

# Colorado Justice Report

Founded in 1999, CCJRC is a network of organizations, faith communities, and individuals working to eliminate the overuse of the criminal justice system in Colorado.

1212 Mariposa St. #6, Denver, CO. 80204 | [www.ccjrc.org](http://www.ccjrc.org) | [info@ccjrc.org](mailto:info@ccjrc.org) | 303 825-0122

## 2018 Legislative Sneak Peek

We are quickly approaching the 2018 legislative session and there is already a lot of buzz around legislation that will be introduced.

There were a handful of interim committees that met this summer, some of which focused on sentencing reform, jail overcrowding and how to address the opioid crisis. From those committees, we know legislation will be coming forward that will be seeking to revise the habitual offender statutes, reduce the maximum mandatory parole period from 5 years to 3 years, expand Medicaid to cover inpatient and residential substance use disorder treatment services, expand loan forgiveness funding to behavioral health providers to increase Colorado's addictions and mental health workforce and allow for a pilot program in Denver to offer a safe injection facility.

Here at CCJRC, our policy agenda is still being firmed up, but we will be moving forward a handful of bills that seek to reduce the amount of people in the justice system and advance community health and safety. One bill we will be working on is the reauthorization of HB14-1355 which provides grant funding to eight community based reentry organizations throughout the state that help people on parole. The funding comes from the Department of Corrections (DOC) and is part of CCJRC's justice reinvestment work moving money out of corrections and into community.

CCJRC will also be working on a bill to expand who has the ability to provide acudetox services, which research has shown to be effective in helping minimize substance use withdrawal symptoms, improve behavioral health treatment outcomes and promote trauma recovery and healing. The legislation would allow Certified Addiction Counselors at any level or Registered Psychotherapists to provide this service. Some of the community based reentry organization staff have stated they would love to be able to offer this service to their participants to support the promotion of healing and recovery. We'll have more about our policy agenda and the legislative session in our next newsletter.

## What we're doing for Democracy - Moving the needle

Wow, what a year! It's hard to believe 2018 is around the corner and as 2017 comes to a close, we are happy to share our experience of running our first Get Out The Vote (GOTV) door-to-door canvass in the 2017 municipal election in Aurora, Colorado.

Since 2006, CCJRC has run the only civic engagement campaign in Colorado specifically targeting people with criminal records who may think that they are not eligible to vote. This isn't true in Colorado but it is a very widely held belief that has been difficult to correct in any large scale way.

Given the era of over-policing and mass incarceration, people with criminal records are not an insubstantial voting bloc, particularly among people of color. National data from The Sentencing Project estimates that over 100 million adults in the US have a criminal record and 1 in 3 US adults will have been arrested by the age of 23. Across the country, it is a fairly common misunderstanding that people can't vote after being convicted, even though that isn't true except in a handful of states. Even in most of those states there are nuances. Public education on the nuances of voting with a criminal record is vital to the civic engagement health of our state and others but is largely missing from the core competency of mainstream civic engagement efforts. The Sentencing Project publishes a great state-by-state overview if you'd like to learn more. <http://www.sentencing-project.org/publications/felony-disenfranchisement-a-primer/>

Historically, our Voting With Conviction campaign has focused on public education and trainings so that people know the law and know their rights. In 2016, we expanded our campaign to include the first voter registration drive at both jails in Denver. We also produced a voting video that was played frequently on the inmate education channel. Although overall voter turnout in the 2016 election in Colorado of 71.3% was significantly higher than the national average of 58.2%, African American voter turnout was fifty percent lower than in the previous election. There are likely to be several factors involved but we were curious as to what extent a misunderstanding of voting eligibility

Continued on page 2

for people with criminal records was having a chilling effect on voter turnout. So in the summer of 2017, we surveyed 500 African Americans in the Denver metro area, including 250 who did vote and 250 who did not vote in 2016 to learn more. One major revelation was that 65% believed that people with a criminal record could not vote in Colorado. This is a stunning level of misunderstanding of the law and helped us better understand just how broad our efforts need to be.

So, for the 2017 election cycle, we knew we needed to do more if we wanted to increase voter participation among people with criminal records, particularly within the African American community. We also knew we needed to get more deeply into the community so we launched our first door-to-door field campaign in the Ward III City Council election in Aurora. The campaign staff and canvassers were all African American and most also had criminal records. One of our canvassers couldn't herself vote because she was still on parole. They were passionate, engaging and committed and we were proud to have them represent CCJRC.

Over an 8 week period of time we reached 3,879 doors and had 1,033 in-person conversations. This contact rate of 27% significantly exceeded the average of 18-21%. For the first time, we also experimented with a new type of communication strategy by renting ad-space at 22 bus shelters around the Denver metro area. Roughly half carried the message around voter eligibility for people with a criminal record. The other half had an explicit GOTV message targeting African Americans. As a result of this work, Ward III had the highest African American voter turnout than any other Ward in Aurora at 18 %, which was a 2% increase in comparison to other off year elections. Citywide, turnout was 27%. Despite this success, there is obviously much work needed over a sustained and long-term period to substantially increase voter turnout among people with criminal records, particularly within the African American community. Given that none of the voter data that is available indicates whether the voter had a criminal record, it not possible for us to determine whether we increased voter participation of people with a criminal record. So, moving forward, CCJRC is starting to build our own voter file from our outreach efforts to people with criminal records so that we can continue to build relationships that are critical to increasing voter turnout in election cycle after election cycle.

CCJRC will continue to grow our civic engagement efforts in 2018 with a focus on those most impacted by the criminal justice system to build our collective voter strength. Every election is consequential but in 2020, voters will determine who the District Attorney is in all twenty-two judicial districts in the state. District Attorney races tend to be very low-profile elections and we're hoping to help change that.

What we are doing for democracy is much more than words on paper. We are helping to move the needle towards strengthening democracy and creating a more just society through the leadership and engagement of people most impacted by systemic oppression.

As we look forward to 2018, we are excited to grow the impact of our civic engagement efforts and to build political power to eliminate the overuse of the criminal justice system and advance community health and safety. We advocate and organize for public safety strategies that are more holistic, effective and just.

We need your help! If you're interested in volunteering in our civic engagement campaign, please contact [alex@ccjrc.org](mailto:alex@ccjrc.org)

## Transforming Safety in Colorado

Over the past 35 years, the Colorado prison population has exploded and the state now spends over \$1 billion every year to incarcerate adults and juveniles. But neighborhoods that experience higher rates of crime and criminal justice involvement have seen little or no improvement. By many metrics, the overuse of the criminal justice system brings its own set of negative consequences by damaging families separated by incarceration, straining police and community relations, undermining the legitimacy of the criminal justice system due to racial disparity, underserving crime victims, and making it harder for people with a criminal record to find employment and housing to support their families. It's time to try what's known to actually prevent crime—community and economic development.

In 2017, the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition worked with community members and a bi-partisan group of state legislators to try something different. We wanted a new approach to public safety that invests in strategies that strengthen communities as a way to prevent crime in the first place.

This new vision became House Bill 17-1326, the Justice Reinvestment Crime Prevention Act, which passed with bi-partisan support. The bill reinvests \$4 million a year for three years in savings in the prison budget from parole reforms to create a pilot in N Aurora and SE Colorado Springs. Funding can only be used for small business lending and a community grant program. This project will be evaluated by an independent third party and the legislature will conduct a sunset review in 2020.

The Colorado Department of Local Affairs selected a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) for each community to manage the small business lending program created by HB17-1326 in SE Colorado Springs and N Aurora. Community Enterprise Development Services (CEDS) was selected to manage the small business loan program in North Aurora and Accion was selected to do the same in SE Colorado Springs.

The Denver Foundation was selected to manage the grant program and has partnered in Colorado Springs with the Pikes Peak Community Foundation and Council of Neighbors and Organizations (CONO). One key feature of this initiative is that a Local Planning Team comprised of residents and others with deep ties to these communities will determine the crime prevention priorities that will then be used to shape the grant guidelines. The Local Planning Team for N Aurora has already been selected and the SE Colorado Springs Local Planning Team will be selected by the end of December.

Both teams will meet intensively in January and February to determine the crime prevention priorities and The Denver Foundation anticipates releasing the grant guidelines by March with awards announced by June. There will also be a fall grant schedule.

This is incredibly exciting and this legislation is being profiled in a national publication by the Urban Institute in early 2018. For more information, CCJRC launched a new campaign website at <https://transformingsafety.org>. If you want to get specific email updates, you can sign up at this website or just send an email to [christie@ccjrc.org](mailto:christie@ccjrc.org). Just indicate whether you want to receive updates on N Aurora, SE Colorado Springs or both!

# Take Care

## Health Matters Update

There is still a lot of uncertainty regarding the future of health-care, but at least for the time being most justice involved people in Colorado have access to Medicaid! As long as you do not make more than \$1300 a month, you will most likely be eligible for Medicaid unless you are incarcerated in a prison, jail or on work release from jail. Talk with your case manager, community reentry specialist or if you are in the community, you can contact your county department of human services to make sure you are enrolled.

As an update of our work, CCJRC held 4 focus groups with justice involved people this fall to learn about their experiences getting enrolled in Medicaid and accessing care. The Department of Health Care Policy and Financing (HCPF) also participated in the focus groups in efforts to improve their delivery of Medicaid to justice involved people.

While there are still challenges to having a smooth, seamless enrollment for people leaving incarceration, we heard great stories about how easy it was to get enrolled in the community. The vast majority of people stated they have been able to easily find a doctor, go to the dentist, get transportation to/from medical appointments, get medications and access methadone or other medication assisted treatment options. One thing that stood out is that folks are still not getting information about what benefits and services Medicaid covers.

CCJRC has a consumer guide called “Your Health Matters” that walks through what Medicaid is, how to access care and treatment through Medicaid and why it’s important. We have provided copies to DOC, parole offices, probation offices and halfway houses. We also recently have been able to place the consumer guide on the tablets within DOC in the ‘health’ folder. If you are not able to find a copy of the “Your Health Matters” booklet wherever you are at, please feel free to write or call CCJRC and we will make sure you get a copy.

Now, back to the uncertainty of the future of healthcare..... Congress failed to renew funding for the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) which is known as the Child Health Plan (CHP) here in Colorado. Federal funding for CHP ended as of September 30, 2017.

This means that unless Congress acts, the CHP program will be ending here in Colorado as of January 31, 2018. This will impact approximately 75,000 children and 800 pregnant women throughout our state. The Department of Health Care Policy and Financing (HCPF) will be sending out letters soon to impacted women and families to let them know what other options, if any, may be available.

Congress has also failed to extend funding for Community Health Centers (CHC), which provide health care, dental and behavioral health care services to more than 740,000 Coloradans.

Through CCJRC’s outreach to justice involved people, CHC’s are repeatedly mentioned as the main clinics that they go to for care and treatment. While the House has passed a bill that would renew funding for both CHIP and the CHCs, the bill varies from what is being discussed in the Senate.

As of this writing, the Senate has not passed any legislation and it is not looking likely that they will move forward on anything soon. We encourage you to write or call our Congressional Senators to urge their support in renewing funding for both CHIP and CHCs.

Senator Michael Bennet:

- Denver: 303-455-7600  
1127 Sherman St., Suite 150,  
Denver, CO 80203
- Washington D.C: 202-224-5852  
261 Russell Senate Office Building,  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Cory Gardner:

- Denver: 303-391-5777  
721 19th Street, Suite 150  
Denver, CO 80202
- Washington D.C: 202-224-5941  
354 Russell Senate Office Building,  
Washington, D.C. 20510

## 2018 Colorado Budget

The state budget for FY2019 is looking stronger than previous years, though we will still need to watch the budget closely especially given the uncertainty of federal funding for some of our state’s health care programs and clinics. We will also be tracking the DOC budget as the FY2019 request is an increase of \$57.8 million over current year funding. Some of the requested items feature more funding for Hepatitis C treatment and \$19 million to increase prison capacity. The DOC received an additional \$11 million this past September to lease 250 beds from a private prison due to our state’s prison population increasing. As of this writing the population has stabilized, but projections show that the population will most likely increase in the next few years. As with previous sessions, we will also continue looking at the Marijuana Tax Cash Fund as there are funding requests to increase the number of housing vouchers for people leaving incarceration as well as funding to continue expansion of substance use disorder treatment services.

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