

healing words by Dr. Mike

black males exiting prisons



The prison industrial complex is being impacted in these days of state and federal budget cuts. Put forth as a measure to "get tough on crime," mandatory minimum sentencing for drug offenses was enacted in the same mid-'90s era as the Three Strikes legislation. Just months ago during the 2004 Election, Californians voted to rescind some language in the Three Strikes law due to unnecessary costs to taxpayers and the state. California prisons are overcrowded with many inmates having been convicted because of Three Strikes. Legislators boast to their constituents about removing criminals from the streets, but after ten years, the long-term financial affects of housing prisoners are now being felt by the state government.

In Georgia, it costs \$24,000 annually to house an inmate. Georgia is not yet faced with overcrowded prisons, but budget cuts by the Department of Corrections' administrators have closed and/or relocated transitional/re-entry programs, ceased rehabilitation programs within prisons, and reduced staff. Many argue that the lack of staff will cause unsafe environments for the staff and guards remaining behind. It is also been argued that the environment within the prison populations has increasingly become more unsafe and hostile.

Condoms are not allowed in most prisons and Georgia prisons are no exception. As inmates are tested for sexually transmitted infections upon entrance to prison, they are not tested prior to re-entry into civilian population. Georgia officials state that the issue is one of cost. Repeated testing throughout the inmate population is costly to the state in an already tight budget. As a result, random and repeated testing is sacrificed due to financial restraints. And, recall that approximately 3,000 inmates will be released to local Georgia communities beginning in a few weeks. The majority of these released inmates, too, will be African American.

Black churches have appealed to legislators and the Department of Corrections for funding to offer transition-to-community programs as a viable option to develop skill sets for employment by these former prisoners. Again, budgetary constraints have hindered the process. Black clergy are to be commended for the desire to open their doors to these individuals. Economics notwithstanding, the larger public health question remains: What will be the behaviors (i.e. sex and drug use), of these former inmates once they re-enter the local community?

Visit Dr. Mike online at www.drmikeyeaver.com. **10**