



PLS Notes

Summer 2023

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PLS Welcomes New Staff

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Sarah Blair (she/her) joined PLS as our first ever full-time Pro Bono Counsel. Sarah will be coordinating with the advocacy community, private bar and volunteers to increase civil legal services and legal representation. Sarah interned at PLS and the Southern Center for Human Rights while studying at Harvard Law. Prior to her new role, Sarah worked for 3.5 years as a staff attorney at Uptown People's Law Center litigating prisoner's rights cases.

Aryanna Cooke (she/her) joined PLS as a Paralegal for the organization's Race Equity in Corrections Initiative. She completed her BS in Criminal Justice this summer and plans to further her education. Aryanna is passionate about criminal reform and social justice advocacy and plans to continue the fight to dismantle systemic racial injustice and uplift the BIPOC community.

Onesha Dixon (she/her) joined PLS in March of 2023 as a Paralegal. Onesha received a bachelor's degree from Suffolk University and plans to go to law school. Prior to PLS, Onesha had worked with children and adults with behavioral health issues and worked on state and local campaigns.

Maheeb Rabbani (he/him) joined PLS as a Paralegal. He is a graduate of Brandeis University and was involved in the Brandeis Educational Justice Initiative which provides classes and workshops for formerly and currently incarcerated folks. He was also part of an inside out class through Brandeis and the School of Re-entry, which took place in the Boston Pre-Release Center. These experiences led him to see the vast and dire needs of people in MA prisons.

Nikki Louis (she/her) joined PLS as a Paralegal and Policy Associate. She is a graduate of Northeastern University with a combined bachelor's degree in history and political science and plans to attend law school. Nikki interned at PLS for ten months before joining full time. Her experience at PLS inspired her to continue fighting for client-centered legal advocacy. She is excited to expand her knowledge of systemic advocacy in her role coordinating PLS' policy priorities.

A Message from PLS' Executive Director, Elizabeth Matos

After twelve immensely gratifying years at Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts, it is with a heavy heart that I must share that I will be leaving the organization in September 2023. It is impossible for me to fully express my feelings in words, but I would like to leave you with a few thoughts, and above all else, my deepest gratitude.

My journey at PLS began when I started as a staff attorney in 2011. I had no idea that I would someday have the privilege of leading this organization. PLS has been like a family to me. Many of us share this feeling. The work is intense as is the passion, dedication, and commitment we all bring to it. Many of us have been or are impacted by incarceration. We care deeply and understand that supporting each other when we really need it is part of who we are and how we sustain ourselves in this work. Challenging moments abound. We have all worked closely with clients who sadly passed away, some due to illness and others who have taken their own lives. We are often the only friendly voice or face our clients will encounter that day, month, or year.

We have also celebrated each other's successes, both at work and at home. We often share pictures of our children's precious moments or our pets, who often accompany us on the days we work from home. We have celebrated birthdays, the comings and goings of our fabulous interns and a few staff members, and sometimes victories- the release of clients, succeeding in getting clients access to surgeries or other services they need, the passage of legislation, or a favorable decision in a case.

Our clients have been the inspiration behind our work and have made me proud to be director of this organization. I have been nothing less than amazed by your resiliency and perseverance. Despite facing some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable, you stand up for your rights and demand the dignity that all humans deserve and are too often denied. I have been humbled not only by your tenacity and determination but by the understanding and gratitude you have displayed despite the frequent frustrations to our advocacy efforts. Any success that PLS has enjoyed is thanks in large part to your leadership. Your invaluable partnership keeps PLS' work grounded and impactful.

Standing with our clients is PLS' hard-working staff, who have been an unceasing source of motivation, inspiration, and love. I have enormous pride in what we have accomplished. Through our work together, PLS has developed innovative projects to better serve our more marginalized populations and pursued new intersectional approaches to addressing the critical needs of the people we serve. We have also elevated our organizational consciousness and commitment to centering equity in our work.

I have always seen my role as an advocate to identify and address structural inequality and maximize impact. I have been honored during these 12 years to know that every day I was genuinely fighting for the civil and human rights of some of the most marginalized people in Massachusetts. The next chapter for me will be with the Attorney General's Office as Civil Rights Division Chief and Senior Advisor to Attorney General, Andrea Campbell. I very much look forward to continuing to advance civil and human rights for those who need it most in this new role.

I am already working closely with our leadership team and the PLS Board of Directors to search for an experienced interim executive director which will give PLS the time it needs to find the next executive director who will bring fresh perspectives and steadfast leadership to the organization. I will work closely with them to ensure a smooth transition and provide any necessary assistance during this process.

PLS has become a large part of who I am and leaving has been one of the most difficult decisions that I have ever made. Thankfully, while this is a new chapter, I will continue to have the privilege to work with my colleagues, counterparts, and clients. Thank you once again for your unwavering support and partnership. I look forward to witnessing the continued success of Prisoners' Legal Services under new leadership, and I will forever remain grateful for the opportunity to have served alongside such remarkable individuals. Together, I am looking forward to creating lasting and meaningful change.

In Solidarity,
Elizabeth Matos



PLS Intake Process

Prisoners' Legal Services (PLS) assists incarcerated persons through litigation, direct client advocacy, and general legal advice. PLS assists clients with issues in several areas, but prioritizes issues related to medical and mental health care, staff brutality, conditions of confinement, and segregation. Below is a description of our intake process.

New Intakes

Phone: Our phone intake hours are Mondays from 1-4pm. You can reach PLS at any of the below phone numbers. Your loved ones and attorneys may also reach us on your behalf at our main line. If our office is closed in observance of a holiday, phone intake hours will be held from 1-4pm the next day.



Main: 617-482-2773
State Prisoner Speed Dial: 9004
County Prisoner Collect Calls: 617-482-4124

Please understand that due to high call volumes, we are often unable to answer every call that we receive. If you are unable to reach us during our phone intake hours, please consider writing to our office instead.

Mail: PLS accepts new intakes by mail at all times. Mail should be sent to:



Prisoners' Legal Services
50 Federal Street, 4th Floor
Boston MA 02110.

In order to ensure that you receive a prompt response with minimal clarification required, please try to write clearly, thoroughly, and to the point. Mail intake letters should include the following, but please feel free to mail PLS a letter even if you do not have all the information:

1. Your identifying information: full name, ID number, location, etc.
2. A brief statement of the issue
3. Any relevant supporting details
4. A description of any attempts you have made to resolve the issue (e.g., sick slips, grievances, speaking with staff members, etc.)

5. A description of any responses or decisions you have received, either approving or denying your requests
6. Any copies of documents or records that may help PLS better understand the issue
7. What you hope PLS can do in order to assist you with the issue

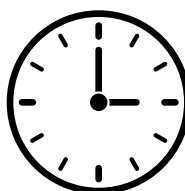
Note: You must open a new intake, either during Monday phone hours or by mail, for each new, unrelated issue for which you seek assistance.

Established Intakes

Once you have initiated a new intake, you should expect a response from PLS. There are several possible responses you may receive. Your assigned advocate may request additional information, advise you to take additional steps to resolve the issue on your own, send informational resources, inform you that we are unable to assist you, etc. Please understand that these responses and our ability to assist with a given issue depend heavily on how time and resource intensive the issue is, the likelihood that efforts will be successful, your individual circumstances, etc.

Please note that each advocate has different time commitments and thus, varying availability to accept phone calls at any given time. We also understand that you as the client may be similarly limited in your ability to call during the above phone hours. For this reason, it is best to communicate early in the intake process how and when to best reach each other.

*Note: If your family member or attorney contacts PLS on your behalf, a new intake will be opened in your name. That being said, because you are our client, you must also contact PLS to indicate that you wish to receive assistance. You may contact PLS by phone during the above phone hours or by mail at:



Phone Hours for Established Intakes

Monday: 9-11 AM

Tuesday-Friday: 9-11am; 1-4 PM

Saturday & Sunday: N/A

Legislative Updates

What Does the PLS Policy Team Do

PLS has greatly expanded its policy work since the passage of the Criminal Justice Reform Act in 2018. However, the office remains focused primarily on individual advocacy and litigation. We have one full time staff person devoted to PLS' policy work, Jesse White, the PLS Legislative and Policy Director. Until this year, Jesse's time was also divided between policy work, pro bono work, PLS Notes, and supervising the PLS Women's Project. Jesse now works with our Executive Director, Lizz Matos, and a policy committee chairperson, Ada Lin, who specializes primarily in medical parole matters and is also working on litigation, to move our policy agenda forward in collaboration with other staff members who fit policy work into their regular case and intake load.

With this limited staffing, PLS is working on 12 bills (summarized more in depth below), with highest priority given to bills to reform medical parole, establish universal baseline conditions standards and end solitary confinement, increase race equity in the prison system, guarantee no cost calls, and end incarceration under Section 35 for substance use disorder treatment. Our priority bills were selected after receiving feedback from incarcerated people about what your priorities are and after engaging in a staff-wide retreat to establish overarching PLS priorities. In determining priorities, we considered: alignment of policies with PLS strategic plan and priority areas, impact on incarcerated people throughout the Commonwealth, client suggestions and input, PLS staff time and resources, and feasibility given the current political landscape.

The legislative process is lengthy and complex, and each bill requires substantial time and attention to move forward. Our work includes organizing for hearings, gathering and drafting testimony, organizing briefings, meetings with legislators and their staff people, organizing and supporting cosponsor drives, lobby days, email and phone call campaigns, and systemic advocacy letters with specific policy related asks. The policy team also closely collaborates with our communications staff to utilize mechanisms of external pressure such as the media to build support and education for our bills. We cannot do all these things equally for every policy priority, so we often must make difficult choices regarding how to prioritize our time to be effective and productive.

We are not community organizers, but we do what is within our capacity and our areas of expertise as a legal services office to support the work of community partners, allies, and our clients.

Although we believe strongly that change in the prison system cannot happen quickly enough, we also know that legislation moves slowly, and requires substantial work and focus to move it forward. We have been immensely grateful for the work that incarcerated people are doing to build support for reform and for the feedback and ideas that we have been receiving from our clients about bill strategy and content. We have seen so much excitement this session to move reform forward, and we are excited ourselves to have the opportunity to work with all of you.

The Legislative Process

As of right now we are amid the 2023-2024 legislative session. The session first convened on January 4, 2023, on the last day of the governorship of Charlie Baker, and is scheduled to continue until January 7, 2025, during the first two years of Governor Maura Healey's first term.

During each two-year legislative session, each bill follows the same process until it is either sent to study, (effectively terminating it for that session), vetoed by the governor, or signed into law. Below is an outline of the legislative process and how you and your loved ones can get involved.

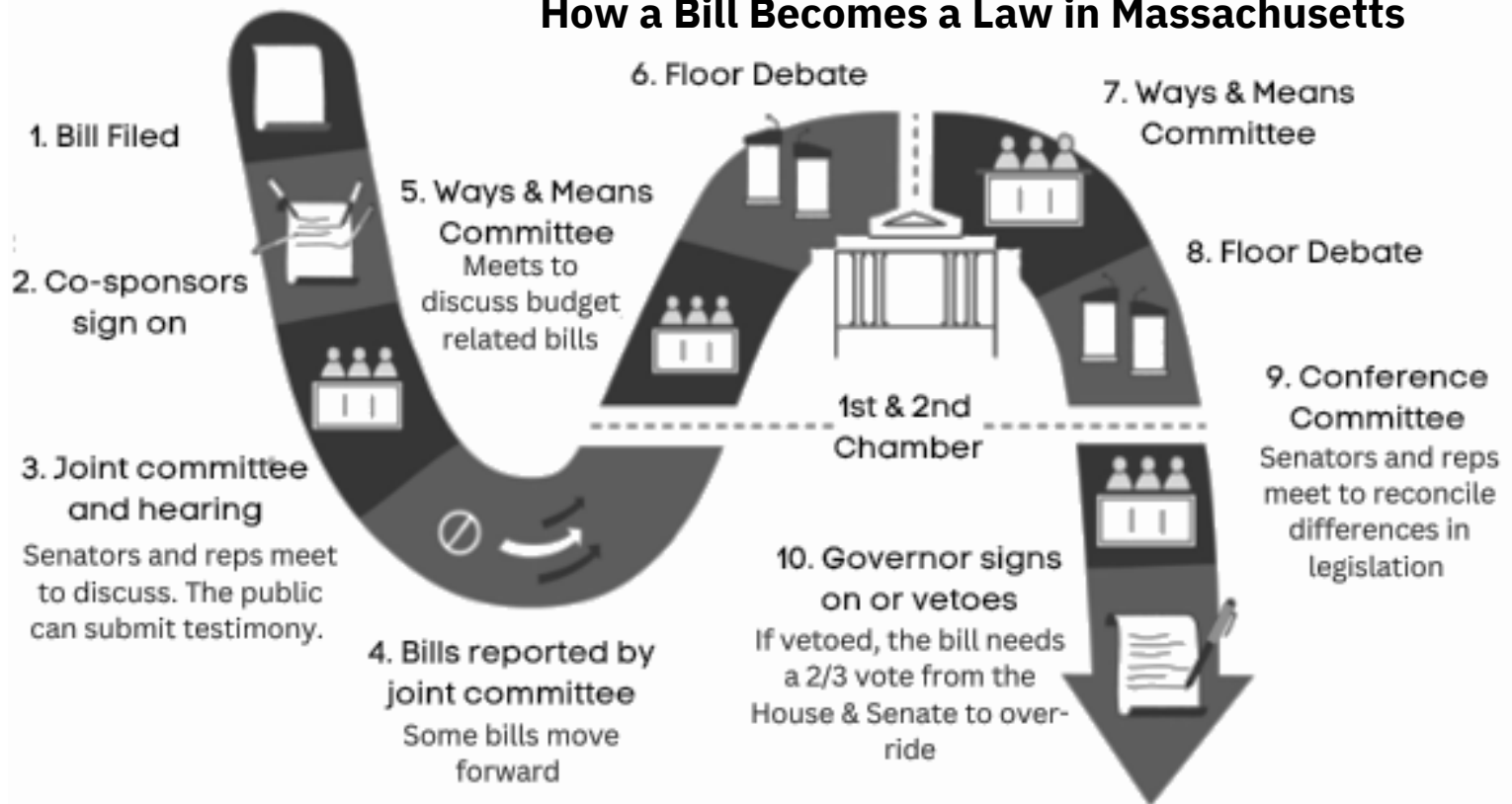
Committee for Public Counsel Services Innocence Program

Have you been convicted of a crime in Massachusetts that you did not commit? If so, please contact the CPCS Innocence Program. They may investigate your case, represent you or assign you a lawyer, or seek forensic testing. They will review your case even if DNA testing is not an option, and even if you pled guilty despite being innocent. To apply, please write or call:

**CPCS Innocence Program 21 McGrath Highway,
2nd Floor Somerville, MA 02143 617-209-5666**

Calls will be accepted Tuesdays and Thursdays.
DOC prisoners may call collect.

How a Bill Becomes a Law in Massachusetts



The Session Starts: Bill Filing

At the start of the session, legislation may be filed by members of the House and Senate and by the Governor. At the same time, the annual general appropriation act (the budget), which originates in the Governor's office, is filed in the House, which considers it first. "Money bills," which raise revenue, cannot be considered by the Senate until approved by the House. With those exceptions, any other legislation may be considered first by either branch.

The bill filing deadline for legislators is the third Friday in January of the first annual session. The Governor may file legislation at any time. Once a legislator's bill is filed in the House or Senate Clerk's office, it is given an initial docket number. The House Clerk and Senate Clerk then assign each bill a bill number and recommend the appropriate Joint Committee to hear the bill. Other legislators may co-sponsor bills any time after filing and before the bill is reported out from its first committee.

Joint Committee Hearing and Executive Session

The Joint Committees must hold a hearing and issue a report on each bill before them.

Hearings are open to the public and all interested parties may attend and address the committee. After the Joint Committee hears a bill, the committee issues its recommendation. Joint Committees are required to report on bills not later than the first Wednesday in February of the second year of the legislative session (for this session, February 2024); however, committees may request and are often granted additional time. The deadline for the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing is later -- the last Wednesday in March.

The committee may meet in an Executive Session open to the public (where only committee members may speak), or it may conduct its business remotely. The committee issues a report to the Clerk's office recommending that a bill "ought to pass," (with or without an amendment adopted by the committee) "ought not to pass," or given a study order.

A study order authorizes the Committee to sit during recess and study this measure and similar ones and file a narrative report of its findings. However, for the vast majority of bills sent to a study order, no further Committee activity takes place, and the bill effectively dies for the session.

The Joint Committee may recommend a small number of changes to a bill; in these cases, the Committee's amendments are attached to the bill, and it retains its original bill number. More frequently, the Joint Committee will redraft the bill entirely and this new draft will be assigned a new bill number by the Clerk. Often a Committee will issue a redraft when it has considered several bills on a particular subject and then issues its own preferred version, which may combine provisions from multiple bills.

If a bill receives a favorable recommendation, the bill moves through the legislative process, which involves three occasions (known as "readings") in each branch in which a bill is considered.

Bill Readings

The First Reading is the first of three mandatory readings in each branch of the General Court. This reading is the account of the Committee Report delivered by the Clerk of the House or Senate. Once a bill receives a favorable report from a committee, it is usually sent to the House or Senate Committee on Steering and Policy or, if it involves state finances, to the House or Senate Ways and Means Committee first.

The Second Reading occurs when the bill is released from Steering and Policy or Ways and Means. It is then placed in the Orders of the Day and the floor of the chamber is opened for debate on the merits of the bill and proposed amendments. A favorable roll call vote or a voice vote is needed to send the bill to the Third Reading.

After a vote of approval for the bill's second reading occurs, it is sent to the Committee on Bills in Third Reading to be reviewed. This committee checks the contents of the bill for legal technicalities and proper citations. After the bill is released by this committee it is read for the third and final time in the chamber where it may again be debated and amended.

Once released from the Committee on Third Reading, the bill is brought before the membership for debate and a vote on "passage of the bill to be engrossed." Once the bill is engrossed, it is sent to the other chamber to repeat the Three Reading process and engrossment.

Conference Committee

Both branches must agree on one version of a bill; if there are differences between the House and Senate bills, the measure can't progress to enactment until the same draft is approved by both chambers. The process of reaching agreement may require the work of a conference committee, a temporary body appointed to resolve differences in legislation between the two branches (Joint Rule 11). Conference committees are appointed by the Speaker of the House and Senate President of both chambers and consist of three representatives and three senators, one of whom from each body must be from the minority party.

A conference committee report is then presented to both branches for approval. The House and Senate may either approve or disapprove the report but may not amend it. In practice, conference committee reports are nearly always approved.

Enactment

Once the House and Senate pass the same versions of a bill, or have both approved a conference committee report, the bill or conference committee report proceeds to an enactment vote. Some bills, such as transfers of state land and bills pledging the credit of the state (also known as bond bills), require a two-thirds majority of the members in a roll-call vote at the enactment stage.

The Governor

Following enactment, the bill is sent to the Governor, who may act on the bill in a variety of ways. The Governor may:

Sign the bill, which becomes law after 90 days, unless it contains an emergency preamble, in which case it becomes law immediately, or if the bill includes a specific effective date.

Veto, which returns the bill to the General Court with his/her reasons for the veto. The legislature may reconsider the bill and can override the veto by a 2/3rds vote in both chambers. The bill then becomes law without the Governor's signature.

The Governor may choose not to sign the bill but let it become law anyway. This occurs if he/she holds the bill for ten days during which time the legislature is in session. If the ten-day period occurs when the Legislature has concluded its session, the bill becomes law only if the Governor signs it (a rule known as the "pocket veto.")

Return the bill to the General Court with recommendation for changes. This action also opens the bill to any additional amendments offered by members. The Legislature can consider the recommendation but may return the bill without agreeing to the proposed changes. If so, the Governor must sign the bill as is, veto it, or let it become law without her signature. If the Legislature does not act on the Governor's proposed amendments, the bill does not become law.

The Governor has the power to line-item veto only with respect to appropriations bills (including bond bills). She may veto or reduce the amount of one or more line-item appropriations or may veto outside sections. The vetoes are returned to the Legislature, which can override them with a 2/3rds majority in both chambers.

Any bills that are not passed by the conclusion of the two-year legislative session are no longer under consideration and must be refiled in order to be considered during the next session.

Formal and Informal Sessions

The Legislature can meet in either a formal or an informal session. Typically, informal sessions are held each Monday and Thursday, with formal sessions scheduled in addition to or in place of an informal session. The scheduling of informal and formal sessions in each branch is determined by the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate.

In an informal session, no roll call votes are taken. Only non-controversial issues on which no legislator voices disagreement are considered and are approved by a voice vote. If any member objects, the matter or motion does not advance. While no attendance is taken, a handful of members usually attend the session in order to object, if necessary, including a representative of the minority party, a representative of the progressive caucus, and members who anticipate that their bills may be approved during the session.

A formal session considers and acts upon reports of committees, messages from the Governor, petitions, orders, enactments, papers from the other branch, matters in the Orders of the Day and any other issues where public debate occurs and roll call votes may be taken. Under Joint Rule 12A, in the first year of the session, formal sessions end on the third Wednesday in November, and in the second year of the session, they end on July 31.

Effective Date of Legislation

Laws become effective no more than 90 days after the Governor's signature. Both the Governor and the Legislature (by a standing vote in each branch) can designate an act as an emergency to take effect immediately. If the Legislature does so, the law takes effect when the Governor signs it. If the Governor designates an act as an emergency, the law takes effect when the Governor's letter of emergency is received by the Secretary of State. The Legislature can also specify a particular effective date for all or part of a law; for example, it can make an act effective two months or six months or one year after enactment.

As you can see, the legislative process is lengthy and complicated. Until bills are reported out of committee, legislative advocacy focuses on developing public education and education within the legislature, building a base of support, and ensuring that committee chairpersons, committee members, leadership, and other legislators hear from constituents and advocates about the bill. Often advocacy centers on organizing a show of force for committee hearings, organizing educational briefings, and other outreach to policymakers and the public. We are anticipating that hearings on most of our priority bills will happen in the fall of this year, and we hope to ensure that incarcerated people's voices are elevated for the hearings.

PLS Notes en Español

PLS Notes está disponible en español. Pídalo si gusta. Además PLS está buscando ayuda de prisioneros quien habla español que pueden servir como contactos con la gente que no hablan inglés. Aceptamos llamadas y cartas en español igual como en inglés.

PLS 2023-2024 Platform and You

PLS is prioritizing 12 bills this session and is providing support for many others. At this stage in the legislative process, all bills have been assigned to committees, which is how we categorize them below.

The Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight had a hearing on June 25th, which included a PLS priority bill to establish a prison and jail construction moratorium. At that hearing, 25 incarcerated people testified in support of the bill via video call, mostly from MCI-Framingham. On July 25th, the Joint Committee on the Judiciary held a hearing at which a number of criminal system reform bills were heard. At that hearing 28 incarcerated people from were able to testify via video call from 5 different prisons. Incarcerated people testified about the moratorium, ending life without parole, ending joint venture, no cost calls, structural racism data and oversight, parole reform, furlough, and the need for educational programming for emerging adults. We will continue to build our community and legislative partnerships to do what we can to normalize incarcerated participation in hearings, and we will be advocating for incarcerated participation in hearings in the fall.

It is likely that legislative hearings will be held in September and October 2023. Between now and September, it is crucial that we coordinate with our partners, such as incarcerated people and their families, so that you can submit testimony on the bills listed below in time. We do not typically get more than one week's notice before a committee hearing takes place, so we need to organize as much as possible over the next several months to ensure we are prepared. Following the list of bills, you will find sample testimony and addresses for where to send them. PLS may not be able to forward testimony from incarcerated people to committee members, so to be sure the committee receives your testimony we ask that you please send it directly to the committee. Ideally you will also send PLS a copy so that we can elevate it with committee members and the public, as much as our capacity allows.

Finally, if you would be willing to speak with a reporter about your testimony, please indicate so when you submit it to PLS. If you like, you may remain anonymous, but please indicate that preference when you contact us.

Mental Health, Substance use and recovery Committee

Section 35 (Senator Friedman and Representative Balser)

An Act ensuring access to addiction services (S.1247 / H.1966) would end the practice of incarcerating men who have not been convicted of any crime but who have been civilly committed for involuntary treatment for alcohol and substance use disorders under M.G.L. chapter 123, section 35 (also known as "Section 35"). PLS is working with the Massachusetts Rights Coalition for Health to support his advocacy.

Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee

Race Data and Oversight (Senator Miranda and Representative Holmes)

*Please note that Rep. Holmes' bill is in the Joint Committee on the Judiciary so please submit testimony to both committees.

An Act creating an independent correctional oversight office to facilitate the recommendations of the Special Legislative Commission on Structural Racism in Correctional Facilities of the Commonwealth (S.1545 / HD. 3646) would create an oversight office focused on addressing structural racism in the prison system.

Medical Parole (Senator Jehlen and Representative Domb)

An Act to ensure appropriate access to medical parole (S.1535 / H.2319) would ensure that the medical parole works as the Legislature originally intended by providing a measure of public decency toward incarcerated people who are terminally ill or permanently incapacitated while ensuring public safety. We are working with Medical Justice Alliance to advocate for this bill.

Parole Reform (Senator Miranda and Representative Sabadosa)

An Act to promote equitable access to parole (S.1544 / H.2398) would improve the efficiency and balance of the parole board, change the standard for parole review to promote appropriate release, account for the rights and needs of persons with disabilities, improve transparency, and reduce the amount of time incarcerated people must wait between parole reviews. It would also significantly reduce re-incarceration for technical (non-criminal) violations of parole and would ensure a meaningful pathway to termination of parole. We are working with the Coalition for Effective Public Safety (CEPS) to advocate for this bill.

Visitation (Senator Miranda and Representative Decker)

An Act to strengthen visitation rights of incarcerated people/An Act to strengthen family and community connection with incarcerated people (S.1541 / H.2314) would enhance public safety, reduce recidivism, and promote rehabilitation by rolling back visitation restrictions created by DOC policy in 2018, and ensuring that visitation is not unreasonably restricted.

Ending Solitary Confinement, Improving Conditions and Programming (Senator Creem and Representative Fluker Oakley)

An Act related to rehabilitation, re-entry, and human rights for incarcerated persons (S.1493 / H.2325) would establish universal baseline standards for conditions of confinement for everyone incarcerated in Massachusetts state prisons, county jails, and houses of correction including a minimum eight hour out of cell time for everyone, no matter what unit you are in or where you are classified, and guaranteed access to good time eligible programming, education, and vocational training. We are working with Massachusetts Against Solitary Confinement (MASC) to advocate for this bill.

Like to Read?

Prison Book Program sends free books to people in prison. You can request books 3 times per year. Write a letter with your committed name, ID#, mailing address and your favorite book genres (for example: mysteries, psychology, nature, sci-fi) to:

**Prison Book Program 1306 Hancock St,
Suite 100 Quincy, MA 02169**

You can expect books within 60-90 days.

**RIGHTs Act (Senator Cyr and Representatives Lewis and Montañó)**

An Act to promote rehabilitation including guaranteed health, treatment, and safety for incarcerated LGBTQI+ People (S.1499) would provide greater oversight, accountability, and support for the rights and privileges of incarcerated LGBTQI+ people. Black and Pink Massachusetts is leading advocacy on this bill.

Elder Parole (Senator Miranda and Representative Sabadosa)

An Act establishing parole review for aging incarcerated people (S.1547/H.2397) would make people ages 55 and older eligible to see the Parole Board after they have served half of their sentence or at least 15 years, regardless of their underlying conviction. The bill would require the parole board to consider the impact of long-term incarceration on elders but would not guarantee an individual's release. Families for Justice as Healing is leading advocacy on this bill.

Parole Supervision Reform (Senator Miranda and Senator Jehlen)

An Act to reform parole supervision in the interest of justice (S.1534 / S.1540) would help ensure that parole conditions are reasonably related to the crime of conviction, that parole is not unduly revoked, that warrants are not issued for suspected violations of parole, and that people have a pathway for terminating parole. We are working with the Coalition for Effective Public Safety (CEPS) to advocate for this bill.

Media and Records Access (Senator Barrett and Representatives Rogers and Decker)

An Act to improve transparency and accountability in correctional facilities (S.1477 / H.2394) would shed light on and bring greater accountability to the correctional system, which is currently marked by opacity and impunity. To increase transparency, this bill ensures that media representatives would have reasonable and confidential access to visitation, telephone, and mail communication with incarcerated people, mandates the collection and public sharing of data on use of force incidents, and ensures that incarcerated people and their legal representatives would have access to video recordings and records of use of force incidents they are involved in.

Media and Records Access (Senator Rausch)

An Act relative to media access and transparency in correctional facilities (S.1582) would increase transparency in the correctional system by ensuring that media representatives have appropriate and reasonable access to visitation, telephone calls, and other communication with incarcerated people.

Joint Committee on the Judiciary**Ending Life Without Parole (Senator Miranda and Representative Christopher J. Worrell)**

An Act to reduce mass incarceration, (S.1045 / H.1821) would allow all people serving life sentences the opportunity for a parole hearing after serving 25 years and would ensure access to restorative justice programming. We are working with the Campaign to End Life Without Parole (CELWOP) to advocate for this bill.

Prison and Jail Construction Moratorium (Senator Comerford and Representative Tyler)

*Please note that Sen. Comerford's bill is in the Joint Committee on State Administration & Regulatory Oversight so please submit testimony to both committees.

An Act establishing a jail and prison construction moratorium (S.1979 / H.1795) would create a 5 year pause on major jail and prison construction and expansion so we can focus on further reducing the number of people in prison, implementing alternatives, and investing in communities. The bill will not prevent essential repairs. Families for Justice as Healing is leading advocacy on this bill.

During the committee hearing in June, 25 incarcerated people testified in favor by video, most from MCI-Framingham. It was a powerful moment that garnered extensive media coverage.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Detention (Senator Gomez and Representative Cabral)

An Act relative to Massachusetts state sovereignty (S.997 / H.1401) would prohibit all Massachusetts entities, including the sheriffs, from entering into or renewing contracts with ICE to rent bed space for immigration detention, and would prohibit all Massachusetts entities from donating state employee time to ICE via 287(g) agreements.

Parole Reform (Senator Miranda and Representative Holmes)

An Act for second look (H.3955) would enable people who have served more than 10-15 years to petition a judge for a sentence reduction, up to and including a reduction to time served. We are working with the Campaign to End Life Without Parole to support this bill.

Joint Committee on Election Laws**Voting Rights (Senator Miranda, Senator Gomez, Representative Uyterhoeven, Representative Tyler, and Representative Domb)**

An Act Relative to Voting Rights Restoration and Proposal for a Legislative Amendment to the Constitution (S.428, S.8, H.724, H.26, H.721) would end the disenfranchisement of voters convicted of felony. This bill is being led by the Democracy Behind Bars Coalition and 3/5ths No More, and it has been reported out favorably by the Elections Committee. Current advocacy is focused on ensuring that the bill is scheduled for a vote in the next Joint Session of the full Legislature. This is currently scheduled for October 2023.

Ending Joint Venture (Senator Miranda and Representative Sabadosa)

In Massachusetts, criminal defendants can be punished if they intentionally assist someone else in committing a crime, even if they are not personally involved in the actual commission of a crime. This legal principle is called "joint venture." To end this practice, An Act to provide sentencing parity in criminal law (HD. 2097) has been filed in the house, but the language is currently being drafted. The organization, We Are Joint Venture, is working to organize people and build momentum to support this bill. To get involved, please send an email to WeRjointventure@gmail.com with the incarcerated person's name, W#, and that they'd like more information about getting involved. PLS does not have the capacity to do this for you so please try to find a friend or family member to help you if possible.

No Cost Calls

No Cost Calls (Senator Creem and Representative Tyler)

An Act to keep families connected/An Act relative to telephone service for inmates in all correctional and other penal institutions in the Commonwealth (S.1494 / H.1796) would provide telephone calls at no cost to people incarcerated in state prisons and county jails and houses of correction, including people held by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

In MA, there are two ways to create new public policy. One is to pass a freestanding bill, and one is to write the policy into the state's budget bill. We have been working with the No Cost Calls/Keeping Families Connected Coalition on getting the policy written into the state's budget bill. The proposed budget includes that all prisons and jails must provide telephone calls at no cost to incarcerated people and their families. The language provides:

Free phone calls for all incarcerated people and their families and friends.

Telephone access may not be reduced, and the Department of Correction and the Sheriffs must ensure adequate infrastructure so that increased demand does not create a decrease in access.

If video and electronic communication services are provided in addition to telephone communication, they must be provided without cost to incarcerated people or their families.

The Legislature passed the budget on July 31, 2023 with an effective date of July 1, 2023 (a date which has already passed). The Governor signed the budget on August 9, but changed the effective date to December 1, 2023 to give DOC and the Sheriffs time to manage vendor contracts and ensure effective implementation. The Legislature now has to adopt this change, modify it, or reject it and then send it back to the Governor's desk. If the Legislature adopts the change proposed by the Governor, the Governor is likely to sign it into law, meaning that calls, email, and video messaging will all be free as of December 1, 2023, and that phone access cannot be reduced below the level where it stands on December 1, 2023. We are not completely across the finish line yet, but we are getting close.

The budget also includes language that should reduce financial exploitation via canteen prices, and should also ensure that canteen provides gender affirming and culturally appropriate items. The canteen provisions include:

Commissary prices cannot be more than 3% over what it costs to purchase the items.

The Department of Correction and the Sheriff must maximize discounts and any other opportunities to reduce the purchase cost of commissary items.

Commissary must carry gender affirming and culturally appropriate items

Non-legislative issues

PLS is also interested in gathering your input and testimony regarding issues that are not being addressed through legislation. We are seeking potential media coverage on these issues and information from incarcerated people would be very helpful. PLS cannot provide individual advocacy on these issues because of a lack of resources, but we would like to find ways to educate the public and policymakers regarding the conditions you are experiencing.

What would you like to learn more about?

PLS wants to hear from you about what you may want included in future Notes. Please write to us to let us know so that we can respond to your needs.

Send letters to
Aaron Steinberg, Prisoners' Legal Services,
50 Federal St., 4th Floor, Boston MA 02110.

PLS is aware that excessive heat is a persistent and intensifying issue. Most prisons and jails are ill equipped to mitigate excessive heat, and there are currently no enforceable regulations to address this issue. New England is one of the fastest warming regions in the world, and increased exposure to extreme heat puts incarcerated populations at a high risk for heat-related illnesses and mortality. We receive many reports each summer about heat conditions and have advocated on the systemic level for temperature regulation and heat mitigation in carceral settings, including our current policy campaign that would create standard temperature conditions by establishing universal conditions of confinement. Although we are working proactively to address heat and other conditions, we anticipate this is going to be a long and difficult fight that will require substantial time and effort to accomplish.

You can support this effort, anonymously or by name, by sharing your story with us and (with your explicit permission) the media, public, legislators, and decision makers in Massachusetts. If you have been affected by excessive heat conditions and would like a copy of our systemic advocacy or to contribute information, please write to Aaron Steinberg using the address on listed on the first page.

Please also send us information regarding:

- Programming and education: What kind of access to education and programming do you have?
- Events: Do you know of events that you would like us to elevate? Please send us the details and we can promote them if they are relevant to PLS' mission.

Providing Testimony

Testimony Worksheet

The following section contains a template that will make it easier for you to provide testimony on legislation that impacts you. Public pressure is a powerful tool to advance legislation and directly impacted people have unique and important voices that should be heard. Please consider sending your testimony to PLS and to the legislative committee where the bill you are testifying on is located. Committee contact info is listed later in the issue.

Opening

Your name, affiliation if appropriate, and address:

Name and number of bill/agenda item (if there is one):

Body hearing testimony (council, committee, meeting, etc.):

Name(s) of chairperson(s) of body:

Your position on item (support/oppose/other) and what you want the body to do:

Main part of argument

Constituency or group you represent (if any):

Do you have a personal connection to the issue?:

Top 3 reasons the body should do what you are asking:

Any data to back up your argument (remember to include a citation to where the data comes from):

A personal story to bring your point home?:

Closing

Thank the body, repeat what you are asking them to do:

Know Non-English Speakers?

PLS hears from a significant number of prisoners for whom English is not their first language, particularly Spanish speakers. Since PLS can have letters translated and to continue communication with prisoners through interpreters, would readers please encourage non-english speakers contact PLS via mail or phone so we can update their language preference? Thank you.

Example Testimony Provided by ACLU

April 27, 2021

Joint Committee on Election Laws

Sen. Barry Finegold & Rep. Daniel Ryan, Chairs

SUPPORT FOR H.76

NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING

Dear Senator Finegold, Representative Ryan, and members of the committee:

The American Civil Liberties Union urges you to give a favorable report to H.76, Proposal for a legislative amendment to the Constitution to provide for no excuse absentee voting. It's time to eliminate perceived barriers to voters casting absentee ballots.

Our constitution provides that “the general court shall have power to provide by law for voting” by individuals who “are absent from the city or town of which they are inhabitants or are unable by reason of physical disability to cast their votes in person at the polling places or who hold religious beliefs in conflict with the act of voting on the day on which such an election is to be held” (Article XLV). Whether this language should be read as restrictive or as an affirmation of the General Court’s plenary lawmaking power is a matter of some debate.

By contrast, these things are quite clear:

First, our voting system needs flexibility in order to work for everyone. Strictly limited voting hours and long lines disenfranchise eligible voters. The elderly and people without ready access to transportation may find it difficult to show up in person. Workers’ schedules conflict with voting hours, parents need to pick up children, families need to eat dinner and put little ones to bed. If they cannot get to the polls during the limited window, they stay home; if they cannot wait, they leave. Our democracy is incomplete without their participation.

Second, the legislature has demonstrated a strong commitment to enable people to vote beyond the strict confines of Election Day. In 2014, the general court enacted reforms to enable voters to cast their ballots early, both in person and by mail. Since then, early voting, and early voting by mail, have been vital and popular features of several successive statewide elections.

Indeed, a number of current legislative proposals seek to expand and more fully integrate mail-in voting in our electoral system, and we applaud and encourage those efforts.

Let us make our constitution as clear as our intention to foster robust democratic participation. Now is the time to erase any constitutional ambiguity about absentee voting, or any form of mail-in voting. Constitutional language intended to expand the franchise via absentee ballot should not be allowed to stand in the way. To ensure that any eligible voter can cast an absentee ballot, the legislature should adopt a belt-and-suspenders approach and advance this constitutional amendment.

Massachusetts would be in good company. Thirty-four states and the District of Columbia already permit any qualified voter to vote absentee or by mail without offering an excuse.

We urge you to move the Commonwealth forward in expanding ballot access for qualified voters, and we offer ourselves as a resource to the Committee as you consider this important proposal.

Contact PLS about the New Transgender Law and DOC Regulations

The Criminal Justice Reform Act requires that prisoners who have a gender identity that differs from the prisoner’s sex assigned at birth be addressed in a manner consistent with their gender identity, provided with access to commissary items, clothing, programming, educational materials and personal property that are consistent with their gender identity, searched by an officer of the same gender identity if the search requires a prisoner to remove all clothing or includes visual inspection of genitals, and housed in a correctional facility with prisoners with same gender identity unless it is certified in writing by the correctional administrator that placement would not ensure the prisoner’s health or safety or that placement would present management or security problems.

Contact Information

To send testimony to Prisoners Legal Services, please write to:

Jesse White and Nikki Louis
PLS Policy Team
Prisoners' Legal Services
50 Federal St., 4th Floor
Boston MA 02110

Joint Committee on Election Laws

Senate Chairs: John F. Keenan (Chair), Adam Gomez (Vice Chair)

24 Beacon St.
Room 413-F
Boston, MA 02133
617-722-1494

House Chairs: Daniel J. Ryan (Chair), Tommy Vitolo (Vice Chair)

24 Beacon St.
Room 433
Boston, MA 02133
617-722-2460

Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery

Senate Chairs: John C. Velis (Chair), Julian Cyr (Vice Chair)

24 Beacon St.
Room 519
Boston, MA 02133
617-722-1415

House Chairs: Adrian C. Madaro (Chair), Michelle M. DuBois, (Vice Chair)

24 Beacon St.
Room 33
Boston, MA 02133
617-722-2060

Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security

Senate Chairs: Walter F. Timilty (Chair), Michael D. Brady (Vice Chair)

24 Beacon St.
Room 213-B
Boston, MA 02133
617-722-1643

House Chairs: Carlos González (Chair), David Biele (Vice Chair)

24 Beacon St.
Room 167
Boston, MA 02133
617-722-2230

You or Someone You Know Might be Eligible for Release on Medical Parole!

You may be eligible if you are serving any sentence (including natural life). To be eligible, you must be either terminally ill (expected to live less than 18 months) or permanently incapacitated (physically or cognitively). In the past year, PLS helped file 8 successful petitions. If you think you might be eligible, please reach out to us and we'll evaluate your situation and whether we can file a petition for you.

Some eligible people are too sick or incapacitated to reach out for help themselves. This is especially true of people who are eligible due to dementia or other cognitive incapacity. To help people in that situation, we count on other folks inside to let us know about them. If you know of someone who may be eligible but may be unable to reach out on their own, please write or call us with their name or ID number and location, so that we may contact them about the possibility for medical parole. You can do so anonymously.

Write to PLS using the address on the front page or call and ask to speak with Ada Lin or Kate Piper about medical parole using the appropriate phone number from the front page.

Joint Committee on State Administration & Regulatory Oversight

Senate Chairs: Nick Collins (Chair), Joan B. Lovely (Vice Chair)

**24 Beacon St.
Room 312-E
Boston, MA 02133
617-722-1150**

House Chairs: Antonio F. D. Cabral (Chair), Chynah Tyler (Vice Chair)

**24 Beacon St.
Room 466
Boston, MA 02133
617-722-2017**

Joint Committee on the Judiciary

Senate Chairs: James B. Eldridge (Chair), Lydia Edwards (Vice Chair)

**24 Beacon St.
Room 511-C
Boston, MA 02133
617-722-1120**

House Chairs: Michael S. Day (Chair), Christine Barber (Vice Chair)

**24 Beacon St.
Room 136
Boston, MA 02133
617-722-2396**

Joint Committee on Ways and Means

Senate Chairs: Michael J. Rodrigues (Chair), Cindy F. Friedman (Vice Chair)

**24 Beacon St.
Room 212
Boston, MA 02133
617-722-1481**

Joint Committee on Ways and Means

House Chairs: Aaron Michlewitz (Chair), Ann-Margaret Ferrante (Vice Chair)

**24 Beacon St.
Room 243
Boston, MA 02133
617-722-2380**

**Hepatitis C in the Counties and
Department of Correction**

We want to hear from you if you are (or were recently) a prisoner in a Massachusetts State Prison or county jail or house of correction and have concerns about Hepatitis C, including if:

- You have asked to be tested for Hepatitis C but have been denied testing; (You can ask for testing by putting in a sick call slip)
- You have Hepatitis C but have not been evaluated recently, or told whether and when you will be treated for it;
- You have Hepatitis C and would like to pursue treatment; or
- You have other questions or concerns about Hepatitis C treatment.

Hepatitis C is an infection spread through contact with infected blood that can lead to liver disease if not appropriately treated. Hepatitis C is a silent disease and many who are infected are unaware of their infection. Individuals who've been incarcerated are at increased risk for this infection. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, risk factors for Hepatitis C include but are not limited to:

- Contact with surfaces, equipment, or objects that have infected blood on them;
- The sharing of needles for injectable drug use;
- Use of tattoo and piercing equipment; or
- Less commonly through sexual intercourse.

If you have questions or concerns about Hepatitis C, please contact Al Troisi at 9004 for state prisoners and (617) 482-4124 for county prisoners or write to Prisoners' Legal Services 50 Federal Street, 4th Floor, Boston, MA 02110.

Litigation Highlights

Below, we provide a list of our active litigation and discuss its status. Please note that each of the cases' descriptions have been shortened so all of the details of the cases are not included. If you would like to learn more about a specific case, please call or write to us.

Briggs, et al. v. Department of Correction, et al.: This class action was filed on December 2015 on behalf of prisoners with hearing impairments who allege that the DOC discriminates against them in virtually all aspects of prison life. In mid-August, the parties proceeded to trial on the issue of DOC's failure to ensure access to emergency notification for deaf and hard of hearing prisoners. Final arguments are scheduled for mid-October.

Converse v. Massachusetts Department of Correction, et al: This is a case filed on October 24, 2018 for damages and injunctive relief brought by a 52-year-old pre-trial detainee with severe mental illness and cognitive disabilities who suffered physical and emotional injury as a result of an assault by correctional officers at Souza Baranowski Correctional Center. The Defendants filed for summary judgment, but before argument could be held, the parties agreed to a settlement.

Diggs v. Mici: In January 2022, on the second anniversary of the events challenged in the lawsuit, PLS and the law firm Hogan Lovells filed a class-action complaint, against the Massachusetts Department of Correction and the officials responsible for overseeing Souza Baranowski Correctional Center during a campaign of systematic, extreme, and unconstitutional violence against more than a hundred prisoners. Currently, Judge Margaret Guzman in Worcester has the case. PLS is in the midst of discovery. We have a dedicated voicemail for questions about the case. We update the outgoing msg every month or two and respond to voicemails left on it.

Foster, et al. v. Mici, et al.: On April 17, 2020, PLS filed a class action complaint and an emergency motion for a preliminary injunction seeking release for incarcerated people throughout the Commonwealth due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following findings of fact issued by the trial court in May 2020, the SJC denied plaintiffs' motion for an emergency preliminary injunction in June 2020, stating that plaintiffs had not established at that time that DOC's efforts to address the COVID-19 emergency are constitutionally inadequate and referred the case back to the trial court for litigation as an emergency matter. After class certification and another outbreak of COVID-19 across multiple DOC facilities in the winter of 2020, PLS filed a second emergency motion for preliminary injunction, which the trial court denied in February 2021. The SJC affirmed the decision in December 2021, and the case was dismissed in March 2023 following cross motions for summary judgment.

Lyons, et al. v. Commissioner of Correction and Stote, et al., v. Commissioner of Correction: These two cases were filed originally by pro-se prisoners to challenge new DOC visiting regulations that went into effect on March 23, 2018, and which require that all visitors be on a pre-approved visitation list. On June 17, 2019, the court denied the Defendants motion to dismiss. Discovery was completed on March 1, 2022, and the parties intend to file for summary judgment.

Medical Parole Cases: PLS continues to be involved in a number of cases challenging implementation of the medical parole statute.

Contribute to PLS Notes

If you have a case that you are litigating or another matter that you are working on that you would like highlighted in PLS Notes, please send submissions to:

Aaron Steinberg 50 Federal St. 4th Floor, Boston MA 02110

Please know that space in PLS Notes is limited, and we cannot promise the inclusion of any submission.

MJA Update

The Medical Justice Alliance (MJA) is a national nonprofit that mobilizes volunteer clinicians to advocate for improved healthcare for incarcerated people. MJA has begun to work with PLS, which is the only statewide legal services office dedicated solely to prisoners' rights in MA. This collaboration has led to the creation of the Medical Justice Alliance-MA Chapter (MJA-MA). MJA-MA has three main goals:

The first is to create a network of healthcare professionals who review and write affidavits (a supporting testimony) for patients who are in custody and have unmet health-related needs, including need for medical parole. Affidavit writing is a process in which physicians review cases and use their findings to support an argument for access to certain treatments or release on grounds of medical parole. In the first step of this process, an attorney identifies a medical concern that their client is facing and requests a medical review by a physician. Next, the MJA pairs one of our physicians to review the case. The physician will then review the case and potentially meet with the client in person or via zoom to clarify any questions. Afterwards, the physician writes and submits a written testimony about the client's medical condition.

The second goal is to help MA hospitals, clinics and providers treat incarcerated patients with the dignity and humanity that they deserve. This includes:

- Educating medical professionals and admins on the experience of being a patient in custody, best practices in caring for them and advocating for their patient rights
- Advocating for improved institutional policies around care of patients in custody, such as protection of confidentiality, ensuring informed consent and allowing for shackles to be removed in cases of critical illness, physical incapacitation or end of life.
- Creating a pathway for medical providers to refer patients they are caring for in custody to PLS for help advocating for medical parole or other medical needs

The third goal is to advocate for state laws and policies that better help carceral patients receive adequate and proper medical care. The current focus is on supporting medical professionals to use their medical expertise and authority to offer testimony in support of bills promoting better treatment of people in the justice system, including the Medical Parole bill and the Section 35 bill.

MJA-MA is still small and growing. In addition to our parent organizations, MJA and PLSMA, we have partnered with organizations like the Anti-Shackling Coalition, and Deeper Than Water and are looking for more collaborations. We also would love to hear from those with lived experience of incarceration about what you feel would be most helpful to improve access to health and healthcare for those inside.

Please feel free to email us at

info@medicaljusticealliance.org or contact Ada Lin using the contact information on the front page if you have any questions or want to hear more information about our work.

PLS Blog

Call for Submissions

PLS continues to seek new ways to further our mission of challenging the carceral system and ending harmful confinement. PLS' new blog will provide an outlet to discuss issues related to policing and incarceration. We believe that fostering a more nuanced and critical understanding of the carceral system will enable communities, organizations, activists, and politicians to better address our country's failed experiment with incarceration. All entries will be considered, but due to staff resources, only a small number will be published on PLS' website, usually twice per month.

Topics may cover a wide range of issues broadly related to policing and incarceration. We also welcome narrative non-fiction, poetry, and visual art. Possible Topics Might Include: Sentencing and/or parole in Massachusetts, Health care in state prisons or jails, Police reform, Prison abolition, Carceral violence, Discrimination (race, gender, LGBTQ+, immigration status, etc.) within prisons and jails.

Submission guidelines

Written pieces can be up to 3000 words. Submissions should be mailed to Aaron Steinberg at the address listed on the front page.

By submitting, you are giving PLS permission to publish your work in print or online. Submissions will be copy edited unless the author requests otherwise. Please note that the blog's priority is to bring attention to systemic issues and not individual cases. Further, if you are currently engaged in litigation or intend to litigate, we recommend that you refrain from discussing details relevant to the case.

REICI Update

PLS' Racial Equity in Corrections Initiative (REICI) is an organization-wide initiative that advocates for equity and the humane treatment of incarcerated people in the Commonwealth. REICI's mission is to build awareness, solutions, and leadership to combat institutional racism and the discriminatory treatment of black and brown people in day-to-day correctional operations through client and legislative advocacy; community building and education; internal efforts designed to increase staff understanding of racial equity work and an anti-racist policy; and litigation.

REICI Survey Report

REICI, in partnership with professors at Boston University and Columbia University, has been aggregating survey data collected from Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) prisoners throughout the DOC. Once this process has concluded, REICI will utilize the findings to generate a report about the various ways that prisoners experience racism in the day-to-day of Massachusetts corrections. In addition to building public awareness around these issues, the report will serve as a guideline for REICI's future initiatives and support our legislative initiative. So far, 547 surveys have been collected.

Intake Hours and Advocacy Plan

Due to the lack of available race data, policy and authority to effectively challenge racism within the DOC, the REICI Team is focusing its efforts on systemic and legislative advocacy and litigation. We will not be able to provide individual advocacy at this time, except BIPOC prisoners in need of assistance in accessing substance use disorder (SUD) treatment and/or Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT).

Clients should continue to contact PLS for general intake concerns. However, issues regarding racially discriminatory treatment should be communicated to REICI with the understanding we will record reports of discriminatory treatment for the following purposes: 1) data collection for future litigation; 2) data collection in support of REICI's legislative priorities; 3) to support clients' self-advocacy.

If you are experiencing racially discriminatory treatment and want your issue to be considered for future litigation (class actions only) and/or would like your experience to be included in our database for future reporting to the IDAREU, please contact an REICI Team Member.

The REICI intake line will begin operations on Thursday, September 7, 2023. This line will operate separately from PLS's general intake line. The Intake line will be operable every Thursday between the hours of 5 and 8 PM (tentative, pending feedback). You will be able to reach the REICI team by using PLS's speed dial number (9004).

Prisoner Empowerment Project (PEP)

This project was created in the early phases of the REICI project in response to prisoner reports (via the REICI survey) that white prisoners are employed more frequently and receive higher rates of pay for correctional jobs compared to prisoners of color. The goal of this project is to provide an equitable source of supplemental income for BIPOC prisoners and their families and to forge a bridge between REICI and prisoners. Volunteers (referred to as PEPs) collaborate with the REICI team to address race-based deficiencies in correctional settings, such as equitable programming, advocacy, and legal educational training.

REICI will be partnering with 22 PEPs from MCI Norfolk, MCI Concord, MCI Shirley, MCI Framingham, SBCC, and OCCC. Anyone interested in becoming a PEP should send the REICI team a resume and a brief message detailing why you would be a good candidate for the project.

RIZE Final Project Plan

Project RIZE's mission is to ensure equitable access to MAT and other culturally appropriate treatments for SUD for Black and Brown prisoners. Through client interviews and individual advocacy, we have identified systemic issues which exist in MAT programs across the DOC and will begin shifting our efforts to focus on addressing these issues. We will begin by tackling 103 CMR 525, the harmful and discriminatory Inmate Substance Abuse Monitoring and Testing policy. While we will continue to provide individual advocacy and client support, these efforts may differ from what we have traditionally provided.

Additionally, we are working to expand our connections with community partners. In expanding these relationships, we seek to provide our clients with proper legal representation for disciplinary and parole board hearings, and to generate a network of reentry services for our clients.

If you are BIPOC and in need of support accessing SUD or MAT, please contact RIZE Coordinator, Kelsea Goodrow.

PLS Vision, Missions, Services, and Client Communications

We want to acknowledge that clients have reached out about difficulties getting through to PLS and receiving the assistance they need. In response to these concerns, we have been meeting regularly to find ways to improve our communication system with clients. We are researching how we could use Corrlinks effectively given the confidentiality barriers, as well as how to collaborate more with clients, family members and liaisons, and ways to be more accessible with limited staffing, increased volume of calls, letters and intakes and increased litigation, particularly with complex class-action lawsuits ongoing.

PLS' current mission reads: "Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts is an anti-racist organization whose mission is to challenge the carceral system through litigation, advocacy, client counseling, partnership with impacted individuals and communities, and outreach to policymakers and the public in order to promote the human rights of incarcerated persons and end harmful confinement." We execute this mission with a focus on five main priority areas: staff assaults, medical and mental health care, conditions of confinement, solitary confinement, and racial equity in corrections.

PLS opens approximately 2000 intakes every year. This volume of intake means that we must prioritize our time in order to be as effective and consistent as possible in the services we provide, and we are often in the difficult situation of being unable to assist with issues, as harmful as they are and as much as we want to help. We offer advocacy and support on a variety of issues such as medical and mental health care, ADA compliance, treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals, staff brutality, solitary confinement, and medical parole, and we offer advice and self-help materials in many other areas.

In addition to PLS' individual advocacy, we advocate on systemic concerns such as poor prison conditions. We have a liaison project wherein each staff person is assigned to two prisons or jails to keep in regular communication with clients and raise conditions concerns with administrators. We are also currently engaged in systemic advocacy related to the long-term nursing care unit at MCI-Norfolk and we are anticipating doing the same at MCI-Shirley. We are also in the process of receiving, analyzing, and organizing data from hundreds of surveys received from clients regarding experiences with race equity and discrimination. The results will help determine priority areas of advocacy in our Race Equity in Corrections Initiative.

Currently, PLS is undergoing a restructuring process, which will have a major impact on the way we approach our advocacy. We wanted to take this opportunity to ask our clients what direction you think PLS should consider taking. Are there certain areas we should focus more on? Conversely, are there areas we should scale back so we can prioritize others? **Please write to Aaron Steinberg at the address listed on the cover page to share your input.**

The nature of advocacy is that it does not always work, and in general individual advocacy is less effective than systemic advocacy in effecting long-term change. Where advocacy has failed and systemic issues have been identified, much of our effort goes into two other areas of our work: impact litigation and legislative and policy work. Systemic impact litigation aims to make a broad change in the system and is very labor intensive. These cases are usually class action or multi-plaintiff cases, though we also do individual litigation, usually related to brutality or for medical parole.

Another way we try to address systemic issues is by working on legal reform through the legislature. In this session, we prioritized 12 bills, which are summarized on page 8. PLS played a major role in pushing for the Criminal Justice Reform Act provisions related to incarceration and we are also advocating to ensure the DOC and counties are properly implementing the law. We have adopted a campaign-oriented strategy, utilizing multiple tools including media work, collaboration with clients and community partners, litigation, and policy work to maximize impact. During PLS' strategic planning process, we identified several important goals for the coming years. We will be working to build and sustain a healthy, inclusive, and effective organization. We will be prioritizing racial justice to reduce or eliminate racial inequities in corrections, we will be working to reduce harm in the system by ensuring respect for civil and human rights, and we will be working to reduce reliance on incarceration overall.

In short, our clients' input and concerns matter to us deeply. We are proud of much of the work we have done and continue to do alongside many of you, but there is always room for improvement, and we want to be as effective as we possibly can be with the resources and limitations we have. Of course, we are always seeking funding to continue the work and expand resources to better address the many issues brought to our attention, but hearing your feedback is crucial to ensuring we are doing that. **Please write to Marisol Carillo, Prisoners' Legal Services, 50 Federal St., 4th Floor, Boston MA, with any input you may have about what PLS should be prioritizing.**

Prisoners' Legal Services of MA
50 Federal Street, 4th Floor
Boston, MA 02110



**PRISONERS' LEGAL SERVICES
OF MASSACHUSETTS**

PLS Notes - Summer 2023