

Demonstrators rally at Richmond City Jail

On Human Rights Day, they decry prisoner treatment in U.S., abroad

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From cell doors that haven't locked properly to the beating death of one inmate by another, Richmond's jailhouse has faced its share of criticism this year.

It received more yesterday from a handful of folks who protested across the street in recognition of International Human Rights Day.

Specific criticisms of prisoner treatment were leveled against the city jail and correctional facilities across the nation and [U.S. military prisons abroad](#).

"Prisoners are left in conditions that ought to be intolerable to the citizens of Richmond and the state of Virginia," rally organizer Art Burton bellowed into a megaphone.

Others at the protest argued for increased prisoner rights.

Lillie Branch-Kennedy, an advocate with the Highland Springs-based Resource Information Help for the Disadvantaged Inc. group, urged those at the rally to contact their elected leaders in support of state legislation that would reduce prisoner sentences for good behavior.

"We're not saying let them out of jail for free. We're saying let them earn a second chance," she said of the proposed Virginia Literacy, Education and Rehabilitation Act. "It's not being soft on crime, it's being smart on crime."

Sue Frankel-Streit of Louisa County spoke about abuse of detainees at the [U.S. military installation in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba](#), and at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

"Our resources are being sent overseas to set up torture camps," she said.

Some at the rally held signs with slogans that read: "The War On Drugs Hurts Non-Combatants," "Prisons Are The New Plantations" and "The Real Criminals Are Getting Elected."

Also planned as part of the local Human Rights Day observance were a panel discussion last night and a trip today to Red Onion State Prison in Wise County. Another rally is to be held there this afternoon, said Harrisonburg resident Peter Gelderloos, one of the organizers of yesterday's rally.

Elsewhere in Virginia yesterday, an Amnesty International chapter from Loudoun County held its 12th annual Holiday Card Writing Action in observance of Human Rights Day.

The group sends letters and holiday greeting cards to prisoners.

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