

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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Governor Polis requests \$1 billion state prison budget, the largest in state history

Christie Donner, Executive Director

On January 9, 2023, the Colorado General Assembly will kick off the next legislative session with Democrats having a larger majority in both chambers following the mid-term elections. Democrats will have a 46-19 majority in the House and a 23-12 majority in the Senate. Democrats won all statewide offices, too, for Treasurer, Secretary of State, Attorney General, and Governor. It is anticipated, even with the Democrats holding such a strong majority in both chambers, that this session will still suffer from in-fighting and all the political theater and fireworks that happen every session, so get your popcorn ready!

Exactly one week after being re-elected, on November 15th, Governor Polis submitted his FY23-24 budget to the Joint Budget Committee that included a request of over \$1 billion for the state prison system, the largest in state history and the first time the DOC budget request crossed the \$1 billion mark.

The Joint Budget Committee (JBC) at the Legislature is responsible for developing the state budget and the budget bill must be approved by both the House and Senate, so it's a long way from being and done deal. In addition, there is only one member out

of six who serve on the JBC who has any institutional knowledge of the budget setting process. One of the longest running JBC members, Sen. Rankin, resigned from the legislature and Rep. Herod is no longer on JBC. Their knowledge and expertise will be missed. We expect the JBC may be more politically charged this year than in prior years, which again, could make the budget setting process more heated than we've seen.

The state is going to have less incoming revenue to play with this upcoming fiscal year given the state income tax rate was reduced by voters this past election cycle, marijuana tax revenue is declining, and we are dancing around the TABOR limit. With these budget limitations in play, there will hopefully be more wiggle room to reduce the budget of DOC. Please know that CCJRC will do our best to reduce the DOC budget and prioritize funding to things that will actually promote community safety.

Our other legislative priorities will include the reauthorization of both the WAGEES Community Reentry Grant Program, that we advocated for in 2014, and the Community Crime Victims Services Grant Program that is supporting underserved victims including men, people of color, and young adults, which CCJRC advocated for in 2018. Both grant programs are supporting invaluable services to people directly impacted by crime and the criminal legal system which is incredibly important. But to CCJRC these are much more than just a grant program. For us, building this infrastructure to strengthen community-led safety strategies is crucial to pivoting away from the overuse of the criminal legal system.

We have heard that there will be several bills with a child-welfare focus that would impact justice-involved people so those will be on our radar screen, too. We've also heard that there are likely going to be some "get tough" on crime sentencing bills, particularly around motor vehicle theft, and possibly another attempt to re-felonize simple possession of drugs which was narrowly defeated in the 2022 legislative session.

We email weekly legislative updates throughout the session. If you aren't already signed up, you can visit ccjrc.org, click on Get Involved and go to Sign up for Updates. You can also write us a letter or send us an email and we'll get you plugged in.

Update: Special Needs Parole

By Terri Hurst, Health Justice Manager

During the 2021 legislative session, CCJRC worked hard on drafting and successfully passing SB21-146 which sought to clean up and clarify roles regarding Special Needs Parole (SNP) for both DOC and the Parole Board. The bill also expanded who could be eligible for SNP and it was anticipated that more people within DOC would be eligible and subsequently released.

What we're finding a year into implementation is that SNP is still not working as it was intended. From October 2021 to October 2022, only 95 people were medically approved by DOC for SNP and, of those, only 17 have been approved for release by the Parole Board.

We are hearing the vast majority of people who are applying for SNP never make it past DOC clinical to even see the Parole Board. CCJRC believes there are many more individuals who are eligible for SNP that could be released.

Not only would this allow people who do not pose a threat to public safety the ability to receive long term care services and supports in the community, including access to end-of-life care so people can be with their family and loved ones, but it would also reduce the cost to DOC who does not have the clinical staff nor the medical capacity to humanely care for these people.

In September, I sent over 300 letters to people within DOC to inform them of the changes to SNP to ensure that people knew the changes that were made in the SNP laws. The response I have gotten has been overwhelming and CCJRC is working with others, as well as DOC, to see how we can improve the SNP process and implementation efforts.

DOC recently published a new A.R. for SNP (250-81) which describes the process of how someone may apply for SNP, how to appeal a SNP denial and clarifies that a person may ask for a SNP review every 3 months or if their medical condition worsens.

There are 4 pathways that someone may be eligible for SNP though the Parole Board still has authority to ultimately decide if someone may be released on SNP.

1. A person is 55 years of age or older with a medical or mental health condition that causes serious impairment that limits the person's ability to function,

2. A person who is any age who suffers from a chronic, permanent, terminal, or irreversible physical illness, condition or disease or behavioral or mental health disorder that requires costly care or treatment and who is incapacitated,

3. A person who is 64 years of age or older, who has served at least 20 years of their sentence and who was not convicted of a class 1 or class 2 felony (as defined in CRS 24-4.1-302(1)), unlawful sexual behavior (as defined in 16-22-102(9), a crime that includes domestic violence (as defined in 18-6-800.3(1)) or stalking (as defined in 18-3-602) – Please note – this pathway does not require a healthcare diagnosis,

4. A person who is determined incompetent to proceed and does not have a substantial probability of being restored to competency, including those with dementia that determine them incompetent to proceed.

In order to meet the medical or mental health criteria for SNP, a person must be diagnosed by a licensed healthcare provider who is employed by or under contract with the DOC or by a private licensed healthcare provider involved with providing care to the person.

Unless someone mentioned below has a terminal illness, the following people are NOT eligible for SNP:

- A person convicted of a class 1 felony and sentenced to life with parole, and has served less than 20 years in DOC for the offense,
- A person convicted of a class 1 felony and was sentenced to life without parole, or
- A person convicted of a class 2 felony crime of violence and has served less than 10 years in DOC.

SNP referrals or requests should be made to a case manager or the SNP case manager. If someone is denied SNP, they have 30 days to appeal that decision by completing an appeal form and submitting it to a case manager.

As CCJRC continues to plug away at trying to figure out why SNP is not working as intended, I welcome your stories and letters about your experience applying for and/or being denied for SNP. Hearing from you is helping CCJRC understand what our next steps need to be to strengthen and improve the SNP process.

The Power of Civic Engagement

Jasmine Ross, Civic Engagement Manager

Hello community and members!

We are pleased to announce that the civic engagement team received Colorado Common Cause's 2022 Champion for Democracy Award!

We were honored to be acknowledged for our work in restoring voting rights, creating jail-based voter access programs, ending prison gerrymandering, and registering and engaging voters who are recently involved with the criminal justice system.

Our scope of work for this year was focused on the local mid-term elections, which generally have lower voter turnout. CCJRC conducted a jail-based voting program at the Arapahoe County jail where we ensured eligible people had voter information, got registered to vote, and got a meaningful opportunity to vote in the primary and general elections. We also continued our partnership with the Denver County Elections Division and Denver Sheriff on their jail-based voting program.

CCJRC also did a lot of outreach at community-based locations where justice involved people are at, including the Aurora parole office, the CTC Core Civic halfway house, Hazelbrook Sober Living, and the Ford Warren Library.

Engaging voters, especially first-time voters, takes a lot of time and follow-up. And just because someone registered to vote, it doesn't mean they will actually vote, as we learned from our efforts.

With the help of volunteers, we registered 52 voters at the Arapahoe County jail for the primary. 47 ballots were cast out of the total of 52, which is a 90% turnout rate. For the general elections, we registered 168 people in the Arapahoe County jail, and 66 of them voted for 40% turnout rate. Between the halfway houses, sober living homes, libraries, and Aurora Parole, we registered a total of 51 voters but none of them voted for a 0% turnout rate.

There's a lot for us to unpack in those wildly different turnout rates from the voters we registered. We gained knowledge and took notes on how to improve turnout for voters in future elections at these sites. The intent of our civic engagement efforts is always to figure out what can be done better and how we can grow. Because of COVID, we knew our numbers would be slightly lower than in previous years just because we are still in the process of ramping things back up, including having consistent access to people in jail.

The takeaway from civic engagement this year was being able to be in contact with people again and continuing to pass on this knowledge about voting and voting eligibility with a criminal background. Since starting the jail-based voting program in 2016, the civic engagement team has been able to register a total of 1,378 people incarcerated in jail and register 388 justice-involved voters at community-based locations. Our plan is to continue to engage with this population and grow these numbers.



CCJRC's Jasmine Ross accepting the Champion for Democracy Award given to CCJRC by Eunice Brownlee from Colorado Common Cause.

Besides tackling our jail-based and site-based voting efforts, the civic engagement team was able to conduct a text bank for the general election. Volunteers and the team sent "get out to vote" messages to our list of justice-involved people and low-propensity voters in Colorado Springs who live in zip codes with the highest incarceration rates. A total of 47,809 texts were sent out.

We couldn't have done this without our volunteers so at this time, CCJRC would like to thank all our volunteers for 2022. There will be more opportunities for volunteers to help with future elections so please be on the lookout for that information. If anyone is interested in assisting us with our efforts for next year, please contact Jasmine Ross, the Civic Engagement Manager, at jasmine@ccjrc.org.

We will be on the move in 2023 to continue to register justice involved people, including in the Denver and Arapahoe County jails in advance of the important Mayoral elections in Denver and Aurora.

Thank you to the community and CCJRC members for your continued support of this work.

With light and gratitude, wishing you all a happy holiday!

CCJRC New Staff

Cecilia Gutierrez - Administrative Assistant

Greetings, My name is Cecilia Gutierrez. I grew up in the southwest neighborhood of Denver Colorado. I am a professional photographer who runs a small business in the community. My family and I have been also affected by the criminal justice system. I joined the CCJRC team earlier this year as the Office Administrative Assistant. This opportunity has allowed me to develop professionally and personally.

Within the scope of work at CCJRC, I have been able to continue inspiring others and advocating for change. I've participated in several CCJRC campaigns and collaborated closely with my colleagues on different projects.

CCJRC is not like other organizations; it is an amazing place that has achieved significant improvements through legislation and how it empowers those in need to change their lives. CCJRC continues to ensure that those who are vulnerable and powerless have a voice because we are their voice, and it is critical that we continue on the path we have taken.

I am honored to be a part of CCJRC and will be forever grateful for the opportunity. I am excited to continue to develop and be a member of the CCJRC team.

Happy Holidays 2022!!



Jason Vitello - Equity and Community Development Manager

I am privileged and humbled to introduce myself as the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition's Equity and Community Development Manager. CCJRC's mission to eliminate the overuse of the criminal justice system and advance community health and safety is in alignment with my own. Over the past 15 plus years, as a public health practitioner, mental health provider, social worker, educator, speaker, advocate, and activist, I have been dedicated to the advancement of justice, equity, safety, health, and healing, across our communities, and within the systems that purport to serve them.

In this new role, I will assist the CCJRC in their efforts to diminish Colorado's overreliance on the criminal legal system, and to promote equity and the influence of BIPOC and other systemically excluded communities in the policy and public funding decisions which impact their health and safety. Additionally, I will strive to connect state and local advocacy efforts to catalyze and coordinate a transformative approach to justice that is community-led, restorative, and racially just.

My ultimate interest is in collective liberation and healing, through the smashing of patterns, changing of narratives, and shifting of paradigms. I am deeply honored and eager to continue to march toward that end under the banner of the CCJRC.

If this does not work, I will return to bartending.



OH WHAT A NIGHT!

This year's 13th Annual Voices for Justice was a beautiful fabulous sold out event! We want to thank everyone who donated, attended, and sponsored this years gala and once again congratulate the award winners.

From the Youth Violence Reduction Collective LifeLine-Colorado, Struggle of Love Foundation, Make a Chess Move, Crowley Foundation, Therapists of Color Collaborative, Heavy Hands Heavy Hearts. We are looking forward to seeing you all again in September 2023!



Youth Violence Reduction Award Winners



Latino Coalition for Community Leadership crew!



Therapists of Color Collaborative award winners

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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!

Your support makes all the difference!

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CCJRC 1212 Mariposa St. #6 Denver, CO. 80204

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 is still available for purchase at ccjrc.org for \$10. We look forward to releasing the 7th edition at the end of 2023.

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.



CCJRC is a proud member
of Community Shares of
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