

Hearts On A Wire

Issue 2 Fall 2010

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♥ support incarcerated and detained trans and gender variant people ♥

♥ build community through bars ♥

♥ organize for justice ♥

Hearts On A Wire

We are trans and gender variant people building a movement for gender self-determination, racial and economic justice, and an end to policing and imprisoning our communities.

We meet in Philadelphia at
**The Institute for
Community
Justice:**

21 South 12th
Street, 7th Floor
Tuesdays from 4-6

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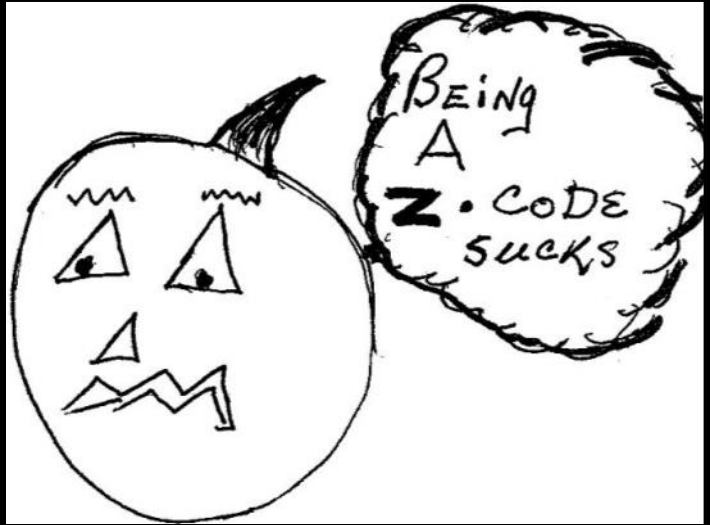
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by Najee





MY CELL IS UP FRONT ON B-A
BLOCK. AND ON THAT BLOCK
ALL THE 215 BOYS BE SAYING
AROUND THE JAIL THAT
I AM IN A Z CODE CELL
CUZ MY CASE WAS IN THE
NEWS PAPERS. SHIT ALL I DID
WAS RAN THE STEETS AS A GIRL.

DAM! I WISH! I
WAS Z CODE. SHIT I AM
DOING 15 TO 30 YEARS 4 KILLING
THIS MAN! SHIT I NEED TIME TO
MYSELF! BUT OCCASIONS PUT
KILLERS IN CELLS WITH
PUMPKINS THAT ARE DOING
REAL TIME!



AND IF YOU GET YOUR Z CODE
REMEMBER DONT GET A WRITE UP. BUT
YOU ARE DOING 15 TO 30. YOU DONT
CARE ABOUT A WRITE UP! BUT I SEE
THE PAROLE. SO I CAN NOT GET
A WRITE UP THATS NUB. THE PUMPKIN
IN P-A STATE JAIL GET Z
CODED. FOR NUT ASS SHIT!
OR IF YOU BEEN PUT
DOWN AS A GAY OR IN
THE L.G.B.T.Q. WORLD!
SHIT! YOU GOT STAFF IN
THESE JAILS PUTTING Z
CODES! ON PUMPKINS
THAT DONT NEED TO BE
Z CODED.



SHIT
MY CELLY
KEEPS ME
UP ALL NIGHTS



Z CODING A PUMPKIN
DONT HELP. MY CELL
GETS HIT FIRST WHEN IT
CLEAN UP DAY!!
Z CODE SUCKS

Perspectives on the Z-Code System

Anonymous, currently confined in PA:

I fell in the mid 80's and received a sentence of 80-160 years, basically a life sentence, perhaps worse. I was given a Z code even before I knew what a Z code was by psychiatric staff and had been as such until 2008.

For some 25 years it remained in place until I was transferred to another state prison. There the psychologist assigned to me—nothing more than a grad student, not a licensed psych mind you—said he could no longer justify me having a Z code and initiated steps to remove it via the staff vote system. All voted to remove and I was forced to double cell for the first time. Now, I couldn't live with my ex, so I knew I couldn't live with another prisoner in close quarters. This double celling went on for a few months while I wrote to anyone and every agency soliciting assistance to reinstate a Z code. All of the law library citations on this were very negative in favor of the DOC. Staff that knew me all said "removing your and others' Z codes is nothing more than a recipe for disaster and tragedy." But they were not in the voting process loop.

I mailed these letters on a Friday and got locked up on the following Tuesday; I was given 4 misconducts including assault, aggravated assault, and threatening. I was given 240 days in the hole. I tried telling people it was a mistake to remove the Z code, but no one listened. They quickly gave my cellmate a promotional transfer to a better prison before he got the idea of filing a lawsuit against the DOC for being on the end of my hands.

The young psychologist assigned to our block was responsible for the health and well-being of the 250+ inmates in one of the population blocks. Plus he was responsible for doing profiles and recs for those seeking parole, commutations, pardons, etc. as well as sessions and groups. He was let go, I believe because of his poor and reckless recommendation on me. I did file a formal complaint with the State Professional Compliance office in Harrisburg against him and the manager who backed up his decision.

In the hole, our Program Review Committee gave me back the Z code and another vote was taken and this time all were in favor of reinstating the Z code permanently.

I remain single celled as we speak. So there it is in a nutshell. I had to take 5 steps backwards just to get back to zero. I have my own demons to live with and can't speak for another 'less I walk in their shoes, so I don't suggest or recommend that others do this. As we speak there are some who succumbed to DOC pressure and doubled up losing their Z code, while others are still in the hole for refusing to double, and all for the sake of the almighty dollar. The Commonwealth of PA is responsible for supporting and condoning sexual assaults and rape by forced double celling. I'm not leaving prison so the bed I make is the one I lie in. It will only be a matter of time before one reads about a life being taken under such circumstances within Pennsylvania.

Najee, formerly incarcerated at SCI Houtzdale:

4

From admission to SCI Houtzdale I was handed a Z-Code because of a past history of engaging in sexual activity. They didn't give me a chance to show if

I'd grown or changed. It's discrimination because I'm of the LGBT community.

I settled, and enjoyed the solitude of the Z-Code, but it got tired and I met someone I wanted to cell with so I started procedures to get it removed.

After seeing the psychologist three times and having the deputy superintendant and Captain of Security all get together with the counselors, the vote sheet went around and I got it removed. When they suspected that my cellmate and I were "significant others" they moved us from the top tier to the first tier right in front of the guard station.

I've noticed that it seems easier for people who are not visibly trans or gay to get it removed. It seems like it's a little easier for Muslims, Latina/os and Caucasians.

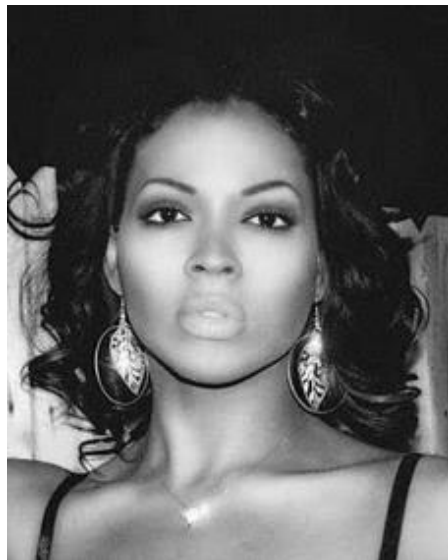
If you get a Z-code lifted it's out of the frying pan into the fire. Watch out for yourself. I've seen girls move in with their significant others thinking it will be cute—it's not cute to step into a domestic violence situation that the facility won't take seriously. Check their background: How many years are they doing? What's their reputation? Still, all in all there are benefits to having it off: more space, more outlets to plug in appliances, less isolation and more privacy.

Jessica Elaine Wolfe:

I have a Z Code. I believe the Z code system was originally developed with good intentions to protect individuals like myself, but now it's used with a malicious intent to label and characterize classes of people. I just filed a lawsuit in the US Eastern District Court addressing characterizing, Docket No. 10-2560.

R.I.P.

*Out deepest sympathies
go out to friends and
family of
Stacey Blahnik,
Overall House Mother
for the House of
Blahnik.*



Stacey was strangled in her Philadelphia home in early October. Police say investigation into the murder is ongoing. Many of her friends and the dozens of young people she mentored organized a candlelight vigil in Love Park .

all about estrogen and 'moning



what is estrogen?

Estrogen is the hormone responsible for the development of female secondary sex characteristics. In trans womens' communities, taking estrogen is sometimes called 'moning, Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT), or medical transition. Estrogen comes in pill, patch, injection (shot), gel, and cream forms.



also sometimes part of medical transition:

Anti-androgens (testosterone/T-blockers) lower overall testosterone level. Used with estrogen to speed up effects. Sometimes used alone to delay puberty in MTF teens. (Pill)

Progesterone is a pregnancy hormone that may have some effect on breast development. Opinions are mixed on whether progesterone is necessary to

transition, it may even work against feminization. (Pill)

Some folks take **Vitamin B** either with their hormone shot or in pill form. While there is no evidence that this is necessary for transition, it does no harm and contributes to feeling energized and happy.

Vitamin E pills or cream soften skin.

estrogen works best if you are drinking lots of water

making smart decisions about black/grey market 'mones

- whether its from the internet or an underground provider, go to a source whose reputation is known among your friends
- sharing needles puts you at risk for HIV and Hep C transmission/infection
- if you are sharing a vial and "double dipping," there is a risk of HIV and Hep C transmission/infection
- if you go to someone for an injection, if you don't SEE the needle come out of the package there is risk



hormones from a doctor

There are **no regulations** or laws about whether a doctor can prescribe hormones; it's up to the doctor – a free market. You may have heard about doctors requiring patients to have years of psychotherapy before they will provide hormones. **They do not have to do this!**

The current standard of care in LGBT health centers and progressive doctors is **informed consent** which means people are prescribed hormones as long as they fully understand what the hormones will do.

Advantages of going to a doctor

- you know for sure what you are getting
- hormones by prescription are cheaper than those available on the black/grey market even if you have to pay cash.
- rarely, insurance will pay for prescribed 'mones. Ask your doctor (or your employer if insurance is through employer).
- if a doctor is overseeing your medical transition, they will periodically run blood tests:
 - estrogen levels: to see if you are at the right dose
 - liver function: to check for side effects
- if you take any prescribed medication it may interact with 'mones. You should talk to your doctor about this.
- if you get locked up, prisons are more likely to maintain you on hormones if they are prescribed by a doctor.

HIV meds affect estrogen: transition is slowed. However, estrogen does not impact the effectiveness of HIV meds.

How much is too much? Everyone's body and genetic makeup is different. The right dose for someone else might not be right for you. It might be tempting to take more than recommended. Taking more estrogen than your body can process increases the risk of side effects and is a waste of money. It won't speed up transition; excess gets pissed out.

what you can expect if you start 'moning



body

- breast buds develop 2-6 months after starting estrogen
- nipples will grow more sensitive over time
- breasts take several years to fully develop, generally to a similar size to non-trans female relatives

“popping” breast buds does not help them grow.

estrogen will “give you body” even if you’ve had silicone work done

- body fat decreases in stomach, increases in thighs and butt
- overall decrease in muscle mass
- breasts are permanent, even if you stop 'moning
- fat and muscle changes are not permanent



everyone with breasts should screen routinely for breast cancer. Learn how to give yourself a monthly breast self-exam, and get an annual breast exam from your health care provider.

softness

- thin layer of fat under the skin fills in the face
- skin will become softer
- facial hair may become lighter and thinner (but it will not go away)
- body hair growth will slow down, and hair may become finer and lighter
- none of these changes will remain if you stop taking estrogen



emotion

- many trans women report a range of emotional effects from 'moning, like mood swings and crying easily
- some trans women experience “estrogen serenity” a feeling of well-being, calmness, and peace, while others experience depression



- emotional changes from 'mones are temporary

sex & genitals

- over time, estrogen can change sex drive and the way orgasm feels
- after years on estrogen, testicles, penis and prostate will decrease in size
- eventually, erections may not be hard enough for penetrative sex
- these effects may go away if estrogen is stopped

Note: estrogen lowers sperm count, however it may still be possible to make someone pregnant

If you are over 50 you should still get an annual prostate exam

side effects

- for the first few months of estrogen therapy, many experience nausea similar to morning sickness in pregnancy
- risk of blot-clots
- high blood pressure may be increased by estrogen

risks associated with estrogen are greatly reduced by quitting smoking

what estrogen won't do

- estrogen will not raise voice pitch
- adam's apple will not shrink
- lost hair won't regrow
- 'mones will not grow a vagina, uterus or ovaries
- you will not get a cycle (menstruate)

this information is reprinted from a pamphlet created by Adrian Lowe for the Trans-health Information Project.

Philadelphia Resources:

Trans-health Information Project (TIP)
21 South 12th Street, 10th floor
offers free classes for trans and gender variant people on hormones and self-injection, as well as a Resource Specialist

Mazzoni Center Family and Community Medicine
809 Locust Street
LGBT Health Center where providers prescribe hormones based on informed consent

Jonathan Lax Center
1233 Locust St
HIV Care Clinic where providers prescribe hormones based on informed consent

Stalkers by Renée

For a gay person in prison, one of the worst elements to deal with are the stalkers. Doesn't matter if you are on the downlow or out like a queen, the perverted stalker will intrude into your life.

There are two kinds of stalkers. The first is one who will pursue stealthily in hopes of getting quickie sex or a possible DL relationship. These are harmless by nature and have fairly respectable intentions. Most are bi-curious and inexperienced.

The second type is the Gamer who steals up under cover to ensnare you. These are problematic. They are sexual predators who will seek to try to take others as sexual prey. To them it is all a big game and they usually don't take no as an answer. They are cunning, manipulative and will rape if need be.

With the Pursuer and the Gamer, tactics vary according to circumstances, but the motives never change. Once you have identified a stalker after you, there are three things to do:

- A. Don't panic; keep your wits about you and your emotions in check.
- B. Ignore them as best you can until they cross the line.
- C. Do not confront in an agitated state. Rather, calmly and rationally state that you are not interested in receiving their attentions.

If they persist, then your best bet is to report them for sexual harassment. This isn't being an informant, rather it sends the message loud and clear to all that you don't play games. The last thing a stalker wants is to have the guards/staff intervene. Once reported or revealed, they back off. After all, stalkers are considered the dregs of prison society and held in low esteem to begin with. Never give in to them!

Legal Update: ID Adrian Lowe

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation has relaxed their policy to allow transgender individuals to change the gender marker on **state ID** and driver's licenses without requiring proof of surgery. Under the new regulations, a medical provider or licensed social worker must fill out a form confirming that the person seeking the change lives full-time in their gender.

This follows on the heels of a change to the rules governing **passports** announced by the Obama administration as part of LGBT Pride month. Passport agencies used to require proof of surgery. Under the new requirements, an applicant must present a certification from a doctor stating that the applicant has undergone "appropriate clinical treatment" for gender transition. What "appropriate clinical treatment" means is between the person seeking the passport and their doctor.

Little Stickers, Big Problem

Public Transportation Policy of Using Gender Stickers Puts Riders at Risk by Nico Amador

Picture this: You've had a long day, you're exhausted, it's cold out, all you want to do is get from wherever you are to wherever you're going as quickly and with as little drama as possible. You try to get on the bus (or the train or the trolley) and the driver takes one look at you and starts questioning you about your gender, LOUDLY, in front of the other passengers. What's worse is that the driver is also telling you that you can't get on because they don't believe you paid for the pass you are using. You have no choice but to pay an extra fare or wait for the next bus. Ugh, what a terrible, humiliating and dangerous situation to be in.

Unfortunately, this has happened to many trans, genderqueer, androgynous and even a few non-trans, straight people in Philadelphia because our public transportation system, known as SEPTA, requires the use of male "M" or female "F" stickers on the ironically named transpasses, which are pre-paid monthly or weekly commuter passes. Some drivers and conductors use this policy as an excuse to intentionally harass trans riders when they try to board a bus or train, others don't have bad intentions but still end up humiliating a rider by making incorrect assumptions about a person's gender or because they are unfamiliar with trans identities.



Why does SEPTA use the M/F gender stickers?



The M/F gender stickers are the only form of identifying information on transpasses, and SEPTA's reasoning is that the use of the stickers will stop a person from sharing their pass with someone else, such as their heterosexual partner, and that way SEPTA won't lose money. Obviously, SEPTA makes many assumptions here about who will be sharing with whom. While you might not be able to share with a person of a different

gender, you can still share your pass with any friend, co-worker, or same-gendered partner, so the very rationale behind using the stickers has

never really made a whole lot of sense. Even so, the policy has been in place for about 30 years!

I am involved with a group called Riders Against Gender Exclusion (RAGE), which was formed to create a grassroots response to this problem and to pressure SEPTA to change this policy. Our position is that the use of the gender stickers is wasteful, and pointless, but most importantly, discriminatory against trans people. We've spoken to many trans riders and collected a number of testimonials that document the problems that people have faced because of this policy.

Not only is it embarrassing to have your gender questioned in front of other people or frustrating to be forced to pay extra because the driver won't allow you to use a pass you've already paid \$80.00 for, but it can also be dangerous. We heard from one woman who said that after being questioned about her gender by a train conductor, two male passengers began harassing her and followed her after she got off the train, making threatening comments. We know that when trans people are already twice as likely to be violently attacked than non-trans people, SEPTA shouldn't be putting people at greater risk by alerting others on the train to someone's trans identity.

What are people doing to change this?

One of the first people to take a public stand on the issue was Charlene Arcila, a Philadelphia local and community advocate. In 2007, after trying to



Charlene Arcila

board a bus and being told she couldn't use her transpass because the driver told her she had the wrong sticker, Charlene worked with Equality Advocates (now Mazzoni Center Legal Services) to file a formal complaint with the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations. The Human Relations Commission is currently conducting an investigation on the treatment Charlene received during this incident. In response to this policy and the trouble it was causing trans people, the Trans-health Information Project also did education and awareness raising on this issue by printing fake transpasses with "M2F" and "F2M" stickers on them.

RAGE was formed in 2009 by a few SEPTA riders who shared the feeling that this policy was pointless, caused harm to trans people and could be changed through a grassroots campaign. In May of 2009 RAGE launched a Facebook group and was surprised to acquire over 500 members within a week.

Encouraged by the response, RAGE took the next step of meeting with the Community Advisory Committee (CAC), an official SEPTA body meant to represent community concerns and make non-binding

recommendations to SEPTA. At that meeting, the CAC voted unanimously to recommend that SEPTA stop the use of the gender stickers.

SEPTA General Manager Joe Casey refused to take action to comply with this request. As a next step, RAGE collected numerous testimonials from riders who experienced harassment, fear, or humiliation because of the gender sticker policies. RAGE also launched a petition drive and in four months collected 1,500 signatures asking Joe Casey to remove gender stickers from transpasses. So far, just about everyone we've talked to agrees the stickers should be removed.

In October 2009, Joe Casey and other SEPTA officials agreed to meet with representatives from RAGE. At this meeting, RAGE presented the testimonials and petitions and asked SEPTA to take immediate action to terminate the use of the gender stickers. Casey refused, but he promised that SEPTA would no longer use the stickers once plans for a new fare-card system were implemented. Casey told RAGE that he expected that the conversion to the new fare system would happen within a year.

In the months that followed this meeting, RAGE waited for signs that SEPTA was taking action. It didn't look like any steps had been taken to address our concerns, so on March 30th, 2010, RAGE organized "SEPTA is a Drag," a rally-style drag show inside City Hall Station. Over fifty people came out to support this action. One of our members dressed in drag as Joe Casey to do a dance to "Mister Big Stuff," and community activists performed spoken word and got the crowd to chant along with us. We received a huge amount of friendly coverage in local papers, online forums, and radio broadcasts.



Septa is a Drag rally

What's Next?

Since the "SEPTA is a Drag" action, we have continued to grow in size and momentum. We have collected over 200 postcards addressed Philadelphia's Mayor Nutter, asking him to take action on the issue, and we are bringing people together to draft a Riders Bill of Rights that we will use to continue to pressure SEPTA to change this policy.

To get involved, learn more, or report an incident you've experienced on SEPTA because of your gender identity, send us mail at the Hearts on a Wire address and they will pass it on, or email us at nogenderstickers@gmail.com, or call/text us at 267-21-SEPTA.

Resources mentioned in this article:

Equality Advocates PA
is now:

Mazzoni Center Legal Services
21 S. 12th Street, 12th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Trans-health Information Project
21 S. 12th Street, 10th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Philadelphia Human Relations Commission
601 Walnut Street
Suite 300 South
Philadelphia, PA 19106

We want to hear from you!

We welcome your:

- Letters responding to this edition
- Artwork (black and white)
- Articles
- Contribuciones en español son muy muy bienvenidos!
- We are looking for help translating articles into Spanish. If you are bilingual and would like to help with this project, please write to us!
- Poetry
- Ideas
- Commissary recipes

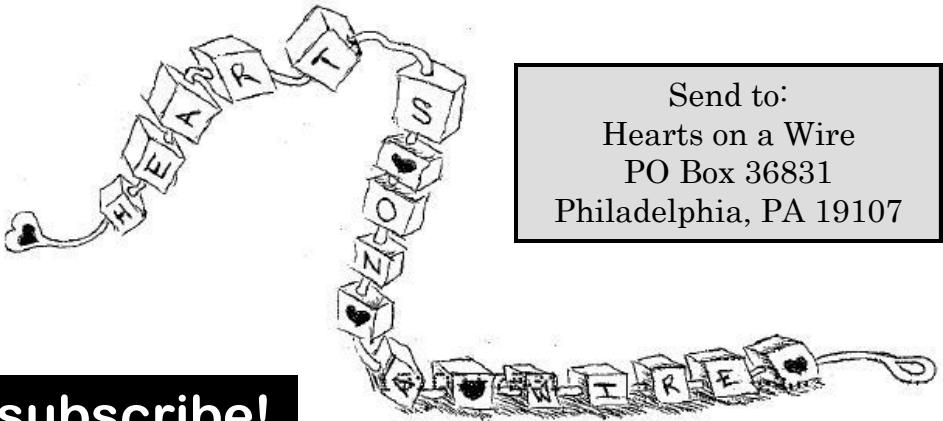
Next Issue:

We are hoping to focus on **commissary**. We are looking for **articles from you** addressing topics related to commissary. Some ideas:

- Comparing what is allowed for male and female institutions. Why is there a difference? What is really going on here?
- What do you wish was on the commissary list but it isn't? Why do you think it's not?
- Who is profiting from this system?
- Condoms.
- Food/nutrition issues.
- What can be done to change this system? From outside? From inside?
- Any other ideas you may have

If you contribute something, make sure you tell us:

1. Exactly how you want to be credited [anonymous, your legal name & ID number, the name you use, your nickname, etc.]
2. Whether it's OK to say the facility you are/were in



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