

# News ||| Inside

A compilation of criminal justice news from  
The Marshall Project  
March 2025—Issue 19

||| The Marshall Project





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On the cover:

Jules, left, and Samantha Werkheiser spend time at their Waverly, New York, home with their son, Julius. Photograph by Camille Farrah Lenain for The Marshall Project

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## A Letter From Lawrence

Welcome to the 2025 women's issue of *News Inside*! Last April we put out our first women's issue, and I keep finding so many powerful stories we haven't shared yet. And this issue? It's really special to me. Let me tell you why.

During my time inside, my wife visited me almost every week for the last 14 years I was there. I still appreciate how lucky I was and how much commitment that took. The prison split up visiting days on weekends between "odd" and "even" based on the last number of our ID. I had odd days, and something interesting happened over time. See, the guys inside had this unwritten rule about not letting our visitors become friends with one another — we worried it might cause problems inside if the women ever had disagreements. But a group of women, including my wife, who mostly visited on the same odd days, ignored our rules and found their own way forward.

They started calling themselves "The Odd Wives," and they showed us something important: Real friendship can work, even with all the complications of prison life. They stuck together through good times and bad, and watching them made us rethink everything we assumed about keeping visitors apart. It brought us closer together and we remain friends after being released — and so do most of our wives. Their friendship is just one example of why putting together this women's issue means so much to me.

We've got some really moving stories in this issue. There's an incredible photo essay about Jules and Samantha Werkheiser, a couple who stuck together through wrongful imprisonment. Their story has everything — love, the loss of their newborn daughter, and the hope they found through their son Julius, who kept them going until they were finally exonerated.

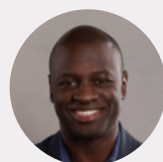
We're also diving into a serious issue with a piece about domestic violence survivors serving time for their abusers' crimes. One story in particular will break your heart — Pat Johnson was sentenced to life in 1993 for being present when an abusive partner committed murder. After more than 30 years, Pat is still seeking clemency.

For news from Cleveland, Ohio, and Jackson, Mississippi, check out our renamed Local Focus section with journalism from our local newsrooms. Of course, we've still got all your favorites: "Peeps," Reader to Reader, a crossword puzzle and more.

Take care, enjoy the read, and, hey — don't forget to thank the women in your life. We literally wouldn't exist without them!



MICHELLE BASTIEN ARCHER



### Lawrence Bartley

*Lawrence Bartley is the publisher of The Marshall Project Inside. He served a 27-years-to-life sentence and was released on parole in May 2018.*

## Letters From Our Readers

Receiving another informative and educational issue of *News Inside* is always good. I especially appreciated Issue 16's focus on women. As an advocate inside, I, too, have been reminded to promote the value of our women peers inside. Bravo!

– **Dortell W., California**

After watching your videos on Edovo and reading *News Inside*, I've found them both interesting and educational. After being sentenced to a harsh sentence due to the acts of my abuser, I began asking anyone and everyone who would listen to tell me what steps I should take. It's been two years, but after reading a few articles from *News Inside*, I've learned where to start. Not only did I learn what steps I should be taking, but I've also spotted a few things to think about program-wise and upon being released. Thanks to the stories of hope, I'm comforted and reminded that I won't be incarcerated forever.

– **Marissa P., Texas**

I have been in a moderate-risk program at a juvenile facility for six months. I am low-key scared of being released; I just don't want to mess up again. My facility allows us to have GTL tablets, and *News Inside* is on the education app. I have read all of them about three times. I really like the idea of allowing people in prisons across America to access the *News Inside* articles.

– **M. S., Indiana**

I would like to request a subscription to *News Inside*. I saw this magazine (Issue 15) for the first time last week in my prison reentry building. I enjoyed reading it a lot and I wanted to thank all of you who made it happen. It was truly a blessing to get my hands on my first copy of the stories, and the information filled me with inspiration and knowledge. Amazing work! You guys are killing it; the topics are wonderfully written in an easy way to relate to and follow.

– **Philip B., Connecticut**

I would like to thank you for your spotlight on everything behind the prison walls. Indeed, with your partners, you have made changes to the culture behind the walls, especially now that your magazine is a click away on our tablets. My community knows they are not alone. Thank you for your magazine. I hope you continue to blow some fresh air into these issues.

– **Carlos G., Texas**

I would like to be put on the mailing list for your publication. I was given this magazine by a fellow human being while housed at another facility and always found the articles informative and in line with where my mind has been for some time. I have been a very vocal incarcerated individual, and now that I am getting closer to the door, I am looking to continue my drive for change on the other side of the fence.

– **Cory S., Michigan**

*We appreciate your letters, so keep them coming! Please note that we will edit what you write to us for length and clarity.*

## Manager's Note

The Marshall Project provides *News Inside* to you free of charge. While we appreciate the gesture, you do not have to send stamps, money or donations of any kind.

Please know that we are unable to write back. Our *News Inside* team has been where you are now, and we understand the struggle. But we are a small team with limited capacity.

When you request a subscription, please follow the format below to ensure you receive your copy of *News Inside*:

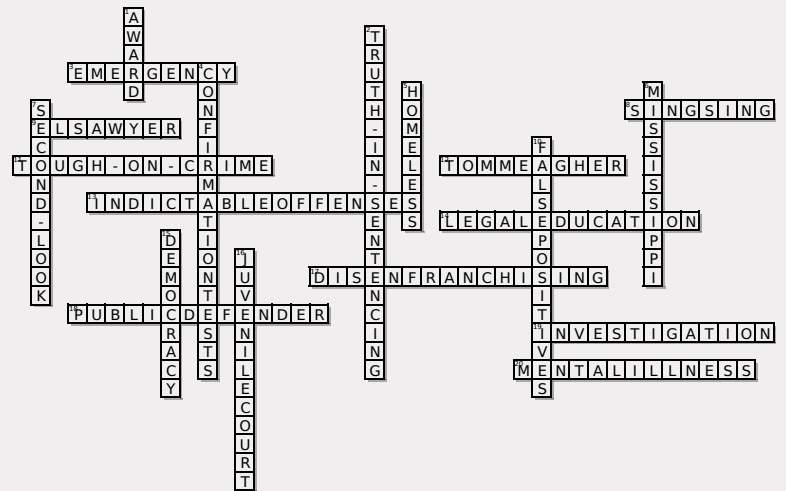
**Full name, Identification number**  
**Name of Facility**  
**Street Address or PO Box**  
**City, State, Zip Code**

Thank you for your continued interest in and support of *News Inside*!

### **Martin Garcia**

*Martin Garcia is the manager of News Inside. He served a 10-year sentence and was released on parole in September 2019.*

### Answers from Issue 18 Crossword



#17 Across was mistakenly entered as #15 in the last issue.



# Love Beyond Bars: Jules and Samantha

Jules and Samantha Werkheiser fought their wrongful convictions for over a decade. Here's their journey of survival — and motherhood — in pictures.



Photographs by CAMILLE FARRAH LENAIN for The Marshall Project  
As-told-to by CARLA CANNING  
Photo editing CELINA FANG  
Word editing by AKIBA SOLOMON



*In a winding legal fight that began in 2011, Samantha Werkheiser and her wife, Jules, were wrongfully convicted of sexually abusing Samantha's daughters from her first marriage. The New York couple maintained that Samantha's ex-husband and his wife alienated the girls from them during a bitter custody battle, and, as a result, manipulated the teens into making false abuse accusations.*

*Over the next 12 years, often on opposite sides of prison walls, Samantha and Jules helped each other cope — with lawyers and judges, motions and decisions, appeals and new trials. Samantha was in prison when she gave birth to their son, Julius, and his twin sister, who died.*

*Samantha's indictment was thrown out in 2019, after two trials. She was released from prison after serving four-and-a-half years of a 15-year sentence. Jules, who was serving 11 years to life, walked out of prison in September 2023. The state dismissed her final charge in January 2024.*

*Here, Samantha (at right) reflects on the bittersweet beauty of her journey with Jules, and how their son kept them connected even when they couldn't be in the same space.*

Our love story is unique. For years, Jules and I were both in and out of prison, sometimes missing each other by days on either side of the fence. We fought for one another and kept hope alive. It's something that I think is really beautiful.

Of course, it's easy to say that our story is beautiful now, but I have to say it wasn't when it was happening. I knew we could make it, but there were times where I didn't know if I could bear all that "making it" entailed.

I was three months pregnant with twins in May of 2013, when I was convicted and sent to prison. Our daughter was born early, and she passed away 22 minutes after birth. Doctors were apprehensive about our son's chances. They said it was likely he would be born early, too. And even if I could manage to make it to 24 weeks, we should expect that he would have all sorts of health and developmental issues.

None of that happened. In November 2013, at full term, I gave birth to Julius. It was miraculous. He survived in the face of those odds.

Our son was 2 when I won my first appeal. Jules was convicted the very same week I got out of prison. I wasn't allowed to visit her because I still had pending charges, and I was waiting for my second trial. So we had an army of friends who would rotate bringing Julius to visit her. Each time he came back, I would hug him so tightly because he had just seen mommy. He was with her when I couldn't be.

Our legal battle was scary and lonely and horrible, but we focused on getting through it little by little, getting to that next visit or next letter. Julius was our hope, our love child [who] bound us together. We didn't believe that God gave us a child that neither one of us was going to be present for. So when one of us would begin to complain or feel sorry for herself, we would remind the other of the great gift of our son. We got through that tunnel of shit. Still, it doesn't feel real. ■

Jules and Samantha had a wedding in 2005, when same-sex marriage was still illegal in New York. They legally wed in 2011.







Samantha and Jules celebrated Julius' first birthday with him at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in 2014. At the time, Samantha was incarcerated, but Jules was free.



The family posed for this photograph on Mother's Day in 2022, when Julius was 8. At the time, Jules was incarcerated, but Samantha was free.



Both Samantha and Jules were free in 2024, when this photo was taken.







Julius points at notes he wrote to his mothers pasted on a window of their house.





Jules and Julius pray inside Saint James Catholic Church, the Waverly, New York, church where he was baptized. Both of his mothers converted to Catholicism while they were imprisoned.



Jules embraces Julius at a soccer game.







Jules and Samantha hug Julius.

**Camille Farrah Lenain** is a French-Algerian documentary photographer who grew up in Paris. She relocated to New Orleans in 2013. Her photographs have been exhibited internationally, including at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, the Arab World Institute, Photoville and Les Rencontres d'Arles.

**Carla Canning** is an engagement journalist and contract editor at Prison Journalism Project. She previously worked on Life Inside as The Marshall Project's Tow audience engagement fellow. At the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism, she created a website guide for people visiting loved ones incarcerated in New York State prisons.



# Why Firing the Prison Guards Involved in Robert Brooks' Death Is Neither Quick Nor Easy

1.17.2025

Our investigation in 2023 exposed how New York's discipline system failed to hold abusive guards to account.

By **JOSEPH NEFF**  
and **ALYSIA SANTO**

Additional reporting by  
**TOM MEAGHER**

The videos show a brutal assault: In December 2024, New York corrections officers beat, kicked and choked a handcuffed Robert Brooks, 43, inside the medical unit at Marcy Correctional Facility, near Syracuse. Hours later, he died from his injuries, authorities said.

New York State Attorney General Letitia James quickly released the officers' body camera footage, which went viral — and not just in the U.S. Gov. Kathy Hochul ordered more than a dozen employees to be fired.

On Jan. 15, 2025, the family of Robert Brooks filed a lawsuit against the officers and some state officials that included numerous photos detailing his assault. But firing New York prison guards is neither quick nor easy. A 2023 investigation by The Marshall Project found that between 2010 and the spring of 2022, the corrections department tried to fire guards for abusing prisoners or covering it up in nearly 300 cases — but successfully terminated the officer only 10% of the time. There are two main ways officers accused of abuse retain their jobs, our reporting found. First, the department settled many cases for lesser punishments or dismissed charges. Second, under the correctional officers' union contract with

the state, they can appeal their firings to an outside arbitrator. Of the nearly 140 appeals we examined, arbitrators gave 75% of officers their jobs back.

In a rare public rebuke, Gov. Kathy Hochul and the prisons commissioner have called for the termination of the employees accused of involvement in Brooks' death. But neither official has the power to fire them. The guards' union contract gives the final say to the arbitrators, a system that former prison leaders and lawmakers say hurts accountability.

Unlike many prison assaults, where evidence is scant or hidden, body cameras caught Brooks' final moments on Dec. 9, 2024, allowing people to see a world seldom observed by outsiders. Civil rights advocates and law enforcement experts universally condemned the beating, which was played on network television and cast a rare national spotlight onto New York's violent correctional system. Details about why Brooks was handcuffed and beaten are not publicly known. Several officers involved had been sued in the past by prisoners accusing them of similar attacks — and those officers have denied wrongdoing in those past cases.

Officials had been alerted to violence and other problems at Marcy. But the public release of video from inside New York prisons is incredibly rare. If a beating does come to light, it's usually years later. When James made the video public less than three weeks after Brooks' death, the urgency and severity of the situation was

undeniable. James has used her authority to investigate in-custody deaths, which was granted in 2021, to publish footage of officer-involved deaths to increase transparency. Brooks was the 46th case with video released by James and the first involving prison guards.

Three weeks after Brooks' death, and three days after the video was released, Hochul visited Marcy prison to announce a new warden, a more stringent body camera policy and a speed-up of body camera acquisition. She also called for prosecutors to quickly charge and arrest the officers. Brooks, who was Black, was handcuffed; the guards all appear to be White. Ten officers have been indicted, six on murder charges.

Some advocates for criminal justice reform see this as a major opening for change in a system where past efforts have failed. In January, a group of legislators signed a letter calling on other lawmakers and Hochul to close Marcy prison and support systemic prison reform.

So far, one officer named in the Brooks beating has resigned; the department has suspended 15 other guards and two nurses without pay and issued them formal notices of termination.

If the employees appeal their firings, the arbitration hearings would resemble a trial. The state and the union present evidence and witnesses, and the arbitrator decides the guard's guilt or innocence and any disciplinary sanction. As a result



People gather at a rally for Robert Brooks on Jan. 2, 2025 in New York City. Brooks died after he was assaulted by New York corrections officers at Marcy Correctional Facility in December 2024.

SHAWN INGLIMA/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, VIA ZUMA PRESS WIRE



of our investigation, we found that the median time from when the department tried to fire a guard for abuse to the end of arbitration was more than eight months.

This disciplinary system heavily favors guards, and remains in place despite repeated efforts at change. Citing our reports, New York state Sen. Julia Salazar filed a bill in 2024 to give the prison commissioner final say to fire officers in serious misconduct cases, which includes excessive force, smuggling contraband and sexual abuse of prisoners. The legislation stalled; it was very similar to changes that Gov. Andrew Cuomo unsuccessfully pushed in 2018.

Meanwhile, the corrections department has yet to use a new tool designed to more thoroughly examine serious charges. A 2019 addition to the union contract mandates a three-person panel — an arbitrator and representatives from the state and union — to decide cases of serious misconduct. The change was supposed to make it easier to fire bad officers. Hochul's office renegotiated a new union contract in 2024 mandating the panels. A spokesperson for the state's civil service department said they are still

working with the union to establish them.

It's unclear how officers accounted for their actions at Marcy the night Brooks was beaten. The medical examiner's preliminary findings indicate Brooks died by asphyxiation; the final autopsy report found his death was a homicide. Guards must file official reports after every use of force on a prisoner. The reports on this case have not been released. But our previous reporting found that guards often work in groups to conceal violent assaults by lying to investigators and on official reports. Some officers then file charges against their victims and send them to solitary confinement.

At least three of the officers implicated in Brooks' death have been sued by prisoners accusing them of similar attacks. In one case, Adam Bauer alleged a group of guards, including one accused in the Brooks case, beat him bloody in a bathroom at Marcy prison in 2020 and then lied about how Bauer was injured. The prison department deemed the force necessary and did not discipline the officers, Bauer's lawyer told us.

This pattern fits with our review of more than 160 excessive force lawsuits in

which the state was ordered or agreed to pay money damages. We found officials attempted to discipline an officer in just 20 of those cases.

In three death lawsuits, the state paid the families more than \$1 million but never disciplined the officers accused. The family of Karl Taylor, a prisoner at the now-shuttered Sullivan Correctional Facility, filed a lawsuit alleging guards had beaten him to death in 2015. The state settled for \$5 million and agreed to install cameras at the prison. Prison officials never filed disciplinary actions against any of the officers involved. A grand jury declined to indict the guards on criminal charges in that case.

The criminal investigation into Brooks' death is now in the hands of the Onondaga County district attorney.

In January 2025, Hochul expressed frustration that no arrests had been made. "The video of this horrific attack demonstrates that crimes clearly were committed," Hochul said in a statement. "The family of Mr. Brooks deserves no further delays." ■

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# Serving Time for Their Abusers' Crimes

6.13.2024

The Marshall Project found nearly 100 people who were punished for the actions of their abusers under little-known laws like "accomplice liability."

By SHANNON HEFFERNAN

Illustrations by YIMIN QIAO for The Marshall Project

Pat Johnson counted the locks on the apartment door. One. Two. Three. There were too many to undo and escape before Rey Travieso got to her. He'd just killed three people — including an infant. He turned to her, her face covered in tears and snot. "Don't worry, Pat, I ain't going to kill you," she remembers him saying. "You believe me?"

She didn't believe him. For seven years, she'd been in an abusive relationship with Travieso. If dinner was not ready on time, he broke furniture and beat her. If she was home after her curfew, he hit her. He had hurt her so

badly, she landed in the hospital. She knew what he was capable of.

So she did what he told her to do and helped stuff jewelry and money into a bag, and then she kept her mouth shut.

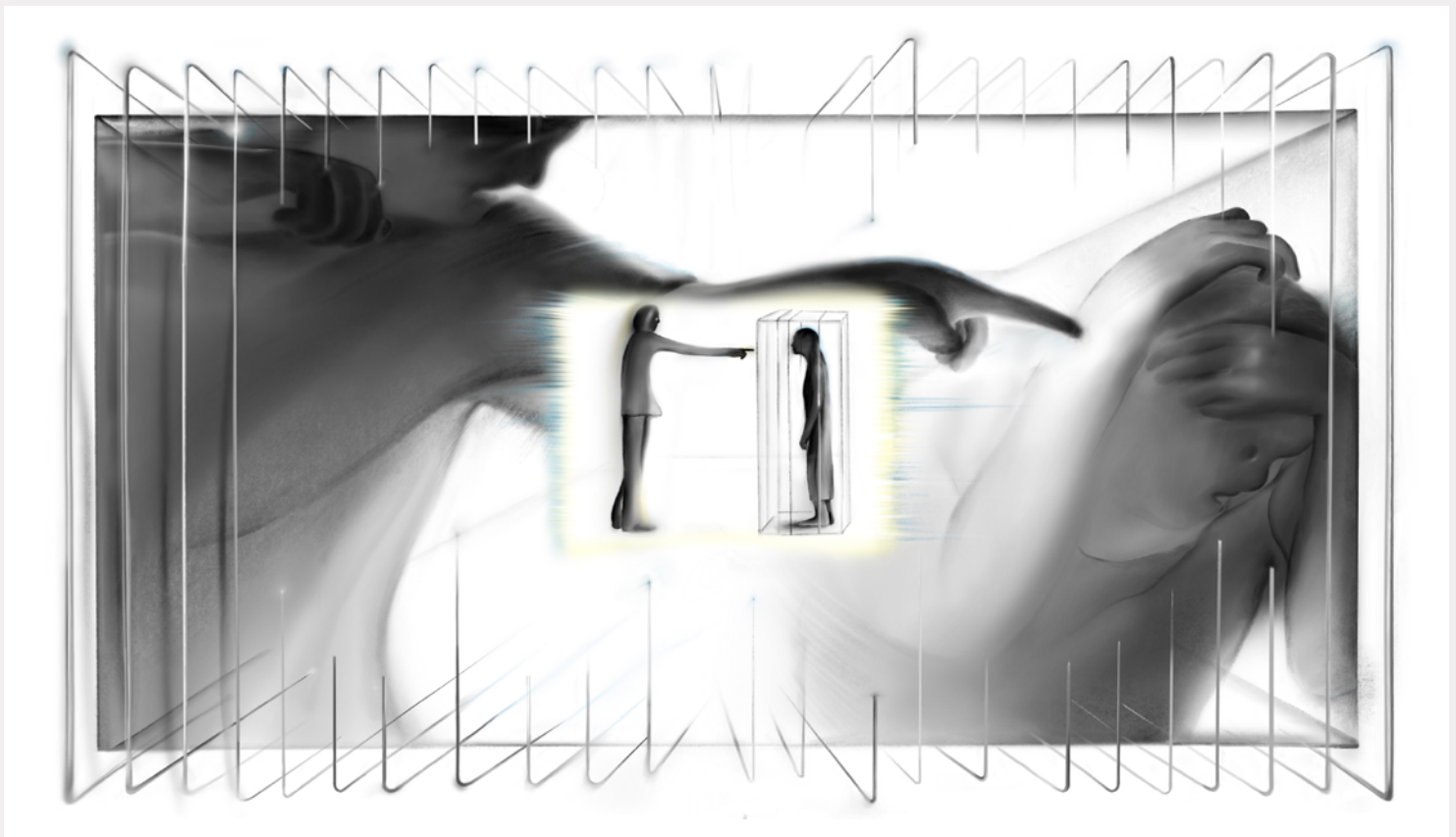
Even though he did not kill her, in a way, he still took her life. Since 1993, Johnson has sat in an Illinois prison for the murders she said Travieso committed.

Prosecutors didn't have to prove that Johnson killed anyone to charge her with murder. Under state law, the "theory of accountability" allows a person to be charged for a crime another person committed, if they assisted. That meant

Johnson's charge was murder, and just like Travieso, she faced a life sentence.

Every state has some version of the theory of accountability — more broadly called "accomplice liability" — though the specifics vary from place to place. These kinds of laws can make victims of intimate partner violence particularly vulnerable to prosecution.

There is no comprehensive national data about how many people are behind bars for a crime committed by their abuser due to laws that allow someone to be charged for the actions of another person. Accomplice liability crimes are



not usually tracked by the courts as a distinct offense, and domestic violence is often not documented, so it would be impossible to account for every case.

Still, searching through legal documents, The Marshall Project and Mother Jones identified nearly 100 people across the country, nearly all of them women, who were convicted of assisting, supporting or failing to stop a crime by their alleged abuser. Some of the women showed clear signs of abuse at the time they were arrested. One had been shot by her abuser weeks before; another was in a neck brace.

In some of the cases we reviewed, evidence of an abusive relationship was excluded at trial. In others, lawyers and judges poorly understood the psychological effects of domestic violence and the real dangers victims face. At one woman's sentencing in 2000, for example, a Michigan judge justified the defendant's 10- to 30-year prison sentence for assisting her allegedly abusive boyfriend with a string of robberies by saying she had ample opportunity to leave him. But the risk of ending an abusive relationship is high: According to data from the U.S. Department of Justice, of the nearly 5,000 women murdered across the country in 2021, about one-third died at the hands of an intimate partner. Experts say the end of

a relationship is the most dangerous time for an abuse victim.

Abusive relationships rarely begin that way. Johnson met Travieso when she was working at a discount chain store. Her manager called her over the loudspeaker to meet Travieso in the hardware department — he wanted to buy an artificial Christmas tree and specifically asked that she help him. A few weeks later, Travieso was waiting outside the store and offered Johnson a ride home. She hesitated. She was just 17 years old, and Travieso was 35, but he showed her that the car had a phone — a luxury in 1985 — and invited her to call her mother and give her his license plate number so she'd feel safer. After that, things moved quickly, and soon they started living together.

Sometimes Travieso could be controlling, dictating where Johnson could go and who she could see. But he also showered her with compliments and made sure she had what she needed. He once gave her a pair of gold, dangly earrings. They went well with her style: short hair and bright red lipstick. Johnson was the youngest of six girls. Her family was poor and had bounced around Chicago, sometimes living in public housing. To Johnson, the earrings were a symbol of Travieso's ability to

provide for her.

But one day, in the parking lot of a Sizzler restaurant, their meaning changed.

Johnson noticed a white Trans Am and offhandedly said it was a nice car, within earshot of its driver. Travieso was furious at Johnson for giving another man attention and called her a whore, then slapped her so hard that one of the earrings flew out of her ear. It wasn't so much the physical pain that stayed with her, but the utter embarrassment. The restaurant had big windows, and customers and staff inside saw everything — she wanted to crawl under the car and hide.

She said Travieso's abuse escalated. Once, he beat her so badly that she looked, as she described it, like "the Elephant Man." He said it was the last time. It wasn't.

Johnson's family and friends say they witnessed Travieso's violence and its aftermath. A shattered glass table. A belt buckle to the face. One of Johnson's nieces remembers visiting when she was a child and realizing that the phrase "black eye" wasn't just an expression, but a literal fact: If you hit a person hard enough, the skin around the eye really could bloom into a purple-black cloud.

Once, Johnson said, she tried to hide





from Travieso in a closet, but he dragged her out by her ankles. She screamed that God was going to punish him for how he treated her. “I am your god,” he replied. And it felt true. He seemed omniscient. He had strong ties in the neighborhood, and plenty of people were willing to tell Rey Travieso where Johnson went. Every time she tried to leave, he found her and brought her back. “I was so afraid of Rey. I don’t think I ever feared anyone that much,” Johnson said years later. “Sometimes, it was almost like fearing God.”

Eventually, Johnson discovered Travieso was not actually a truck driver, as he had claimed when they first met, but a drug dealer. He started to give her cocaine, and soon she became addicted.

Travieso ran a restaurant with his friend Juan Hernandez. Johnson said they sold food in the front and drugs out of the back. Sometimes they’d fight about their business, and Johnson overheard them threaten each other. But then they’d come out and drink a couple of sodas, and everything would be fine again.

Despite struggling with addiction, Johnson stayed in close contact with her family. Her nieces remember her being more like a sister than another

adult. She took them to the beach, and when they threw sand at each other, she joined in. At night, they would stay up late, well past bedtime, watching movies. Even though her niece Tromeka Turner-Mason was a child at the time, she said Johnson confided in her that she felt trapped with Travieso and didn’t know what to do.

In November 1991, when she was 23, Johnson tried to leave Travieso. She went to stay with another man, and they spent their days using crack cocaine. Travieso found her, as he always did, but this time he didn’t make her move back in with him. Instead he kept coming back to see her. Sometimes he’d take her to a motel, where he forced her to have sex. At the trial, when a lawyer asked her why she wasn’t able to refuse him, she explained, “He said he owned me, that’s why.”

On the afternoon of Jan. 16, 1992, Travieso asked Johnson to come with him to “take care of some business.” At her trial, she described what happened that day: They drove to the home of Travieso’s business partner, Hernandez. Johnson knew they’d been fighting because Travieso said Hernandez owed him about \$40,000. Travieso was angry and making threats, but she assumed he was just acting macho. Hernandez

answered the door and walked them to the living room, where his wife, Olga, sat holding their 10-month-old baby, Evelyn.

Travieso and Hernandez argued, alternating between Spanish and English. Johnson couldn’t follow everything they were saying, but she could tell Travieso was asking for the cash, and Hernandez responded by laughing at him. Clearly, they were unhappy with one another, but it seemed like one of their routine fights. Then someone knocked on the door.

When Hernandez stood up to answer, Travieso pulled out a gun and told him to sit down. That’s when Johnson said she knew this fight was different. Travieso pointed the gun at her and told her to tell the pizza delivery man that the order was canceled. Johnson obeyed. Olga gathered up a few thousand dollars and some jewelry, but it wasn’t enough to satisfy Travieso. He tied Hernandez’s hands, and as medical examiner reports would later show, pistol-whipped him and slit his throat. Next, he killed Olga and the baby. Johnson was certain she would be next.

Travieso told Johnson that if he killed her there, police would trace the crime back to him. But if Johnson stayed calm and never told anyone, then things

would be fine. She wiped her tear-stained face on her shirt, and followed his instructions to walk casually to the car with him.

Although this is the story Johnson told at trial, it's not the only version of events, and there is no clear physical evidence that points to how much Johnson participated in the killings. Only two people really know what took place: Travieso and Johnson.

When police arrested them more than six months after the murders, Travieso confessed to killing Hernandez, but he said that Johnson had killed Olga and the baby. Later at his trial, he changed his story and said he wasn't there at all, despite strong evidence to the contrary. I wrote to him in prison, where he is serving a life sentence for the murders, to ask about his version of events. He responded briefly: Johnson "should never have been in prison ... All these years I've felt bad about it all." I sent him multiple messages asking for an interview or details about Johnson's accusations of abuse and account of the murders, but he never replied.

Over time, Johnson's story has varied. In her police confession, for example, she said she went with Travieso to buy plastic gloves before the murder and was with him when another drug dealer ordered a hit on Hernandez. But at trial, she said the police inaccurately summarized what she told them. A clemency petition, written more than two decades later, says Johnson can't remember pawning the jewelry, a fact she confessed to at trial. Trauma can reshape a person's memory — impairing factual recall while also making recollections painfully visceral. But Johnson is consistent on the two most important facts: She did not kill anyone, and she was terrified of Travieso.

Since going to prison, Johnson has come out as a transgender man. He remains in a women's facility and still uses she/her pronouns when talking about his life before prison — and has requested we do the same, because he said living as a woman was central to the abusive dynamic with Travieso. When Johnson finished telling me the story during our 2023 interview, he looked over at his lawyer, Rachel White-Domain, and gave a weak smile.

"God was there," he said.

"You survived," White-Domain replied.

"God was there. He knows I didn't hurt anybody. He knows I didn't kill anyone. God was there. He knows that."

When White-Domain began working with incarcerated survivors of domestic violence in 2008, she was still in law school at DePaul University. It was a passion project she did on Saturdays with a handful of other volunteers around a kitchen table. At first, most cases involved women who had killed abusive husbands or boyfriends. But as hundreds of letters from women's prisons poured in, she realized that many were in prison not for killing an abuser, but for aiding them in committing a crime. Johnson was one of the first clients convicted under the theory of accountability whom White-Domain took on in 2019. She estimates that they now make up about a quarter of her clients at the Illinois Prison Project, an advocacy organization for incarcerated people, where she runs the Women & Survivors Project.

Many of the cases against the people White-Domain represents aren't about evidence or proof; they aren't "whodunnits." Instead, juries and judges (and the politicians who write the laws that govern them) must decide: What should a person be held responsible for? How should the conditions of a person's life be weighed when they are involved in a crime? White-Domain says another lawyer once asked her: Is it worse if they don't believe your story of abuse, or is it worse if they believe you, but it doesn't matter?

Even though White-Domain told me she thinks accomplice liability cases are more common than self-defense cases, they are harder to explain to the public and get far less attention.

When people defend themselves against deadly attacks by killing their abusers, it's relatively easy to sympathize. It's more complicated when the victim is not a violent husband, but is instead an innocent third party. And it's even more difficult when the offense involves young victims or especially gruesome murders — the kinds of crimes that make some people so afraid and furious that they want to make sure anyone even remotely involved is punished.

While every state has some version of an accomplice liability law, states vary as to what degree of participation is necessary for someone to be prosecuted. And accomplice liability laws aren't

the only ones that allow people to be punished for supporting or failing to stop another person's crime.

In many states, felony murder laws allow someone to be punished for a murder they didn't commit if they were engaged in a dangerous felony with the person who actually did the killing. Prosecutors can charge someone with conspiracy for agreeing to assist with a crime and taking action to help. Failure-to-protect laws in some states allow a parent (in practice almost always a mother) to be punished for abuse committed by another person if the courts believe she should have prevented the crime.

These laws each function differently and often overlap, but together they create a web that expands who can be held responsible for a crime.

No one tracks how many abuse victims are convicted nationwide because of these laws, but there are some telling numbers. A study of 72 women serving life in Michigan found 60% were there for a murder they didn't themselves commit. Most of those crimes were connected to a man they had a relationship with. In a survey of people serving time for murder or manslaughter in women's prisons, 13% of the respondents said they had been convicted for a crime committed with their abuser.

The Marshall Project's reporting found a similar pattern. Reviewing court documents, we identified scores of cases where prosecutors charged a person (almost always a woman) for supporting, taking part in or failing to stop a crime by their alleged abuser. We counted nearly 100 cases that span 26 states and federal courts and date back as far as four decades ago.

In one typical example, Carolyn Moore has been incarcerated in Louisiana since 1985 for assisting her co-defendant — and alleged abuser — with a robbery, during which he killed two men while she waited in the car. She said that he had threatened to kill her if she didn't help with the robbery. At trial, he admitted to the killings, but denied forcing Moore to participate in the robbery (despite testimony from a witness who said he had admitted to threatening Moore). Moore was sentenced to life without parole.

The cases often blur the line between "victim" and "perpetrator." In one instance, a girl with developmental



delays was sex trafficked at 17 years old by a man who “savagely beat her,” according to a sentencing memo. But because she had helped store a gun and drugs for him, federal prosecutors in Washington state charged her as his co-defendant in his trafficking ring. She agreed to a plea deal at age 19 and was released with time served in 2009, but had to serve a year of supervised release.

Sometimes being a domestic abuse survivor is used as evidence against women. In 2016, while Krystal Hayes was at work, her live-in boyfriend severely beat her baby daughter, fracturing her skull. Prosecutors in Tulsa County, Oklahoma, pointed to evidence that her boyfriend had choked Hayes before, and so she should have known better than to allow him near an infant. She pleaded guilty to failing to protect her child. Now she is serving a 20-year sentence.

Even after a person completes their sentence, the shadow of punishment can be long. Ajela Banks was convicted in federal court for conspiracy to sex traffic a minor in Alaska, despite being 19 years old and being trafficked by the same man who was her co-defendant. According to court documents, he had recently shot her in the stomach while she was pregnant with his child. Although she

was sentenced to time served, she had to register as a sex offender and her home address was made public, which she said makes her vulnerable to further harassment and threats.

In 1999, Gabby Solano was convicted of felony murder in California in connection with a killing done by her abusive ex-boyfriend. Gov. Jerry Brown commuted her sentence, making her eligible for parole, but because of her conviction, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement deported her to Mexico, a country she had left as a toddler.

White-Domain, Johnson’s lawyer, said that looking at case after case has made one thing abundantly clear to her: The criminal justice system is not built to support victims of abuse. In some instances, people tried to get help, from police or social workers, and those systems failed to intervene. But bureaucrats aren’t considered accomplices when things go wrong — the victims are, and so they are the ones who suffer the consequences.

At Johnson’s trial in 1993, she was allowed to introduce evidence of Travieso’s abuse. The jury saw pictures of injuries Johnson said Travieso gave her: marks on her knees from a belt, wounds

on her lips and shoulder from a hanger, bruises on her backside from the handle of a plunger. But the jury also saw and heard descriptions of the crime scene: the family’s bashed-in skulls, the parents’ slit throats, a baby’s pacifier in a room splattered with blood. At trial, prosecutors explained to jurors that, “When two people do commit a crime together, each person is responsible for the acts of the other.” That meant even if Travieso did the actual killing, because of the help she’d provided, Johnson was just as responsible for the grisly murders.

I recently spoke to a juror, who asked not to be named because she is afraid Travieso could somehow retaliate against her. She and her fellow jurors struggled to know what to do, she said. The physical evidence did not prove how much Johnson had helped. But the juror remembers believing two things: One, Johnson had provided Travieso at least some support. And two, Johnson would have never done anything like this had it not been for Travieso and his control over her.

It’s clear from the trial documents that the jury was wrestling with what the “theory of accountability” meant for someone like Johnson. In one note, they asked the judge for clarity on the term



“legally responsible.” In another, they asked, “Do we consider one individual equally accountable for the actions and deeds of another?”

The juror who spoke with me grew up in a home with domestic violence. She understood why a woman could be so afraid that she wouldn’t flee an abuser, no matter how dire the circumstances. But she also wanted to do a good job and follow the law — it wasn’t her place to rewrite it. She said there was almost a hung jury, but in the end, they reached an agreement and found Johnson guilty.

She remembers crying along with other jurors — tears not of relief, but of sadness. Three decades later, the weight of what they did still remains with her. To this day, she said, she believes Johnson was the fourth victim in that crime and that the world is not safer with Johnson behind bars.

The judge sentenced Johnson to life in prison. At her sentencing hearing, Johnson addressed the family of Juan, Olga and Evelyn Hernandez. “My pain is nothing compared to theirs, but I am truly, truly sorry for not coming forward.”

Olga Hernandez’s sister, Dora Arrona, said in a recent interview that Johnson has played the victim, but Olga and her family were the real victims. Arrona discovered the bodies of her family members after they were killed, and that trauma still affects her physical and mental health. She said she was skeptical of Johnson’s version of events because she believes the murders could not have been carried out by a single person. Johnson, she said, should stay behind bars.

Lawyers, lawmakers and advocates who believe people like Johnson should not be in prison have tried different approaches to change the system. One strategy tackles the broader issue of accomplice liability laws, and another targets how domestic violence survivors are sentenced.

Accomplice liability is as old as common law itself. In 1020, English law allowed a thief’s entire family to be enslaved as accomplices. And while the net of accountability might not be quite that wide now, the concept has stubbornly remained part of the criminal justice system.

Joshua Dressler, distinguished emeritus professor of law at The Ohio State University, has studied accomplice liability laws across the country. He noted that it’s difficult for any jurisdiction to narrow accomplice liability, for the same

reason that so many attempts at justice reforms are hard: Legislators want to appear to be tough on crime.

In 2023, at an Illinois legislative hearing on a proposal to limit the theory of accountability, a lawmaker argued that these kinds of laws hurt victims of domestic violence. But Democratic state Rep. Dave Vella pushed back. “You’re accountable for the people you do nasty things with,” he said. “And if something bad happens, you should be accountable for the bad act.” The proposed legislation, which would have narrowed the theory of accountability in Illinois, went nowhere, but activists say they are continuing to push for changes.

Another approach lawmakers and activists in several states have taken is to rethink how domestic violence victims are sentenced. New York’s Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act, passed in 2019, allows judges to depart from mandatory minimums when sentencing (or resentencing) survivors. According to the Survivors Justice Project, which works to free victims of domestic violence from prison, 64 people have been resentenced after filing applications.

Similar bills in other states, including Minnesota, Oregon and Louisiana, have failed.

In 2015, Illinois passed a law to allow people in prison to apply for resentencing if their crime was directly related to domestic violence. The state does not track how many people have been released from prison early under the Illinois law, but it has been much smaller than many advocates for domestic violence victims hoped. One reason is that, unlike New York’s law, it doesn’t say judges can diverge from mandatory minimums. That ended up being key in Johnson’s case. When he applied for resentencing under the law, the judge ruled he was already serving the minimum sentence of life, so he was not eligible for anything less.

During his decades in prison, Johnson has become part of a support group for survivors of domestic violence. Together, they perform poems and songs about their experiences. He has also become deeply devoted to his Christian faith, paying tithes from his meager prison wages. And he is still working on getting released.

In Illinois, governors can grant clemency to people in prison they believe no longer need to be incarcerated. With

the help of White-Domain, Johnson filed a clemency petition in 2020. It included certificates, accolades and dozens of letters from academics, lawyers, domestic violence workers, a warden and fellow incarcerated people who call Johnson a mentor.

But the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office opposed the application. An assistant state’s attorney wrote that for a sentence to be meaningful it must be enforced, and “the purpose of a sentence is not only rehabilitative but also punitive” and Johnson “has not yet fulfilled that punishment.” In 2023, Gov. J.B. Pritzker declined to grant Johnson clemency. He re-filed his clemency application in early 2025 and is scheduled for a hearing in April.

If Johnson is released, because of clemency or changes to the law, his family will be ready. They have not one, but two bedrooms set aside for him — one a niece’s home and one at a sister’s. Multiple family members tell me they’ve got jobs waiting for him. And he will have a small nest egg to start out with. For years, Johnson’s mother put away a little money from her monthly Social Security checks to help her child. When Johnson’s mom died in 2021, she left behind \$6,150 she’d saved for him. His family has even bought Johnson a homecoming outfit: a crisp white shirt and pants and a white ball cap with his nickname, Peppe, embroidered on the side.

Johnson, now in his mid-50s, has spent more than half his life behind bars. Prison can be hard on a body. His teeth are in bad shape, and he has a cane because of pain in his leg, but he’s trying not to use it. Sometimes he wishes Travieso had killed him that day. But then, just minutes later, he beams talking about the children in his family or the women in prison who call him “Uncle PJ.”

He says he no longer fears Rey Travieso, no longer thinks Travieso is as powerful and omniscient as God. Instead, he prays constantly: on calls with his family, with women who come to his cell for help, with his lawyer during meetings and at the end of our interview. Johnson says he owes it to God to be brave. ■

*This article was published in partnership with Mother Jones.*





BERNARDO RODRIGUEZ FOR THE MARSHALL PROJECT

# I Survived Pregnancy and Postpartum Depression in Jail. Now I Guide Others Like Me.

As a doula in Georgia prisons and jails, Tabatha Trammell supports incarcerated clients through pregnancy, childbirth — and giving up their newborns.

By **TABATHA TRAMMELL**, as told to **NICOLE LEWIS**

*Tabatha Trammell is a certified prison doula based in Gwinnett County, Georgia, who uses her personal history to connect with incarcerated clients. In a post-Roe landscape, community-based doulas like Trammell could play a key role in helping pregnant people in custody advocate for themselves and get the mental and physical support they need.*

When I got pregnant at 15, my family disowned me. They were real religious folks — Jehovah’s Witnesses. My church didn’t want to be bothered with me. And when everybody at school found out, they stopped being my friend. “Oh, she’s pregnant,” they’d whisper. “She’s pregnant.” So I hated being pregnant, and I hated children. My pregnancy was a shame.

The second time I was pregnant, I was in and out of jail. I was consistently arrested for selling drugs because that’s how I supplied my habit. Once, three weeks after giving birth, I was locked up in the Decatur Street annex of the Atlanta City Detention Center, which has since been closed. I told them at intake that I had just had a baby, but they did not come check on me or take me to medical so they could watch me. I was still bleeding, but I could hardly get any pads. Eventually, I had to use torn-up sheets.

For weeks, until I was bonded out, I cried and slept all day. I didn’t want to deal with the other ladies who were in the pod. I didn’t even want to deal with the reality of getting up and taking a shower. I was suffering postpartum depression, I had been on drugs, and I was locked in a room all day.

Today, I am just under 14 years sober, and I take care of my mental health. I’ve started an organization, Woman With a Plan, that helps connect girls and women returning home from prison to resources. I’m also a doula who is certified to work in prisons and jails.

I meet with my non-incarcerated clients in a clinic with baby stuff on the walls. In jail, I have to meet women in cold, gray concrete visiting rooms with heavy metal tables and plastic chairs.

Usually, I am nervous walking in because I know I have to gain my client’s trust. I always start off by laying my story out on the table. Once I tell my clients what I’ve been through, they open up.

I also ask new clients if they know what a doula is.

“Oh, it’s a lady that delivers babies,” most women respond.

But that’s not it; we’re not midwives. Doulas are much-needed emotional and physical support people. A lot of times — especially in prisons and jails — a birthing person doesn’t have a voice.

I serve as a second voice.

I tell my new clients I am not there to try and restructure the jail or replace the father or your partner. “I am here to support you as a person,” I say, “to make sure you are doing alright, and you are being treated right.”

I’ve had a few clients in Gwinnett County Jail who I met with via video classes. As in many other jails, women are cycling in and out for petty crimes. Some come in pregnant because they didn’t have the money to have an abortion, or because they just didn’t believe in it. I’ve met women who are pregnant because of incest or rape. Many are struggling with drug addiction and mental illness.

The way I see it is, for many women, the prisons and the jails might be the safest place for the baby while they are pregnant. It may be a place where they are getting their medical care. If she is out on the street doing drugs, she is not going to the doctor. It’s better to be prepared for pregnant women when they do go to jail, so we can connect them to resources.

To help women in jail, we have to be really creative and thoughtful. There are a lot of restrictions. Incarcerated women can’t have things that make their pregnancy easier, like pregnancy pillows and essential oils. We can’t go to their medical visits with them, but we follow up and ask them how

the visits went. We talk about nutrition and how to work with the food they have. For example, the jails offer a snack between meals for pregnant women and diabetics. I have one client who says she is too tired to get up to receive the snack. But I encourage her to go because it may be a good substitute for a breakfast she doesn't like.

I am also there to help women post-pregnancy. Most incarcerated women only have two days to bond with their baby after birth. Some give their children up for adoption, and others give their babies to family members. Sometimes the women are just trying to forget the traumatic experience of being separated from their babies, so they don't like to talk about it with me during our follow-up visit. I don't press them. Instead, I show them different ways of bonding with their baby even if they can't be there. If

their facility permits it, they can keep a blanket that the baby has slept in and cuddle with it, and they can send the baby home with a blanket with their scent.

When I look back, my experience being in and out of jail while pregnant chipped away at my inner core. It was hard on my spirit. But the doula work is healing because I get to help women who are going through what I went through. I try to remind women that this is just a situation — it is not their destination in life. ■

If you'd like to tell your own story about abortion, pregnancy and reproductive rights in prison or jail, send us a JPay message or an email at [postroe@themarshallproject.org](mailto:postroe@themarshallproject.org), write to us at Cary Aspinwall/TMP PO Box 52809 Tulsa, OK 74114 or leave a voicemail at 212-803-5207.

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## 'What Now?' People Behind Bars React to Trump's Win

11.08.2024

The 2024 election was framed as a contest between a "prosecutor and a convicted felon." Donald Trump's Election Day victory will have far-reaching implications for the millions of people like him who have felony convictions. But the vast majority of people serving time in state and federal prisons did not get to vote.

Most people in prison can't vote. But they share concerns about inflation, misinformation, racism and the state of our democracy.

Ahead of the election, *The Marshall Project* asked thousands of incarcerated people about their political beliefs and who they'd choose for president if given the chance. After the election, we asked people in state and federal prisons to reflect on what Election Day felt like behind bars.

By NICOLE LEWIS, SHANNON HEFFERNAN and BETH SCHWARTZAPFEL



DIANA EJAÍTA FOR THE MARSHALL PROJECT



For some, Nov. 5, 2024 was like any other day. Others navigated racial tensions among their fellow prisoners. Many shared their anxieties about the expense of everyday items, hopeful the next president would ease their economic burden. Still others expressed dismay that the country won't be led by the first woman president and worried Trump would be a dictator.

These conversations, via telephone calls and prison email systems, have been condensed and edited for clarity. Each speaker's age, place of incarceration and the details they shared are listed as of November, 2024, unless otherwise noted.

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### Bruce Altenburger

*A 35-year-old White man incarcerated at U.S. Penitentiary Allenwood in Pennsylvania. Update: Bruce Altenburger is no longer in BOP custody.*

I like Trump as an entertainer. I just don't understand. I got seven years for having a gun. You put me in federal prison for having a gun as a convicted felon. They're going to give this convicted felon the nuclear codes? It just shows what money can do for you.

A lot of my homies like Trump! I'm not talking about White guys from the suburbs. I'm talking about Puerto Rican dudes, Black dudes from North Philly, from South Philly. We all felt like he kept it real. He's also one of us; he's a convicted felon.

They feel that when Trump was president before, when he was running the country — there was more money, a better economy. And they're worried that when [President Joe] Biden took over, it all went to hell.

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### Joseph Sabir

*A 37-year-old Black man at Washington State Penitentiary in Washington.*

I didn't really talk to any fellow incarcerated individuals about the election. But I did talk with a corrections officer who I know from previous conversations does not like Donald Trump. That is a rarity among COs, who are almost all Republican-leaning. America is too misogynistic to elect a woman, I explained, and still racist enough not to elect a Black woman.

Once Joe Biden exited the race and the assassination attempts on Trump

happened, I think Trump sealed the deal. It would've been interesting to see Kamala Harris lead the country.

One thing everyone was talking about was the fact that a 34-time convicted felon defeated a prosecutor in a landslide and is now president-elect. That amused every single convict behind these walls.

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### Jason Scott Morgan

*A 45-year-old White man at the Federal Correctional Institution-Lewisburg in Pennsylvania. Update: Since this article was originally published on Nov. 8, 2024, Jason Scott Morgan was transferred to Federal Medical Center - Lexington in Kentucky.*

Most people are excited because in [the federal Bureau of Prisons system] — in every facility I've ever been, especially among staff — Trump is king. I remember at USP Hazelton, they hated Biden so much that in the foyer they had Biden's picture hanging sideways, like "Crooked Joe."

The majority of prisoners, I think, are Trump supporters, but there are some very devastated people, too. In the chow hall someone really had a breakdown, like it's going to be the end of the Constitution, and it's the end of our country.

Some people are really taking the rhetoric to heart. Sitting in the TV room, watching election results, a guy in there said, "He's a fascist!"

I thought I would hear more people picking on each other. I think people are just ready to move on. We don't even get to vote.

The biggest issue in prison is money. Our commissary has shot through the roof: Things like ramen noodles, they were 25 cents, now they're \$1. Things are doubling and tripling in price.

We feel it when we have to get the things that we need, when our families can't send us as much money, because their money doesn't go as far as it used to.

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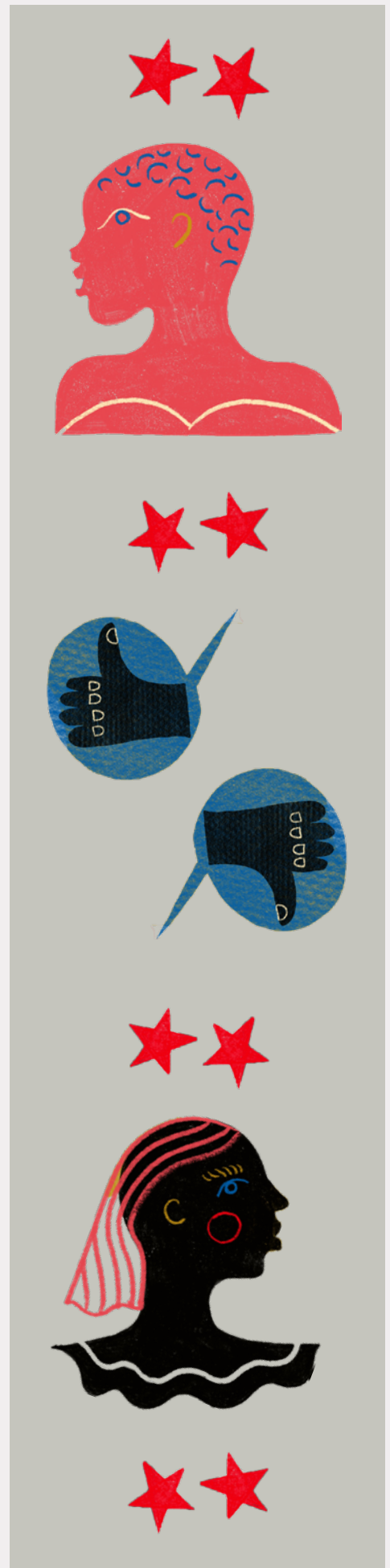
### Adrian Torres

*A 49-year-old Latino man at Mule Creek State Prison in California.*

I can't believe the numbers.

The feeling in the prison was somber. At least one person can't believe why people would vote in a "dictator."

People are going to become bolder about the racism, about the discrimination. Because they've been hiding. Now



they're going to be able to say: "Look at my president! He can say certain things and get away with it. I can do it too." That scares me.

My family and loved ones are going to be affected on the outside. Because if money gets more difficult — travel, gas — all these things make a big difference to my sanity. If my family is stressed, I'm stressed. And maybe even double-stressed, because I can't help them.

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### Jodi David

*A 39-year-old White woman incarcerated in Dr. Eddie Warrior Correctional Center in Oklahoma.*

For most, Election Day is the same as any other day here. There is a common attitude that whatever is going on out there has no bearing in here. That could not be further from the truth. Today's issues become tomorrow's laws. And everyone at this facility will go home one day.

Misinformation is mostly the information spread here. Someone could hear two seconds of a broadcast that had the word "transgender" in it, and 20 people later, via what we call "inmate.com," the story is, "Kamala is fighting for state prisons to provide transition surgery."

Even if we had access to more news outlets, sometimes people only hear what they want.

Republican or not, I can admit Trump is an idiot. He doesn't pretend to be anything else. And somehow that may have seemed safer than the unknown of Kamala. The first woman president and a woman of color was just too much in a time of great uncertainty at home and abroad. It was also bad timing with our economy. It may have been a different outcome had we been more stable.

I don't think Trump is going to sink the country, and I pray our system of checks and balances, made for this exact purpose, constrains him. We made it through his first four years. We will make it through this.

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### Joshua Turner

*A 42-year-old Native American man at Alexander Correctional Institute in North Carolina.*

We are all in single cells. To be heard and to hear, we have to stand at the solid steel doors and yell through the cracks or door jambs. I began by asking my neighbors,

"What's going on today?"

On Election Day I was told that the guards were being extra polite. They're not making as many as normal walk-throughs.

I asked the general block: "Does anybody know how the voting is?"

A few of us who are Harris supporters began a hopeful conversation, saying we all agree she is leading but barely. We made some negative Trump remarks and laughed until the Trump supporters got angry. The tension instantly became thick as a London fog, so the political conversation ended. Everything went deathly quiet.

This prison had everybody locked in their cells by 4 p.m. We have no TV in our cells and no way but the radio to keep up with the voting.

Life in prison differs from life on the outside in that most prisoners "come alive" at night. So around 9 p.m. almost all 48 fellows in my dorm were fully alert and awake. Most don't care about the actual politics, but for a chance to talk smack and cheer on an event to carry our lonely souls through another day.

Racial tensions exist but go unspoken.

My dorm seems to have a lot of Trump fans. As the votes came in, the banter became more aggressive and harsher.

Now that the news of the election is set in stone, it feels like the "winning" side has lost. I feel like the best team lost the championship game.

The staff are all happy and bouncing around being nice. That makes for a "good" day in prison — if there is such a thing. The guards even gave out all the extra food for breakfast and lunch. That is rare.

Some of the staff didn't even come to work. They consider Mr. Trump's win a "Trumpday," like it's a holiday.

The convicts that want to see Mr. Trump [as president] are all whooping and hollering and screaming Harris-fueled obscenities! I don't get involved with the trash talk in politics, because it's a quick way to end up fighting.

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### Lexie Handlang

*A 37-year-old White transgender woman at the Jefferson City Correctional Center in Missouri.*

I've been in prison almost 11 years, and it seemed like more people were talking about this election than have ever talked about an election in here.

I was really wanting Kamala Harris to win. Trump's prior history in office, and

his dislike of LGBTQ folks — it was very concerning. I thought that people in here were going to feel the same, but they do not.

The majority of the folks that I have talked to are excited about having a convicted felon as a president.

It's really hard for us to fact check anything in here. Most of the time, when people call their family, it's not like (they ask), "Hey, can you fact check this for me? Or can you look this up?"

A lot of them are calling to get money, or they're wanting to talk to their kids. So when rumors float around, they just believe it. There's nothing to disprove it.

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### Matthew Safrit

*A 34-year-old White man at the Pamlico Correctional Institution in North Carolina. Since this article was originally published on Nov. 8, 2024, Matthew Safrit was transferred to Nash Correctional Institution in North Carolina.*

We are flooded by Republican talk radio. We might get NPR as a counternarrative. But the majority is conservative talk radio. We have newspapers, but it seems like after COVID, I've not seen as many floating around.

We are in a system where we see things that aren't right happen on a daily basis. We get treated like shit. We see officers, judges and attorneys all lie to us. And so you come into prison, and Republican talk radio is calling out a corrupt establishment and blaming it all on Democrats. So they are channeling that discontent a lot of prisoners already have, and they are able to pull them over to their political views.

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### Quentin Taylor

*A 33-year-old Black man incarcerated in Pendleton Correctional Facility in Indiana.*

I look at politics a lot different now since I'm a little older and incarcerated. I was 18 years old when I got locked up. I'm now 33 years old, and I hate that I never had a chance to vote! It really makes you feel like you're not even a real part of America.

I think a lot of people in here are shocked, because people didn't think Trump would win again. I hear a lot of anger and other emotions.

I don't have any issue with Trump. I'm just wondering what now? What's next for our country? ■



### LETTER FROM LOUIS

Hello readers,

On Friday, Dec. 13, 2024, we hosted the first The Marshall Project - Cleveland community event at Miss O's Cafe in Garfield Heights. Nearly 100 people attended, including journalists Doug Livingston and Rachel Dissell, with our editor, Phil Trexler, moderating. The public had a chance to voice concerns about the new Cuyahoga County Jail.

Cuyahoga County has approved the \$38 million purchase of 72 acres in Garfield Heights on which to construct the new jail. The project, which is projected to cost close to \$1 billion altogether, is supposed to bring improvements, including better medical and mental health services. But with a project this big, there are still a lot of questions. How will people with mental health challenges be supported? Will it truly serve those who need help or simply create more space to put people behind bars? Many in the community are pushing for real diversion programs in which people struggling with mental health and addiction issues get the support they need before they end up incarcerated.

I know firsthand what it's like inside the old Cuyahoga County Jail. When I was first incarcerated there in 1998, parts of the facility were already falling apart. Now, with this new jail, there's an opportunity to make the system work better. But that won't happen unless we lift our voices and demand something different.

This is why we're holding in-person community engagement events throughout Cuyahoga County – our journalism is at its best when we are listening directly to the people. The stories we produce at The Marshall Project are driven by needs and insights from the community. This isn't just about those directly impacted by the justice system; the entire community has a stake in what happens because we are all interconnected.

I want to hear from you if you've spent time in the old jail. What needs to change? How can this new facility be more humane and just? Your perspective is invaluable.

Reach out. Share your story. Let's make sure this new chapter is written in the voices of those who've lived it.

Thank you for reading and stay strong.



#### **Louis Fields**

*Louis Fields is the outreach manager for The Marshall Project - Cleveland. He served 23 years in Ohio state prisons and was released on parole in October 2021.*

# You Can See Who Is in Many Ohio Jails With a Few Clicks — Just Not in Cuyahoga County

The sheriff's department lags behind other agencies by failing to offer a website to help the public quickly learn who's inside its notorious county jail.

By MARK PUENTE, The Marshall Project and NORA MCKEOWN, Spectrum News 1.



The Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Department in Cleveland, Ohio. NATE SMALLWOOD FOR THE MARSHALL PROJECT

While Cuyahoga County houses more than 1,400 people each day in its notorious jail, learning who is inside is often a frustrating struggle for those on the outside.

For years, many sheriff's offices across Ohio have allowed the public to search a website database to discover who is behind bars. They're often a quick tool for families and friends searching for missing loved ones.

Cuyahoga County is the exception. There is no database for the public to search.

In addition to families, the lack of access affects attorneys, bail bond agents and even police detectives, who say they've often waited hours for a jail employee to answer a phone — if the

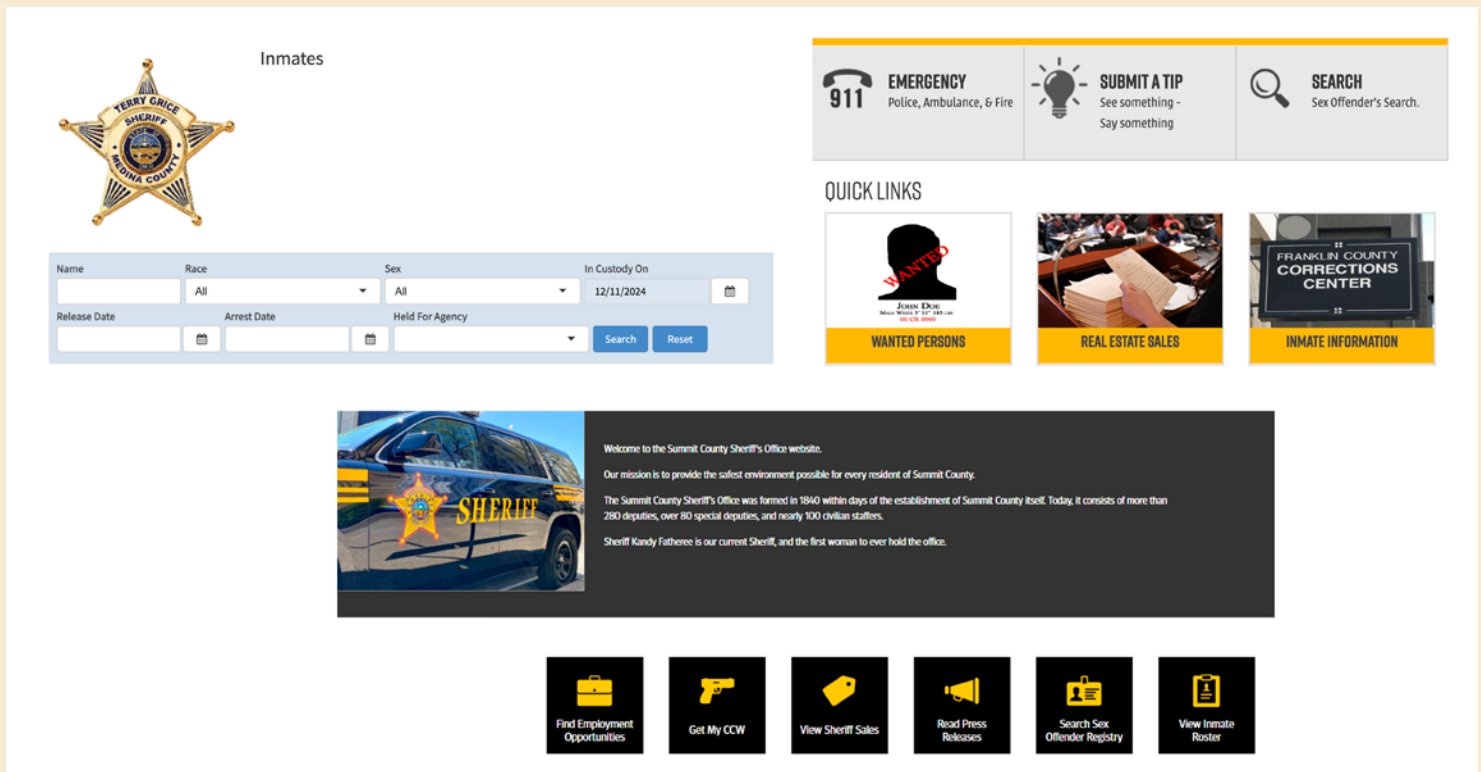
call is answered at all — to learn if someone is in jail.

They'll all have to continue waiting as Cuyahoga County attempts to build a database, a process that could extend deep into 2025.

Advocates say having immediate access to jail rosters is vital, not only to law enforcement, but to the public. Websites help eliminate uncertainty for families and friends of those behind bars. It's also a tool used by crime victims seeking assurances that their perpetrator is in custody.

"It's the most obvious thing they should do," said William Malachi, who operates transitional housing sites for 50 formerly incarcerated men in Cuyahoga County.





Screenshots of web pages to search for information about jail detainees, clockwise from top left, Medina County, Franklin County and Summit County. MEDINA COUNTY, FRANKLIN COUNTY AND SUMMIT COUNTY SHERIFFS' OFFICES

Recently, Malachi spent days trying to locate a man who disappeared from the facility. Malachi and his colleagues scoured East Cleveland streets before finally reaching a corrections officer on the phone. He was assured that the missing man was not in jail.

“Three days later, the man showed up after getting released from jail,” Malachi said. “The employees just tell you anything on the phone.”

But with a few computer keystrokes, anyone can find a person in an Ohio prison and many county jails.

The Medina County Sheriff’s Office added a searchable database in October 2023 because it was receiving an influx of calls each day from the public. Its website provides a person’s booking photo, birth date and arrest date.

The Lake County Sheriff’s Office provides a daily PDF roster. It contains a booking photo, birth date, arrest date and the total number of days a person has been in custody.

In Summit County, the sheriff’s office publishes a daily report on its website providing each person’s name, housing unit, race, sex, birth date and their respective criminal charges.

Kelly Pongracz, Summit County’s support services administrator, said the jail has been posting its roster for at least 10 years. The website is updated daily at 6 a.m.

To prevent companies or others from abusing or profiting on booking photos, the county uses smaller-sized images to limit republishing so no one can monetize the faces of people, she said.

The public, Pongracz said, pushed for the database because they wanted to know who is in the jail.

“It’s an accountability measure. It’s about transparency. People want to know where somebody is when they are missing,” Pongracz said.

Ohio’s other large counties like Franklin, Hamilton and Lucas provide the information each day to the public.

But Cuyahoga County is still likely a year away from adding a searchable database to its website.

Chief Deputy Aaron Reese, second-in-command at the Cuyahoga County Sheriff’s Department, said he knows firsthand the frustrations of trying to locate someone in jail.

Reese spent years as a homicide leader in the Cleveland Division of Police.

Reese told The Marshall Project - Cleveland and Spectrum News 1 that it has taken him hours to reach someone in the jail. He has also heard similar complaints from prosecutors and the courts.



Cuyahoga County Sheriff’s Department Chief Deputy Aaron Reese speaks with reporters inside the downtown Justice Center in August 2024. NATE SMALLWOOD FOR THE MARSHALL PROJECT

He said he understands the problems in trying to locate people. “You know, no one should have to experience that,” Reese said. “You want to call and find out information about a loved one; you shouldn’t have to wait.”

Because the existing system is outdated and a searchable database cannot be added, Reese said, steps are being taken to add public access for jail rosters. The county is in the process of awarding a contract to a vendor to create a new jail management system, Reese said.

Reese hopes the new tool can be in place by next summer, but he cautioned it could take longer.

As Cuyahoga County awaits a new vendor, Reese said officials are also working with The Sheriff App to get the department added to the app available on smartphones.

Numerous sheriff’s offices across Ohio are on the app, which provides daily jail rosters, push notifications, news and information on how to provide money to commissary accounts for incarcerated people. It also allows the public to provide crime tips, Reese said.

The county could get listed on the app sometime in 2025. “We believe that will be a good stand-in in the meantime,” Reese said. “There’s all kinds of resources and tools we could use this app for.”

Dana Acy, owner of Dana Bail Bonds and Insurance Services, said the lack of a database is also a public safety issue in instances when crime victims can’t find out if a suspect has been released from jail.

“There’s real victims of these crimes,” Acy said. “They should be able to see if this person is in jail or did they get out of jail. I would need to know that for my safety if I was a victim. Public safety is important.”

People of all ages, regardless of their education level, cannot get information from Cuyahoga County, she said.

“We are in the Information Age,” she said. “We should be able to pull it up. This is digital information. It shouldn’t be a problem.” ■

*This article was published in partnership with Spectrum News 1.*

## MISSISSIPPI FOCUS

# Jackson, Mississippi, Officials Aren’t the First to Stay in Office Amid Corruption Charges

11.8.2024

**Hinds County District Attorney Jody E. Owens II and Jackson Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba vow to fight federal corruption charges and not step down.**

By **DAJA E. HENRY**

Hinds County District Attorney Jody E. Owens II walked briskly toward a crowd of TV cameras and reporters on the steps of the federal courthouse in Jackson in early November 2024, to denounce what he called a “horrible example of a flawed FBI investigation” and an “assassination attempt on my character.”

Owens, the top elected law enforcement official for Mississippi’s largest county that encompasses its capital city, pleaded not guilty to multiple federal felony charges stemming from an alleged FBI bribery sting. He vowed to remain in office.

And indicted Jackson Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba, who faces similar charges in the same case, pledged to remain mayor and continue his 2025 reelection campaign.

“We plan on fighting these charges. But right now, I’m going to get back to

protecting Hinds County and being your district attorney that you elected us to be,” Owens told reporters last week after his arraignment in federal court in Jackson.

“I am not guilty, so I will not proceed as a guilty man,” Lumumba said.

For at least the last 50 years, it has not been unusual for top-ranking elected officials across the U.S. to keep their offices as they fight the charges, even after major felony indictments for corruption, according to legal experts interviewed by The Marshall Project - Jackson. Indictments are allegations, and the accused are innocent until proven guilty.

Public corruption investigations have become commonplace in the news. In 2023, the latest year available, there were 28 guilty pleas and seven trial convictions for public officials, ranging from a U.S. Congressman to a deputy U.S. Marshal, according to the Department of Justice’s

Public Integrity section’s annual report.

Beyond Jackson, New York City Mayor Eric Adams is facing federal corruption charges and vowed not to step down. And although Donald Trump was convicted in 2023 of 34 felony offenses in New York for a hush-money payment, voters returned him to the presidency Nov. 5, 2024, knowing full well about his convictions and other pending charges.

Public corruption in the country is as old as American politics, said Robert Collins, a professor of public policy at Dillard University in New Orleans. But cracking down on it has become an FBI priority in recent decades.

In 1978, Congress passed the Ethics in Government Act in the wake of the Watergate scandal that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. That same year, the FBI began its Abscam investigation into lawmakers taking





Hinds County District Attorney Jody E. Owens II, center, enters the Thad Cochran United States Courthouse on Thursday, Nov. 7, 2024, before pleading not guilty to bribery and corruption charges against him. IMANI KHAYYAM

bribes. The investigation involved undercover agents using a yacht and offering cash to a senator, six congressmen and a mayor for political favors and sponsoring legislation. The case led to 19 convictions, including long-time U.S. Sen. Harrison A. Williams Jr. of New Jersey, who resigned his seat only after he was convicted and was about to be expelled from the Senate.

More recently, in 2017, then-District Attorney R. Seth Williams of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was indicted on 29 charges related to public corruption while in office, including bribery. He was accused of accepting gifts from businessmen, including a 1997 Jaguar and a trip to Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic. Williams, who once headed the city's anti-corruption investigations as inspector general, initially pleaded not guilty, but changed his plea and resigned

from office three months later. Williams admitted "that he accepted tens of thousands of dollars' worth of concealed bribes in exchange for his agreement to perform official acts," according to the Department of Justice. He served three years in federal prison and was disbarred.

More often than not, an indicted public official eventually resigns. And in many cases, prosecutors use the official's elected position as a bargaining chip, offering a better plea deal or dropping charges altogether in exchange for a resignation, legal experts said.

"Whenever an indictment is brought, the FBI and the Justice Department that bring the indictments have the intention that that will cause that official to resign right away," said Kenneth Katkin, a law professor at Northern Kentucky University. "Sometimes, they openly call for it."

Corruption investigations can impede public officials from doing their jobs and often erode the public's trust in their elected officials, Collins said.

In New Orleans, Mayor LaToya Cantrell has been surrounded by a federal probe for at least two years. Former police officer Jeffrey Vappie, who led her security detail, was indicted in July 2024 on a wire fraud charge. And a local contractor, Randy Farrell, was served a 25-count indictment in September 2024 on charges of wire fraud and conspiracy to commit wire fraud, with "Public Official 1," who local media reports have identified as Cantrell. Cantrell has not been charged.

The cloud of the investigation has negatively affected Cantrell's performance in the polls, Collins said. It has also affected city employees, who told Collins that it's hard to conduct everyday business with the investigation looming.

In Mississippi, reactions to the indictments of the Jackson mayor and county district attorney have been mixed.

“You know, what we try to do is build trust, and what these indictments will do is send a message ... Do not say you’re running for office to help people, and you’re trying to help yourself,” Councilman Kenneth Stokes said following the indictments. “If you’re going to help people, help people.”

Gov. Tate Reeves said, “Obviously, the allegations are serious and bring into question individuals’ ability to do certain jobs. We are monitoring it and watching very closely.”

Lumumba said in a video statement that he believes the investigation is a political move against him ahead of the 2025 mayoral race, a refrain also used by Trump, New York City Mayor Adams and others. Former U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez of New Jersey, a Democrat, said he was being targeted because he was a prominent Latino in government. In 2024, a federal jury found him guilty of accepting hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes, including cash and gold bars. He kept his seat but resigned after he was convicted. In January 2025 he was sentenced to 11 years in prison.

Collins, the Dillard University professor, said that claims of political persecution are a standard defensive tactic.

“Almost every politician claims political targeting and political retribution, but whether or not they can convince the voters of that, I think it depends on the skill set of the individual politician, and it depends on the facts of the individual case,” Collins said.

In Jackson, former District Attorney Robert Shuler Smith, who preceded Owens, faced criminal conspiracy charges brought against him by the state in 2016 and 2017, as well as aggravated stalking charges in 2018, all while in office. He did not resign and was never convicted. At the time, Smith told Mississippi Today that people were plotting behind his back for political reasons.

Political prosecution is especially a common refrain in a majority-Black, Democrat-run city like Jackson, which has a notoriously strained relationship with its White, Republican state leadership. However, the FBI prosecution is led by the federal government, which was headed by Democratic President Joe Biden when the charges were brought.

In his public statement, Mayor

Lumumba did not refer to race, nor address who could be behind such political attacks. A friend of the mayor, Danyelle Holmes, however, told reporters at the courthouse following his arraignment that the prosecution was a direct attack on Black leadership and an attempt to discredit the mayor’s character. The U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Mississippi did not respond to a request for comment.

In recent years, public corruption cases have become more complicated to prosecute and are overturned on appeal more than half of the time because of the gray areas that the political process creates, Katkin said.

In cases like Lumumba’s, where an official is accused of bribery in the form of campaign contributions, the legal landscape can get complicated.

Politicians legally ask for contribution money throughout their campaigns, and they often make promises to their constituents. Voters, including people and businesses who contribute to election campaigns, often tell politicians what policies they want enacted or what problems need to be fixed.

Asking politicians to take action is well within every constituent’s First Amendment right, Katkin said, which makes it difficult to enforce public corruption statutes.

“The ordinary operation of our American electoral campaign system can be painted to look like bribery in ways that often is persuasive to juries, but not persuasive to courts of appeals,” Katkin said.

A landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision that overturned the 2014 conviction of Virginia’s then-Gov. Bob McDonnell narrowed the paths for prosecutors to build a federal bribery case. McDonnell was convicted of charges related to \$175,000 in gifts that he received from a local businessman seeking government research. The businessman never got anything in return.

McDonnell was convicted by a federal jury at trial. However, a unanimous Supreme Court decision reversed his conviction and narrowed the definition of an “official act” that could trigger a bribery charge. In short, the court said, if money is given but nothing is done in exchange for the money, there is no crime.

The justices said that leaving the broad definition of an official act up for pros-

ecutors’ interpretations could harm the political process for fear of prosecution for common political acts.

In the Jackson indictment, the U.S. Attorney claimed that Lumumba’s “official action” was that he moved a development deadline to help the agents posing as corrupt developers. District Attorney Owens is accused of facilitating bribes to prompt Lumumba’s and Councilman Aaron Banks’ actions to help the developers. Banks has also pleaded not guilty and remains on the city council.

But in Mississippi and other states, a conviction is not always a bar to future political office. The Mississippi Constitution allows those convicted of tax evasion and manslaughter to hold office.

In 2007, Oliver Thomas, a New Orleans councilmember, pleaded guilty to bribery charges. He served three years in federal prison, returned home to New Orleans and built trust within his community for more than a decade before running for office again in 2021. He now serves on the city council.

Public policy professor Collins said Thomas’ immediate admission of responsibility to his constituents, coupled with his run in a majority-Black, low-income district composed of people more likely to have contact with the criminal legal system — and therefore more likely to be sympathetic to second chances — helped him to gain favor, and ultimately the most votes in the election. ■



# Reader to Reader

In the last issue, we asked our readers behind bars how they spend their time. What keeps them busy? What keeps them grounded?

Some people shared that they play chess because they're drawn to the strategy and focus it requires. Others embrace their creativity by drawing, crafting, writing poetry or even making tiny hats out of paper. Some told us they were all about learning; they were taking courses, studying law or teaching new languages. Cooking is also a source of comfort for a handful of readers. A few even said they found unexpected passions, like yoga or hacky sack.

If you're looking for a hobby to help you stay sharp, take a break from the daily stresses or connect with others, these ideas might offer something new to try when boredom hits. Who knows, they may even help you uncover a different side of yourself!

I am a self-taught jailhouse paralegal. Here at the state prison, people don't know how to seek remedies in court by following the laws in the PLRA [Prison Litigation Reform Act], so I help people and listen to their stories. It's something I'd like to continue outside. It's fulfilling.

FROM A READER IN MT

Poetry. Whether it's Shakespeare or 2Pac, I believe the art of poetry is one of the most important and healing practices any human being can be a part of.

FROM A READER IN MT

I can make these crosses out of thread that I pull from the sheets and clothing. I can make them in two different colors, but usually [with] what's available, like wool blankets and dingy white sheets. My peers then get them from me. A cellie I had like 15 years ago taught me how to make them and I've been making crosses [ever] since! Thanks, cellie!

FROM A READER IN MT

When I get depressed, which happens a lot, I cook. To me, cooking is therapeutic and almost meditative. Whether I'm cooking sweet & spicy pork over rice or making "bacon" sandwiches with the funky t-ham the facility gives us, the act of cooking lifts my spirit. Sharing a meal with a friend is an amazing feeling, too.


FROM A READER IN AZ

I make tiny hats from cardboard and paper. I draw sports team logos on the front with the NFL logo on the back.

FROM A READER IN NC

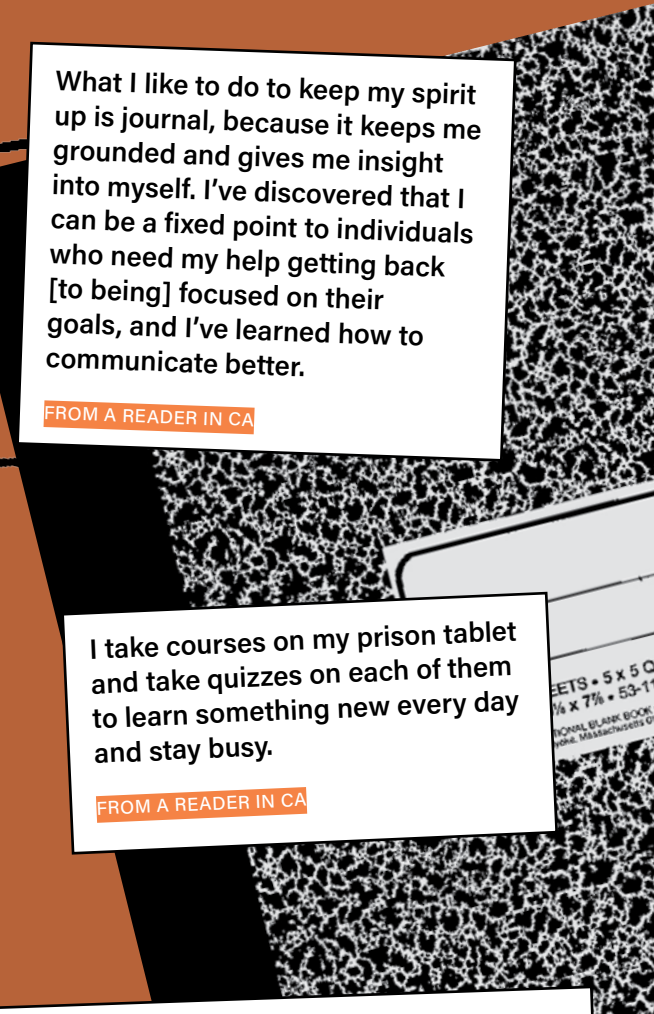
[I am] trying to write a book, crafting things, reading books on various topics, and trying to learn a new language.

FROM A READER IN OH



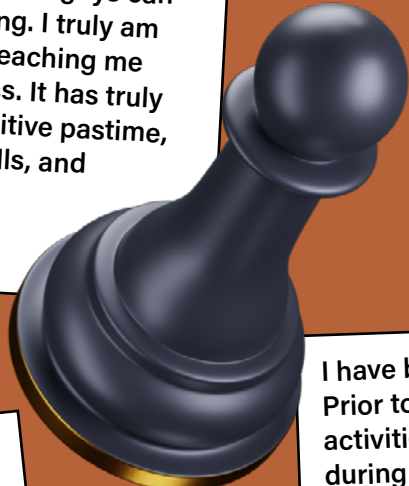
I draw all the time. I've even developed a comic character I send to my friends. At one point, I was selling my drawings to people regularly for soups. I got way better than I used to be and have even picked up a few tricks from some zines on the tablet. I also write everything from music to poetry to a Dungeons & Dragons setting and a story about my cats in said Dungeons & Dragons setting.

FROM A READER IN AL



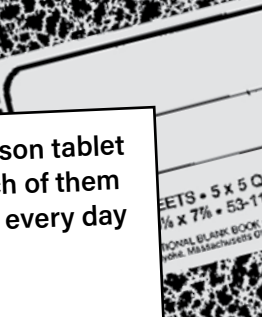
What I like to do to keep my spirit up is journal, because it keeps me grounded and gives me insight into myself. I've discovered that I can be a fixed point to individuals who need my help getting back [to being] focused on their goals, and I've learned how to communicate better.

FROM A READER IN CA




Playing chess. It is truly a game of skill and not the luck of a draw. Plus, a game can go on for a long time. It's a game where other guys can entertain themselves by watching. I truly am grateful to my former cellie for teaching me the wonders and beauty of chess. It has truly changed my life, given me a positive pastime, teaching me critical thinking skills, and keeping me mentally stimulated.

FROM A READER IN CA




I take courses on my prison tablet and take quizzes on each of them to learn something new every day and stay busy.

FROM A READER IN CA




Drawing on envelopes. Putting time and effort in to show I took the time to send my loved ones something special.

FROM A READER IN WV



I have been incarcerated for just over four years. Prior to my incarceration, I enjoyed crafting, outdoor activities, and cooking (never baking lol). However, during my stay here, I somehow acquired the position of facility baker. Our population of women is small, at just over 100 women. I am the only baker. I make all the bread, rolls, pies, cakes, muffins, and cookies. It's a lot of work, but I have discovered that I REALLY enjoy baking. It's ironic because I used to think I was terrible [at it]. Baking brings me joy; it's therapeutic. It makes all the women happy, so it makes me happy. I have also learned to crochet, which has brought me great stress relief in times of need. It also allows me to make meaningful presents for my loved ones at home.

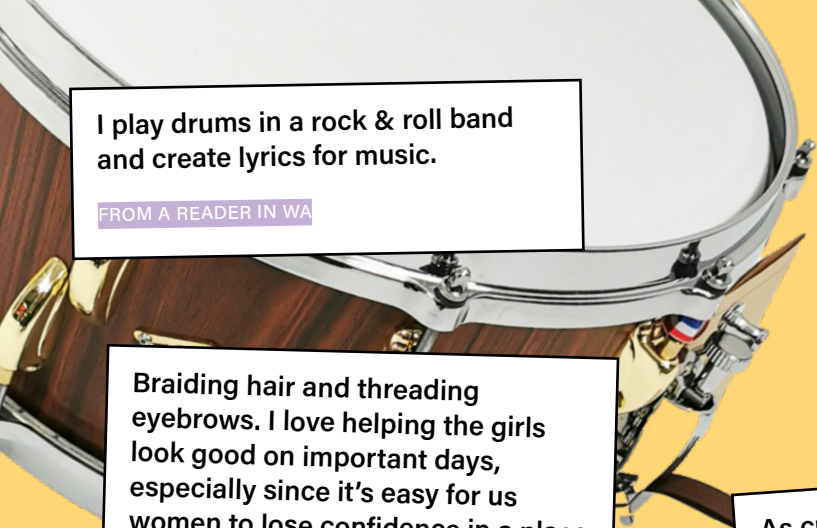
FROM A READER IN NH



I really enjoy role-playing games like Dungeons & Dragons. It gives you a special and one-of-a-kind way to truly go to another world and meet new people. The game takes your mind off of daily stresses and gives you something to look forward to. Dungeons & Dragons, along with other games like it, has sparked my love for writing and storytelling. I'm no longer at a facility where I can play Dungeons & Dragons, so I'm all the more grateful for the passion I've gained for writing.

FROM A READER IN WV





I play drums in a rock & roll band and create lyrics for music.

FROM A READER IN WA

I've recently picked up reading fantasy series books. I enjoy these types of books most because they help me zone out by allowing me to [immerse myself] in a totally different world. I just finished reading the Game of Thrones series.

FROM A READER IN MN

Braiding hair and threading eyebrows. I love helping the girls look good on important days, especially since it's easy for us women to lose confidence in a place like this. I taught myself how to do both since I've been incarcerated, and it's my skill now. I hope to own a salon when I come home.

FROM A READER IN NE

As crazy as it sounds, I recently picked up hacky-sack! I moved into a new wing and a couple of guys were in the dayroom playing hacky-sack. Before long, I decided to join in (it seemed like good cardio), and now it has become a daily thing. It's so serious now, we go for hours and it gets extremely competitive. Who would have thought?

FROM A READER IN TX

We have taken to creative thinking. We pull sentences or headers from magazines, put them in a bag, and pull them randomly. When it's your turn, you pull a topic and say whatever comes to mind in two minutes or less. The best speech wins.

FROM A READER IN TX

I feel that becoming educated in every area available, including, but not limited to, GED or self-healing, has become the way I continue to stay positive and productive. With a 25-year sentence — honestly, with any length sentence — it is easier for most to stay accustomed to being stagnant and remaining the same person we've always been in life. For me, I choose growth. Every day is an opportunity to be better than you were the day before, even if you start with just little things. Before you know it, all the little things have turned out to make a big change in the person you were.

FROM A READER IN SC

I find making origami almost like a meditation. But my tastes in origami have changed over the years. I don't really care for traditional origami anymore, but I love doing 3D origami, in which I employ hundreds to thousands of pieces to make sculptures. My largest piece yet was a 4,455-piece castle. Then, I donate my sculptures to Visions of Hope, a charity that auctions them off to raise money for the Otino Waa orphanage [now Path International].

FROM A READER IN OR

I help show the staff and incarcerated people how to grow plants in two greenhouses.

FROM A READER IN NC

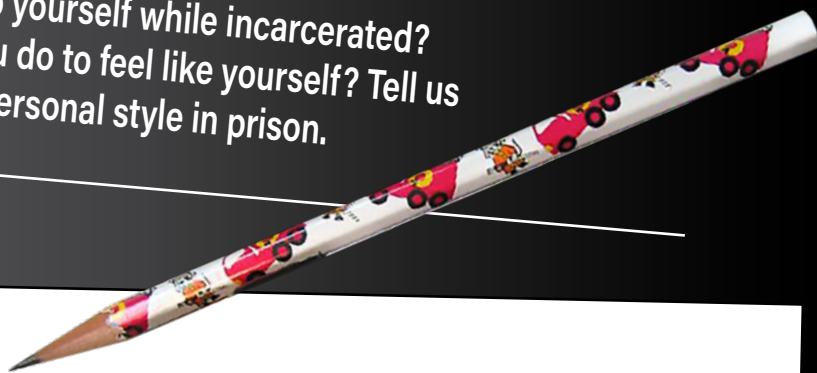
Our next Reader to Reader is about ...



# Style

In prison, it's easy to feel like you have little control over anything, including your appearance. But many people find creative ways to hold on to their sense of self-expression while incarcerated. From wearing fragrances to styling your prison-issued uniform or personal clothes in unique ways — these small acts of personal expression can help you feel more grounded.

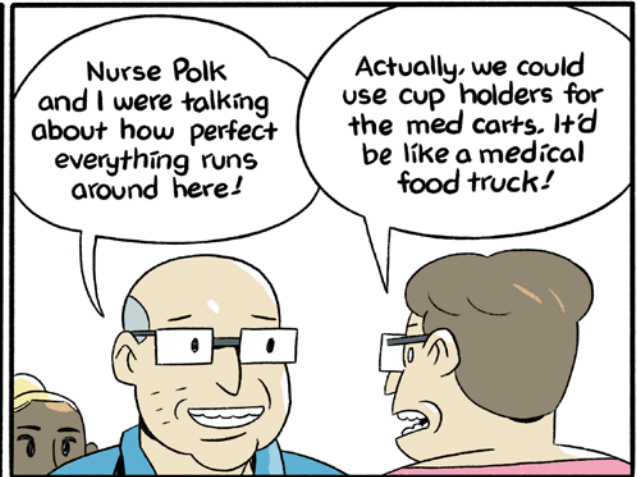
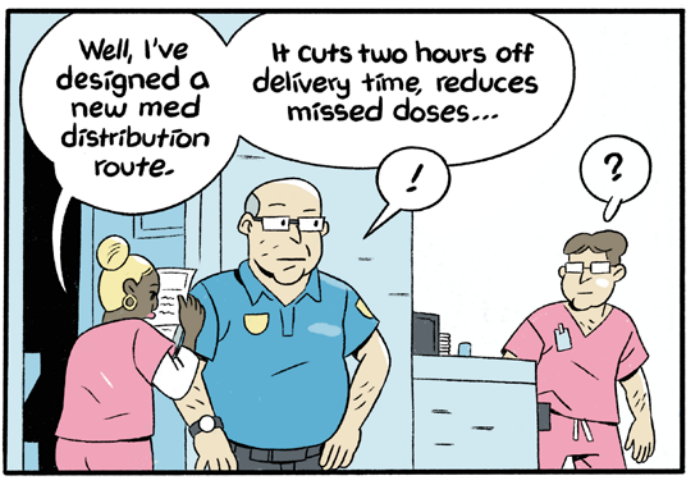
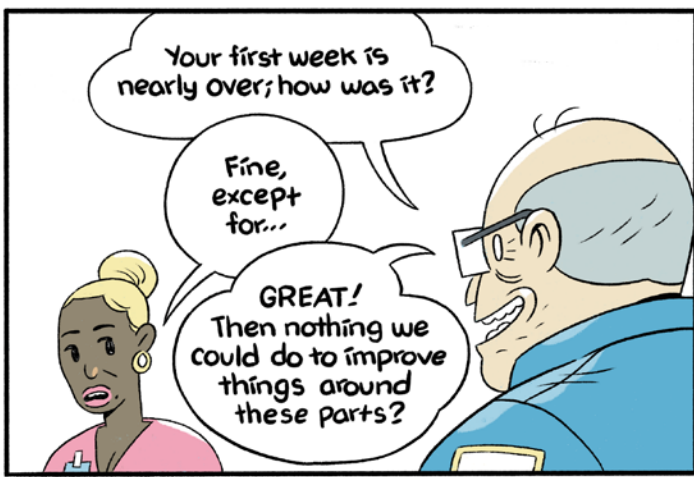
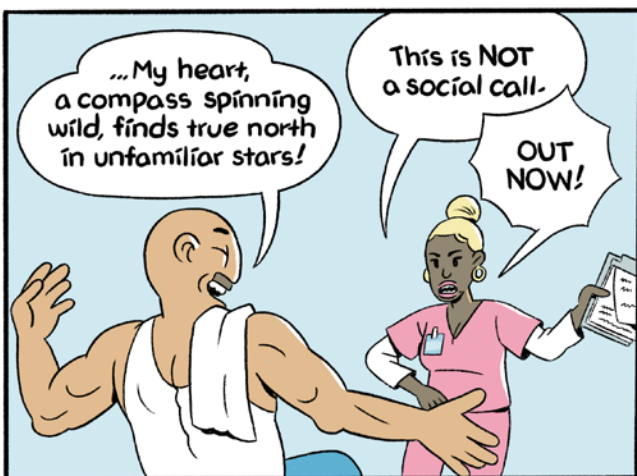
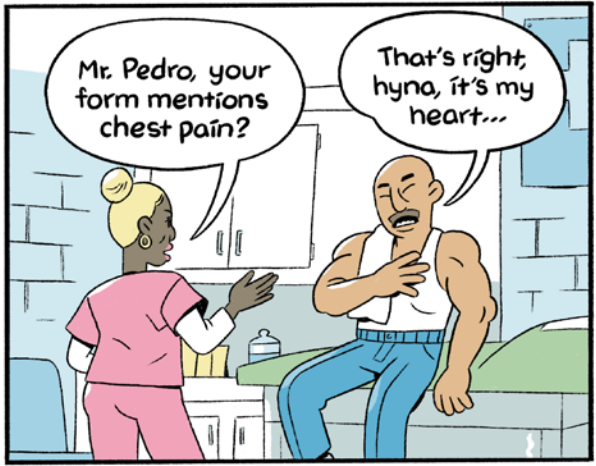
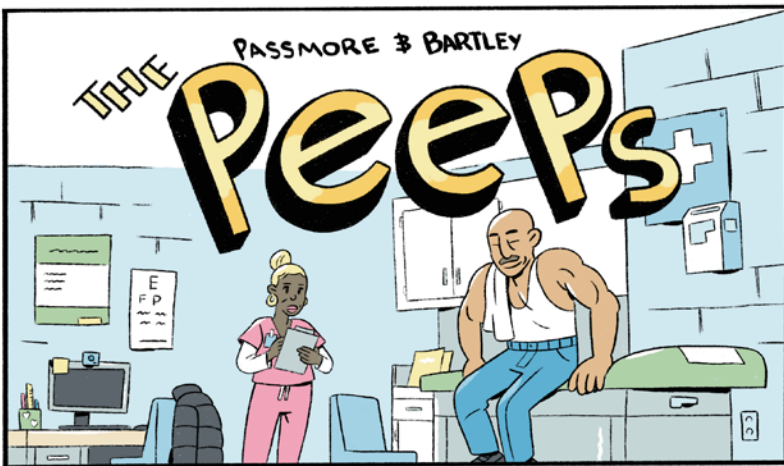
How do you stay true to yourself while incarcerated?  
What little things do you do to feel like yourself? Tell us  
how you express your personal style in prison.

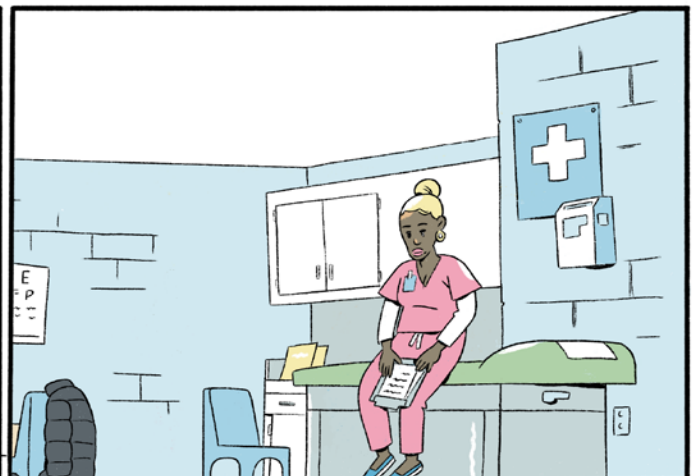
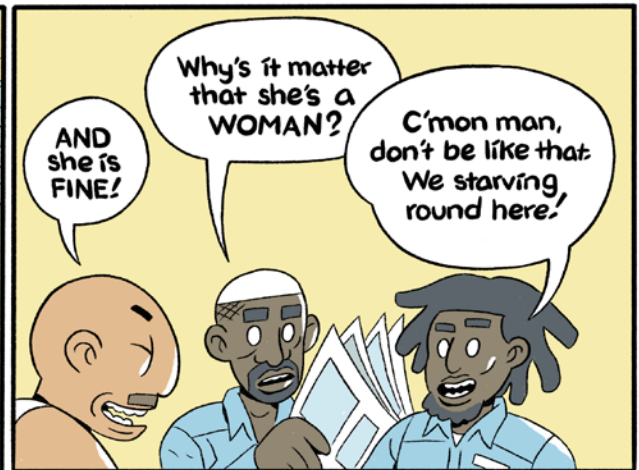
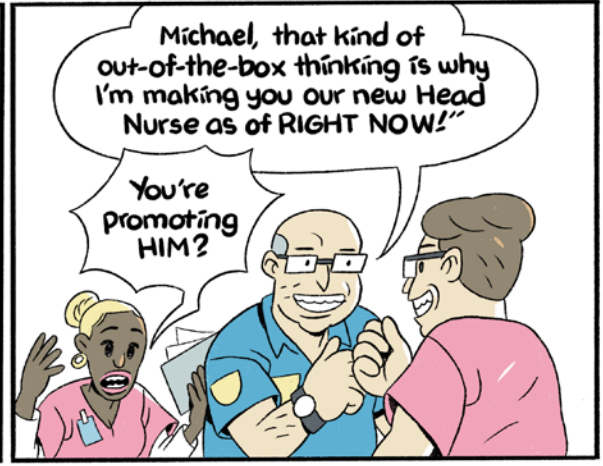
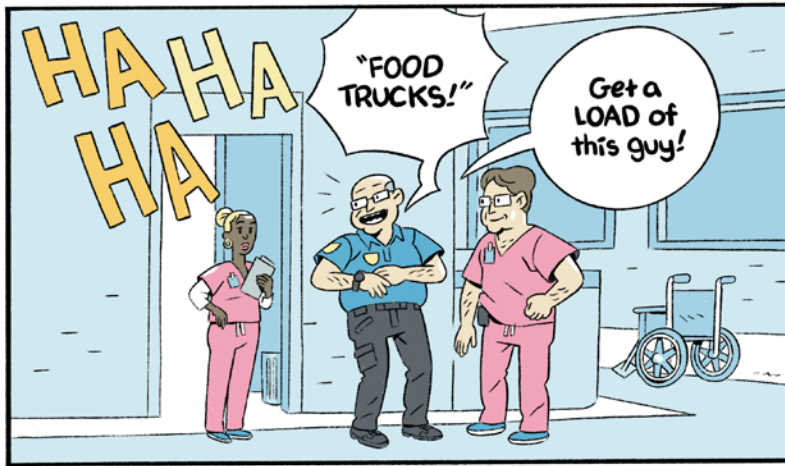


A large, empty white rectangular box intended for a reader's response to the questions above.



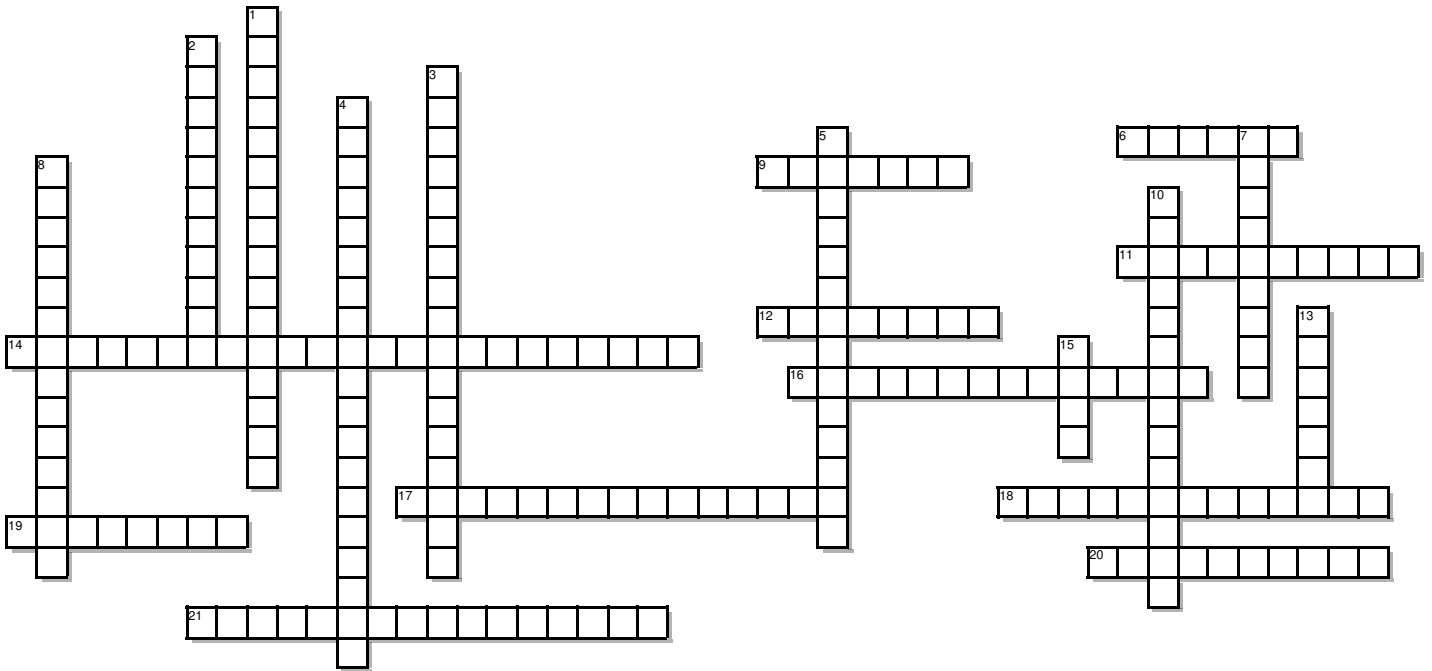
THE PASSMORE & BARTLEY  
**Peeps**







# Crossword



## ACROSS

- 6** "\_\_\_\_\_ are much-needed emotional and physical support people," during childbirth. **(1 word)**
- 9** "Most incarcerated women only have \_\_\_\_\_ to bond with their baby after birth." **(2 words)**
- 11** "Samantha's \_\_\_\_\_ was thrown out in 2019, after two trials." **(1 word)**
- 12** The county jail in Ohio that does not have a database of incarcerated people. **(1 word)**
- 14** "The \_\_\_\_\_ allows those convicted of tax evasion and manslaughter to hold office." **(2 words)**
- 16** The district attorney handling the investigation into Robert Brooks' death. **(2 words)**
- 17** "[Theory of accountability] laws can make victims of \_\_\_\_\_ violence particularly vulnerable to prosecution." **(2 words)**
- 18** App that "provides daily jail rosters, push notifications, news and information on how to provide money to commissary accounts for incarcerated people." **(3 words)**
- 19** First name of the woman who gave birth to Julius while incarcerated. **(1 word)**

- 20** The female presidential candidate in the 2024 election was commonly referred to as the \_\_\_\_\_. **(1 word)**
- 21** "New York's \_\_\_\_\_ Survivors Justice Act, passed in 2019, allows judges to depart from mandatory minimums when sentencing (or resentencing) survivors." **(2 words)**

## DOWN

- 1** "\_\_\_\_\_ investigations have become commonplace in the news." **(2 words)**
- 2** When terminating a prison guard's employment, the union contract gives the final say to the \_\_\_\_\_. **(1 word)**
- 3** "A 2019 addition to the union contract mandates a \_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_, an arbitrator and representatives from the state and union — to decide cases of serious misconduct." **(3 words; 2 hyphenated)**
- 4** State law that allows a person to be charged for a crime another person committed, if they assisted. **(2 words)**
- 5** Name of the photo essay series featured on the cover. **(3 words)**
- 7** "\_\_\_\_\_ say having immediate access to jail rosters is vital, not only to law enforcement, but to the public." **(1 word)**

- 8** Organization based in Georgia that helps connect girls and women returning home from prison with access to resources. **(4 words)**
- 10** The male presidential candidate in the 2024 election was commonly referred to as the \_\_\_\_\_. **(2 words)**
- 13** The last name of the mayor of Jackson, MS, who was recently indicted. **(1 word)**
- 15** "Most people in prison can't \_\_\_\_." **(1 word)**

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## In the Spotlight



COURTESY OF SARAH HAINSTOCK

I wish I had had access to *News Inside* when I was at the Ohio Reformatory for Women. I wondered whether anyone “outside” knew how incredible the food was, how inadequate the medical care was or how mind-numbing our days were. During my 21 months there, I watched more television than I had in my entire life. I kept wondering what the point of prison was.

I saw how women addicted to drugs were still able to find drugs. How those who had been sexually or physically abused before prison could still encounter the same kind of trauma behind bars. I wondered if lawmakers realized that when women with children are locked up, families are destroyed. Most of all, I wondered if anyone besides me and my peers understood that incarcerated women aren’t the horrible humans our media portrays them as. I never thought in a million years I would be telling my friends and family that Julene, my best friend “inside” — a kind, intelligent, witty and empathetic person — was someone convicted of murder. After coming home and finding The Marshall Project, I realized that, yes, there are folks who care about what’s going on inside!

**Sarah Hainstock** is a self-described “bullhorn for judicial reform,” telling her prison stories to help change a harmful system. She serves on the board of The Gemma Project, which provides and promotes the creation of gender-responsive jail and prison reentry programming for justice-involved women across the country. In July 2024, Hainstock completed the inaugural class of the REFORM Advocacy Institute, which has a mission of transforming probation and parole by changing laws, systems and culture.

*We want to hear a bit about you and how News Inside has affected you. If you are interested in being featured in “In The Spotlight,” please mail us your response to the address on the back of the magazine, or send us an electronic message at [newsinside@themarshallproject.org](mailto:newsinside@themarshallproject.org). If you are chosen to be featured, we will contact you to request a picture of you and discuss your response if needed.*

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## Last Issue’s Answers

1 “Truth-in-sentencing” laws severely restricted or eliminated opportunities for incarcerated people to earn parole partway through a sentence. **TRUE** 2 Mississippi is among 11 states that ban at least some people with felony convictions from voting for life. **TRUE** 3 “Indictable offenses” are New Jersey’s equivalent of misdemeanors. **FALSE** Correct answer: “Indictable offenses” are New Jersey’s equivalent of felonies. 4 Under Washington state law, any assault on a health care worker can be a felony — including spitting. **TRUE** 5 According to some studies, urine drug screens are easily misinterpreted and often wrong, with false positive rates as high as 50%. **TRUE** 6 T or F: Sing Sing Correctional Facility held its first film festival in an NY prison. **TRUE** 7 More than 1,200 children accused of serious crimes in Cuyahoga County since 2020 were defended by court-appointed lawyers who lacked state-mandated qualifications. **TRUE** 8 The Black Shield, formed by Black officers in Cleveland nearly 80 years ago, came together to support and protect each other from discrimination and retaliation in the mostly White police department. **TRUE**

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## ? Thinking Inside the Box

Give these questions a try after you've read the stories in this issue. We'll include the answers in the next issue.

1 **T or F:** Samantha was in prison when she gave birth to her son, Julius, and his twin sister, who died.

2 **T or F:** A 2019 addition to the correctional officers’ union contract in New York mandates a three-person panel — an arbitrator and representatives from the union and the state — to decide cases of serious misconduct.

3 **T or F:** In some states, failure-to-protect laws allow a parent to be punished for child abuse committed by another person if the courts believe they should have prevented the crime.

4 **T or F:** Doulas are women who deliver babies.

5 **T or F:** The vast majority of people serving time in state and federal prisons do not get to vote.

6 **T or F:** Advocates say having immediate access to jail rosters is vital, not only to law enforcement, but to the public, as well.

7 **T or F:** Public corruption cases have become more complicated to prosecute and are overturned on appeal more than half of the time because of the gray areas that the political process creates.





is a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization that seeks to create and sustain a sense of national urgency about the U.S. criminal justice system. We achieve this through award-winning journalism, partnerships with other news outlets and public forums. In all of our work we strive to educate and enlarge the audience of people who care about the state of criminal justice.

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