

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 and advance community health and safety in Colorado.

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Colorado Christmas tree at the US Capitol

(Re) Defining Public Safety

Christie Donner, Executive Director

On November 1st, the Governor announced a \$113 million public safety initiative as part of his budget package submitted to the Joint Budget Committee at the state Legislature. Many of the components of the initiative will require legislation so this will be a big aspect of CCJRC's legislative agenda. So watch out for more updates once session starts and lots of action alerts. This will be one of the most high-profile opportunities that community will have to frame the debate and design of public safety strategies and funding that center community-led efforts not criminal justice system ones.

There are a lot of details that still need to be worked out that are unknown right now but know that CCJRC is very actively involved.

Holding District Attorneys Accountable

By: Jasmine Ross, Civic Engagement & Volunteer Coordinator

2020 marked unprecedented challenges for us as a country and as a state. COVID changed everything overnight! Citizens in our state were faced with challenges never seen before and had the duty and responsibility of electing our next leaders for the state during the 2020 elections. An important decision that voters had was choosing their next DA.

All 22 Judicial District Attorney seats were up for election. CCJRC for the last couple of years has worked diligently to educate citizens on the role, power and responsibilities of elected DA's and more importantly, that DAs are elected!

CCJRC produced educational materials and distributed them to the public, hosted community forums and DA candidate forums to educate citizens on DA's, surveyed community to gather public opinion on their expectations of their DA and produced DA voter guides in 2020 to help voters make informed decisions on who their next DA would be.

We also created an "Equitable Prosecution Statement of Principles" to outline community driven accountability measures and expectations of elected DA's. The statement is a demand and call to action. These principles include:

- Transparency, accountability, and research-based training for prosecutors
- Fairness and equity in filing decisions, plea offers, and sentence recommendations
- Increase use of community-based opportunities over incarceration
- Use of best practices in the prosecution of youth
- Limitation of pretrial detention, and support for sentencing reform that remedies disproportionate outcomes for communities of color, advances equity, and restores individualized judicial determinations.

Our Statement of Principles has been well received and supported by over 70 + organizations and elected officials. Several newly elected DAs indicated support for most of the principles.

In 2021, CCJRC pivoted from education to DA accountability focused on their campaign promises, their performance, and more importantly to their alignment with the values of the community.

To that end, CCJRC is analyzing data from three judicial districts to assess who is going to prison to get more insight into DA plea bargain and sentencing practices. Stay tuned for those reports to be released in early 2022. We are also approaching this research from an equity lens to better document any racial/ethnic disparity for both men and women.

This research will help us educate community, influence policy advocacy and drive strategies for accountability that align with the community's expectations around how to hold DAs accountable. So please, stay tuned! There will be a lot happening with the DA Accountability Campaign and there will also be new volunteer opportunities opening up soon. If you are interested, please email jasmine@ccjrc.org.



Exposing Inequities in Victim Services in Colorado

By Juston Cooper, Deputy Director

Over the last decade Colorado has seen an exponential growth in funding for victim services. Even though the two state agencies that administer most of the victim services funds have acknowledged in multiple reports that victims of color have been historically underserved, they did not address this chronic issue even with substantially more funding.

Consequently, CCJRC spent over a year researching this issue and just released a groundbreaking new report on victim's services that documents the lack of equity in victim services for people of color, identifies a number of structural and systemic reasons for that gap, and offers recommendations for change.

The new research builds on our 2018 *Victims Speak* report, which revealed substantial shortfalls in crime victims' awareness of and access to services, especially among people of color, in the Denver metro area. It also found that three out of four crime victims — and 90% of African American victims — believe victims are treated differently based on their race or ethnicity. Those findings prompted us to take a closer look at the equitability of the distribution of state and federal resources for victim services in Colorado.

Victims Services in Colorado Examined from an Equity Perspective examines victim services in the state, how they are funded, and their impact on underserved and marginalized people. It is based on survey data of victim services agencies across Colorado, discussions with state agency administrators, and interviews with 15 victim services leaders of color from community-based organizations and law enforcement agencies.

The report concludes that a lack of diversity within Colorado victim services programs and the agencies that administrate state and federal victim services funds is contributing to inequitable outcomes for crime victims of color and marginalized communities. Most notably, it found that people of color are substantially underrepresented in both the leadership of decision makers and the population of victims served at the organizations receiving 99% of state and federal victim services funds. In contrast, a grant program created in 2018 to fund community-based programs that focus on underserved victims is largely led by people of color and primarily serves victims of color, but only receives 1% of funds.

Our research indicates that providers who share and understand cultures of those they are serving may be best positioned to support victims in their healing processes. Yet the victim services field continues to be overwhelmingly white at both the organizational level and in terms of victims served. We believe that as a state, this is the time to take actions that invest deeply in communities of color, recognizing that the well-being of communities of color is necessary and valuable to the well-being of the whole community.

Key to advancing equity in access to victim services is to develop funding formulas that are more aligned with victimization rates by race/ethnicity. Although victims currently served may reflect the Colorado general population, state and national data is clear that people of color have substantially higher rates of victimization and access to victim services should reflect that reality.

Key findings of the new report include:

- In fiscal year 2019, \$75 million in state and federal funds for victim services were allocated to three state agencies to administer three separate grant programs: the Colorado Department of Public Safety, Office for Victims Program (OVP), which administered about 95% of all victim services funding; the Colorado Department of Human Services, Domestic Violence Program (DVP), which administered about 4% of funding; and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Community Crime Victim Services Grant Program (CCVS), which administered about 1% of funding.
- The OVP and DVP collectively serviced over 141,000 victims in fiscal year 2019. Of the victims that were tracked, 57% identified as white, 25% Latin American or Hispanic, 8% Black or African American, 4% other, 3% multiracial/ethnic, 2% Native American, and 1% Asian.
- There is substantial underrepresentation of leaders of color in the victim services field in Colorado, particularly among African Americans, who hold less than 4% of all leadership positions. Fewer than 15% of organizations funded by OVP and DVP have an executive director of color. Three-fourths of the senior staff at OVP and 78% of the executive and senior staff at OVP-funded organizations identify as white, while 100% of the staff at the DVP and 71% of executive and senior staff at DVP-funded organizations identify as white. Also, 82% of the boards of directors at funded organizations and 85% of the Crime Services Advisory Board identify as white.
- The CCVS, which is only allocated 1% of victim services funding, is largely led by people of color. One hundred percent of the executive and senior staff at CCVS-funded organizations and 80% of the boards of directors of CCVS-funded organizations identify as people of color. Despite this broader representation, only 8% of all executive and senior staff identify as African American.

• All victim services leaders of color who were surveyed expressed how critical it is to have staff that looks like the population served, which is necessary to create culturally relevant outreach strategies and programs. None of the interviewees were surprised by the data showing that most of staff, board members, and the victims served at state agencies and funded organizations are predominantly white. They also noted that it was problematic that victim services agencies were not independent of the criminal legal system (e.g. law enforcement and district attorney offices), given the mistrust for this system among communities of color

We provide numerous substantive recommendations to state lawmakers, state grant administrators, and victim services program leaders on how to address the inequities highlighted in the report.

Power and resources have historically been concentrated in victim service entities that lack diversity in leadership and in the populations they serve. Colorado must do better, and that means expanding its purview to be more inclusive regarding race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender representation in agencies, commissions, boards, and organizations that make decisions on funding and administer victim services.

continued on page 3

We must be committed to doing something different. It is time to re-examine policies, procedures, and practices through an equity lens and establish new equity standards and accountability measures that will ensure real progress is made toward reducing the racial and ethnic gaps in victim services. This is paramount for the equal distribution of power and diversity needed for relevant responses to the needs of victims.

We hope the recommendations in this report will not only deepen the conversation, but also inspire the action needed to ensure the system is reaching all victims and meeting their needs.

You can access the report on our website at www.ccjrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/CCJRC_Victim_Services_Report_2021.pdf

.....and I thought passing legislation was exhausting.....

By Terri Hurst, Policy Coordinator

With the legislative session ending in June this year (it usually ends in May every year) it feels like the end of the year has gotten here quicker than ever. If you read our Summer 2021 newsletter you know that CCJRC had a beast of a legislative session with some big wins. While getting a bill passed is a huge lift and takes a lot of work, ensuring legislation that was passed gets implemented with intent, integrity and in a timely manner is another level of intensity that doesn't get discussed much. Two bills that CCJRC were point on during the legislative session called for work to occur this interim session to study and make recommendations for future areas of focus.

SB21-138 established the Brain Injury Support in the Criminal Justice Task Force which was required to develop a plan to integrate into the criminal justice system a model to identify and support individuals with brain injury. The Task Force began meeting in July and will have final recommendations provided to both Judiciary Committees by January 1, 2022. The work of the Task Force is extremely important as the rates of brain injuries for people involved in the justice system are much higher than the general population and the impact of a brain injury on one's functioning can be significantly impaired, which can lead to higher rates of recidivism.

SB21-146 tasked the Colorado Commission on the Aging (CCOA) to study and make recommendations regarding the ability for elders, or those over the age of 65, to have access to health insurance coverage upon release from incarceration. Given the complexity of Medicare, which is the federal health insurance option for people over the age of 65, it is challenging for someone who has been incarcerated for any length of time to be able to have timely enrollment in Medicare if they are incarcerated when they turn 65 years old. The CCOA established a Criminal Justice Ad-hoc Committee that has been meeting weekly since the end of June to make recommendations that will also be presented to the Judiciary Committees by January 1, 2022.

While it's too early to give an update on what recommendations will be coming from these two initiatives, CCJRC will be sure to share the recommendations and any follow up in our next newsletter. You may also write to terri@ccjrc.org or send us a letter if you are curious about learning about the recommendations that are forthcoming before our next newsletter.

In addition to the previous two Committees, the state received approximately \$4 billion in federal stimulus dollars to help with the impacts that COVID has had across the board. In particular, \$450 million was set

..exhausting continued

aside to improve access to behavioral health (mental health & addiction) services across the state through the work of a legislative Behavioral Health Transformational Task Force (BHTTF) and Subpanel. Subpanel members were appointed and made up of interested stakeholders and community members, with CCJRC staff being appointed as a Subpanel member.

The work of the Subpanel and Task Force should be finalized by January with recommendations on how that funding should be allocated. It is anticipated that there will be multiple pieces of legislation that will define how and where this funding will be spent. We'll be sure to keep you up to date on what's to come during the 2022 legislative session.

This year's 12th Annual Voices for Justice was a beautiful fabulous sold out event! We want to thank everyone who donated, attended, and sponsored this years event. It was especially sweet to see everyone since we weren't able to hold the event in 2020. We are looking forward to seeing you all again in September 2022!



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*We wish our members a
happy holiday season. We under-
stand that this time of year can be very
difficult for people separated from their
loved ones. We keep you all in our
thoughts and prayers.*

YES! Count me in! I want to support CCJRC and help eliminate the overuse of the criminal justice system in Colorado. Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution!

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GO GUIDE

GETTING ON AFTER GETTING OUT
A RE-ENTRY GUIDE FOR COLORADO



6th edition • Spring 2021

Please remember that the newest edition of the GO GUIDE was released earlier this year and is available for purchase at ccjrc.org for \$10

If you are in prison, you should be able to get a copy at no cost from your reentry specialist, case manager, or at the library. If you are unable to get a GO GUIDE please write to CCJRC at 1212 Mariposa St. #6, Denver, CO 80204.



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