



INITIATE
JUSTICE

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 40,000+ Inside Members (like you!), 400+ Inside Organizers, 300+ Outside Organizers, and members and volunteers across California.

What's inside?

Pg. 3: Community Corner
Pg. 5: Primary Election Results
Pg. 6: Wellness Corner
Pg. 7: Art Call to Action
Pg. 8: Policy Corner

the inside journal

July 2026 Edition



Journal Timeline:



The Inside Journal shares news about California state laws, CDCR policies, and campaigns pushing for decarceration, as well as stories and art gathered from Initiate Justice's Inside Members. **In 2026, the journal will be sent to the printer in mid April, late May, mid September, and mid October and it takes about three weeks to reach you after it's sent to the printer. Kindly note, our "late May" edition was delayed and is coming to you in August.**

INITIATE JUSTICE
P.O. Box 15836
Los Angeles, CA 90015

Kindly note: We strive to meet this timeline, but due to the nature of our work and the size of our team, *The Inside Journal* may take us a bit more time to complete and therefore more time to reach you. We appreciate your patience and understanding!

MAILING ADDRESS

PO BOX 15836
Los Angeles, CA 90015

WEBSITE

www.InitiateJustice.org

EMAIL

info@InitiateJustice.org

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook.com/InitiateJustice
Instagram.com/InitiateJustice
TikTok.com/InitiateJustice



We're thrilled to share that Community Connect: Owning Your Narrative was a huge success at High Desert State Prison! The atmosphere was alive with music, conversation, and an impromptu cypher that brought everyone together and kept the energy high.

Every photo and video captured the joy, connection, and sense of community that made the event so special.

Thank you to everyone who attended, participated, and helped make this unforgettable event possible! A special thank you to our HDSP planning committee inside, you all held it down!



Everyone enjoyed pizza, connected with one another, and explored valuable resources shared by our community partners. Swag bags added a fun surprise, while games and raffles filled the yard with laughter, cheers, and plenty of friendly competition.



"Going inside to be in a community was one of the most inspiring events I've ever attended. The space we created allowed for all of us to be free in the sense of being able to share, laugh, interact and inspire each other to continue doing the work we do."
-Mireya G., Initiate Justice Board Chair

Road to Democracy Mail Night Event

In May, we came together with our community for our **Road to Democracy Mail Night**. Together, we mailed more than 500 copies of our report to Inside Organizers, Inside Members, and community partners across the state.

This event was our way of making sure the Inside Organizers who helped create this report received a copy. Their hard work in passing out surveys, completing them, and sharing their personal stories, made this report possible. We also sent copies to our community partners, so they can challenge the harmful belief that people inside don't care about voting.

Together, we filled envelopes, shared a meal, reflected on our loved ones who are still inside, and on some of our own experiences with incarceration. **It was a powerful reminder**

of why every voice matters, why our community inside should keep using their voices, and why they should be a part of our democracy.

Our report, *The Road to Democracy: Honoring Incarcerated Voices and the Right to vote*, was published last year, and we're excited to continue getting it into the hands of our Inside Members. If you would like a copy of the report, you can write to us with **ATTN: The Road to Democracy**, or you can have your loved one fill out this online form at: **www.TinyUrl.com/TheRoadToDemocracy** for us to mail one to you.

Kindly Note: At this moment, the report is only available in English.

Community Corner: We Fight Together

3

Across this state, organizations like ours are fighting for us—currently incarcerated people, people returning home, and our loved ones. We understand that freedom is a collective effort, and we're stronger when we fight together.

This new section will uplift the organizations and fellow leaders standing with our community, supporting our people, and building real pathways towards freedom.

Meet UnCommon Law:

For the past 20 years, UnCommon Law has supported people serving long prison sentences by providing trauma-informed legal representation, mental health counseling, in-prison programming led by formerly incarcerated people, and advocacy to improve California's parole process. **By standing with directly impacted people, they're helping change both lives and the public's understanding of people serving long prison sentences.**



UNCOMMON LAW
JUSTICE DONE DIFFERENTLY

If you'd like to learn more about their work or connect with them, you can write to them at:
UnCommon Law, 318 Harrison Street, Suite 103, Oakland, CA 94607.

Your loved one can also request that their parole and educational resources be mailed directly to you by visiting: www.UnCommonLaw.org

How Families Can Support Parole Reform in California

UnCommon Law is also a member of the California Alliance for Parole Reform (CAPR), a coalition that includes Initiate Justice and other organizations working to make California's parole process more fair and transparent. CAPR hosts virtual community meetings to help families better understand the parole process, connect with resources, and learn how to support their loved ones.

If your family would like to stay informed about future meetings and opportunities to get involved, encourage them to sign up to receive CAPR email updates:

www.CAParole.com



Organizer Spotlight: A Message from Henry O.

My name is Henry O. and I am a graduate from the Initiate Justice Institute of Impacted Leaders Sacramento Cohort. I was incarcerated as a youth and spent nearly two decades in prison before returning home and dedicating my life to service, advocacy, and community.

The need to fight for freedom and justice for people who have been criminalized, marginalized, and disproportionately impacted by the legal system is what inspired me to join Initiate Justice and the Institute of Impacted Leaders. **Having personally experienced incarceration, I understand the importance of changing policies that affect our communities and creating opportunities for healing, restoration, and second chances.**

Something that I'd like someone new to the organizing space to know is that in order to truly change the system and improve our communities, we must address the policies and structures that have created barriers for generations. **Organizing is not an ordinary job— it is mission-driven work that requires heart, dedication, and persistence.**

Change is not only possible—it is necessary. Our movement needs new leaders, organizers, and advocates who are willing to continue this work. Whether you are directly impacted by incarceration or simply care about justice, there is a place for you in this movement.

2026 Gubernatorial Primary Election Results

Why does it matter?

Voter turnout in California's 2026 Primary Election is trending higher than recent years.

This means that despite attacks on voting systems and people's voting rights, locally and nationally, people still believe in the power of their vote. It is important that we believe in the power of justice-impacted voices and votes, too.

California's voter turnout statewide was almost 41%. **That means nearly 41% of all registered voters casted their ballots.** The highest primary election turnout since the 2020 presidential primary election, and the highest non-presidential primary election turnout since 1998.

Why should you and your loved ones be paying attention to what's on the ballot?

The Governor plays a major role in setting the state's budget, and deciding which proposed policy changes become law.

- Xavier Becerra and Steve Hilton are the top two candidates for California Governor moving forward to the November ballot.
- This election was very competitive. The top candidates received relatively similar shares of the vote. That means voters are divided among several candidates, and not rallying largely behind one or the other. **What does this mean for your loved ones?** It means that their vote in November counts!

County and city officials also make decisions that have big impacts on day-to-day life in our communities, and they are often part of the pipeline to state elected offices.

- The county sheriff can set jail policies, lead investigations, execute search and arrest warrants, and manage a large budget.
- In Los Angeles County, Robert Luna and Alex Villanueva are the top two candidates that will move forward for Los Angeles County Sheriff

State Assembly members and Senators make decisions that affect criminal justice policy, programs inside, voting rights, housing, education, healthcare, reentry services, and more.

- These positions will be on the November ballot.
- In Orange County, Assembly District 68, there are two candidates for State Assembly member who have less than a 1% difference in votes (or only about 800 votes). The top 2 candidates will face off in the general election in November.
- In Kern County, Assembly District 35, there are two candidates for State Assembly member with a difference of just 33 votes for the top spot. The top 2 candidates will face off in the general election in November.

Did you know: As soon as you are released, even if you are on parole, you are eligible to vote? If you're coming home before the upcoming election in November, you can find free zines and other important voting information on our website by visiting: www.TinyUrl.com/WeVoteForUs. This page is regularly updated with the latest and most relevant voter information.

What happens next?

- County elections offices have until July 2nd, 2026 to report final election results to the Secretary of State. All official election results must be certified by the Secretary of State no later than July 10th, 2026. That means that **some** of the California primary election results may not be official until then. As of writing this article, June 25th, 2026, there are still more than 56,000 ballots statewide that have not been processed for one reason or another.
- The top two candidates from each statewide race will advance to the November General Election. Between now and November, they will continue campaigning, participating in debates, raising funds, and sharing what is important to them.

Why should your family and friends at home start preparing to vote in November now?

- There could be as many as 18 ballot measures on the November ballot.
- Making informed decisions requires research. Looking beyond all of the election ads and mailers that people will receive. Cutting through the noise by learning what's on the ballot early and by doing research is important.
- You can do research by looking at campaign websites, seeing who endorses a candidate, and listening or reading for what issues they say they care about most.
- **We have helpful information for you upon release or for your loved ones at TinyUrl.com/WeVoteForUs. We make it clear who can vote, make it easy to learn how to vote, and even tell you how to prepare to vote.**

What is the school-to-prison pipeline? Why is it important?

The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the practices and policies that push students, often low-income, Black, and Brown students, out of classrooms and into the criminal legal system.

Some examples of this are:

1. A student is repeatedly suspended, and ultimately expelled, for rule violations, such as getting into a school altercation or disrupting class instruction. Instead of receiving counseling or mediation, the student misses school causing them to fall behind and become disconnected from education leading to drop outs.
2. Students who frequently miss school may face court referrals, fines, or other penalties, such as expulsion, rather than receiving the support needed to address the reasons for their absences, such as transportation challenges, housing instability, or family responsibilities.

3. According to a study done by the UCLA for Transformation of Schools, Black/African American students statewide face suspension rates that are roughly 3x the rate of all California students combined.

Reflection: How did your experiences in school shape your future, and do you believe the school-to-prison pipeline played a role?

This is why our co-sponsored bill, AB 1851 (Gipson), is so important. It goes against the system that was put into place to send our communities into the criminal legal system. Learn more about the bill on page 6.



An Update on AB 1851 by Assemblymember Mike Gipson

AB 1851 (Gipson) was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee on August 13 and will not move forward. While we are disappointed by this outcome, we are proud of how far the bill went and the Inside Organizers who helped create it.

AB 1851 started through our Inside Organizing program. Incarcerated organizers at PVSP drew from their own childhood experiences to create a proposal that would support young people.

Assemblymember Mia Bonta called the organizers work **"incredibly admirable."** The bill received bipartisan support and passed the Senate Education Committee with

a 7-0 vote. Mike B., an Inside Organizer shared his story with the iHeartRadio broadcast and spoke about the hard work he and his peers put into this bill.

AB 1851 was also Initiative Justice's first education bill we co-sponsored. It opened the door to new partnerships and expanded our policy work.

Most importantly, AB 1851 was about **preventing harm before it happens—not punishing people after.** The bill aimed to connect education, youth well-being, and public safety by giving young people tools to manage emotions, resolve conflict, and build healthy relationships. Investing in these skills is an investment in safer communities.

Although AB 1851 was held this year, **this is not the end of this work.** Bills do not always become law the first time they are introduced, but that does not diminish the importance of the idea or the leadership of the people who created it.

To every Inside Organizer who contributed to this bill: We see you! You turned your experiences into a bill that would have supported emotional safety for our youth, given them more tools, and pushed them toward a different path. Thank you for your leadership, your courage, and for fighting with us.

Wellness Corner: 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique

A mindfulness exercise to calm anxiety and anchor you in the present. This grounding activity was recommended by Liz L., our New Inside Membership Program Coordinator. She relied on it while serving 30 years of a LWOP sentence and needed to manage her anxiety when preparing for court hearings, board prep, and everyday life in prison. She hopes this grounding exercise brings you a sense of calm.

The 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique is designed to interrupt anxious thoughts by bringing attention back to the five senses. With regular practice, it can become a reliable tool during moments of stress and self-doubt.

How: Take a slow, deep breath, then name:



5 things you see
(e.g., pen, sunlight)



4 things you feel (e.g., fabric, floor)



3 things you hear
(e.g., fan, birds)



2 things you smell
(e.g., coffee, air)



1 thing you taste
(e.g., water, mint)

Continue to repeat as needed. **Remember:** there is no right or wrong way to do this. Do what feels the most comfortable for you.

art from inside

Call for Submissions: Artwork for our 10 Year Anniversary Celebration

This year, we are celebrating 10 years of community power, and we know that you have been a big part of our work over the decade!

So we want to hear from you, submit a one-page reflection, poem, quote, or artwork inspired by one of the following prompts:

- What has Initiate Justice meant to you?
- How have you grown over the last 10 years?
- What accomplishments or personal victories are you proud of?
- What does (or would) freedom mean or feel like to you?

We welcome all forms of artwork and creative expression. Whether you create on paper, canvas, or another way, we encourage you to share what speaks to you.

If you would like for your piece to be considered for our 10 year celebration in October 2026, send it in by September 1st, 2026. **You can write to us with ATTN: 10 Year Celebration Artwork.**

Thank you for joining us in celebrating a decade of resilience, growth, and transformation by sharing your story, creativity, and voice!



INITIATE JUSTICE

Attn: 10 Year Celebration Artwork
P.O. Box 15836
Los Angeles, CA 90015

*Send in your
submissions labeled
like this!*



Art by: Paul D.

policy corner

Our 2026 CoSponsored Legislation:



AB 1851 (Gipson)

AB 1851, authored by Assemblymember Mike Gipson, would implement a Social Emotional Learning curriculum for Kindergarten-12th grade public schools as a harm-prevention measure to combat the school-to-prison pipeline.

Latest Update: AB 1851 (Gipson) was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee on August 13 and will not move forward.

Our Priority Legislation:

Sometimes, we work on other criminal justice bills, not just the ones we co-sponsor. These bills are aligned with our mission, and help build safer communities. **We do not lead on these bills, but we lend extra support to them.** We talk to lawmakers, ask our community to take action, share information about them, and more.

AB 1229 (Shultz)

AB 1229, authored by Assemblymember Nick Schultz, would change reentry grants to support increased housing to better reduce homelessness for those on parole or have been released the last five years from prison. **Unfortunately, AB 1229 (Schultz) is no longer moving forward.**



AB 1958 (Kalra)

AB 1958, authored by Assemblymember Ash Kalra, would make additional clarifying changes to the procedures for Racial Justice Act (RJA) claims. It will do three (3) things: 1) remove procedural barriers that have blocked disparity claims, 2) make it clear that the law applies to plea bargains, and 3) make it clear that the prosecution must hand over evidence in the hands of law enforcement.

Latest Update: AB 1958 (Kalra) unfortunately did not pass out of the Assembly floor, with major opposition from law enforcement in its final hour.

AB 2122 (Kalra)

AB 2122, authored by Assemblymember Ash Kalra, would stop the courts from issuing bench warrants when the underlying charge is an infraction. This bill stops the criminalization of poverty.

AB 2122 (Kalra) passed out of the Senate Suspense File on August 13, 2026. It is now moving on to the Senate Floor.