

Statewide Harm Reduction Coalition and Jail/Prison Moratorium Endorsers

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Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Statewide Harm Reduction Coalition Launches Day-Long Van Tour Calling for Jail/Prison Construction Moratorium in Massachusetts

CHICOPEE, MA - On Monday, August 21, 2006 starting at 8:30am, at the construction site of the Chicopee women's jail, 701 Center St., the Statewide Harm Reduction Coalition (SHaRC) will launch its 6-city, day-long van tour to promote the call for a moratorium on all new jail/prison construction and expansion in Massachusetts.

From Chicopee, the VAN TOUR schedule includes the following:

10:00-11:30am Arrive at the People In Peril (PIP) Homeless Shelter in *Worcester* to hold a discussion about why a Harm Reduction approach is important, and the relationship between Harm Reduction and the Prison Industrial Complex;

1:00-2:15pm Travel north to a Coalition for a Better Acre (CBA) in *Lowell*, where we will participate in a community strategy meeting aiding CBA in including their membership in SHaRC and the call for a moratorium on jail expansion;

3:30-4:15pm Stand-out/community outreach at Union Square Parking lot, *Somerville* to talk with community members about the proposed jail expansion in Middlesex County;

4:30-5:15pm Stand-out/community outreach at the parking lot behind Harvest Coop, *Cambridge*;

6:00-8:00pm Celebration and Speak-out at the Community Church of Boston, 565 Boylston St., *Boston*.

With the support of 1st Hampshire State Representative Peter Kocot, SHaRC announced the call for a moratorium on jail/prison expansion last July, 2005 during a press conference held at the State House. Since then support for the moratorium has been increasing from other Representatives, including 34th Middlesex Representative, Carl Sciortino.

"Given that nearly \$13 million has been approved by the state for costs related to the opening and operation of new jails in Hampden, Franklin and Middlesex Counties, and the Department of Corrections FY 2007 budget has increased again, now at \$425 million, we thought the time was right to travel around the state and let communities know that Massachusetts plans to spend more on punishing people than on low-income housing, drug treatment/healthcare, quality schools, positive jobs creation, etc.," states Holly Richardson, Out Now/SHaRC.

Ranger Varzeas, Youth Community Organizer, also of Out Now/SHaRC adds, "Teachers in our schools in Springfield haven't had contracts for the last 4 years, we barely have the school supplies we need, and there always seem to be more cops, and more surveillance equipment as we enter the building. I just don't get it. Why is the state legislature willing to spend more money on locking people up than to helping us grow up having what we need in the first place?"

Stopping at the PIP homeless shelter in Worcester, SHaRC anti-prison community organizers will be focusing on the criminalization of homeless people and facilitate a discussion on harm reduction. Cha Connor, Harm Reduction Activist in Worcester reports, "Drug users in Worcester are being targeted by the police and politicians. Even though Massachusetts passed the pharmacy sales of syringes this past July, the police are still arresting and harassing drug users for possession.

Massachusetts politicians and prison officials have been voicing complaints of overcrowding in prisons and jails throughout the state; and this argument is most often used to gain sympathy and support for new jail construction and expansion of existing prisons. Kimberly Milberg, Arise for Social Justice/SHaRC reports, "Hampden County Sheriff, Michael Ashe, has been seeking funds for an additional 56 cells at the not-yet-built Chicopee women's jail, claiming the jail is already overcrowded before it's built!" "The 'overcrowding' argument is faulty, and is used to manipulate the public; for instance, police do street sweeps where dozens can be picked up for petty offenses and end up in jail because they are poor and cannot bail out" adds Milberg.

"At the root of overcrowding are the discriminatory laws and policies that target people based on race, class, gender and country of origin," says Andrea Hornbein, Community Church of Boston/SHaRC. Hornbein concludes, "U.S. prisons and jails steal money from poor, working class, and indigenous people and people of color, on whose backs the wealth of this country was and continues to be built; whose resources and labor continue to be stolen. We are demanding community solutions to problems that have their roots in poverty. This is what the van tour will be speaking out about."

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