

# IT'S UP TO US

## TO END MASS INCARCERATION!

ISSUE #7 JUNE 2019

A NEWSLETTER TELLING THE STORIES OF THOSE AFFECTED BY THE PRISON SYSTEM, EXPOSING THE INJUSTICES OF THE SYSTEM, AND ORGANIZING RESISTANCE TO END MASS INCARCERATION.

### CALL TO ACTION:

## Demand Christen Conyers Be Released from Rikers Immediately!

Christen Conyers has been held in Rikers Island jail since March 2018 on 2nd degree attempted murder and 1st degree assault charges, facing 25 years to life in prison, despite a glaring lack of evidence. His bail is currently \$150,000. We are demanding he be released immediately on his own recognizance so he can be with his family, and that the false charges against him be dropped.

**Call the prosecutor's office:**

**Assistant District Attorney**

**Tricia Phillips:**

**212-335-4231**

**And the district attorney  
general office line:**

**212-335-9000 ext. 8**

***Demand: Release Christen Conyers on his own recognizance! Don't keep him in Rikers Island on \$150,000 bail any longer! Drop the false charges against Christen Conyers!***

Conyers was arrested for an incident in February 2018 in which, according to a complaint filed with police, a man was assaulted and stabbed at 830



Amsterdam Ave. Conyers lives at this apartment building with his wife. The “evidence” against Conyers was video of him leaving the building (where he lives!) and the assault victim IDing Conyers. The victim, however, subsequently recanted this ID in two letters to the court. The victim has stated that NYPD Detective Moultrie coerced him into IDing someone and promised to drop a prior gun possession charge against him if he made the ID. Detective Moultrie has been accused of making up evidence in other cases. This is an all too common tactic: coercing someone facing charges and prison time to testify against someone else. The victim is a friend of Conyers

and visited him in Rikers Island after the alleged assault. Prosecutors have not provided any physical evidence connecting Conyers to the assault.

Why is Christen Conyers being targeted? (1) His brother, Dana Ashmore, has also been charged in this case. (2) Conyers has a prior record and is being

*continued inside*

# Demand Christen Conyers Be Released!

(continued from front cover)

targeted, like so many other Black men with convictions, by the police and prosecutors. When Conyers was a teenager, lacking opportunities in the hood and having to support his family, he got caught up in selling drugs. He was arrested in a drug raid as a teenager and later on a gun possession charge and spent six years in prison.

Conyers turned his life around after his rough teenage years and convictions. He became a Muslim in prison and was active with the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood in recent years, and currently serves as an Emir in Rikers Island. He got married two years ago and is a loving husband to a mother of four, helping raise her children in addition to taking care of his own son, who has sickle cell anemia.

The false charges Conyers faces while languishing in Rikers for over a year show how the system is always targeting Black men for punishment, and that once you have a conviction, no matter what you do, police, prosecutors, and parole officers will be out to

get you. Previously, Conyers was arrested and brutalized by police June 22, 2015 when he was riding his bike past a protest in Harlem to honor the victims of the Charleston Emanuel A.M.E. Church massacre, in which nine Black church members were gunned down by a white supremacist. Conyers was held for months because the arrest was considered a parole violation (view the Gothamist's article about this arrest at [http://gothamist.com/2015/12/17/nyc\\_parole\\_trap\\_conyers.php](http://gothamist.com/2015/12/17/nyc_parole_trap_conyers.php)).

It's time we come together and stand behind Christen Conyers and all those unjustly imprisoned. If we all take 10 minutes to call the prosecutor and demand that Conyers be released on his own recognizance and the charges be dropped, they will feel the pressure of people who refuse to allow Black men and other targets of the justice system to be treated this way. Let's get Christen's back and demand he not be held in Rikers Island, separated from his family, any longer! Christen's next court date is

June 24, so it's imperative that the prosecutor feel the pressure from us before then.

**Call Assistant District Attorney Tricia Phillips:  
212-335-4231**

**And the district attorney general office line:  
212-335-9000 ext. 8**

**You can use the following script:**

"My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm calling to insist that Christen Conyers be released on his own recognizance immediately and that the false charges against him be dropped. Conyers is a loving husband and father and needs to be with his family. There is no evidence against Conyers. The complaining witness has recanted his ID of Conyers in two letters to the court and describes being coerced by Detective Moultrie to make the ID. It is unjust to keep Christen Conyers locked up in Rikers for over a year."

After you call, email us at [itsuptoustoendmi@gmail.com](mailto:itsuptoustoendmi@gmail.com) and let us know how it went.

## SOME STARTLING FACTS ABOUT PLEA DEALS, SNITCHING, AND INNOCENT PEOPLE BEING CONVICTED:

The following excerpts come from Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow* (pages 88-89):

"...simply by charging someone with an offense carrying a mandatory sentence of ten to fifteen years or life, prosecutors are able to force people to plead guilty rather than risk a decade or more in prison."

"The number of snitches in drug cases has soared in recent years, partly because the government has tempted people to 'cooperate' with law enforcement by offering cash, putting them 'on payroll,' and



promising cuts of seized drug assets, but also because ratting out co-defendants, friends, family, or acquaintances is often the only way to avoid a lengthy mandatory minimum sentence."

"...under the federal sentencing guidelines, providing 'substantial assistance' is often the only way defendants can hope

to obtain a sentence below the mandatory minimum."

"It is impossible to know for certain how many innocent drug defendants...are convicted due to lying informants and paid witnesses, but reliable estimates of the number of innocent people currently in prison tend to range from 3% - 5%."

"...if only 1% of America's prisoners are actually innocent of the crimes for which they have been convicted, that would mean tens of thousands of innocent people languishing behind bars in the United States."

# Brutalized in Rikers Island and Upstate Prisons as a Teenager

*The following stories are from a young man recently released from a two-year bid:*

[My first time in Rikers] I got a scar – they hit me with the big stick, the wooden one. **I was 16.** Basically it was because I was on the phone but I was too loud, and the [corrections] officer was telling me “shut the fuck up I’m trying to sleep.” I turned to him, I’m like “fuck you, I don’t care if you’re trying to sleep. You don’t come here to sleep.”

Once I got off the phone he was like “you’re lucky I don’t hit you with the stick.” I’m like, “you’re not hitting me with no stick.” He told me to go the bathroom. And then he came in there and hit me with the stick. It’s called “play the bathroom.” I seen with my own eyes the first two days. I already knew what was up. This was all adolescents.

## **Upstate prisons**

They call you for school at 8 in the morning. Don’t nobody wake you up. If you miss school you get a ticket. They put you in the box for 20 days, 30 days, just for missing school. It’s a mandatory program. So I kept going late and the [corrections] officer was like, “If you late again, I’m gonna smack the shit out of you.” So I just looked at him and laughed. That was my first [state prison]. So at that point I’m not about to let nobody put they hands on me. I’m angry, I just got sentenced, I don’t come home til 2018.

I was late again and he told me go back to my [cell]. He came back in and he closed the double doors. And he took his gloves off. He’s like “get on the wall.” So I put my hands on the wall. And he’s like “If you move, I’m pulling the pin, and I’m gonna tell them you hit me.” And if he do that they’re gonna come in and drill me. 10 [corrections] officers, they’re gonna come in and fix me, put me in the box.

So he smacked the shit out of me. I couldn’t do nothing. I just took it cuz I wanted to go home. I was 19 years old, I wasn’t gonna come home til I was 21, and I don’t wanna come home when I was 24 just cuz I was late for school.

[Another time] I got into a fight, I had bruises, I had a black eye. And the [corrections] officer seen it, and he’s like “what happened to your face?” I’m like “I



fell in the shower.” He’s like “no, you got in a fight, and that’s called an unreported injury, you get a ticket for that.” Let’s say you got a scratch, you gotta report it or you get a ticket. The tickets upstate is \$5. But it’s not about the money, they kill you with the box time. So they’ll charge you \$5 but give you 20 days in the box. One time they gave me 7 months in the box.

So they cuffed me and brought me to the sergeant. “So you not gonna tell me who you fought?” Because they wanted to get the other person, they wanna get both of us in trouble. I held it down and ain’t say nothin. The sergeant was like, “see the thing is, when you lie to me, he gets mad” and pointed to the CO. So [the CO] kept punching me in my face. Cuz they didn’t take the pictures yet and bring me to medical. So they punched me in my face mad times. There’s no cameras in there.

## **Resisting being starved**

Everybody I know’s been starved in the box. My friends, I could call them right now and just ask them one question, “what happens when you talk too loud in the box?” And they gonna say “they gonna starve you.”

The officers they stick together. Some inmates, they be acting like police, but for the most part the inmates stick together. For example, when I was in upstate box, my man a couple cells down, the officer gave him his tray, cuz it was cameras, but it was empty, it wasn’t no food in there. The whole 60 people, nobody gave our trays up. Everybody was Blood, Crip, Latin King, it was the just the point that we’re all people in here, you’re not about to starve us. When the captain comes and says “why is 60 trays missing?” They’re gonna say all 60 people did it cuz he ain’t eat.



# HAS SOMEONE YOU KNOW BEEN STUCK IN RIKERS AWAITING TRIAL?

According to NYC Department of Correction statistics, NEARLY 80% OF RIKERS ISLAND INMATES ARE AWAITING TRIAL. In the first six months of fiscal year 2019, 6,192 of 7,790 Rikers inmates were pretrial detainees – i.e., they had not yet been convicted of the charges for which they were being jailed. It's time we stop letting them hold our people in jail, often for long periods of time, without convictions.



It's time we put an end to this. It's time we start demanding that our people locked up in Rikers awaiting trial be released and get a fair day in court without delay. We can do this by coming together, flooding prosecutors' and judges' offices with phone calls, publicizing the injustices being done to our loved ones, packing the courtroom

to support them, and holding press conferences and protests to make our outrage visible.

If you're sick and tired of your loved ones being held for months or even years in Rikers while awaiting trial, email us at

**[itsuptoustoendmi@gmail.com](mailto:itsuptoustoendmi@gmail.com)**.

# IT'S UP TO US

## TO END MASS INCARCERATION!

1. Mass incarceration must end. The prison system, courts, parole, and probation dehumanize millions of people inside and out.
2. Mass incarceration is the leading edge of white supremacy and the oppression of Black people in the US. It is the new Jim Crow.
3. It is the struggle of people, especially those most affected, that will stop this. We can't rely on politicians and the court system.
4. We stand with our immigrant sisters, brothers, and children locked up in detention.

email: **[itsuptoustoendmi@gmail.com](mailto:itsuptoustoendmi@gmail.com)**

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