



ILLINOIS PRISON PROJECT

ANNUAL REPORT
FISCAL YEAR 2025

WHO WE ARE

The Illinois Prison Project (IPP) uses advocacy, public education, and direct legal representation to reduce mass incarceration and help needlessly incarcerated individuals fight for freedom after conviction. IPP uses creative lawyering to create pathways out of prison, reunite families, and save millions of taxpayer dollars. We fight alongside incarcerated people and their loved ones for a more free, more humane, and more just system for all. With a mission focused on hope, compassion, and humanity, IPP fights against regressive policies, racist practices & systems that treat people as disposable.

WE ARE ADVOCATES FOR INCARCERATED PEOPLE:

IPP fights to ensure that the humanity and worth of incarcerated people are recognized by a legal system designed to ignore them. IPP directly represents hundreds of clients annually and connects hundreds more with pro bono attorneys across the state.

WE ARE ALLIES TO INCARCERATED PEOPLE & THEIR FAMILIES:

IPP advocates for the rights of incarcerated people and their families through our education and advocacy campaigns. We support those advocating for their own release by providing toolkits, trainings, and support through our virtual legal clinics, as well as interpersonal support for clients and families.

WE ARE CHAMPIONS OF MERCY, EQUITY & REDEMPTION:

IPP works alongside currently and formerly incarcerated people to educate the public about the high cost of Illinois' prison system, broken sentencing laws and policies, and the many paths for criminal justice reform. IPP advocates for systemic change through media coverage and impact on legislation and post-sentencing policy, and our work is regularly featured in news outlets in Chicago and throughout Illinois.

IPP BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Sheila Bedi (Secretary) – Clinical Professor of Law, Community Justice Clinic, Northwestern Pritzker School of Law
- Jeanne Bishop – Assistant Public Defender at the Office of the Cook County Public Defender, Author
- Anne Dodge – Chief Impact Officer, Metropolitan Planning Council
- Leonard Goodman – Defense Attorney, Len Goodman Law Office
- Sarah Grady (President) – Partner, Kaplan & Grady
- Melissa Mitchell (Treasurer) – Chief Privacy Officer, Phreesia
- Jamelia Morgan – Professor of Law & Director, Center for Racial & Disability Justice, Northwestern Pritzker School of Law
- Dr. Veena Raiji – Director, Section of Uveitis & Inflammatory Diseases, Department of Ophthalmology, Rush Medical College
- Reena Sikdar – Special Counsel, Valentine Austriaco & Bueschel, P.C.
- Sarah Weiss – Partner, Jenner & Block

FY25 KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In FY25, IPP has expanded our mission of reuniting families and reducing mass incarceration, including:

- Freeing 24 people from prison, sparing our clients 239 years behind bars and saving taxpayers approximately \$24 million.
- Filing 34 clemency petitions, 37 medical release petitions, and 7 youth parole petitions.
- Providing 10 people with administrative advocacy support, and representing one person at their resentencing hearing.
- Mailing 1,126 legal resource kits with information about clemency, medical release, sentencing credits and more to incarcerated people, their families, and lawyers.
- Providing free legal consultation & advice to 154 people through our twice-monthly legal clinics.
- Assisting 27 formerly incarcerated people with reentry support.
- Through IPP's Education Team, hosting and/or collaborating with partners to hold 65 events for the public and stakeholders, reaching 6,120 people.
- Training & graduating two cohorts of formerly incarcerated Ambassadors, including 46 training hours on storytelling, leadership, advocacy, public speaking & media relations.
- Reaching hundreds more incarcerated people through our network of incarcerated Community Navigators, which includes 128 navigators across 26 correctional facilities.



Serving an 80-year sentence, Aryules Bivens thought he would never be with his beloved daughter Maleka again. With the help of IPP and his community, Mr. Bivens was granted parole in February and reunited with Maleka and his grandchildren.

DIRECT REPRESENTATION

IPP provides direct representation to hundreds of clients currently incarcerated in Illinois. Through individual advocacy, IPP not only litigates each client's case, but tells their story more completely. While we consider each person's situation independently, we also identify fixable problems that repeat throughout the legal and prison system, and find novel ways to encourage policymakers to address them.

Medically Vulnerable

In 2019, IPP client Joe Coleman – a decorated veteran and father of six – died alone in an Illinois prison from terminal cancer while serving a life sentence for stealing \$640 from a gas station. In Joe's honor, IPP partnered with stakeholders to write the Joe Coleman Medical Release Act, which created an expedited process for incarcerated people with terminal illness or disabilities to end their sentences and return to their families. Since the Joe Coleman Act became law in 2022, IPP has worked tirelessly to reunite medically vulnerable incarcerated people with their loved ones.

In FY25, our team filed 37 medically vulnerable release applications on behalf of incarcerated clients, ultimately winning release for 14 people. Since 2022, IPP has won release for 74 medically vulnerable clients, saving Illinois taxpayers nearly \$150 million in incarceration and health care costs.



The IPP Social Work team pays a holiday visit to clients Saul Colbert (seated-L) and Antoine Wiggins (seated-R) at their nursing home in Chicago. Both clients were granted medical release and are now getting the dignity and care they deserve.

But we didn't stop there. IPP's legal team found that the single biggest factor correlating to success in the medical release process is representation by counsel; over the last two years, 60% of medically vulnerable petitioners who were represented by counsel were granted release, whereas fewer than 19% of unrepresented people were granted release.

To meet this dire need for legal representation, IPP recruits, trains, and supports pro bono attorneys to represent terminally ill and medically incapacitated people in release hearings. In FY25, IPP held three CLE trainings for 70 pro bono attorneys. In just a few short months, 8 new pro bono attorneys have begun representing medically vulnerable clients; every single pro bono who has had a Coleman Act hearing has won medical release for their client.

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT: MICHAEL LYNCH



Mr. Lynch and his sister Debbie visit IPP's office.

Michael Lynch is a devoted brother, father, and grandfather, the oldest of nine close-knit siblings. During 35 years of incarceration, Mr. Lynch worked to maintain relationships with his beloved family, while missing countless family celebrations, as well as the loss of parents and siblings.

Several years ago, Mr. Lynch began feeling short of breath while sweeping the floors at Hill Correctional Center. Since then, he has been diagnosed with several serious heart conditions, including terminal end-stage heart failure and

advanced kidney disease. His illness left him living as a permanent bedbound resident in the infirmary, relying on prison staff for nearly all of his needs, including bathing, dressing, and toileting.

Despite living in the infirmary, Mr. Lynch could not get the constant care that his condition required, leaving him vulnerable to dangerous falls. In 2023, Mr. Lynch was hospitalized 17 times after losing consciousness; his medical care that year cost Illinois taxpayers an estimated \$230,000. Terrified of falling, Mr. Lynch would often lay in bed for hours waiting for a worker to transfer him to a wheelchair.

In November 2023, Hill's head nurse asked IPP to assist Mr. Lynch with a Joe Coleman medical release petition; she said she did not want another one of her patients to needlessly die alone in the infirmary.

With the help of family and IPP attorney Nadia Woods, Mr. Lynch filed for release in May 2024 but was denied. Nadia kept fighting and filed again. Mr. Lynch won his freedom in September 2024.

Mr. Lynch now lives with his sister Debbie in Urbana, Illinois, near several other family members. He receives excellent care from the local health system and enjoys spending time with his family.

PRO BONO SPOTLIGHT: TARA GOODARZI



Pro bono attorney Tara Goodarzi (standing) attended IPP's CLE training on medical release in January 2025, and by August she was able to bring home her first client, Mr. Gibson (seated).

Why is it important to support IPP's mission with pro bono services?

"Chicago has a history of racist and abusive practices in the criminal legal system, and I believe that lawyers have a duty to help victims of this system. Many IPP clients are suffering under excessive sentencing, are elderly, and need a strong advocate. It's important to view people as more than just their worst mistake, and to give them a chance at a life of dignity after years behind bars. While IPP is well-staffed, they can't do this work alone."

Would you encourage other legal professionals to join IPP's pro bono cohort?

"Yes! Volunteering with IPP is a great way to expand your legal practice, gain direct access to clients in need, and practice true advocacy work. IPP does a fantastic job of finding folks in need of release, so there is always work to be done. If mission-based lawyering has ever appealed to you, but you aren't able to practice it full time, this is an excellent way to bridge that gap. You don't even need criminal law experience – IPP has all the resources you need for success."

What makes the IPP pro bono experience unique?

"The support system for pro bono attorneys is exceptional. IPP attorneys, paralegals, and social workers are available to offer guidance every step of the way. They truly look at the process of decarceration as a team effort, with each step building on the one before it. Their training, such as the Joe Coleman Medical Release Act CLE seminar, is incredible. I learned about the Coleman Act for the first time at the CLE in January, and by August our client was granted release!"

Youth and Emerging Adults

Emerging adults are at the epicenter of the mass incarceration crisis in Illinois. Despite research showing that the brain and decision-making skills are still developing into a person's mid-20s, emerging adults are disproportionately arrested, prosecuted, and incarcerated compared to other age groups, especially emerging adults of color. IPP seeks to address this injustice by providing direct representation to those impacted by the criminal legal system as youth and emerging adults through several innovative campaigns, including the Youth Parole and Automatic Adult Transfer campaigns.

Youth Parole

The 2019 “youth parole” law allows most people who were convicted under age 21 to apply for parole after serving 20 years (depending on the offense), but only if they were sentenced after 2019. Youth parole hearings require a substantial investment of time, resources, and care; unlike traditional parole, where a person is generally eligible for consideration every year, a youth parole petitioner is not eligible for reconsideration for ten years if the petition is denied. In FY25, IPP filed seven youth parole petitions and won six youth parole releases on behalf of our clients, all of whom were eligible for youth parole because they were resentenced after 2019 thanks to Miller v. Alabama and People v. Buffer, Supreme Court and Illinois Supreme Court cases that made it unconstitutional in Illinois to sentence a person under age 18 to a sentence of greater than 40 years.

Even though there are thousands of people who were convicted of offenses committed before their 21st birthday in prison right now, youth parole is not retroactive. Anyone whose final sentence was imposed prior to 2019 is ineligible for release consideration. IPP continues to advocate for these clients – who are no less deserving of compassion and freedom simply because of their sentencing date – through other legal mechanisms like clemency and post-conviction.



In April, IPP staff and supporters attend the clemency hearing of automatic transfer client Matthew Cruz, who was arrested three weeks after his 15th birthday and tried in the adult legal system. Although Matthew would be eligible for youth parole today, reforms passed in 2019 are not retroactive, so Matthew's only path to freedom is clemency.

Automatic Adult Transfer

IPP advocates for incarcerated people who were 15 or 16 years old at the time of their offense, and tried as adults under Illinois' automatic and mandatory "adult transfer" laws. These laws require juveniles as young as 15 to be tried in the adult system if they are charged with a specific offense, before any finding of guilt. Automatic transfer laws eliminate the ability to make individualized assessments of the child, ignoring the fundamental differences and needs of children in the legal system. Many juveniles who were automatically tried as adults lack any legal mechanism for sentencing relief but for clemency, as most juvenile reforms are not retroactive.

Although the age for automatic transfer was raised to 16 and the transfer process was made discretionary for most offenses in 2015, those changes were not retroactive. That meant that hundreds of children who are automatically tried as adults remained in prison, with no clear pathway for release even if they could never be prosecuted as adults under today's laws. Using creative tools like clemency, administrative advocacy, and youth parole, IPP represents people who were prosecuted as adults under antiquated automatic transfer laws to help correct this historic injustice.

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT: TERRANCE ROBINSON



(L) Terrance Robinson with family during a prison visit. (R) Terrance celebrates his first Thanksgiving home with his niece & sister.

Terrance Robinson was born in 1985 in Joliet, Illinois and lived with his mother and sister. He was arrested a month after his 15th birthday. Despite scientific consensus that adolescent brains are not fully developed, Illinois' Automatic Transfer laws required that Terrance was tried in the adult legal system. He was sentenced to 50 years, a de facto life sentence. His family thought they would never see Terrance home again.

Terrance worked hard to maintain strong ties with his family, always holding out hope that they would be reunited. In 2023, after he was resentenced to 40 years, which reset his sentencing date, Terrance filed a petition for youth parole review. IPP attorney Lia Raves contacted Terrance after compiling a list of people who were incarcerated at age 15 under Automatic Transfer laws. With the assistance of Lia and a pro bono attorney, Terrance was granted youth parole by a unanimous vote on October 31, 2024.

After 24 years of incarceration, Terrance celebrated his first Thanksgiving at home. "Being home with family gave me a feeling of love, excitement, and happiness," said Terrance. "It made me appreciate small things I once took for granted. I feel blessed to be able to make new memories."

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT: JERMAINE BROWN



(L-R) Jermaine Brown as a toddler in his grandmother's kitchen; Jermaine reunites with his Grandma Lula after 22 years of incarceration; Jermaine holds his granddaughter Cherish for the first time.

Jermaine Brown was born on the west side of Chicago in 1982. His mother experienced serious mental illness, including schizophrenia. During his mother's absence, Jermaine was raised by his beloved grandmother, Lula.

Despite Lula's love and guidance, Jermaine got caught up in neighborhood gang violence and was arrested when he was 19. He was taken from Lula, and sentenced to 31 years in prison.

During his incarceration, Jermaine maintained strong ties with loved ones. In 2023, Jermaine filed for clemency, writing, "I have an elderly grandma who means the world to me. I am in a race against time to spend time with her, after leaving her side for 21 years."

With help from IPP, Jermaine was approved for work release. In February 2025, he was finally reunited with Lula, and got to hold his own baby granddaughter Cherish for the first time.

Women & Survivors Project

Domestic violence and other forms of abuse puts survivors at high risk for criminalization. Nearly all women in Illinois prisons have survived domestic abuse or gender-based violence. IPP's Women & Survivors Project (WSP) is a unique effort to push back against the criminalization of survivors by representing people in prison for crimes related to surviving gender-based violence, including those who acted in self-defense or were forced or coerced to participate in violent acts by abusive partners. WSP represents survivors in post-conviction, resentencing, clemency, parole, and compassionate release cases.

The WSP team closely follows changes in laws and policies impacting survivors, and responds with creative lawyering to win freedom for more clients. For example, Illinois' amendments to the domestic violence resentencing law, which went into effect in 2024, allow incarcerated survivors to file for resentencing if substantial evidence of their abuse was not presented at their original sentencing. These amendments eliminate the prior two-year timeline for a survivor to file a resentencing petition, meaning that survivors can file for resentencing at any time after their conviction. The amendments also expanded the definition of abuse from "domestic violence" to "gender-based violence," which includes survivors of sexual assault, stalking, and trafficking.

IPP knew that there were hundreds people in IDOC who are potentially eligible for resentencing if they could be identified and receive legal representation. Much of this litigation is time and resource intensive, but with help from our supporters and from pro bono partners such as Latham & Watkins (pictured below), we are able to expand our reach to help even more survivors.



At clemency hearings in July 2024, domestic violence advocates from Ascend Justice and the Network Advocating Against Domestic Violence support incarcerated women represented by IPP's Women & Survivors Project, with assistance from pro bono attorneys from Latham & Watkins and DLA Piper, as well as support from our community partners from Organized Communities Against Deportations and clients' friends and family members.

In addition to direct legal representation, IPP's WSP team educates the public and policymakers about the unique challenges facing criminalized survivors. In August 2024, IPP staff and Ambassadors – including several criminalized survivors – gave a powerful presentation to the American Bar Association's Commission on Domestic & Sexual Violence. This unique discussion explored the intersection of criminalization and domestic violence, and acknowledged the ways gender-based violence is tied intrinsically to mass incarceration.



Members of IPP's Education and Women & Survivors Project teams spoke at the ABA's Commission on Domestic & Sexual Violence, including Community Navigator JeiJei Webster, Ambassador Fellow Ana Navarro, and WSP Paralegal Cindy Murillo.

In November 2024, IPP hosted a screening of "Kemba," a film about a young woman who was sentenced to 24 years in prison due to mandatory minimum drug laws, followed by a panel of formerly incarcerated survivors and advocates exploring the intersection of race, gender, and the legal system.



Several formerly incarcerated survivors and legal advocates spoke at IPP's November 2024 screening of "Kemba." (L-R): Colette Payne and Dyanna Winchester of the Women's Justice Institute, IPP Community Navigator JeiJei Webster, and IPP Women & Survivors Project Director Rachel White-Domain.

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT: MISTY MOREMAN



While incarcerated, Misty Moreman found healing in the Helping Paws dog training program.

IPP client Misty Moreman was born in 1975 to a single teenage mother. As a child, Misty survived repeated physical and sexual abuse by several adults in her life. Misty was eventually taken from her family and became a ward of the state. Having never received treatment for her trauma, Misty often used drugs and alcohol to cope, and experienced ongoing sexual and physical violence from romantic partners in her adolescence and early adulthood.

In 1999, when Misty learned she was pregnant, she was excited to be a mother, and stopped using alcohol and drugs to protect her child. In January 2000, her daughter was unexpectedly born stillborn. At that point, she lost herself.

In 2002, Misty participated in a robbery. Although she regrets her participation, she never expected that her co-defendants would kill the man targeted for robbery. While Misty did not participate in the killing, she pleaded guilty to

first-degree murder. The court did not take her experience of trauma and abuse into consideration and sentenced her to an astonishing 30 years in prison.

During incarceration, Misty transformed herself. She regularly attended Bible studies, earned certification in computer technology and dog grooming, and was repeatedly promoted for her work in the prison garment shop. In 2016, Misty enthusiastically joined the Helping Paws dog training program; working with animals helped Misty heal her trauma and work through anxiety, allowing her to become a teacher and mentor to other incarcerated women.

IPP's Women & Survivors Project accepted Misty's case as part of its pro bono cohort program. In 2023, pro bono attorney Lisa Schoedel got to work petitioning for Misty's clemency. In 2024, an amendment to the domestic violence resentencing law allowed incarcerated survivors to file for resentencing if substantial evidence of their abuse was not presented at their original sentencing. With support from IPP, Lisa filed for Misty's resentencing in court. In June 2025, Misty's sentence was reduced from 30 to 26 years.

Misty is now in the process of moving to the Fox Valley Transition Center where she can prepare for life after release. When she is released, Misty wants to give back to her community by volunteering at animal shelters and helping other survivors heal from their trauma.

Speaking about the importance of IPP's Women & Survivors Project pro bono program, Misty says that working with IPP has helped her healing journey. "I knew that the laws around sentencing survivors had changed, but without IPP, I didn't have the knowledge of how to file, and I didn't have the means to pay for an attorney. I would have absolutely been stuck, but instead I was given hope."

In May 2025, WSP and IPP's Communications team launched a social media campaign in the week leading up to Mother's Day called #MissingMothersDay. This campaign educated the public about the harms of incarceration on survivors of domestic and gender-based violence and their families.



A social media post from IPP's #MissingMothersDay campaign.

The #MissingMothersDay week culminated with the publication of a powerful op-ed in the Chicago Sun-Times on Mother's Day, where system-impacted survivor Tammy Englerth described her harrowing experience of domestic violence, criminalization, and incarceration. Tammy was granted clemency by former Governor Pat Quinn and has since opened her own non-profit organization serving domestic violence survivors.

With the help of IPP's Communications team, criminalized domestic violence survivor Tammy Englerth published a powerful Mother's Day op-ed in the Chicago Sun-Times, arguing for reforms that protect and support survivors, and clemency for survivors still trapped in prison.

Scan code to read the full article



CHICAGO SUN★TIMES

**This Mother's Day,
remember domestic
violence & trauma survivors**

By Tammy Englerth

I'm a mother of three and criminalized survivor of domestic violence. We must do more to protect vulnerable women, not punish them.

EDUCATION

IPP's Education team works to shift the narrative around incarceration by centering the voices and expertise of formerly incarcerated people. The team teaches communities about the harm caused by excessive sentences, especially to communities of color, and the need for reform to decarcerate the prison population. Their goal is to foster understanding and empathy, focusing on inclusivity rather than division, and to promote a more nuanced and compassionate perspective towards these often-marginalized communities.



In March 2025, IPP led a training for new Cook County public defenders at their brand-new Freedom Defense Center on Chicago's South Side. Trainers included members of IPP's Legal and Education teams, as well as formerly incarcerated Ambassadors Ronnie Carrasquillo and Fatima Monteiro.

Community outreach:

In FY25, IPP's Education team participated in 65 public education events, directly reaching over 6,000 people at events hosted by the Cook County Public Defender, Chicago Public Libraries, universities, and many other spaces across Illinois. Audiences included community members impacted by incarceration (43%), legal practitioners or service providers (28%), and students (25%). All IPP's education events are led by formerly incarcerated people with experience in the criminal legal system.

Ambassadors:

Through the Ambassador Fellowship Program, IPP trains formerly incarcerated people to tell their stories and teach communities about the harm caused by excessive sentences, especially to communities of color, and the urgent need for reform. In FY25, IPP's Education team held 46 hours of training in storytelling, leadership, advocacy, public speaking and media relations for two full cohorts. Since launching the Ambassador Program in 2022, IPP has trained a total of 36 Ambassadors.

IPP's Ambassador Fellowship Program Cohort 6 gathers for a training on advocacy and public speaking. (L-R) Sandra Falls, Ronnie Carrasquillo, Sylvia Begay-Pullum, Stanley Howard, LaToya Baines, and Fatima Monteiro.



Incarcerated Community Navigators:

IPP brings critical legal information, training, and resources to incarcerated people and their loved ones through the Incarcerated Community Navigator Program, a statewide network for sharing legal information and support for incarcerated people who are advocating for their own freedom. Through community-based workshops and quarterly trainings held within IDOC facilities, Incarcerated Community Navigators help incarcerated people advocate for themselves. The Community Navigator network includes two full-time, system-impacted (formerly incarcerated) IPP staff members, and dozens of men and women currently incarcerated across Illinois.



In April 2025, IPP staff and Ambassadors led a panel discussion at the “Cell 2 Self” event hosted by Heartland College in Normal, Illinois, where formerly incarcerated leaders shared their experiences on the difficult transition from incarceration to community life.



In March 2025, IPP's Education team joined the Prison Ministry at Trinity United Church of Christ for a screening of "In Their Hands," followed by discussion with IPP Education Director Renaldo Hudson, IPP Ambassador Ronnie Carrasquillo, Deyra Mercado, Charles Perry, Gail Hardy, and film director Dan Protes.

Staff Community Navigators run virtual trainings for Incarcerated Community Navigators, respond to Incarcerated Community Navigator referrals for legal information for incarcerated people, provide court accompaniment, and refer incarcerated people to service providers. Incarcerated Community Navigators support other incarcerated people by sharing legal information and resources and connecting incarcerated people to IPP for additional support, information, and referrals.

In FY25, IPP trained 128 Incarcerated Community Navigators across 26 IDOC facilities, in addition to the two formerly incarcerated Community Navigators who work full-time as IPP staff members. IPP Community Navigators provided direct assistance to 422 individuals. Through IPP's social media channels, the Education team promoted IPP resources to over 120,000 individuals.



In February 2025, IPP's Education team and Ambassadors gathered for a trauma-informed training to support their advocacy. It was hosted by the Chicago Torture Justice Center, an organization providing trauma-informed resources and healing support to survivors of police violence and institutionalized racism.

POLICY & COMMUNICATIONS

Legislative Policy

IPP partners with other organizations to fight for short, medium, and long-term expansions of decarcerative policies and mechanisms.

IPP's Policy team works closely with a statewide network of advocates called the "Credit for Change" coalition, which includes the Cook County Public Defender, ACLU Illinois, FAMM, Cabrini Green Legal Aid, Impact for Equity, Restore Justice, the Coalition for Collective Liberation, and Vera Institute for Justice, among others. The coalition advocates for an end to so-called "truth-in-sentencing" laws that require people to serve a certain percentage of their prison sentence regardless of their participation in rehabilitative programming. In contrast, Credit for Change reforms would allow incarcerated people to reduce their prison sentence through good behavior and rehabilitation, promoting racial equity, addressing prison overcrowding, and reuniting families torn apart by excessive sentences.

On May 6, the Credit for Change coalition held a press conference and subject matter hearing at the state capitol to advocate for reforms. IPP Policy Director Marshan Allen and Ambassador Ronnie Carrasquillo spoke at the press conference, and former IPP Ambassador Yosef Moore (who now serves as a Policy Analyst at Access Living) spoke at the hearing. The day's actions resulted in several news stories in Chicago and downstate.



In May 2025, IPP Policy Director Marshan Allen (2nd from right) and Ambassador Ronnie Carrasquillo (far right) joined allies in the Credit for Change coalition to hold a press conference and subject matter hearing at the state capitol. They urged lawmakers to allow incarcerated people to earn time credits for completing education and other rehabilitative programming.

IPP Action Fund

IPP's sister organization, the Illinois Prison Project Action Fund (IPPAF), is an independent and separately funded 501(c)(4) organization that fights against regressive policies, racist practices, and a system that treats people as disposable. IPPAF advocates for legislative change by meeting directly with policymakers. In FY25, IPPAF met with more than 40 legislators, including members of the Black, Latino, and Progressive Caucuses.

IPP ACTION FUND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Charles Hoffman – Office of the State Appellate Defender
- Beth Johnson – Founding partner, Rights & Restoration Law Group
- Sharone Mitchell – Cook County Public Defender
- Keith Rudman – Investor and philanthropist
- Jason DeSanto – Distinguished Senior Lecturer, Northwestern Pritzker School of Law
- Stevie Valles – Executive Director, Chicago Votes

On April 29, 2025, dozens of supporters – including many previously incarcerated people and their loved ones – traveled to the state capitol for IPP's Lobby Day, where they urged lawmakers to support policies that would help free more needlessly incarcerated people (below).



Passed Legislation

In May 2025, the Illinois General Assembly passed several important revisions to the Joe Coleman Medical Release Act, which is the pathway for medically vulnerable people to be released from prison. These revisions ensure all eligible cases are considered without additional restrictions and increase transparency around medical release hearings, evaluations, and denial decisions.

IPP's amendments to the Joe Coleman Act were adopted into SB 19, alongside several important reforms to the Prisoner Review Board. The new law strengthens release procedures by letting petitioners attend their own medical release hearings, expands the factors the board must consider in making parole decisions, and requires the PRB to publish clear public guidance on how victims can submit statements, among other things. These changes increase fairness, transparency, and accountability in the release process, creating a more balanced system for incarcerated people and their families.

Pending Legislation

IPP will work to pass the following bills in the upcoming legislative session:

- **SB 1785:** Extends day-for-day good conduct credit to individuals on Mandatory Supervised Release (MSR), creates a pathway to reduce the length of MSR terms, and promotes successful community reintegration.
- **SB 1788:** Removes the felony murder provisions from the first-degree murder statute and reclassifies it as second-degree murder, ensuring fair sentencing, reducing excessive punishment, and modernizing Illinois' legal system in line with national trends.
- **SB 2367:** Allows all incarcerated people to earn credit off their sentences for participating in rehabilitative, educational, or professional programs while incarcerated. This change would significantly improve Illinois' ineffective sentencing system by allowing people to earn one day of sentence credit for each day they serve with good behavior.



At IPP's Lobby Day in April 2025, advocates urged lawmakers to end the harms of mass incarceration in Illinois.



In May 2025, IPP leaders spoke with members of Illinois' legislative Black Caucus about the need for legal representation for incarcerated people. (L-R) IPP Policy Director Marshan Allen, former client Leonard Lewis, Ambassador Ronnie Carrasquillo, Executive Director Jennifer Soble, and Director of Education Renaldo Hudson.

ADVOCACY SPOTLIGHT: STATE REPRESENTATIVE WILL GUZZARDI



(L) Rep. Will Guzzardi accepts the Visionary of the Year Award at IPP's 2024 Gala, and (R) celebrates with IPP Executive Director Jennifer Soble and Policy Director Marshan Allen.

"I'm so proud for my ongoing partnership with the Illinois Prison Project. The organization has this incredible combination of a transformational vision for a more just and free world, combined with the strategic savvy to advance justice. That's the combination of vision and strategy that enabled us to move the Joe Coleman Act together, finding an opportunity in the challenging waters of Springfield, to pass what I really believe to be the proudest legislation of my 10-year career.

Now more than ever, we need IPP walking the halls of Springfield, continuing to push for more, continuing to demand that we do better. And we need these incredible attorneys in courtrooms, in hearings, fighting to get people home, and we need the incredible people who come home to be trained and to get those skills developed to advocate to folks like me, to demand a fair and more just world. Now, more than ever, we need the Illinois Prison Project."

Media and Storytelling

IPP's Communications team works to educate the public about mass incarceration and to change the narrative about people serving excessive sentences in Illinois. To that end, IPP provides journalists with opportunities to speak with legal and policy experts as well as system-impacted people and their loved ones. In FY25, IPP staff, Ambassadors, clients, and loved ones appeared in dozens of news, TV, and radio stories, as well as podcasts and online publications. IPP appeared in outlets including the Chicago Tribune, Chicago Sun-Times, WBEZ, WTTW Chicago Tonight, Chicago Magazine, The Appeal, The Marshall Project, Block Club Chicago, NPR Illinois, and several downstate local news outlets.

"It can happen to anyone."

**When your back is
against the wall &
you need to feed
your kids, you're
going to do what
you need to do."**

- IPP Ambassador
Fatima Monteiro



Formerly incarcerated IPP Ambassador Fatima Monteiro was quoted in a WGLT-NPR news article on community interventions for public safety, bravely sharing her own experience of being in survival mode as a young single mother.



IPP reaches 15,000 supporters daily through our social media channels on X, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Flickr, YouTube, and TikTok. Our social media posts include a mix of client stories, short videos, news articles, event promotion, and educational resources. We also reach supporters through our email list and monthly newsletter, the IPP Insider, which is distributed to more than 3,000 people.

In FY25, the Communications team created several short videos about IPP clients and their loved ones. For example, Communications Manager Clare Fauke visited the family home of IPP client Toussaint Daniels on Thanksgiving, where she documented his first holiday home with his family after 25 years of incarceration. Several family members provided heartfelt testimony on how Toussaint's incarceration impacted their family. The video, which has been viewed hundreds of times online, helps raise awareness about the harmful effects of incarceration on families and communities.



**Toussaint Daniels
is
HOME
for the
HOLIDAYS**

This video documents IPP client Toussaint Daniels' first Thanksgiving home after 25 years in prison, highlighting the impact of incarceration on families.



Scan code
to watch
the video

NEW DOCUMENTARY SHINES A LIGHT ON PAROLE



IPP client and Ambassador Fellow Ronnie Carrasquillo speaks at a screening of “In Their Hands” for lawmakers in Springfield, Illinois, along with filmmaker Dan Protes (L) and IPP Executive Director Jennifer Soble (R).

At the age of 18, IPP client Ronnie Carrasquillo was sentenced to 600 years in prison. During his 47 years of incarceration, Ronnie was denied parole more than 30 times – despite a sterling prison record – by a parole board whose decisions are heavily influenced by politics and an ever-present police union.

Award-winning film director Dan Protes sought to tell the story of Ronnie’s fight for freedom and ultimate release in 2023. Dan worked closely with Ronnie’s family and his attorney – IPP Executive Director Jennifer Soble – and included behind-the-scenes deliberations and decisions from Ronnie’s case.

The result was In “Their Hands,” a powerful documentary released in December of 2024 and available for streaming on PBS, Apple TV, and Prime Video. Since the film’s release, it has been screened at more than 15 public events, many of which include panel discussions with Ronnie, Jennifer, and Dan, who have also been interviewed for articles in major news outlets.

DEVELOPMENT

IPP's success depends on the financial support of government grants, foundations, and the generosity of individual donors. To diversify our funding sources and ensure our continued stability, IPP established a monthly sustaining donor program called Team Hope, which encourages individual donors to contribute to IPP on a regular basis, providing the organization with consistent and reliable support.

WHY I'M A TEAM HOPE MONTHLY DONOR: SHAWN SMITH

Mr. Smith is the managing attorney at The Smith Law Firm in Ames, Iowa, where he represents clients in criminal defense, personal injury, estate planning, and bankruptcy.



"As an attorney, I believe in justice and fairness. Many people are serving excessive sentences due to racial bias in our legal system and lack of access to quality legal representation. Many sentencing reforms are not retroactive, so most of those who were sentenced in the 80s and 90s still languish behind bars.

"The U.S. has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world. We need to reduce the prison population. We must give incarcerated people the opportunity for rehabilitation, personal growth, and a chance to reintegrate back into society. Incarcerated people are human beings and should be treated with dignity.

"After learning about the work that IPP is doing, I wanted to get involved. Since I don't have the bandwidth to provide legal services, I decided the best way to support is with my financial gift.

"To be honest, I kept forgetting to make my donation – my intentions were good but my follow up was not! So I was excited to hear about IPP's Team Hope monthly giving program. With my automatic monthly donation, I don't have to worry about remembering to give. It helps me be committed to my values, and I know my money is going to support the work that I care about.

"Team Hope also helps IPP have a predictable source of revenue. To do this work, we need funding, and it needs to be reliable. I would encourage everyone who cares about ending mass incarceration, about giving hope to those trapped in excessive sentences, to join Team Hope."

Scan the code to
join Team Hope!



Emil Gumpert Award supports IPP's Compassionate Release Program



IPP staff gather at the law offices of Jenner & Block to receive the Emil Gumpert Award from the American College of Trial Lawyers.

IPP was honored to receive the prestigious Emil Gumpert Award from the American College of Trial Lawyers, in honor of our work representing medically vulnerable incarcerated people. The Gumpert Award, which is accompanied by a \$150,000 grant, recognizes innovative programs that improve the administration of justice. This award will help to fund IPP's Compassionate Release Legal Representation Program, which provides legal representation to medically vulnerable incarcerated people seeking release under Illinois' Joe Coleman Act.

Despite the promise of the Coleman Act, IPP found that only one-third of the hundreds of incarcerated people who are eligible for medical release have been freed; the biggest factor correlating to success in the release process is representation by counsel. IPP hopes to train more attorneys to represent eligible clients, allowing more terminally ill and disabled people to spend their remaining days with dignity.



Why we give to IPP: Drs. Veena and Manish Raiji

"When our dear friend Jennifer Soble founded the Illinois Prison Project, we were immediately interested in providing support. As doctors, we both spend our careers dedicated to the medical care of vulnerable populations — children with surgical illness for Manish and people with threatened vision for Veena. IPP's focus on recognizing the humanity of incarcerated people and fighting to secure their rights resonates deeply with both of us, as physicians and educators. Its leadership by such a dynamic and principled woman makes us proud to support IPP as it continues to grow and provide lasting justice to an increasing number of people within the criminal legal system."

HOPE & ART COMMUNITY EVENT



On May 1, hundreds of community members gathered at Lyric Opera House to celebrate the connection between Hope & Art. The event included musical performances from Lyric artists, a screening of the documentary “In Their Hands” about IPP client Ronnie Carrasquillo’s fight for freedom, and an interactive discussion with Ronnie Carrasquillo, IPP Education Director Renaldo Hudson, and Executive Director Jennifer Soble.

Following the program, IPP held a lively reception which included artwork by Renaldo Hudson and Vincent Boggan, who is a former IPP client and IPP’s Intake Coordinator. The reception provided a space for networking among leaders in the movement to end mass incarceration, while raising much-needed funds to support IPP’s work.

Thank you to all those who gave to IPP in honor or memory of a loved one or cherished community member in FY25. To learn more about making a tribute gift to IPP, please contact Development Manager Shana East at shana@illinoisprisonproject.org.

2025 Tributees

Michael Broadway
Ronnie Carrasquillo
Larry Cavitt
Stephanie Ciupka
Joe N. Coleman*
Gary W. Davis
Kenneth Durant
Shana East

Clare Fauke
Darlene Fieste
David Fischer*
Claire Gaudiani*
Anthony Gay*
Nathan Goc*
Tewkunzi Green*
Yuchabel Harris

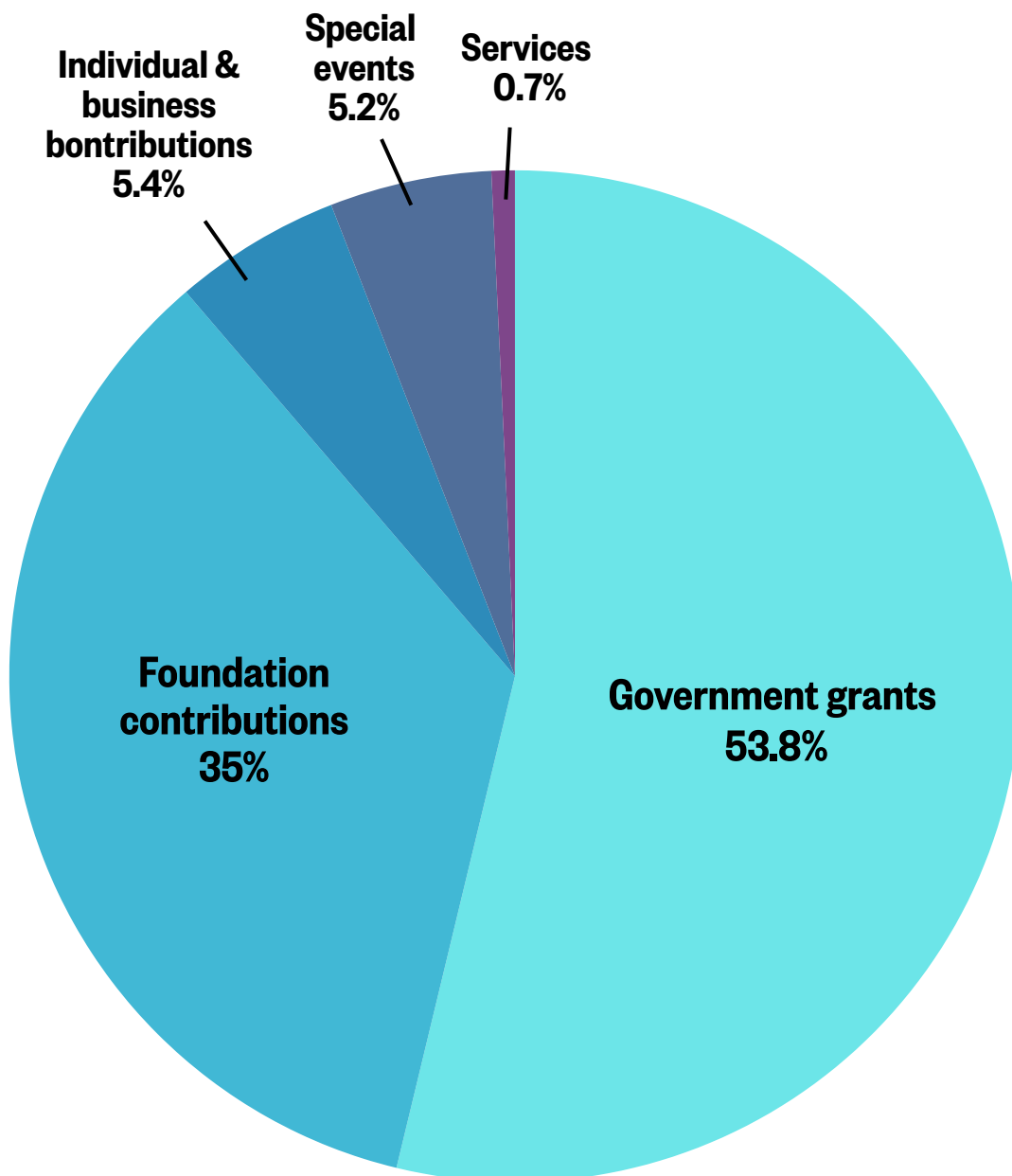
Chick Hoffman
Renaldo Hudson
Preeya Hughes
Grover Hunt, Jr.*
Nancy Matthews
Brian Moseley*
Jim Mutchnik
Colette Payne

David Saxner*
Tasha Shelby
LaVertis Stewart
Queintin Stone
Devon Terrell
Nadia Woods
Sue Wooten

* Denotes memorial gift

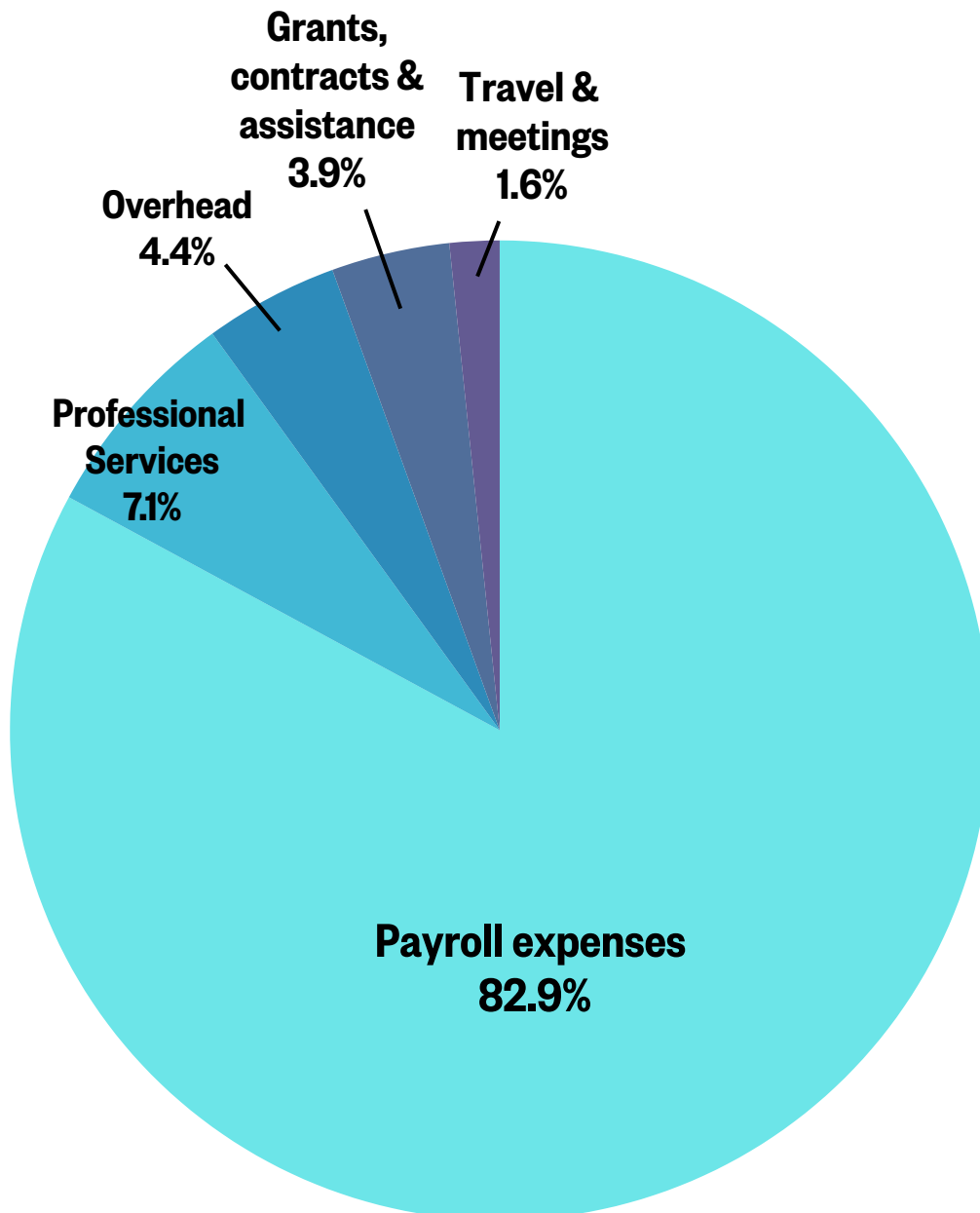
FINANCIAL SUMMARY

INCOME



FINANCIAL SUMMARY

EXPENSES





Help reunite more families like Mr. Bivens' who have been torn apart by incarceration.



Scan here to donate!



53 W. Jackson, Suite 452
Chicago IL, 60604
(312) 324-4463
info@illinoisprisonproject.org