

Rally to close MSDF

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Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility (MSDF), 1015 N 10th Street, Milwaukee

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#CUT50, a bi-partisan organization founded by former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and CNN commentator Van Jones, has announced its support for the Campaign to close the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility (MSDF). The March 6 event is part of a national “Day of Empathy” being promoted by #CUT50. Day of Empathy is a national day of action to generate empathy on a massive scale for millions of Americans impacted by the criminal justice system. Organizations and activists across the country will advance local efforts of the national bipartisan criminal justice reform movement.

#CUT50 is the second major national group to sign on to the Close MSDF Coalition. They join Just Leadership USA, the New York-based organization that has led the high-profile call to close the infamous Rikers Island facility in New York City. Just Leadership USA will be represented at the rally by staff member Ronald Simpson-Bey.

The rally will build empathy for all Wisconsinites who are behind bars.

Speakers will focus especially on the unjust incarceration of Ventae Parrow. Mr. Parrow, an active leader in EXPO, WISDOM, and #CloseMSDF has recently been “revoked” back to prison for more than two years, despite the fact that he has not committed or been charged with a crime since the 1990’s. This “crimeless revocation” makes Ventae one of more than 3,000 people who are inhumanely sent to prison for “technical violations” each year.

MSDF, one of the most inhumane penal facilities in the country, is filled with Wisconsinites imprisoned for allegedly violating rules of community supervision; not for committing a crime. People imprisoned in MSDF never see outside (there are no

windows), and never get outdoors. The facility has no air conditioning and allows for no in-person visits by family members. 17 people have died while detained in MSDF.

States around the US, including those led by Republicans and Democrats, are reducing their use of crimeless revocations. Texas, for example, has closed several prison facilities, in large part because of a reduction in crimeless revocations – and its violent crime rate has dropped faster than the national average. Closer to home, Michigan has limited incarceration for crimeless revocations to 30 days.

The addition of major national partners to the Close MSDF Coalition underscores the need for Wisconsin to catch up to the nation's movement toward being smart on crime."