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For Immediate Release
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Attn: News Desk

PA march against prison expansion, austerity nears state capitol

Coalition marching 100 miles for “a people’s budget, not a prison budget”

Harrisburg, PA—Pennsylvania’s **unprecedented 113-mile march against mass incarceration is nearing the State Capitol of Harrisburg, where demonstrators are holding a major rally at noon on June 3 to demand “A People’s Budget, Not a Prison Budget.”** The march arrives in Harrisburg as the state legislature reconvenes to discuss the budget for next year, including the governor’s request for additional corrections spending.

Marchers are demanding that the General Assembly refuse to pass a budget with a \$68 million increase in corrections spending. They further call for the governor to stop the \$400 million construction of two new prisons in Montgomery County, outside Philadelphia.

The march is being organized by Decarcerate PA, a grassroots campaign working to end mass incarceration in Pennsylvania by insisting that the state stop building prisons, reduce its prison population, and reinvest money into local community resources. More than thirty organizations have cosponsored the march, including public school advocates, immigrant rights groups, faith-based communities, and a wide array of racial and economic justice organizations.

The March for a People’s Budget has also been endorsed by several high-profile analysts, who call it an impressive and creative step in a growing national movement against mass incarceration.

“This march is not just about one state budget,” said noted scholar and activist Angela Davis. “It is about enacting a vision of a society rooted in humanity instead of prisons. Decarcerate PA is an exciting part of a growing national movement to challenge the erroneous idea that prisons make us safer.”

Several other analysts agree that the march breaks new ground in the fight against mass incarceration.

“Decarcerate PA’s march highlights a simple truth: Public budgets should be made by the people for the people,” said Ruth Wilson Gilmore, an award-winning scholar of imprisonment and the past president of the American Studies Association. “In walking the walk, these historic marchers take the fight against prisons and austerity to a new level. What happens in Pennsylvania now can lift all who strive for a new national freedom agenda.”

Like other states, Pennsylvania has embraced a path of austerity. In recent years, Republican governor Tom Corbett has cut more than a billion dollars from education, eliminated General Assistance, and slashed health care spending. Philadelphia alone is in the process of

closing twenty-three schools. Yet the PA Department of Corrections is requesting an additional \$68 million increase in next year's budget, which will push the DOC budget over \$2 billion for the first time in the state's history. Further, the state continues to expand its prison system.

"At a time when prison populations are finally beginning to decline nationally, it's unfortunate that Pennsylvania is planning to build new prisons," said Marc Mauer, executive director of The Sentencing Project, a national prison reform group. "We've seen that sentencing and drug policy reform, along with a broader array of non-prison options, can have a significant impact on the number of people incarcerated. Prison construction also assures that resources will be less available to invest in the communities most heavily affected by mass incarceration."

The March for a People's Budget began with a major kick-off rally in Philadelphia on May 25—two weeks after a massive school walkout in the city protested school closings. Marchers have held several demonstrations throughout the state as the marchers head toward the capitol, including a rally in Norristown with DreamActivist PA targeting immigrant detention and criminalization. On Memorial Day, marchers held a rally at a busy intersection in Collegeville, just miles from the site of the ongoing \$400 million prison construction. The ten-day march route has also included community forums highlighting the high costs of budget cuts, such as a panel discussion in Reading, PA, featuring the president of the local teachers' union, local academics and activists, and members of Decarcerate PA.

Decarcerate PA formed in 2011. Last November, seven members of the group were arrested and charged with trespass and disorderly conduct following a sit-in on the construction site of two new prisons in Montgomery County, PA. The demonstrators sat at school desks and wore banners reading "fund schools, not prisons." The charges are still pending.

Marchers have walked through rain and shine, bringing their call for a people's budget closer to the state capital every day. For live updates and images of the march, visit www.decarceratepa.info/march and @decarceratepa. The march route and current list of cosponsors is below.

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Route and related actions for "March for a People's Budget: Stop Prison Expansion Now":

- ♦ May 25: Kick-off rally in Philadelphia at noon in Love Park, marching to the Art Museum.
- ♦ May 26: "Invest in the Future, not Fear!" (protest against immigrant detention and deportation) with DreamActivist PA and other local organizers, 1 pm, Montgomery County Courthouse in Norristown. Six-mile march (10 am -1 pm) ending with a community barbeque (1 - 4 pm) at Mellon Park in Pittsburgh.
- ♦ May 27: Protest in Collegeville, PA, near site of Graterford prison construction project.
- ♦ May 29: "From the Underground Railroad to the School-to-Prison Pipeline: Freedom Struggles Then and Now" (panel discussion on mass incarceration and austerity), 7:00 pm at the Hopewell Mennonite Church, 45 S. 6th Street, Reading.
- ♦ May 30 – June 1: March to Womelsdorf, Lebanon, Hershey.
- ♦ June 2: "A Community Conversation on Mass Incarceration," 7:30 pm, Harrisburg Friends Meeting, 1100 N. 6th Street, Harrisburg.
- ♦ June 3: March into Harrisburg and rally at noon at the Capitol, N. 3rd and State streets.

Cosponsors of the "March for a People's Budget: Stop Prison Expansion Now" include:

ACLU – PA ❖ ACT UP ❖ Angela Davis ❖ Books Through Bars ❖ Broken On All Sides movie project ❖ Campaign for Nonviolent Schools ❖ The Center for Returning Citizens ❖ Coalition of Labor Union Women ❖ DreamActivist PA ❖ EXIT-US Inc ❖ Fight for Philly ❖ Granny Peace Brigade Philadelphia ❖ Hearts on a Wire ❖ Human Rights Coalition ❖ International Action Center ❖ International Socialist Organization ❖ Jobs with Justice ❖ Juntos ❖ Mishkan Shalom ❖ NAACP Graterford Branch ❖ New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia ❖ Noble Pillars ❖ Point Breeze Organizing Committee ❖ Occupy Trenton ❖ Parents United for Public Education ❖ Philadelphians Allied for a Responsible Economy ❖ Philadelphia Coalition Advocating for Public Schools ❖ Philadelphia Federation of Teachers ❖ Philadelphia Student Union ❖ Philly Survivor Support Collective ❖ Reconstruction Inc. ❖ Ruth Wilson Gilmore ❖ Students Organizing for Unity and Liberation ❖ Support Center for Returning Citizens ❖ Teacher Action Group ❖ Youth Art & Self-empowerment Project ❖