



200 CLIENTS FREED!



ILLINOIS
PRISON
PROJECT

ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2026

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

- Sarah Grady (Co-President) – Partner, Kaplan & Grady
- Sarah Weiss (Co-President) – Partner, Jenner & Block
- Anne Dodge (Secretary) – Chief Impact Officer, Metropolitan Planning Council
- Melissa Mitchell (Treasurer) – Chief Privacy Officer, Phreesia
- Jeanne Bishop – Assistant Public Defender at the Office of the Cook County Public Defender, Author
- Leonard Goodman – Defense Attorney, Len Goodman Law Office
- 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.

FY26 KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In FY26, IPP has deepened our mission of reuniting families and reducing mass incarceration, including:

- Winning release for 28 incarcerated people, sparing our clients 332 years behind bars and saving taxpayers approximately \$23 million
- Filing 16 clemency petitions
- Representing 18 clients in youthful parole hearings
- Filing 25 medically vulnerable release petitions, winning release for 17 people
- Providing 22 people with administrative advocacy support
- Providing free legal consultation to 149 people at our twice-monthly legal clinics
- Assisting 14 formerly incarcerated people with re-entry support
- Holding 11 CLE trainings for pro bono attorneys
- Through IPP's Education Team, hosting and/or collaborating with partners to hold 35 events for the public and stakeholders, reaching 3,706 people
- Graduating 6 formerly incarcerated Ambassadors, which included 56 hours of training in storytelling, leadership, advocacy, public speaking, and media relations
- Mailing 3,151 legal resource kits with information about clemency, medical release, sentencing credits and more to incarcerated people, their families, and lawyers
- Reaching hundreds more incarcerated people through our network of Incarcerated Community Navigators, which includes 169 navigators across 25 correctional facilities



A group of recently released clients celebrate together at IPP's 5th Annual Gala in October 2025.

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 FY26, our team filed 25 medically vulnerable release applications on behalf of incarcerated clients, ultimately winning release for 17 people. Since the implementation of the Coleman Act, IPP has won release for 89 medically vulnerable clients, saving taxpayers \$145 million in incarceration and health care costs.

IPP has recently expanded our capacity to represent medically vulnerable clients by recruiting, training, and supporting pro bono attorneys to represent people in Joe Coleman Act release hearings. In FY26, IPP held 11 CLE training sessions for our current cohort of pro bono attorneys who were able to immediately represent clients in these time-sensitive cases.

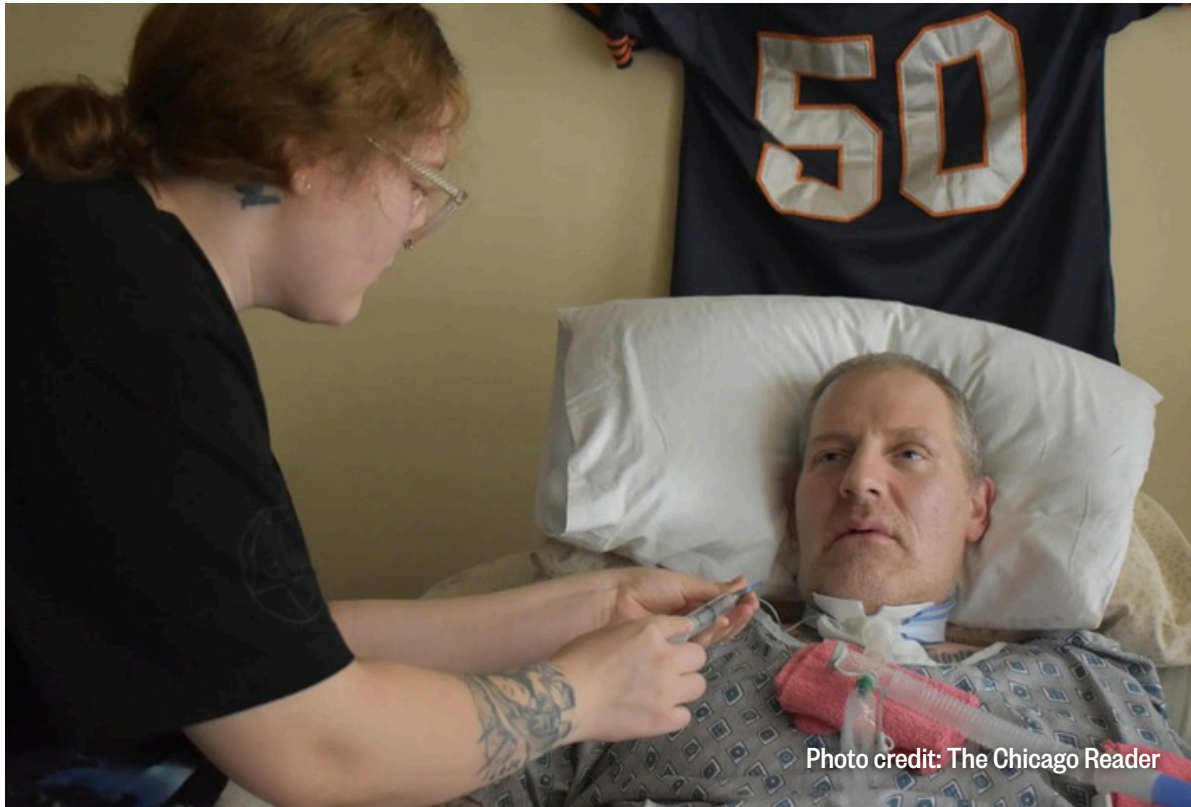
CLIENT SPOTLIGHT: In Memory of Guillermo Ruiz

After serving more than three decades of a life sentence, Guillermo Ruiz suffered from serious cardiac problems. His heart issues led to multiple emergency room visits and several hospitalizations. Even after multiple surgeries, Guillermo's heart was incapable of pumping sufficient oxygenated blood to sustain him; he increasingly suffered from pain, breathing problems, and immobility.

Guillermo was determined not to die alone in prison. With the help of IPP, Guillermo petitioned for compassionate release under the Joe Coleman Act. His two loving brothers came to hearing and testified that they could care for Guillermo until his last breath. On October 3, 2025, the Prisoner Review Board granted Guillermo's release. Three weeks after his release, Guillermo passed away peacefully and with dignity, surrounded by loved ones at his family home in Chicago.

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT: Gary Sams

For Gary Sams, ALS was like a “prison within a prison”



With help from IPP, Gary Sams was released from prison in 2025 and now gets the care he needs from his family.

In late 2024, Gary Sams began suffering from pain and loss of feeling in his arms. By the spring of 2025, Gary was diagnosed with ALS, a devastating and untreatable neurological condition in which a person's body rapidly loses the ability to function in every way. A few months later, after losing the ability to swallow, Gary was hospitalized after choking on his own saliva. Unable to move, Gary was put on a ventilator and feeding tube – at a huge cost to Illinois taxpayers.

Knowing that the prison was not equipped to handle his complex medical needs, Gary and his loved ones asked IPP to help him petition for Joe Coleman medical release. The Prisoner Review Board denied Gary's release in August 2025, and his health continued to deteriorate.

IPP's legal team didn't give up. They petitioned again and on November 15, 2025, the Prisoner Review Board finally granted Gary's compassionate release. Gary now lives at home with his family, who have learned how to maintain his life-support systems. He is grateful to get the care he needs, and spend the little time he has left with his three children.

Youth and Emerging Adults

Emerging adults continue to drive the mass incarceration crisis in Illinois. Despite the fact that emerging adults (age 18-25) have unique developmental characteristics, they are disproportionately arrested, prosecuted, and incarcerated compared to other age groups. Long prison sentences isolate young people from their families and communities, and severely limit their opportunities for education, employment, and healthy relationships. IPP seeks to address this injustice by providing direct representation to those impacted by the criminal legal system as youth and emerging adults.

Youthful Parole

The 2019 “youthful parole” law allows most people who were convicted for conduct committed under the age of 21 to apply for parole after serving either 10 or 20 years (depending on the offense), but only if they were sentenced or resentenced after 2019. Youthful 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 youthful parole petitioner who has served 20 years is not eligible for reconsideration for 10 more years if the petition is denied, and a petitioner who was eligible after 10 years only gets a single opportunity for youthful parole. In FY26, IPP represented 18 clients in the youthful parole process.

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT: Flynard “Fly” Miller

Clemency tells a story of transformation



In July 2025, dozens of loved ones & supporters gathered for the clemency hearing of IPP client Flynard “Fly” Miller. Fly was incarcerated at age 19, just months after the birth of his son. Despite the horrors of incarceration, Fly earned his GED and then a bachelor's degree from Northwestern University – one of the most competitive colleges in the U.S. Fly also maintained a close and loving relationship with his fiancée Natori during his 25 years in prison. Sweethearts since grammar school, Fly and Natori talk daily as they plan for a future life together. Fly's freedom is now in the hands of the Illinois Prisoner Review Board and Gov. Pritzker.

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT: Byron Merriweather

Youthful Parole means a second chance at life

At age 17, Byron Merriweather was arrested, taken from his family and – despite his young age – sentenced to 70 years in prison. While incarcerated, Byron missed helping his younger brothers and sisters grow up. He missed the birth of his beloved nieces and nephews. He thought he would die in prison alone, never to see his family again.

During his two decades in prison, Byron worked to maintain relationships with his loved ones, always hoping that someday they would be reunited.

With IPP's help, Byron petitioned for youthful parole, and was granted release.

Since his release, Byron has taken full advantage of his second chance at life. He quickly found housing and employment near his family in Belleville, Illinois, and completed IPP's Ambassador Fellowship program, honing his skills in advocacy and public speaking.

Byron is also a certified paralegal, and plans to pursue a degree in sociology at Southwestern Illinois College. He was recently chosen for a Restore Justice Future Leaders apprenticeship, where he will engage in training, mentorship, and social justice advocacy.

Despite these incredible achievements, Byron says his most important job has been as a volunteer coach for his niece's 8th grade basketball team. "He's my biggest supporter for sure," said Byron's niece Nyana. "I like the support and the motivation that he gives me when I'm playing basketball. There could be a thousand people in the crowd and I'm going to hear him the loudest!"



Since his release from two decades of incarceration, IPP youthful parole client Byron Merriweather (L) says his most important job has been as a coach for his niece Nyana's basketball team.

Clemency and post-conviction

The youthful parole law is not retroactive, which means that it is not available as a path to freedom for the thousands of incarcerated people in Illinois who were convicted of offenses committed before their 21st birthday. However, IPP has identified other legal mechanisms like clemency and post-conviction that could lead to shortened or vacated sentences for our clients.

In Illinois, the Governor has unfettered authority to use clemency to modify any sentence or to vacate any conviction. IPP's legal team helps clients petition for clemency by showing how the client has taken responsibility for their mistakes, transformed themselves through educational and rehabilitative programming, and prepared themselves for life in the community.

Post-conviction petitions challenge a conviction or sentence based on a constitutional violation. IPP's post-conviction work has focused on challenging clients' life or virtual life sentences because they do not satisfy the Illinois Constitution's requirement that sentences "be determined both according to the seriousness of the offense and with the objective of restoring the offender to useful citizenship."

In FY26, IPP represented several individuals sentenced to life in prison as "habitual offenders" when their first offense took place before their 21st birthday. Today, as a result of changes in law that take into account youth, this group could not be sentenced to life. However, these changes in law are not retroactive, leaving our clients with no meaningful pathway for release. IPP, having previously filed clemency petitions on behalf of these individuals, also represented them in post-conviction matters in criminal court. Unfortunately, this year's Illinois Supreme Court ruling in People vs. Brown precluded relief, but IPP's advocacy on behalf of our clients continues.

Women and 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. Since its launch in 2021, WSP has saved 100 years of prison time for 23 clients who won their freedom with legal representation from IPP. These women and survivors are now home with their children and loved ones, and many are leaders in the movement against abuse and the criminalization of survivors.

Bring Her Home Project

IPP's Women & Survivors Project worked closely with the JB & MK Pritzker Family Foundation to develop and launch a bold new initiative called Bring Her Home. This groundbreaking project follows WSP's years of work to raise awareness about women's incarceration and meet the unique needs of incarcerated women and gender-nonconforming individuals with competent and trauma-informed legal services.

Bring Her Home will screen all women serving long sentences in Illinois and collect data about their existing eligibility for relief and remaining barriers, with the goal of providing legal representation to those who qualify while also creating a national model for addressing the harms of mass incarceration on women.

The Bring Her Home launch follows a nine-month planning and pilot initiative, which brought together community partners such as Alliance of Local Service Organizations, Ascend Justice, Cabrini Green Legal Aid, Center on Wrongful Convictions at Northwestern Law, Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, Children's Best Interest Project, Family Rescue, Life Span, Love & Protect, Moms United Against Violence & Incarceration, Uptown People's Law Center, WIN Recovery and the Women's Justice Institute.

During the pilot initiative, WSP determined that there are 572 women serving 10 years to life in Illinois, and almost all are survivors of gender-based violence. Thanks to new legal pathways, most of these women now have the opportunity to reduce their sentences, but only if they have legal representation. In April 2026, the WSP team hosted a project launch event where dozens of survivors, advocates, and loved ones discussed best ways to support incarcerated survivors while working for their freedom.



In April 2026, IPP's Women & Survivors Team led a dynamic discussion with dozens of survivors of gendered and domestic violence and their advocates. Together they crafted a plan to assess incarcerated survivors with the goal of providing legal representation – and ultimately freedom.

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT: Yesenia Diaz

Speaking out for survivors through art and writing

WSP client Yesenia Diaz's self portrait won first place in the "Art Is Healing" contest, organized by Illinois First Lady MK Pritzker to recognize the talents of incarcerated artists. In November 2025, MK and Gov. JB Pritzker presented Yesenia's artwork to Pope Leo XIV in Rome.

Yesenia responded to this honor by publishing a powerful op-ed in the Chicago Sun-Times. She explained how she and countless other incarcerated women are trapped in excessive prison sentences as a result of domestic and gender-based violence, and begged the governor to grant clemency to incarcerated survivors like her.

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

"There was a direct link between the violence they experienced & the crimes they were convicted of ... they acted in self-defense, [or] were coerced into committing crimes by their abusers."

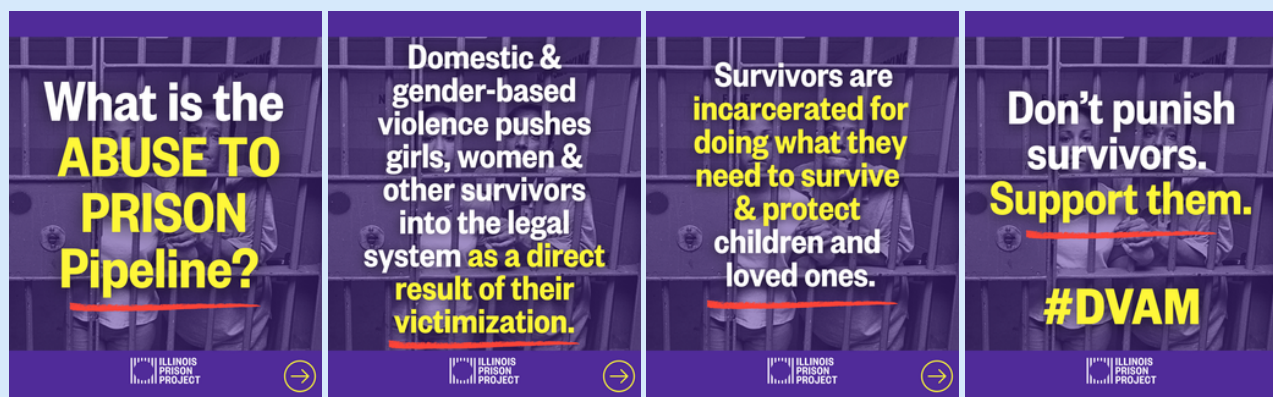
It is my prayer that the governor will show mercy, & grant clemency as many Illinois governors before him have done."



WSP client Yesenia Diaz calls for clemency for criminalized survivors of gender-based and domestic violence.

Raising awareness about criminalized survivors

In partnership with IPP's Policy and Communications team, WSP works to raise awareness about the impact of women's incarceration and uplift the voices of survivors. The teams ran social media awareness campaigns during Domestic Violence Awareness Month (October 2025), International Women's Day (March 2026) and the week leading up to Mother's Day (May 2026). The posts were viewed and shared more than a thousand times.



In this widely-shared Domestic Violence Awareness Month social media thread, IPP educates the public about the reasons so many survivors of domestic and gender-based violence are incarcerated.

EDUCATION

IPP's Education Team works to shift the narrative around incarceration by centering the voices and expertise of formerly incarcerated people. This team teaches communities about the harm caused by excessive sentences, especially to communities of color, and the need for reform to decarcerate the current 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.

Community outreach:

In FY26, IPP's Education Team participated in 35 public education events, directly reaching 3,706 people at in-person events at the Cook County Public Defender's Office, Chicago Public Libraries, universities, and many other spaces throughout Illinois. Our primary audiences include community members impacted by incarceration (54%), students (32%), and legal practitioners or service providers (13%). All of IPP's education events are led by formerly incarcerated people with direct experience in the criminal legal system.

In FY26, the Education Team expanded its community outreach through a monthly "Lunch & Learn" series, a free video broadcast on Facebook and YouTube, designed to educate the public on prison reform obstacles and the realities of the criminal legal system. They cover diverse topics such as family support strategies, challenges of re-entry, and tips for navigating the Illinois Department of Corrections. The series serves as a key resource for fostering community understanding and advocating for a more humane prison system, and features formerly incarcerated activists to ensure the conversations are centering the voices of directly impacted experts. In FY26, Lunch & Learns have reached an additional 4,350 people.



Community Navigators at the Library

In FY26, IPP's Education Team expanded their community outreach to include a new partnership with the Chicago Public Library. On the first and third Wednesdays of each month, IPP Community Navigators are stationed at the Harold Washington Library Center, Chicago's flagship library branch downtown. Community members – especially those who are helping an incarcerated loved one navigate IDOC or the Prisoner Review Board – are encouraged to chat with IPP navigators and learn more about our resources.



Cohort 7 of IPP's Ambassador Fellowship Program gathers for their first training session on advocacy and public speaking. (L-R): Byron Merriweather, Terrance Robinson, Nia Frazier, Gilbert Morales, and Tanya "Bam" Woods. Not pictured: Toussaint Daniels.

Ambassadors:

Through the Ambassador Fellowship Program, formerly incarcerated people are trained 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 FY26, IPP's Education Team held 56 hours of training in storytelling, leadership, advocacy, public speaking and media relations for one cohort. Since launching the Ambassador Program in 2022, IPP has trained a total of 40 Ambassadors.



In March 2026, IPP Ambassadors attend a trauma-informed training to support their advocacy and public speaking, hosted by Chicago Torture Justice Center, an organization providing resources and politicized healing to survivors of police violence and institutionalized racism.



In April 2026, IPP's Education Director Renaldo Hudson spoke to a Constitutional Law class at Loyola University, where he led a lively discussion on his experience of incarceration, the prison grievance system, and litigation with and without counsel.

Incarcerated Community Navigators:

IPP brings critical legal information, training, and resources to incarcerated people and their loved ones through the Community Navigator Program. This program was designed to create 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 in IDOC facilities, IPP Community Navigators help incarcerated people advocate for themselves. Our Community Navigator network includes two full-time, system-impacted (formerly incarcerated) IPP staff members, and dozens of men and women currently incarcerated in IDOC facilities across Illinois. Staff navigators run virtual trainings for incarcerated navigators, respond to in-system navigator referrals for legal information for incarcerated people, provide court accompaniment, and refer incarcerated people to service providers. In-system navigators support other incarcerated people by sharing legal information and resources and by connecting incarcerated people to IPP for additional support, information, and referrals.

In FY26, IPP trained 169 incarcerated navigators across 25 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 780 individuals. Through IPP's social media channels, the Education Team promoted IPP resources to over 101,000 individuals.

In September 2025, IPP's Assistant Director of Education Kaitlyn Foust, and Community Navigators JeiJei Webster and Ronnie Carrasquillo educated participants at the "Defenders of the Court" Legal Resource Fair at Aspire Center on Chicago's West Side, hosted by the Office of the Cook County Public Defender.



COMMUNITY EVENT: Democracy On Both Sides Of The Wall



In May 2026, IPP gathered dozens of community leaders, advocates, and directly impacted people for a conversation about power, participation, and what democracy means – on both sides of the prison wall. Moderated by Dr. Christina Rivers of DePaul University, the panel featured Marshan Allen, IPP Director of Policy and Communications; Brian Beals, Executive Director of Mud Theatre Project; and Stevie Valles, Co-Executive Director of Chicago Votes. The speakers shared their experiences of incarceration and disenfranchisement, as well as a vision for how to expand democracy to include all system-impacted people and communities.



POLICY & COMMUNICATIONS

Legislative Policy

Through IPP's advocacy work, we partner with other organizations to develop and implement policies that will reduce the harms of incarceration, end excessive sentencing, and bring more people home from prison. In FY26, IPP's Policy Team worked closely with a statewide network of advocates to create the "Credit for Change" coalition, which includes the Cook County Public Defender, ACLU Illinois, FAMM, Cabrini Green Legal Aid, Impact for Equity, Restore Justice, Illinois Alliance for Reentry and Justice, and Vera Institute for Justice, among others. The Credit for Change campaign fights to restore Illinois sentencing credits so that incarcerated people can receive credit for engaging in rehabilitative programming and good behavior. Credit for Change would make prisons safer, families stronger, and save Illinois taxpayers close to \$1 billion.

IPP Action Fund

IPP's sister organization, the Illinois Prison Project Action Fund (IPPAF), is a 501(c)(4) organization that fights against regressive policies, racist practices, and a system that treats people as disposable. The IPPAF board includes Sharone Mitchell, Charles Hoffman, Stevie Valles, Keith Rudman, Beth Johnson, and Jason DeSanto.

IPPAF advocates for legislative change by meeting directly with policymakers. In FY26, IPPAF met with more than 50 legislators, including members of the Black, Latino, and Progressive Caucuses.

Ongoing IPPAF policy priorities for 2026 and beyond:

- Credit for Change: Allows people to earn credit off their sentences for participating in rehabilitative, educational, or professional programs while incarcerated.
- Mandatory Supervised Release (MSR) credits: Extends day-for-day good conduct credit to individuals on MSR, creates a pathway to reduce the length of MSR terms, and promotes successful community reintegration.
- Felony Murder Reform: Abolishes felony murder, a law that disproportionately criminalizes and sentences people for the conduct of others. The legislation ensures fair sentencing, reduces excessive punishment, and modernizes Illinois' legal system in line with national trends.
- Joe Coleman Medical Release Act: We will continue to monitor the implementation of this important legislation and advocate for refinements to ensure that it is fair, equitable, and accessible to the people who need it most.

IPP Lobby Day: Amplifying the voices of system-impacted people



On May 20, 2026, IPP trained and organized dozens of community members to travel to the Illinois state capitol in Springfield, where they talked directly to lawmakers about supporting IPP and ending the policies that fuel mass incarceration. For many participants, lobby day was personal – including formerly incarcerated clients and those with loved ones who are still trapped inside Illinois jails and prisons.

Communications 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. IPP provides journalists with opportunities to speak with legal and policy experts as well as system-impacted people and their loved ones. In FY26, IPP staff, Ambassadors, clients, and loved ones appeared in media outlets across the state including the Chicago Tribune, Chicago Sun-Times, The Chicago Reader, Chicago Reporter, CAN-TV, WBEZ, WTTW, WGN News, The Triibe, and NPR Illinois, as well as several downstate local news outlets.

IPP's Communication Team works closely with the Education Team to find opportunities for formerly incarcerated Ambassadors to share their experiences of incarceration and re-entry. For example, in November 2025, former Ambassador Rogelio Richart was featured in a WGN-TV Chicago news story about second chances after incarceration, where he described his experience of opening his own business where he also hires and trains other formerly incarcerated people.

In May 2026, CAN-TV Channel 21 News interviewed IPP clients Terrance Robinson and Byron Merriweather about the experience of working while incarcerated. In "The Realities of Prison Labor," Terrance and Byron described the humiliation and indignity of prison work, with no recourse for abuse or mistreatment by staff.

All three men had previously completed media and storytelling training through IPP's Ambassador Fellowship Program.



IPP Ambassador Rogelio Richart is featured on a TV news story for his accomplishments after incarceration. He owns a chain of automotive service centers and employs other formerly incarcerated people.



IPP client & Ambassador Terrance Robinson shared the experience of working while incarcerated on a TV news show. He received media training from IPP's Communications Team during his Ambassador Fellowship.

IPP engages the community directly through our social media channels, which include Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X (formerly Twitter), Flickr, YouTube, and TikTok. Our social media posts include a mix of client stories, short videos, news articles, event promotion, and educational resources. In FY26, IPP had 16,845 subscribers to our social channels; our social posts were viewed 679,444 times. IPP also reaches supporters directly through our website, newsletter and email list, which now has more than 3,500 subscribers.

In addition to our public outreach, IPP's Communications Team has been working closely with our Legal Team to create mitigation videos which are used to tell a client's full story in various legal proceedings such as clemency and resentencing. These videos are especially powerful for showing the impact of a client's incarceration on family members, including spouses, parents and children.



In December 2025, formerly incarcerated survivor Ana Navarro speaks at a widely covered press conference calling on IDOC to implement a safe and humane transfer plan for incarcerated people at Logan Prison. Ana received speaking and media training as part of her IPP Ambassador Fellowship, and is now a leading voice in the movement to protect incarcerated women and survivors.

DEVELOPMENT

IPP's success depends on the financial support of government grants, foundations, and the generosity of individual and corporate donors. IPP has implemented several strategies to increase and diversify support for our mission, including a monthly sustaining donor program called Team Hope, a new Associate Board, and a new volunteer program.

Team Hope

FY26 was the first full year of the Team Hope campaign, an effort to diversify IPP's revenue with the support of community members who make monthly, recurring donations of any amount. This sustainer model provides IPP with reliable, ongoing funding that can be used to support all areas of the organization. In FY26, IPP grew Team Hope to 28 members.

IPP Launches New Associate Board

In FY26, IPP launched a new Associate Board, which is made up of early- and mid-career professionals who are passionate about ending mass incarceration. The board's mission is to build support for IPP through volunteering, fundraising, and raising awareness about IPP's mission. Since its founding, the Associate Board has hosted two fundraising events, including a Juneteenth-inspired art showcase that featured artwork and performances by system-impacted people.



Volunteer Program

In FY26, IPP launched a new volunteer program to provide more opportunities for community members to support IPP beyond financial contributions. Volunteer opportunities include development support, mailing IPP resources to incarcerated people, providing logistical support for Education events, assisting released clients with re-entry, boosting IPP's social media content, and participating in IPP lobby days in Springfield. Since its launch in February 2026, more than 100 people have joined the volunteer program.



IPP volunteers greet attendees as they arrive at IPP's May 2026 Community Event at the National Public Housing Museum. IPP has trained more than 100 volunteers to provide support in all areas of our mission.

Thank you to all those who gave to IPP in honor or memory of a loved one or cherished community member in FY26. To learn more about making a tribute gift to IPP, please contact Development Manager Shana East at shana@illinoisprisonproject.org.

2026 Tributees

Marshan Allen
Mason Astill
Maddie Caponiti
Roosevelt (Rosey) Carr*
Joe N. Coleman*
Jessica Daniels
Olga Dawson
Kenneth Durant
Shana East
Charles & Lucille Edwards
Rhonda Ekwunoh
Anne-Marie Fleming*

Claire Gaudiani*
Anthony Gay*
Rafael Hernandez
Lisa Holzman
Stanley Howard
Renaldo Hudson
Grover Hunt, Jr.*
David Keen
Melinda Klee hamer
Audrey Koeberlein
Fred Mandoline, Jr.*
Maggie Meiners

Melissa & Sharone Mitchell
Byron Mashawn Moore
Katie Moynihan
Bill Ryan
Elizabeth Scinto
Harriet Smith*
Jennifer Soble
Jimmy Soto
Stateville 2022 "Narrating
Social Change" Class
Stateville Think Tank
Sarah Weiss
Sue Wooten

* Denotes memorial gift

WHY I GIVE TO IPP: Maggie Meiners

Maggie Meiners is a Chicago-based multidisciplinary artist whose practice spans photography, film, and mixed media.



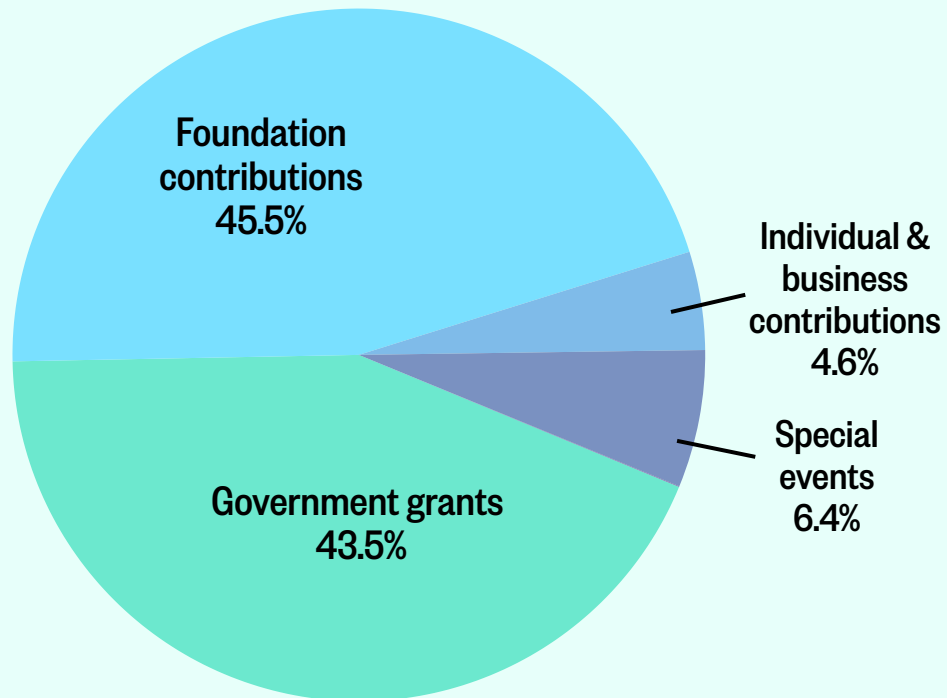
"I first became a supporter of IPP when my husband and I were invited to a 'friendraiser' by IPP Board Member Jeanne Bishop. The stories we heard and the people we met that evening made a lasting impression. It was immediately clear how impactful IPP's work truly is.

IPP's approach to advocacy and systemic change is genuinely inspirational. Grounding their work in hope, compassion, and humanity offers a lesson for all of us. I've always believed mass incarceration is unjust, and I believe deeply in people's capacity to change when given the opportunity. Through IPP's work, I've seen firsthand how incarcerated individuals are given hope—and how, upon release, they're given the support, resources, and opportunities they need to build a new and free life.

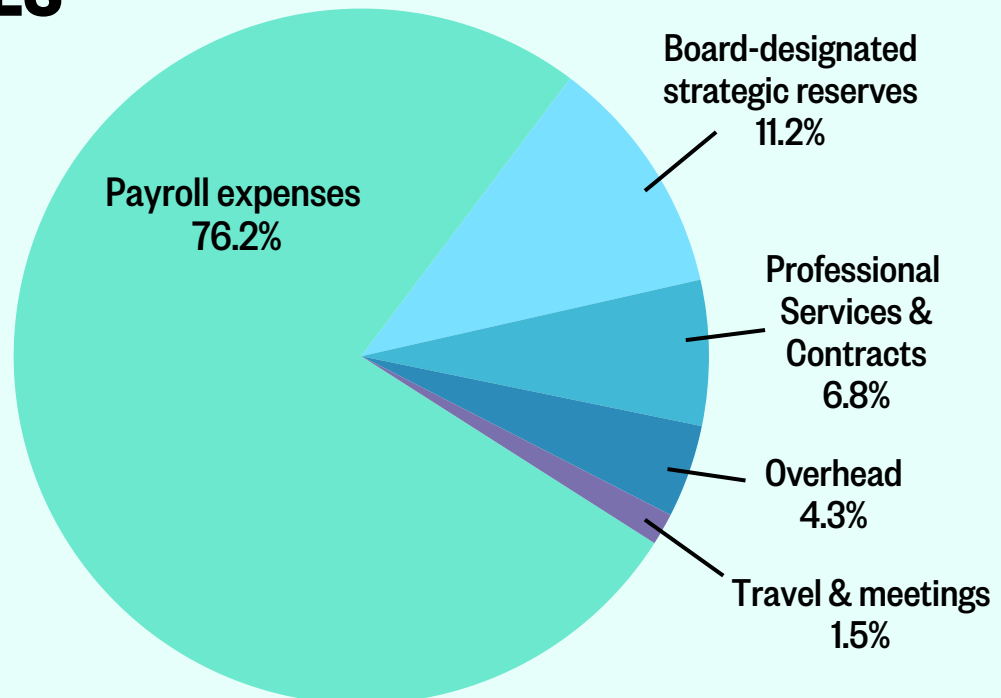
I believe our justice system, as it currently operates, is a cornerstone of poverty in this country—and a major reason it's so difficult for people to escape impoverished conditions. Until we confront the injustice, mass incarceration, and racism embedded in the current system, we won't relieve the extraordinary financial and human burden it places on all of us. I support IPP because it gives them the resources to change outdated laws, build bridge programs for newly released individuals, and expand access to education and advocacy. It's an investment not just in individual lives, but in a more just and humane system for everyone."

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

INCOME



EXPENSES



A man with a mustache and goatee, wearing a dark blue t-shirt and shorts, is sitting in a wheelchair. He is smiling and holding a small, dark-colored dog in his arms. The background is black.

Help us free
more people like
Neo Barbosa,
who was
reunited with his
family in 2026,
after more than
two decades in
prison.



Scan here
to donate!



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