



THE
SENTENCING
PROJECT

Annual Report 2023



A close-up photograph of a woman with her hair in braids kissing a man on the cheek. The man is wearing a blue and white checkered shirt. The woman is wearing a blue top and a silver earring. The background is a dark, solid color.

“

The Sentencing Project leads the fight to rethink sentencing to achieve true safety. I so appreciate the high quality reports that pour out of the organization, and the breadth of your education and advocacy efforts. Amazing!”

MARTA NELSON, DIRECTOR OF SENTENCING REFORM,
VERA INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE



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The Sentencing Project

advocates for effective and humane responses to crime that minimize imprisonment and criminalization of youth and adults by promoting racial, ethnic, economic, and gender justice.

OUR POLICY PRIORITIES



ENDING
extreme sentences



EXPANDING
voting rights



PROMOTING
youth justice

OUR COMMITMENT TO RACIAL JUSTICE

We recognize that ending both mass incarceration and the ineffectiveness of our current criminal legal system cannot be achieved without addressing the rampant racism that supports it. This racism costs lives, inflicts atrocities, and prevents the United States from functioning as a true democracy.

As The Sentencing Project works to expand our impact, we are guided by a strategic focus on racial justice and a commitment to amplifying the work, voices, and leadership of directly impacted individuals, families, and communities.

Message from the Executive Director



Kara Gotsch
Executive Director

I am honored to share my inaugural “Letter from the Executive Director” for The Sentencing Project’s 2023 Annual Report. I am grateful for this opportunity to lead an outstanding criminal legal reform organization and to partner with a community of committed champions for justice like you. It takes all of us to transform hearts, minds, and systems to recognize every person’s dignity and act and invest accordingly.

Much of The Sentencing Project’s activities in 2023 were influenced by an unfortunate milestone—the 50th anniversary of the onset of mass incarceration in the United States. Today, nearly two million people—disproportionately Black—are living in prisons and jails instead of their communities. In the early 1970s this count was 360,000. Misguided changes in sentencing law and policy—not crime—account for the majority of the increase in correctional supervision.

To commemorate this anniversary, The Sentencing Project launched a year-long public education campaign, **50 Years and a Wake Up: Ending The Mass Incarceration Crisis In America**. The initiative incorporated the publication of numerous reports and

a series of in-person and online events with our partners across the country highlighting meaningful solutions for ending mass incarceration and its racial disparities. Our message was a sharp rebuke of the heated political rhetoric that has emerged in the run up to the 2024 presidential elections and leveraged the research we have documented for decades that harsh responses are not effective in curbing violence and divert precious resources from prevention of the root causes of violence.

The Sentencing Project also released its first-ever public service announcement, reaching more than 47 million viewers over just a few months. The video featured formerly incarcerated partners warning of the consequences of extreme punishments and won gold in the Human and Civil Rights - Global Awareness Campaign at the Anthem Awards.

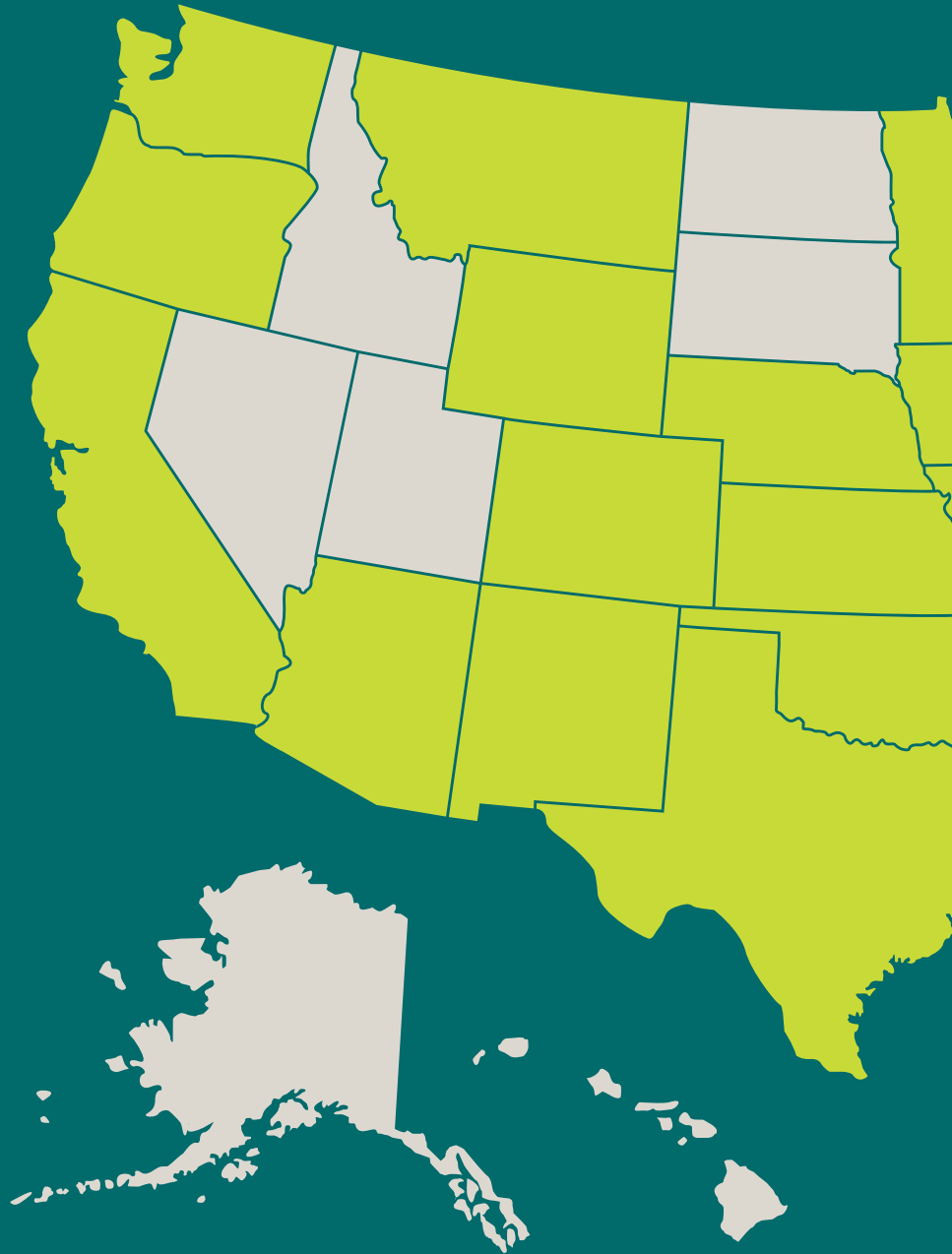
I am so glad you joined us in this important work in 2023. Thank you for your continued support and partnership.

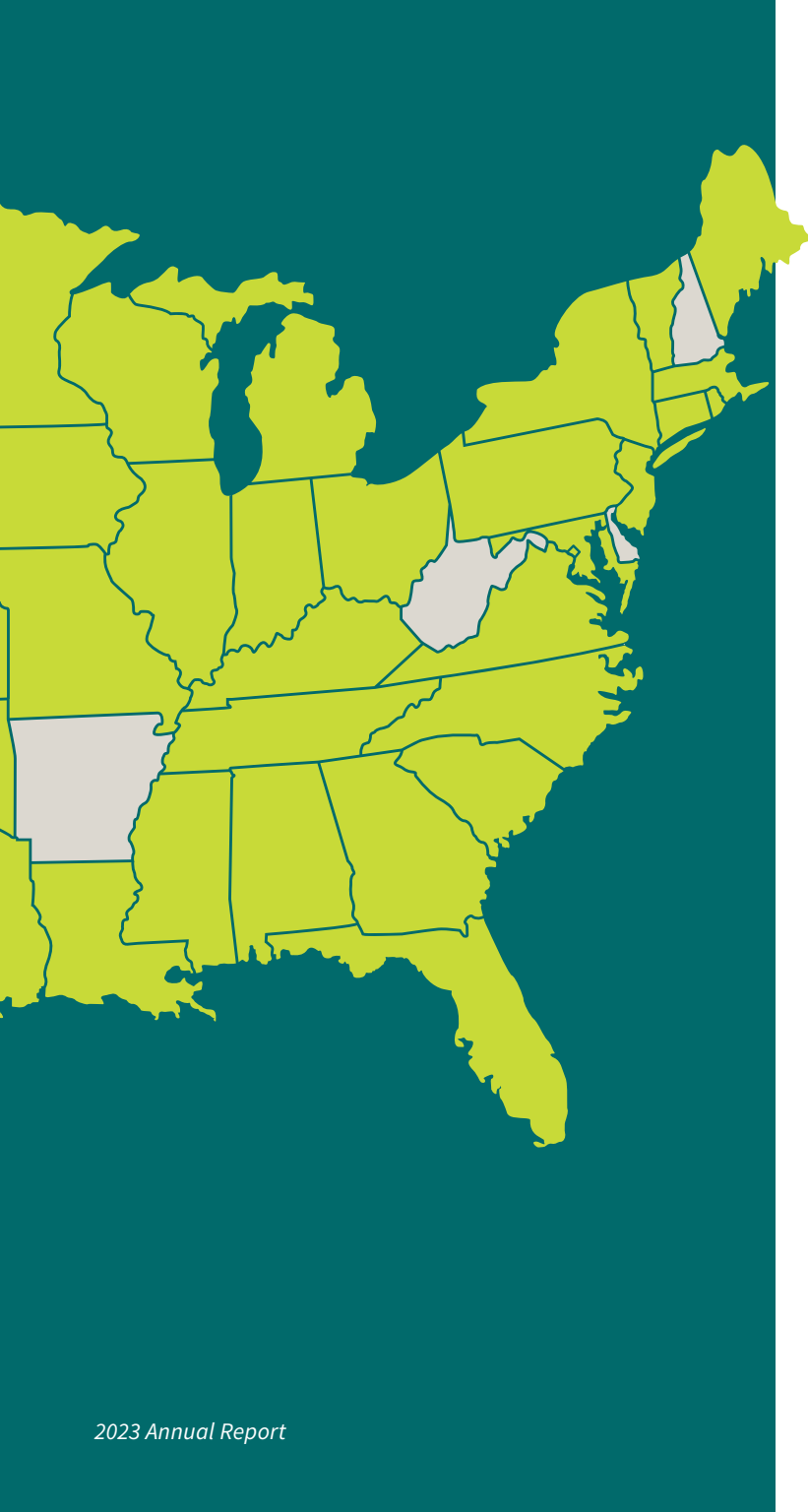
In community,

Kara

Where We Work

The Sentencing Project brings unique value as a bridge organization, building grassroots advocacy capacity and uniting work on the ground with overarching policy changes at the national level. We currently partner with more than 80 national groups and over 300 state-level organizations who are working with us to end extreme sentencing, expand voting rights, promote youth justice, and eliminate racial disparities in our criminal legal system. In all of these partnerships, we are committed to centering the voices of directly impacted individuals and communities; and their direction informs and tailors our strategy.





Alabama

Arizona

California

Colorado

Connecticut

District of Columbia

Florida

Georgia

Illinois

Indiana

Iowa

Kansas

Kentucky

Louisiana

Maine

Maryland

Massachusetts

Michigan

Minnesota

Mississippi

Missouri

Montana

Nebraska

New Jersey

New Mexico

New York

North Carolina

Ohio

Oklahoma

Oregon

Pennsylvania

Rhode Island

South Carolina

Tennessee

Texas

Vermont

Virginia

Washington

Wisconsin

Wyoming

50 Years and a Wake Up:

ENDING THE MASS INCARCERATION CRISIS IN AMERICA



Senior Director of Advocacy Nicole D. Porter gives a presentation in Austin, Texas as part of our “50 Years and a Wake Up” public education campaign

In 1973, the United States embarked on a path of mass incarceration that has led to a staggering increase in the prison population.

Over the next 50 years, the American prison population grew by 500%. Today, almost 2 million individuals—disproportionately Black Americans—are incarcerated in our nation’s prisons and jails.

To raise awareness about the dire state of our country’s criminal legal system, The Sentencing Project and a coalition of advocates, experts, and partners launched a powerful year-long public education campaign, “50 Years and a Wake Up: Ending The Mass Incarceration Crisis In America.”

This campaign catalyzed action across the country through new research, strategic communications, in-person events, and online gatherings. We were honored to receive an Anthem Award in recognition of the campaign's wide-reaching impact. Highlights of our work include:

BEYOND BARS

The Sentencing Project staff co-edited and contributed to a new book, "Beyond Bars: A Path Forward from 50 Years of Mass Incarceration in the United States." This new book offers insightful and practical solutions for advocates, lawmakers, and policy experts to bring an end to mass incarceration and create a just and fair society for all. Thanks to your support, we were able to make this book available free of charge on our website, where it has been accessed by thousands of readers.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

One of our key goals for this campaign was to reach new audiences in order to build increased momentum for our movement to end mass incarceration. To do this, we created a powerful Public Service Announcement (PSA) featuring Kemba Smith and Joel Castón, formerly incarcerated activists working to transform our criminal legal system. To date, the PSA has reached more than 47 million viewers across the country, and is featured on the Ad Council's website.



Senior Director of Advocacy Nicole D. Porter participates in a panel discussion on the concurrent rise and impact of Hip Hop and mass incarceration

HIP HOP'S STRUGGLE AGAINST MASS INCARCERATION AND THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM

In addition to marking 50 years of mass incarceration, 2023 also marks the 50th anniversary of Hip Hop. To center the juxtaposition of these milestones, The Sentencing Project, Hip Hop Caucus, and the Fair Election Center co-hosted a panel discussion at the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Annual Legislative Conference on the relevance of Hip Hop culture in advocating against mass incarceration and over criminalization. We were proud to be joined on-stage by Mutulu Olugbala, also known as M1, one-half of the Hip Hop duo dead prez.

AND MORE...

This powerful campaign provided new opportunities to galvanize action in communities across the country, with thousands of people attending our public webinars and in person events across the country. In total, staff gave nearly 20 public talks and presentations as part of this year-long public education effort, sparking discussion nationwide, from Texas to Ohio to Montana.

Extreme Sentencing

Despite an increasingly hostile political climate, sentencing reform momentum keeps growing.

Over the past year, we have seen politicians on both sides of the aisle call for a return to the excessive punishments that originally fueled America's mass incarceration crisis. Resistance to reform has been on display during Congressional discussions of carjacking, fentanyl, and sentencing reform in the District—among other issues. However, the scare tactics used by those opposed to sentencing reform continue to ignore the

facts: data show that extreme sentences are not an effective crime deterrent or public safety solution.

In response, The Sentencing Project has deepened its commitment to advancing urgently needed sentencing reforms through an increased scope of research, advocacy, and public education. In 2023, our Extreme Sentencing team released 13 new sentencing reform publications, provided intensive advocacy support to campaigns in 10 jurisdictions, and drafted wide-reaching communications to fight against fear mongering



The Sentencing Project staff joins state partners to advocate for second look legislation at the Massachusetts State House

“

Support from The Sentencing Project transformed our campaign for survivor justice from a dream to a tangible reality. Without their support we would not be poised to pass the next major criminal justice reform in Oklahoma that supports survivors of intimate partner violence. Thank you, TSP team, for trusting your state partners and allowing us to flourish.”

COLLEEN MCCARTY, FOUNDING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OKLAHOMA APPLESEED CENTER FOR LAW AND JUSTICE

and misinformation. Significant wins in Louisiana and Oklahoma, two deeply conservative states, demonstrate the success of our approach to transformative systems change.

In Louisiana, which has the highest rate of people serving life without the possibility of parole (LWOP) per capita nationally and across the globe, we worked with state partners to successfully pass a resolution mandating the formation of a committee to consider reforms to Louisiana's second degree murder statute. This is a critical first step in both preventing people from entering the system under disproportionate sentencing laws and in developing a model for ending extreme sentences in other jurisdictions.

In Oklahoma, we supported coalition partners by launching a wide-reaching public education campaign to end the harsh sentencing of abuse survivors. Our work recently won an Anthem Award for its impact. Our advocacy collaboration garnered widespread media coverage, as well as crucial support from high-profile stakeholders, including the attorney general, the house floor leader, and the governor. In addition to reaching over 2.5 million Oklahomans through digital ads, we secured national attention for this issue through coverage on PBS's widely-aired Amanpour & Company news program. Thanks to our work building widespread awareness of this issue, we are optimistic that new legislation protecting domestic violence survivors will advance in 2024.



Senior Campaign Strategist Alex Bailey and Campaign Associate Warren Allen at a New York state rally for second look

Voting Rights

2023 was a groundbreaking year of progress for expanding the right to vote to justice-impacted people.

The Sentencing Project's voting rights team worked on the ground in more than 12 states to support grassroots partners fighting to expand voter eligibility to people completing their sentence inside and outside of jail and prison, and to guarantee ballot access for incarcerated voters.

“The Sentencing Project has provided Nebraska’s Voting Rights Restoration Coalition with invaluable guidance, assistance and connections to other amazing organizations. Having Nicole join our coalition calls has given us the opportunity to strengthen our strategy with her keen insight on how to move our efforts forward.”

JASMINE HARRIS, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC POLICY AND ADVOCACY, RISE (NEBRASKA)



Voting rights advocate Desmond Meade provides remarks at our 2023 Civic Power convening

Victories in Minnesota and Texas demonstrate how our team continues to ensure that all Americans can exercise their fundamental right to vote.

In Minnesota, the legislature passed the Restore the Vote Act, which automatically expanded voting rights to over 46,000 Minnesotans who are either on probation or parole. The Sentencing Project supported this campaign through the publication of a state-specific fact sheet, coordination of a sign-on letter, and communications support, including op-eds placed in *The Minnesota Reformer* and *Newsweek*.

In Texas, our team worked with coalition partners including MOVE Texas to advance jail-based voting efforts, resulting in the implementation of a new Dallas County jail-based polling site during the 2023 May and



Attendees pose for a group photo at our 2023 Civic Power convening

November elections. Our coalition secured the support of the elections administration, the Dallas County Commissioners court, and effectively flipped the Dallas County sheriff from opposing the policy to being its final key supporter. Advocates across Texas are now leveraging this important advancement to push for more jail-based voting locations as the 2024 elections approach.

The Sentencing Project also hosted its first ever Civic Power conference, a three-day convening providing a space for voting rights advocates, academics, and policymakers to connect and collaborate. More than 130 people attended, with over 50 speakers providing informative perspectives on opportunities and

challenges to guarantee voting rights for all persons regardless of incarceration status.

The program featured welcome remarks by Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson and a keynote address by Desmond Meade, a nationally renowned voting rights advocate. We were especially proud to have incarcerated residents from Illinois' Stateville Correctional Facility lead a panel in partnership with the DePaul University Behind the Walls Participatory Civics Collaborative. At the conclusion of the convening, attendees participated in an engaging strategy session to identify the key goals, tactics, and strategies to advance voting rights for all including all persons with felony convictions.

Youth Justice

We must end youth incarceration and provide all youth with the support they need to thrive.

The Sentencing Project worked in partnership with advocates in key jurisdictions to defend youth from misleading media stories about youth involvement in crime and a political backlash targeting reforms that have helped to limit youth incarceration and protect young people from the adult criminal legal system.

In response to calls for harsher punishments for youth, our Youth Justice team released two new publications, “Effective Alternatives to Youth Incarceration” and “Systems Reforms to Reduce Youth Incarceration”, demonstrating how we can successfully reduce youth incarceration while also improving public safety outcomes. These reports received widespread distribution and acclaim;



The Sentencing Project staff advocate for the passage of the YES Act in Annapolis, Maryland

over 1,400 registrants joined for a recent webinar delving into this research. This research also provided a critical foundation for our advocacy efforts: in 2023, our Youth Justice team provided advocacy support to partners in 10 jurisdictions, advancing new reforms while protecting youth from harmful policies.

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The Sentencing Project has been a vital supporter of Youth Law Center’s work to strengthen the advocacy community in Tennessee...their expertise has been integral to our efforts to bring real data into conversations that are so often dominated by outdated stereotypes and puffed up rhetoric...through utilizing their analysis of crime data we have been able to disarm that argument and hold policy makers accountable for spreading misinformation.”

JASMINE YING MILLER, STAFF ATTORNEY, YOUTH LAW CENTER (TENNESSEE)

In Tennessee, harmful legislation was introduced that would automatically transfer youth into the adult legal system, a practice which has detrimental outcomes for young people and for public safety. Our team worked with numerous partner organizations, including the Youth Law Center and Disability Rights Tennessee, to fight this harmful legislation. We analyzed Tennessee's arrest data to bring facts to the debate and refute misinformation about youth crime in the state. Thanks to our research and the efforts of our partners, this dangerous bill was defeated.

In Connecticut, Governor Ned Lamont signed bills to end extreme sentences for people under 21 and to move the state closer to removing its youth from adult prisons. The Sentencing Project supported the passage of this legislation by working with state coalition partners and providing written testimony on both bills.

In addition, we worked with partners to end the charging of youth as adults and remove youth from adult prisons across the country. We laid the groundwork for increased participation from directly-impacted youth, co-chairing a coalition in Maryland that includes a directly impacted working group and meeting with dozens of directly impacted youth and coalition partners in Connecticut, Maryland, and Wisconsin.



Youth Justice Campaign Associate Jordyn Wilson with Maryland state partners



Director of Youth Justice Josh Rovner participates in a Congressional Caucus Commission panel discussion

Federal Advocacy

The Sentencing Project continues to inform federal policy through ongoing advocacy, technical assistance, and public education.

In partnership with a wide array of allies in the Justice Roundtable coalition, we advocate for sentencing reforms and defend against regressive sentencing legislation and policies, such as new mandatory minimums.

Working with a member of Congress, we collaborated on the forthcoming introduction of a federal Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act (DVSJA) after policymakers sought our technical assistance to integrate recommendations from our DVSJA research. Our input and expertise was instrumental to improving the bill.



In early 2023, we also provided extensive feedback to the United States Sentencing Commission (USSC). Our advocacy focused on expanding the eligibility criteria for compassionate release under the federal sentencing guidelines, including provisions for survivors of sexual assault by corrections officers as well as individuals who received disproportionately long sentences under previous guidelines. The USSC's adoption of a broadened policy statement, which went into effect on November 1st, marks a significant step forward in our goal to limit extreme sentencing.

“

Racial disparity accumulates as people traverse the criminal legal system. While reforms across the last two decades have helped reduce levels of criminal legal system contact, the crisis of mass incarceration and racial injustice persists. We are at risk of losing momentum and reversing hard-won reforms.”

NAZGOL GHANDNOOSH, CO-DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH, THE SENTENCING PROJECT

Racial Justice Fund

We're making strategic investments to increase the capacity of the movement for racial justice nationwide.

In 2021, The Sentencing Project established its Racial Justice Fund (RJF) to support state advocacy partners. These targeted grants provide our partners with the support needed to build their capacity and increase the scope of their impact with rapid response funding for time sensitive projects.

In 2023, we provided 18 grants to grassroots organizations in 15 states. Grants supported a wide range of projects including hiring and training community organizers, launching public education campaigns, hosting community events, and supporting the attendance of directly impacted individuals at conferences and convenings.

Our partners at The Massachusetts Campaign to End Life Without Parole (CELWOP) used their grant to create compelling new videos for their Second Look campaign, drawing statewide attention to legislation proposing new reforms; our friends at the Connecticut Justice Alliance used their grant to support the work of their Justice Advisors, empowering directly impacted young people to provide education about the youth and adult legal system to communities across Connecticut; and our partners at OLÉ in New Mexico used grant support to do new in-prison civics trainings.

The Second Look Network

Ending mass incarceration requires taking a second look at extreme sentences.

In 2023, The Sentencing Project proudly launched the Second Look Network, an exciting new initiative dedicated to serving attorneys and defense teams across the country providing direct representation to incarcerated people serving lengthy or unfair sentences.

Criminological research showing the limited deterrence effect of long sentences coupled with remarkably low recidivism rates among those serving such sentences have increased momentum for second look release mechanisms. These mechanisms include petitioner-led judicial sentence reviews, prosecutorial sentencing review units, expanded parole eligibility, clemency, and compassionate release.

Attorneys and post-sentencing specialists are on the front lines of this work. Despite the critical role that these advocates play, we have found that they are often operating in siloed environments, with little to no support or resource sharing opportunities. The Second Look Network aims to harness the collective wisdom of these practitioners in order to share effective litigation and mitigation strategies and resources in order to successfully bring more people home.

Demand from the field has been overwhelming—since the Network launched in March 2023, we’ve welcomed over 240 members from more than 80 different participating organizations. Members receive a variety of supports and services, including bi-weekly training events, access to an extensive online library of

“

The Second Look Network has been critical in sustaining me as an attorney doing second-look work. Knowing that I have a nationwide network of people alongside me who I can turn to (and have turned to) for practical guidance, new ideas, and communal support not only lightens my own load, but sharpens my skills and makes me a better advocate. The Second Look Network is a constant reminder that this work cannot be done well alone.”

SARAH FREE, EQUAL JUSTICE WORKS FELLOW, ILLINOIS PRISON PROJECT

resources, communications and media support, and connections to local and national policy efforts to support the expansion and implementation of second look mechanisms.

A highlight of the Network's 2023 activities was its first annual conference. Convening in the nation's capital, over 100 Network members attended an intensive two-day conference full of training sessions, panel discussions, and networking opportunities. Attendees left the convening with new connections and insights to take back to their organizations. As one participant shared, "The Second Look Network Conference provided an incredible opportunity for members to draw inspiration and ideas from one another and gather encouragement from colleagues we may not have even known we had. I have been using the connections made since the conference and then connecting others who could not attend. I can't wait for the next gathering."

The Network is a critical step forward in the fight to end mass incarceration and safely bring more people home. We are already seeing the results of this work,

which include better resourced attorneys, more knowledgeable and trauma-informed defense teams, successful new litigation strategies, and a burgeoning community of support for our front-line defense teams who dedicate their lives to this important and difficult work to end mass incarceration.



Attendees participate in a strategic communications training at our 2023 Second Look Network national convening

25

in-person and virtual trainings offered to Network members in 2023

30

states represented by Network members

40

client success stories

2023 Publications at a Glance

The Sentencing Project is fighting misinformation with the latest facts and data about crime, punishment, and public safety.



38

Reports, fact sheets, and research briefs produced

24

Opinion pieces published

22

Letters of support, amicus briefs, petitions and testimonies provided

Public Education

126

Public talks and presentations given by The Sentencing Project staff

6,524

Mentions in national, state, and local media

6,873

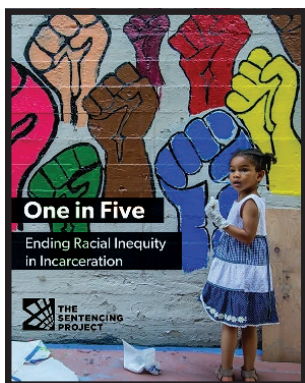
Webinar registrants

1.8M

Website page views



Publication Highlights



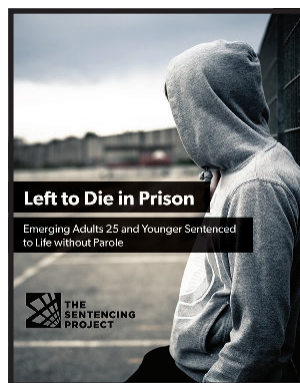
ONE IN FIVE

One in five Black men born in 2001 is likely to experience imprisonment within their lifetime, a decline from one in three for those born in 1981.

The Sentencing Project's new four-part series exam-

ines racial inequities in America's criminal legal system, as well as highlights promising reforms and threats to further progress. The reports, which cover drivers of racial disparity across many points of the system including policing, sentencing laws, practitioner discretion, and collateral consequences, garnered national interest, particularly by Black news outlets including *Black Press USA*, *Essence*, and *The Root*, as well as outlets including *19th News* and *Public News Service*.

The release of this series has set the stage for a number of recent public education opportunities, including a widely-shared series of explanatory videos on The Sentencing Project's Instagram account that distill the series' findings for the public. In addition, the series inspired a recent webinar hosted in partnership with the Berkeley School of Theology and the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation during Black History Month.



LEFT TO DIE IN PRISON

Relying on data recently compiled by The Sentencing Project, this report finds that two in five people—11,600 individuals—sentenced to life without parole between 1995 and

2017 were 25 or younger at the time of their sentence. In some states, including Michigan, Pennsylvania, and California, nearly half of those sentenced to LWOP were 25 or younger. The report also exposes troubling racial disparities in the sentencing of emerging adults: two thirds (66%) of people 25 or younger who were sentenced to LWOP are Black.

It is important to focus on this population because the period of development between the ages of 18 to 25 marks a unique stage of life between childhood and adulthood when individuals are still undergoing cognitive and emotional development. During this age, many experience lower levels of emotional control and higher levels of impulsive actions. Consequently, emerging adults share many key developmental characteristics with adolescents under age 18, and should not be treated as adults.

Our Team

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Florence Lee

Development Manager

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Jail-Based Voting Advocacy Consultant

Morgan McLeod

Director of Communications

Richard Mendel

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Ashley Nellis, Ph.D.

Co-Director of Research

Sabrina Pearce

Research Associate

Leyda Pereyra

Second Look Network

Program Manager

Nicole D. Porter

Senior Director of Advocacy

Joshua Rovner

Director of Youth Justice

William “Bill” Underwood

Senior Fellow

Jordyn Wilson

Youth Justice Campaign Associate

2023 FELLOWS

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Rice University

Rachel Jollie

Johns Hopkins University

Niki Monazzam

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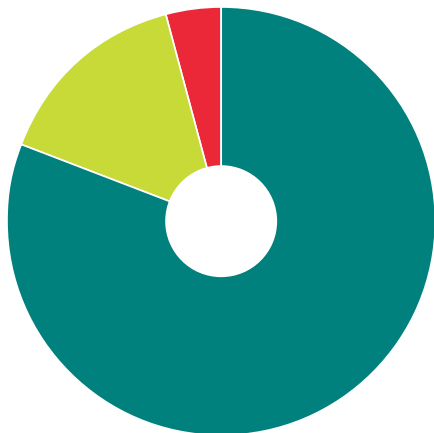
2023 Supporters

The Sentencing Project's work is made possible through the commitment and generosity of our community. Thank you for standing with us in our fight for a more fair and effective criminal legal system. This listing includes all supporters who gave contributions of \$1,000 or more in 2023.

1002 Foundation	Roswell Gift Fund	Deborah and David Rothschild	Ewoma Oteri
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Legal Horizons Foundation			Sheila Dykstra	
Lewis Cabin Fund				

2023 Revenue and Expenses

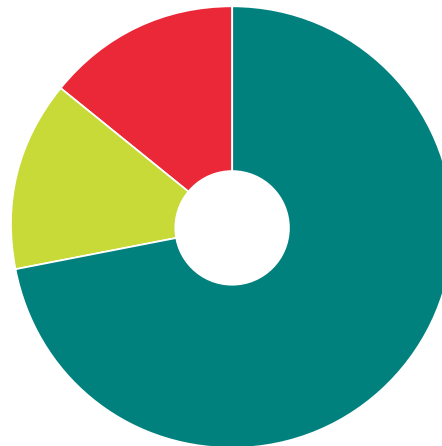


REVENUE

81%	Foundations	\$4,628,109
15%	Individuals / Corporations	\$843,057
4%	Other	\$214,585
Total		\$5,685,751

EXPENSES

72%	Program Services	\$3,982,091
14%	Development	\$750,321
14%	Management and General	\$762,391
Total		\$5,494,803



These financials are presented using the Form 990 tax-method of accounting. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Our full audited financial documents are available for review at <https://sentproj.org/financials>.



**Help us power
the movement**

Learn

more about the issues, key criminal justice facts, and our recommendations for reform on our website at sentencingproject.org, and follow us on social media.

Share

your support for our policy priorities with your friends, family, networks, and local legislators—your voice is essential to make change happen!


Donate

to make another year of our impactful research and advocacy possible. The Sentencing Project is almost entirely funded by charitable contributions, and our work is only possible with your support.

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Together, we stand
for racial justice
and an end to
mass incarceration.
We need you to
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