

CALL TO ACTION: PA GOV CORBETT to SIGN BILL TO SILENCE PRISONERS ON TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21

After a fast-tracked passing of a bill that, if enacted, has the power to silence all Pennsylvania prisoners if they allegedly cause "mental anguish" to their "victims" by speaking out, this bill has now passed both the House and the Senate of Pennsylvania and is set to be signed by Governor Corbett on Tuesday, October 21, in Philadelphia. The bill, which passed the House on October 15, HB 2533, and the Senate on October 16, SB508, is called the Revictimization Relief Act.

This Act is clearly unconstitutional and is being challenged by legal experts, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) [http://decarceratepa.info/sites/decarceratepa.info/files/memo HB 2533 SB 508 Senate House Oct 2014.pdf](http://decarceratepa.info/sites/decarceratepa.info/files/memo_HB_2533_SB_508_Senate_House_Oct_2014.pdf), the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), and others as violating prisoners' basic First Amendment rights, the right to free speech.

In addition to fighting back legally, we are asking people to sign our call below and to join us in Philadelphia for a day of protest on Wednesday, October 22. Please join those of us who have signed the Call and add your organization's name or your individual name. And if you possibly can, come to Philadelphia on Wednesday, October 22, for a day of protest, which will include a press conference in the morning, a street action in the afternoon, and a town hall meeting at 6 PM. Details as to the exact time of the press conference and the location of the Wednesday events will follow.

If you have any questions about the Call or would like to go to Philadelphia on Wednesday and need help getting there, call Suzanne Ross, 212 927-2924.

THE CALL

This "Call to Action" is also a summons to all persons of conscience to protest in Philadelphia on October 22, 2014.

To add your name to this call as an organization or individual, email sophia.williams@baruchmail.cuny.edu.

For details see www.bringmumiahome.com, www.prisonradio.org, and www.freemumia.com.

We the undersigned stand unequivocally against the passage, in Pennsylvania, of House Bill HB2533 on October 15, 2014, and PA Senate Bill SB508 on October 16, 2014. Because the bill was fast-tracked in the legislature, the Governor of Pennsylvania is already poised to sign the bill into law.

Known collectively as the "Revictimization Relief Act," the laws affords virtually unlimited discretion to District Attorneys and the Attorney General to silence

prisoner speech by claiming that such speech causes victims' families "mental anguish." This law targets both prisoners' speech and supporters who sponsor that speech. Thus, under the guise of victim relief, politicians are claiming a power that if granted to them will be difficult if not impossible for citizens to check.

In seeking to silence the legally protected speech of prisoners, the law establishes a precedent for the further erosion of First Amendment rights. In so violating prisoners' speech, the state also damages citizens' right and freedom to know — in this case, to consider the speech of the imprisoned to better understand an area of American life physically removed from public scrutiny. The courts have consistently upheld the right of prisoners to constitutionally protected speech; with little success government and prison officials have sought to curtail that speech for political reasons, often claiming safety concerns.

"Victim relief," while a worthy goal in itself, is only to be achieved by just verdict and the extension of due process to all parties involved. Victim relief is not served by denying fundamental rights to those convicted, especially because prisoner freedom of speech is crucial for redressing wrongful convictions and the current crisis of harsh sentencing that is often disproportionate to alleged crimes.

Our society is currently engaged in a full-scale debate on the problems of mass incarceration. This debate could not have grown without the articulation by prisoners themselves in the press, exposing systemic violations of their rights in the courts and the dehumanizing conditions of prison life.

This legislation emerged as a politically charged response on the part of the Fraternal Order of Police and its political allies, because they failed to stop Pennsylvania prisoner and radio journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal from delivering his October 5, 2014, commencement address at Goddard College in Vermont, from where Abu-Jamal earned his BA in 1996 while on death row. Students at Goddard collectively chose Abu-Jamal as their commencement speaker and the administration supported the invitation. In this case, this law would deny the school the right to hear from its alum, Abu-Jamal.

To block Abu-Jamal's free speech at Goddard College would have been a violation in itself. But this law goes further and sacrifices the rights of all prisoners in Pennsylvania in order to silence Abu-Jamal. This is an unethical deployment of collective punishment by those in power.

At stake in this legislation is the very premise on which American democracy was erected — the notion that in order to achieve a robust engagement with and understanding of society and its problems, the state cannot be allowed to silence unpopular or dissenting voices. Instead of defending constitutional rights, Pennsylvania politicians appear to be far more interested in promoting their own interests and political vendettas. The Bill was debated in an atmosphere that

reflected an unethical process riddled with political maneuverings, rather than fair and informed deliberation.

As PA Senator Daylin Leach confirmed in his vote against the legislation: “This is the most extreme violation of the First Amendment imaginable.” This law has a chilling effect that prevents any prisoner from speaking out on any issue for fear of a retaliatory civil suit.

This law, therefore, violates the public trust we expect from legislators. It is an attack on our freedom, a freedom that must be guarded — especially when and if officials do not agree with the content of speech they hear.

We oppose and protest Pennsylvania’s abuse of state power and its trampling of the fundamental human rights of all — of students to hear Abu-Jamal, of teachers and journalists to access perspectives of the imprisoned, and, by extension, of everyone who deserves the free flow of information in society.

With the growing number of executions by the police across the country and the passage of flagrantly unconstitutional laws as seen in Pennsylvania, we the people have to organize collectively in our neighborhoods and in the streets to oppose the increasingly ominous display of rogue state power in Pennsylvania.

Join us in Philadelphia for a day of action on October 22, 2014. Press Conference at 12PM. Honk against the Bill at 4PM and Town Hall Meeting at 6PM.
For information:

www.bringmumiahome.com * www.prisonradio.org * www.freemumia.com

Signatories:

International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal (ICFFMAJ)
National Lawyers Guild
Center for Constitutional Rights
Prison Radio
Cornel West
Netfa Freeman, Voices With Vision on WPFW 89.3 FM, Washington DC
MOVE
Educators for Mumia Abu-Jamal (EMAJ)
Campaign to Bring Mumia Home
Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition (NYC)
International Action Center/IAC
German Network Against the Death Penalty and to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal
Committee to Save Mumia Abu-Jamal
Sankofa Community Empowerment
Mobilization to Free Abu-Jamal/Northern California
Le Collectif Français “Libérons Mumia”
Amig@s de Mumia de México

Frantz Fanon Foundation

Resistance in Brooklyn

Megan Gabriel, The DC Childcare Collective

New Jim Crow Movement (FL)

Free Marissa Now Mobilizing Campaign

Will Miller Social Justice Lecture Series, Burlington, VT