and conflict without relying on imprisonment and punishment to solve problems. Our goal is abolition: to shrink the prison industrial complex into non-existence and to build up the resources, practices and systems we need for healthy, strong communities.

Please contact us if you're interested in learning more about our work!

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GET INVOLVED WITH CR-NYC

Critical Resistance New York City hosts a monthly volunteer night to help us maintain connections with people imprisoned across eastern states, share information and resources, and develop abolitionist vision and strategy beyond prison walls.

When: 7-9pm, every third Tuesday, every month

Where: Families for Freedom
35 W. 31st Street, Suite 702

Transit: B/D/F/M/N/Q/R Herald Square or 1/2/3 Penn Station

Access: No ID is required for building entry. This office is accessible by elevator and private bathrooms are available on the same floor as the office.

For additional resources, please visit www.criticalresistance.org