

March 7, 2011

(italics added for emphasis)

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Dear Committee Members,

My name is Brandon Thongsavanh and I am a Maine Prisoner Doc #18214, presently located in Suffield, CT at McDougall Correctional Institution. I am writing to you about LD 690 An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Transfer of Prisoners to Other States.

In April 2006 I was involved in an altercation with another prisoner that occurred within the Maine State Prison. Though I was not the only incident of similarity at the time (stabbing) to occur I was the one repeatedly informed that I would not be returning to the general population and instead subsequently this would be the reasoning why I was transferred out of state once again.

I was transferred the first time roughly in May 2003, but was returned due to my conviction being overturned, the estimated 8 months out in an Arizona State Prison was mentally and physically taxing (which I will explain later in this.) On around September – October of 2008 I was told my best bet to remain on the East Coast and be somewhat close to family would be to request a transfer among the New England areas. Believing I had no other choice to remain close by I did this. I was transferred to CT in November 2008..

Upon my arrival in CT, I was spoken to by officers who then said to me “must be a pain in the ass, a problem inmate” simply based on I was shipped out. Thus my first day here in a new state I was already deemed a problem inmate. Similar as to my first encounters with Arizona DOC officers who surrounded me and said “So you like to assault CO's, huh?” I basically had to plead my case as this was no so.

The reasoning for describing these incidents is to show how out of state inmates are viewed and received based on what type of report is send along with him, and the simple fact he comes from another state. In my first transfer I was labeled as being of African American race and that in itself creates conflicts/problems. Seeing as most if not all West Coast prisons are very racial and my own race being of Asian American.

In both transfers I have been labeled a gang member. The first time I did not even know this until I was questioned by Arizona's gang unit, asking why I was claiming a particular group, especially one whose members are 95% black. After explaining that I was not and being checked over for tattoos that would indicate otherwise, I was cleared when I was returned to Maine and eventually awaiting transfer again I made it a point to specifically speak with one of the gang units officers within Maine's prison. I explicitly asked the officer to verify I was off the “gang member” labeling. I was told, shown I was not a gang member.

Though once I came to CT DOC once again I was labeled a gang member based on Maine DOC records but though this time as a different group then the first reports in Arizona. This in itself creates tremendous problems as most states have certain criteria one must meet in order to be allowed into population and/or off the state's gang list. This normally involves renouncing one's affiliation. Officials see gang members as problems, aggravation, threats, all that seeing I am not one makes my

time more complicated. I am apt to more cell and person searches, higher monitoring, harassment by CO's but all so life threatening if other inmates who are actually in gangs believe I am in one because CO's speak of it, records fall into wrong hands, or I'm forced to renounce something I was never actually apart of that affiliation will see it as disrespect to them. All of these put my life in constant danger to wrongful assumptions, hatred between groups, etc.

In both cases the mental strain has been enormous as seeing my family especially my children is basically none existent due to the driving distance and children being in school. I have not been able to watch them grow or visit with family as I once did weekly in Maine. Births of new family members, weddings, or any type of issues with the family or friends I am only made aware a week at a time minimum later due to the time letters take to reach me or be received by family. The 15 minutes phone call allowed makes communication with both children and parents complicated because my time must be split up evenly between them all and due to the cost of collect calls so far in distance. The strains on my family is tremendous as the constantly fear that either because of wrongful labeling by DOC reports, worrying about family/kids, or that just being from out of state I will be constantly forced to defend myself. The children (both 8) ask why they cannot see me like they used to, let alone at all and trying to explain why the distance is too far for only a one time short visit, or short phone call is very difficult and depressing.

Whenever an inmate from a new state finds I am from out of state and was transferred, a number of things occur which if not handled respectfully and delicately can have serious consequences. Suspicion, accusations, fairy tales, disgust, hate. A lot if not all see people like myself – transfers- to have snitched on someone or something in Maine and were sent out for safety precautions. We are looked down upon as being weak for not being able to handle a “petty prison” as Maine is identify as. We are seen as “fish food.”

In both transfers I was sent to the new states maximum facilities due to DOC reports and “process” between transferred prisons. This is mentally and physically demanding as these facilities are worse than population. Segregated, filthier, noiser, more shakedowns all and everything that makes time difficult, seeing as these are facilities the state has for those inmates who become problems. The confinement can range from 8 months to years within these facilities. The visitations, telephone usage, recreations are limited less than population making confinement physically and mentally draining. To give some idea to this consider initially I weighed 230 lbs. Upon transfer to Arizona on my return to Maine 8 months later I was only 170 lbs.

I have been requested to be returned to Maine or at least closer. I was told to contact Maine's Interstate Compact Administrator, who then informed me my request would be forwarded to proper authorities, that was all I have been told since. The return process if there is one I know nothing about. I do not know if I must complete certain programs, be on good behavior for a certain amount of time, or simply wait. I would like to return to Maine because of the amount of time I have I would like to be able to still have contact with my family and a relationship with my children and watch them grow. Interaction with family/friends makes stress and emotional situations more bearable and less straining. Also communication between all is more easily available making the bond between myself and my children still possible. I thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Brandon Thongsavanh