



September 2024 Edition

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 Members. **In 2024, the journal will be sent to the printer in late February, late May, mid September, and mid October. It takes about three weeks to reach you after it's sent to the printer.**

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.

Institute of Impacted Leaders - Advocacy in Action Day 2024

In August, staff from Initiate Justice, participants from the 2024 Institute of Impacted Leaders (IIL) cohorts in San Joaquin and Los Angeles counties, and Outside Organizers returned to the Capitol for our first in-person "Advocacy in Action" lobby day since 2019. During the lobby day, formerly incarcerated people and people with incarcerated loved ones had the opportunity to share their personal testimonies, and talk about how our co-sponsored bills would positively impact them and their loved ones. There were nearly 40 of us and we met with about 20 CA state senate and assembly offices.

We are excited to announce that these bills made it out of the legislature and are currently on the Governor's desk. Now, we're working to get the Governor's signature by September 30th. (Don't forget to read the Policy Corner on Pg. 5 & 6 for details.)

We also had the privilege of bringing along Eddie H. and Brian A. who captured these images, and also videos. Both Eddie and Brian are formerly-incarcerated individuals who began their careers in San Quentin's Media Center.

Institute of Impacted Leaders

The Institute of Impacted Leaders is a 12-week organizing training program designed *specifically for people directly impacted by incarceration*. Participants learn about community organizing, the legislative process, how to change statewide laws, and how to advocate for themselves and their loved ones in prison.

What's inside?

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Hear from some of our participants on the impact this day had on them:

"This experience left me feeling humble, empowered, accomplished and strongly committed to revisiting the Capitol to be civically engaged." - Johnny H. (Former Inside Organizer)

"Attending Lobby Day with Initiate Justice for the first time was an empowering experience that allowed me, as a formerly incarcerated woman, to use my voice to advocate for systemic change and amplify the needs of our community. It deepened my sense of purpose and belonging." - Dawn G.



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Celebrating 8 years!

This month, Initiate Justice celebrates Our 8th Anniversary doing this work alongside you. For those who do not know, Initiate Justice was co-founded in 2016 in a prison visiting room in Soledad. In our earliest days, we mobilized around Proposition 57 in 2016, built a mailing list of a few hundred people, and co-sponsored SB 1437 by Senator Nancy Skinner in 2018.

We have since grown into a statewide movement. We've built a strong political influence. Not only that, but we have a broad reach up and down the state, and we accomplished several key policy wins. This is possible thanks to our collective efforts and your support.



Over the past 8 years with you, we:

- Co-sponsored 23 bills, with 12 being signed into law and 5 sitting on the Governor's desk today. These bills have eliminated medical and dental co-pays, addressed racial discrimination in our courts, expanded credit-earning opportunities, codified restorative and alternative justice approaches into law, increased access to programming, and more.
- Passed Proposition 17 in 2020, restoring voting rights to over 50,000 people on parole in California at that time. Today, you can register to vote upon release from prison, regardless of parole.
- Reached over 60,000 people inside California prisons with political education and resources.
- Supported hundreds of other criminal justice reforms alongside our community partners.
- Trained over 350 advocates, leaders and community organizers in California who are formerly incarcerated or have incarcerated loved ones through our Institute of Impacted Leaders program.
- Developed the leadership, political power and advocacy of over 400 more advocates inside of state prisons throughout California.
- Hosted civic engagement workshops, developed Initiate Justice Activity Groups, and supported resource fairs visiting you all in person at many facilities over 60 times in the past few years.
- Transformed the ways our state's elected leaders talk about people who are or who have been incarcerated, and brought the humanity of all people into conversations about criminal justice.
- Welcomed home many community members as a result of our collective efforts, from Board Members and Inside Organizers to Inside Members and the loved ones of others in our community.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment and support alongside us! Let's continue this work in solidarity and in power.

What is a coalition? How do they support our efforts? What coalitions are we a part of?

A **coalition** is a partnership formed between individuals, groups, or organizations that come together to achieve a common goal. They each may have different backgrounds or expertise, but they unite temporarily around a shared goal or issue. For policy change, coalitions are created to gain a majority stance in the legislature or to strengthen our influence on decision makers and the public's opinion.

Initiate Justice is part of several coalitions that work to shape criminal justice policies that positively affect our communities inside and out. As a collective, we make decisions on bill language, strategies, advocacy action items, and more. This can include things like choosing how we talk about a bill and who we talk to about it, making a bill a 2-year bill, or even deciding to park (no longer move) a bill in the legislative process.

Coalitions can be very big or they can be small. Big coalitions we are a part of are CURB, Californians United for a Responsible Budget, and TPW, Transformative Programming Works. Smaller coalitions we are a part of are the Free the Vote Coalition, CAPR, CRJPC, and the Californians United Against Prop. 36 coalition.

CAPR is the California Alliance for Parole Reform.

Alongside ACLU of Northern California, California Coalition for Women Prisoners, Californians for Safety and Justice, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Jesse's Place Organization, Just Advocate Inc., Prison from the Inside Out, Smart Justice California, Transgender Gender-Variant and Intersex Justice Project and UnCommon Law we are working on parole reforms.

CRJPC is the California Restorative Justice Policy Coalition.

This includes Ahimsa Collective, Alliance for Boys and Men of Color, Californians for Safety and Justice, Community Works, GRIP Training Institute, Impact Justice, Insight Prison Project, and about 10 other organizations. Last year, we successfully passed AB 60 (Bryan). This year we introduced AB 2833 (McKinnor). A recent collaborative decision by CRJPC was to halt AB 2833 (McKinnor) due to amendments that shifted the bill away from its original intent to protect our community.

Coalitions play a crucial role in our work, helping us strategize what will have the best impact on the most people and building a stronger influence on decision makers.

Introduction to Prop 36

There's a critical proposition you should be aware of on this year's ballot: Proposition 36. Prop 36 would:

- Increase punishment for some theft and drug crimes by:
 - Turning some misdemeanors into felonies
 - Lengthening some felony sentences
 - Requiring some felonies be served in state prison

By now you should have received our postcard to send to your loved ones. We encourage you to make sure your family and loved ones are registered to vote.

The last day to register to vote online is October 21st.

Meet our New Director of Policy and Advocacy

Initiate Justice Community,

I'm truly honored to join you in the fight to abolish the prison system and create meaningful change. As someone who comes from a family and community that has been generationally impacted by the criminal justice system, this work is deeply personal to me. Recently, I had the privilege of visiting some of you at CCWF, and it was a blessing to hear your perspectives and opinions on the issues that matter most to you. I'm eager to continue advocating for justice through legislation and direct conversations with elected officials.

I believe that one of the most critical aspects of my role is elevating your voices and making sure the decision-makers in Sacramento and our communities understand that your experiences matter. I have appreciated reading your support letters for our Initiate Justice bills, and I look forward to working together and meeting more of you in the process.

With Solidarity, Community, and Determination,
Katrina A. Ruiz



Artwork from our Inside Members



Jaime P.



Raul C.



Marco Z.

Wellness Corner

A Week of Wellness Activities

As we wait for the Governor's decision on our 5 Co-Sponsored bills. It's important to take care of ourselves by doing activities that promote our well-being. Take some time this week to do an activity which promotes positive health based on each dimension for that day. We provide examples below:

Sunday Spiritual

Meditate, try breathing exercises, read

Monday Intellectual

Do creative writing, read, learn something new, play a brain game

Tuesday Emotional

Journal, express gratitude, meditate, try breathing exercises

Wednesday Social

Talk to someone new or a loved one, join a self-help group

Thursday Physical

Exercise, go for a walk, sleep, rest

Friday Environmental

Organize or clean your living area, pick up any trash on yard

Saturday Occupational

Complete a work task/project, support a co-worker

policy corner

ON GOVERNOR'S DESK

AB 1986 (Bryan): CDCR Book Bans

This bill will require the Office of 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, upon request, and determine if a banned book or publication is in violation of department regulations. The office will be able to notify CDCR if it does not agree with CDCR's determination that a publication it has reviewed is in violation of department regulations.

AB 1986 passed the Legislature and was sent to the Governor on September 10, 2024.

ON GOVERNOR'S DESK

AB 2310 (Hart): Parole Language Access

This bill will increase language access for limited English speakers in the parole hearings process by requiring the Board of Parole Hearings to translate **important notices and forms to the 5 most common non-English languages** spoken by parole eligible incarcerated people. Please make note that this bill **no longer requires the translation of all documents in 15 languages, and no longer includes interpreters**. Due to the budget deficit we were forced to make changes to this bill that would reduce costs in order to have the best chance at passing it.

AB 2310 passed the Legislature and was sent to the Governor on August 31, 2024.

NOT MOVING FORWARD

AB 2833 (McKinnor): Restorative Justice Confidentiality

This bill would have established comprehensive admissibility protections to ensure that information shared during a Restorative Justice session would not be admissible in future legal proceedings.

Update: On August 8, 2024, in collaboration with Assembly Member McKinnor and The California Restorative Justice Policy Coalition, we made the difficult decision to stop moving this bill forward. The Senate Public Safety Committee made amendments to the bill that our coalition felt diminished the spirit and essence of this bill. The amendments would have excluded certain crimes from being protected or confidential under this bill.

AB 2833 was Parked and Will Not be moving forward.

NOTE

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

policy corner

ON GOVERNOR'S DESK

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 Legislature and was sent to the Governor on September 11, 2024.

ON GOVERNOR'S DESK

AB 1186 (Bonta): Youth Restitution

This bill will **change the state's approach to youth restitution fines** by alleviating the economic hardships that restitution fines create. This bill **will eliminate prospective youth restitution fines going forward, vacate restitution fines older than 10 years, end wage and account garnishments. This bill will also end the practice of joint several liability for each juvenile involved in the case, prohibiting the state from requiring that each juvenile be held liable for 100% of the youth restitution amount.**

AB 1186 passed the Legislature and was sent to the Governor on September 5, 2024.

VETOED

AB 544 (Bryan): Voting in Jail

This bill would have established in person polling stations in county jails and require county jails to provide voter registration forms to eligible incarcerated voters. The bill would have created a pilot program in 3 counties: San Mateo, Santa Cruz and San Benito counties.

AB 544 was vetoed by Governor Newsom on September 22, 2024. It will not be moving forward.

SCHEDULE REMINDER

Just a month after receiving this, you will be receiving the last 2024 issue of The Inside Journal. The bills are currently sitting on the Governor's desk and has until September 30 to sign or veto them.

All questions and updates about legislation will be answered in the October 2024 edition!

IMPORTANT NOTE

We receive thousands of letters every few months! Please give us a month and a half 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.