

OUR PEOPLE OUR POWER.

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VOICE OF THE EXPERIENCED

2023 IMPACT REPORT

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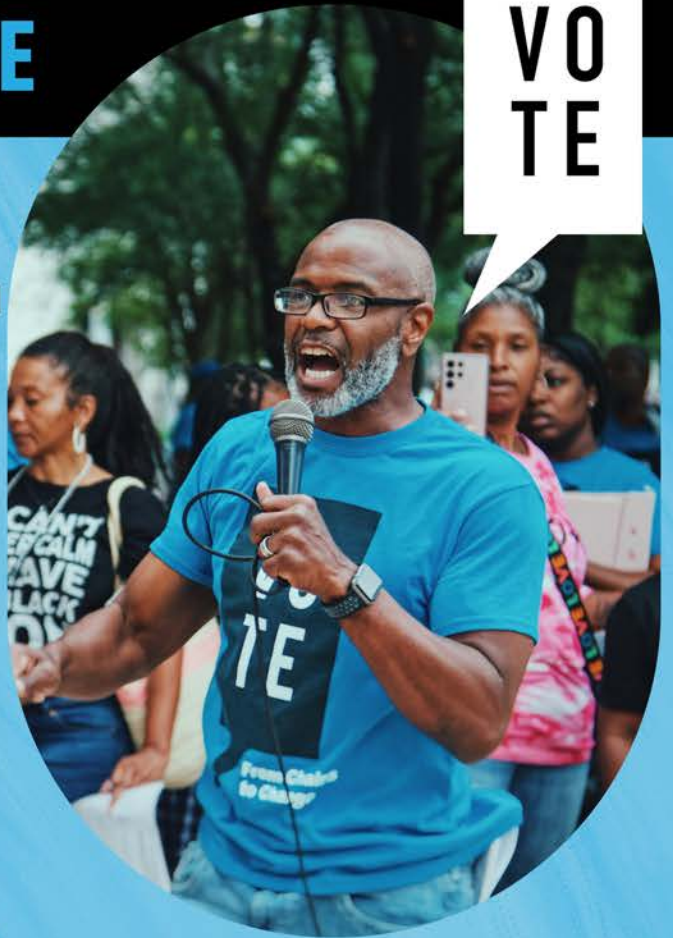
OUR MISSION FROM CHAINS TO CHANGE

VOTE

Voice of the Experienced (VOTE) is a grassroots organization founded and run by formerly incarcerated people (FIP), our families and our allies. We build power through community organizing, policy advocacy, and civic engagement.

We are dedicated to restoring the full human and civil rights of those most impacted by the criminal (in)justice system.

Together we have the experiences, expertise and power to improve public safety in Louisiana and beyond without relying on mass incarceration.



DEDICATION TO BIGGY

This Impact Report, as much of our work in 2023, is dedicated to Kenneth "Biggy" Johnston. Biggy "with the Y not the IE" was a co-founder of the Angola Special Civics Project, a VOTE thought leader and member, a magnificent legal mind, and made history as the first man on parole in Louisiana to register and vote (pictured left).

Biggy passed on May 8, 2023, and his presence is felt, and deeply missed, in all aspects of our work.

**We miss you Biggy,
but we know you are with
us always.
Rest in Power.**



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



I have to start first by saying thank you. In March, I celebrated 20 years home, and we had people from all over the country come in to be there with us on that day. A very special thank you to our Board, most of whom have been here since literally the beginning, who made that event happen. I am grateful to you all.

VOTE celebrates its own anniversary next year as well, as I incorporated VOTE one year and day post my release on March 24, 2004. However, this fight has been going on long before that. As a progeny of the Angola Special Civics Project, I've been telling this story going on 50 years now. **But anything worth having is worth fighting and waiting for.**

What started as a hope of a few men on the inside has turned into a staff of nearly 30 across three cities in the state with numerous victories under our belt. **And along the way, we've added truly remarkable people to our movement, some of whom we freed from prison ourselves.** We have accomplished lawyers, organizers, relationship builders, and survivors on our staff and in our membership. The passion is tangible – and they represent how far we've come and what we've never lost. Our people have always been influencers of power and change – even inside a cell. **Our People Are Our Power.**

Everybody suffers when you go to prison – be it from a rural community or an urban one. This can happen to anyone. We lead the nation in both incarceration and exoneration – emphasizing that putting people in prison isn't the solution to the problem. We are addressing systemic issues by educating and mobilizing people as we go. Our advocacy, policy and organizing work are a testament to the hearts and minds we change each year. We've grown consistently in our staff, membership, and donors every year. We're willing to fight one day longer than the last person because we don't have the luxury to quit. **And we have a dedicated base that refuses to surrender or retreat with us.**

When you start on these journeys, they become just that. You don't have a destination. We didn't know what it would look like we just started doing something. I could have never pictured we would be where we are now, and I'm grateful for the places we've been and the places we've yet to go. The sky is the limit for us. We're gonna be a thorn in their side until this thing is said and done. We're in it for the long haul and will take this as far as we can see.

Our People Are Our Power.

In gratitude and solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Norris Henderson". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Norris Henderson, Founder & Executive Director



VOTE & VOTERS ORGANIZED BY THE NUMBERS



ADVOCATE



400+

YEARS OF STAFF
INCARCERATION
EXPERIENCE



217

PARDON & PAROLE
BOARD HEARING
TESTIMONIES



4

VOTE STAFF SERVING
ON **2 TASK FORCES**

EDUCATE



49,413

VOTE & VOTERS
ORGANIZED
MAILERS SENT



22

BILLBOARDS &
BUS SHELTER ADS



805

ARTICLE MENTIONS
(QUOTES &
REFERENCES)

MOBILIZE



37,879

HUSTLE TEXTS SENT



20,809

CALLS MADE



23,500+

DOOR KNOCKED



12

ACTION
ALERTS SENT

WITH **3,709**

ACTION
RESPONSES

LEGE



150+

COMMUNITY MEMBERS
TRAVELING TO THE CAPITOL
ON ADVOCACY DAY ALONE

16

BILLS
SUPPORTED



WITH

6

VOTE
PRIORITY
BILLS



1

BILL AUTHORED
AND SIGNED
(**ACT 214**)

BATON ROUGE CHAPTER

BREAKING SYSTEMS NOT PEOPLE



unjustified



BREAK SYSTEMS, NOT PEOPLE



After more than a year of organizing and research, our Baton Rouge chapter launched its UnJustified campaign in April with the UnJustified Summit. The Summit attracted the interest of 125 community members and shed light on the systems within Baton Rouge that feed into East Baton Rouge Parish Prison (EBRPP) jail. The BR chapter is dedicated to improving conditions for those housed there and supporting efforts to depopulate the facility so that any new jail that is built is smaller, safer and more humane.

UnJustified Numbers: Concerning EBRPP Stats

- **↑ 433%** people held at EBRPP between 1970-2015
- **80%** of people held at EBRPP can't afford the bail to get out
- **47%** people incarcerated at EBRPP have mental health and addiction diagnoses
- **67 deaths** since 2012
- **1 in 3 people** in BR have an outstanding warrant — that's **12% of the parish's adult population** and **15x higher than the national average** (Source: Fair Fight Initiative)

With these frightening statistics, the chapter's focus became educating on the collateral consequences of incarceration, building community relationships as a form of public safety, and engaging in community needs without law enforcement presence. The chapter held two trainings with Court Watch NOLA and now a team regularly sits in on pre-trial hearings to hold the new Case Navigator system accountable. Members also attend Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) Engage meetings and Metro Council hearings to embed those with lived experience, and their loved ones, in the jail conversation. In July, we partnered with the Democratic Socialists of America to host a Brake Light Clinic, offering free brake light replacements to help combat unnecessary arrests often stemming from burned-out brake lights.

Lastly, Baton Rouge moved into a new home, expanded their base in 2023 and reached a milestone of 50 attendees at their monthly meeting for the first time. They continue to bring new voices to the table who can affect change. In 2024, VOTE Baton Rouge will continue its work towards a smaller, safer EBRPP and promoting a safer Baton Rouge community for all.

Happy 20 Years Free Checo!

A special congratulations to ASCP co-founder and VOTE Policy Director, Checo Yancy, who in September 2023 celebrated his 20 years of freedom six months after Norris. Checo is a well-known fixture at the Louisiana Capital and was instrumental in passing Act 636 in 2018 which restored voting rights to formerly incarcerated people, including himself. Checo continues to build power in the chapter with the Member Policy Team who meet weekly to get skilled up on local and statewide policy work.

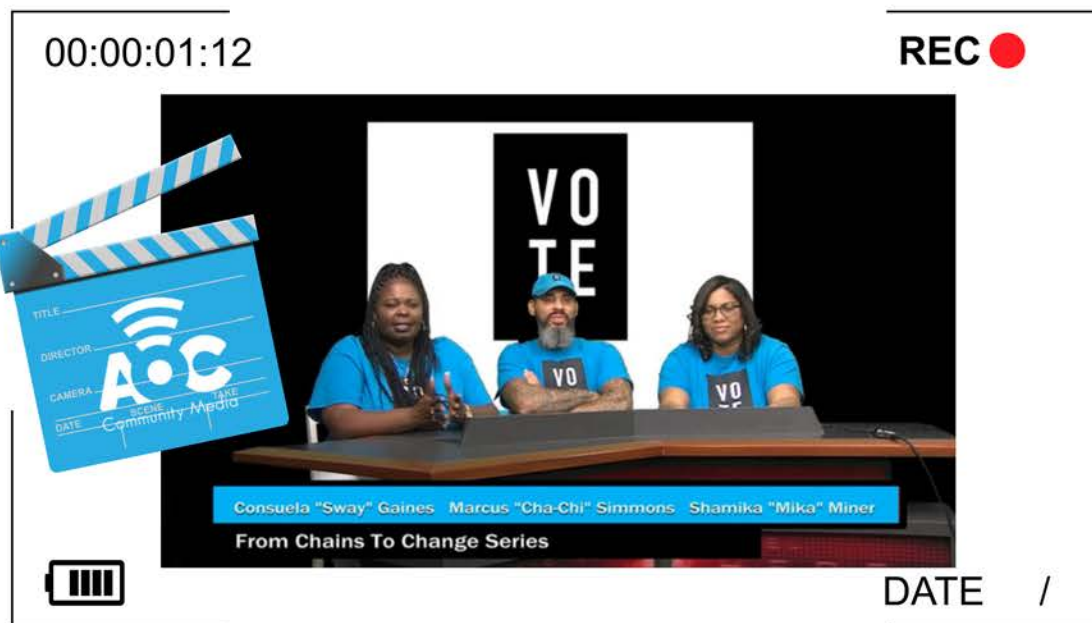


LAFAYETTE CHAPTER

BROADCASTING ON A NEW CHANNEL



Our Lafayette chapter has been meeting our community where they're at: their living rooms! They began hosting their own television series, "From Chains to Change," through Acadiana Open Channel (AOC) in July 2023. AOC is a public free speech broadcast network, available throughout the five Acadiana parishes of Southwest Louisiana. "From Chains to Change" has been viewed across thousands of television sets. Though their main goal is to expand the reach of VOTE's messaging, they have also built engagement with their current members through the series. Chapter organizers started a production committee to include members in the planning and creation of the show, meeting regularly to discuss hot topics in the Lafayette region and brainstorm how VOTE can be tied into them. The committee plans out two episodes in advance and works on production and editing with member and volunteer, Don Mitchell. To date, they have hosted multiple guests on the show including staff members Norris Henderson, Checo Yancy, Ilona Prieto and Ronald Marshall, as well as Lafayette chapter member leaders and most recently, Nureaka Ross who was a candidate for Lafayette's City Council District 5.



In the nearly seven years they've been organizing; Chapter organizers say the Lafayette community is finally starting to fully realize their strength and power. They predict as community members become more involved civically, the city will shift to align with the political power of its people to a more progressive space. They have been building relationships with partner organizations and, most recently, co-hosted a candidate forum that had 100% candidate participation and passionate debates. In 2024, they plan to continue to build out the strength of their base and the engagement of their membership.



"From Chains to Change" is broadcast every first and third Wednesday of each month on the AOC channel. You can also view it on VOTE's social media and YouTube channels.

Congratulations to our VOTE Wavemaker Sway!

Shoutout to Chapter Organizer Consuela Gaines for receiving an Undercurrent Award. Out of 100+ nominations, Sway was chosen as one of six 2023 Wavemakers – a force for good moving under the surface to make Lafayette a better place to live.



NEW ORLEANS CHAPTER

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND LEADERS



Stripping back down to basics, our New Orleans chapter has been returning to the heart of our organizing philosophy: building relationships and empowering leaders. Our organizing model comes from Marshall Ganz and is often depicted as a [snowflake](#) to represent the central organizers who connect outwards to more and more individuals based on relationship building. By creating connections, we create change.

In proportion to 2023's difficult legislative session, New Orleans' Member Policy Team (MPT) has grown in size and leadership. Members have seen firsthand how policy impacts their lives and the lives of loved ones. As the legislature has become more contentious, the desire to push back has also grown. The **MPT now has more than 44 members and has 8 member leaders** who aid staff in coordination and communication logistics with the rest of the team. Empowering member leaders is essential to our organizing model, as it builds agency and the confidence to take bold steps of their own.

The New Orleans MPT began a phone tree during the legislative session as a way to share responsibility for contacting team members when action was needed on certain bills. MPT members, alongside Lafayette member leader Matthew Greene helped staff in hosting our third VOTE Institute for Policy (VIP.) Members have grown their skills and knowledge significantly on legislative work and have shared that info far and wide in their communities.

In 2024, the New Orleans chapter plans to continue to build empowered leaders including Civic Engagement, Outreach and "VOTE Got Game" teams and to meet new folks in new areas. Last year they began organizing on the West Bank and have their sights on "The East," Jefferson Parish, and Algiers. With over a million people in the Greater New Orleans area, the chapter has a lot of untapped geographies and power still to discover.

Environmental Justice in Our Own Backyard (and Office)

In 2023, at the guidance of environmental activist and general counsel, Emily Posner, VOTE began a recycling and composting initiative at our New Orleans HQ. What started as Emily carting recycling to and from her home, bloomed into a full staff-supported movement! We now have our own recycling pick up at the office from the city and a composting partnership with Schmelly's Dirt Farm. Emily estimates we have diverted nearly 1,500 lbs. of recyclable materials and food waste from this effort. The compost is shared with local farms for fertilization cultivation, and recyclable metal is scrapped for funds used to feed unhoused community members.





Established in 2011, the **Formerly Incarcerated & Convicted People and Families Movement (FICPFM)** is a network of over 50 civil and human rights organizations led by policy experts, subject matter experts, organizers, thought leaders, artists, healers and attorneys who also have conviction histories or are family members who are closely involved with people living with conviction histories. VOTE Executive Director Norris Henderson and Deputy Director Bruce Reilly are both FICPFM co-founders and Norris is a current board member. Now the FICPFM network has staff and provides support for organizations and campaigns nationally. www.ficpfm.org

A decade ago, Bruce Reilly wrote a FICPFM report called "Communities, Evictions, and Criminal Convictions." VOTE and Stand with Dignity, where VOTE's Alfred Marshall was organizing at the time, launched a grassroots campaign to overhaul the exclusion policy at the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO). Even the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reached out, wondering how we achieved such a transformational policy.



In 2023, FICPFM launched its first national campaign, #Housing4All, drawing on the history of our organizing and scope of federal programs. Working with the legal community which recognizes the leadership of directly impacted people, we have met with HUD and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), provided insights and proposals, and drafted public comments for the federal process to influence the Fair Credit Reporting Act. Discrimination will always exist in some manner, but it is so much easier to do in the darkness. This is why we must bring in the light or *let them feel the heat.*



Alfred Marshall organizing with Stand with Dignity



THE DIAMOND HOUSE

TURNING A HOUSE INTO A HOME



Last December, we unveiled Diamond House, VOTE's first transitional home for women nestled in the backyard of our New Orleans headquarters. Last year, VOTE purchased and renovated the 4-bedroom, 2.5-bathroom home and partnered with Floor 13 NOLA- a woman-owned furniture reseller, to fully furnish each bedroom uniquely, with local artists hand-painting headboards, nightstands, and dressers to evoke a sense of freedom. It made perfect sense to gear the program towards women returning home – the numbers of women entering and being released from prison have been on the rise, but the access to services and support has stayed stagnant.

Ivy Mathis, the first female juvenile Lifer released in Louisiana and our Reentry Specialist, says when she was inside there were programs for men everywhere but not women. Ivy explained, *"Men have more opportunities than women in prison. Hobby crafts for one. Men can make furniture for profit; women are restricted to canvas, yarn, and beads."*

At Diamond House, the focus is on personalized transformation. The standard program spans six months, but the length of stay is uniquely tailored to each woman's needs. Currently we exclusively welcome "Returning Jewels" who are released from prison, ideally from long-term incarceration.

Since opening its doors less than a year ago, Diamond House has supported four women returning home: three of whom have already moved on to their own apartments and two of whom have purchased their own vehicles.

Ivy and Danena Williams, Diamond House's second alum, returned to Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women for LCIW's October Job Fair. After her March 8, 2023 release to Diamond House, Danena started as a server at IHOP and swiftly earned three promotions in seven months. She now serves as the General Manager at a popular New Orleans IHOP, where she oversees hiring and is able to extend a helping hand to formerly incarcerated people.



IVY MATHIS

A WOMEN'S WARRIOR



“ —
If you want somebody to be whole, you have to invest in people and make individuals believe in themselves and expose them to opportunities.

—Ivy Mathis

Ivy Mathis was handed a life sentence at the age of 17. She spent 26 years, 2 weeks and 5 days inside and was released on December 11, 2018, after the U.S. Supreme Court's *Montgomery v. Louisiana* ruling in 2016. The Court left it up to the states to determine how to apply the ruling. VOTE opposed the Louisiana legislature's initial proposal to release juveniles after 35 years, eventually successfully reducing it to 25 years through advocacy efforts. Ivy said, *"I never would have imagined that VOTE would be the main entity that stood in defense of me and didn't even know me then."*

Ivy made a promise to the women on the inside that she would be back after her release. After joining the team as an organizer for the Baton Rouge chapter, Ivy joined the Families of Incarcerated Loved Ones Reentry Advisory Board with the DOC. There she created Life Support, a six-week program taught on the inside that focuses on seven main topics: processing freedom, goal setting, employment, Medicare vs. Medicaid, financial readiness—particularly in using debit cards and the differences between debit and credit—boundary setting, and family reunification.

After two and a half years as an organizer, Ivy approached Norris about starting a women-centered reentry program – an idea VOTE had conceptualized but not yet brought to fruition. With Norris's blessing, she says she used her own experiences in a transitional home after her release as a metric for what to implement into Diamond House.

The symbolism behind "The Diamond House" and its "Returning Jewels" is rich. Ivy explains, *"when you are incarcerated, it's almost like you lose your value as a human being. You are constantly shown that in prison – from the time you are arrested in the parish, to the prison, to the time after."* She says her fear that people won't see her for anything other than her incarceration – to stop at that surface – is what inspired her. *"Everything a diamond has to go through before you see its beauty. It's covered in so much darkness, grit, debris, dirt – we equate that to the traumas we've encountered. The things we've gone through prior to going to prison. The things that were enforced upon us while incarcerated. But beneath all that, with cultivation, there's beauty and value that hasn't even been touched yet."*

Ivy poses with our newest Returning Jewel on Crystal's release day from LCIW



THE FIT CLINIC INITIATIVE TOWARDS A HEALTHIER US



In 2015, the **Formerly Incarcerated Transitions (FIT) Clinic Initiative** was founded, in partnership with VOTE and the Tulane School of Medicine, by Dr. Anjali Niyogi who now serves as FIT's Executive Director. The FIT Clinic Initiative's mission is to remove barriers to access and provide continuity of care to individuals returning home from incarceration. www.fitclinicnola.com

Incarceration has a negative impact on health, increasing risks of medical and mental health conditions. The trauma of incarceration can also impede successful reentry, so to address the emotional needs of their clients, FIT runs the Formerly Incarcerated Peer Support (FIPS) Group which meets two times a month to connect and process the overwhelming feelings that come with coming home. FIT connects recently released individuals with its network of health and community-based partners to aid in a holistic reentry experience.

Danielle Metz and Haki Sekou, both formerly incarcerated VOTE members, leverage their own experiences with healthcare challenges during reentry to serve as FIT's Community Health Workers (CHWs). They are dedicated to building trust in the healthcare system and ensuring comprehensive care by accompanying clients to appointments, assisting with insurance, and facilitating follow-up care. The duo and their work have both been featured in films that released this year and premiered at the 2023 New Orleans Film Festival, Danielle in "Commuted" and Haki in "Big Arms."



In August 2023, The FIT Clinic Initiative launched: **"Towards a Healthier Us" Wellness Nights** held every third Tuesday. FIT Wellness Nights provide comprehensive education and services for formerly incarcerated people and their loved ones. Each month centers on a different topic and features specialty physician presentations, fitness coaching, acupuncture, nutrition, cooking demos, and mindfulness techniques.



August 2023: Cardiovascular Health
September 2023: Women's Health
October 2023: Brain Health



Danielle Metz on the red carpet for the New Orleans Film Festival premiere of "Commuted" with VOTE member Kim Robison



JPAY: MISSION POSSIBLE

OUR ORGANIZERS ON THE INSIDE

“

I'll never forget where I came from or the ones I left behind.

— Norris Henderson



In line with VOTE's conception, we actively organize both outside and inside the prison system at Louisiana DOC facilities, and digitally through the JPAY system. We connect with more than 300 currently incarcerated people across the state, and our Mission Possible Team receives 150+ messages each week from them. Our JPAY leaders inform our staff of current issues and atmosphere inside, provide feedback on our policy priorities, disseminate information to the general population inside and to their families, and send us testimonies to be read at committee hearings during the legislative sessions.

During this Legislative Session, our Mission Possible Team played a crucial role in opposing HB 588, which addressed Non-Unanimous Jury Conviction Relief for those with Jim Crow Jury verdicts, a VOTE priority issue. While VOTE fought all the way to the US Supreme Court to end non-unanimous juries in Louisiana in 2018, it did not apply retroactively, and it was thrown back to the state, and ultimately legislature, to determine relief. Currently there are more than 1000 people incarcerated on 10-2 and 11-1 verdicts, many of whom have dubbed themselves "Angola 1000: The Forgotten."

On May 11th, the Non-Unanimous Jury Coalition packed the House Judiciary Committee Room and provided testimony after testimony about the flaws of the bill and the need for true relief. This included letters read directly from our organizers on the inside with non-unanimous verdicts. While HB 588 passed the House Judiciary Committee, it was ultimately defeated on the House Floor, partly due to points conveyed via JPAY. VOTE remains committed to fighting this issue, alongside the Coalition and Angola 1000, until the last person imprisoned by a Jim Crow jury is freed.

The team is currently focused on working to establish relationships and build ties with Mission Possible family members to empower them to have an active voice in issues most impacting their loved ones.



VOTE staff and members read testimony from the Angola 1000 in opposition of HB 588

ERIC CALVIN

A JPAY LEADER BECOMES VOTE STAFF



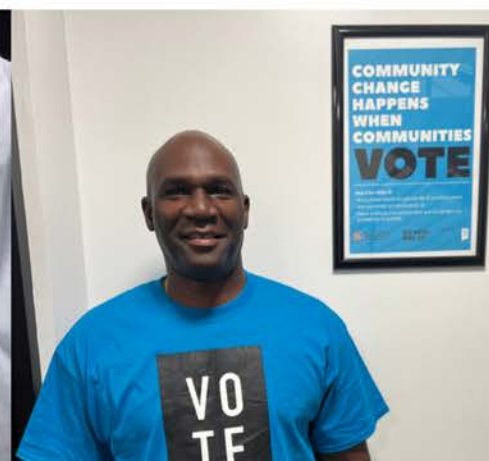
Eric Calvin was convicted at 24 years old with a 173-year flat sentence. He was released after 25 years through **Act 122**, a VOTE bill which expanded parole eligibility and was passed into law in 2021. When Eric first got to Angola in 1998, he was held in lockdown for the first couple of years, mainly for attempted escapes. He says, *"I saw that as my only way out. There was no discharge date. So, the smartest thing for me to do, at least I thought at the time, was to figure out how to maneuver my way outta this one."* It was there in solitary that he met Albert "Fox" Woodfox, a member of The Angola 3.

Each day Fox would send reading materials down to him, urging Eric to look into his own case, and stayed on him. He recalls Fox saying to him, "You got a good head on your shoulders. You just got your head in the wrong place." Despite his own passivity toward his situation, Eric says these moments of intervention made him start paying attention. Interacting with these men, and seeing the funding, support, and protesting they were inspiring in the thousands, motivated him. Eric states, *"I saw a different light even though my sentence never changed. [The Angola 3] had been there all this time and the type of camaraderie and respect...solidarity. They had mad influence. It was admirable to me. I still haven't seen nothing like it – even out here. Not like that."*

After being moved from solitary to general population Eric went on to receive his GED and multiple degrees. He became a respected leader and voice in the prison and began to develop programs. He organized an entire dormitory as a mentor coordinator and created a mentor program that today is modeled in Hunt, Rayburn and Angola. He created mentor trainings, facilitating manuals, and was the first mentor at Angola to receive the Dept. of Public Safety and Corrections Certification from DOC Secretary James LeBlanc. He was also an accomplished writer, editor and photographer for the Angolite. Eric recalls, *"I modeled myself behind guys like Norris in dealing with leadership, Fox in dealing with standing your ground but thinking strategically, doing your homework and research and having the right diverse group of people behind you to support you, and Wilbert Rideau in writing ability."*

Eric was an active leader for us through JPAY prior to his release. His main job was to disseminate information throughout the prison and during COVID, he kept the Mission Possible Team abreast of how many guys were sick, were being treated, and had family contacts. Eric was released in the summer of 2022 and began working for VOTE as a chapter organizer in New Orleans shortly after. He currently leads New Orleans' Member Policy Team.

Eric describes our leaders on the inside as go-getters. He says, *"They always want to help and get more involved. They see VOTE as being the only solution to their problems. They play a big part [in the work.] They're always asking, 'what can we do next to best help us and our circumstances?'"*



2023 LEGISLATIVE SESSION SWINGS AND MISSES IN AN ELECTION YEAR

“

“We don’t have the luxury to quit.”

— Norris Henderson, a sign he hung on the door of the Angola law library

Any session during an election year tends to be difficult, as politicians often try to lay low going into re-election. Others try to create an “issue” they can run their campaigns on, and this year we saw that tactic all over the LA lege. During a fiscal session, legislators were more concerned with restricting rights of minority and disenfranchised groups to appease their conservative constituents than they were on the budget. Sluggish and combative hearings around women’s reproductive health, children’s gender identity, library books, urban crime, and guns took up a lot of time. In the end, that group of legislators failed to pass many of the bills we opposed.

We kept our streak of passing legislation by building a coalition around the need for mental health care for incarcerated people. Act 214 (HB 55) started out sponsored by Rep. Larry Selders in the Health and Welfare Committee, and ended up passing with 18 co-sponsors, unanimous support in the House, and only one nay vote in the Senate. Like every law, it is part of a larger issue area that requires multi-year attention across various administrations to work. This is what we do.

This year, in addition to our VOTE Bill Tracker for all criminal justice related bills, we created our **first 2023 Lege Report** for a full overview of the session and our **2023 Lege Scorecard**, analyzing the voting records of legislators on key issues to see who is consistently voting for or against bills that impact us. 21 Reps and 2 Senators scored a 100% across our slate of 13 bills and comprise the “VOTE 100 Club.” You can read both of these reports on the Legislative Corner of our website or by scanning the QR code below!



VOTE members, staff and coalition partners from Power Coalition and the Urban League pose with HB 396 bill sponsor, Rep. Sam Jenkins



VOTE members and staff testify in favor of HB 545, a bill by Rep. Jordan proposing free prison phone calls, during VOTE Advocacy Day

READ OUR FIRST EVER VOTE LEGE REPORT & SCORECARD



LA SENATORS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100	



VOICEOFTHEEXPERIENCED.ORG/
LEGISLATIVE-CORNER

VOTE'S INAUGURAL

OUR PEOPLE



We hosted our very first Advocacy Day this year during the session! On May 4th, we flooded the LA Capitol in a sea of **VOTE blue** with over 150 members from all over Louisiana. This effort was a long time coming and would not be possible without our chapter organizing teams and VOTE members who stepped up during planning and implementation. We prioritized comprehensive education to our members, making sure they understood every part of the legislative process and how they could engage best to make an impact.

priorities.

Prep for this session began back in fall 2022 when we implemented for the first time a survey-based priority selection process into our policy strategy. VOTE's Policy Team created an online survey for VOTE staff and members to send feedback on which issues impacting our people mattered most to them. Along with feedback from our leaders on the inside, the Policy Team analyzed these responses and formed our 2023 Legislative Priorities to narrow our focus once session began.



skillin' up.

We started pre-session with a reboot of the VOTE Institute for Policy (VIP) course we first introduced in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the help of Lafayette member leader and UL professor, Matthew Greene, we condensed the six-week course into a two-hour Zoom bootcamp for members all over the state. Topics included how a bill becomes a law, how to utilize red and green cards in committees, and a deep dive into the legis.la.gov website and how to navigate it.



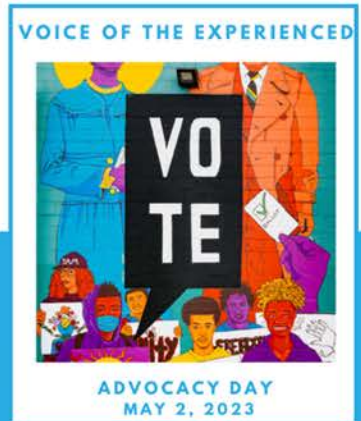
fireside chats.

As the session kicked off on April 12th, we introduced our Monday evening Fireside Chats. These Zoom sessions were an opportunity for the Policy Team to review highlights of the previous week, inform VOTE members of bills scheduled to be heard next, and answer questions. Fireside Chats created a truly collaborative environment and included members in every step of the process. Many shared how much they appreciated this time to break down committee decisions with the Policy Team and to know what action they needed to take next.



ADVOCACY DAY

ARE OUR POWER.



OUR MAY 2ND TIMELINE

Sporting stickers and buttons by Lafayette member Melany Champagne helped us show solidarity and support of JRI



9:00 AM

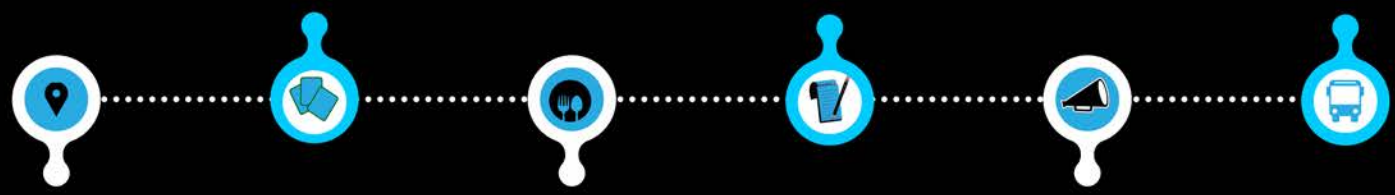
Hearings begin; VOTE members turn in red and green cards and testify to the Administration of Criminal Justice committee on a range of bills from mental health, attempted rollbacks, bail, sentencing and more

2:00 PM

VOTE turns in floor notes to the House floor

3:45 PM

Buses Depart the Louisiana State Capitol



7:00 AM

Buses depart New Orleans and Lafayette for Capitol Hill; staff held mini teach-ins and introduced the Advocacy Day handbook

12:00 PM

VOTE lunch, fellowship + floor note instruction in State Library

3:00 PM

VOTE rally on Capitol steps with Executive Director Norris Henderson + Randy Tucker; wrap day with signature No Surrender, No Retreat chant



We are so proud of everyone for using their voices to let our elected officials, who work for us, know that this is OUR house. **No Surrender, No Retreat.**



RONALD MARSHALL

A CHAMPION OF MENTAL HEALTH



“ —

"When it comes to mental health in my lived experiences, can't nobody teach my community mental health and trauma like I can."

— Ronald Marshall

Ronald Marshall joined the VOTE team in October 2021, one week after his release from 25 years in prison. On staff, he serves as the Chief Policy Analyst for Voice of the Experienced and lends his legal expertise to our policy strategy during legislative session. An accomplished jailhouse lawyer, he is the research and writing brain behind Act 214, "**The Mental Healing Justice for Incarcerated People Act**," signed into law by Gov. John Bel Edwards this summer. This bill mandates the DOC to create mental health services for incarcerated people including: requiring screening for mental health disorders upon intake, mental health training for employees, and expanding training of peer support on mental health.

Ronald credits his love of reading for discovering the genre of mental health and trauma in a prison library after Katrina. He says, "**I began to see behavior patterns differently. I began to understand why we were doing things we were doing. The explosive tempers, the behaviors, the anger, the hypervigilance.**" After a while Ronald began teaching a trauma awareness class at Rayburn in 2016. He taught about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and this is where he discovered his passion and calling card. He says, "**I saw the close relationship between trauma and the number of deaths that were happening in prison.**"

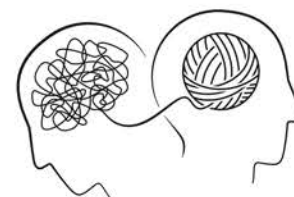
ACEs categorize ten types of childhood trauma and their correlation to long-term impacts on mental and physical health. Ninety-eight percent of the U.S. prison population suffers from at least one ACE (source: Compassion Prison Project.) Having 4 or more, Ronald says, increases your risk of all medical conditions. Ronald himself suffers from 9 of them.

Ronald says he wants people to come home to their communities and rebuild — not tear down. That's why he travels every weekend to Angola to continue to teach trauma awareness to guys inside. Hours after Act 214 was signed into law, Ronald met with the DOC on the implementation strategy of the bill. He has been tasked with training all mentors in the DOC on trauma-informed care. The DOC has committed to transporting all mentors to attend Ronald's classes on trauma-informed care and how to relate their lived experiences and trauma knowledge to the general population of all DOC correctional centers across the state.



Ronald poses in front of a signed copy of Act 214

In response to what mental health means to him, Ronald leaves us with this: "**Good mental health equals public safety. Good mental health reduces recidivism. Good mental health ensures people being released from prison have a better chance of not returning to prison. And until we get a handle on mental health, inside and outside of prison systems, we're going to continue to lose this fight. Everything you see in this city, on the news, in the newspaper, is all related to unresolved trauma. And until we fix that, we'll never fix the crime problem. Ever.**"



RESEARCH MATTERS

EXPLORE OUR 2023 REPORTS

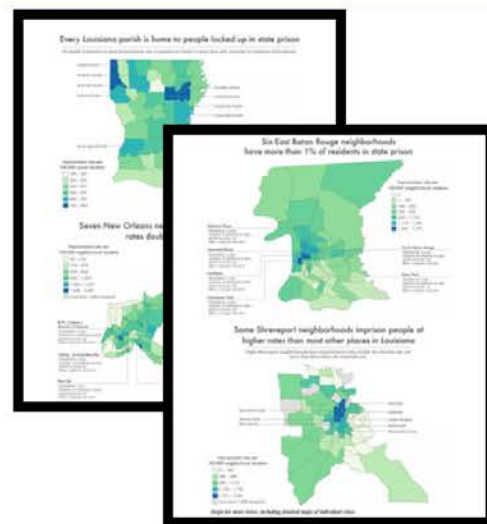
We don't just build people power; we also lend our expertise to collaboration with thought partners. We publish research and reports about incarceration and its impact with our knowledge and lived experiences alongside academic institutions and advocacy organizations.

“WHERE PEOPLE IN PRISON COME FROM: THE GEOGRAPHY OF MASS INCARCERATION IN LOUISIANA”

By: VOTE, Prison Policy Initiative, and Redistricting Hub (June 2023)

One of the most important criminal legal system disparities in Louisiana has long been difficult to decipher: **Which communities throughout the state do incarcerated people come from?** Data have never been available to quantify how many people from each Louisiana community are imprisoned with any real precision... **until now.**

Working with the Prison Policy Initiative and Redistricting Hub, we found that in Louisiana, incarcerated people come from all over the state, and unsurprisingly, the largest number of imprisoned people are from the state's most populous cities of New Orleans, Shreveport, and Baton Rouge. However, a handful of less populous and more rural communities — like in the parishes of Washington, Franklin, Caldwell, and Webster — have some of the state's highest imprisonment rates suggesting that people all over LA are affected by the state's reliance on mass incarceration.



“NO SURRENDER, NO RETREAT!”

REMOVING BARRIERS TO THE BALLOT BOX FOR FORMERLY INCARCERATED PEOPLE IN LOUISIANA”

By: VOTE, Advancement Project, and Dr. Ariel White (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) (May 2023)



This report examines voter participation among voters with convictions after passage of Act 636 (2018) and Act 127 (2021). Hard-fought and won by VOTE and its allies, these two laws are **the only advancements in rights restoration in Louisiana in nearly 50 years.**

The report highlights VOTE Member Gregory Finney, wrongly deemed ineligible to vote despite voting the previous year. Finney testified on behalf of HB 396, VOTE proposed legislation to eliminate paperwork barriers for FIP, and in the subsequent lawsuit, *VOTE v. Ardoin*, against the Secretary of State for violating the National Voter Registration Act. Both actions leveraged our "No Surrender, No Retreat" report.



HIGHLIGHTS: VOTE IN THE MEDIA

READY FOR OUR CLOSE-UP



When our humanity and expertise is centered above our convictions, we consider this a win. We have spent years building relationships with the media and educating them on people first language. We shape hearts and minds when we can transform how the public views and speaks about us. See some of our highlights this year below!



Indeed and Wall Street Journal feat. Norris Henderson and VOTE for fair-chance hiring practices in a 3-minute feature ad



NFL Inspire Change national TV ad feat. VOTE member Earl Hagans



Andrea Armstrong, an incarceration law scholar from the Loyola University New Orleans law school, was awarded a MacArthur Foundation "genius grant" for bringing transparency to detention policies, conditions of confinement, and deaths in U.S. prisons and jails. Photo courtesy of the MacArthur Foundation

This New Orleans 'genius' is on a quest to learn more about rising deaths in prisons



Copyright: antigravity.com. Photo: The Phase III March at Board of Governor's House, organized by VOTE in New Orleans on October 18, 2019. Photo: © J. Williams. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.



The high cost of staying in touch while incarcerated can linger long after release

NEW ORLEANS — After serving 28 years in prison, Charles Amos walked out of Louisiana's Angola prison a free man. But since his release last year, he's felt the economic strain of costly prison phone calls to stay in touch with his incarcerated friends.

LEFT: PBS New Hour feat. VOTE Board Member Professor Andrea Armstrong for being awarded a MacArthur genius grant, CENTER: Antigravity magazine photo spread of VOTE's Phase Out Phase III: March for Community Health, RIGHT: PBS News Hour interviews VOTE Organizer Charles Amos's on prison phone justice



LOUISIANA'S NEWS CHANNEL
RONALD MARSHALL
POLICY ANALYST, VOTE



LOUISIANA'S NEWS CHANNEL
LOCAL FAITH LEADERS FIGHT FOR CLEMENCY HEARINGS



LEFT: Ronald Marshall, Chief Policy Analyst gives commentary in favor of HB 55 with Rep. Larry Selders with WAFB, CENTER: Lafayette Chapter Organizer Consuela Gaines and VOTE member Alison McCrary are featured on WAFB as 1 of 10 local faith leaders a Prayer Vigil for Death Row at the Governor's Mansion, RIGHT: VOTE Office Assistant Anthony Hingle, Jr. sits down with WWLTV to discuss the cruel lack of air conditioning in Angola State Penitentiary during unprecedented heat waves

EMILY POSNER, ESQ.

A GENERAL COUNSEL FOR THE MOVEMENT



In the last year, we've grown our team in a big way by creating a legal department at VOTE. Our staff has decades of legal experience inside and outside of the prison system, but we lacked the resources to support an official legal team – until now. VOTE has always walked the litigation line with many of our allies and partner organizations such as Promise of Justice Initiative, Advancement Project, and The Campaign Legal Center, but mostly in plaintiff support capacities. With the addition of our legal team and extern program, we're able to influence our organizing and advocacy work through our own litigation as well.

Emily received her J.D. from Loyola University New Orleans and has been a practicing attorney for a decade. Her participation in movement work, she says, began much earlier. Emily recalls, "I've been involved in movement work since I was 16 and got more serious with it when I was 18. I went to law school to try to utilize the law as a means to support social justice movements."

Emily began working for currently and formerly incarcerated people long before she ever joined VOTE staff. She represented fellow staff member, Ronald Marshall, on his release in 2021 and Angola 3 member, Albert "Fox" Woodfox, on his First Amendment case. She was also the lead counselor for Mid-City Neighborhood Organization, et al. v. Gusman, et al in 2018 – a joint-coalition lawsuit (VOTE was a plaintiff) against then Sheriff Gusman's illegal land use for the Temporary Detention Center. The case resulted in the bed cap reduction at Orleans Parish Prison from 1,438 to 1,250.

Emily practices movement lawyering. To describe the concept she says, "*If you think about movements as having various components: a media element, a policy element, an organizing element. All that litigation does is bring another tool to the toolbox to push social change. Litigation is generally the slowest and most conservative mechanism to bring about social change, but the legal cases that are most successful are the ones that are done when those other things happen at the same time.*" She also says it's a way to enforce laws our Policy Team passes. When asked what justice means to her, Emily says she doesn't know that she's ever truly experienced justice in our culture herself. But she says, "*I think we're building a culture here [at VOTE] that represents what justice may be.*"



Emily with Judge Angel Harris and staff after VOTE's first Voter Registration clinic at New Orleans Parish Criminal District Court



Emily speaking at the Phase Out Phase III Rally in front of New Orleans Eastern District Court

CALVIN DUNCAN, J.D.

DIRECTOR OF LIGHT OF JUSTICE PROGRAM



Calvin Duncan's employment on staff is actually a homecoming – to New Orleans and to VOTE.

Calvin was arrested in 1982 and spent 28.5 years inside Angola for a crime he didn't commit. After being freed, Calvin earned his bachelor's degree from Tulane University in Paralegal Studies in 2019, and moved to Portland, Oregon to start Lewis and Clark Law School. He graduated in May 2023 on a Saturday and was back in Louisiana the following Monday.

Calvin first met Norris Henderson at Orleans Parish Prison before being transferred to Angola. By the time he made it up to The Farm, Norris and Checo were already assigned as inmate counsel and vouched for Calvin to become one as well, despite his much younger age, he says. Calvin would go on to be a founding member of the Angola Special Civics Project alongside Norris, Checo and Biggy – the organizational foundation for what VOTE is today.

He affirms that he knew from day one he wanted to go to law school. *"First, I started trying to learn the law to save myself from the death penalty. But then I just fell in love with law and helping other people with their civil suits against the prison/jail."* Calvin's very first filed motion was while in Orleans Parish Prison for the right to a law book – which he won.

Described by Wilbert Rideau in his memoir as "the most brilliant legal mind at Angola," Calvin was a well-respected and successful jailhouse lawyer for more than 20 years. He aided many fellow incarcerated people in their cases, including Rideau. Upon completing his law degree, he returned to VOTE as the Director of the Light of Justice Program.

Calvin describes it as *"a program I created once I got out to continue to help the people I left behind."* In Louisiana, a direct appeal is final and a person is no longer entitled to an attorney. He works closely with jailhouse lawyers inside facilities all across the state, with the mission of helping them overcome procedural hurdles they encounter in the post-conviction stage. He provides them with assistance on their clients' cases, particularly in securing records, providing updated law, and monitoring appeal schedules for them.

Calvin confidently states that justice to him is, *"to eliminate all barriers that prevents a person's case from being heard on their merits."* His long history of suing for constitutional wrongs has born significant fruit, namely his participation on the legal team that would eventually get *Ramos v. Louisiana* to the U.S. Supreme Court – which led to their ruling nonunanimous juries unconstitutional in 2020.

What's next? *"Two things: to convince the DOC to allow me to be over the jailhouse lawyers to train them, and to teach."* PS: Calvin is teaching his first class, Criminal Law, at Tulane Law School, starting in January.



LEGAL UPDATES

LITIGATION, LITIGATION, LITIGATION

Halting Jury Trials Until Rolls Include People with Felony Convictions

In January, VOTE learned that the the Orleans Jury Commission had been wrongfully excluding all citizens with felony convictions from criminal court juries. VOTE partnered with the Orleans Public Defender Office to address this civil rights violation. Following litigation and advocacy work, the Orleans Criminal District Court suspended all jury trials for two months to rectify this issue. **Eligible individuals with felony convictions are now serving on juries.**

VOTE v. Ardoin: Reducing Paperwork Requirements for FIP

The Campaign Legal Center (CLC) is representing VOTE in federal litigation against the Louisiana Secretary of State (SOS). This litigation is an extension of the work VOTE has been doing since its inception to expand voting rights to those with criminal convictions. Currently, the SOS requires any person whose voter registration has been suspended due to their felony conviction to get a voting rights restoration letter from a probation and parole office. This letter then needs to be hand delivered to the voter registration office. VOTE alleges that this redundant, vague, and inconsistent requirement violates the US Constitution and the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA).

Intervening in the Mayoral Recall Petition Process

VOTE filed a motion to intervene in a lawsuit involving the failed recall of the Mayor of New Orleans. Individuals leading the recall effort sued the SOS claiming that it incorrectly determined the number of signatures they needed to obtain in the recall effort. The SOS and these individuals settled the lawsuit and agreed on a number that contravenes Louisiana law. VOTE intervened to protect the integrity of Louisiana's election law. This matter is still ongoing.

Expanding Jail-Based Voting & Access to the Absentee Ballot

VOTE works to create equal access to the absentee ballot, and specifically works to help those incarcerated pre-trial vote absentee. During 2023, the organization sent voting rights info to over 1,500 individuals incarcerated pre-trial across the state.



Phasing Out Phase III: Stall, Delay, Win.

VOTE opposes expanding the current jail in Orleans Parish to create \$110M glass panopticon mental health wing. We recently sued the City of New Orleans alleging that it violated the city's home rule charter and illegally moved over \$32 million from the capitol budget to construct this facility. The case bounced from federal court and back to state court where the judge ruled against us and implied a federal judge has total authority over our city. We are seeking review in appellate court.

Ending the Farm Line at Angola

VOTE is a plaintiff in litigation against the Louisiana Department of Corrections to end the use of the farm line -- where as punishment, incarcerated people are required to work on Angola's commercial farm for two cents an hour (hence Angola's nickname "The Farm." People make a choice between taking paltry pay or "good time" credits. Often this labor is forced during extreme heat and/or cold weather. VOTE contends that this labor practice violates the United States Constitution and Americans with Disabilities Act.

Solidarity with Letcher, Kentucky #NoNewLetcherPrison



Building
Community
Not Prisons

VOTE is an organizational member of the Building Community Not Prisons Coalition (BCNP) to oppose the construction of a new federal prison on top of a former coal mine in Letcher County, Kentucky. Letcher locals, incarcerated people, and their communities are working to raise awareness about this proposed toxic prison. VOTE is working with the coalition to meet with Congressional leaders, and to prepare potential litigation under the National Environmental Protection Act.

PHASE OUT

THE ONGOING FIGHT FOR COMMUNITY



phase III

What is Phase III? The ongoing federal consent decree has governed the constitutionally deficient jail, rebuilt after Katrina, and now called "Orleans Justice Center" (OJC). In pursuit of constitutional care for people in pretrial detention with serious mental illnesses, the federal judge ordered the City to construct a \$110m building with 56 cells in a glass panopticon. No mention of treatment plans, how to staff an already under-staffed OJC, nor mental health treatment upon release (or sentencing to prison).

history

Norris and VOTE played a key role in organizing against the jail, even before Katrina, when over 6,000 people were regularly held as a massive money-maker for certain people. The Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition (OPPRC) fought against the bail bond industry, created a bed-cap (through City ordinance) for new jail construction, and organized people to share experiences with the Dept. of Justice (DOJ).

In 2012, Southern Poverty Law Center filed Jones v. Gusman on behalf of 10 named plaintiffs, which turned into the Consent Decree that includes the DOJ and jail monitors. The attorneys were tasked with representing everyone in the jail, and who will be in the jail in the future. With litigation, and hopes of judicial intervention, organizers tend to take the foot off the gas. With OPPRC getting some staff and broader traction around 2017-20, VOTE was freed up to focus on more state policy issues.

2023 timeline highlights



Bruce Reilly sorts through OJC surveys; 7/12 VOTE press conference prior to City Council meeting on Phase III



8/1 VOTE's blog post (cited by media) critiquing MacArthur's representation



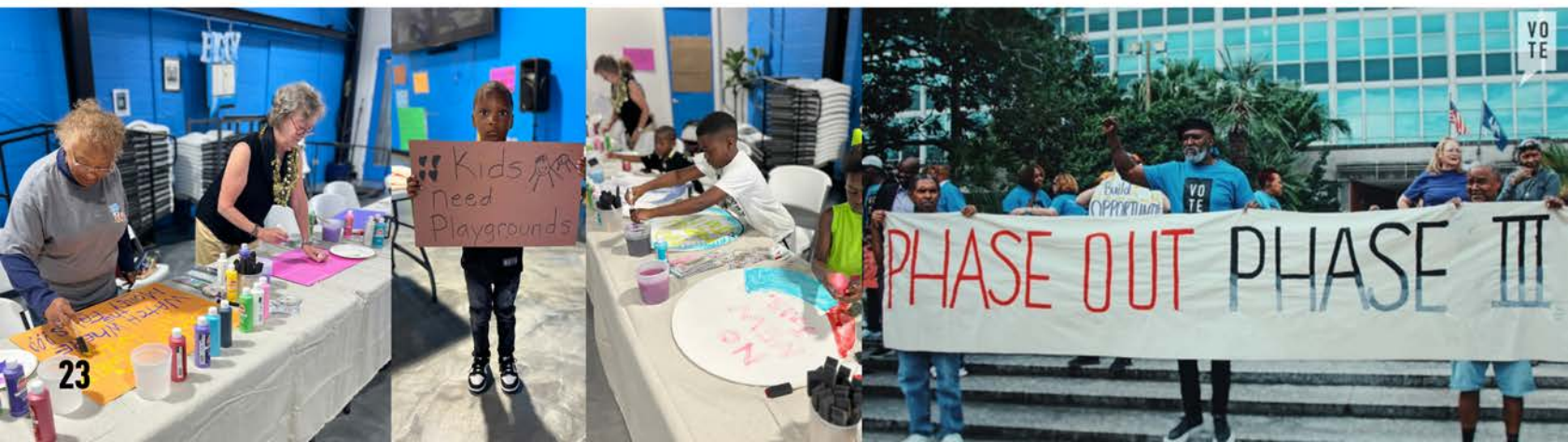
Take action: digital campaign targeting the mayor and City Council launches and sustains



9/1 filing of VOTE v. Cantrell, challenging Phase III funding process followed by a press conference at City Hall Speaking: Kiana Calloway Coverage: The Lens



9/3 full page ad in Sunday edition of the Advocate, includes contacts to take action



PHASE III MENTAL HEALTH IN NEW ORLEANS

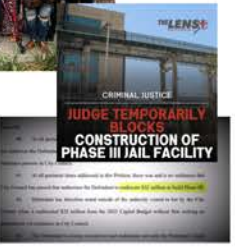


history
cont.

In December 2021, first time candidate and former police monitor Susan Hutson defeated 17-year incumbent Marlin Gusman, and became the defendant in Jones v. Gusman. Her new legal team attempted to change the trajectory of the case, but found themselves in a world where the sheriff opposes expansion, the mayor gave up on the idea of a more cost-efficient “retrofit,” and the plaintiff’s lawyers (now MacArthur Justice Center) supported expansion. The judge ordered the City to do it, and it started that process behind the public’s back.

2023
reignited
struggle

The City informed the federal court that they had re-allocated funds (bypassing the Home Rule Charter budget process) to build the jail. Preparing to break ground in early July, MacArthur claimed “the people inside want this” jail expansion. We didn’t believe it, so we went into the jail and surveyed 211 people in the jail. People inside had no idea about the consent decree and hadn’t even heard of MacArthur Justice Center. We took action using movement lawyering and filed VOTE v. Cantrell, arguing that the City violated the public process. Our society continues to fix problems with bandaids, not at the root, and we won’t stop fighting and being a thorn in their side, until we get it right. Our campaign combines the power of our voices, litigation and mobilizing in the street. We will continue to hit on all corners until we **Phase Out Phase III**.



10/10 Phase Out Phase III: March for Community Mental Health included an art build days before, multiple co-sponsors, and we second-lined from a City Hall press event to a Federal Courthouse. Speakers included VOTE members, elders, partners, and Sheriff Hutson.



10/24 Formerly Incarcerated Peer Support (FIPS) Group Mental Health & Incarceration Panel included judges and mental health experts, building community consensus on solutions



11/6 VOTE staff and members testify in New Orleans City Council budget hearings for the Sheriff, police, district attorney, public defender, recreation department and others. One silver lining was a clear alignment with the City to create free phone calls in the jail.

9/6 VOTE v. Cantrell hearings begin. Media covered every step, including our **11/3 temporary restraining order (TRO)**. On **11/8**, the local judge ruled against us, and we filed our Notice to Appeal. We also filed an additional appeal against the Zoning Board, who granted a permit without a public hearing.





GET FAMILIAR WITH VOTERS ORGANIZED



Voters Organized to Educate, our separate 501(c)4 affiliate, began organizing in 2015. In 2017, we launched the **Know Your Vote** campaign and branding for the organization. Voters Organized's mission is to build collective power across Louisiana to create change in the criminal legal system by building an educated and engaged democracy.

Voters Organized projects center on education and civic action. The Voters' Book Club has been meeting since summer of 2022 and they read and analyze texts that inform our movement work with the stories of our history. City Watch is a group of active members who attend local City Council hearings to engage in the local democratic process and hold local government officials accountable.

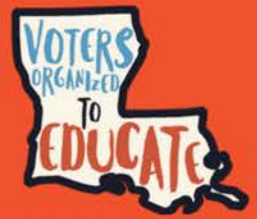
Since its founding, Voters Organized has educated voters in Louisiana on candidates running for office and their stances on the issues that matter to us. Voters Organized has educated and mobilized voters in every election over the past six years.



TOP: Voters Organized votes early with Rep. Mandie Landry, **LEFT:** Voters Organized Book Club reading "We Do This 'Til We Free Us" by abolitionist Mariame Kaba, **RIGHT:** Voters Organized and VOTE registration drive with Xavier University students



TO EDUCATE



The Academy

The
**LEADERSHIP
INSTITUTE**
A project of Voters Organized to Educate
Empowering Formerly
Incarcerated Individuals and
our allies to run for office and
win!

After more than a year of strategic planning and program development, Voters Organized launched its Leadership Institute initiative in 2023. The Leadership Institute is a statewide recruitment and training school focused on equipping formerly incarcerated people and their allies interested in running for office with the resources, knowledge, training, and tools necessary to launch successful campaigns and win across the state of Louisiana. With the goals to prepare, educate, empower, and run directly impacted candidates in Louisiana, The Leadership Institute centers VOTE's theory of change that those who are most impacted are closest to the solution. We've spent decades building power in Louisiana, and now we want to empower our members and allies to be agents of change in their communities as well.

The Leadership Institute is currently reviewing applications for our first cohort with curriculum beginning February 2024. However, we are always looking for new potential candidates. If you, or someone you know, are interested in running for political office in the state, please fill out our nomination form at VotersOrganized.org!



Podcast



From Chains to Change

Voters Organized to Educate

Discover "**From Chains to Change**," a podcast on the changing landscape of criminal justice reform, hosted by Bruce Reilly. Join us as we engage with elected officials, coalition partners, thought leaders, and those most directly impacted to explore the political landscape at local, state, and federal levels, the promise of abolitionist praxis and of course, elevating the voices of formerly incarcerated people. Listen on your preferred podcast platform, watch the podcast on YouTube, or visit www.fromchainstochange.org.

THANK YOU, MEMBERS

OUR PEOPLE ARE OUR POWER



“

“Those closest to the problem are also closest to the solution.”

- Norris Henderson



Our VOTE members are our family, friends, and allies situated all across Louisiana. The heartbeat of our movement, they elevate our voices and expand our people power. Our members aid in our work at every single step. They register voters, knock on doors during Get Out the Vote season, follow and testify at committee hearings during legislative session, build relationships with their elected officials, and outreach to new places and new people. We are hundreds strong and continually growing.

Thank you for your dedication, passion, time, and sweat equity. **You're our power that is unshakeable and our voices that can't be silenced. Our gratitude is endless.**

BECOME A MEMBER WITH VOTE

VOTE

We have chapters based in Lafayette, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans! Our chapters meet monthly for organizing education, dinner, and fellowship. If you are based in one of these areas, you're invited to join us and get involved in our work locally and statewide! If you are located elsewhere, but still want to take part in the action, make sure you join our mailing list. You'll receive periodic newsletters with current VOTE news and events, and calls to action when we need urgent support.



Baton Rouge Monthly Meeting: Fourth Thursday of every month from 6pm to 8pm at 251 Florida St., 4th Floor, Baton Rouge, LA 70801
Contact: Amelia Herrera at amelia@voiceoftheexperienced.org or 225-441-0789



Lafayette Monthly Meeting: Third Thursday of every month from 6pm to 8pm at Downtown Convention Center, 124 S. Buchanan St. Lafayette, LA 70501
Contact: Consuela Gaines at conseula@voiceoftheexperienced.org or 337-445-0233



New Orleans Monthly Meeting: First Wednesday of every month from 6pm to 8pm at 4930 Washington Ave., Suite A, New Orleans LA, 70125
Contact: Donald Arbuthnot at donald@voiceoftheexperienced.org or 504-971-9599



THANK YOU, DONORS + FUNDERS

DONATE TO THE MOVEMENT

Our work is not possible without the financial power to carry it out. As a nonprofit, funding we receive covers everything from our operational expenses, to our resources and supplies for members during legislative and election seasons, and to our staff salaries to continue to keep up with the demands of the work. We are eternally grateful for our funders and donors who believe in what we do and place their trust in us to bring results.

To our funders, particularly those that have been sharing the ride with us for many years: **Thank You** for continuing your support year after year — especially before we had many wins under our belt. Your impact is immeasurable.

To our donors: **Thank You** for entrusting us with your hard-earned dollars to create the social change you want to see in our world. Your support is growing. We had more individual donors and donor support in 2023 than any other year at VOTE! We tip our hats to you and extend our boundless appreciation.



As our team and efforts continue to grow, so does our need for funds to keep growing. Building financial power is just as essential to our work as is the people power we build.

This year, **we're asking our supporters to donate to VOTE in honor of a power builder you admire.** Be it historic figures, a member leader or staff, or someone you care about, you can make a donation to VOTE today and include their name. We will be honoring all the power builders you honored after the New Year!

Scan to donate in honor of your power builder or visit bit.ly/votedonate2023



JOIN THE CHISOLM CIRCLE

HELP US BUILD FINANCIAL POWER



“ —

"If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair." -Shirley Chisholm

The Chisholm Circle is our newly branded community of monthly donors!

We chose to name our community after Rep. Shirley Chisholm, who, in 1968, became the first Black woman to be elected to the United States Congress, in recognition of her persistence and the ways in which consistent support sustains our work over time.

Monthly giving is the most impactful way you can donate to the movement – and we deeply appreciate these committed funds throughout the year to fill funding gaps and unpredicted expenses.

Thank you to our current Chisholm Circle donors for your dedication to our mission.



Scan to join the **Chisholm Circle** or visit
VOICEOFTHEEXPERIENCED.ORG/MONTHLY-GIVING

Did You Know?

Shirley Chisholm was the first African American to run for a major party's nomination for President of the United States, making her also the first woman ever to run for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination.

2024 marks
20 YEARS OF



Thank you for building power with us for 20 years.

Here's to 20+ more.

No Surrender. No Retreat.

Throughout this milestone platinum year, we will be reminiscing about the accomplishments of VOTE — and even the decades of organizing and advocacy before with the ASCP. In our [official] 20 years, VOTE has seen massive victories and growth. We've built coalitions, passed historic laws, expanded to new places, grown our staff, and mobilized hundreds of members.

As we move through the year, VOTE will be commemorating this momentous occasion with special content and events. **Be on the lookout in 2024 for more info.**



Norris Henderson, Founder and Executive Director of VOTE was released from prison after 27 years, 10 months and 18 days for a crime he did not commit on March 23, 2003. Building upon the foundation set by the Angola Special Civics Project (ASCP), and in fulfillment of a promise, he officially incorporated VOTE as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization a year and one day after his release.



A woman with dark hair, wearing a black beanie and a bright blue t-shirt with the word 'VOTE' printed on it, is speaking into a microphone. She is surrounded by other people, some wearing similar blue shirts. In the top right corner, there is a white speech bubble containing the word 'VOTE' in large, bold, black letters.

**VO
TE**

2024 IMPORTANT DATES

- **LA 2024 Legislative Session** – Mon, March 11 to Mon, June 3
- **VOTE 2024 Advocacy Day** – TBA

2024 ELECTION DATES

- **March 23** = Presidential Preference Primary/ Municipal Primary
- **April 27** = Municipal General
- **November 5** = Open Primary/ Presidential + Congressional
- **December 7** = Open General/ Congressional