



THE PROMISE OF JUSTICE INITIATIVE 2022 ANNUAL REPORT



Acknowledgements

The Promise of Justice Initiative Annual Report FY 2022

Dedicated to Sandra Gordon and the clients we've lost this year.

Thanks to Sara Gozalo and Jackson Hill for photos.

Pictured in photos (by page number):

Cover (from top left, clockwise): PJI Civil Litigation team; Claude-Michael Comeau & Ned Biagas; a member of Silence is Violence at lobby day; Sister Helen Prejean & Bishop Michael Duca; Derrick Fruga; Jamila Johnson & Terrance Winn; Trent Wells, Hardell Ward, & Greg Earles.
4: Nathan Webster and his family
6: Johnny Handy
9: Mercedes Montagnes
12 (from top): Derek Hayes; Rev. Anderson & Sister Helen Prejean; Lewis v. Cain team with named plaintiffs
13: Edna Gibson & her daughter; survivors of violence, homicide victims' loved ones & their allies
15: Lewis v. Cain class members in the Angola medical dorm
16: Reginald Reddick
18: Derrick Fruga
19: Dwayne Harvey & his loved one
20: Katie Hunter-Lowrey with survivors of violence, homicide victims' loved ones & their allies

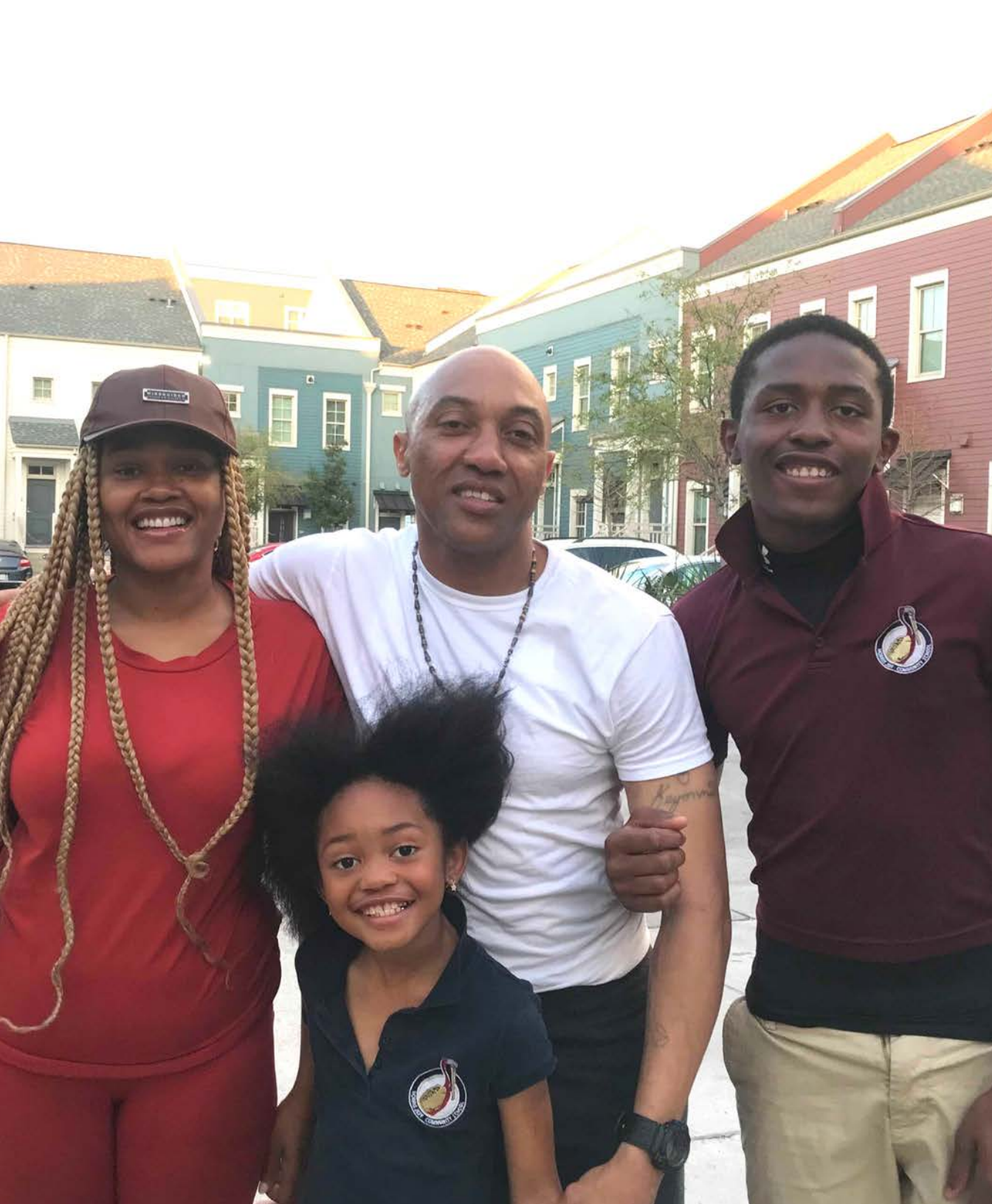
22: Derek Hayes
23: Jermaine Hudson
24: Sister Helen Prejean
27: Alva Edwards
28: (from left) Dameion Brumfield & Katy Martinez (Disability Rights Louisiana)
32: Terrance Winn
35: Colin Reingold
37: Community members at RAE 2.0
38 (from top): Gloria Williams & Brandon Jackson
39: Gloria Williams & her loved one
40: Rayshaud Green & Jackson Hill
42: Supporters of ending Jim Crow juries
43 (from top): Calvin Duncan, Flozell Daniels
44: Soren Gisleson, Amir Ali
45: Lois Ratcliff, Lynda Woolard
46 (from left): Jamila Johnson, Hardell Ward, Claude-Michael Comeau
47: PJI Staff
51 (from left): Albert Damond, Bilal Nadir (One More Time) & Landon Marshall
Back Cover: Sandra Gordon

The Promise of Justice Initiative

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**THIS WORLD
WILL BE
SAFER AND
MORE SECURE
FOR ALL
PEOPLE.**



Our Vision

PJI works to create positive change for people in the criminal legal system at the intersection of impact litigation, direct services, and community engagement.



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MERCEDES' MESSAGE

We formed the Promise of Justice Initiative (PJI) ten years ago, because we had a vision of a better justice system where all communities—including those in prisons—were safer and more secure. And we made a promise to work to fulfill that vision.

Back then, the local newspaper had just published a series of articles about Louisiana's criminal system that began with a piece entitled, "Louisiana is the World's Prison Capitol." It struck a chord that has reverberated ever since.

We all knew what Louisiana had been doing did not make us safe. Prisons are inherently unsafe places. We wanted to change that and set to work.

After 10 years, we are redefining what it means to seek safety. We do our work alongside our clients and community. We work in 57 of Louisiana's 64 parishes. We provide services to thousands of people each year and organize communities around the state. We partner with and support survivors of crime and those survivors criminalized by an unjust system. We work to bring people home and to improve the conditions of their incarceration. And as we do all this, we recognize the legacy of Jim Crow in our criminal legal systems.

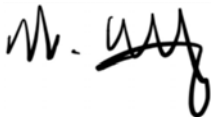
Our clients are the best part of our jobs, and their lives most reflect the work we have done over the last 10 years.

We promised to start a new type of organization: one that works to decarcerate, but also one that recognizes the value of each person. We promised to work toward the abolition of the death penalty and excessive sentences, but also to confront the legacy of Jim Crow in our justice system. We promised to tell the stories of what is happening behind prison walls.

We promised to be brave—even when we faced uphill battles and tough losses. We have kept that promise and will continue to do so in the coming years.

Whether you have been with us since the beginning or joined us recently, PJI has much to celebrate after 10 years in the fight for a safer future for all. We are so thankful to you! But our work is not over, and the system has a long way to go.

Thank you!



Mercedes Montagnes
Executive Director



**Will you join
us for the next
10 years?**



WHERE WE WORK

We work in our community.

We are the most comprehensive statewide organization committed to people living in prison in Louisiana. This year we worked alongside clients and communities in 57 of Louisiana's 64 parishes.



Criminal Law Help

When a person has a final conviction, there is often nowhere to turn. We represented 1,129 people in criminal cases at that stage.

Class Action Lawsuits

Through certified class actions, we represented 5,980 people on the conditions in the prisons where they lived. We also represent three individuals seeking to be class representatives in a putative class action of 6,000 people.

Direct Non-Legal Services

Through our direct non-legal services, we served 242 people in prison, providing support, someone to talk to, and assistance with family visits.

Organizing

We provided resources for people to show and own their power. Our organizers have been working in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Lafayette, and providing survivor services statewide. We supported five additional coalitions in Louisiana.



OUR IMPACT



We work to ensure people in prison get medical care.

Shannon Hurd made 37 sick calls to prison officials. By the time anyone took him seriously he had lost 61 pounds and had stage 4 renal cancer. Shannon died fighting for medical care for himself and others.

Louisiana State Penitentiary, known as Angola, is one of the nation's largest prisons. On more than 18,000 acres, it is larger than the island of Manhattan. The men who live in Angola have been suffering for years from a lack of constitutional medical care.

We sued and won. Last year, a federal judge said the deprivation of medical care at Angola amounted to cruel and unusual punishment.

On June 6, 2022, we went back to trial to establish how to improve the medical care at the prison as class counsel for the nearly 5,000 people who live there.





We help our state heal from the harms of Jim Crow.

In 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court ended Jim Crow jury verdicts in our *Ramos v. Louisiana* case. Since then we have been fighting for it to apply to all Louisianans convicted by Jim Crow jury verdicts.

Reginald Reddick went to trial in 1997. Little did he know that nearly 100 years before, lawmakers in Louisiana had held a constitutional convention where their stated mission was to ensure the supremacy of the white race. They put in place what the U.S. Supreme Court has called Louisiana’s last Jim Crow law—a law that allowed people like Mr. Reddick to be convicted even though some jurors thought he was innocent.

Mr. Reddick is in prison even though his fingerprints didn’t match those at the scene. The only witness to connect Mr. Reddick to the scene was not credible, and two jurors said he was innocent.

On May 10, 2022, we took Mr. Reddick’s case to the Louisiana Supreme Court and argued that the *Ramos* decision should apply to Mr. Reddick and the other 1,500 Louisianans still in prison with unconstitutional convictions—1,000 of whom we directly represent.

We bring people home from prison.



Louisiana incarcerates more of its population than any other state. Prisons are inherently unsafe places, and over-incarceration does not make anyone safer. We have been challenging excessive sentences, negotiating on behalf of men and women with Jim Crow jury convictions, and representing people on resentencing.

We grew our strategic criminal litigation team this year, and since July 2021, our advocacy has brought home 49 clients—many of whom were serving life or virtual life sentences.



Welcome to the Louisiana State Capitol

Day	Time	Room	Room
Tue	8:00 a.m.	Room 1	100-117
Tue	8:00 a.m.	Room 2	100-117
Tue	10:00 a.m.	Room 1	100-117
Tue	10:00 a.m.	Room 2	100-117
Tue	2:00 p.m.	Room 1	100-117
Wed	8:00 a.m.	Room 1	100-117
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Thu	2:00 p.m.	Room 2	100-117



We lift the voices of survivors and victims' loved ones.

Too often, victims are silenced or ignored, and we recognize that harm and healing exist on a continuum.

We facilitate Louisiana Survivors for Reform (LSR)—a coalition of survivors of violence, homicide victim's families, and organizations creating change in the criminal legal system. We hold monthly support group meetings to provide a healing space and organizing meetings to build capacity for our statewide policy and education efforts. We train survivors with tools to advocate for themselves and their communities.

We served on and staffed the Louisiana Survivor Informed Task Force to study the link between trauma, abuse, and subsequent incarceration. We authored a bill and presented recommendations and powerful testimony from domestic violence survivors and formerly incarcerated survivors to the legislature for trauma-informed policies that would prevent criminalization of survivors of abuse and provide relief for those who are currently incarcerated.

We assist people in prison.

We support people in prison and their families by organizing family visits, providing funds for commissary, and helping people living in incarceration navigate the prison system.

This year we supported 242 people, filled 515 requests for financial support, and facilitated 36 family visits despite COVID-19 visitation interruptions. This work is done with the help of fellows with Avodah, a Jewish Service Corps, and the Jesuit Volunteer Corps.







LA Catholics
For Repeal of
Death Penalty

We organize to end the death penalty in Louisiana.

Our LAREPEAL Coalition is fiercely dedicated to repealing the death penalty in Louisiana. In 2022, we worked to support two death penalty abolition bills with State Representative Kyle Green and State Senator Katrina Jackson. In supporting these bills, LAREPEAL worked alongside Sister Helen Prejean—a world-renowned death penalty abolition advocate and author of the critically acclaimed book "Dead Man Walking," which is based on Sister Helen's own experiences counseling people who have been condemned to death by the state.

This year, we also dedicated an organizer to Lafayette, Louisiana, and the Acadiana region and hosted events where victim-survivors discussed why they oppose the death penalty. Although LAREPEAL's death penalty abolition bills were not successful this year, every blow to the trunk of injustice is another step toward felling the entire tree.

We represent Louisianans imprisoned past their release dates...

Louisiana holds more than 2,000 people past their legal release dates each year.

Brian Humphrey should have been a free man from the moment he was sentenced by a judge in Bossier Parish, Louisiana. He'd already spent time pre-trial in jail—enough to cover his entire sentence.

But instead, the sheriff took Brian back to the jail, where he waited for weeks with no idea of when he would be released.

We have been building two class actions, *Humphrey v. Leblanc* and *Giroir v. Leblanc*, to challenge these practices and help those affected return home.



LOUISIANA STATE
PENITENTIARY

NOTICE

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING NOTICE CAREFULLY. THIS NOTICE IS POSTED IN THE ENTRANCE TO THE PENITENTIARY. IT IS THE POLICY OF THE PENITENTIARY TO MAINTAIN A HIGH LEVEL OF SECURITY AND TO PROTECT THE SAFETY OF ALL PERSONS ON THE PREMISES. VISITORS ARE REQUESTED TO REMAIN CALM AND TO FOLLOW ALL INSTRUCTIONS OF THE STAFF. ANY VIOLATION OF THESE RULES WILL RESULT IN IMMEDIATE REMOVAL FROM THE FACILITY AND POSSIBLE ARREST. THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION.



...and represent those held in solitary confinement.

Dameion Brumfield saw horrific conditions in the extended lockdown wing of David Wade Correctional Center.

We joined Disability Rights Louisiana, Tulane's First Amendment Clinic, and Adams & Reese LLP at trial in the *Telis v. LeBlanc* class action to examine men like Dameion so the court could understand what Dameion and other men saw in lockdown at David Wade.

We support communities speaking out against jail deaths...

The East Baton Rouge Parish Prison is one of the deadliest jails in Louisiana and in the nation. For years, we have supported families and community members in Baton Rouge as they speak out against jail deaths. We work to support the East Baton Rouge Parish Prison Reform Coalition and share tools and resources to assist their advocacy.

44

DEATHS

WITHIN THE
CUSTODY OF
EAST BATON ROUGE
PRISON
FROM 2012-2020

EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH
PRISON REFORM COALITION



Kevin Thayer

David Jones

James Brown

James Brown

James Brown

James Brown

Walter Jones

David Jones

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**IT'S
ABOUT
US**

**E
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JUN**

...and organize advocates for legislative reforms.

Each year, we monitor hundreds of bills filed in the Louisiana Legislature affecting the criminal legal system. We connect people impacted by these bills with legislators. We help people prepare their testimony and secure rides to the capitol. We organize and host Survivors of Violence Lobby Day and include faith leaders in our work. This year we generated more than 800 individual connections between people impacted by the system and their lawmakers.

As a result of the work of Louisiana Survivors for Reform in partnership with Republican lawmakers, Louisiana became the third state in the country to end the requirement that survivors must report crimes to police in order to obtain compensation through the Crime Victims Reparations Fund. This bill passed unanimously at every step through a highly divided state legislature. We also staff the Louisianans for Prison Alternatives coalition.

We were there when Hurricane Ida hit.

When Hurricane Ida hit Louisiana, we first ensured our staff was safe. Then we packed our computer servers into the back of a car, and drove them to a safe location. Immediately after, we went back to work to determine whether incarcerated people who were in the path of the hurricane and were not evacuated were safe.

We voiced concerns to the Governor and the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections. Then, we began distributing resources and funds through mutual aid to the communities hit by the hurricane, offered support to our recently released clients, and provided support to families of clients impacted by the storm and long power outages.





We support capacity growth for local nonprofits.



Death row exoneree J.T. Thompson started Resurrection After Exoneration (RAE) when he returned home. The non-profit was focused on creating a space for people returning home to thrive. Following Thompson's death in 2017, the building and the nonprofit mourned.



This year, we entered into an operating agreement with the reconstituted non-profit RAE 2.0 to refurbish and reinvigorate the space, so that RAE 2.0 can operate there in the future. We have served as fiscal sponsors to many small non-profits and provided help and skill building.

We help people get parole.

Gloria Williams had a dubious title—Louisiana’s longest serving woman in the prison system. Brandon Jackson had been convicted of an armed robbery with practically no credible evidence, in part, because a juror said he made too much eye contact with her. We helped bring them home this year.



Gloria Williams

We represented Gloria through her grant of clemency, and supported Louisiana Parole Project for her parole hearing.



Brandon Jackson

We represented Brandon on his Jim Crow jury conviction, and before the Louisiana parole board.

We also served on a task force to help improve Louisiana’s medical parole and worked to issue a report on the state of medical parole with recommendations.





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SUBJECT **RASHAD GREEN**
Camera
Date *1-7-21* / Day / Night / Sync / Mos
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On the Horizon: End Plantation Prisons

For the last year, we have been researching the use of prison labor in Louisiana.

We envision a system that builds skills and provides dignity for incarcerated people, lends economic stability to impacted communities, and eliminates unsafe work conditions. We have been working with people who have been forced to work in prisons and recording their experiences. We have also been mapping how forced labor operates in Louisiana. Next year, we will unveil public education resources to engage and empower citizens and work toward ending these practices.



FEATURED SUPPORTERS



Calvin Duncan

Calvin Duncan knows the importance of the promise of justice. He was one of PJI's first employees; his role was dedicated to supporting the vibrant community of inmate counsel he left behind at Angola after he was released from prison after 28 years of wrongful incarceration. Today he supports PJI as a board member and is about to enter his third year at Lewis and Clark Law School. He supports PJI because of the staff and their representation of people who are incarcerated.



Flozell Daniels

Flozell Daniels, Jr., President and CEO of the Foundation for Louisiana and longtime New Orleans' activist, supports PJI because "we need strong Louisiana based non-profits who can advocate for change on the ground." Flozell works to help PJI secure grants from multiple sources.

Soren Gisleson

Soren Gisleson is a private attorney who represents survivors of sexual abuse, those injured by prisons, and those harmed by the BP oil spill and was born and raised in New Orleans. He was also PJI's third board president, and a long time advocate for our work. His continued support of PJI comes from PJI's long term dedication to clients year after year.



Amir Ali

Amir Ali is the executive director of the Macarthur Justice Center and teamed up with PJI in 2017 to represent Corey Williams whose release we helped secure from wrongful incarceration. He is recognized as a national leader in litigating issues of police and prosecutorial accountability. Amir supports PJI because “PJI was there to defend Corey’s innocence when there was no one else, and it continued to fight even when the odds seemed impossible. Corey would not be free without PJI’s near decade of persistence and advocacy.”





Lois Ratcliff

Families of clients are some of PJI's most valued supporters. Lois Ratcliff is the mother of a former client and a friend to the office. She has donated to PJI because "In times of great struggle, god shows us the path. Fellowship is needed to insure his glory is kept in good faith. PJI shows the strength of faith, for that my family and I are eternally grateful."



Lynda Woolard

Lynda Woolard is an organizer, strategist, and host of the Louisiana Lefty podcast. Lynda was the Director of Field Operations for the Unanimous Jury Coalition and helped to end the practice of non-unanimous juries. Lynda supports PJI because she "saw the significance of PJI's deliberate and thoughtful efforts and the positive effect they have on directly impacted people."



OUR TEAM

Brave, bold, strategic

The PJI team is brave, bold, and strategic. We hail from diverse backgrounds, histories, and experiences and share a belief that all people deserve equality and justice. Our staff is deeply committed to doing the important self-work to make ourselves and our organization as anti-racist and inclusive as possible. We encourage everyone's professional development so that we can do the best work for our clients. We believe in uplifting our community partners and honoring the experience of all impacted people in the state. We honor the legacies of those who have paved the way to make our work possible, and we continue to break down walls in the fight for justice.

By The Numbers

54% BIPOC

50% BIPOC leadership

40% People from Louisiana

18% LGBTQ+

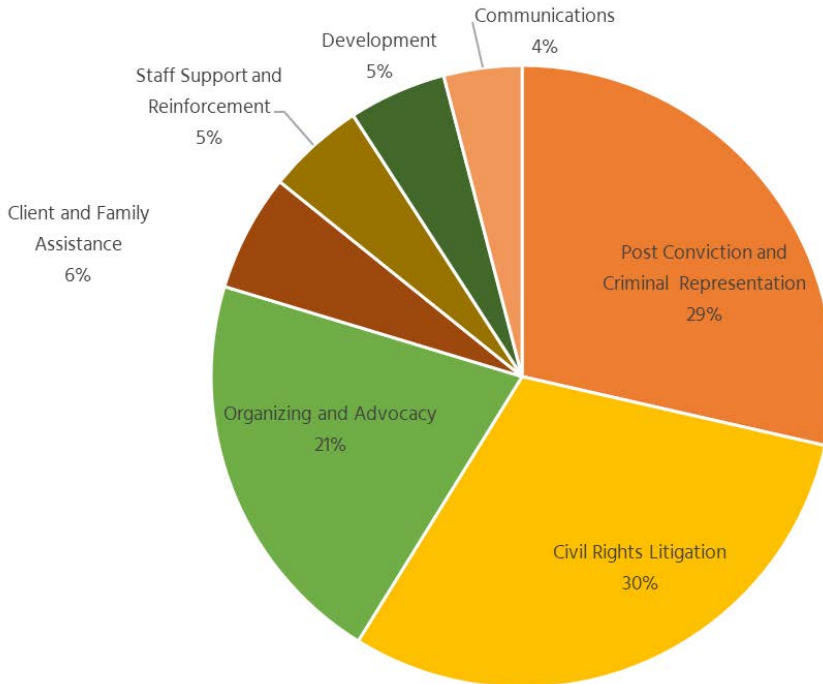
22% Directly impacted



OUR FINANCIALS



Annual Expenditure Breakdown Through Third Quarter



We started only 10 years ago building this organization, serving affected people throughout Louisiana, and working toward systemic changes in our criminal legal system. As we continue to grow, we are committed to putting our money where our mission is, with a focus on keeping overhead low and our impact high.

90%

of our funding goes directly to our programs and our impact.

Support the next ten years at PJI!



Donate

PJI relies on funding from foundations and individuals to support our work and impact. Your generosity will support:

- Incarcerated people and their families
- Civil rights impact legislation
- Investigation and reporting
- The fight for unanimous juries
- Ending the death penalty in Louisiana
- Building survivor-led policy changes

For more information on supporting our work,
visit www.promiseofjustice.org/donate



Follow us on social media
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Thank you for being a supporter of
the Promise of Justice Initiative!



**In loving memory of
Sandra Gordon**



The Promise of Justice Initiative
Annual Report 2022