



the inside journal

The Inside Journal shares news about California state laws, CDCR policies, and campaigns pushing for prison abolition, as well as stories and art gathered from Initiate Justice's Inside and Outside Members. The journal is mailed out in late February, late May, mid August, and mid October.

Who is Initiate Justice?

Initiate Justice is an organization led by people whose lives have been impacted by the California prison system - people who are currently inside, formerly incarcerated, or those who have loved ones inside. Our goal is to build the political power of people impacted by incarceration so we can fight for freedom and bring everyone home. We are 45,000 Inside Members, 260 Inside Organizers, 180 Outside Organizers, and members and volunteers across California, working together to build our knowledge and understanding of the political system, and changing laws to build the world we want to live in.

The Initiate Justice team



What's inside?

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We made some changes to the journal!

Thanks to your feedback over the last year, we have made some changes to the timeline of this journal. We will still be mailing it out four times a year, but we've lined it up with the legislative calendar so that you will be receiving the most important policy information as soon as we can put it together. We're sending this issue in February instead of early January so that we can tell you about the new bills we'll be carrying this year. (See Pages 5 & 6 for Policy Corner.) Like every year, we will be asking all our Inside Members to write letters of legislative support (See Page 5 & 6 for more information on Letters of Support). This new schedule will make sure you have plenty of time to participate in that process!

Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec

We receive thousands of letters every few months! Please give us 1.5 months to reply to you.



When you send us multiple letters asking for a response, it just takes us longer to get any answer back to you since we have to sort, read, and write to your duplicate letters. Also, please write as clearly as possible on new member sign up sheets and letters to us so that our staff and volunteers can read it. For letter guidelines/tips, see page 4.

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A Quick Note from our Executive Director



Hi team! This year is a powerful opportunity for some real change. I know that the media can be demoralizing— but that just tells me we need to keep talking about these issues, keep educating, and keep sharing our stories. We can't let the narrative be dominated by those with no lived experience of these justice issues. We have to keep our elected

officials on the hook, and bring in new elected officials ready to join us in this fight against incarceration.

There's a lot we can do to change the political climate, and now is a great time to start. Let's redefine safety in a way that brings everyone home. Stay in the loop to make sure you get all our action calls as the year progresses. As always, I'm proud to be in this fight with you.

– Taina
Co-founder & Executive Director, Initiate Justice

Abolition is safety.

Our current systems do not create safe environments or respond to harm in a way that repairs or restores safety for anyone. So in these ways, safety is at the heart of abolition.

It is how we recognize the current failure of safety, and how we assert our right to safety.

My friend and coworker, Ra, recently framed abolition as asking:

1. How do I keep myself safe?
2. How do I keep my family safe?
3. How do we bring and keep everyone home without sacrificing the first two?

The answer, to me, is abolition.

– Sarah, *Policy Coordinator,
Facilitator of Abolition Corner*

EXCITING ART UPDATES

Thank you for your submissions of art and jewelry to the abolition-themed virtual Art Gallery. Response letters to those accepted will be sent out by late April. The month-long exhibit is scheduled for August. See page 4 for more information on how to submit.

What happened to AB 1509?

AB 1509 (Lee) did not pass in 2021. This bill attempted to amend the 10/20/life (PC § 12022.53) gun enhancement.

Will IJ have a new bill fighting enhancements this year? No. We spoke with many legislators about bringing a new version of the bill, but we were unable to secure an author primarily due to concerns about the current political environment being resistant to a big bill like this. Without an author who is willing to carry a new gun enhancement bill, we cannot move forward this year.

What happened? A pandemic-related jump in gun violence & homicide rates, election-year politics which often result in only small changes, false perceptions of rising property/shoplifting crime rates, and concerns about past criminal justice reform bills have all contributed to a difficult year for criminal justice reform in 2022.

What can we do? We remain committed to changing gun enhancement laws. We know that fighting enhancements is key to fighting incarceration. This year, that commitment means focusing our energies on holding the line. It means opposing bills that might pull us backwards. If we can successfully hold the line, and continue to let our legislators know that we care about ending gun enhancements, we will be in a good position to bring back a gun enhancement bill in 2023.

The Inside Journal Companion is now available to your loved ones who want to read along with you. They can subscribe to or download a digital version at the website:

www.InitiateJustice.org/TheInsideJournal

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."
- Martin Luther King, Jr.

We are committed to offering our members as many ways as possible to get involved in the movement to end incarceration.

What does it mean to be system-impacted?

To us, a system-impacted person is anyone personally and materially affected by incarceration. This includes currently incarcerated people, formerly incarcerated people, and their loved ones.

As a policy organization, it's important to remind voters and legislators that our systems of punishment meaningfully affect more than just those currently incarcerated. This is how we're able to pass policy like Prop 17, where we were able to show how the costs of incarceration continue well after coming home, and affect thousands of households. Prop 17 restored voting rights to everyone on parole, increasing the political power and voice of people returning home.

We center currently-incarcerated people, but we are stronger together when people inside and outside direct their energy in unified ways for the same goals - passing legislation, building community and power.

For some, this means we deliver their Letters of Support directly into the hands of legislators. For others, we offer this journal as a knowledge bank, while others use it to showcase their political or cultural art.

And for some, we connect them to opportunities to donate to organizations that are actively trying to bring lots of people home. These endeavors have to be fully aligned with our views in order to be uplifted by our journal or social medias.

We believe good laws are abolitionist laws, which means they don't make it harder for people to come home, and they don't reinforce or support the bad ideas behind incarceration. Before deciding to carry a bill, we work very hard to make sure it meets all our careful criteria!

All forms of participation, movement holding, and power building are optional. We are simply here to make them available.



Outside Organizer Retreat

Graduates from the Institute of Impacted Leaders gathered together in October to think about the mission of this work, and to create a gameplan that helps us implement

it. The feedback from our Outside Organizers is hugely important to the policy decisions we make, and their stories as system-impacted people matter deeply to the work we do together.

This event was particularly heart-warming because our Institute classes were on Zoom this year, and so it was the first time many of them had met face to face, even after storytelling and healing together all semester.

Artwork from our Inside Member



This mural was sent in by Inside Organizer, Jaime G. IJ staff shown for scale!

Initiate Justice is here to help you build your political power, with the goal of helping you and everyone inside come home and to create a new society based on true justice. One part of justice is consent – that people should have the choice to agree to engage in a conversation or activity voluntarily. Initiate Justice receives many amazing letters from you, our Inside Members, but we have also been receiving letters with lewd, sexual, or romantic content directed towards our staff, our Outside Organizers, and our Outside Members and volunteers. All the photos in the Inside Journal are meant to build community with you as a member, but people engaging in IJ's work on the outside are not part of IJ in order to penpal or start a romantic relationship. We ask that you please keep your letters on topic to your liberation, power building, education, and political issues, and not romance or sexual comments. Thank you.

How To Submit Your Art to Initiate Justice

Reminders

We cannot give legal advice on individual cases or review personal details on cases. We cannot review legal paperwork, court transcripts, and cannot contact attorneys/judges on your behalf.

If you write to us asking for updates that will be included in the next issue of The Inside Journal, we will not respond to your letter since you'll be receiving answers then.

Sometimes we ask for submissions of artwork. To participate:

- 1 Mail your work to our P.O. Box and write "Attn: Artwork"
- 2 Do not send anything you need back. **We cannot send anything back.**
- 3 Let us know if it's just for The Inside Journal, or if it is a donation to any Initiate Justice project.

By mailing in artwork, addressed to Attn: Artwork, you are giving Initiate Justice permission to use your material in whatever way most benefits the movement.

policy corner

Looking Ahead to 2022 Elections:

2022 will be a big year in CA politics. In addition to most legislators who are up for re-election, the Attorney General race will be closely contested. There is a pending recall of the current progressive San Francisco DA Chesa Boudin, as well as a potential recall of Los Angeles DA George Gascon. Governor Newsom is also up for re-election after winning last year's Recall effort.

Stay tuned for future updates about these elections in 2022 and how you can help spread the word about supporting progressive candidates who favor ending mass incarceration.

Assembly Bill 256 (Kalra): The Racial Justice Act 4 All.

TWO-YEAR BILL

This bill would make existing legal protections against racism in the courts retroactive. If this bill passes, incarcerated people could be able to file petitions to get back to court for hearings to challenge racism. AB 256 did not pass in 2021, but is on track to move in 2022 and be sent to the Governor by Fall.

- Under AB 256, these are the following ways to challenge racial bias in someone's case:
- Explicit racial bias by an attorney, judge, law enforcement officer, expert witness, or juror involved in the case.
- Use of racially discriminatory language in court and during the criminal proceedings, whether intentional or not.
- Racial bias in jury selection, such as removing all or nearly all people of color from the jury.
- Statistical disparities in charging and convictions – that is, evidence that people of one race are proportionately charged or convicted of a specific crime or enhancement.
- Statistical disparities in sentencing – that is, evidence that people of one race receive longer or more severe sentences, including the death penalty or life without parole.
- The statistical data to support the racial disparities will be available in the future.

NEW LEGISLATION

Assembly Bill 2632 (Holden): California Mandela Rules on Solitary Confinement

AB 2632 provides a clear definition of what constitutes solitary confinement in jails, prisons, and immigration detention facilities, and sets limits on how it can be used. This bill ends the use of solitary confinement for vulnerable populations, including those with disabilities, pregnant women, and other vulnerable populations. The bill prohibits long-term solitary/segregated confinement by limiting the time spent in confinement to not more than 15 consecutive days, or 20 days total in any 60-day period; and require facilities to keep clear records on the use of solitary confinement in order to provide public transparency.

This bill is named after Nelson Mandela, South African revolutionary leader who was incarcerated for 27 years because of his political activism. In his honor, the the United Nations ratified the Nelson Mandela Rules in 2015, prohibiting any period of segregation beyond 15 days and defining it as torture. This is the international standard that many other countries in the world use.

Please complete a letter of support for this bill by using the template included. Tell CA legislators why AB 2632 (Holden) needs to pass!

See page 6 for information on why a Letter of Support is so important, and how to address your envelope so we will get your letter in time!

NEW LEGISLATION

Assembly Bill 2195 (Jones-Sawyer): The Alternative Plea Act

This bill will create an alternative plea for those charged with specified drug offenses to protect immigrants and other state residents from having a drug conviction and facing collateral consequences. This bill will stop unnecessary deportations for minor drug offenses for noncitizens by providing a safe alternative plea option to resolve their case. In creating an alternative plea, California citizens will also be able to avoid the devastating life-long consequences of a drug conviction, which can include the loss of educational opportunities, housing, public benefits, child custody, and immigration status.

This bill focuses on the intersection of the criminal justice system and immigration law, sometimes called "crimmigration". Convictions related to drug offenses are the most common basis for arrests and detention by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). We are excited to work on a bill that protects all communities from the devastating impacts of mass incarceration.

NEW LEGISLATION

Senate Bill 875 (Skinner): Parole Suitability Reform

This bill blocks the Board of Parole Hearings from using any discriminatory factors in reaching a finding of unsuitability for parole, including, but not limited to: The person's race or ethnicity, cognitive or physical impairment, current or prior history of mental illness, an incarcerated person's ability to express complex or abstract concepts, among other factors.

NEW LEGISLATION

Senate Bill 1106 (Wiener): The Fresh Start Act

This bill prevents restitution from acting as a barrier to criminal record relief like expungement or record sealing. Expungement or sealing criminal records increases access to employment, education, housing and other social services which support successful re-entry. In the future, we will tackle other areas related to restitution, like ending collateral consequences for people who owe restitution, CDCR garnishment, and finding other ways to provide compensation for crime survivors.

INITIATE JUSTICE MAILING ADDRESS

Attn: Letter of Support
PO BOX 15836
Los Angeles, CA 90015



◀◀◀ Be sure to address your envelope like this, with nothing else in it, so we can process it right away!

A Legislative Letter of Support is a short letter that goes to your representatives and lets them know that you support, or don't support, a bill. It also tells them a few reasons why you feel how you do, including any personal stories that show how it would impact yourself, your family, or your community. Representatives use these letters to get an idea for how their constituency feels about the bill. They use them to make decisions, often counting them up to see how many people are on either side. The personal stories included can make a big impact. Last year, Assemblymember Alex Lee received a letter of support from one of our Inside Members and read it aloud to the Assembly Public Safety committee.

For Initiate Justice bills, we always provide a template like the one included with this journal! This is an important way to stay involved in the legislative process! **In 2021, we received over 1,500 Letters of Support from Inside Members. Can we double that in 2022?**

AB 965 update: AB 965 is currently being implemented to advance Youth Offender Parole Dates for those who have earned Educational Merit Credits by completing GED's, AA's, or other educational/professional degrees. No other types of credits are currently being applied to advance someone's Youth Offender Parole Date, and CDCR has no plans to apply other types of credits. The public comment period will open later this year. CDCR's case records services will determine which people with Youth Offender Parole Dates are eligible. If someone was previously scheduled for an initial parole consideration hearing, they will not be eligible for advancing their Youth Offender Parole Date.