

# 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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## The 2025 Legislative Wrap-Up

By Kyle Giddings, Deputy Director

This year's legislative session was a wild ride with high highs and low lows. We faced and navigated a resurgence of tough-on-crime politics and a state budget crisis. Since Colorado voters passed Props 128 and 130 last year, which enhanced "truth in sentencing" for certain crimes and mandated the state provide \$350 million for police, we heard again and again that there's now a "mandate from the people" for harsher sentences.

In total, 10 bills were introduced this year to increase penalties or roll back needed reforms. Six of them had bipartisan sponsors. Four were signed into law and six were defeated. Of those that passed, two focused on firearms: one added first-degree auto theft to the list of crimes where a conviction would prohibit someone from owning a gun, and the other made all firearm thefts a felony, regardless of value. The other two added repeated 911 calls to the obstruction statute and changed how careless driving charges can be filed.

But we also saw that there's still a path forward for the larger reform advocacy community: a way to protect past reforms, kill bad bills, and push new policies that support people impacted by the justice system. Chief among these for CCJRC was the huge success in protecting over \$11 million in funding that goes to grants to support community-led services for reentry, underserved victim services, and crime prevention. Given the state budget crisis, that was no small feat. CCJRC actually hired a 2nd team of lobbyists just to focus on the state budget. The latest economic

forecasts have just released and next year is going to be a really bad budget year, too.

Despite the state budget crisis, the DOC's budget increased by over \$10 million for a total of \$1.2 billion. One silver lining is that DOC's effort to close Skyline Correctional Facility, home to the beloved Beacon honor unit for men, was DEFEATED by pressure from people at Skyline, their loved ones, and CCJRC. It's weird for CCJRC to be fighting to keep a prison open, not just once but two years in a row, but saving Beacon at Skyline is really important.

The Joint Budget Committee also introduced several bills that were all passed and signed into law including: SB25-209: Allows inmates to refuse community corrections placement after being accepted, not before referral as is current law. SB25-210: Repeals 5-year funding requirement for bills extending incarceration. SB25-211: Requires better reporting by DOC on population, capacity, and vacancies. Much more controversial was the bill, SB25-212, that gave DOC temporary authority to open beds at Tower C -Centennial-South (aka CSP2) to transfer people in medium, close, and protective custody at Sterling to CSP2 "temporarily" due to a maintenance project at Sterling Correctional Facility. It also added \$1.8M to the DOC budget. So, let's take a look at what happened this year. The Good Bills: The ones that passed, and those we lost, starting with:

### CCJRC priority bills

#### **SB25-001 – The Colorado Voting Rights Act (COVRA) – PASSED (led by Common Cause & CCJRC)**

Given the threats to federal voting rights, COVRA codifies voting rights into state law. It also creates first-of-its-kind protections for voters held in county jails. Most people in jail are eligible to vote, but many face serious barriers to registering, getting election info, or casting a ballot. COVRA gives jailed voters a clear legal pathway to challenge any interference—through the courts or the Attorney General. Are you or someone you know in jail and having trouble accessing your right to vote? Contact CCJRC - we're here to help.

#### **SB25-190- Offender Release from Custody-PASSED (coalition effort by CCJRC, Spero Justice Center, Office of the State Public Defender, Disability Law Colorado and Maxted Law)**

Yet, another legislative attempt to try and fix Special Needs Parole, Colorado's "compassionate release" law that allows the Parole Board to release someone from prison before they are eligible for parole if they meet criteria. The bill did a number of things: revised defini-

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tions for the severity of the physical or cognitive impairment needed to meet the standard of being “seriously impaired” that is based on medical diagnosis; eliminates the higher medical standard to be eligible for special needs parole if someone is 55 years old or younger and replaces with a minimum time served requirement; allows outside medical providers that are providing patient care to also screen eligibility, not just DOC medical staff; and directs Legislative Council to conduct a study, with stakeholder input, on placement options outside of DOC that already exist and gaps for elders and those with high medical/behavioral health care needs that are approved for special needs parole.

**HB25-1214: Appropriate Use OF Prison Beds – DIED (led by CCJRC)**  
Oh... this one hurt to lose. There actually is a crisis in corrections. DOC is running out of beds and we need to neutralize prison population growth or we're going to have prison overcrowding and/or the state is going to argue about spending \$100m to buy a closed private prison to expand capacity. This was the only bill this session that would have actually reduced the prison population. We had the votes in the House and Senate to pass it but the DOC opposed, and the Governor guaranteed a veto, so the House never took a floor vote. On the policy side, it was pretty modest and made changes to the process for a reconsideration of sentence that is already in place, would have created a presumption of parole for people who were assessed as low risk, and increased funding for reentry support services to reduce the growth rate of parole revocations.

**SB25-062: Failure to Appear Charges in Municipal Court PASSED (led by Colorado Freedom Fund)**  
This bill ends the practice of charging someone with contempt of court just for missing a court date. It's a major win, especially in places like Pueblo, where 1,700 contempt charges were filed in just eight months last year. In one case a person received 575 days in jail, and many others were sentenced to hundreds of days behind bars for low-level offenses like loitering or traffic tickets that don't even carry jail time. SB-062 puts an end to such practices.

**SB25-155: Legislation Inside Advisory Council – PASSED (led by Kory Wise Innocence Project)**  
Absolutely one of our favorite bills this session! The bill creates a mechanism for people currently incarcerated to meaningfully engage in policy debates and developing bills. KWIP has been helping facilitate Legislation Inside for several years which is comprised of inmate representatives from each facility who meet regularly by zoom to discuss policy matters and solutions. This bill formalizes and protects this process.

**HB25-1013: DOC Visitation Rights- PASSED (led by End Slavery Coalition)**  
Thanks to this bill, visitation rights in Colorado prisons have been strengthened and protected. No longer can DOC suspend visitation rights for violations of prison rules. The only exception is if someone is in restrictive housing or has been found guilty of a Class 1 disciplinary violation or there is a specific legal or safety concern. DOC is also required to make every reasonable effort to accommodate visits after the birth of a child or a death in the family.

**HB25-1116: Court Records Search Before Inmate Release -PASSED (led by Stand for Children)**  
Too often, people are transferred to community corrections or released on parole only to be re-arrested because of an old warrant or detainer from before they were incarcerated. This bill is trying to fix that by requiring DOC to check for outstanding warrants when someone enters prison, before their referral to community corrections, and again before they're released on parole. Among other requirements, if a warrant is found, DOC must notify the public defender liaison, who can help resolve the issue before the person leaves prison.

**HB25-1146: Juvenile Detention Bed Cap- PASSED (National Center for Youth Law- Colorado Campaign)**

While this bill started out as a major increase in the number of juvenile detention beds. There was a lot of opposition to this bill and due to the community pressure, it was ultimately highly amended. It gives more flexibility in how existing beds could be used, requires youth detention staff to use body-cams, and puts \$3 million into a grant program to deflect youth from the justice system.

**HB25-1275: Forensic Science Integrity – PASSED (led by Office of the State Public Defender)**

After it was uncovered that Missy Woods, a now-disgraced forensic scientist at the Colorado Bureau of Investigation, falsified DNA results or cut corners on DNA testing in over 1,000 cases, a bipartisan team of lawmakers stepped up. This bill sets up a new system to report misconduct, creates accountability measures for those who are responsible for the misconduct, and establishes a post-conviction relief process for people wrongfully impacted.

**HB25-1026: Repeal Medical Copayment for DOC Inmates - PASSED but VETOED (led by Stand with Children)**

This bill would've eliminated all medical copays for people in DOC custody, who currently pay \$3-\$5 to see a doctor and \$25 if they miss or refuse a specialist appointment. It had bipartisan support, but Governor Polis vetoed it in May, arguing the legislature shouldn't “micro-manage” DOC policy. Instead, he signed an Executive Order requiring DOC to reevaluate the copay system and collect better data.

**HB25-1147: Fairness & Transparency in Municipal Court - PASSED but VETOED (led by Colorado Freedom Fund)**

The bill would have capped the maximum incarceration sentence for a municipal violation that has a comparable state law crime at the same length as the state-level offense. When there is no comparable state-level offense, the maximum period of incarceration is capped at the maximum for a state-level petty offense. Currently Coloradans face a possible sentence that is 30x longer in municipal court vs if they were charged in state court.

## Looking Ahead: 2026 and Beyond

As we prepare for the 2026 legislative session, we're facing threats to reform on multiple fronts—and it's become clear that the fight for justice reform is no longer limited to the State Capitol. While we were very involved during the legislative session, we were also closely tracking the actions of tough-on-crime advocates working to push harmful initiatives onto the ballot.

Advance Colorado and the Common Sense Institute are leading the charge to drag Colorado back to the days of mass incarceration. They've already filed four separate ballot initiatives that are likely to appear on the November 2026 statewide ballot targeting criminal justice reform victories from the past. Their proposals to increase penalties for fentanyl and theft offenses would undo 20 years of progress, blow up the prison population and require massive prison expansion. We will continue to sound the alarm about the crisis within the Department of Corrections in 2026 despite DOC and the Governor's claims that everything is just fine to justify their inaction. But that's just one part of a broader system that's under heavy pressure. From staff shortages and near-capacity prisons to overwhelmed courts, overworked public defenders, and overcrowded jails, every part of the criminal legal system is buckling under its own weight.

Yes, communities have both the right and the responsibility to respond to harm. But the legal system we have today is not built to support crime prevention, healing from harm that's been done, or accountability.

This moment isn't just about strained resources or overcrowded systems. It's about what kind of society we choose to be. It's also a crisis of morality—and it demands leadership and community to confront injustice with courage and clarity.

We can no longer excuse inaction by the DOC, the Governor, and other policymakers. We can no longer accept a status quo that is failing, unsustainable, and is out of step with what actually makes communities safer.

In 2026, we're not just fighting for policy change or at the ballot box, we're building a bigger, stronger coalition. One that holds elected officials accountable and helps everyday Coloradans understand what actually works to reduce harm, lower recidivism, and create real community safety.

There's more to come, but for now, start spreading the word: Colorado's legal system is in crisis. It's a crisis that cuts to the core of our shared humanity, and it's going to take all of us showing up for our communities, and for our neighbors, to turn things around.

## Public Defender CDOC & BOP Liaison Program

If you or your loved ones are navigating the special needs parole process — including applications, appeals, or related questions — the Public Defender CDOC Liaison Program is available to assist. If you believe you qualify for special needs parole and would like assistance with your application and/or appeal, request a Liaison Program application/intake form from your case manager. If you or your loved ones have any issues obtaining an application, have questions, or need any other information or support, contact the Liaison Program directly (email communication is preferred).

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## Look out for us this summer!

CCJRC will be tabling at community events across the state. Come out and talk to us about what we're working on and how to get involved. (More events to be added—stay tuned!)

Thank you for being in this fight with us.  
— The CCJRC Team

## Meet CCJRC's Newest Staff Member: Kym Ray



Meet Kym Ray A proud Denver native, Kym Ray is the newly appointed Denver Campaign Coordinator for the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition (CCJRC), bringing a deep well of grassroots experience and quiet strength to the role. A graduate of Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia, Kym returned home to Denver with a lifelong commitment to justice, community, and connection.

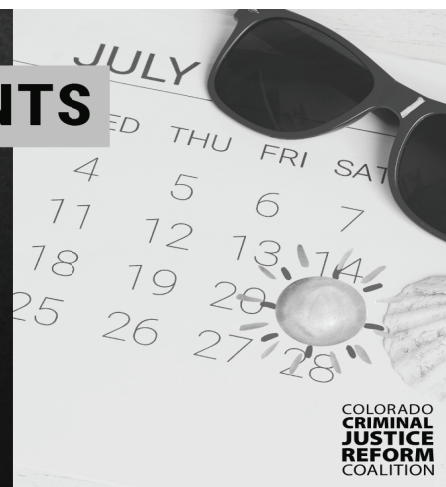
Kym's passion lies in building grassroots power and amplifying the voices of those too often left out of policy conversations. With grace and grit, she has supported legislative and voter-driven campaigns that affirm the dignity of incarcerated individuals, support successful reentry, and uplift families navigating the criminal legal system.

Grounded and shaped by lived experience, Kym is known for her ability to meet people where they are and move change forward with patience, collaboration, and care. Whether she's building coalitions, holding space for hard conversations, or standing beside impacted communities, she brings unwavering integrity and a fierce love for her city.

Outside her work, Kym finds joy as a devoted mother to Jahi and Leila, and as the spirited guardian of her two pets, Penni and Bruno. Her work at CCJRC continues to be guided by a steadfast belief in the power of people to heal systems—and each other—and by a vision of justice that is human-first, transformational, and rooted in love.

## COMMUNITY EVENTS

June 15	Black Pride Queer Cookout <i>SIE Film Center, Denver</i>
June 20-22	Southern Colorado Juneteenth <i>The Citadel Mall, Colorado Springs</i>
June 28	Havana Night Market <i>Leezakaya, Aurora</i>
July 26	Havana Night Market <i>Leezakaya, Aurora</i>
August 3	Aurora Pride <i>Fletcher Plaza, Aurora</i>
August 30	Havana Night Market <i>Leezakaya, Aurora</i>
September 27	Havana Night Market <i>Leezakaya, Aurora</i>







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## 16th Annual Voices For Justice

Wednesday, September 10, 2025

5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Doors open at 5:00

COCKTAILS AND CUISINE

BASKETS AND BUNDLES SILENT AUCTION

MILE HIGH STATION

2027 West Lower Colfax Denver, CO.

CATERED BY FOOTERS

PLEASE JOIN US FOR ANOTHER WONDERFUL EVENING!



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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ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

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

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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 \_\_\_\_\_

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### ***Join Us for CCJRC's 16th Annual Voices for Justice***

On Wednesday, September 10, 2025, we're thrilled to host our fifteenth annual night of fun and fundraising at Mile High Station in Denver, Colorado. The evening will feature an open bar, delicious food, and a silent auction—all in support of our shared vision for justice.

This year, we are proud to honor two incredibly deserving award recipients:

**Legislative Inside -- Facilitated by  
Jeanne Segil and Jamie Ray**

**Friends and Family of the  
"Save Skyline and Beacon" Campaign**

We invite you to attend or become a sponsor of this special evening.  
**Early Bird Tickets are on sale now!** Visit [www.ccjrc.org](http://www.ccjrc.org) for details.  
We can't wait to celebrate with you!