

pending

December 16, 1974

Mrs. Luci Johnson Nugent
2313 Red River Street
Austin, Texas 78705

Dear Luci:

This will acknowledge receipt of your letter of December 9.

My interest in Prison Reform dates back to my tenure in the Texas State Senate when I served on a Special Committee of the Senate Studying prison reform. The Committee filed reports, but never did anything to bring equity to persons incarcerated by the Texas Department of Corrections.

A Subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee is currently working on national legislation which would, if enacted, bring many needed changes to the Federal Prison system.

As you know, our jurisdiction does not extend to state systems. However, the Subcommittee on Crime chaired by Honorable John Conyers and the Subcommittee on Courts, Civil Liberties and Administrative Justice chaired by Honorable Robert Kastenmeier have had appear before them as witnesses many capable people who could aid the work of the Sullivan's.

I will inquire of John Conyers and Bob Kastenmeier as to whether they have any suggestions to make regarding persons of ability to seek a position with the Parole and Prison system of Texas.

Warm best wishes for the holiday season ahead.

Sincerely,

BARBARA JORDAN
Member of Congress
BJ/mgr

Luci Johnson Nugent

2313 RED RIVER STREET
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78705

December 9, 1974

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Dear Barbara,

The letter I am enclosing is from a young man I met at the Democratic State Convention last September. I know nothing of his position other than what he has said but I was impressed with his sincerity.

The validity and significance of prison reform to the community is very real but my endeavors in health and educational fields have given me no basis for real understanding or service. I recognize that I am not one of your constituents but I feel that possibly you might know of someone in a minority category who would be sensitive to needs and render service that would be invaluable. I would appreciate any insight that might be passed on to this young man who appears to be attempting to do his best homework in getting someone with a concerned heart and mind to deal with this.

As a black, a woman and a representative from the largest urban area in Texas and a member of the judiciary

committee, this subject must be one you would be sensitive to and I hope you'll have some concrete suggestions, if you haven't already made them - my part is simply to bring the work of this young couple to attention.

In this season of thanksgiving, I want you to know that you are on my list of "reasons to be grateful" - my heart beamed with pride over the intensely human, yet dignified way you responded to your responsibilities as a member of the judiciary committee. A friend of yours once took "high store" in persons who thoroughly did their homework and who listened to all aspects of the problem at hand. My father said so many times how intensely proud he was of your ability to meet the needs of our people and I know you are continuing and increasing this great favorable impression with his children. We also are so proud and so very grateful.

Affectionately,



Dear Mrs. Nugent,

Just a note to tell you
that I enjoyed our conversation
at the Democratic Convention.

I placed your name on our
mailing list & I hope that
you received our newsletter
on the "yellow ribbons," & our
petition which I am enclosing.

We are in the midst of
gathering resumes & I was won-
dering if you would know anyone
who would be interested in the
parole or Prison positions. This
mountain or woman should
have the time to devote more than
the two hour meeting every two
months on the Prison Board. The
role, however, is a \$35,000 a year

suggestions for nominees, they
could contact me, or their
legislator or state senator who
could forward a one page
resume to the Governor on the
Prison Board & Judge Greenhill
on the Parole Board.

I took your advice & went
down to the Newman 11:15
Quitar Mass & enjoyed it.

Your friend,
Charlie
Sullivan

SIGN ON THE BACK IF YOU BELIEVE THAT MEMBERS OF THE TEXAS PAROLE & PRISON BOARDS SHOULD REPRESENT ALL AGES, RACES, OCCUPATIONS & SEX.

AGES

board members

The Board of Pardons & Parole decides who gets parole from prison and pardoned. The Chairman of this three-member board is 67. He is up for re-appointment in Feb., 1974 for a six year term. The Prison Board makes decisions on how the state prison is run & hires the Director. The chairman of the Prison Board is 79. He was first appointed in 1949 and has been Chairman since 1956. He will be 84 when he is up for appointment again. The average age of the nine-member board is well over fifty years of age.

inmate population

The average age of the prison inmate population is 28 years and over 80% are under 40 years of age.

RACE

board members

All members of the Parole & Prison Boards are white except for one black on the Prison Board.

inmate population

44% of the prisoners are black, 38% white, 16% Mexican-American & 2% other.

BACKGROUND

board members

The Chairmen of the Parole Board was appointed by a judge and has a brother who is a judge. One of the board members is a former district attorney. Most of the Prison Board members are millionaire or very wealthy businessmen with experience in banking, oil industry, construction, ranching & agriculture. Even the one member with a professional background (medical doctor) is also a director of a loan company.

inmate population

Most prisoners are poor, and in need of professional and educational help.

SEX

board members

All members of both boards are male.

inmate population

There are over 650 women in the state prison, one of the largest women's prisons in the world.

Explanation

We ask you and your friends to sign on the back of this petition if you agree (Include address, city, zip, & phone number & if possible). Mail it to us & we will send copies to the judge & Governor who will make appointments to these boards in Feb. 1974. We will also send a copy to your state senator asking that he or she confirm only those appointments in agreement with this petition. Mail to: CURE 1926 Newning Ave. Austin 78704 - Phone 447-8052. CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants) is a state-wide organization of 3000 members whose purpose is to stop crime through prison reform. CURE is not against the service rendered & success achieved by the present members of the Parole and Prison Boards. We are only asking that a BALANCE be given in age, race, background & sex.

Pair lobbies for reform of prisons



October 25, 1974

By Valerie Harper

Special to the National Catholic Reporter

AUSTIN, Texas — Charles and Pauline Sullivan are working "with one foot in the establishment and one out" to bring about prison reform in a state with the largest ratio of prisoners to population in the country.

So far, their record isn't bad. Since 1972 they have:

- Initiated low-cost bus service enabling relatives of prisoners to visit state and federal prison units.
- Lobbied successfully for passage of a bill which in effect eliminates the use of inmates as guards.
- Helped push through a proposed constitutional provision that would have restored voting rights to felons on completion of their sentences while giving the legislature the right to make exceptions. This effort died when Texas lawmakers failed to come up with a new state constitution this summer after wrangling for months. The Sullivans plan to tackle the issue again when the legislature convenes in January.

A former nun and priest, the couple recently moved to the state capital from San Antonio so they could lobby more easily. They may be the poorest and most idealistic lobbyists in the state. "We always joke that the legislators have to take us to lunch," said Charlie.

They live in a tiny South Austin apartment that rents for \$55 a month and includes feeding the owner's dog when she is away. Their total monthly income is about \$150, money Pauline earns from part-time employment. Charlie hopes to supplement this with something of his own, but both make it clear that prison reform is their important work.

"When I left the religious life I wanted to do something for people who nobody else would help, almost the hopeless," said Pauline. "The prison issue is frustrating and depressing but it's the most forgotten issue. There are people serving life sentences who will serve 20-25 years before anyone will look at their records."

"I think we could get paid for the type of work we're doing," said Charlie. "But then we'd become members of 'the system.' I feel very strongly about freedom. When I was a priest in Alabama I had to do a lot that I didn't agree with. I said I'd never get into that type of thing again."

The Sullivans married in Minnesota in 1970 and roamed the country until settling in San Antonio where they opened a storefront to minister to the needy.

Their first confrontation with the prison system came when they picketed San Antonio's Bexar County Jail in support of a hunger strike. They literally got thrown into the prison issue when Charlie landed in jail for being "overly enthusiastic about yelling to the prisoners."

After working to change conditions in the jail, the Sullivans established the bus service. The Texas Department of Corrections has 14 units housing some 18,000 prisoners. The Sullivans say the system is "no better or worse" than any other, though they add, "people who've done time in other states say doing time in Texas is hard time."

The immense size of the state, presents a problem not encountered elsewhere. Some people must travel as much as 800 miles to units in eastern Texas, most of them prison farms in the middle of nowhere with poor transportation connections. When they finally arrive they are often subjected to questioning before starting a two-hour visit.

When the bus program began, it was sorely needed. Five busloads left on the inaugural trip and more than 8,000 people have used the service.

Since then, six bus programs staffed by volunteers have sprung up around the state. The Sullivans, meanwhile, have moved on to the prison lobby they established called CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants). Three thousand persons, including 1,000 prisoners, are on their mailing list.

"We go pretty straight," said Charlie. "I keep my hair short. Being from the South and having a southern accent I can talk to some of these good old boys in the legislature. I like talking to conservatives. You know where they stand."

Between now and January the Sullivans will be studying a stack of possible prison reform legislation which they expect to be a big issue. Charlie has been appointed chairman of the Citizens Advisory Committee to the legislature's Joint Committee on Prison Reform. Members are documenting specific changes they feel need to be made.

One of the most important, as the Sullivans see it, is redistribution of the prison population. Illinois, with the same population as Texas, has half the number of inmates. The situation could be improved, many believe, with more community-based corrections and a modernized probation system.

In Texas the probation system is in the hands of the counties, some of which ignore it completely. The state parole board is conservative and understaffed. Few people are paroled though this seems to be changing. The Sullivans plan to lobby for a staff increase as the only way to get people out of prison.

They will also work for pay for prisoners, more minority recruitment to top prison jobs and more meaningful rehabilitation. They accuse the department of corrections of token educational and vocational training and say there is not one drug program in the entire system, not even counseling.

"They (prison officials) have to know that when they're running a prison they're dealing with people," said Pauline. "We support all the alternatives to the prison system, but we don't want to forget those who are already inside. We feel for those people who are sitting in their cells tonight."