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Medical Conditions Reach Crisis in Pelican Bay Hunger Strike Advocates Demand Access to Strike Leaders, Negotiations

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What: Press Conference

When: Wednesday, July 13; 11:00am

Where: San Francisco California State Building, at Van Ness Ave. and McAllister Street

Oakland—According to advocates working on behalf of prisoners on hunger strike at Pelican Bay State Prison's Security Housing Unit (SHU), medical conditions for many strikers have deteriorated to critical levels, with fears some prisoner could start to die if immediate action isn't taken. Prisoners at Pelican Bay have been on hunger strike for nearly two weeks and have been joined by thousands of other prisoners throughout California's vast prison system. Some of their main demands revolve around health conditions in Pelican Bay's Security Housing Unit, while the entire California prison system is under federal receivership due to grave health conditions throughout its facilities.

A source with access to the medical condition of the hunger strikers, who asked to remain anonymous told lawyers with the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity coalition that health of the prisoners on hunger strike is quickly and severely deteriorating, saying, "All of the medical staff has been ordered to work overtime to follow and treat the hunger strikers. Some [strikers] are in renal failure and have been unable to make urine for three days. Some are having measured blood sugars in the 30 range, which can be fatal if not treated. The staff has taken them to the [prison hospital] and given them intravenous glucose when allowed by the prisoners. A few have tried to sip water but are so sick that they are vomiting it back up."

Prisoners participation in the strike in other prisons in California have also reported that medications, including those for high blood pressure and other serious conditions, are being withheld from prisoners on strike. Some prisoners have participated for limited periods of time or have joined other prisoners in "rolling" strikes, due to their already poor medical conditions.

"This situation is grave and urgent," says Carol Strickman, staff attorney for Legal Services for Prisoners with Children and a legal representative of the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity coalition. "We are fighting to prevent a lot of deaths at Pelican Bay. The CDCR [California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation] needs to negotiate with these prisoners, and honor the request of the strike leaders to have access to outside mediators to ensure that any negotiations are in good faith."

The Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity coalition is urging journalists to do further investigation into the health conditions at Pelican Bay, while also pushing state politicians to visit the prison itself. The coalition is also encouraging members of the public to pressure Gov. Brown and the CDCR to negotiate with the prisoners. Taeva Shefler of the Prison Activist Resource Center, another member of the solidarity coalition says, "The question for the CDCR is: will they continue to jeopardize prisoners' health and safety rather than sit at the same table and talk?"

Hunger strike supporters will hold an emergency press conference Wednesday at 11:00 am outside the State Building in San Francisco. Supporters, including family members of those held at Pelican Bay, will also continue to hold rallies and other events in the coming weeks.

For information on upcoming events, visit www.prisonerhungerstikesolidarity.wordpress.com

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