

Spring Edition
April 2021

the inside journal



Who is Initiate Justice?

Initiate Justice is an organization led by people whose lives have been impacted by the California prison system - people who are currently inside, formerly incarcerated, or those who have loved ones inside. Our goal is to build the political power of people impacted by incarceration so we can fight for freedom and bring everyone home.

We are 38,000 incarcerated members, 162 Inside Organizers, 106 Outside Organizers, and members and volunteers across California, working together to build our knowledge and understanding of the political system, and changing laws to build the world we want to live in.

WE MAKE THIS FOR YOU

Please write and let us know what you'd like to see in future issues.



We sent out 525 responses to your questions this January. Thank you to all of our volunteers!



Initiate Justice staff on their weekly Zoom call!
From top left to right: Taina, Michelle, James, Sarah, Antoinette, Marta, Lee, Greg, Daisy, & Crystal!

You're holding the first issue of *The Inside Journal*!

Initiate Justice's quarterly newsletter has become *The Inside Journal*, a 4-times-a-year magazine that shares news about California state laws, CDCR policies, and campaigns pushing for prison abolition, as well as stories and articles gathered from Initiate Justice's inside and outside members. We hope the magazine is informative and fun, and builds connections between all parts of the Initiate Justice community.

What's inside?

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- Member Artwork - Pg 4
- Policy Corner - Pg 5 & 6

How To Submit Your Work to *The Inside Journal*

We will ask for submissions of artwork, poems, and stories from our inside members (you!). To participate:

- 1 Mail your work to our P.O. Box and write "Attn: Magazine"
- 2 Keep written material to less than 150 words. Do not send anything you need back.
- 3 We cannot send anything back.

By sending *The Inside Journal* artwork, poems, & stories you are giving Initiate Justice permission to use your material and publish it in future issues of the magazine.

What Initiate Justice Does:

Share updates on CA legislation and send action items so people can learn about and be a part of the process of changing laws. Inside members can also mail IJ questions.

What Initiate Justice Does Not Do:

Provide legal advice for any individual cases, or review individual legal paperwork of any kind.

INITIATE JUSTICE MAILING ADDRESS

PO BOX 15836
Los Angeles, CA 90015

WEBSITE

www.InitiateJustice.org

EMAIL

info@InitiateJustice.org

Social Media

facebook.com/InitiateJustice
instagram.com/InitiateJustice
twitter.com/InitiateJustice

Prop 17 Passed – Now What?

Did you hear the exciting news?! California Proposition 17 (better known as Prop 17) was included on the ballot during California's statewide elections on November 3, 2020, and passed as one of the most successful propositions in California history, with nearly 10 million "Yes" votes.

Prop 17 restored voting rights to more than 51,000 people currently on parole, and will provide the right to vote to every CA citizen who comes home on parole in the future.

The idea for Prop 17 began behind the walls of San Quentin State Prison. **Rahsaan Thomas, an Initiate Justice Inside Organizer**, told us that if we wanted to build the political power of impacted people, we had to start with giving people a political voice, the right to vote. To take advantage of these new rights, you will need to register to vote when you come home. We'll talk more about this in our next issue. In the meantime, keep dreaming up ideas like Prop 17, so we can help you make them happen. And we hope to win voting rights for everyone inside CA prisons in the future, because "Democracy Needs Everyone," a quote from our **Inside Organizer Juan Haines**.



Prop 17 restored voting rights to Lee, our Inside Organizing Manager.

On November 3, 2020 we took one more step towards abolition: restoring voting rights to everyone in CA who is on parole.



Abolition is Building

Creativity is at the heart of building the world we deserve to live in.

It takes creativity to find ways to untangle the current systems that harm us and to build something new.

We know incarceration does not reduce, prevent, or address harm; it actually creates more harm! We know it is possible to build a world that doesn't rely on police and prisons. There are many people with ideas to radically transform our society, but there is no clear roadmap we all can follow. Instead, abolition requires all of us to be imaginative and to practice and experiment daily, so that radical transformation can emerge.

Let's imagine! Instead of relying on punishment and incarceration to address harm after it has already happened, what resources do we need to create true safety for our communities (like safe housing, quality education and employment)?

Abolition is Creative



sweet bites to repeal three strikes

Building a future without policing and prisons is going to require some imagination, right?

IJ co-founder Taina demonstrated her abolitionist creativity recently when she held a bake sale advertised over social media to raise money to repeal California's Three Strikes Law. By the end of the fundraiser, more than 70 of Taina's friends and followers had ordered **93 dozen cookies** – which raised \$4,252 for the effort to Repeal Three Strikes.



IJ's Co-Founder & Executive Director Taina along with her famous Sugar Cookies.

Show us your creativity! Our theme: **Repeal Three Strikes**. Send us an art piece – a drawing, poem, or anything else – that reflects the importance of repealing Three Strikes. Instructions on how to submit work is on Page 1. More information about repealing Three Strikes is on Page 3.

A Facilitator on: The Institute of Impacted Leaders

My name is Serafin Serrano; once referred to as a "minor," "ward," and "inmate." Despite the deliberate efforts of the (unjust) judicial system's dehumanizing practices and policies, thanks to genetic memory, community elders/mentors, and viable transformational affirming opportunities such as Initiate Justice's Institute of Impacted Leaders, I prevailed. I am honored to now serve a facilitator with Initiate Justice's Institute of Impacted Leaders Orange County cohort.

Initiate Justice's Institute of Impacted Leaders is a collective transformative force that deliberately accesses, activates and leverages its keen insight, lived and proven expertise, rich imagination and fierce determination to create public policy that is equitable, affirming, inclusive and just. According to Cornel West, "justice is what love looks like in public." It is with that bold intention, highest frequency, resolve, ancestral wisdom and leadership that we will audaciously create a humane, communal and loving tomorrow and end mass incarceration for our children and future generations. - *Serafin*

Also, please tear off the section below and send it to a loved one on the outside who will get involved!

REPEAL CALIFORNIA'S THREE STRIKES LAW COALITION

We are excited to announce that Initiate Justice is part of The Repeal CA's Three Strikes Law Coalition which is working to place an initiative on the November 2022 ballot to completely repeal California's Three Strikes Law!

The Three Strikes Law, enacted in 1994, has cost families in ways we cannot even calculate, and upholds systemic racism at every turn. (Did you know: Even though Black people make up less than 6% of California, they represent nearly 50% of those sentenced under Three Strikes!)

*The Repeal CA's Three Strikes Law Coalition is led by directly impacted people and their loved ones. We are working to repeal Three Strikes in California, and reunite families by utilizing the ballot initiative process.**

* The ballot initiative process gives California citizens a way to propose laws and constitutional amendments directly to the voters, without going through the Legislature and the Governor.

Here's how you can help: Right now, we are working to raise funds to begin to collect signatures later on this year. We will be hosting an art auction to fundraise, so if you're an artist, please consider donating a piece of art related to repealing Three Strikes that we can auction off. All proceeds will go to The Repeal CA's Three Strikes Law Coalition and we will send you a certificate of recognition to thank you.

TEAR HERE AND MAIL



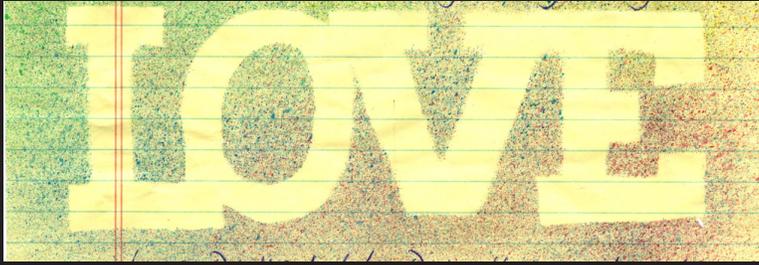
"Let's Repeal California's Three Strikes Law in 2022!"

We are excited to announce that Initiate Justice is part of The Repeal CA's Three Strikes Law Coalition, which is working to place an initiative on the November 2022 ballot to completely repeal California's Three Strikes Law! What this means is that we are part of a group of people in prison, formerly incarcerated people, and people with incarcerated loved ones who are working hard to place an initiative on the November 2022 ballot to completely repeal (or get rid of) California's Three Strikes Law. If it passes, everyone with a strike will be eligible to have their sentence recalled and the strikes removed. It is not going to be an easy win! We have to collect more than a million signatures to qualify for the ballot, and raise millions of dollars. **How you can help:**

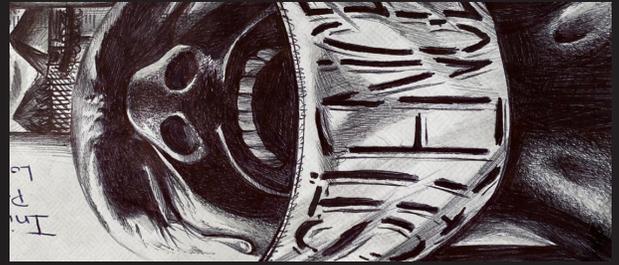
- Visit RepealThreeStrikes.org to sign up to volunteer
- Follow @Repeal3Strikes on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter
- Donate at www.bit.ly/donate2repeal3strikes

Stay tuned for updates. We will be working on this for the next 18 months, and we will need everyone in this together!

artwork from our inside members



Artwork from our Inside Members located in California City Correctional to show their gratitude to the Initiate Justice team and Outside Members!



Inside Member Michael N. located in California Training Facility.

An Outside Member on: Rallying to Support LA District Attorney George Gascón

On Feb. 2nd, IJ Outside Members and Organizers rallied alongside Black Lives Matter Los Angeles outside of the LA courthouse to support George Gascón during his hearing defending his resentencing

initiatives in LA County. We called on our ancestors to surround Gascón in the courtroom and give him the strength to persevere. It was incredibly powerful to stand together and raise our collective voice - literally chanting together - to demand the judge rule in our favor. During a time when COVID-19 has prevented us from gathering regularly, it was really moving to be able to see each other and hear each other's stories, to uplift each other, and to uplift your voices from the inside. I felt a huge sense of pride standing alongside all of the Initiate Justice members. Listening to families share their stories about the barriers that have unnecessarily prevented their loved ones from coming home, I experienced so many emotions at once; anger for the injustice, admiration for how brave they are to share their story and fight for their family, and motivation to fight harder. I left feeling energized and inspired because we are a strong community. When we fight together, we win. - MJ



Members of IJ community at rally for Los Angeles DA George Gascon

An Outside Member on: IJ Mail Nights

In January, Initiate Justice hosted a Mail Night for the IJ community to respond to your questions from inside. Of the 45 volunteers who attended our mail night, 21 of them were first-timers! It was my first mail night, and I invited my older brother who lives in Colorado to join. IJ leaders always welcome everyone so warmly - it really feels like a family. We felt so excited to get to work! We all broke off into small groups, with leaders who could help ensure that we answered your letters in the best way possible. Every time I read a letter, even though I haven't met the letter writer, I feel like I'm reading mail from a friend. My heart is with you when I read your letters, and I am deeply invested in your empowerment; I am so grateful for the opportunity to write to you! After we finished answering letters, we all came back together to celebrate answering your letters - we answered 85 letters at our January Mail Night! - Caitlin



Pictured above is another Mail Night we had, this time with Southwestern Law School's Mass Incarceration Awareness Law Society (MIALS)

Policy Corner

The 2021 Legislative session is in full swing and Initiate Justice

needs your help. Please review the breakdown of the four bills we are co-sponsoring this year, and complete the template letters of support for AB 292 + AB 1509. Completed letters of support should be returned to:

Attn. Legislative Letter of Support
P.O. Box 15836
Los Angeles, CA 90015



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P.O. Box 15836
Los Angeles, CA 90015

Assembly Bill 292 (Assemblymember Mark Stone): Access to Programming Act.

This bill is a re-do of AB 3160 that was dropped in 2020 due to the pandemic. This bill seeks to eliminate common barriers to programming such as; long waitlists, frequent transfers, and inflexible work schedules that conflict with program availability, while also ensuring that programming continues during lockdowns. This bill also creates a path for people who have their VIO determinate removed to earn half time.

Co-Sponsors of AB 292 include: Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Initiate Justice, Re:Store Justice, and Transformative In-Prison Workgroup

Assembly Bill 1509 (Assemblymember Alex Lee): The Anti-Racism Sentencing Abuse Act.

This bill seeks to eliminate most gun enhancements and reduce all others (Penal Code §12022.53 and Penal Code §12022.5.) to 1/2/3 years and allow for re-sentencing. Sentence enhancements are costly, ineffective, and are a relic of the failed tough-on-crime era. Approximately 40,000 currently incarcerated folks are serving time for a gun enhancement, of which 89% are people of color.

Co-Sponsors of AB 1509 include: Initiate Justice, Re:Store Justice, Silicon Valley De-Bug, and Essie Justice Group.

Assembly Bill 256 (Assemblymember Ash Kalra): The Racial Justice Act 4 All.

This bill builds upon the Racial Justice Act, passed in 2020 (AB 2542 - Kalra), that prohibits the state from seeking or obtaining a criminal conviction, or from imposing a sentence, based upon race, ethnicity or national origin. AB 256 extends those protections to those who have already been impacted by unfair convictions and sentences. Providing for retroactivity will give these individuals an equal opportunity to pursue justice.

Co-Sponsors for AB 256 include: ACLU of California, American Friends Service Committee, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, CA Coalition for Women Prisoners, Californians United for a Responsible Budget, Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights Los Angeles, Initiate Justice, League of Women Voters CA, NextGen Policy, and Silicon Valley De-Bug

AB 965

We are still awaiting CDCR's regulations for AB 965 implementation. AB 965, passed in 2019, directs CDCR to apply Prop 57 credits to people's Youth Offender Parole Hearing Dates if they are sooner than their earliest parole eligibility dates. CDCR has full discretion to decide which credits to apply and when to begin applying them.

We are expecting the Regulations to be announced at some point in 2021, with an implementation date of January 2022.

Once announced, we will launch a large campaign to fully implement the legislative intent of AB 965 by applying all types of Prop 57 credits to Youth Offender Parole Dates, in addition to applying Prop 57 credits to Elder Parole dates so that all Prop 57 credits can be applied to a person's earliest possible parole date. Stay tuned for updates.

DA of Los Angeles County, George Gascón:

Elected in Nov. 2020, District Attorney of Los Angeles George Gascón announced sweeping changes. Under his directive, LA county would no longer recommend sentence enhancements, Strikes, or the death penalty.

The Deputy DAs (career prosecutors) swiftly filed an injunction. On Monday, February 8th that injunction was partially granted. DA Gascón is temporarily blocked from applying these new directives to the nearly 10,000 pending felony cases his office inherited. He plans to appeal for a favorable ruling from a higher court. In the meantime, please note:

- He is still able to apply these new directives to anyone arrested in LA county after his administration began (November 2020).
- It does not affect those seeking postconviction relief or resentencing under 1170(d).

Right now, the only way to be recommended for resentencing is for the DA's office to review your case and decide if you may be eligible. Contacting the DA's office will only slow the process. We need them focused on reviewing cases instead of replying to letters.

If they decide you may be eligible, you will receive a letter from the Public Defender's office, or a nonprofit they are partnering with, requesting access to your C-file. Hiring a lawyer before you are contacted will not help you in any way, as there is nothing that can be filed to speed up this process. Please be patient. We are following this closely and will provide relevant updates.

Stimulus Check Update

Incarcerated people are eligible to receive federal stimulus checks. In order to be eligible, individuals must be a US Citizen or Permanent Legal Resident, not claimed as a dependent on another person's tax return; and if married, you and/or your spouse must have a valid Social Security Number. If you filed a 2019 tax return or received the first stimulus check, you do not need to take action and should receive the next payment.

The last day to file 2020 taxes is May 17th, 2021.

CDCR advises calls be made to the following number for more information: (800) 919-9835. Please note that phone number is not set up to accept collect calls, so it has to be a family-made call.

Expansion of Good Conduct Credits

In Mid-2020, the Governor directed CDCR to begin drafting regulations to expand Good Conduct Credits. The Regulations have still not been released, so we are on stand by until they are public. Once released, we will mobilize our community to submit public comment.

Note for future Inside Organizers

If you have signed up to become an Inside Organizer, please give us some time before you receive your welcome packet. Thank you for your patience!