

# 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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## DOC BUDGET REQUEST More money More beds.

By Christie Donner and Jason Vitello



Here we go again. In November, Governor Polis submitted his FY24-25 state budget request to the Joint Budget Committee and the DOC budget would increase by \$135 million to \$1.2 billion and add another 500 new prison beds. As you may remember, the General Assembly approved a \$1 billion DOC budget and 700 new prison beds in the 2023 legislative session despite a substantial DOC staffing crisis. CCJRC opposed the DOC budget and prison bed expansion during the 2023 legislative session, and we will do so again in 2024.

This time around, we want to make sure policymakers understand the lived experience of people in prison, so this fall we sent a formal survey to incarcerated residents in all facilities across the state. We are currently finalizing our analysis of the results and will publish a report to the Legislature, the public, our members, allies, and other key stakeholders in January 2024.

The survey results will highlight the abysmal decline in programming and services offered to residents, as well as alarming health, mental health, and safety concerns for residents and staff alike. Moreover, the findings are in keeping with a national trend where DOCs across the country are struggling to recruit and retain adequate staff. We would like to deeply thank the 400 plus respondents who shared their experiences with us. Please know that your voices will greatly assist us in our efforts to better educate legislators and the public.

The circumstances for staff are also dire. Although DOC has received tens and tens of millions of dollars for increased staff pay, retention/recruitment bonuses, and housing stipends for staff, they have not been able to close the staffing gap, which is still over 20%. To cope, DOC continues to require mandatory overtime, and has shifted DOC program staff and case managers to fulfill security posts on a regular basis. Teachers aren't teaching regularly, and case managers are often reassigned to "other duties", too. Staff hiring and training standards have also been lowered so now someone can be 18 years old, go through a 14-day academy and be a correctional officer in Colorado. The staffing crisis is most critical in medical, dental, and behavioral health staff which is causing serious harm to the health and mental wellness of people incarcerated.

So, gear up CCJRC members, we have a fight on our hands, and we need your help! Although the prison population is growing, it is only growing by 43 people a month and CCJRC is simultaneously working on a prison population management measures bill to neutralize that growth.

Here's a brief overview of the FY24-25 DOC budget request. The way the budget is presented is that anything that increases or decreases the current budget is submitted as a "decision-item", is labelled with an R, and are ranked highest to lowest priority starting with the number 1. These are just the DOC's requests. The Joint Budget Committee will decide on what is included, and not included, in the state budget bill. And then all members of the General Assembly will vote on the state budget bill. This is NOT a done deal.

**FY24-25 total DOC budget request: \$1,217,112,396  
(an increase of \$135m)**

**R-1: Prison Caseload increase (highest priority)** (<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1t92ycxjSBzcHTxTEnY0Zex7InD92s3Ny>)  
**Cost: \$8,180,923**

Summary: funding for 17.4 FTE and an additional 433 beds: 253 male beds at the private prisons (Bent County Correctional Facility and Crowley County Correctional Facility), 100 male beds at Sterling Correctional Facility, and 80 female beds at LaVista.

**R-2: Medical caseload** ([https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1R7QDEQ9O-kilQ\\_D7vMAIEYXO9XBOaRmM](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1R7QDEQ9O-kilQ_D7vMAIEYXO9XBOaRmM))  
**Cost: \$3,176,772**

Cont. on page 2

Summary: additional funding due to an increase in the administrative rate charged by the third-party health administrator and increase in cost of pharmaceuticals.

**R-3: Critical Staff Retention and Talent Acquisition** ([https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1mIWA8PSaabDgyFgxnfetva\\_SFiEhZ-y8](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1mIWA8PSaabDgyFgxnfetva_SFiEhZ-y8))  
**Cost: \$3,098,081**

Summary: funding for 6.5 FTE to focus on recruitment/retention of staff, uniform stipends, and mentoring program for new staff

**R-4: Transgender Unit and Healthcare** (<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/17VeeXPk3AJec2Uy1USqt7ttfkTBBdRZV>)  
**Cost: \$9,012,316**

Summary: funding for 28.3 FTE, and \$5m for specialized medical care, including gender-confirming surgical care, for transgender women in prison. DOC proposes creating two new transgender units, one at Denver Women's Correctional Facility (maximum capacity of 48 people), and another at Sterling Correctional Facility (maximum capacity of 100 people) for those who have not yet met eligibility criteria for the transgender unit at DWCF. DOC also requests funding for staff training and a security van. Several transgender women in prison sued DOC in 2019 and DOC argues that this request is necessary to comply with the consent decree that was negotiated in the settlement agreement. DOC reports there are 216 transgender women in DOC facilities.

**R-5: Broadband** (<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1p3hPiKtrLq5vNIQz9BqP-c0vIlxAGzi>)  
**Cost: \$11,606,770**

Summary: funding that can be spent over the next three years for broadband upgrades at all state facilities.

**R-6: Workforce Housing** (<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/16y0bTw6eQN8uZdhtS68ec6LEaOuy1sm7>)  
**Cost: \$16,360,000**

Summary: funding that can be spent over the next three years to build on existing state-owned land 14-18 units of housing for staff working at Sterling Correctional Facility (\$6m cost) and 50 units of housing for staff working at the Denver Correctional Complex (\$10m). According to DOC, the 50 units in Denver would provide housing for 100-150 staff in a roommate situation.

**R-11: Inmate Pay** (<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1RHURR2ptOPoYX6faRrMp1z-1V-gkL6R8>)  
**Cost: \$586,190**

Summary: funding to begin a phased approach over the next several years to bring average daily inmate pay up to \$2.00 a day.

There are several other funding requests including items like increased funding for maintenance, victim services unit, and transportation.

The legislative session starts on January 10, 2024, and we will start sending out our weekly legislative updates and action alerts.

# Civic Engagement Winter Newsletter

By: Jasmine Ross and Kyle Giddings

We did it! What a fantastic way to end the year. The civic engagement team had another successful year with our voting and registration efforts inside the jail. In total, this year we've registered 303 voters and counting at the Denver Detention Center (DDC) and 146 voters and counting at the Denver County Jail. The turnout for the Denver School Board elections in the jails continued to outpace the general public, just like what we saw for the mayoral elections. The eligible voters who were incarcerated in Denver had a voter turnout rate of 43%, which was five points higher than the general public turnout, which was 38%. Most importantly, all voters who registered and voted had their ballots accepted! We couldn't have achieved this without the support and collaboration of our partners at the Denver Election Division and the Denver Sheriff's Office Programs Administrators. Thank you for helping us continue this successful program. Next year is shaping up to be even bigger for civic engagement, and we will need all the help we can get. If you would like to volunteer, please feel free to reach out to Jasmine Ross, our civic engagement manager. Thank you to all our members for their continued support with this work. We look forward to sharing more exciting news with you all next year!

## Jail Based Voting Legislation Update

It is with great pleasure that we share some exciting updates that have taken place in our civic engagement efforts. Our experience with jail-based voting over the years has fueled our passion for ensuring justice-involved voters have equal access to the democratic process. Collaborating closely with America Votes and the Denver Election Division, our civic engagement team has been developing jail-based voting legislation.

We are delighted to announce that Senator Julie Gonzales has graciously agreed to sponsor and show support for our cause. This legislation will tackle crucial issues such as enabling justice-involved voters to access candidate information, improving the eligibility process and timing of CDOC list updates, holding jails accountable for informing voters of their rights and implementing penalties for failure to do so, mandating in-person voting in all jails for elections, and enhancing the ballot return process.

If this legislation successfully passes, Colorado will become the first state to mandate in-person voting in all 61 county jails. The relationships we have built have also opened doors for our civic engagement team. We have received an invitation to train the Sheriffs Association and County Clerks Association, in partnership with the Denver Election Division, on this process.

Furthermore, we have proposed an idea to the Secretary of State Office on how they can better support community-led efforts through a new grant program to increase voter turnout among BIPOC, youth, rural and disabled voters. This proposal aims to utilize the extra funds received by the SOS to help close the voter gap in these communities. Senator Julie Gonzales is also supportive of this proposal. We are filled with hope and optimism for the upcoming legislative session.

# CCJRC has a new home!

821 22nd Street,  
Denver, CO 80205

Christie Donner, Executive Director



For almost twenty years, CCJRC has been blessed to be a renter at the Denver Inner City Parish Community Center. Back then, it was just me and Pam on staff and we rented the smallest office in the building, which is literally now used by the Parish as a storage closet. Those were humble beginnings, but the work was always real, and we coordinated the 2005 Fail the Jail campaign out of that storage closet. Over the years, we have rented bigger offices at the community center, but the time had come when the Parish needed more space, and so did CCJRC. So, this summer, when it looked like we might not be able to renew our lease, we started on a journey to find CCJRC a new home.

We can't thank the DICP family enough, especially their Executive Director, Larry Martinez, for providing CCJRC with a home for all these years where we felt cared for and included as part of their community. We know that relationship will continue, even if in a different form.

But it was time to move on. And we found out that not only are the housing rental rates through the roof in Denver, so are the commercial rental rates. So, after doing a deep analysis of the commercial real estate market and our own finances, and a whole lotta soul searching, the Board and staff decided that it made more sense for our long-term sustainability and impact in community to buy a building to call our own.

So, we did and CCJRC is now the new owner of the Brand Iron building at 22nd and Champa St in Denver. We looked at a lot of properties. But this building and this neighborhood felt like home. It's located in the Five Points neighborhood, the historic center of cultural, political, and economic power in the Black community in Denver. This neighborhood has been subjected to and weathered, struggled, and been resilient in the face of segregation, gentrification, and neglect, if not outright hostility, to marginalized people, especially people who are unhoused, have criminal records, or use drugs. Even our own realtor took a few minutes to understand that the encampments of unhoused people near the building and around the neighborhood were part of what drew us to this building. In his experience, that was not the usual response from a prospective buyer. We're



Christie - signing all the paperwork at closing at the Title Company!

also honored to be neighbors with organizations like the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless' Stout Street Medical Clinic, Phoenix Multi-Sport, and the methadone clinic, just to name a few.

There were many emotions involved when I signed the closing documents to purchase this building on behalf of CCJRC. Excitement, disbelief, a little fear, and a lot of wonder for what was possible. But, as an Executive Director, I also felt a quiet sense of contentment that this would also help CCJRC build deeper roots in the community long into the future. I think one of the most important things an Executive Director can do is to lay a solid foundation for the next generation of leaders who will continue to move the vision and work forward. I believe that CCJRC owning this building is part of that foundation.

We are so thankful for all the hands that made this possible, including the Board and staff who responded so quickly and competently when we found out that we wouldn't be able to renew our lease. In June 2023, we had no idea what was about to unfold and that by the end of the year we would be in a new building, that CCJRC would own. We're also so grateful to the Colorado Health Foundation, and the Public Welfare Foundation for making this financially feasible for CCJRC to purchase the building. And I want to acknowledge my fellow Executive Directors, Hassan Latif (Second Chance Center) and Leo Alirez (Life-Line Colorado) who successfully ventured into nonprofit commercial real estate ownership long before me. Their big vision and courage inspired me and helped me see the path.

It will take us a little while to get situated and, of course, we launch right into the legislative session in early January. We look forward to hosting many community events, trainings, and all the other ways we can help bring people together for fellowship and to serve community that we haven't even considered yet. Thank you for being on this journey with us and for all your support. Please feel free to come on by!!!!



After closing L-R, Hassan Latif, CCJRC Board President with Jason, Christie, and Pam from CCJRC staff



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CCJRC 821 22nd St., Denver, CO 80205

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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!***

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

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|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$35                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Low Income/senior \$15       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Household \$50                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Prisoner <b>Free in 2021</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustainer \$100 or more                            |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Freedom Fighter \$____ charge me monthly/quarterly |   |

Credit Card # \_\_\_\_\_

Exp date \_\_\_\_\_

Please return to:  
CCJRC 821 22nd St., Denver, CO 80205

We are thrilled to share some exciting news with you—CCJRC's very own Kyle Giddings has been chosen to be a part of the 2024 Just Leadership USA (JLUSA) Leading with Conviction cohort! Out of a pool of over 1500 applicants from across the nation, Kyle is one of the fortunate 46 selected for this transformative program.

Leading with Conviction is a 12-month-long, cohort-based advanced training opportunity designed to strengthen the leadership skills of people who have been directly impacted by the criminal legal system that already have a track record in advocacy, activism, and community organizing. This includes individuals working in the social, economic, or justice reform areas.

We are so proud of Kyle for being selected and know that he will bring all he learns to his work and leadership in Colorado. He also has a built-in mentor since Pam Clifton @ CCJRC was a member of the third Leading with Conviction training cohort in 2017. Congrats Kyle!!!



CCJRC is a proud member  
of Community Shares of  
Colorado!