

2024 ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

LEWISBURG PRISON PROJECT



“YOU MUST DO THE THINGS YOU THINK YOU CANNOT DO.”

-ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

- Angela Trop

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we reflect on this busy year at the Lewisburg Prison Project, I am filled with gratitude for the progress we have made and the renewed sense of purpose we have cultivated. Through our strategic planning last summer we enhanced our mission and honed in on three priorities.

One priority is to continue to update and create vital educational materials. Our legal bulletins aim to inform incarcerated individuals about their civil rights. They are crucial contributions to justice for incarcerated people. The bulletins are being revised and updated by attorney Jennifer Tobin, to ensure the case law is current. We are also taking this opportunity to edit the bulletins for optimal readability for those unfamiliar with legal discourse. We are deeply thankful for Jennifer Tobin's time, labor, and expertise.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE (continued)

As always, providing a timely response to every letter we receive remains our top priority. In this newsletter, you will find that we have a new coordinator, Carol Pavlick, who is excelling at learning how to respond to all letters. Carol is also a great asset who keeps our highly active board members on target.

Equally as important, the volunteer-spirited board wants to be engaged with the community. Look for Lewisburg Prison Project more often in press releases as we notify the public about prison system news. For example, this newsletter shares what is happening regarding our Federal Bureau of Prisons. Additionally, this newsletter explains more about our new monthly work sessions at the Community Zone. These Super Saturdays provide the board and community members time and space to learn about current issues in the prison system, the impact of new policies, and opportunities for advocacy.

We invite you to join us in this mission. Whether you are a longtime supporter or new to our cause, your ideas, energy, and intellect are invaluable to our efforts. We encourage you to engage with us, learn more about the challenges within the prison system locally, statewide, and nationally, and consider how you can contribute to our initiatives.

Together, we can make a meaningful impact and continue the vital work that lies at the heart of the Lewisburg Prison Project. Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to justice. As I write this letter, I realize that an election will have happened by the time you read these words. Whatever the outcome may be, I wish everyone peace and wellbeing in the next four years.

In solidarity,
Angela Trop

LEGAL BULLETINS UPDATE

- Ben Vollmayr-Lee

In the past few newsletters we have described our legal bulletins and our desire to update them. In brief, these bulletins are made available to incarcerated individuals or their families to help them navigate the legal issues associated with the conditions of their confinement. The bulletins can be sent by mail to inmates who request them, or can be simply downloaded from our website by family members with internet access. They are written in straightforward, accessible language and cover a wide range of topics. But sadly, most of them are fairly dated, having last been revised in 2005.

Fortunately, we have been working with Attorney Jennifer Tobin to update the bulletins. This comprehensive process will take some time, and will involve some reorganizing of the topics.

We are happy to report that the first updated bulletin is nearly complete, covering the Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA). This involves the relatively rare exceptions to sovereign immunity that allow incarcerated individuals to bring claims against the United States for the negligent or wrongful acts of its employees. Note that this only applies to federal inmates. The current draft is a thorough 26-page document that begins with describing what a 'tort' is (a civil claim of wrong or injury that is committed against someone for which the law provides a remedy), then describes in considerable detail the conditions under which one can or cannot



bring an FTCA claim. This is followed by a description of the process for filing a claim, and finally some examples of torts for FTCA claims, such as negligence, medical malpractice, assaults by prisoners or by staff, etc.

The next bulletin to be updated will be on Civil Actions, which will apply to all inmates, not just those in federal prisons. This bulletin describes how to prepare a draft complaint, how to determine the correct parties to sue, how to exhaust administrative remedies (i.e., follow the grievance procedures all the way through), how to select the correct civil action (e.g. Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus, Section 1983 Civil Rights complaint, etc.), and how to navigate all the subsequent steps up to and including trial. Following that, the next bulletins to be updated will be those covering medical rights, assaults, and religion.

It is a long process to update and reorganize the bulletin contents, but the outcome will be well worth it. These bulletins have a national reach and over the years have assisted thousands of inmates. Should you feel moved to donate, and wish to earmark a portion of your donation towards the legal bulletins, we would be most grateful.

Farewell Tom, Welcome Carol!

- Deirdre O'Connor

The board is delighted to welcome new Coordinator, Carol Pavlick, to LPP. Carol was hired in September, replacing Tom Stiller, who served in the role from January to June. Tom, a social worker and activist, helped LPP transition at a critical time and streamline some of our processes. For family-related reasons, Tom moved to Syracuse, NY early in the summer, though he kindly offered to help from afar over the summer and while we conducted a search for his replacement. Thanks so much, Tom, and welcome Carol!

Carol, who has served as the Environmental Health and Safety Program manager at Bucknell for the past ten years and continues in that position, is a native of Bloomsburg. She grew up in a family that has been involved in the justice system for generations: her father was district attorney, her grandfather a judge, and her great-grandfather a county judge. When Carol saw the ad for a part-time Coordinator at LPP, she applied, correctly assuming that the work would be meaningful, allowing her to help others and make new connections. The fact that responding to letters from incarcerated people also requires doing research on their behalf appeals to Carol's desire to learn more not only about the experiences of people in prison, but also the resources that she might direct them to.

P.O. BOX 128

Lewisburg, PA 17837

Email: info@lewisburgprisonproject.org



Carol says she's been impressed by how much some incarcerated people writing to LPP already know about the law, and she said she is amazed at their resourcefulness. She said she has also been saddened to discover how many letters describe mental health and other medical concerns that letter writers are seeking to address. Whether responding to writers involves identifying legal or other resources, specifying how a prisoner might acquire a book they're looking for, or consulting with Board members about ways LPP might intervene on a prisoner's behalf, Carol says her new position is keeping her busy and allowing her to learn a lot about the concerns of people who are incarcerated in local, county, and federal prisons.

Carol is a busy person. In addition to her new position as LPP Coordinator and her full-time job at Bucknell, she is a mom of two daughters, a stepmom of two, and a step-grandmother of two. She also has three dogs—all labs, including a twelve-week old puppy—and plays bells in her church choir.

We are so glad that Carol has agreed to share her energy, enthusiasm, and organizational skills with LPP!

Super Saturdays - Erica DelSandro

For the Lewisburg Prison Project, “going back to our roots” means more active and consistent engagement with the regular tasks of the organization. As the president, Angela Trop, often explains proudly, “we are a working board!” One way we have integrated a more hands-on approach to the mission and labor of LPP is through our monthly Super Saturday meetings.

Thanks to the generous support of Cindy Peltier, the LPP board comes together one Saturday a month at the Community Zone on Market Street in Lewisburg. Our activities during these sessions have been extremely productive as we work together to establish a clear process for responding to inmate mail. As many readers of our newsletter know, receiving and responding to mail from incarcerated people is at the center of LPP’s mission.

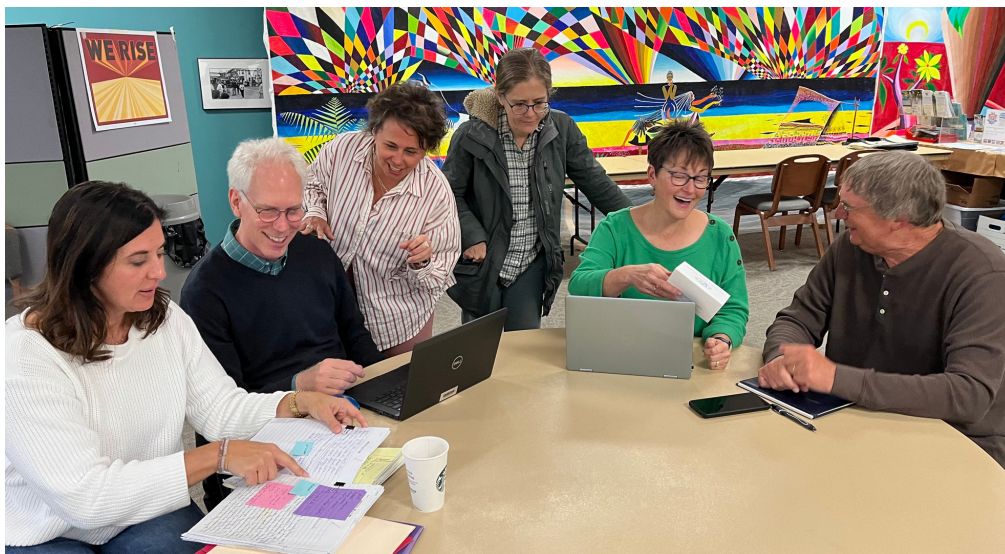
Over the spring and summer—and thanks to the board’s dedication—we have been able to catch up on our correspondence; and now, thanks to Carol Pavlick’s presence and commitment, we are successfully keeping up

with the dozens of inmates a month who reach out to LPP for advice, information, or assistance. While LPP can not provide legal advice, we can offer information regarding additional resources, providing inmates with additional possibilities for assistance and support. Moreover, as Angela discusses in the President’s Message, we are working diligently to revise the legal bulletins—once the centerpiece of LPP’s mission—and hope to be in a position to start sending those out in 2025.

As we look forward to the new year, LPP hopes to open our Super Saturday meetings to donors, allies, and interested community members. These meetings will be a terrific way to get you—our friends and supporters—more involved in LPP by offering the opportunity to join us in our work which is educational, activist, and rewarding. By building community through the mission of LPP, we hope to solidify our already strong foundation in the region and build toward a sustainable future of continued support for those who are incarcerated.



Fill out our [Volunteer Interest Form](#) (scan here) or email Jennifer @ jct021@bucknell.edu



Some LPP Board members at our Super Saturday in October 2024. Pictured: Carol Pavlick, Ben Vollmayr-Lee, Erica DelSandro, Jennifer Thompson, Angela Trop, and Dave Sprout.

Federal Prison Oversight Act

- Dave Sprout

On July 25, 2024 President Biden signed into law historic prison reform legislation to overhaul independent oversight of the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). This bipartisan law will hopefully provide prison oversight and ensure the BOP is fulfilling its duty to provide safe and humane conditions of confinement for all inmates.

Some of the highlights of this new law include requiring the Department of Justice's Inspector General (OIG) to conduct comprehensive, risk-based inspections of all the BOP's 122 correctional facilities, as well as to provide recommendations to fix problems and assign each facility a risk score, with higher-risk facilities required to be inspected more often. The OIG must also report its findings and recommendations to Congress and the public, and the BOP must respond to all inspection reports within 60 days with a corrective action plan.

The bipartisan law also will establish an independent Ombudsman to investigate the health, safety, welfare, and rights of incarcerated persons and staff. The Ombudsman will also create a secure hotline and online form for family members, friends, and representatives of incarcerated people to submit complaints and inquiries.

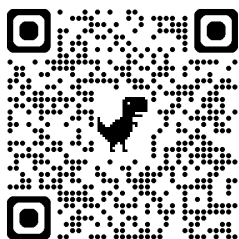
The bipartisan law is backed by civil rights, prison unions, and public safety organizations. Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM) stated in a press release that the bill's passage is a "crucial step in bringing transparency and accountability to an agency that has been plagued by scandal for decades."

The Lewisburg Prison Project, during the years when the Special Management Unit (SMU) was at USP Lewisburg, tried to get Congress, the Department of Justice, and the Inspector General of the BOP to look into the conditions at USP Lewisburg, to no avail. We had success generating local media attention, and subsequently assisted the Marshall Project and NPR in bringing national attention to the problems with the SMU, which helped lay the groundwork for congressional action. With this new law, hopefully in the future such issues that occurred in the SMU will be dealt with in a timely manner.



Additional information can be found at:

<https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/aclu-applauds-legislation-creating-oversight-and-accountability-in-federal-prisons>



Become a member; help us grow!

We welcome new members and others who want to support our mission. Share our information and/or help others find us at:

[HTTPS://WWW.LEWISBURGPRISONPROJECT.ORG/CONTACT](https://www.lewisburgprisonproject.org/contact)

From the Archives

The Beginning of the LPP

This is an often-told story, but perhaps it's time for an update in print. The LPP really came out of the Viet Nam war. By the late '60s some of us became aware of the presence of conscientious objectors in the federal penitentiary, and, as opposed to the war, we felt it necessary to support them by letters and visits (which were often hard to obtain). In a short while several COs said to us, "Hey, there are other guys out here, too." And at that point we began to have contact with so-called ordinary prisoners.

By 1970, Brigitte Cooke, Isabelle Patten, and Sally Farber began running a very busy letter-writing enterprise, based on a table in Brigitte's dining room. Not much later, as Isabelle's husband, I joined them. Word spread fast inside the prison, and soon the volume of mail increased considerably. It was then that the three women decided to be an organization, the Lewisburg Prison Project. This was sometime in 1973. Access to the prison was absolutely denied us, though we did visit the Allenwood Camp, as it was then, occasionally.

Frustrated by the warden's obduracy, a group of us went down to Washington, having made appointments ahead of time with Department of Justice officials and a number of staff workers on the House Justice Committee. This was August 1977. We were received well, and the general council of the Dept. of Justice gave us unabridged access to the prison. I'll never forget his telling me that if we were ever denied or harrassed I should go out to a phone box, slip in a dime, and call him collect. I'm not sure now who made the first visit, but I know that I did that very August. From that time on several of us (the LPP had grown in members) were constantly going out to "the Wall," as it is known. Over the years we saw hundreds, perhaps thousands, of prisoners. The beginning led to real success.

Karl Patten

Lewisburg Prison Project
P.O. Box 128
Lewisburg, PA 17837

Lewisburg Prison Project Mission

The Lewisburg Prison Project, Inc. is a non-profit organization that provides advocacy, information, and legal assistance to people incarcerated in Pennsylvania regarding their conditions of confinement. We also provide incarcerated people across the United States with information and legal bulletins regarding conditions of confinement.

We are dedicated to the principle that incarcerated people have incontestable human and constitutional rights.



THANK
YOU!