



POST OFFICE BOX 110034 BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11211

Updates for November 26th

11 Nov - Update on Cara and Celeste

Cara and Celeste, recently arrested and accused of releasing mink from a "farm," have been bonded out while they await trial. Corporate media reports and other updates follow below.

MORE:

Cara and Celeste, "the Northumberland 2", were arrested after a mink raid at a fur farm. They were held on multiple charges, including felony eco-terrorism. On the 9th of November, their bail review changed as the judge accepted 10% bail (from 150k each to 15k each) and they are both out of jail after 3 weeks locked up. Despite the reduction of bail conditions, they are still facing multiple charges including felonies, which will ensure a lot of court dates ahead.

They are going to need a lot of support, even now when they are out of jail. The legal costs will start piling up very fast, and it is only through solidarity that we can ensure Cara and Celeste are supported and have the best chance at remaining free.

We have an art fundraiser in the pipeline, but for now, please head to Philly ABC's donor box and donate a couple of coins to support them through the legal battle!

Find it here: unoffensiveanimal.is/nu2

We see a lot of people celebrating when anonymous reports are published. It is time now to be as loud as possible about support. Regardless of their innocence, showing up for anyone who is facing the law means we are telling everybody the movement has their back if they ever get into trouble.

November 13th - 'Northumberland 2' Free on Bail After Alleged Mink Release in PA Felony Case

via *Unicorn Riot*

An engaged couple from Massachusetts was freed on bail from jail last week after the alleged October 19 release of over 600 mink from the Richard H. Stahl Sons Inc. fur farm near Sunbury, off Pennsylvania State Route 890. State prosecutors charged Celeste Legere and Cara Mitrano with over a dozen criminal counts — including ecoterrorism and RICO charges — and they face decades in prison.

Originally held on \$150,000 bail each, Legere and Mitrano were later allowed by a judge to post 10 percent of the full bail amount.

Legere and Mitrano face identical sets of charges in Pennsylvania state court. In addition to the RICO and ecoterrorism charges, they are also charged with Agricultural Vandalism, Criminal Mischief, Theft, Burglary, Loitering and Prowling at Nighttime, Accidents Involving Damage to Attended Vehicle or Property, Recklessly Endangering Another Person, Cruelty to Animals, Agricultural Trespassing on Posted Land, and Depositing Waste on a Highway — as well as Conspiracy counts related to the Ecoterrorism, Agricultural Vandalism and Burglary charges. (An additional charge of "Conspire in Unwarranted Detention" was withdrawn earlier.)

Pennsylvania's Ecoterrorism statute became law in 2006, shortly before a similar federal law — the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act — was signed by then-President George W. Bush. Before the PA statute went into effect, the ACLU said that it "violates the First Amendment because it discriminates against certain expressive speech based on the viewpoint of the speaker" and warned that "people who engage in traditional forms of civil disobedience, such as sit-ins, could be treated as terrorists."

Both the state and federal laws widened the scope of what counts as “terrorism” — a word usually reserved for killing or threatening to kill civilians in order to influence government policy — to include acts intended to “prevent or obstruct” businesses in the agricultural or animal industries.

These laws were part of the post-9/11 “Green Scare” era during which the Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front were the U.S. government’s top domestic “terror” targets. Industry groups and politicians successfully exploited the political climate after the September 11, 2001 attacks to criminalize direct action movements targeting companies for their harmful and controversial practices — often garnering popular support as animal rights abuses and environmental damages became more widely known.

Chris Carraway, staff attorney at the Animal Activist Legal Defense Project, told *Unicorn Riot* that the case against Legere and Mitrano is “part of a decades-long effort to vilify and persecute animal rights activists.”

“Here, the addition of animal cruelty charges adds insult to injury. A society that protects an industry that gasses and electrocutes animals to turn them into coats, while charging those who allegedly attempt to free those animals with terrorism and cruelty, has utterly lost its moral compass. The true ecoterrorism on this planet comes from corporate industries that destroy habitats, pollute the environment, and slaughter billions of animals for profit.”

Chris Carraway, Staff Attorney, Animal Activist Legal Defense Project

Pennsylvania State Police Complaint Outlines Alleged Mink Release

Celeste Legere and Cara Mitrano were both arrested in the early hours of October 19 after the Stahl fur farm’s security system went off and surveillance cameras showed two individuals releasing minks from pens and destroying breeding records, according to a Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) complaint.

Much of the PSP probable cause affidavits rely on the narrative provided by members of the Stahl family who own and operate the fur farm — Mark, April and John Stahl.

According to the affidavits, Mark Stahl told state troopers that his “camera sensors were activated” and captured two individuals — alleged to be Legere and Mitrano — “inside the enclosed property...wearing dark clothing with head lamps...carrying bags...[with] their hoods up.” They then released 683 mink “and destroyed records on the pens,” according to an affidavit.

April Stahl claims to have photographed a vehicle fleeing the fur farm shortly thereafter. (The prosecution asserts this is the same car Legere and Mitrano were later pulled over in when they were arrested.) April Stahl and John Stahl then turned their own car sideways on a road, blocking it, at which point the vehicle leaving the scene is alleged to have struck the Stahls’ car on its way out; April and John Stahl then reportedly followed the fleeing vehicle. (The exact location alleged in the documents is not clear.)

Before losing sight of the fleeing car, April and John Stahl told police that they “observed a backpack, work glove and dark in color sweatshirt get tossed out the suspect vehicles driver and passenger windows.” The items were reportedly recovered later by Pennsylvania State Troopers.

At around 1:14 AM, Legere and Mitrano were pulled over by Ralpho Township Police Officer Glen Wonsock, who arrested them before handing them over to Pennsylvania state troopers Cody Fischer and Jacob Hook – the authors of the affidavits.

Fischer and Hook wrote in an affidavit that they then obtained search warrants for the defendants’ vehicle as well as a backpack and purse found inside it. The troopers claimed to find items including a “pair of work gloves,” a “lock picking kit,” “two headlamps” and “two orange plastic crowbars.”

However, the Affidavit of Probable Cause also includes items of a political nature within the basis for the criminal case – dovetailing with efforts across the country to criminalize anarchist, antifascist and environmental and animal rights movements.

Political surveillance and profiling of U.S. citizens by the federal government based on their perceived ideology is also directly involved in the case beyond the purely physical mechanics of an alleged criminal act.

The affidavit signed by Troopers Fischer and Hook indicates that the defendants and their roommates have been monitored by federal authorities prior to being accused of anything in court: “Following the search I made contact with FBI Intelligence. The FBI Source informed me that both Mitrano and Legere are connected with two anarchist Communes in... Massachusetts.”

Affidavit Conflates Post-Arrest Bail Arrangements with A Priori Payment for Crimes

Troopers Fischer and Hook’s signed and sworn probable cause statements, approved by Magisterial District Judge Rachel Wiest-Benner, appear to misrepresent one of the defendant’s attempts to raise bail money, purporting a notion that they were expecting to be paid for raiding the fur farm. (Wiest-Benner won an open judicial seat late in 2023.)

The affidavit filed by state troopers Cody Fischer and Jacob Hook seems to misrepresent a jail phone call about raising bail funds as evidence that the defendants were promised payment to commit the alleged crime. *Unicorn Riot* redacted language in this portion of the affidavit that misgenders Celeste Legere.

Fischer and Hook’s affidavit notes a recorded jail call by Celeste Legere was discussing their bail being set at \$150,000, but claims that Legere saying on the call that she was “already promised \$50,000.... illustrates Legere was promised \$50,000 dollars prior to coming to Pennsylvania and committing the above crimes.” This seems to extend a national trend of attempting to criminalize raising bail funds for arrested protesters — in Atlanta, a similar line of attack led to money laundering charges against a bail fund supporting ‘Stop Cop City’ activists that collapsed last month.

The state police affidavit also notes that as of October 27, 2024, out of the 683 mink released, 619 had been recovered, 64 had not been recovered and 3 died post-recovery. The source for this claim is not cited in the filing.

Judge Skeptical of ‘Terrorism’-Level Bail in November 4 Hearing

A sunny and tranquil afternoon in Sunbury, a central Pennsylvania river town, was the setting for the bail hearing on ecoterrorism and other charges for the two defendants on Monday, November 4, while locals raked leaves and senior citizens strolled the park outside the courthouse.

The bail hearing was overseen by Judge Paige Rosini, a former defense attorney elected to the Northumberland County Court of Common Pleas in 2015.

Mike O’Donnell, the prosecuting attorney in the case, was elected as the Northumberland District Attorney earlier in 2023 after running as the Republican nominee on a ‘tough on crime’ platform.

District Attorney O’Donnell opposed the defense’s bail modification request, claiming Legere and Mitrano were an “extreme flight risk.” He referred to a map of the area surrounding the Stahl mink farm allegedly found on the defendants and began to reference the literature about using VPNs, Tor, burner phones, allegedly found during the defendants’ arrests, but was interrupted by Judge Rosini – “I’ll stop you there, do you have any evidence?” O’Donnell replied by answering “the affidavits,” to which Rosini replied, “affidavits aren’t evidence.”

Celeste Legere told the court that she works as a therapist and volunteers with various community projects such as clothing drives for unhoused people. Cara Mitrano, who told the court she “ran a free pantry out of my home” and helps with a local Earn-A-Bike program, works in medical data analytics. Both defendants testified that they had no prior criminal record and promised to attend any future court dates.

Legere also testified that she was being held in so-called protective custody because she was a trans woman — meaning she had very limited time outside of her cell and had limited access to the commissary; officers had been instructed not to let her have any contact with other inmates. She told the court that “almost every time I am let out of my cell, I receive pervasive sexual harassment” as well as “threats of rape” and said she’d been denied any access to her hormone medication since her October 19 arrest.

When the proceedings moved on to the defendants’ home address and housing upon posting bail, District Attorney O’Donnell was extremely eager to zero in on what he alternately described as “anarchist communes” or “compounds” — aka ‘collective houses’ where the defendants live with roommates.

After O’Donnell began this line of questioning, Judge Rosini said he could “ask about specific groups” but that “saying anarchy or anarchist is pretty broad.” O’Donnell also pressed the defendants and witnesses on whether their collective house roommates were involved in “anti-law enforcement activities.”

Defense counsel asked the court to allow their clients to bail out at a lower amount by reminding the court that they were “presumed innocent” and had a “long-term residence” in a “stable location” with phone access and “substantial ties” to a community.

Character witnesses described both Legere and Mitrano with phrases like “reliable and honest,” “kind and thoughtful person.” Others, including several doctors and an attorney, offered to house and employ the defendants upon their release. When questioning one character witness offering to house one of the defendants, O’Donnell pressed them on why they thought bail should be granted. They replied, “because we live in a free country, and I think that’s important.”

Judge Rosini also pushed back on O’Donnell’s claim that the defendants should be denied bail because they weren’t from the area – “living in another state isn’t necessarily a flight risk.”

Amidst his final remarks arguing against the bail modification request, the District Attorney O’ Donnell again started to cite the internet privacy literature allegedly found during Legere and Mitrano’s arrest the defense quickly objected to this, and the Judge sustained the objection.

O’Donnell insisted that the higher bail amount should remain in place because “they came here to commit a crime,” adding, “they did ram Mr. Stahl’s car in order to leave,” and that they employed “well thought-out, sophisticated tactics. He told Judge Rosini that “it doesn’t matter if they’ve injured someone or not,” to which she replied “that’s one of the conditions.” O’Donnell also failed to offer any substantiation for his claim that the defendants were in “an organization” when Judge Rosini asked, “do you have proof of that organization?”

“The commonwealth hasn’t presented an iota of evidence to support the claims made by Mr. O’Donnell.”
James Best, Sunbury attorney representing defendant Celeste Legere

The Monday afternoon ended on a slightly hopeful note for the defendants and their supporters as some of Judge Rosini’s final remarks seemed to cast doubt on the prosecution’s demonization of the two women as violent threats who could strike again at any time if let out of jail:

“This is exponentially more than is set for people who hurt people... How is \$150,000 a reasonable bail for someone who hasn’t hurt people?... This is a property crime.... Who are they at risk of hurting?”
Judge Paige Rosini at November 4, 2024 bail hearing for Celeste Legere and Cara Mitrano

The hearing ended with Judge Rosini saying she would read additional letters of support for the defendants that had been submitted and make a decision in the coming days. Later that week, Legere and Mitrano were each allowed to post 10 percent cash of their \$150,000 bail – an option not available prior to Judge Rosini’s decision after the bail hearing.

Both were released without GPS monitoring or home confinement conditions, and allowed to leave Pennsylvania on the condition that they check in with Northumberland County probation twice a month. Rosini also nullified a no-contact order between the defendants, another request by the defense made on the grounds that they need to coordinate a mutual defense and are engaged.

“My client is grateful to the court for recognizing that she is not a danger,” Legere’s attorney James Best told the Daily Item. “She looks forward to returning to her community while she fights these charges.” District Attorney O’Donnell complained that Rosini’s decision “downplays the nature of this crime.” Fur Commission USA, an industry lobby group paying close attention to the case, circulated a statement claiming that “granting reduced bail” “only emboldens extremist activists.”

Stahl & Sons Fur Farm Previously Targeted by Animal Liberation Front

Located in Sunbury, Pennsylvania, just off of State Route 890, the Richard H. Stahl & Sons mink farm was founded in 1955 and currently has 7 employees with an annual revenue of \$298,790, according to business directory information. The October 19 incident for which Legere and Mitrano are charged is not the first time the Stahl family’s mink pelt facility been targeted — it was previously raided in 2023 by animal liberationists who freed between 6,000 and 8,000 mink.

While the exact details of Stahl & Sons’ operations are not public, it’s estimated to kill thousands of mink each year. Mink raised for fur generally do not live to see their first birthday and are typically killed one of three ways — being gassed with carbon dioxide, getting beaten to death and/or having their neck snapped, or being electrocuted.

Images of the facility taken on November 4, 2024 show that in addition to the dozen or so large pens containing mink cages, numerous additional new rows of pens are under construction.

Local media has repeatedly quoted statements branding Legere, Mitrano and the wider animal rights movement as “terrorists” and “domestic extremists” by the Fur Commission USA, a 501(c)6 nonprofit that pushes the mink industry’s interests. Corporate-owned news in Northumberland County and Pennsylvania has thus far failed to note a conflict of interest regarding the entity’s advocacy in this case: Mark Stahl of the Richard H. Stahl Sons Inc. mink farm is the Secretary of Fur Commission USA, according to 2024 IRS records.

Fur Industry In Decline

Mink farming has long been a priority target of the Animal Liberation Front as well as those seeking more humane treatment of animals generally. Banned in 20 countries but not in the USA, fur farms confine mink — semi-solitary aquatic predators who roam miles in a day in the wild — to crowded rows of small, often unhygienic cages not much larger than the size of their body. Mink routinely injure themselves in confinement by fighting with each other or biting and scratching on their cages until they bleed and their teeth and claws break.

Fur farms have also been labeled a “pandemic time bomb” and are ideal superspreader sites for diseases like the coronavirus or bird flu, according to recent research by scientists at Imperial College London.

“Fur farming takes place in a high-density animal environment that allows for rapid spread of viruses with pandemic potential—and for virus adaptation to animals that would be unlikely to occur in nature. This is particularly

true for normally solitary, undomesticated carnivores, such as mink... mink, more so than any other farmed species, pose a risk for the emergence of future disease outbreaks and the evolution of future pandemics."

'Mink farming poses risks for future viral pandemics', 2023 study by Thomas P. Peacock and Wendy S. Barclay, Imperial College London

Between 2017 and 2022 over half the fur farms in the US closed and the value of mink pelts declined by 68 percent, according to the Humane Society. Some fur farmers hope that these strong downturns will be offset by increased demand for furs from Russia and China.

Despite the escalating legal repression of animal rights activists in the post-9/11 era, activists who support direct action against the fur industry believe that they can push it further towards collapse. While it remains to be seen if the allegations against Celeste Legere and Cara Mitrano will hold up in court, their supporters say they are dedicated to helping them beat the case and stay free.

November 18th - Cara and Celeste's Legal Fundraiser Is Up, Grab A Tee Or Some Prints!

via *UNOFFENSIVE ANIMAL*

Cara and Celeste were arrested back in October after a mink farm was raided in Pennsylvania. They spent a few weeks in jail until the judge agreed to a reduction to 10% on their bail as well as dropping a few other bail conditions, and they were able to come out a few days ago. Whilst a reduction from 150k USD to 15k each for bail is an amazing drop in costs, Cara and Celeste are now facing such massive legal costs that they need all the help they can get.

They are facing multiple charged including felony eco-terrorism, accused of the release of 600+ mink from a fur farm. Their support team is fundraising 75k USD to help cover sots of legal, transportation and other outgoings for the long road ahead.

We have launched our own fundraiser, supported by artists [@praxis_vgz](#), [@daisy.lotta](#), [@zerofoursixeight](#) and [@steveortiz_art](#).

Grab yourself a t-shirt, a print (or a full collection if you fancy!). If you grab both a collection and a t-shirt, we will add some free stickers to your order which have been specially designed for this fundraiser!

This is a pre-order item only. The preorder starts today and it shuts 12th December, we will not print any more t-shirts than the ones you order, so please go grab one now, support the initiative. Every single penny in profits will be sent to Philly ABC's run Cara&Celeste fundraiser.

As always, our site is not a shop, it is a pay as you feel style donation where we send you cool itemz when you drop some coins, so please if you can afford it donate more than the minimum for t-shirts and prints! We've set the minimum price at 20 GBP for t-shirts, 15GBP for the full print collection and 7GBP for individual prints. If you can donate more, please do!

Prints are A4 size, on thick, recycled luxury paper. The t-shirts are printed on NoSweat garments, who run a campaign against sweatshops and produce garments that are organic, eco-friendly and only made in cooperative factories.

Grab them at unoffensiveanimal.is/product-category/mink-trial-solidarity

If you grab other items on the same order, please understand they will all be sent together with the pre-order items, so you might now receive them for a little while.

Please, grab a tee and a print, share it around and spread the word. let's support folks when they face the system, prisoner support is our biggest weapon!

If you don't want to buy shit to clutter your wardrobe, please just donate some coins to the legal fundraiser: unoffensiveanimal.is/nu2

PS: Please use your head. Cara and Celeste HAVE NOT been found guilty of any crimes. Don't thank them for crimes, don't tell them they are heroes, being charged does not equate guilt. Do not treat them like they are guilty of a crime they have not been sentenced for. Just support them through the fucked-up road that is navigating the judiciary system.

11 Nov - Leonard Peltier Still Needs Medical Care

On October 30th Leonard was released from the hospital, back into prison.

MORE:

However, Leonard still needs continued medical care, his health is continuously getting worse. For example he is experiencing partial blindness. You can put pressure on politicians and prison staff to provide Leonard with the medical care that he needs. You can find contact information to Senate Judiciary Committee at freeleonardpeltiernow.org/donate

Leonard is 80 years old, having been locked up since 1976, for a crime he didn't commit. His was convicted by a racist jury of the involvement in the murder of two FBI agents inside Pine Ridge Reservation. Leonard does not have a release date. You can find more information about Leonard's case at unoffensiveanimal.is/prisoner-support

November 21st - In Final Plea, Amnesty International Urges Biden To Free Leonard Peltier

by Jennifer Bendery (*HuffPost*)

Amnesty International is appealing to President Joe Biden to use his final weeks in office to “rectify a case of injustice” by releasing 80-year-old Native American rights activist Leonard Peltier from prison.

“As a matter of humanity, mercy, and human rights, you should grant clemency and release Leonard Peltier,” reads a Wednesday letter to Biden from Paul O’Brien, executive director of Amnesty International USA.

“This would not only allow Peltier to be home with his family and community for his last years, but it would also help mend the fractured relationship between Native Americans and the U.S. government, which could be forever part of your legacy,” said O’Brien.

A White House spokesperson did not respond to a request for comment.

Here's a copy of O'Brien's letter, which also calls on Biden to take actions like closing the Guantanamo Bay detention center and changing course in response to the Israel-Gaza war.

Peltier, who is nearly blind and struggles to walk, has been in prison for almost 50 years. He is widely considered to be America's longest-serving political prisoner.

The U.S. government convicted him for murdering two FBI agents in a 1975 shoot-out on Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. But his trial was carried out with unbelievable misconduct: The FBI threatened and coerced witnesses into lying. Federal prosecutors hid evidence that exonerated Peltier. A juror admitted on Day 2 of the trial that she was biased against Native American people, but she was kept on anyway.

The government's case fell apart after these revelations, so it abruptly revised its charges against Peltier to aiding and abetting whoever did kill those agents — entirely on the grounds that he was one of dozens of people present when the shoot-out took place.

The FBI and U.S. attorney's office later admitted they never did figure out who killed those agents. There was never evidence that Peltier committed a crime.

In his letter to the president, O'Brien raised concerns about Peltier's health — he has diabetes and an aortic aneurysm — amid the ongoing unfairness of his imprisonment. Peltier was hospitalized in July after his diabetes reportedly caused him to “develop open wounds and tissue death on his toes and feet.” He was hospitalized again in October.

“No one should be imprisoned after a trial riddled with uncertainty about its fairness,” O'Brien wrote, “and keeping him locked behind bars does not serve justice.”

Members of Congress, U.S. senators, Indigenous rights groups, Hollywood celebrities and international human rights leaders including Pope Francis and Nelson Mandela have called for Peltier's release over the decades. The main reason he's still in prison, if not the only reason, is because of staunch opposition from the FBI. But the bureau's stated reasons for opposing Peltier's release are full of holes, outdated and remarkably easy to disprove.

“The FBI remains resolute against the commutation of Leonard Peltier's sentence for murdering FBI Special Agents Jack Coler and Ronald Williams at South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in 1975,” the bureau asserted to *HuffPost* in a 2022 statement. “We must never forget or put aside that Peltier intentionally and mercilessly murdered these two young men and has never expressed remorse for his ruthless actions.”

The FBI still has not publicly addressed the key context of that 1975 shoot-out, either: The FBI itself was intentionally fueling tensions on that reservation as part of a covert campaign to suppress the activities of the American Indian Movement, or AIM, a grassroots movement for Indigenous rights. Peltier was an active AIM member and an FBI target.

Biden has authority to unilaterally release Peltier before he leaves office. Presidents historically announce batches of clemencies at the ends of years, and particularly at the ends of their terms.

Biden wouldn't even have to formally pardon the Native American elder; he could simply grant Peltier clemency, which would allow him to live out his final years at home with his family in South Dakota without the U.S. government simultaneously conceding it was wrong to imprison him.

HuffPost spoke to Peltier in a rare interview in May 2022. Asked what he would say to Biden if he had a few minutes alone with him, he said his message would be simple.

“I'm not guilty of this shooting. I'm not guilty,” Peltier said. “I would like to go home to spend what years I have left with my great-grandkids and my people.”

12 Nov - The Real Problem With Banning Masks at Protests

Privacy advocates worry banning masks at protests will encourage harassment, while cops' high-tech tools render the rules unnecessary.

MORE:

by Ilica Mahajan (*The Marshall Project*)

On Dec. 16, 1773, a group of protesters in Boston donned handkerchiefs and smeared their faces with soot, disguising themselves as Native Americans, as they hurled tea into the sea. Some of these Boston Tea Partiers were apprentices who worked for pro-government masters and worried about losing their jobs. Others feared retribution from the British crown. Most of the protesters who dumped tea into Boston Harbor still remain unknown, but the conditions making that kind of anonymity possible may be gone forever.

Protesting anonymously is as old as America itself, but Americans' ability to do so appears to be in jeopardy as government officials across the country push mask bans to hold protesters accountable to law enforcement.

While today's activists have more reliable communication tools than did Revolutionary War-era agitators, the Boston Tea Party's ringleaders didn't have to contend with surveillance technology, like Stingrays that impersonate cell phone towers to track nearby cell phones en masse, geofence warrants that let law enforcement request location data from companies about all the devices in a certain area (often without a warrant), professional social media monitoring firms that maintain scores of clandestine accounts to surveil activists, networks of automated license plate reading cameras that can track protesters' vehicles, and even gait analysis technologies that can identify someone based on how they walk.

All this tech at law enforcement's fingertips complicates claims by politicians, in the wake of a nationwide wave of protests, that banning face coverings in public is essential for punishing protesters when they engage in violence or property damage. Instead, privacy experts and activists warn, mask bans could chill free speech and open protesters up to identification and harassment by political opponents.

The earliest mask bans date back to the 1840s, when New York prohibited face coverings after roving bands of protesters terrorized landlords in the Hudson Valley. That same law was used to arrest Occupy Wall Street protesters in 2011, and those protesting the Shah of Iran in California in 1978. Many other states followed suit in the first half of the 20th century, enacting bans in response to the Ku Klux Klan's white-hooded campaigns of violence and intimidation.

At least 18 states have had some form of mask ban laws on the books at some point. Some weren't enforced during the COVID-19 pandemic, with New York repealing its statewide ban entirely. However, jurisdictions like Nassau County and the town of Ballston Spa subsequently implemented their own local bans. North Carolina also passed severe restrictions on masking earlier this year.

Statewide mask ban bills have been introduced in New York and New Jersey, though New Jersey's bill was revised following public pressure to only penalize masking while committing a crime. The mayors of Los Angeles and New York have expressed interest in bans, and one was proposed in Chicago, but has yet to pass. The University of California system recently banned masks on campus, following a nationwide wave of student demonstrations over Israel's invasion and bombardment of Gaza.

While many of these bills don't explicitly mention protests, their backers have directly invoked the desire to broadly limit anonymity.

"We will not tolerate individuals using masks to evade responsibility for criminal or threatening behavior," said New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, who floated the idea of banning masks on New York City subways. "People should not be able to hide behind a mask to commit crimes."

"Take your mask off. Don't be a coward," said Nassau Executive Bruce Blakeman as he signed the county's ban into law.

"Cowards hide their faces," agreed New York Mayor Eric Adams.

Arrests for violating the new laws started almost immediately. Weeks after its ban passed, police in Nassau County arrested a 26-year-old man for using a keffiyeh, a scarf associated with Palestinian advocacy, to cover his face while protesting Israel's large-scale killings and destruction in Gaza in response to Hamas' attack in October 2023. A misdemeanor offense, it was the only crime he was charged with.

These new mask bans have also triggered a swift backlash.

Disability Rights New York, a legal and advocacy non-profit for people with disabilities, filed a class action lawsuit against Nassau County earlier this year, arguing its mask ban “discriminates against people with disabilities by depriving them of equal access to public life.” The law exempts people with medical justifications for masking, but the plaintiffs argued it would force people masking for medical reasons to constantly have to explain themselves to police, sometimes being arrested anyway.

A New York judge dismissed that lawsuit last month, saying exemption was sufficient to answer their concerns.

While steering clear of weighing in on the mask ban controversy, the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends masking as a way to avoid the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases. “Wearing a mask is a prevention strategy you can choose to further protect yourself and others that can help lower the risk of respiratory virus transmission, especially if you are at higher risk for severe disease,” CDC spokesperson David Daigle said in a statement.

Health concerns are not the only source of anxiety for mask ban opponents. Many activists also worry about “doxxing,” publishing someone’s personal information online with malicious intent.

Liv Kunins-Berkowitz, a media coordinator at Jewish Voice for Peace, a group of Jews against Zionism, said members have repeatedly been doxxed due to their participation in protests criticizing Israel’s military occupation of Palestinian land and killing over 40,000 Palestinians during its recent military campaign.

“Due to doxxing, those who advocate for Palestinian freedom have been fired from their jobs and even received threats to their safety,” Kunins-Berkowitz said. “People should have the right to cover their faces, be it for religious purposes or to protect themselves from illness.”

Thirteen states have some law on the books permitting lawsuits over doxxing.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), an advocacy organization for Muslim civil liberties in America, says that doxxing is on the rise. “For decades now, American Muslims have been a testing ground for intrusive surveillance and other policies that I think many Americans would object to, were they the initial target of it,” said Corey Saylor, CAIR’s research and advocacy director. “These things are tested against disliked populations, but then applied to the general population as a whole.”

This year, CAIR filed one of the first doxxing lawsuits in Illinois against Canary Mission, a pro-Israel organization that operates an online database and trucks with large screens on college campuses like Yale and Columbia, featuring pictures of pro-Palestinian protesters and others they accuse of antisemitism and links to their social media accounts. The lawsuit accuses Canary Mission of doxxing a Pakistani woman. Soon after her profile appeared on its site, she began receiving death threats.

Concerns about doxxing exist across the political spectrum. A conservative student at Auburn University was doxxed after engaging in pro-life activities on campus, as were employees at voting machine companies following President-elect Donald Trump’s fraudulent attempts to overturn the results of the 2020 election, as were the far-right attendees of the white nationalist Unite The Right rally in Charlottesville Virginia.

But for mask ban proponents, this type of identification is precisely the point.

“It’s really hard to identify people when their faces are covered, and people intent on breaking the law are obviously very aware of that,” said Hannah Meyers, director of policing at the Manhattan Institute, a conservative think tank, who argues mask bans help law enforcement quickly identify suspects and prosecutors to charge them.

Meyers argued that masking at protests makes it harder for police to identify people engaging in criminal behavior at otherwise legal demonstrations. Prohibiting masks, she noted, would also have the added benefit of dissuading police from using more invasive surveillance methods.

Masking, Meyers said, can “embolden people to behavior that they wouldn't otherwise engage in, you know, push them toward criminality, push them toward riskier, more disorderly behavior.”

In some cases, it's possible for protesters to evade law enforcement surveillance.

For technologies like Stingray and geofence warrants, protesters can leave their phones at home or switch to airplane mode, preventing the devices from connecting to the cellular network, which has the side effect of inhibiting crucial communications. Automated license plate readers can be circumvented by walking or taking public transit to the protest — in situations where that's feasible, though public transit payments produce data on people's movements too.

However, even when a protester's threat model is doxxing from political opponents without law enforcement's high-tech tools, the problem is that tracking someone through social media isn't difficult.

TikToker Kristen Sotakoun, who goes by “notkahnjunior”, uses publicly available information to find personal information about people who challenge her to — a practice she calls “consensual doxxing.” Sotakoun's goal is to get people to realize the actual size of their digital footprint and, in the process, become a little more careful about what they post online.

In a recent video, Sotakoun found someone's real name and birthday starting with only their TikTok handle, despite their being masked in their profile picture.

Even while wearing a mask in public, there's so much information people leave on the internet making them identifiable. “You don't need their face. You just need a really unreliable relative who loves posting all the time,” Sotakoun said. “I think people think the end-all-be-all is if people cover their face, they'll never be found, but they don't realize... [that if they] said, ‘Hey, I'm celebrating at the Cheesecake Factory. Here we are on December 3rd, 2019.’ You willingly gave that up.”

Identifying an unmasked person is fairly trivial, even for someone without Sotakoun's sleuthing skills. All that's necessary is a picture of their face.

Online tools like PimEyes, a facial recognition search engine, is open for anyone to use by paying a small fee. A blog post on PimEyes' website suggests its algorithm struggles when someone's face is obscured, like when wearing a mask.

PimEyes was almost instantly able to identify the author of this article without a mask on, retrieving high school yearbook photos and pictures from conference talks. With a mask on, however, PimEyes found other masked faces with similar skin tones, but none of them were the author's.

In contrast, police have access to controversial tools like Clearview AI, which can identify people through a picture of their face “even in situations where their facial features are partially obscured, such as in low-light or when they are wearing masks.” Clearview's facial recognition is only made available to law enforcement officials or governments, not the general public.

While universally available, off-the-shelf tools like PimEyes may eventually catch up with the law enforcement's state-of-the-art software. In the meantime, mask bans seemingly make it easier for political opponents to identify and dox people while adding little value for police.

“There are lots of different tools that are available to law enforcement. Facial recognition is one of those tools that it's about expediency,” said Dr. Nicole Napolitano, the director of research at the Center for

Policing Equity. But it's not without its pitfalls. Like PimEyes, tools like Clearview AI can make mistakes and incorrectly identify people, leading to erroneous arrests. "Police have become increasingly reliant on and then biased by what the model tells them," said Napolitano.

"There's no constitutional right to cover your face in public," charged Meyers, the Manhattan Institute's policing director.

Indeed, the legal landscape surrounding how law enforcement can use surveillance technologies has been hazy, explained Beth Haroules, a staff attorney for the New York branch of the American Civil Liberties Union, largely because the law hasn't kept up with the pace with technological development.

For Haroules, the potential for omnipresent surveillance means people never really have a reasonable expectation of privacy—an important historic legal standard. "[Surveillance] cameras aren't just the eyes of a police officer," she said. "They are being monitored, perhaps 24/7, in real time. They're feeding images into artificial intelligence, aided by algorithms that then kick out and match you to a number of faces and places that you've been."

That legal haze, though, may finally be starting to clear.

This summer, a federal appeals court judge declared that geofence warrants were violations of the Constitution's protections against unreasonable searches and seizures, though this decision only holds in Texas, Mississippi and Louisiana. Similarly, a New York judge ruled warrantless phone searches at border crossings are unconstitutional. While the ruling only applies to a portion of New York, it does cover JFK, one of the country's busiest airports.

Phone manufacturers have also been making strides with regard to technological solutions to subvert surveillance methods. Google announced changes to how it stores users' location data, making it unable to comply with future geofence warrants.

Even so, determining when police use surveillance technology can be difficult. Tushar Jois, a City College of New York professor studying the intersection of privacy, technology and censorship, said that police departments "would routinely drop evidence in their cases rather than share data" about their surveillance technology use.

Beryl Lipton, a senior investigative researcher at the tech-focused civil liberties nonprofit the Electronic Frontier Foundation, said that many of the things law enforcement officials used to only dream of are now increasingly possible.

"I think there's been a big shift in how we need to think about what it means to have an expectation of privacy in a public space," Lipton said.

Half a century ago, Lipton explained, you'd potentially be able to see someone following you down the street, listening to your conversation. Now, that type of surveillance isn't so obvious.

"That's something we, as a country, really need to reevaluate," she added. "We don't want to be in a position, either as protesters, or just as regular individuals, trying to live a life where we're essentially being followed and listened to all the time."

15 Nov - Anarchist Toby Shone Free in the Forest!

Toby Shone walked free from HMP Garth on Monday 11th November after serving his entire sentence.

MORE:

via *Dark Nights*

Toby Shone walked free from HMP Garth on Monday 11th November after serving his entire sentence. He was released at 8:30am and picked up by friends and comrades. He has no license conditions or restrictions.

The State made a few last desperate attempts to exercise their spite and misery at losing Toby, including removing another close comrade from his phone list four days before his release, but it was to no avail.

16 Nov - Transfer of comrade Marianna to Korydallos prison

Greece: The anarchist comrade Marianna, just one day after the second operation in a row that she underwent and while she had been a multi-injured patient for 15 days in the hospital of Evangelismos, was transferred to Korydallos this Friday morning.

MORE:

via *Act for Freedom Now!*

The pressures of the anti-terrorist garbage, which work in close cooperation with the investigator who has taken over the case, resulted in the discharge of the comrade and her being taken to the women's prison of Korydallos, where there is not even a hospital and therefore any possibility to provide her with proper care for her injuries.

We are making it clear in all directions, whatever happens to our comrade will have consequences and will not be left unanswered.

18 Nov - Anarchist Comrade Nikos Romanos arrested by anti-terrorist cops

Greece: Word comes to us from comrades that anarchist comrade Nikos Romanos has been arrested by anti-terrorist cops during an operation in Athens and has been take to the GADA (Athens Central Police Headquarters).

MORE:

via *Dark Nights*

All we know so far is that he has been arrested in connection with the same case involving the explosion at an apartment in the neighborhood of Ampelokipoi in Athens on 31st October.

November 20th - Athens explosion: Prominent anarchist arrested, solidarity actions worldwide

by Kit Dimou (*Freedom News*)

“No one will be left alone against the repressive campaign of the state and capital”, declare demonstrators

Greek anarchist Nikos Romanos has been arrested in connection with the explosion in an Athens flat on 31 October, which authorities attribute to a bomb-making accident. According to media reports, Romanos's fingerprint was found on a bag containing an unused weapon in the blown-up apartment.

The explosion killed Kyriakos Ximitiris, a long-term activist in the anarchist milieu, and seriously injured another long-term comrade, Marianna M. Two other individuals connected to the flat were also arrested, allowing the police to invoke anti-terrorism legislation. Marianna M. underwent multiple surgeries and remains heavily injured, but was nevertheless recently transferred to Korydallos prison, which does not even have a hospital.

Romanos, who was arrested on 18 November as he was returning to his home, is well-known to the Greek public as a friend of Alexis Grigoropoulos and an eyewitness to his police murder, which triggered the 2008 uprising in the country. Romanos was in prison between 2012-2019, sentenced for possessing and planting explosive devices and for participating in two bank robberies. While in prison he went on hunger strike after authorities refused him access to further education, drawing support from a mass mobilization on the streets of Athens.

Over the weekend, actions, assemblies and demonstrations in memory of Ximitiris and in solidarity with the imprisoned comrades took place in response to an international call for action. In the quarter of Exarcheia in Athens, a political memorial was held where statements written by Marianna and comrades in Greece and Germany were read out.

The event continued with a march to the Polytechnic university, commemorating the 51st anniversary of the 1973 student uprising. The demonstration passed in front of the US and Israeli embassies with a banner in his memory and in solidarity with the Palestinian resistance. In Thessaloniki, the parallel demonstration ended in a mass petrol bomb attack on the police, although there were fewer commemorative clashes than expected.

Solidarity actions also took place in London and Glasgow. In Rome, two people were arrested and fined for dropping a solidarity banner in front of the Colosseum. Anarchists across the Iberian Peninsula have also dropped banners in memory of Ximitiris. In Hamburg, several dozen angry people marched unannounced and masked through the St. Pauli district. Slogans were sprayed, fireworks set off, and an office of the ruling Social Democratic party was attacked. A convergence of insurrectionary cells in Chile have written a letter to Kyriakos and Marianna titled "A death in action is an eternal call to struggle."

Romanos is expected to appear in court again on Friday to state his defense.

19 Nov - Lawyers horrified at conditions for FCI Dublin transfers at Alabama prison

Lawyers horrified at conditions for FCI Dublin transfers at Alabama prison

MORE:

by Lisa Fernandez (KTVU)

Two Bay Area lawyers have been trying to visit the 600 women who are now in federal prisons across the country after the Federal Correctional Institute at Dublin shut down this spring.

"And we were pretty horrified by what we heard and saw," said Susan Beaty, one of the lawyers who filed a class action lawsuit against the Bureau of Prisons in the wake of the sex scandal at the now-shuttered women's prison in Dublin.

Beaty was specifically speaking about her visit, along with co-counsel Kara Janssen, to FCI Aliceville, a low-security prison with about 1,500 incarcerated women in Pickens County, Alabama, last month.

"It reaffirmed for us that many of the really serious abuses that happened at Dublin were not just because of something specific to Dublin or because of bad actors at Dublin, but due to deep systemic issues in the Bureau of Prisons," Beaty said.

She said that after speaking to 60 women in Alabama, dozens of women told her and Janssen that they continue to face retaliation by FCI Aliceville staff for having come from Dublin and for speaking out against the staff misconduct there – including seven officers being convicted of sex crimes; an eighth is headed to trial – which ultimately led to the abrupt closure of FCI Dublin in April.

"We talked to multiple women who allege that they were raped and sexually assaulted by Aliceville guards in the last one to two years, and in at least one case the guard was allowed to continue working at the prison for months after sexual assault allegations were made," Beaty said. "It honestly felt like being at Dublin, you know, prior to the implosion."

The Bureau of Prisons refused to say how many employees are on leave or under investigation.

However, at least two officers have been sentenced for sex crimes in the last five years, according to the Department of Justice. Eric Todd Ellis was sentenced to 18 months in prison for having sex in the laundry

room with an incarcerated woman in 2020 and Robert Smith was sentenced to 24 months in prison for engaging in sex acts with an incarcerated woman in 2019, and another woman in 2018.

In a lengthy statement to *KTVU* this week, BOP spokesman Benjamin O'Conne did say that the Bureau of Prisons "strongly condemns all forms of sexually abusive behavior and takes seriously our duty to protect the individuals entrusted in our custody. Actions threatening the safety and integrity of our institutions will not be tolerated. We are resolute in our mission to foster a humane and secure environment, protecting both our employees and incarcerated individuals from any form of sexual harassment and assault."

O'Conne pointed out that earlier this year, the BOP, the Department of Justice - Office of Inspector General and other "law enforcement partners" conducted an "interagency operation designed to achieve our shared goal of maintaining a safe environment for both our employees and the incarcerated individuals housed at FCI Aliceville."

O'Conne said that this operation meant "gathering intelligence to better understand the current environment at FCI Aliceville."

He explained that this included "mass interviews" of the women, a "thorough review of existing investigations, and an evaluation of the intelligence gathered."

In addition, O'Conne said that the BOP conducted "comprehensive training to reinforce best practices and ensure they are fully equipped to handle any issues that arise."

But none of these words ring true for Beaty or Janssen, who have now visited FCI Dublin transfers at SeaTac in Seattle and FCI Waseca in Minnesota, where the women have told them stories about being put into isolation for relatively minor offenses and not receiving mental health services. Women in federal detention in Miami complain they have no access to direct sunlight.

"It was really disheartening for me and for my colleague," Beaty said. "You know, we've both spent a lot of time in a lot of prisons and talked to, at this point, dozens and dozens of people who've suffered sexual abuse by prison staff. And despite that, I think this was one of our hardest visits yet."

Beaty said that the "same patterns, the same playbooks" are playing out, where women who were abused come forward, they're not believed and then they are put in solitary confinement as retaliation, while the officers being accused keep working and then assaulting other women.

As for what can be done, Beaty said she and her legal team continue to write reports for Special Master Wendy Still, who has oversight over the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, at least until December, though her powers are limited because the complaints are now being lodged from prisons across the country and she is physically located in Alameda County.

Beaty and Janssen said they filed a report of their concerns about FCI Aliceville under seal to the U.S. District Court in Northern California.

Beaty also said that the lawyers are trying to connect their clients with resources and advocacy groups in Alabama and other cities where the women are incarcerated. And Beaty said that she hopes that members of Congress hold the BOP accountable for how they are treating people in their custody.

"You know, the same tools of punishment and silencing are being used by staff at Aliceville and other institutions that were used in Dublin," Beaty said. "What happened in Dublin was horrific. But I think it is important that we understand that Dublin was not an aberration, that Dublin was not a one-off, that these same patterns are happening in other facilities and in other prisons."

24 Nov - International Call For New Year's Eve Noise Demonstrations

This is a call for a raucous night of strong solidarity with those imprisoned by the state on one of the noisiest nights of the year.

MORE:

On New Year's Eve gather your crew, collective, community, organization, or just yourself and come together to raise a racket and remind those on the inside that they are not alone.

Internationally, noise demonstrations outside of prisons are a way to remember those who are held captive by the state and a way to show solidarity with imprisoned comrades and loved ones. We come together to break the loneliness and isolation.

We know that prison is beyond reform and must be completely abolished. It is a mechanism of repression used by the state to maintain a social order rooted in white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity. To come together outside of the sites of repression is to also stand in defiance of what they represent.

The logic of the state and capital—of punishment and imprisonment, must be replaced by a rejection of oppression and exploitation. This call is one step in that direction.

Wherever you are, meet on New Year's Eve at the prisons, jails, and detention centers, be loud in solidarity with those imprisoned and to push forward the idea of a world free from domination.

We want a world without walls and borders.

We will fight together until everyone is free!