PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SOCIETY

IMPACT REPORT



Promoting the health, safety, and dignity of incarcerated people and families

"Since 1787, we have focused on the health, safety, and dignity of people in prison and their families. Our work impacts real lives—often at the most critical moments. Each connection we make enhances the resilience of the communities we serve. This report celebrates the work we've done to make those connections and the incredible generosity that makes it possible. Together, we can continue bringing light to the inside and bringing the darkness inside to light."

—SIMEON POLES, BOARD PRESIDENT



Prison Monitoring Manager Angela Damiano with Marion Damick (right), our remarkable, longest-serving volunteer who is 99 years young (!), alongside her son, Dean.

Welcome From The Executive Director

For 238 years, the Pennsylvania Prison Society has brought empathy, honesty, and respect to people confined in Pennsylvania prisons and jails, their families, and their communities. We work for the common good—building bridges of connection that keep families together, creating safer facilities and communities, and drawing attention to systemic issues in prisons so that policymakers and the public can take action.

2023/24 was a year of expansion and change. We launched new programs for families with loved ones in prisons. We dramatically increased our capacity to provide assistance to people in prison who are not receiving necessary healthcare, whose safety is compromised, or are otherwise experiencing degradation. We worked closely with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections to significantly improve nutrition—a change that will reduce the number of people who go hungry and reduce the prevalence of diet-related illness.

Our work depends entirely on the dedication and skill of our staff and our volunteers, who combine professionalism and honesty with empathy and respect. I want to take this opportunity to thank them all for their commitment, courage, and compassion.

In 2023/24, we saw major growth in our staff and our volunteer base. This growth is paying off in the number of people and families we can serve, as well as our ability to provide more and better information on what is happening in Pennsylvania's prisons and jails.

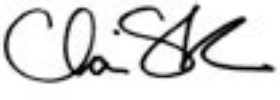
The impact we had was only possible thanks to the generosity of our donors. While some people who donate to the Prison Society have benefited from our services, volunteered their time, or have worked in prisons themselves, just as many have only a slight notion of what takes place behind prison walls. All, like our founders Benjamin Rush and Benjamin Franklin, are committed to the humanity of every person. Thank you.

This year, for the first time in our contemporary history, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania recognized the Prison Society for the profound public service we provide by allocating state dollars for the advancement of our mission. We are deeply grateful for this recognition.

We play a unique role in the constellation of nonprofit organizations, foundations, and public institutions that safeguard health, safety, and dignity. Thank you to all of our partners.

This report tells the story of what you made possible. The Prison Society's work flows from our vision, mission, and values. Our impact is a result of a huge collective effort, and the support and goodwill of thousands of people. As you read this report, I hope you will feel a sense of pride and satisfaction for what we have achieved together.





Claire Shubik-Richards
Executive Director

#VisitsMatter

We help people stay connected to their friends and family—their support networks—during incredibly challenging and isolating times.

REAL STORIES



Successful Bus Pilot Rekindles Family Connections

This year, our buses for families to visit loved ones in distant state prisons made a strong comeback, thanks to a successful pilot from January to June.

"If you have no one coming to visit, showing they love you, it makes you weak. It makes you vulnerable. My father was arrested three weeks before I was born. I'm 30 now, but have been visiting him since I was 6-months-old. The benefit goes both ways because as much as these visits mean to my father, they are just as important to me. I appreciate the Prison Society's bus service and hope the program will continue and expand."

—MALIKA

Read more about Malika here:

Ridership was higher during the 6-month pilot than pre-pandemic!

There's no substitute for in-person visits, which have been shown to reduce recidivism and improve mental health.

However, barriers like cost, lack of transportation, and physical disabilities can make them difficult. Video calls are a great alternative when in-person visits aren't possible, and we're here to help families stay connected despite challenges.



Our Work In Action

Dismantling the isolation caused by incarceration

Limited visiting schedules, a new online scheduling system, and the lack of transportation have made it harder for families to stay connected with incarcerated loved ones post-pandemic. We're here to support families in navigating these online systems to ensure they can see loved ones in person and virtually.



REAL STORIES

"When the Prison Society arranged for me to 'see' my incarcerated son for the first time in three years, tears rolled down my face during our video call via Zoom. I could see him physically. I could see his whole body. I can sleep better at night knowing he's okay. Now, I make regular visits to the Prison Society to 'visit' my son on Zoom."

—GALE

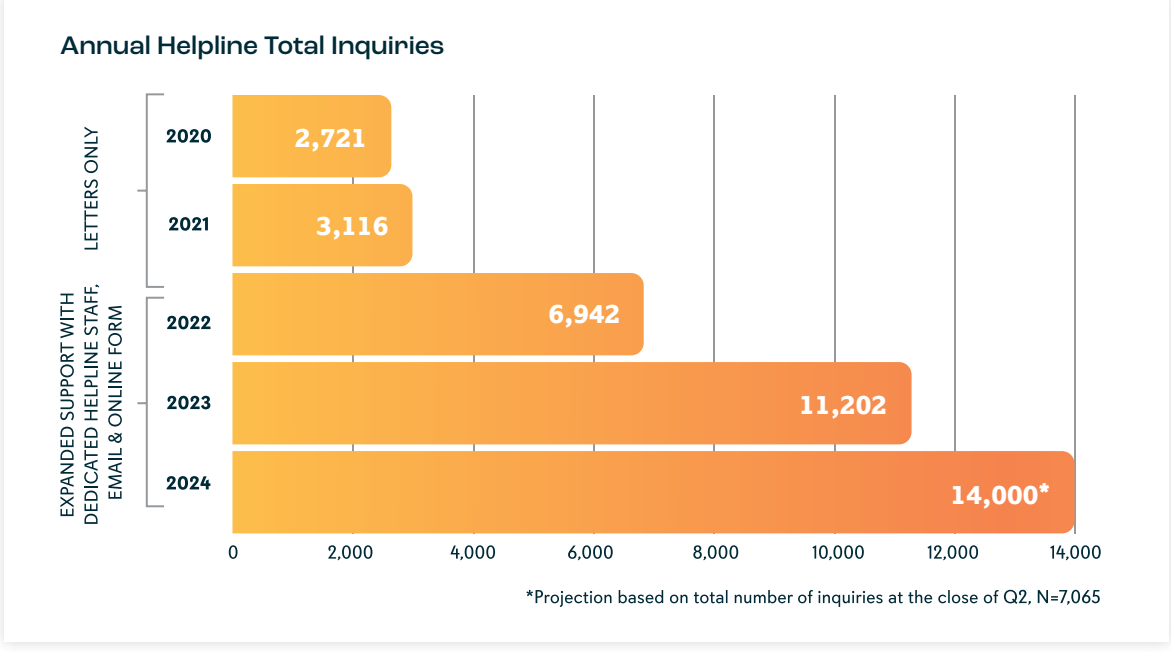
Read more about Gale here:

Help is just a phone call away



The Helpline Breaks Records Again

Our free Helpline assists thousands of families and their incarcerated loved ones every year. Prisons can be difficult to navigate, and many people call us after struggling to find answers elsewhere. This year, we've set a new record for the number of people we've supported.





"We help families stay connected with their incarcerated loved ones by setting up visits, explaining the rules, and helping them prepare for what to expect." **—CONNOR**

A Day On the Helpline

Below are actual messages received by our Helpline and the staff members who handle these inquiries.

NAME:
Glenda

WHO IS THE MESSAGE CONCERNING?:
My Stepdaughter

"My stepdaughter is incarcerated and awaiting her first hearing. Her entire family here in Oregon have been unable to find a way to call her. We're concerned about her physical and mental health and would like to at least get word to her that we're trying to get a way to communicate."

NAME:
Carline

WHO IS THE MESSAGE CONCERNING?:
My Brother

"My brother is currently incarcerated at Luzerne County Correctional Facility. He is anticipating release with parole, and I am seeking information regarding re-entry assistance programs in Luzerne or Columbia County specifically for housing and employment. Any information you can provide is greatly appreciated. Thank you."

NAME:
Ruth

WHO IS THE MESSAGE CONCERNING?:
My Husband

"I'm reaching out for help for my husband. I just received a letter from him saying that he attempted to commit suicide so they took his bed sheets away from him due to that. He isn't eating, drinking or sleeping. They also still have him in the hole instead of on suicide watch. I am afraid for his life at this moment."



"We help families access information and resources so that they can be effective advocates for their loved one's well-being." **—SARAH**

"When people are experiencing specific issues inside of prisons, we coordinate with our local prison monitoring volunteers who can go in and visit with that person and then follow-up with their family." **—CASS**



Shining a light on prison conditions

Our education and advocacy agenda is shaped by the experiences of people in prison and their families.

Issue Advocacy

This year, we've focused on issues like hunger, health care and mental health, family connection and facility safety. The people we help are best at explaining why these issues matter.

FAMILY CONNECTION

"Nothing compares to being able to hug my father and build that relationship outside of a 15-minute phone conversation."

—Daughter

SEVERE ISOLATION

"My son has been in the hole for 115 days. I feel distraught and don't know how to proceed. Please help him."

—Father

PRISON FOOD

"If you can't afford or are unable to buy commissary, you'll be severely hungry."

—Incarcerated Person

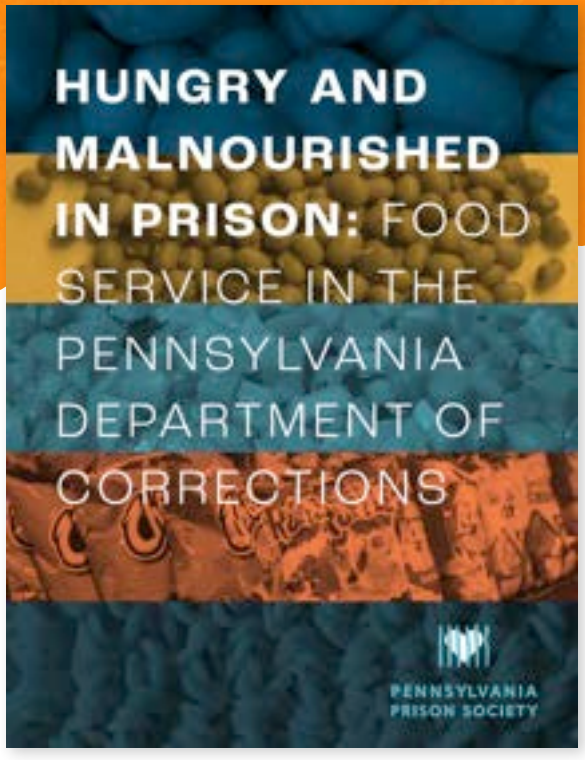
MEDICAL CO-PAY

"Constantly stressing about medical co-pays forces me to sacrifice food, soap, and precious calls with my daughters. It feels so unfair."

—Incarcerated Person

Groundbreaking research on food in PA prisons

In the Spring of 2024, we published a report on food service in Pennsylvania state prisons, the product of a year-long research project. Here's what we found:



- Food served in state prisons leaves incarcerated people hungry.
- Menus likely contribute to diet-related illnesses.
- Hunger forces incarcerated people to buy expensive junk food from the prison commissary.

Read on:

Our research is driving change in food quality in PA prisons

After the Prison Society shared the results of the evaluation with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC), the department promptly developed new menus that increased calories and addressed deficiencies in fiber and key nutrients. More improvement is needed, however, as the new menus still leave nutritional deficiencies unaddressed. The cooperation of the DOC was essential to this work, and the Prison Society continues to work with the DOC to improve food service.

Thank you to our partners at the Center for Science in the Public Interest, The Food Trust, and Impact Justice, as well as Associate Professor Carolyn Cannuscio of University of Pennsylvania and Associate Professor Jeffery Lin of University of Denver.

Growing prison oversight



Prisons are loud, crowded spaces, but are often also locations of profound loneliness, anxiety, and isolation. We are the public's eyes and ears behind prison walls, ensuring accountability of the people managing these institutions, and safeguarding the health, safety, and dignity of incarcerated people.

Meeting Regional Demand

This year, we've strengthened our team with regional prison monitoring staff across the state. They're on the ground supporting our volunteers and addressing issues directly in prisons. Below are actual requests for assistance handled by our prison monitoring team.

Western PA, SCI Forest

8/19/2024 Request for wellness check: I'd like to request a wellness check for my 79-year-old father. He has mobility issues, and I recently had to tell him about the passing of my brother three days ago. Since then, I haven't heard from him, which is very unlike him. I'm worried about him and just want to make sure he's okay.



"I spend time in the prisons each week, visiting people. Our presence provides a much appreciated form of solidarity." –Angela Damiano, Prison Monitoring Manager (Western PA)

Central PA, Dauphin County Prison

8/28/2024 Follow up on prison conditions: I have concerns about the facility I'm in and would like to have a local volunteer follow-up on inhumane living conditions, including lack of power, ventilation, and hot water, leading to fainting incidents among inmates. Someone on my block had a medical emergency that went untreated for over two and a half hours.



"We have 225 trained volunteer prison monitors organized in chapters throughout the Commonwealth who visit 23 state and 62 county prisons. They help incarcerated citizens resolve issues related to medical care, property, cell conditions, programming, and abuse, among other issues. I assist with recruiting and training new volunteers and step in to help troubleshoot complex visits and any issues that arise in the prisons." –Jessica Reed, Prison Monitoring Manager (Central PA)

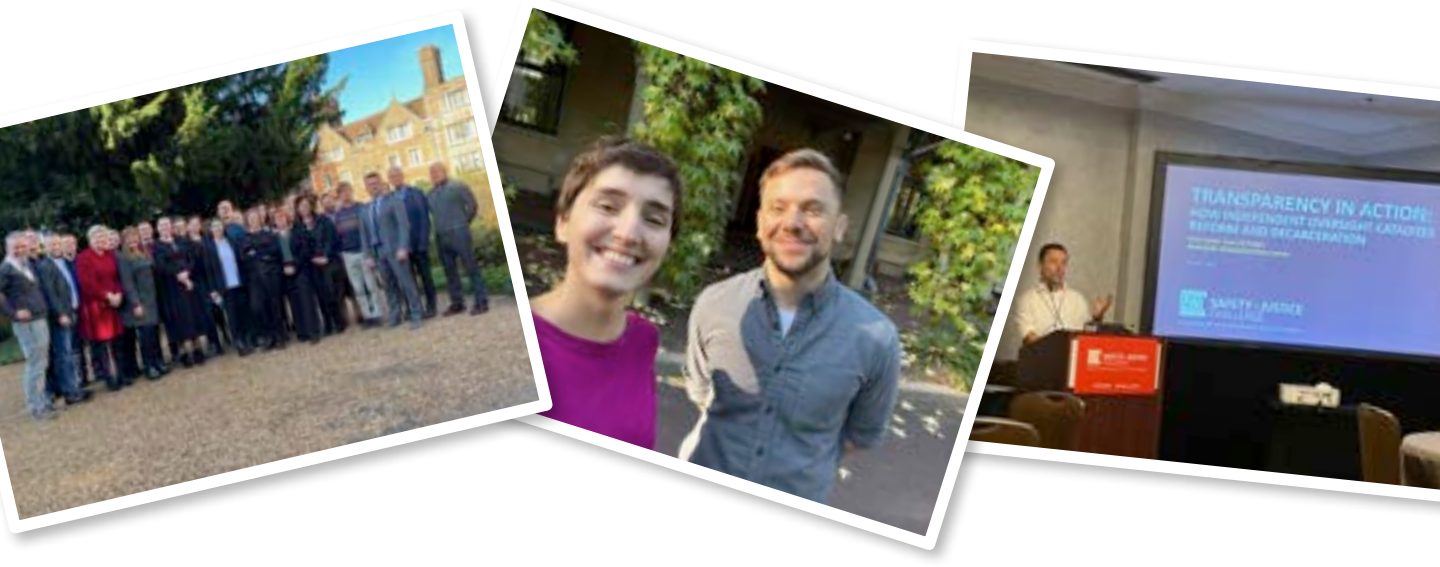
Eastern PA, Philadelphia County Jail

9/16/2024 Request for medical follow-up: My son broke his arm in March, and it wasn't treated, so it healed crooked. Now he has an infected bite on his other arm that might be MRSA. I'd like a follow-up appointment to make sure he gets the proper medical care for both issues.



"The core of our work is responding to individual requests for help from incarcerated people experiencing specific issues inside the prisons. We are uniquely positioned to do this as state law guarantees us the right to meet privately with anyone in custody."
–Dzemila Bilanovic, Prison Monitoring Manager (Eastern PA)

Modeling The Way Beyond PA



We conducted our first prison monitoring technical assistance trip to Arizona in October, invited by Gov. Katie Hobbs' office. With our partners at the John Howard Association of Illinois, we led a crash course in prison monitoring, guiding oversight board members through hands-on training at a maximum-security prison.

We made our debut at two international conferences presenting at Cambridge University on use of the "Measuring Quality of Prison Life" survey in the U.S., and at the International Corrections and Prisons Association in Belgium, where we also visited Belgian and Dutch prisons for comparative insights.

Our Year At A Glance

We supercharged our story with our first-ever **brand video**.



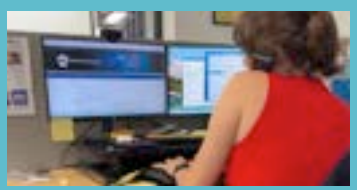
We relaunched our **bus service** for families to visit loved ones in distant state prisons.



We launched programming in **halfway houses** for the first time.



Our **Helpline** had another record-breaking year, responding to more than 14,000 calls, letters, and emails.



Our staff increased by **33%**, including a doubling of our Helpline staff.



We offered **paid stipends** to full-time summer interns, increasing the number and diversity of applicants.



We introduced a one-of-a-kind **interactive resource** for county jail data.



We proudly contributed to **Philadelphia Mayor Cherelle Parker's transition team** and were invited to sit on a Philadelphia task force for the city's reentry partnerships.



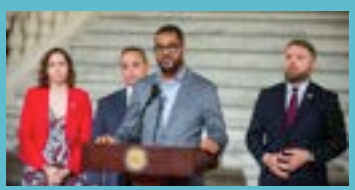
In partnership with our sister organization in Illinois, the John Howard Association, we conducted our first **prison monitoring technical assistance trip** to Arizona, inspiring other states to model our approaches!



We had a **tremendous fundraising year**, with contributions from 16 private foundations, 31 monthly sustainers, and 10 major donors ($5,000+).



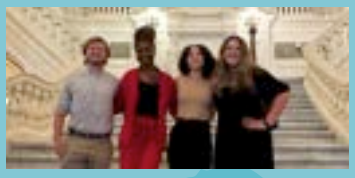
We significantly increased our **visibility in Harrisburg**, holding 60+ meetings with legislators over the past year!





For the first time, the **FCC capped prison phone rates** thanks to a national coalition of advocates, including the Prison Society.

We secured **state general operating funding** for the first time in our history.



We tackled the issue of **hunger in jails** by producing groundbreaking research; the DOC responded by increasing calorie counts!



Our return to in-person events was a huge success, highlighted by **Love Above Bars** at World Cafe Live.



For the first time ever, we have **full-time prison monitoring staff** based in all three geographic regions of Pennsylvania. (Hi, Yinzers—we see you!)



2024 by the numbers:



$351,364

raised in individual donations from supporters like you



14,000+

calls, letters, and emails answered by our Helpline



2,500+

prison monitoring visits with incarcerated individuals



165

participants in our transportation pilot

15

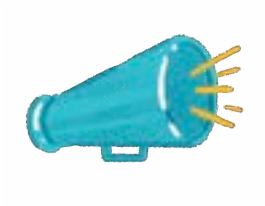
prison monitoring walkthroughs

60+

legislative visits

33%

increase in staff



61

earned media mentions

48

people in a state Community Correctional Center (halfway house) participated in our programming for the first time in Prison Society history

Celebrating Impact

Every year since 1973, we have recognized people in our community who exemplify our mission by volunteering, living, and working in prison. We are proud to introduce you to this year's award winners.

2024 Award Winners



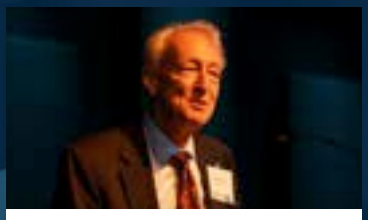
Tyreem Rivers with PA State Rep. Christopher M. Rabb. We are required to blur Mr. River's image because of a DOC policy that prevents publication of faces of incarcerated people.

Tyreem Rivers, Incarcerated Person of the Year

Tyreem Rivers was sentenced to life in prison in 1996 at only 19 years old. Throughout his almost 30 years of incarceration, he has displayed remarkable resilience, overcoming substance abuse and addiction while advancing his education.

"I think one of the biggest differences between the kid I was before coming to prison and the man that I am today is that I've done a lot of maturing and a lot of thinking. I have worked hard to slay a lot of demons. I now use what I have learned to mentor those around me."

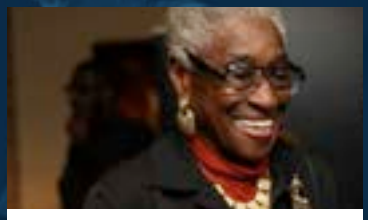
Our Work In Action



Bradley Bridge, Human Rights Champion of the Year

As a longtime and newly retired public defender, Brad has brought freedom to hundreds of people sentenced as juveniles to life in Pennsylvania prisons. In addition, his willingness to take on herculean tasks has yielded thousands of overturned convictions.

"I got into this business to help people to ameliorate bad situations and to vindicate people where vindication is a component."



Virginia Hammond, Volunteer of the Year

Virginia has volunteered with the Prison Society for nearly a quarter century, since her son was incarcerated in 2001. She was a bus rider, turned dedicated volunteer, and now a member of our Community Advisory Council.

"Being a volunteer isn't always easy. Sometimes time plus effort doesn't add up to a satisfactory conclusion. I don't judge myself. My goal is to be available, to be supportive, to be helpful."

Jim Bright, Correctional Employee of the Year

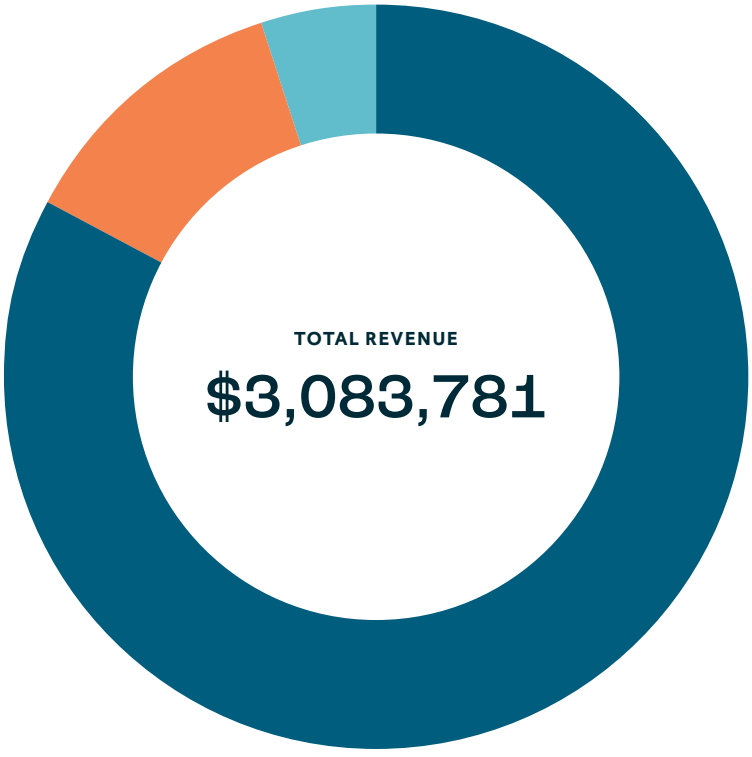
Jim is the Corrections Health Care Administrator at SCI Fayette and has been recognized for his accessibility, responsiveness, and ability to effectively communicate complex medical issues, particularly in oncology.

"People have a tendency to think that everybody in prison is a bad person. I think a little kindness and understanding go a long way."

Scan here to hear more from award winners:

Financial Report

Total Revenue

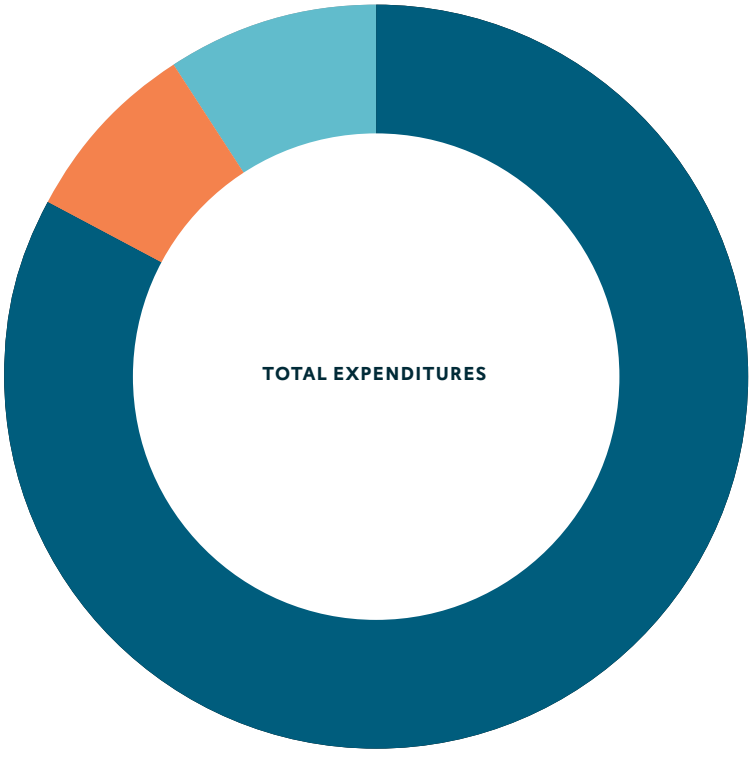


- GRANTS **83%**
- INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS **12%**
- PROGRAM REVENUE **5%**

"Our financial report tells a powerful story about the Society's focus and commitment—marking a significant milestone with revenue exceeding $3 million. The majority of this funding directly supports programs for the people we serve, enabling us to make a meaningful impact across the Commonwealth."

—SETH WILLIAMS, TREASURER

Expenditures



- PROGRAM **83%**
- ADMINISTRATION **8%**
- FUNDRAISING **9%**

Donors

DONOR SPOTLIGHT



"I believe that the work the Prison Society does to protect the health, safety, and dignity of all incarcerated Pennsylvanians is crucial to our community as a whole. There is a tireless team of experts working around the clock to provide unbiased and critical information on the PA prison system, and it is essential to make sure they continue to have the resources they need to continue and broaden the work."

—KERRI PARK, PRISON SOCIETY DONOR

Chief Operating Officer, World Cafe Live

"FY24 saw a 55%+ increase in giving from the previous year, due in large part to the generous bequests of some of our longtime supporters and more than 150 new donors who joined us in 2023–2024. We also joyfully returned to in-person events, invested further in our incredible network of volunteers, and produced our first-ever brand video which helped take our work and our message to a larger community. All in, it was a tremendous year, and we are well positioned for continued success thanks to the investment of our community."



—EMILY CHERAMIE WALZ, DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

The work we do across the state is funded in large part by the generosity of individual donors. *Thank you to our supporters!*

FY24 $40+ DONORS

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Ted Agoos
Fareed Ahmed
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DONOR SPOTLIGHT



The Prison Society was sad to learn of the passing of longtime volunteer Barbara Rittenhouse, who served on the Board of Directors for 15 years with enthusiasm and dedication. Her passion for Philadelphia, and her kindness and knowledge were appreciated. In addition to her years of service to our mission, she also generously gave her time across the city to Ready, Willing and Able; Singing City; Penn Museum; Historic Rittenhouse Towne; and Youth Service Inc., to name just a few.

Barabra's involvement with the Prison Society was an outgrowth of her work teaching literacy at SCI Graterford.

"Barbara was so connected to the incarcerated men she taught that she wanted to do more. She wanted more people to understand the humanity of the people confined to prison. When I started at the Prison Society, Barbara was in her 15th year on the board. I was struck by her kindness, her heart, and the grace that she brought to her interactions with everyone." —Claire Shubik-Richards, Prison Society Executive Director

We were honored to learn that Barbara provided for the Prison Society in her estate plans. Her bequest will go a long way toward furthering our mission across the Commonwealth.

Please let us know if you have recognized the Pennsylvania Prison Society in your estate plans or if you would like information on doing so. We sincerely hope that this Impact Report inspires you and reinforces your own personal connection to the Society.

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Events Rewind



In April, Mt. Lebanon Representative Dan Miller asked us to participate in his annual Disability & Mental Health Summit with featured guests Governor Josh Shapiro, Lt. Governor Austin Davis, County Executive Sara Innamorato, and state Senator Devlin Robinson. Prison Society Education and Advocacy Director Leigh Owens presented on the disability and mental health needs of incarcerated people.



John Hargreaves has been the heart, soul, and face of the Prison Society for decades. It was a joy to gather in Harrisburg recently to celebrate John's 45-year commitment to the Prison Society. Volunteers, donors, state representatives, staff and friends joined us for an evening of laughter and connection, to fete John's service and passion as he transitions to the role of Senior Advisor.

We were thrilled to host Jay Aronson and Roger A. Mitchell Jr. for the launch of their new book, ***Death in Custody***. This book is built on the understanding that the U.S. significantly undercounts the number of individuals who die while in law enforcement custody each year.



Staff & Leadership

"Tell everyone, every staff member, that on behalf of families, we appreciate you all so very much. Please continue to do the work that you all do."

—SONIA, HELPLINE CALLER



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WHAT'S AHEAD

SAVE THE DATE!

Love Above Bars 2025

PHILADELPHIA, PA

We are delighted to announce Love Above Bars will return to World Cafe Live next year! Mark your calendars for Wednesday, September 17, 2025 for another evening of transformative impact and camaraderie.

LOVE ABOVE BARS



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Every action counts and we're counting on you.

TOGETHER WE CAN DO SO MUCH MORE.

DONATE and take a stand for human rights and just criminal laws. Your contribution helps us tell the truth boldly, hold power to account, and care for our fellow citizens.

VOLUNTEER and join our work inside and outside of prisons. We offer a range of opportunities to fit your interests and availability.

PARTNER with us. Join our team of corporate partners to make an impact that is mutually beneficial to your company and the Prison Society.

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