

Community Church of Boston Statement Regarding Patrick Administration's Use of Dogs to Search Visitors to Prison

The Community Church of Boston is a free community united for the study and practice of universal religion, seeking to apply ethical ideals to individual life and the democratic and cooperative principle to all forms of social and economic life. Since its 1920 inception CCB has been active in the prison justice movement. Our congregation is comprised of 'Free World' members and Massachusetts prisoners. We seek to nurture equitable relationships with incarcerated people. The CCB Prison Membership Committee exists to develop and sustain connections with its 'Inside' members.

Therefore, the Community Church of Boston is compelled to condemn the DOC's March 6, 2013 memo (*attached*) that mandates the search of all visitors to its facilities by drug-detecting dogs. We call upon all people of conscience to demand that the Deval Patrick Administration, under which the DOC operates, rescind this plan immediately. Additionally, Governor Patrick must abandon the punitive visitation practices he has put into place beginning in his first term. The gratuitous severing of family ties enacted under his administration has caused great harm. Visitation has become increasingly restrictive and punitive. Wardens have removed chairs from visiting rooms to produce 'over-crowding' and used the resultant tensions to further reduce visiting days and hours. The use of dogs to search visitors is just another in a long line of restrictions that serve to diminish family ties and humiliate those who have incarcerated relatives. These restrictions have little to do with safety and serve to increase the secretive nature of a Commonwealth agency without oversight or accountability. Such policies are also a needless burden on the state's budget.

The plan to utilize drug-detecting dogs to search children, wives, husbands and grandmothers **MUST NOT STAND**. Such a memo could not have been issued without the prior knowledge and consent of Governor Patrick and Executive Office of Public Safety and Security Secretary Andrea Cabral. As a first step, we urge the community to call **Governor Deval Patrick's Office (617 725 4000) to DEMAND an immediate end** to the highly punitive restrictions he has placed on the loved ones of prisoners.

We express our outrage and disgust that this plan, so evocative of police dog attacks upon Black civil-rights protestors and Abu Ghraib prisoners, is even being considered. We express equal outrage and disgust that there is no truly independent oversight entity to monitor or control the Massachusetts Department of Correction. DOC has far too much unfettered control over human lives.

**The Community Church of Boston and the CCB Prisoner Membership
Committee
565 Boylston Street Boston, MA 02116**

- Approved on the occasion of our annual Liberation Seder, March 24, 2013

March 6, 2013 Massachusetts Department of Correction Memo posted at all prisons:

"To all inmates:

In the very near future, the Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC) will be utilizing non-aggressive drug-detecting canines (K-9s) as part of our entrance procedures for visitors, in an effort to eliminate illegal drugs from entering DOC correctional facilities. The use of drugs many times is a root cause of criminal activity and continued drug use while incarcerated severely impacts your reentry efforts to return to the community better able to cope with the stressors of everyday life.

If the narcotics dog alerts on a visitor, the visitor will be asked to consent to a thorough search by correctional staff. If drugs are discovered as a result of this search, the visitor may be subjected to criminal prosecution and barred from visiting DOC facilities. In the event that a visitor refuses to consent to a thorough search based upon a narcotics dog's alert, the visitor will be denied entrance and immediately barred from all DOC facilities.

While we realize that visits are an extremely important part of your lives during your incarceration, the Department will not allow your reentry and treatment efforts to be derailed by illicit activities. It is our duty to do everything in our power to keep you and correctional staff safe from harm; this K-9 drug detection initiative is part of that effort.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

**Luis S. Spencer
Commissioner"**