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GET FREE MINNESOTA

November 24, 2026

From the Desk of the Board Chair

What Comes Home from a Day's Work?

Dear Get Free Minnesota Family,

As the holidays draw near, I'm sending my love to our folks on the inside and to everyone at home who's missing them. I'm thinking of the child saving a story for the next phone call, the parent inside who wants to hear every word of it, and the family member finding the gas money for a winter visit. If this season feels heavy, please know there's a place for you in this family, on the hard days most of all.

If someone in your family is incarcerated and your household could use a little help this season, Darla's Holiday Toy Giveaway is open to you. You can register here and request a toy for each child from birth through age 15. Pickup is Friday, December 11, from 6 to 9 p.m. Central at The Coven in St. Paul. If you know another family who could use it, please pass the signup along.

https://hub.therealyb2016.com/holiday-toys

What I'm Asking of Our Members

Before the 2027 legislative session opens, please call or email your Minnesota state senator and state representative, and ask each of them two questions. A simple yes or no will answer either one.

> *"Will you support letting Minnesotans vote to remove the criminal-punishment exception from our state constitution's ban on slavery and involuntary servitude?"*
>
> *"Will you support wage and safety protections for people working in Minnesota prisons?"*

Find My Legislators · https://gis.lcc.mn.gov/iMaps/districts/

What No Record Can Tell Us

Most of us know what a day's work is for. It puts something on the table at home. We already know what a day's work in a Minnesota prison puts there. What no record will ever show is what that day asks of the person who works it, and of the family sitting down without them.

On November 16, the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) launched a public dashboard showing who is in our state prisons, facility by facility. It can count our people. It can't speak for them. No number will tell you what it takes to do the work, what it means to say no, or what a family learns to go without. No pay scale has ever measured what a person is worth, and no sentence has ever ended what they mean to the people who love them.

Reaching People in Every Minnesota State Prison

DOC's revised reentry policy took effect November 17. It now expressly includes help obtaining a driver's license or state ID among the tasks reentry staff coordinate, and an ID can make a real difference when someone applies for a job after release. The policy also confirms an avenue that's open to us now. Facilities hold transition fairs once a year, and people in restricted housing may request the materials through a transition coordinator or caseworker. I'd like us to ask the same question at every Minnesota state prison. Who can get our materials to people who can't attend the fair, and how will we hear back from them?

Two Distinct Goals for the 2027 Session

HF 3335 proposed removing the criminal-punishment exception from Minnesota's constitutional ban on slavery and involuntary servitude. The amendment is that change in wording. The ballot measure is the yes-or-no question voters would answer. A majority of the elected members of each legislative chamber must first vote to put it on the ballot. It passes only if more than half of everyone voting in the general election votes yes. HF 3335 did not reach the ballot. HF 5104 separately proposed wage, safety, and other workplace protections for people working in state prisons. It did not become law.

Official Sources

DOC Facility Demographics Dashboard · DOC Reentry Policy 205.140
HF 3335 · Constitutional Amendment · HF 5104 · Worker Protections
Minnesota Constitution · Articles I and IX

What I’m Asking of Our Leadership

To the Board

My story on this continent begins in the cotton fields of Mississippi, with ancestors who were held as property. The amendment that abolished chattel slavery in 1865 kept one exception, for punishment of a crime, and Minnesota’s constitution carries the same one to this day. Their freedom came with a clause, and people in our prisons are living under it as you read this.

If slavery is wrong, what conviction could ever make it right? I hope you’ll join me in carrying that question to our Minnesota lawmakers. A call to a legislator you know is one place to start. Would they support letting Minnesotans vote to remove the exception? Would they stand for fair pay and safe working conditions for people working inside?

To Every Program Leader and Director

What are people inside and their families telling you that no record ever could? You’re close enough to hear it, and I trust you to carry it faithfully, alongside the people who are living it.

To Our Members

You don’t need a statistic to call or email your legislators. You need only say who you’re calling for. If you’ve worked inside or supported someone who has, share as much or as little of that experience as you wish. It’s yours to tell. And if someone you love is inside now, please let them know we’re listening, whenever and however it feels safe to them.

You know what a day’s pay means at home. Let’s carry that knowledge, and the voices of the people who earn it, into the rooms where decisions are made. Let’s refuse to let another holiday season come and go while our folks on the inside are exploited and enslaved.

And to every one of you, thank you for all your hard work and commitment, and for staying with us on the long road ahead: to abolish slavery in Minnesota’s prisons and in prisons across the United States, and to bring about carceral reform. I’m grateful to walk it in your company.

With hope and solidarity,

Yolanda Butler
Acting President and CEO · Board Chair pro tem | Get Free Minnesota