



PLS Notes



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PLS Welcomes Dave Rini

PLS is excited to welcome Dave Rini, Esq as the new Executive Director of Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts! With extensive experience in criminal justice reform and a proven track record of building innovative programs at Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC), Dave brings valuable leadership to our mission of advancing justice and equity in Massachusetts' criminal legal system.

While at BARCC, Dave served as Senior Director of the Systems Advocacy Department. He created and managed innovative programs serving incarcerated individuals, including establishing one of the nation's first volunteer-staffed hotline programs supporting incarcerated survivors of sexual violence.

As Executive Director, Dave will lead PLS's staff members in their work providing individual and systemic impact litigation, direct administrative advocacy, and legislative initiatives. Rini holds a J.D. from Northeastern University School of Law, where he graduated with honors and was a participant in the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project and Domestic Violence Clinic.

Staff Updates

Hannah Roth (she/her) joined Prisoners' Legal Services in February 2025 as a paralegal. Hannah has extensive intake experience after working for Iowa Legal Aid as an intake paralegal for almost four years. Hannah began her journey into the legal field by volunteering for the ACLU of Pennsylvania. Hannah has an undergraduate degree in International Relations from Mount Holyoke College and a paralegal certificate from Villanova University.

Finn Helgesen (he/him) worked as the Brutality Project Paralegal at Prisoners' Legal Services throughout the spring and summer of 2025. In this role, he served as a passionate advocate for incarcerated individuals, specializing in cases of staff assault in state prisons and county jails. He has been thrilled to support the crucial services provided by PLS.

PLS Intake Overview

PLS serves people incarcerated in all state prisons, county jails, and houses of correction in Massachusetts. We provide assistance through individual advocacy, systemic advocacy, and litigation.

Our individual intake work aims to help clients get their immediate needs met while our systemic advocacy work aims to reform the systems and structures causing the problems. Both sides of this coin are important, but this means difficult choices regarding where to focus our time and resources. We are a small office, and we receive approximately 1500- 2000 new requests for services every year. Consequently, much of our advocacy is collaborative and may require you to advocate for yourself, sometimes with assistance from us, often in the form of self-help materials.

The list of materials on the next page is intended to give you a better idea of what materials we have available as you reach out for our help. We welcome your calls during our phone intake hours and letters requesting any materials that you might need. However, the combined total of the listed materials is hundreds of pages and cannot be sent in bulk. So, when you request materials, please limit your request to materials that you need for help with something that you are working on right now.

Our focus areas for individual advocacy are guided by PLS' priorities together with where individual advocacy can be most effective and where there are laws or established court decisions supporting our clients' position. Below we provide a short overview of where we usually advocate and where we don't advocate except in exceptional circumstances.

Areas in which we often do individual advocacy:

- Medical and mental health care,
- Access to Medications for Assisted Treatment (MAT) for substance use disorder,
- Access to accommodations for disabilities,
- Investigations of staff assaults on incarcerated individuals,
- Medical parole,
- Language access,
- Individuals held in custody after their release date.

- With respect to living conditions such as rodent infestations and broken heating or cooling systems, we do institution-wide advocacy in response to reports of such problems, and we encourage you to report them to us by using the intake process described below.

Areas where we do not advocate/that are outside of our scope:

- Criminal legal problems and criminal appeals,
- Probate matters,
- Disciplinary issues,
- Failure to protect (assault by other incarcerated people),
- Parole hearing representation
- Most Classification problems
- Investigations into deaths of incarcerated people

We still encourage you, however, to write or call PLS to report these problems because we may have informational materials or pro se legal resources that could help.

When you write to request materials, even in areas where we can't help you individually, please tell us anything you would like us to know to inform systemic advocacy work.

PLS systemic advocacy fights for the rights of incarcerated individuals through strategic litigation, class action lawsuits, and legislative and administrative advocacy. We challenge unconstitutional conditions, discriminatory practices, inadequate medical care, and brutality in Massachusetts correctional facilities. Our legislative advocacy is rooted in client feedback, and we prioritize a couple of bills each year that we collaborate on with community partners and clients.

¿Habla Español?

PLS Notes está disponible en español. Solicítelo si lo desea. Además, PLS busca la ayuda de presos hispanohablantes que puedan servir de contacto para quienes no hablan inglés. Aceptamos llamadas y cartas tanto en español como en inglés. Utilice la información de contacto de la página principal.

PLS 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 during this time. If our office is closed in observance of a holiday, phone intake hours will be held from 1-4pm the next day. **We accept intakes related to brutality at any time.**



Calls From Community: 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. A description of any attempts you have made to resolve the issue (e.g., sick slips, grievances, speaking with staff members, etc.)
4. What you hope PLS can do to assist you with the issue

Our intake line is also open on Thursday evenings from 5pm-8pm for calls related to our Racial Equity in Corrections Initiative (REICI), which focuses on ending the racist treatment of Black, Indigenous, and people of color incarcerated in Massachusetts.

Know Non-English Speakers?

PLS hears from a significant number of people for whom English is not their first language. Since PLS can have letters translated and communicate with prisoners through interpreters, please encourage non-English speakers to contact PLS via mail or phone so we can update their language preference.

Please note: We do not accept intakes through Corrlinks because it is not protected by the attorney-client privilege. If you write to us through Corrlinks with an intake matter, we will not respond and we will not forward your intake to an advocate. You must use our mail and phone intake channels for intake issues.

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.

If your family member or attorney contacts PLS on your behalf during intake hours on Mondays, a new intake will be opened in your name. However, because you are our client, you must also contact PLS by phone or mail to indicate that you wish to receive assistance.



Phone Hours for Established Intakes:

Monday: 9-11 AM

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

Materials Available for Request

This section contains a list of documents that we can send to you to assist in advocacy for issues you are facing. In certain instances, sharing one or multiple documents may be the extent of the advocacy we're able to provide. In other instances, a document may be one part of more extensive advocacy if your issue falls into one of our issue areas listed on page 2 and you've opened an intake with us.

Translations Available:

[S] = Spanish, [P] = Portuguese

All documents can be translated to nearly any language upon request.

Legal Rights & Procedures:

- Bar Referral Services [S]
- Cert Action Challenge to D Report
- Clemency package 2024
- Commutation Info Sheet **(new)**
- CORI Damages Complaint
- Dissatisfied With Criminal Attorney [S]
- Interstate Agreement on Detainers
- Law Libraries and Photocopying
- Legal Procedure Self Help Manuals for prisoners
- Lifetime civil commitment [S]
- Obtaining/Correcting Records [S]
- Personal Injury Information and 258/60L sample letter
- Privileged Mail – DOC Standard Operating Procedure
- Pro Se Package [S]
- Program Engagement Strategy (PES) and Loss of Privileges Due to Refusal to Participate in Programming
- Request to Transfer to County, other state or federal prison
- Sample Fair Information Practices Act request to DOC

Criminal Justice:

- Classification [S]
- Clearing MA warrants
- Disciplinary Hearing instructions for State Prisoners
- DNA Database Law
- Earned Goodtime information change in law from 2019 [S]
- Innocence Claims
- Jail Credit [S]
- Three Strikes info sheet

Medical & Healthcare:

- Claims for Inadequate Medical Care
- Complaint for Constitutionally Inadequate Medical Care
- CPCS Letter [S]
- Dental care problems [S]
- Health Care Proxy [S]
- Medical Grievance and Advocacy
- Medical Parole Questionnaire [S]
- Pregnancy Rights
- Right to Refuse Medical care/Hunger Strikes

Civil Rights:

- Censorship/Reading Materials Access
- Immigration Project Flyer [S]
- Immigration Services [S]
- Indigent Mail
- Legislative facts sheets
- Legislative Process/Facts
- LGBTQ Know-Your-Rights Guide **(new)**
- PLS Legislative Priorities Information
- PREA information, State and County
- Reasonable Accommodations information sheet and 103 DOC 408
- Religious Diets [S]
- Translation/Interpretation Services in DOC [S, P]
- Treatment of Transgender people
- Voting Rights

Reentry & Support:

- Assistance for Incarcerated Veterans
- Community Justice Support Centers
- Parole Manual [S]
- Personal Spending letter and 103 DOC 405 SOP
- Reentry Coming Home Directory
- Representation at Parole Hearings

Prison Conditions:

- Canteen information [S, P forthcoming]
- DOC Institutional Grievances [S]
- End Solitary Packet 2024
- Enemy Notification [S]
- Explanation of Where Prisoner May Be Held [S]
- Failure to Protect Materials [S, P]
- Unsanitary conditions
- Verbal Harassment [S, P]

Women's Issues:

- Pregnancy Rights
- Women's Decarceration Report
- Women's Project Report

A Message from Dave Rini

My name is Dave Rini, and I am honored to introduce myself as the new Executive Director of our organization. I joined the team in early 2025, and I wanted to take this opportunity to connect with each of you directly. Before stepping into this role, I served as the Senior Director of the Systems Advocacy Department at the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC), where I worked to create meaningful changes in how institutions respond to and prevent sexual violence. Over the past decade, I've dedicated my career to systems-focused advocacy, policy reform, and nonprofit leadership within the social justice community. I hold a J.D. from Northeastern University School of Law, where I graduated with honors.

What excites me most about joining this organization is the opportunity to work alongside all of you. I believe deeply in the power of community, education, and advocacy to transform lives and systems. The barriers you face are the result of systemic failures, and I am committed to addressing these challenges head-on. In the coming months, I look forward to listening and learning from your experiences, insights, and ideas. Your voices are essential to guiding our work and ensuring our programs and advocacy efforts address your most pressing needs. We are here to support you, to amplify your voices, and to work together toward a more just and equitable society.

Every person deserves dignity, respect, and the opportunity to rebuild their lives. My door is always open, and I welcome your thoughts, questions, and feedback as we move forward together.

With hope and solidarity,
Dave

Litigation Spotlight

Caron et al. v. Coppinger

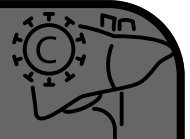
On April 23, 2025, PLS filed a federal class action lawsuit, challenging the Essex County Sheriff's refusal to provide medically necessary treatment to people in his custody with Hepatitis C. Hepatitis C is a viral infection that can cause liver failure, cancer, and death, as well as a host of other serious medical conditions like kidney disease, diabetes, brain disorders, and heart problems. Although safe, effective, and widely available medications (direct-acting antiviral medications, or DAAs) for Hepatitis C have existed for more than a decade, Sheriff Kevin Coppinger denies this treatment to nearly everyone in Essex jails, forcing hundreds of people each year to endure unnecessary and potentially life-threatening physical consequences and suffering from a curable disease. The lawsuit claims that this constitutes deliberate indifference to the serious medical needs of people in Essex jails, in violation of the 8th and 14th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

This lawsuit comes seven years after PLS secured a landmark settlement requiring the Massachusetts Department of Correction to provide DAA treatment to people with Hepatitis C in state prisons.

Based on evolving medical consensus and litigation in other states, Caron goes further than PLS's DOC case by seeking DAA treatment regardless of disease stage and pushing for treatment for pretrial detainees.

Named Plaintiffs Nathan Caron and Adam Cochrane sought Hep C treatment from Middleton House of Correction in Essex County for over a year prior to filing. The lawsuit seeks a court order requiring timely treatment for all people with Hepatitis C in Essex jails, routine testing upon admission, and connection to community care upon release. We filed our motion for class certification and supporting memorandum at the same time as the Complaint and are waiting for the Defendant's response.

If you have Hepatitis C



and are incarcerated at the Middleton House of Correction, Essex County Pre-release and Re-entry Center, or the Women in Transition Facility, please call PLS and ask to speak to the Hepatitis C team or write us a letter at the address on the front page.

Diggs v. Mici

In January 2022, PLS and the law firm Hogan Lovells filed a class-action complaint against the Massachusetts Department of Correction, numerous correctional officers and supervisors, 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 that followed an assault on three correctional officers. The lawsuit highlights that brutality is not merely perpetuated by a few “bad apples.” Rather, it is perpetuated by a broken system that not only fails to rehabilitate incarcerated people but actively harms them physically and psychologically. The complaint alleges that high-level DOC officials authorized and encouraged the violence against prisoners. The lack of oversight and accountability in DOC prisons fosters a culture of violence, particularly towards Black and Brown people. The case is in federal district court in Worcester before Judge Guzman.

On October 3, 2024, the Court certified both a damages class and an injunctive class consisting of all prisoners at SBCC who were subject to a use of force during the events of January and February 2020. Plaintiffs estimate that about 160 people fit this definition. The Court also certified a subclass of all Black and Latinx prisoners who were subject to a use of force during the class period; in addition to the excessive force claim brought by all class members, the subclass has an equal protection claim alleging that Black and Latinx prisoners were targeted for particularly harsh treatment. The parties engaged in more than two years of extensive and hard-fought discovery. We obtained almost 100,000 pages of documents and hundreds of hours of video footage depicting uses of force and other events over the monthlong class period; we took 14 depositions; and we filed two motions to compel discovery.

In May 2025, after many months of negotiations, the parties reached an agreement to settle the case, which was preliminarily approved by the Court on May 30, 2025. It provides for substantial payments to class members; policy reforms aimed at reducing excessive force and racial discrimination by corrections officers; and attorneys’ fees for PLS. Notice has been mailed to class members. The Court has set a hearing date for October 25, 2025, at which to consider final

Diggs v. Mici Settlement Information

Only class members may submit claims and receive money from the settlement. A class member is anyone incarcerated at SBCC who was subjected to a use of force from January 10, 2020, to February 6, 2020. Class members must submit a claim form so that it is received by September 4, 2025, in order to be considered for payment; requests to be excluded from the settlement must also be received by this date.

If you believe you are a class member and have not received a claim form, or have questions about the case, write to:

SBCC Settlement c/o Analytics Consulting LLC,
PO Box 2006,
Chanhassen MN
55317-2006

Or send an email to:

SBCCSettlement@noticeadministrator.com

or call [866-910-8320](tel:866-910-8320)

There is also information about the case at <https://sbccsettlement.com>. Do not delay, as claim forms must be received by September 4, 2025, to be considered.

Linsenmeir v Springfield Police Department, et al.

Along with the ACLU of Massachusetts and Goulston & Storrs, PLS represents the family of Madelyn Linsenmeir, who died while in custody of the Hampden County Sheriff’s Department on October 7, 2018. Her death received national attention after her family published a heart-rending obituary online describing Ms. Linsenmeir’s struggles with opioid addiction. PLS became involved when the Sheriff’s Department initially refused to allow Ms. Linsenmeir’s family to visit her as she lay dying in the hospital.

Ms. Linsenmeir was arrested in Springfield on September 29, 2018, then transferred to the Hampden County women’s facility in Chicopee, where she was denied medical care for nearly four days despite her complaints of chest pain and difficulty breathing and her clearly deteriorating medical condition; staff told her it was her own fault for using drugs.

Litigation Overview

Only after staff discovered her unresponsive on the floor of her cell did they send her to the hospital, but it was too late. She died of a heart infection common to IV drug users a few days later.

We filed the Complaint alleging wrongful death and constitutional violations on March 5, 2020. The Defendants filed a motion to dismiss, which the court denied. After several years of exhaustive fact and expert discovery, the family settled its claims against the City of Springfield and its police officers in April of 2024, for \$900,000. Also in April, the federal court in Springfield denied the Sheriff's Department's motion for summary judgment. The court ruled that the plaintiff had presented sufficient evidence for a jury to find that the Department violated the Americans with Disabilities Act by discriminatorily denying Ms. Linsenmeir medical treatment based on her opioid use disorder, a disability under the ADA. The court also denied summary judgment to a Sheriff's Department nurse, ruling that a jury could reasonably find she violated Ms. Linsenmeir's 8th Amendment right to adequate medical care.

After several postponements, trial was set for March 2025. On the Friday afternoon before the Monday the trial was to begin, Hampden County settled the claims against the county for a significant amount of money and agreed to numerous policy changes aimed at ensuring that all women entering the Women's Correctional Center receive proper medical care. The changes include improving intake screening and assessment, documentation of medical complaints, training of medical staff on differential diagnosis, training on substance use withdrawal; establishing detailed minimum requirements for monitoring symptoms and vital signs of people undergoing withdrawal from different substances, and requiring daily wellness checks of all incarcerated people for the first 72 hours of their incarceration; requiring a warm handoff for any person on medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) to a MOUD provider in the community upon release; and requiring access to all three types of MOUD for all people entering HCSD with OUD.

The following section is a comprehensive overview of PLS' litigation docket.

Battle, et al. v Sheriff, Bristol County: This is a class action challenge to solitary confinement practices at the Bristol County House of Correction and Jail. We are co-counsel with the Mental Health Legal Advisor's Committee. The complaint was filed in 2018, on behalf of all Bristol prisoners who have a mental illness. Plaintiffs challenged the failure to exclude prisoners with mental illness from segregation; the failure to take mental illness into account in the disciplinary process; and to provide adequate mental health care, particularly to prisoners in segregation. As a result, the suicide rate in Bristol County was alarmingly high, twice that of other Massachusetts county correctional facilities and three times the suicide rate for jails nationally. On June 29, 2023, the Superior Court approved the Settlement Agreement. Among other things, the Agreement calls for appointment of an independent settlement monitor. The monitor issued her first report on December 15, 2024, finding numerous instances of partial compliance and noncompliance, and noting BCSO's failure to provide required documentation. A second monitoring visit, taking place from March 11-15, 2025, appeared to show progress in some aspects of mental health care but ongoing violations of settlement provisions governing restrictive housing. Plaintiffs' attorneys are planning to pursue areas of noncompliance through the dispute resolution procedures set forth in the Agreement including, if necessary, resort to the Court.

Briggs, et al. v. Department of Correction, et al.: This class action was filed in December 2015 against the Department of Corrections (DOC) on behalf of prisoners with hearing impairments, alleging discrimination in prison programming, healthcare, communications, emergency systems, disciplinary hearings, and work assignments. We co-counseled this case with Wilmer Hale and the Washington DC Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights.

In 2018, a settlement agreement was reached, resulting in deaf class members receiving access to ASL interpreters for medical appointments and others receiving hearing aids that had been previously denied.

In 2019, an additional settlement required DOC to provide ASL interpreters, hearing aids, videophones, captioned telephones, vibrating watches/pagers, and other accommodations, with an independent monitor overseeing compliance.

The sole unresolved issue from 2019 was emergency notifications. In January 2024, Judge Stearns ruled DOC violated federal disability laws by failing to provide emergency alarm access. DOC's May 2024 remedial plan includes immediate pagers for all class members and visual alarm installation over three years. As of March 2025, approximately 650 individuals have received pagers, with visual alarm installation nearly complete except for Shirley and Bridgewater facilities, which will finish this summer.

Cheek v. Massachusetts Parole Board: This suit was filed on November 30, 2021, on behalf of 10 individuals who have been successfully on parole for many years. Eric Tennen of Swomley and Tennen was initially the lead counsel in the case, with PLS as co-counsel. The Legislature understood that not everyone on parole needs to remain under parole supervision for the full length of their sentence. Thus, it enacted a statute authorizing the Parole Board to terminate parole if it is in the "public interest." See G.L. c. 127 § 130A. Although this statute existed on paper, it was ignored in reality. The suit contends that the Parole Board has effectively repealed § 130A by adopting a blanket practice of denying termination in virtually all cases. Plaintiffs asked the court to order the Board to conduct timely and meaningful reviews of petitions to terminate parole.

In response to the suit, the Board agreed to draft regulations governing termination proceedings and conducted a public hearing in September of 2022 at which dozens of people on parole and their families gave compelling testimony. The board issued final regulations in December of 2022 that set up a process for people to apply for termination and criteria for the Board to consider in making termination decisions. Since the regulations have gone into effect, the Board has terminated parole for more than 20 individuals. In order to give people on parole more time to prepare parole-termination applications, and the Board more time to schedule and hold hearings on these applications, the court has stayed the case until May 30, 2025. The parties have now negotiated a settlement agreement that embodies the new regulations.

John Doe 1-3 v Massachusetts Parole Board: In *Crowell v. Massachusetts Parole Board*, the Supreme Judicial Court, adopting the reasoning of an amicus brief filed by PLS, ruled that the Americans with Disabilities Act requires the parole board to provide accommodations to incarcerated people with disabilities, including, where appropriate, a professional evaluation of how the disability may influence the person's behavior, and assistance in locating community supports and services that might allow them to live successfully in the community. Since the board failed to apply the *Crowell* decision to other people seeking parole, PLS, along with the Mental Health Legal Advisors and the Disability Law Center, filed a class action complaint in June of 2023 on behalf of all prisoners with mental disabilities who have been discriminated against by the Parole Board. The suit alleges that their opportunity to be released on parole is significantly diminished by the Board's ongoing failure to provide accommodations at all stages of the parole process.

The Board filed a motion to dismiss but has indicated to us that they are committed to putting into place procedures that will provide people with disabilities the accommodations they need. On April 17, 2024, the Court denied the Board's Motion to Dismiss but transferred the case from Suffolk to Middlesex County. The parties subsequently agreed to a framework for negotiations and filed a joint motion to stay the litigation, which the Court allowed. Plaintiffs have provided the Board with proposed revised ADA policies and received comments back from the Board. The parties have had multiple productive settlement conferences, most recently on May 8, 2025.

John Does 1-10 v Commissioner of Correction, et al.: This class action represents men civilly committed under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 123, Section 35 for alcohol or substance use disorders who are placed in correctional facilities instead of treatment centers due to lack of community beds. The Court certified two sub-classes: men at MASAC (operated by DOC) and men at Stony Brook (operated by Hampden County Sheriff). About 2,000 men are incarcerated annually under Section 35. The Goodwin law firm serves as co-counsel with PLS.

The legal claims allege: (1) gender discrimination since only men go to prison while women receive community treatment; (2) disability discrimination under the ADA for subjecting men to stigma and punishment instead of treatment; and (3) substantive due process violations for unnecessary incarceration in counter-therapeutic environments.

Since filing, defendants made changes including transferring MASAC operations to clinical providers and removing correctional officers, though correctional authorities retain ultimate control. In December 2021, the court ruled Section 35 not facially unconstitutional because incarceration wouldn't be needed if DPH created sufficient treatment beds.

Discovery closed in January 2025 after expert tours and depositions. Defendants filed motions claiming mootness due to DPH approval of facilities and seeking class decertification due to missing Hampden plaintiffs. Plaintiffs moved to substitute new representative plaintiffs.

On December 23, 2024, the Governor signed amendments requiring DPH to create sufficient non-correctional beds so MASAC can close by December 31, 2026. A settlement was reached with Hampden County limiting use of isolation and restraints. On March 25, 2025, the Court dismissed the case against DOC and other state defendants as moot due to the new law. The legal team plans to appeal.

Evelyn et al. v. Jenkins et al.: PLS, along with the Boston College Law School Civil Rights Clinic and the law firm Holland & Knight, filed a class action complaint on July 1, 2024 on behalf of all people incarcerated in a Behavior Assessment Unit ("BAU") at any state prison or in the Secure Adjustment Unit (the "SAU-IV") at Souza Baranowski Correctional Center. The SAU-IV and BAUs are the in the same prison units that DOC used to call "restrictive housing," "special management," and "segregation."

The Complaint alleges that DOC chose to rename its Restrictive Housing Units in order to circumvent the text and intent of the Commonwealth's Criminal Justice Reform Act of 2018 ("CJRA"), which, among other things, cabined the well-documented harms of restrictive housing by guaranteeing certain visitation, canteen, property, disciplinary, and procedural rights to those forced to live there.

This lawsuit challenges the DOC's refusal to grant people in the SAU-IV/BAUs the substantive and procedural protections afforded to prisoners in Restrictive Housing under the CJRA, the due process and equal protection clauses of our state and federal constitutions, GL c. 127 section 32 (the "kindness statute"), the DOC's own DSU Regulations under 103 CMR 421, and the Massachusetts Administrative Procedure Act under G.L. c. 30A, et seq..

The Defendants have filed an Answer. After significant discussion, the parties reached agreement about the definition of the class and submitted an unopposed motion for class certification, which included over a dozen affidavits from men describing life in these units. On April 15, 2025, the court certified the class and both sides have served written discovery requests.

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 write to Aaron Steinberg using the contact info on the first page. Please note that space in PLS Notes is limited, and we cannot promise the inclusion of any submission.

Gaskins, et al. v. Commissioner of Correction: This is a case filed pro-se by PLS Board member Tony Gaskins and two other men challenging their confinement in the highly restrictive Behavior Assessment Unit (BAU) at MCI Concord. On February 8 and 12, 2024, Superior Court judge Shannon Frison issued Orders stating the BAU was a "work-around" to the protections provided by the Criminal Justice Reform Act to individuals held in restrictive housing, and ordered DOC to release all individuals who had been held in that unit (and any other "segregated" unit for more than 90 days. DOC appealed and sought a stay pending appeal from a Single Justice of the Appeals Court.

PLS filed an Amicus brief opposing the stay and participated in the oral argument on March 26, 2024. Although the Single Justice stayed the injunction, he ruled that "the plaintiffs have presented serious issues concerning the conditions in the Concord BAU and the review process for BAU placement. The Superior Court judge . . . issued a flawed preliminary injunction . . . but with future factual submissions or an evidentiary hearing, a properly crafted preliminary injunction may well be proper."

The Superior Court subsequently denied plaintiffs' renewed motion because they are no longer confined in a BAU. Plaintiffs appealed, and argument was held before the Appeals Court on January 6, 2025.

PLS submitted an amicus brief. On April 15, 2025, the Court ruled that the preliminary injunction was not justified because the plaintiffs had not submitted affidavits sufficient to establish that the BAU qualified as "restrictive housing" as defined by the CJRA. Accordingly, it suggested that the issue required more factual development, which can be done in the class action case described above, Evelyn, et al, v. Commissioner of Correction, that raises similar issues to those presented in Gaskins. Significantly, the Court also ruled that the Gaskins plaintiffs had shown that the conditions in the BAU imposed on them an "atypical and significant hardship" that triggering due process protections. The remedy for DOC's failure to provide due process will also be addressed in Evelyn et al. v. Jenkins et al, which was discussed on page 10.

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.

PLS filed amended complaints in July challenging several specific provisions of the regulations: (1) DOC has capped the number of visitors that each prisoner may receive, and has tiered the caps by security level, with prisoners in maximum security facilities only permitted 5 visitors, medium only 8 and minimum only 10; (2) DOC is only permitting prisoners' to update their visitation lists twice per year; (3) visitors are only permitted to see one prisoner facility wide, and (4) the pre-authorization process is unduly burdensome, intimidating, and has made prisoners' family members fearful for the security of their personal information. MA has now become one of the most restrictive states in the country with regard to visitation. The visitation caps punish prisoners who have maintained robust community connections vital to rehabilitation and re-entry and bar numerous visitors without any reasonable justification. Plaintiffs contend that the restrictions violate constitutional and Massachusetts law because they unreasonably limit visitation without any rational basis, and are arbitrary and capricious. All cases challenging these regulations were consolidated in Suffolk County.

On June 17, 2019, the court denied the Defendants' motion to dismiss. On May 22, 2024, after discovery was complete, the Court ordered the parties submit a status report, but did not send notice to PLS or any pro se litigants. The Court then dismissed the case in July of 2024 due to failure to provide a status update. PLS promptly filed a Motion to Vacate Dismissal given the lack of notice for the required status update. Although the Court acknowledged that it did not send proper notice for the required status update, it nonetheless dismissed the case. It reasoned that several Plaintiffs have either been released or are no longer interested in pursuing this action, and that there have been significant changes in the DOC's visitation practices in the years since the case was filed, including post-COVID modifications and the availability of video visitation, that together present a different set of facts than existed in 2018. Notably, the Court specifically ruled that plaintiffs may bring a new action challenging current visitation practices.

PLS is preparing a new case focused on addressing additional visitation practices that are currently of greatest concern to people who are incarcerated and their visitors.

JH v. Commissioner of Correction: This is a certiorari action in the Superior Court on behalf of JH, a 66-year-old Spanish-speaking man with advanced Alzheimer's dementia challenging the Commissioner's denial of JH's petition for medical parole, which PLS had filed on his behalf in August of 2024. In the denial, the Commissioner disregarded DOC's own medical director's finding that JH has very severe cognitive decline (7 out of 7 on the Global Deterioration Scale) and essentially ignored other evidence of JH's profound cognitive incapacitation. The Commissioner additionally faulted JH for symptoms of his disability—such as non-compliance with medication (even though JH can't give informed consent), and an incident where he hit his hand against the glass of his cell—as well as for his non-participation in prison programming, which was never actually available to JH due to the language barrier.

In addition to requesting a ruling that the Commissioner's decision was arbitrary and capricious because it disregarded JH's cognitive incapacitation, we sought a declaratory judgment that the Commissioner violated the Americans with Disabilities Act by holding symptoms of JH's disabilities against him without evaluating whether he could be accommodated with appropriate supports and services on parole.

PLS also sought a declaratory judgment that the Commissioner violated Equal Protection Clause by using JH's inability to speak English as a proxy for race to exclude him from medical parole.

The Commissioner twice denied requests for JH to be medically paroled but on June 10, 2025, he granted a third request. JH remains incarcerated currently as DOC seeks to place him in a nursing facility rather than in his family's home where loved ones can care for him.

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).

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.

If you think you might be eligible, write or call PLS using the information on the front page.

Canteen Pricing

PLS is aware that canteen prices were raised as of July 1, 2025. As many of you know, as of October 31, 2024, a new law is in effect that canteen prices cannot exceed 95% of market prices found at major retail stores in the commonwealth. The law also requires facilities and vendors to pass along savings from bulk purchasing and prohibits them from receiving commissions or financial incentives from canteen contracts. Additionally, facilities must now provide gender-affirming and culturally appropriate items.

Keefe Corporation, the current vendor, maintains that their prices already comply with the new law.

At least one lawsuit has been filed against the Commissioner of Corrections regarding compliance with the new pricing requirements, and a motion for an emergency temporary restraining order to address the price increases was recently submitted and is pending before the Court.

If you believe that canteen prices are too high and violate the new law, it's important to take action through proper channels. You should first submit a formal grievance and complete all levels of appeal in the grievance process. This step is crucial as it preserves your right to file a lawsuit later if necessary.

Several groups continue to work on this issue. PLS' Race Equity in Corrections Initiative (REICI) is focusing specifically on access to culturally appropriate items. Senator Creem's office is actively monitoring the implementation of the new law, and legal advocates are currently seeking outside firms to pursue litigation on this issue. While PLS does not have a lawsuit pending right now, we will continue to monitor these developments and provide updates as new information becomes available.

Correcting DOC's Documentation of Your Racial Identification

PLS is aware that many incarcerated people have had problems with DOC documents misidentifying their race and with being unable to get DOC to fix the mistaken identification. In the course of the Diggs v. Mici class action litigation undertaken by our Brutality Project, raising both use of force and equal protection claims, PLS addressed this problem with DOC.

If DOC has you recorded as a race different from how you self-identify, you can correct it in one of two ways:

1. Put in a request to your Correctional Program Officer that they correct it for you, or
2. Make the request at a classification review.

We suggest that you do either, or both, of these things in writing so that you can establish that you made the request if necessary. If you attempt to get a racial misidentification corrected through those processes but DOC does not correct it, please contact PLS through our intake process, describing your requests to fix the problem and what the response was. Please send copies of all available documentation. We will follow up with DOC if the process is not working.

Legislative Advocacy Update

We're excited to share important updates on our legislative advocacy work. Your involvement and feedback shape our priorities and strategies as we work toward meaningful reform.

Last fall, we conducted a policy survey to hear directly from you about your priorities. We received around 160 responses from the approximately 300 surveys distributed. You told us that Elder Parole, Ending Life Without Parole, Visitation, Commissary, Second Look, Medical Parole, and Programming and Education were most important to you. This feedback was invaluable in helping us develop our legislative agenda for this session.

Our Priority Bills

Based on your survey responses, our analysis of the political landscape, and where we believe PLS can be most effective, we've focused our efforts on three key bills for the 2025-2026 legislative session:

1. An Act Relative to Medical and Elder Parole (S.1722/H.2693) filed by Senator Liz Miranda, Representative Lindsay Sabadosa, and Representative Erika Uytterhoeven: This bill addresses the crisis of aging and illness in Massachusetts prisons. It creates a pathway for elders to be considered for parole once they reach age 55 and have served 15 years or half their sentence. It also improves our medical parole system to ensure people who are terminally ill or permanently incapacitated can access medical parole as originally intended by the legislature.

2. An Act to Build Restorative Family and Community Connection (S.1720/H.2591) filed by Senator Liz Miranda and Representative Marjorie Decker: Family separation is one of the most painful aspects of incarceration. This "Visitation Reform Bill" protects access to daily visits, eliminates caps on visitor numbers, creates child-friendly spaces, and reduces discrimination. It establishes fair processes that sustain family connections during incarceration and promote successful re-entry.

3. An Act Relative to Human Rights and Improved Outcomes for Incarcerated People (S.1651/H.2608) filed by Senator Cindy Creem and Representative Brandy Fluker-Reid.

Friends and Family List

We encourage your loved ones to join our policy mailing list to get information about our priority bills, volunteer opportunities, events held by PLS and the coalitions we work with, and opportunities to testify or connect directly with legislators. If your loved ones would like to join, please direct them to: plsma.org/get-involved

Despite declining prison populations and increasing budgets, our system continues to prioritize punishment over personal growth and successful re-entry. This "Human Rights Bill" would establish universal access to programming, education, and vocational training, ensure meaningful out-of-cell time, and protect human rights behind prison walls.

4. An Act Creating an Independent Correctional Oversight Office (S.1725/H.2636) filed by Representative Russell Holmes and Senator Liz Miranda and Erika Uytterhoeven.

Our Race Equity in Corrections Initiative is also continuing its critical work on this bill filed by Representative Russell Holmes and Senator Liz Miranda. This bill would establish an oversight office within the Office of the Inspector General to address structural racism in correctional facilities. Learn more about this bill in the REICI section later in this issue.

Recent Advocacy Events

In March, we helped organize a two-part legislative advocacy event alongside community partners and incarcerated leaders. Part 1 was a webinar introducing the MA legislative process and key advocacy timelines. Part 2 was an in-person workshop on legislative advocacy skills, strategies, and building collective power.

On April 15, we organized a Joint Lobby Day at the State House in partnership with Families for Justice as Healing, the Keeping Families Connected Coalition, MA Against Solitary Confinement, UU Mass Action, Progressive MA, the Campaign to End Life Without Parole, and Drop LWOP New England. Dozens of advocates gathered to support our priority bills, visiting eighty legislator offices to advocate.

Committee Assignments

All our bills have been assigned to the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security:

Senate side: Chair John J. Cronin, Vice Chair William J. Driscoll, Jr., and members Jamie Eldridge, Dylan Fernandes, Michael Moore, John Velis, and Peter Durant

House side: Chair Daniel Cahill, Vice Chair Christopher Worrell, and members Richard G. Wells, Jr., Rodney M. Elliott, Bridget Plouffe, Alan Silvia, David Paul Linsky, Homar Gómez, Amy Mah Sangiolo, Michelle L. Ciccolo, Marcus S. Vaughn, Steven George Xiarhos, and Kenneth P. Swezey

The address for the public safety committee is:

24 Beacon St.
Room 218 (Senate), Room 527-A (House)
Boston, MA 02133

Please know that not every bill that is important to you is before the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security. An Act to Reduce Mass Incarceration, which would end life without parole sentencing and An Act relative to Proportionality in Joint Venture Sentencing are both in the Joint Committee on the Judiciary. While we are unable to prioritize these two critical bills this session, we know that they are extremely important to many of you. Please know that the Campaign to End Life Without Parole is advocating for both initiatives.

The Chairs of the Judiciary Committee are Senator Lydia Edwards and Representative Michael Day.

The address for the Judiciary Committee is:

24 Beacon St.
Room 413-A (Senate) Room 136 (House)
Boston, MA 02133

How You Can Help

Friends and Family List

We continue to build our list of friends and family members who can advocate from outside. If your loved ones would like to join our advocacy network, please direct them to: plsma.org/get-involved

Testimony for the Legislative Hearing

We're committed to amplifying your voices and are working to ensure incarcerated people can testify directly at the Public Safety Committee hearing where our priority bills are heard. We intend to focus most of our energy on organizing and amplifying testimony on our priority bills this session, which are detailed above.

We've had productive conversations with the Public Safety Committee Chairs about ensuring incarcerated people may speak at the public hearing about our bills. At the time of this writing, we do not know how much testimony will be allowed, but it may be limited to as few as 15-20 incarcerated people system wide on all bills. We are therefore encouraging people, as much as institutional rules will allow, to work together to select 1-2 spokespeople per prison per bill. This will be helpful both to deal with any limits that the Committee may put on testimony, and to ensure that we are forwarding our strongest possible messages and messengers at the public hearing.

Please remember that written testimony is unlimited. You may submit written testimony of any length on as many bills as are important to you. We do recommend keeping it relatively short so that the Committee will be able to read it and digest it more easily, but there are no page limits. Please remember that all testimony you submit, written and oral, will be publicly accessible on the internet.

We have sent a more detailed mailing out about legislative testimony to our policy mailing list. If you would like to be added to the policy mailing list to get legislative updates and information, please write to Nikki Louis at the address on the front page.

Other ways to help

There are a multitude of ways that you might consider advocating for change. You could write up personal stories that could be shared with legislators, online or at public education events, you could write opinion pieces to try to get placed in local media, you could interview each other about your experiences and why you support change, and publish those interviews, you could do research and develop facts and figures that support passing the bills, you could reach out to your friends and families and make sure they are aware of the reforms that are being considered, and ask them to speak to their friends and neighbors about getting involved.

Whatever you do, please make sure that you are taking care to follow institutional rules and that you remember retaliation is always a possibility. You are the best person to assess what the risks are of reform advocacy and determine what makes the most sense for you.

We are aware that some of you are already doing incredible work to advocate in various ways about the importance of these and other reforms and also encouraging your friends and families on the outside to do the same. We appreciate all of your hard work and partnership. Please feel empowered to reach out if you have ideas for legislative advocacy that you might be able to engage in on your own, and that we could amplify or support.

Keep an eye out for more detailed materials about our bills and additional ways to get involved. Together, we can create meaningful change in Massachusetts' justice system.

Beyond Hearings: Building Power Together

We're expanding how we do advocacy work. Our theory is simple: legislative and policy change happens when we shift the political landscape from below, bringing pressure to bear on the legislature to spur action. That means building lasting power with incarcerated people and their families alongside our ongoing legal and legislative efforts.

We're working to amplify the expertise that comes from lived experience. This means supporting inside groups, connecting with leaders across facilities, and ensuring that when we walk into legislative meetings, we're bringing the people most affected by these policies with us -- not just talking about you. Our friends and families list keeps growing, and we're working towards connecting incarcerated people's loved ones with their legislators and with each other for advocacy, education, strategy, and mutual support.

Every policy position we take is grounded in research, but just as importantly, in the real experiences of incarcerated people and their families. We're working to ensure that bills moving through the legislature address the issues that matter most to incarcerated people.

Next year, we're planning to launch an advisory board made up of former clients to guide our advocacy strategy.

We're also working to train formerly incarcerated people as lobbyists and build up families as educated advocates while supporting inside leaders across facilities.

What issues are you seeing that need attention? What organizing is happening where you are? Let us know -- your insights drive our work.

S.1256/H.1587: An Act Relative to Justice for Survivors (Reps Fluker-Reid & Barber and Sen. Rush)

Many incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people in Massachusetts experience early and consistent exposure to violence and trauma, which has been linked to the routine criminalization of survivors of domestic violence, trafficking, and abuse for their acts of survival. An Act Relative to Justice for Survivors would interrupt cycles of harm by expanding opportunities for criminalized survivors to seek diversion, reduced sentences, and post-conviction sentencing relief. People are eligible for relief under this Act if they are accused or convicted of an offense that was substantially related to their experiences of abuse, sexual assault, or trafficking.

The criminalization and punishment of survivors is cruel, inhumane, and does little to enhance public safety. Rather, it fuels cycles of harm by condemning survivors of trauma to the endemic violence of carceral systems. An Act Relative to Justice for Survivors would divert survivors of violence away from the compounding trauma of the carceral system and create pathways home for those already entangled in its web.

While we are unable to include this bill in PLS's priority platform, PLS's Women's Project is involved in the coalition that is working to advance the bill. Please write to Sarah Nawab using the address on the front page if you would like to learn more.

HB-4125: An Act to Improve Food Safety and Quality in Department of Correction Facilities (Reps Uyterhoeven and Worrell)

Please note that the information about this bill is provided by an incarcerated person and is not a PLS initiative. We are unable to answer any questions about this bill.

For every pound of food prepared and served at MCI-Norfolk, over half a pound per incarcerated individual is thrown away. In FY 2024 alone, 928,760 pounds of food were discarded, and \$1,475 per month was spent to dispose of food waste.

When low-quality, ill-prepared, and inedible foods are served to incarcerated individuals their only option is to resort to commissary purchases, which mostly consist of ultra-processed and high-sodium foods. There is a disproportionate percentage of chronic diseases exacerbated by diet among incarcerated individuals. Though the Food Services policy (103 DOC 760) mandates that only dietitian-approved menus and corresponding recipes are required to be followed- they are not in practice. Food Services routinely substitutes dietitian approved items such as beef, turkey, cake, eggs, etc.; these substitutions most often contain as much as 10 times the sodium as what is specified in the "Spreadsheets." Food Services are being allowed to purchase discounted, unhealthy foods not approved by dietitians, known as "convenience," or "opportunity purchases."

MCI-Norfolk's mainline kitchen has some of the most deplorable working conditions in the DOC and repeated Department of Health violations for rodent droppings and infestations, sanitary infractions, filth, leaking pipes over food and kettles, and lacking in training/oversight. Nationally, on average, 87% of incarcerated individuals will eventually be released from prison and individuals in MA are being released with a high percentage of diet related diseases; diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and obesity.

This bill would identify exorbitant sources of food waste to reduce food that is not consumed. It would create a safe environment for training and provide incarcerated individuals with the tools and culinary certificates needed to prepare them for re-entry. The bill would audit purchases from the "Inmate Food Account" to prevent misuse by Food Services and ensure only dietitian-approved foods are ordered. It would prevent Food Services from using foods intended for incarcerated individuals to feed staff at no cost, in violation of 103 DOC 214.01. The goal is to lower the \$212,259,576 spent on incarcerated individual health care while more efficiently utilizing the \$18,591,977 spent on food.

Proposed \$360 Million Women's Prison

On June 30, 2025, the Healey administration announced a proposed project to renovate and do new construction on the MCI-Framingham campus at a projected cost of \$360 million.

The cost of the project raised serious concerns about allocating significant funding to build more prison infrastructure instead of programs and services that reduce recidivism and help women succeed in their communities. PLS opposes this project and sent a letter to the Governor explaining our position, cosigned by 82 organizations across the state. We know MCI-Framingham has fallen into disrepair due to decades of institutional neglect, and we do not oppose repairs for safe housing for our clients. However, this project is not a narrowly focused allocation to ensure a safe housing environment.

At this stage, it is still unclear what is included in the project and proposed costs, despite multiple public records requests. The administration has not provided a bed count for the proposal, demonstrating the lack of a clear plan. This project's costs are wildly out of line with what facility renovation would require and will not solve the safety concerns of the people held at MCI Framingham, which are much more focused on harassment and lack of privacy from staff than on the conditions of the physical plant.

PLS detailed three critical reasons for our opposition our letter:

- Spending \$360 million on new prison infrastructure is a misallocation of critical resources and is not the investment we need in incarcerated women or public safety;
- Changing the physical plant of MCI-Framingham will not make the prison "rehabilitative" because the conditions hindering rehabilitation are cultural, not architectural; and
- The proposed new women's prison complex will not move public safety forward, but will instead undo the progress the Commonwealth has made in decreasing incarceration rates.

We sent the letter to the Governor's office, and we had a meeting with the Lt. Governor to discuss with Families for Justice as Healing (FJAH) and Jane Doe, Inc. Several other organizations, including FJAH, Jane Doe, and a coalition of public health and health care professionals, have also submitted letters in opposition.

We are asking that the administration pause all planning for this \$360 million project and explore alternatives. We have asked the administration for:

- Transparency about the planning process and specific costs of each phase, and identifying the source of the funding used to pay for it;
- A detailed review of what work was already done in the planning process;
- A review of the population to identify people eligible for parole, medical parole, and pre-release programs. We noted that there was also legislation filed this session that would improve equity and access to medical parole and establish elder parole that could address the crisis of aging and sick women held in the facility before any new construction is initiated.
- Consideration of other options for updating the facility. We noted that MCI-Framingham is not the only prison in the Commonwealth in disrepair, and it would be a better use of resources to continue working towards decarceration while making reasonable repairs system wide, rather than concentrating such vast resources on one small population that can be further reduced with no impact on public safety.

LGBTQ+ Know-Your-Rights Guide

Thanks to a grant from The Boston Foundation, PLS created a know-your-rights guide based on direct feedback from LGBTQ+ people in MA prisons. This guide contains information about the laws and policies that provide protections for LGBTQ+ people in custody, how to seek support, and how you can protect yourself. Please use the info on the front page to reach if you'd like a copy and encourage others to reach out too!

No Cost Calls Update

On December 1, 2023, legislation took effect requiring that all prisons and jails in Massachusetts must provide free communication services. In partnership with the Keeping Families Connected Coalition, we continue to monitor the situation and suggest ways for the state to improve call quality and save money on all communication services.

Heat Issues

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 of 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. 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.

Other Issues

PLS is also interested in gathering your input and testimony regarding issues that are not being addressed through legislation or litigation. 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.

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 MA.

Additionally, please 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.

To contact us about non-legislative issues, please send a letter to Aaron Steinberg using the contact info on the first page.

Voting Rights

"There are legislators on all levels that file and enact legislation that immensely impacts me during and after my incarceration. This can have a profound impact on my ability to seek housing, employment, and to rebuild ties with my community," shared Maurice Skillman. "If I can vote while incarcerated, I would feel like I belong to my community."

Maurice, who spoke remotely from MCI-Norfolk, was one of twelve currently incarcerated individuals across three facilities who testified before the MA Joint Committee on Election Laws on April 1, 2025. The hearing was the first step for S.7 and H.63, introduced by Senator Liz Miranda and Representative Erika Uyterhoeven, which would end felony disenfranchisement in the state, ensuring that all incarcerated citizens can fully participate in the political process. Maurice is a member of the African American Coalition Committee (AACC) and Empowering Descendant Communities to Unlock Democracy project. These groups, alongside others like PLS, have helped pave the way for meaningful access for incarcerated people to speak at legislative hearings.

If you would like to get involved further, including organizing from behind the wall, please reach out to democracybehindbars@gmail.com or visit dbbcma.org. You can also call (617) 435-2066 or send mail to Healing Our Land, Inc. 670 Washington St, Dorchester, MA 02124.

As a reminder, if you are a U.S citizen incarcerated in MA, who is 18 and older and NOT CURRENTLY serving a felony conviction, you are eligible to vote in city, state, and federal elections.

REICI Update

PLS' Racial Equity in Corrections Initiative (REICI) is an organization-wide initiative to eliminate institutional racism and its impact on Black and Brown prisoners in the day-to-day operations of Massachusetts prisons and jails. REICI's mission is to build awareness, solutions, and leadership to combat carceral racism through client and legislative advocacy; community building and education; litigation; and internal efforts designed to increase PLS staff's understanding of racial equity and anti-racist policy work.

Intake Hours and Advocacy Plan

The REICI Intake Line is active and accepts callers who wish to report race discrimination within Massachusetts DOC and HOCs. In addition to documenting these reports, the line may also serve as a channel for limited advocacy, though such advocacy is offered selectively and only where there is a realistic path toward resolution.

Because racism is so deeply entrenched within the Department of Correction, REICI cannot provide advocacy in all cases. Instead, matters are assessed carefully and, when possible, case-specific advocacy is pursued. At present, we are particularly monitoring and investigating concerns related to the K2 epidemic and the lack of adequate substance use treatment for incarcerated BIPOC community members. We strongly encourage individuals to call and report any experiences connected to K2 or other barriers to care, as this information is vital for shaping both our advocacy and potential litigation strategies.

Over the coming months, REICI will begin narrowing additional issues of racial discrimination within the DOC that will help guide our focus and determine where advocacy can be most effective. We anticipate rolling out this more structured advocacy framework in the fall.

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 included in our database in anticipation of the passage of the REICI Race Data & Oversight bill which, if enacted, would create an independent correctional oversight office to which such information can be reported please call PLS's speed dial number (9004) to reach a member of the REICI team. Lines are open every Thursday between 5 and 8 PM.

As a reminder, the REICI Intake Line operates separately from PLS's General Intake line. Any individual advocacy requests relating to PLS' priority areas, other than racism, should be directed to General Intake. This line is open every Monday between 1 and 4 PM.

REICI Bill

REICI, with the assistance of Senator Liz Miranda and Representatives Russell Holmes and Erika Uyterhoeven, has refiled our Race Data & Oversight bill, formally known as 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. 1725 and H. 2636).

The bill is under consideration by the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security this legislative session, and our team is, once again, hard at work garnering community and legislative support for this pivotal legislation.

We are also encouraged by developments in other jurisdictions. On May 20, Philadelphia voters approved a ballot measure establishing an independent Office of Prison Oversight, led by Councilmembers Isaiah Thomas and Nicolas O'Rourke. This measure created both an Office of Prison Oversight with authority to access and assess prison conditions, data, and operations, and a Prison Community Oversight Board to hold public meetings, issue policy recommendations, and increase transparency by centering the voices of incarcerated people and their families. The measure was developed in response to chronic understaffing, in-custody deaths, and systemic mismanagement across Philadelphia's prisons.

Other states, including Arizona, Nebraska, Maryland, Virginia, Washington, and New York, have also recently enacted legislation establishing independent prison oversight. Meanwhile, in Massachusetts, incarcerated people who seek recourse for inhumane conditions, abuse by staff, or medical neglect face grievance processes controlled by the very officials they fear. Incomplete and inconsistent DOC data further exacerbates this crisis by concealing racial inequities in everyday operations.

These initiatives strongly align with the goals of the REICI Race Data & Oversight bill—particularly its focus on dismantling structural racism within corrections through independent oversight, comprehensive racial data collection and analysis, and community accountability. Like our bill, these models ensure independent access to facilities and data, protection from retaliation, community representation, and public reporting. We hope that these growing national reforms will build momentum for passage of the REICI bill here in Massachusetts. If you have questions about the REICI Race Data & Oversight bill, please contact a member of the REICI team.

Prisoner Empowerment Project (PEP)

The Prisoner Empowerment Project (PEP), created by REICI, recognizes the expertise of incarcerated individuals and their contributions to advancing justice through structured collaboration and compensation.

PEP liaisons serve for one-year terms. The 2024–2025 cohort has now concluded. REICI is currently securing additional funding before opening applications for the 2025–2026 cohort. We expect to begin sharing updates on the new cycle by October. During the past year, PEP liaisons advanced several important initiatives:

- The Canteen Project – Advocating for the inclusion of gender-affirming and culturally appropriate commissary items.
- The PEP Newsletter – A new publication designed to improve transparency across the DOC and keep incarcerated people informed on facility-specific developments. The first issue is set to be published this fall.
- Liaisons also benefited from mentorship, education, and re-entry resources provided by PLS staff, including:
- Substance Use Advocacy – Support from REICI's RESTORE Project Coordinator and Paralegal, Kelsea Goodrow, on connecting individuals with treatment resources.
- Mentorship and Education – Training from REICI's Community Liaison and Paralegal, Mac Hudson, on legal education, re-entry services, and resume building.
- Immigration Resources – Self-help materials from Attorney Leah Hastings, Director of PLS's Immigration Detention Project, to support individuals with immigration cases through language-access services.

While the formal cohort has ended, many of our PEPs continue this type of advocacy independently, including work on canteen reform, newsletter submissions, and peer support. REICI welcomes anyone interested in supporting these ongoing initiatives to contact our team.

REICI Survey Update

As many of our readers know, REICI previously conducted a comprehensive survey documenting the experiences of BIPOC prisoners in the day-to-day operations of corrections. With the support of Clark University, we have now aggregated that data and are preparing a new, shorter survey to ensure our information remains fresh and up to date. We will share more details in the coming months regarding the survey's content and how it will be distributed to incarcerated BIPOC community members. Our long-term goal remains the production of a comprehensive report.

This next round of surveys will also incorporate new areas of focus. We are partnering with GLAD and an environmental researcher to address issues related to gender as well as the toxicity of certain canteen products and the importance of including ethnically specific products in commissary. These new components will strengthen the report by ensuring that the full range of intersecting inequities are considered. More information will be forthcoming soon.

Documentary Projects by Mac Hudson

We are proud to announce that REICI's Community Liaison and Paralegal, Mac Hudson, has expanded his work in racial justice advocacy by serving as the Director and Producer of two groundbreaking documentaries:

Behind the Wall: Facing Structural Racism in the Massachusetts Prison System: This documentary amplifies the voices of BIPOC incarcerated individuals by examining the structural racism and harm experienced within the Massachusetts Department of Correction. The film opens with the account of John Boone, Massachusetts' first Black Commissioner of Correction, and the systemic and institutional racism he faced within DOC leadership and the state legislature.

Through interviews with formerly incarcerated men and women, legislators, religious leaders, community members, and former DOC officials, *Behind the Wall* documents the lived realities of racism in Massachusetts prisons and centers the narratives of those directly impacted.

Massissippi: This documentary tells the stories of three formerly incarcerated BIPOC Bostonians—Stacey Borden, Gregory Davis, and Omar Abdur-Rahim—and their experiences within the Massachusetts Department of Correction.

Massissippi has already received national recognition, having been:

- Selected for the Roxbury International Film Festival
- Selected for the Greenpoint Film Festival
- Named a semi-finalist for the Atlanta Movie Awards
- Named a semi-finalist for the Austin International Art Festival

Both films represent a powerful reclaiming of narrative by BIPOC individuals, ensuring that the experiences of Black and Brown people behind the wall are documented and told as they truly are.

RESTORE Project Update

The REICI team would like to formally introduce the Recovery and Equity in Substance Treatment, Outreach, Re-entry, and Empowerment (RESTORE) Project. Formerly known as Project RIZE, RESTORE builds on the work REICI has been doing to ensure equitable access to life-changing substance use treatment for Black and Brown incarcerated individuals since 2020.

RESTORE seeks to achieve equitable access to treatment through individual and systemic advocacy challenging correctional policies and practices that create or exacerbate barriers to treatment within Massachusetts correctional institutions, addressing the K2 epidemic, and otherwise meeting the needs of Black and Brown incarcerated individuals living with substance use disorder (SUD).

If you have an SUD and would like assistance accessing treatment, are encountering issues with your current SUD treatment, or have been impacted by the K2 epidemic" (e.g., addiction, overdose, or other adverse reaction as a result of use), please contact RESTORE's Project Coordinator, Kelsea Goodrow.

Immigration Detention Conditions Project

PLS's Immigrant Detention Conditions Project (IDCP) is staffed by a single attorney, Leah Hastings, and focuses on the intersections of the immigration and carceral systems. The IDCP works to expose and challenge conditions of immigrant detention at Plymouth County Correctional Facility; support grassroots community organizing against ICE detention; shift dominant narratives about criminalized and detained immigrants; and provide education and resources to incarcerated people impacted by detention and deportation.

Individual and Systemic Advocacy

In recent months, the IDCP has engaged in ICE detention conditions advocacy related to cold temperatures, medical care, and language access. The IDCP has also advocated on behalf of our noncitizen clients in the DOC, against unlawful ICE detainers and for international video visitation and disability accommodations.

If you are incarcerated or detained, and experiencing immigration-related issues, please feel free to send us a letter at PLS's address on the front page to the attention of IDCP.

You can also call the PLS intake line on a Tuesday or Wednesday, between 1pm and 4pm, and ask to speak with Leah, who speaks English and Spanish. Clients should always feel free to call or write to PLS in whichever language feels most comfortable-- we will obtain any interpretation or translation necessary to allow us to communicate with you.

A Few Reminders

The IDCP does not represent individuals in their immigration hearings or handle criminal appeals. We also cannot force ICE to cancel a detainer unless there is a legal basis for challenging the detainer's validity. If you receive notice that you have an immigration court hearing coming up, or that you will be released and taken into ICE custody, please reach out to us for information and resources as early as possible. The more time you have to plan and prepare, the better.

Legal Support for Organizing and Community Education

In addition to our direct advocacy, the IDCP works in partnership with immigrant-led base-building organizations and allied community organizations to empower our neighbors in the face of rampant ICE detentions. Most recently, we have been supporting the LUCE Immigrant Justice Network's rapid response, organizing, and mutual aid work. The IDCP helps facilitate LUCE's legal working group, where we have been working on expanding bond representation for detained community members and developing informational materials for people with detained loved ones. As we have seen in recent weeks, a courageous, informed, and connected community is our best defense against ICE violence.

This is as true for incarcerated people as it is for those on the outside. Over the winter, the IDCP developed an immigration law primer for incarcerated advocates in partnership with the Boston University School of Law Immigrants' Rights Clinic and APICA. We presented this to incarcerated community members for the first time at MCI-Norfolk in April, followed by a Q&A session. We hope to partner with affinity groups across the DOC to make this a repeat offering-- please feel free to reach out if you are interested in working with us to make that happen.

Media and Narrative

This year, across various media outlets, the IDCP has spoken out against proposed legislation that would expand sheriffs' ability to hold people for ICE. We are currently collaborating with journalists on several longer-form pieces about the intersections of immigrant detention, incarceration, and deportation. We would be interested in collaborating with incarcerated immigrants to identify or create opportunities to share more of your stories and perspectives, which are too often demonized or absent from the mainstream. Please let us know if you have ideas or would be interested in collaborating on this.

Immigration Legal Resources and Self-Help Materials

Immigration law has always been volatile. Over recent months, it has evolved especially quickly. To combat the inaccessibility of up-to-date information for incarcerated noncitizens, we are committed to providing information about the following topics upon request:

- Your rights during ICE interviews in DOC or jail custody
- How to seek proof of U.S. citizenship (if you are a U.S. citizen)
- Information for noncitizens regarding clemency, parole, and appeals
- Contact information for embassies and consulates
- Contact information for trusted private immigration attorneys and regional legal services organizations that may provide legal representation or consults
- Self-help materials re: immigration court hearings, types of immigration relief, and how to challenge a bad immigration court outcome
- Up-to-date information about third-country deportations and countries that are/are not accepting deportees
- Information and resources for countries where Massachusetts prisoners are most often deported-- we currently have info sheets for Brazil, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, and Trinidad and Tobago, and are working on Cambodia, Cape Verde, China, Colombia, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and Vietnam. If there is a country you think we should add to this list, please let us know!

In the coming months, we look forward to expanding our legal toolbox, developing more self-help and educational materials, and fostering connections between anti-ICE and anti-carceral work, inside and outside. If you have loved ones who are interested in getting plugged into local organizing by and for immigrant communities, please send them our way—we would be happy to connect them with some of the groups leading this work.

PLS Notes Feedback

We want to hear from you about what you want included in future issues of PLS Notes. Please write to Aaron Steinberg at the address on the front page to share your thoughts!

Medical Justice Alliance Update

The Medical Justice Alliance (MJA) continues its vital work mobilizing volunteer clinicians to advocate for improved healthcare for incarcerated individuals. Our MA chapter (MJA-MA) works with PLS to build a network of healthcare professionals dedicated to advancing healthcare rights.

We're excited to report significant growth in our volunteer network, which now includes 100 clinicians across MA. This expansion includes a new partnership with Harvard Medical School, bringing additional expertise and resources to our advocacy efforts. Nearly 150 case requests from MA have been reviewed by MJA-MA and MJA national. MJA continues to:

- Provide guidance on standard of care
- Improve treatment of incarcerated patients in MA hospitals and clinics
- Educate healthcare providers about the unique challenges faced by incarcerated patients
- Advocate for systemic improvements in correctional healthcare

If you or someone you know is experiencing healthcare issues in a correctional facility, please reach out to PLS for assistance. With your consent, we may consult with volunteer clinicians who can review your medical records and provide expert opinions to support advocacy for improved care. Please note that you cannot contact MJA directly for assistance.

PLS Blog

PLS' blog discusses issues related to policing and incarceration. We believe that fostering understanding of the carceral system will enable communities, activists, and politicians to better address carceral issues. We welcome fiction, non-fiction and creative writing. All entries will be considered, but only a small number will be published on PLS' website. Pieces can be up to 3000 words. There is no minimum length. Submissions should be mailed to Aaron Steinberg at the address listed on the front page. Submissions will be copy edited unless the author requests otherwise. If you are engaged in litigation or intend to litigate, we recommend that you do not discuss the case.

Know Your Rights: DPH Standards for Correctional Facilities

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) has established minimum health and sanitation standards that all correctional facilities in the Commonwealth must follow. These standards are legally enforceable and can be a valuable resource when advocating for better conditions. The following overview covers key regulations from 105 CMR 451.000 that may be particularly relevant to your daily life.

Basic Necessities

Bedding and Linens

- Each person must receive fire-retardant, non-toxic blankets sufficient for comfort
- Two clean sheets, a pillow with pillowcase, two towels, and a washcloth must be provided
- Linens must be laundered at least once per week
- Each person must have a clean, fire-retardant mattress in good condition
- Each person must have a bed raised above the floor

Clothing

- Proper clothing must be provided to preserve health and comfort in all seasons
- Access to laundry facilities must be provided at least weekly (or laundry service if access cannot be provided for security reasons)

Sanitation and Hygiene

Toilet and Washing Facilities

- Each person must have access to a toilet and handwashing sink at all times
- Cells where people may be locked for any part of the day must have a working toilet and sink with hot and cold water
- Toilet paper and soap necessary for proper hygiene must be provided at all times
- Shared facilities (where allowed) must have at least one toilet for every 12 male residents or every 8 female residents
- Shared facilities must be located within 75 feet of cells

Water

- Safe drinking water must be accessible at all times
- Hot water for personal hygiene must be available at a temperature between 110°F and 130°F

Bathing Facilities

- At least one shower or bathtub with hot and cold running water must be available for every 12 residents (with additional facilities required for larger populations)
- Pre-release facilities must have at least one shower or bathtub for every 8 residents
- Toilet and shower facilities must provide privacy through partitions (unless security concerns require close supervision)
- Shower floors must be constructed of non-absorbent, non-slippery materials

Activities and Facility Conditions

Exercise and Recreation

- Unless security concerns dictate otherwise, each person in general population should have at least one hour of exercise outside their cell daily
- Those in special management or disciplinary units should have at least one hour of exercise outside their cell, five days per week
- Outdoor exercise should be provided when weather permits
- Facilities must have indoor and outdoor space for active sports and large muscle activities

Ventilation and Temperature

- Adequate ventilation must be provided at all times
- Windows and doors used for ventilation must have screens to block insects and rodents

Facility Maintenance

- Facilities must be maintained to exclude weather elements, prevent pest entry, and remain watertight
- Interior structural elements must be free from holes, cracks, loose plaster, or other defects
- Toilet, handwashing, and bathing facilities must be cleaned daily with hot water and effective detergent

DPH Inspections

The DPH inspects each correctional facility at least twice annually, without prior notice. Their written reports are public records and are provided to facility administrators, the Commissioner of Correction, and other officials. If you believe your facility is not meeting these standards, you can write to PLS at the address on the front page.

Other Resources

The following organizations also provide services to incarcerated individuals and may be able to assist you if PLS cannot.

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 to request an application:

**CPCS Innocence Program,
75 Federal Street, 6th Floor
Boston, MA 02110 617-209-5666**

The Innocence Program also accepts collect calls from DOC prisoners. The number to call is: 617-209-5666.

BC Law's Lifer Parole and Prison Clinic

Boston College Law School's Lifer Parole and Prison Clinic will provide supervised student-attorneys to prepare and to represent incarcerated persons serving second-degree life sentences at appearances before the Parole Board scheduled during the months of October, November, December, March, April, and May.

During the same months, the Clinic is available to represent any incarcerated persons facing disciplinary hearings. Contact:

Boston College Lifer Parole and Prison Clinic, 885 Centre St., Newton MA 02459.
Tel: 617-552-0248. Mon-Fri 9am to 5pm.

Like to Read?

Prison Book Program sends free books to people in prison. You can request books 3 times per year and should expect book to arrive within 90 days. 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
c/o Lucy Parsons Bookstore
1306 Hancock St, Suite 100
Quincy, MA 02169**

Harvard PLAP

The Prison Legal Assistance Project (PLAP) is a student practice organization at Harvard Law School in which PLAP student attorneys represent clients charged with violating MA prison regulations at disciplinary hearings and those facing parole revocation or rescission and second-degree life sentence hearings before the Parole Board. Student attorneys also aid with classification hearings and commutation petitions. PLAP handles neither criminal nor civil court cases and cannot assist people outside of MA.

**Harvard PLAP
6 Everett Street, Suite 5107
Harvard Law School
Cambridge, MA 02138**

General Phone: 617-495-3969
Prisoners' Hotline: 617-495-3127

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



**PRISONERS' LEGAL SERVICES
OF MASSACHUSETTS**

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