

PRISONERS' ADVICE SERVICE

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THE INDEPENDENT LEGAL CHARITY PROVIDING INFORMATION AND
REPRESENTATION TO PRISONERS

JUSTICE BEHIND BARS

Dear Friend of PAS

With the festive season once again upon us, PAS is delighted to share our Christmas Newsletter with you.

Below you will find a recent case-study in which PAS successfully challenged an illegal local prison policy regarding legally privileged mail. We also examine recent projections which suggest that the prison population will soon reach 100,000 and celebrate our first year of Outreach Clinics at HMP Wormwood Scrubs.

Please be aware that our Advice Line will be closed from Wednesday 24th December and will reopen on Monday 5 January.

Finally, may we take this opportunity to wish all our supporters and followers a very merry holiday and a Happy New Year.



Case-Study: PAS Successfully Challenges Legally Privileged Mail Policy

Prisoner A contacted PAS after being transferred to a prison where staff routinely asked all prisoners to open their legally privileged mail in front of them.

PAS' Advice Line Caseworker advised Prisoner A to submit a complaint, as this was a clear breach of Prison Rule 39, which prohibits unauthorised opening or reading of legally privileged material by prison staff. Prisoner A formally complained to the prison, but officers insisted that staff were authorised to ask all prisoners to open their legal mail in front of them since they were not actually reading the mail.

PAS subsequently emailed the prison governor, raising this concerning practice at the prison, which had been in place for almost an entire year. PAS explained to the prison that any blanket interference with legally privileged mail - including

opening the mail in front of officers - is a breach of Rule 39. Decisions to open prisoners' mail should be made on a case-by-case basis and only where the governor has reasonable cause to believe either that it contains an illicit enclosure or is not from a recognised legal adviser or other body covered by Rule 39. We therefore asked the governor to urgently investigate the matter, ensure that staff were aware of the correct procedures for Rule 39 correspondence, and rescind the local policy authorising staff to routinely ask that prisoners open their legal correspondence in front of staff.

PAS promptly received a response from the governor explaining that a new member of the senior management team had put out this notice in error, and that it had been rescinded. The governor himself also reminded staff of the correct process in handling legally privileged mail, and a notice to staff was issued reiterating the correct, formal processes.

MOJ Predicts Prison Population Will Reach 100,000 By 2030

As many of you will know, the prison population in England and Wales has risen exponentially in the last 30 years to 87,056. (Howard League for Penal Reform, December 2025). Nearly half (49.6%) of all jails in England and Wales are currently graded as 'of concern' or 'serious concern', with the number of deaths in prison rising by 30% over the past year to 411 - 96 of which were self-inflicted.

Nevertheless, the Ministry of Justice now projects that the prison population will increase to between 98,000 and 103,600 by March 2030 – with a central estimate of 100,600. Specifically, the adult male prison population is projected to increase to 95,400; the population of older prisoners from 16,163 to around 18,600 and the female prison population from 3,527 to 3,900.

The projected increase is driven by several factors including: continued growth in police charging and prosecutorial activity; increased flows into the courts; and increases in the numbers of offenders recalled to custody.

Worryingly, the rising number of people in prison only increases the probability that the rights of prisoners be overlooked – or ignored – by overworked prison staff or stymied by Prison Service bureaucracy. PAS' work to educate prisoners with regards to their legal rights will remain a lifeline for those in custody, empowering them to know and protect their own rights - even in the most challenging of environments.

PAS Completes First Year of Outreach Clinics at Wormwood Scrubs

PAS is pleased to have completed its first year of Outreach Clinics at HMP Wormwood Scrubs.

Scrubs is a Category B reception and resettlement prison in London which holds 1,144 men. As of June 2025, this included 419 Foreign National Prisoners – 37% of the overall population - as well as 640 prisoners from ethnic minority backgrounds – 56% of the population.

Between January and December this year, Caseworkers successfully delivered eight Outreach Clinics, directly benefitting prisoners both one-to-one and face-to-face. Beneficiaries included victims of discrimination and persecution, such as those from minority ethnic backgrounds, LGBT+ prisoners, and those least powerful – the elderly, chronically ill, those with physical and intellectual disabilities and those with poor mental health.

Outreach Clinics particularly benefit those prisoners who are uncomfortable speaking on the telephone, who are unable to read or write, or whose first language is not English.

PAS remains grateful to the Hammersmith and Fulham District Council for its support of our outreach work in Wormwood Scrubs.

New Website to go Live Before Christmas

PAS is delighted to reveal that our website is being refreshed and that the updated site will go live before Christmas.

Funded by a capital grant from The Clothworkers' Foundation, the site has been redesigned and implemented by PAS' IT support team, The Blue Lizard.

The site will again feature the amazing work of prison photographer, Andy Aitchison, whose image of a Christmas tree behind bars you will have seen above. It will be easier to navigate, with all PAS' legal information more readily accessible.

Last refreshed in 2015, our existing site had begun to fail, with bots continually downloading our guides and information sheets, thereby, skewing download

figures for evaluation and reporting purposes.

We look forward to sharing the recharged site with you all in the next few days.



PAS' telephone Advice Line is run by caseworkers four days a week. Our telephone number is globally cleared within all prisons throughout England and Wales. **Please note: In order to assist a prisoner, we need to be contacted by them directly before we can discuss matters with family members.**

NUMBER: 020 7253 3323

OPENING TIMES

Monday, Wednesday and Friday
10:00-12:30 and 14:00-16:30

Freephone Service from Women's Prisons
NUMBER: 0800 024 6205
Tuesday morning 10:00-12.30

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