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. We organize, advocate, and build together. We work to make statewide policy change, build relationships with state senators and assemblymembers, and build the world we want to live in. We are 45,000+ Inside Members (like you!), 400+ Inside Organizers, 300+ Outside Organizers, and members and volunteers across California.

Beware of Unauthorized Messages!
With the expansion of tablets in CDCR facilities, we want to alert you to be wary of scam messages that you may receive from anyone offering legal services on behalf of Initiate Justice and organizations alike.

As a reminder, Initiate Justice does not and cannot offer legal advice or representation. We do not have lawyers or attorneys on our team— anyone who claims they are reaching out on behalf of our organization offering these services is unauthorized and fraudulent.

If you have questions, reach out to the Initiate Justice Inside Organizer in your yard/ building!

Initiate Justice Offers Many Ways to Be Involved!
We are committed to offering our members as many ways as possible to get involved in the movement to end incarceration.

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.

All forms of participation, movement holding, and power building are optional. We are simply here to make them available. What other types of opportunity would you like to see from us?
Every year, the California Governor, in this case Governor Newsom, works together with members of the Legislature to establish the state's budget. The budget determines allocations for various sectors like education, healthcare, transportation, housing, and more.

Seeing the breakdown of the budget, and where the State's money was allocated, is important because it allows us to get an inside look as to where and how the California Governor and Legislature think the money should be spent.

This year, during the May review of the budget, called the May Revise, Governor Newsom announced that CA is currently in a budget deficit. This means that the state of CA has spent more money than it’s bringing in, so there have to be shifts and cuts to the way the State's money is being spent.

Along with 2024 being an election year, this budget deficit adds more hurdles to the criminal justice reform space and other movement spaces that advocate for various marginalized communities. Initiate Justice is committed to ensuring people impacted by incarceration are heard when important decisions are being made during the Budget Committee hearings.

The State's Budget Deficit— What Is the Budget and Why Is It Important When Passing Bills?

A Lobby Day at the California Capitol!

In April, some of the Initiate Justice staff attended the Quest 4 Democracy Lobby Day at the Capitol in Sacramento, hosted by Legal Services for Prisoners with Children and All of Us or None!

During this Lobby Day, hundreds of system-impacted people from dozens of organizations attended to advocate and share their experience with the carceral system— using their stories to advocate for the needed change in California to ensure we have safe, whole, and just communities without relying on over-policing and incarceration.

“My first Lobby Day at the Capitol was an unforgettable experience, where we united to amplify our collective people-power in the fight for justice and resilience. As system-impacted individuals, it was crucial for our voices to be heard, and that day we ensured our perspectives were integral to the legislative process. This powerful experience underscored the importance of our advocacy and the continued impact we can make together in the fight for justice.”

-Brianna C.
Community Engagement & Outreach Coordinator

Important Definitions to Know:

California Budget: An estimate on how much money the government expects to make and how it plans to spend it for the people living in CA.

Budget Deficit: When a government spends more money than it's bringing in.

Legislature: CA's legislative (or lawmaking) branch of government, made up of the Senate and the Assembly.

Legislator: An individual who holds an elected position in the legislature, either a Senator or Assemblymember.

The California Legislature— What Is It and Who Makes It Up?

The CA Legislature is made up of two “Houses”, the Assembly and the Senate. The Assembly is made up of 80 legislators and each Assemblymember represents about 500,000 people. The Senate is made up of 40 legislators and each Senator represents about 1,00,000 people.
In May, Initiate Justice hosted a Mother’s Day Brunch to celebrate and honor mothers who have been impacted by incarceration. We embraced the power of collective healing, collective transformation, and community.

We had a panel discussion featuring two formerly incarcerated mothers, both of who are former LWOPs, where they spoke of the resilience and unwavering strength that they exhibited as they navigated motherhood and incarceration. At the event, we also had activities promoting self-care, wellness, and personal growth, and resource tables showcasing local organizations, providing the opportunity to connect with members and advocates of the community!

At Initiate Justice, we believe in the power of healing and community care as a way to drive our work, and this event served as a reminder that every mother and every person belongs at home.

Unlocking the Ballot: Using Data to Expand Voting Rights Panel with the Sentencing Project!

In April, our Executive Director, Antoinette Ratcliffe, was a panelist for The Sentencing Project’s Unlocking the Ballot: Using Data to Expand Voting Rights. Antoinette spoke of the involvement and advocacy of impacted voices to advance voting rights in California.

Panelists were advocates from organizations across the country such as Texas’ Grassroots Leadership, Florida Rights Restoration Coalition, and North Carolina’s Forward Justice. The panelists shared and discussed what has and has not been successful in their approaches to ensuring and restoring voting rights for people from marginalized communities.

At Initiate Justice, we believe it’s important and impactful to immerse ourselves in movements beyond those in California because collectively, we can and will restore voting rights to our community members.

“The Bill Was Amended” – What Does This Mean?

When we say a bill was “amended” that means the language of the bill was changed. Amendments can be language that was added or removed to the bill and are often suggested by members of the legislature, the governor’s staff, and the authors and cosponsors of the bill. Amendments are often made to give the bill the best chance at passing.

Most, if not all, Initiate Justice bills are amended throughout the legislative process, but we have internal standards we hold ourselves accountable to as an abolitionist organization. For example, when we take amendments to our bills, we make sure they won’t have any unintended consequences like carving out certain groups of people, or deviating too far from our original goal.

For example, on April 3, 2024, the bill AB 2483 (Ting): General Resentencing Procedures was amended so that victims have the right to speak in court if they wish to do so. The amendment also states that the victims must notify the prosecution of this request within 15 days of learning the incarcerated person is getting a new sentence.
Wellness Corner: Write and Dispose of Your Anger!

In a study published in the journal Scientific Reports, data showed that if we write down our feelings of anger on a piece of paper and then crumple that piece of paper and throw it away, our feelings of anger will diminish or return to the state we were in before feeling angry. The fight towards freedom is a long and tough one— let’s use this brief moment to release some of the anger and frustrations that can result from it.

Here is what you can do:
1. Recognize your anger: Realize and acknowledge that you are feeling angry.
2. Write down what you’re feeling: List the reasons you are angry and why.
3. Read and think about what you wrote:
4. Rip up the paper and dispose of it: Imagine you are getting rid of your anger as you do this.
5. Breathe and Reflect: Take a moment to pause and reflect— how are you feeling now?

Hopefully, you’re noticing the anger diminish and wash away. Know that we stand alongside you in this fight.
AB 1186 (Bonta): Youth Restitution

This bill will replace youth restitution with a more sustainable and accessible system of compensation for crime survivors by ensuring timely payments from the California Victim Compensation Board while holding youth accountable in appropriate ways that do not involve them paying money. Instead, youth will participate in restorative justice programs, perform community service, or be connected to educational, employment, or mental health programs and opportunities.

AB 1186 passed Senate Public Safety and Senate Appropriations and is currently pending a vote on the Senate Floor.

Note: The bolded sections in Policy Corner are updates on the bills from the last issue of The Inside Journal.

Reference your copy of The Annotated Legislative Process to know where we are in the process and where we are heading to next!

Still have questions or don’t have a copy? Reach out to an Inside Organizer in your yard/building for help!

AB 544 (Bryan): Voting in Jail

This bill will establish in person polling stations in county jails and require county jails to provide voter registration forms to eligible incarcerated voters. The bill was amended to become a pilot program in 3 counties—selected counties to be determined.

AB 544 passed the Assembly and is now in the Senate.

AB 2483 (Ting): General Resentencing Procedures

This bill will establish general legal and administrative procedures that apply to all resentencings. The bill will require stakeholders such as judges and public defenders to meet and collaborate in advance of any new resentencing law, and require that CDCR assist litigants with obtaining institutional records.

AB 2483 passed the Assembly and is now in the Senate.

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AB 1186 passed Senate Public Safety and Senate Appropriations and is currently pending a vote on the Senate Floor.

AB 1986 (Bryan): CDCR Book Bans

This bill will require the Inspector General to post the list of books that have been banned by CDCR on the office’s internet website. The bill will also authorize the Inspector General to review banned books and determine whether there is a legitimate penological reason for the book to be banned, and if not, to remove the book from the banned list.

AB 1986 passed the Assembly and is now in the Senate.
**AB 2065 (Kalra): Racial Justice Act Data**

This bill would have improved access to county-by-county data outcomes needed for RJA claims. It would have also required the Department of Justice, CDCR, and Judicial Council to include statistics in a machine readable format for further analysis.

AB 2065 was held in Assembly Appropriations and will not be moving forward.

**What Does It Mean When a Bill Is Held? Why Does This Happen?**

When a bill is “held”, that means that the bill will not be moving forward in the legislative process. There are various reasons a bill may be held, such as financial, political strategy, and technical disagreements.

One of the most commonly asked questions we get when a bill is held is “does that mean the bill won’t ever be introduced again?”. In short- the answer is yes and no. Though the exact version of the bill will not exist again, organizations and legislators will often reintroduce bills focused on the same issue areas.

For example, in 2021 we introduced AB 1509 by Assemblymember Lee that intended to reduce firearm enhancements, but it was held in committee. In 2023, we reintroduced another bill relating to gun enhancements, but the bills did not seek to accomplish the same exact thing.

Though we may feel discouraged when bills are held, we use these losses as opportunities to form better strategies for future bills.

**AB 2310 (Hart): Parole Language Access**

This bill will ensure that parole candidates are able to fully participate in Board Hearings in their native language, if it’s not english. This bill will require the Board of Parole Hearings to translate all relevant documents in the 15 most common non-English languages and establish, by July 1, 2026, regulations and standards for providing qualified interpreters. This bill will also require BPH to post their language access services and policies on their website.

AB 2310 passed the Assembly and is now in the Senate.

**AB 2833 (McKinor): Restorative Justice Confidentiality**

This bill will establish comprehensive admissibility protections and thus ensure that information shared during a Restorative Justice session will not be admissible in future legal proceedings.

AB 2833 passed the Assembly and is now in the Senate.

Our Inside Membership Manager, Crystal, along with our Membership Engagement and Outreach Coordinator, Brianna, tabling at the Cal State University, Northridge Justice and Wellness Resource Fair!