



STATEVILLE SPEAKS

Voices from the inside • Spring 2024

IL Governor Proposes Closing 2 State Prisons – and Spending \$1 Billion to Build New Ones

What Would You Do With \$1 Billion Instead?

BY PNAP AND STATEVILLE SPEAKS

On Friday March 22, the governor announced the proposed closure of two state prisons – Logan and Stateville. This announcement was possible because people inside, their loved ones, and other advocates have long pushed to close these toxic prisons and to bring people home.

However, this news release also proposed spending almost \$1 billion to build two new “state of the art” prisons.

Shortly after the announcement, people currently incarcerated at Logan and Stateville offered these alternative ideas for how to spend \$1 billion dollars:

.....

“If the \$900 million was spent on the ‘before,’ we wouldn’t need it for the ‘after.’ A \$450 million prison? I’ve never seen one \$450 million high school. What if we spent it on nine \$100 million community educational resource centers in under-resourced communities?”

Michael Bell

“I would use the money toward reentry because many people leaving prison need help, and without security there is recidivism. Money needs to go into transitional housing, recovery homes, mental health facilities, and domestic violence shelters for people upon release. I would work toward making prisons extinct.”

Mishunda Davis

“If I had \$900 million, I would invest in mental health services and healthcare resources for marginalized communities.”

Chester McKinney

“\$900 million is an unfathomable number to allocate to building sites of depravity, removal, and disharmony. There is no such thing as a humane prison. What an



Art by Jared Rodriguez (Truthout)

oxymoron – spending \$1 billion to build a prison, but continuing to allow poverty to flourish in communities of color.”

Darnell Lane

“The \$900 million should be used to declare poverty a public health crisis. Invest in curing the symptoms of poverty – which are violence, mass incarceration, political, economic and educational inequity – rather than building prisons to disappear marginalized bodies.”

Robert Curry

“Instead of spending \$900 million to rebuild two state prisons, our governor could use the principles of equity to address the inequalities that exist in the undercurrent of society. Illinois has environmental and social issues that should take precedence over rebuilding prisons. In some Chicago neighborhoods, there is a 15 to 25 percent unemployment rate, and 1 in 3 young people are high school dropouts. When we have a government that sees human caging as a priority over community building, this is a government that should concern us all.”

Michael Sullivan ●

STATEVILLE SPEAKS

Spring 2024

Stateville Speaks is a newsletter written by and for incarcerated individuals, their families, those working in the correctional system, activists, advocates and everyone affected by prison conditions. It is available to any incarcerated individual who requests it regardless of their ability to pay, as well as any interested reader. Additionally, it is provided to every Illinois state senator, state representative, and Illinois Department of Corrections warden.

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**ANNOUNCING THE 2024
STATEVILLE SPEAKS
AWARDS! SEE PG. 10**

Stateville Speaks Spring 2024

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Stateville Speaks was founded in 2004 by Renaldo Hudson and Bill Ryan

Northeastern Illinois University Justice Studies has been home to *Stateville Speaks* since 2009

You can learn more, donate and read digital issues at statevillespeaks.org

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We want to publish your article, essay, letter, announcement, poem or artwork in an upcoming issue!

Please try to limit articles to around 500 words and include a short bio. Articles may be edited for length. Due to the volume of submissions we receive, work may not be returned. If you have a topic or question you would like us to address in an upcoming issue, drop us a line and let us know!

Send letters, submissions, and art to:
Stateville Speaks c/o Justice Studies
LWH 4062 Northeastern IL University
5500 N. St. Louis Ave.
Chicago, IL 60625-4699



Art by Arkee

Voices

Skating for Freedom: We Have the Right to Move Freely

BY ROBERT CURRY

Roller skating has long been an outlet for Black people to move freely and express themselves, offering a way to break barriers of discrimination. Black roller skating was prevalent in the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement. Skating was used to bring about inclusion, culture and education.

On February 19, 2024, a Skate For Freedom event was hosted in Summit, Illinois, by my foundation, the Justice 4 Robert Curry / Justice 4 Restricted Citizens Foundation (J4RC). I was not present physically at that event, because I'm incarcerated: I am serving a 50-year sentence for a crime I did not commit. The skating event was a means to raise funds for my pursuit of freedom and the broader fight to end systemic oppression and violence in Illinois. It was a community-building effort meant to unify families, promote higher education in prison programs, and uplift organizations working toward transformational justice.

As people of African descent and other marginalized groups, we still find ourselves under attack in this country by practices of discrimination, segregation, and the intentional oppression of our bodies and voices by the systems that fuel mass incarceration. As our ancestors stood in community for the violations of their civil rights, we skated to protest and resist the violations of our human rights through continued slavery, genocide and captivity by other names: mass incarceration, poverty, and political and economic repression. As we skated, we came together to create a culture of liberatory thought, which resurrects those revolutionary spirits.

Mass incarceration has given the systems of supremacy a vehicle to remove marginalized people from society through the criminalization of our lifestyle choices, influenced by the oppressive states of our environments. The carceral systems are solely punitive and aren't designed for restricted citizens to become "better versions" of themselves. The state sentences us to death by incarceration, without realistic consideration of our capability to mature and evolve. This lack of consciousness has caused the state of Illinois to remove pathways back to society for brothers and sisters. "Truth-in-sentencing" legislation, the abolishment of parole in Illinois, and the fear-mongering deterrence laws that hold us accountable for hypothetical crimes are keeping people locked up for life.

Organizations such as The Prison + Neighborhood Arts/Education Project, University Without Walls, Parole Illinois, Depaul's Institute for the Restorative Educational Engagement Program, Chicago Votes, and J4RC advocate for transformation of the criminal legal system through policy initiatives like the Earn Reentry Bill, corrective clemency, The Race Act, and the appeal of "truth in sentencing" laws. These pieces of legislation and policy changes must be enacted to counter penal harms imposed by existing racially charged laws.

As people of color, we have a right to our humanity. Our humanity gives us a right to life, and our lives have value. We must have the right to move freely, beyond the walls of prison, poverty, and repression of any kind. ●

ROBERT CURRY aka "Cubbs" was born on the low end, south side of Chicago. Robert is currently serving a de facto life sentence at Stateville prison for a crime he did not commit.

12 Years After Degrading Mass Strip Search, Women in Prison Won \$1.4M Settlement

BY BRIAN DOLINAR

Content note: This article reports on explicit and demeaning language that was directed at incarcerated women.

It was horrific," Michelle Wells recalls of the morning when the "Orange Crush," a notorious band of prison guards, stormed through her cellblock at Lincoln Correctional Center, in central Illinois, to conduct a mass shakedown. "They're not friendly," she told Truthout in an interview. "When they come in, they come in trashing everything."

Wells was taken out of her cell, ordered to stand in the hallway facing the wall, and put in handcuffs that were tight against her wrists. "They do their thing, they tear things up, go through your property and throw everything around." Then it got worse.

Wells and the other women in her cellblock were walked in a single file line to the gym where some 200 other women were being held. She was left standing in handcuffs for "hours" in the gym as she watched the women being taken into a bathroom and strip searched.

Wells was then taken to the prison beauty shop, where she and other women in the room were told to strip naked. She fainted and hit her head on a lockbox as she fell. She woke up lying naked on the floor. When she got up, she was told by guards to, "Bend down, squat, open [your] buttocks, and cough."

The door was open to the room, she recalled, with male guards looking in. "That's all I see, men, and I was standing there naked. I blocked that part out of my life."

Wells was a plaintiff in *Henry v. Hulett*, a class-action lawsuit against the Orange Crush, a self-described "tactical team" of prison guards who carry out coordinated searches of cells. While such brutal exercises are carried out widely in prisons across the country, in Illinois, the guards dress in orange jumpsuits — wearing riot gear, carrying shields and waving batons — earning them their infamous nickname.

I have previously reported for Truthout about the original incident, which happened on March 31, 2011, at the women's prison in Lincoln, about a three-hour drive south of Chicago. Women who were menstruating were made to take out their tampons and bled through their clothes. Guards laughed at them and made

lewd comments. In 2022, the women won a hard-fought victory at a trial in front of a jury who decided that guards violated their Fourth Amendment right against unreasonable searches and seizures.

More than a dozen years later, much longer than class-action lawsuits typically last, the women and their attorneys finally reached a settlement that was finalized in November 2023 with the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC). In a historic decision, a federal judge approved a \$1.4 million settlement, with each plaintiff receiving an average of \$13,000.

Emails between head Warden Melody Hulett, and the administration staff in charge of “special operations,” Cmdr. Rodney Brady and Maj. Cecil Polley, make clear that the mass strip search was done with the sole intent of conducting a training exercise. The planned “shakedown,” Hulett wrote in an email, was to “strip search the women to give the female cadets an opportunity to experience the proper way to do this.”

Wells is out of prison and takes care of her 82-year-old mother. After she gave her testimony, Wells felt a sense of closure. It’s not about the money, she said. “It’s about respect. Even if I’m in prison and got a number, you should treat me with dignity.” It took 12 years, but it was worth it, “whatever it takes for other inmates not to go through what I went through, so be it.” ●

Originally published in Truthout, Feb. 20, 2024. Reprinted with permission. A full version of this article can be found online at truthout.org

BRIAN DOLINAR is an independent journalist based in Urbana-Champaign.

RE-ENTRY RESOURCES

National Alliance for the Empowerment of the Formerly Incarcerated (NAEFI)

Sankofa Cultural Arts & Business Center, 5820 W. Chicago Ave., Chicago, IL 60651 (773) 593-2540
naefimotor.wixsite.com/naefi

Institute for Nonviolence Chicago

Austin (Main Office), 819 N. Leamington St., Chicago, IL 60651 (773) 417-7421
nonviolencechicago.org

Pushing Envelopes Chicago

see page 11 for more info
P.O. Box 577942 Chicago, IL, 60657
pushingenvelopeschicago.org

Community Leader Marketta Sims

BY ORION MEADOWS

Marketta Sims is a leader in the Chicago organizing community, doing grassroots work with organizations such as the Chicago Coalition For The Homeless and Cabrini Green Legal Aid. She has overcome many obstacles in her life, showing her resilience and fortitude as a formerly incarcerated woman in society. She has now become a voice for marginalized and disadvantaged groups, as she knows firsthand the issues they face.

Marketta’s path as a proponent for equity, rights and resources for system-impacted people and unhoused people began while she was serving her 13-year prison sentence in the Illinois Department of Corrections. When Marketta was taken into custody and placed in Cook County Jail, she was the mother of a two-month-old child. The traumatic experience of having her liberty – and access to her infant child – snatched abruptly resulted in her having severe separation anxiety. This could have overwhelmed Marketta and sent her on a downward spiral of hopelessness, but she refused to succumb.

Marketta sought to take the time to work on herself and prepare for the future, so she obtained her GED in 2005. She also created a Domestic Violence Center to support domestic violence victims, and became a member of the Phoenix Rising Toastmasters in Lincoln Correctional Center because she wanted to improve her diction and public speaking skills. Among other accomplishments, Marketta helped create a group that writes to veterans, a group that experiences homelessness in alarming numbers – a cause which Marketta found herself advocating for with the Chicago Coalition For The Homeless, years later.

As Marketta found new ways to enrich her life as well as others, she obtained a certification in Business Management and completed courses in Computer Technology. She eventually went on to become a teacher’s aide after being incarcerated for seven years, with just a little less than half of her time left to serve on her sentence.

In 2013, Marketta paroled out of the women’s correctional center with hopes of having a successful transition back to society. What she encountered was a world that had transformed dramatically and a family dynamic that was counterproductive to her mental and emotional wellness, a component of reentry that is not talked about frequently enough. Therefore, Marketta was driven into homelessness and had to scavenge for resources that were scant for homeless formerly incarcerated women.

Although it was heartbreaking and excruciating at the time, this circumstance seems to have only pushed Marketta more, for she was determined to never go back into the correctional system. She built her networking skills so that she could flourish in her endeavors as a community activist and advocate for marginalized citizens while providing them with a service that helps address their needs. Marketta now serves as an advocate for human rights for the formerly incarcerated, support for people living with addiction, and resources for those experiencing homelessness. ●

New PNAP Art Space, Walls Turned Sideways, is Now Open!

BY STATEVILLE SPEAKS

On January 27, the Prison and Neighborhood Arts and Education Project (PNAP) hosted the Grand Opening of Walls Turned Sideways, a new gallery and community space. Walls Turned Sideways was organized and built by Pablo Mendoza and Sarah Ross and many, many others over the course of about three years. The process included interviewing 20+ community members, working with artists inside to dream up what a space could look like, and pounding the pavement for about 18 months to find a suitable space. The new space is approximately 3,000 square feet and includes a gallery, art studio, and community space. We’ve been hosting free art studios on Saturdays (tell your kids and families!) and community events around healing, political education and more.

The opening featured the artwork of Arkee Chaney, longtime Art Editor for *Stateville Speaks*.

Walls Turned Sideways is dedicated to artists and communities impacted by incarceration. ●

[You can learn more at p-nap.org](https://p-nap.org)

System-Impacted Community Members and Allies Celebrate Women’s History Month

BY ORION MEADOWS

A National Women’s Month event was held on March 23 at the new Walls Turned Sideways space, hosted by the Prison + Neighborhood Art & Education Project (PNAP) and Formerly Incarcerated Standing Together (FIST). The night was shared by system-impacted community members and their allies



Walls Turned Sideways Grand Opening featuring art by Arkee Chaney
Photo by Olivia Ridge

working in solidarity to improve upon the present conditions of the society we co-exist in. The program consisted of speakers, djembe drumming, and spoken word performances. The highlight of the event were the honorees: Hermene Hartman, Dawn Ewing and Jewell L. Ewing.

Hermene Hartman is founder of the iconic N’DIGO Magazine. She is a legend in Chicago media, and during her speech she talked about the power of media to provide the community with the truth. She upholds the importance of integrity in an era when shock value and fake news are becoming the accepted norm, for the sake of going viral or getting likes and views.

Dawn and Jewell L. Ewing are a mother-and-daughter team of legal defense attorneys. Jewell, Dawn’s daughter, talked about her encounters with law enforcement and the criminal legal system as a youth. She obtained a conviction at a very troublesome time in her life. Despite her mistakes, she toiled to obtain her degree and eventually graduated from Kent College of Law in Chicago, Illinois. Dawn Ewing is the founder of To Defend If Necessary, LLC, and considers her work as a legal defense attorney as a ministry to assist system-impacted clients, who often come from marginalized communities. Dawn’s fire helped to motivate and inspire her daughter Jewell who at one time sat on the same side as those men and women she advocates for in the criminal legal system. Now both mother and daughter ardently fight to defend those who have the misfortune of being entangled in the legal system. ●

ORION MEADOWS spent 24 years in Illinois prisons. He published three books of poetry while incarcerated. Currently host of the *Prison Freedom* show on PIC TV, Meadows is also a member of the editorial team at *Stateville Speaks*.

DARK BUTTERFLY BY JAFETH RAMOS

I was a prisoner long before I was incarcerated.
I had chains wrapped around my soul
Long before I even had a chance to live
Chained in a world all alone
I was a dark butterfly and didn't even know
Domestic violence left a hole in my heart
Something that I experienced in my everyday Life.
So when I got booked I didn't feel differently
And I always wondered why. A Dark Butterfly
That does not know where to fly.
All I know is darkness and that's where I still reside. I always pray to God so I know he is Always by my side. A lost butterfly who's finding its way through life.
It's been a long journey
And my wings are tired. My son gives me strength and power
So I'll always be the butterfly he'll always admire.

The art in this section is a preview of work that will be featured in "More Beautiful, More Terrible: Humans of Life Row," at Co-Prosperity, 3219 S. Morgan St, Chicago, an exhibition co-sponsored by Co-Prosperity, Prison+Neighborhood Arts/Education Project (PNAP) and the Center for the Study of Race, Politics & Culture's Beyond Prisons Initiative at the University of Chicago.

*Above: Michael Sullivan, Untitled, 2024. Response to writing by Stephanie Bonds.
Below: Benny Rios, "Love casts down all fears," 2024. Response to writing by Lakeshia Murph.*

MAGIC MAN BY SARAH SHUTTER

I thought you were my magic man
But you had another plan
The abuse I took at your hands
I can never ever understand
Every time I tried to shout
You knocked me the heck out
I loved you with all of my heart
But at your hands, my life fell apart
Magic – I gave you everything I had
Even though life with you was so bad
I tried to get away
Just remember, God has the last say
For over 20 years I was your wife
I ran away, you found me, and totaled my life
Behind these walls I got 35 years
All because of your crocodile tears
Everything that you've done:
How can I explain to our surviving son?
Our son would come to see me here
And never know who caused such fear
If only he knew
Your life would be through
To ever tell would destroy him
That would be such a sin
While you always thought you
had the upper hand
I now know that you were never
My magic man ●



TWENTY IS PLENTY (A POEM FOR PAROLE ILLINOIS)

BY TERRY DOLL

Now is the Moment
With all prejudice aside
That twenty is plenty
People, time to decide

If you want this
As a new choice
Tell your Representative
Let 'em hear your voice

It's we the people
Becoming united as one
Who have the power
To get this done

Let's turn the tide
Of politics of old
And become the first
To be so bold

To show other states
This new leading trend
That twenty consecutive years
Is where sentencing ends



PNAP Launches Educational Initiative at Logan Prison

BY INDIGO WRIGHT

After over five years of ongoing discussion, the Prison Neighborhood Arts and Education Project (PNAP) launched the Logan Initiative, an educational program at Logan Prison, in January 2023. We began with listening sessions, where faculty came inside to hear out the wants for classes and programming from people incarcerated at Logan. With months of continuous planning and brainstorming of what we as a team actually had capacity to do, we began a pilot program with three course tracks: Creative Nonfiction, Violence in Society, and Logan Think Tank. Out of this work came a foundation to build community together, profound discussions on care, the practice of writing, and what we need to create change.

Logan students concluded 2023 with impassioned discussions on the art of collective action and the transformative potential of building new worlds. Guided by the insightful writings of Mariame Kaba and Kelly Hayes in *Let This Radicalize You: Organizing and the Revolution of Reciprocal Care*, students spent three months delving into the book's accompanying workbook, composing personal journals inspired by Audre Lorde's "Questionnaire to Oneself," and deepened connections within a pioneering cohort established at the onset of 2023.

Having laid the groundwork for exploration of the criminal legal system, the current phase of the Logan Initiative hones in on the intersections of gender violence and criminalization. Guided by Beth Richie's *Arrested Justice* and in-person facilitation, students bring to the surface the stories and analysis of violence against women and others who experience sexism who are incarcerated in the United States.

The cultivation of this reading and writing workgroup will end in printed and distributed zines crafted throughout the workshop. Participants will collectively curate zines encompassing essays, poetry, stories, and visual art in tandem with actively reading: *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation*. Finalized zines aim to be distributed across prisons in the United States and intersected communities. The process of zine making will be shared at *Beyond the Bars* in New York, New York on April 7th, 2024 and *Co-Prosperity* in Chicago on May 16th, 2024. ●

If you are interested in becoming sustainably involved in the Logan Initiative, please reach out to Indigo Wright (indigo@p-nap.org) with specified interest, capacity, and experience.

INDIGO WRIGHT is Program Coordinator at Prison + Neighborhood Arts/Education Project.

IN MEMORIAM

I Was Hurt Twice

BY DAVID NAZEEH BAILEY

Content note: mention of prison death and suicide.

I was initially hurt when I learned **Bro. Willie D. Scales** passed away in December 2022, and again when I opened my most recent *Stateville Speaks* and found his passing had not been mentioned. These moments of hurt, sadness, and pain are now being recorded in ink for one to read.

Bro. Willie D. Scales and I spent approximately 30-something years around one another throughout the Illinois state maximum-security prisons. Our bond of love and unity grew throughout the years, so much that he began calling me nephew Nazeeh. I carried this title with so much honor that I started calling him Uncle Willie. To this day, that special recognition has not been extended to anyone else but him.

Our first encounter was during a time that we both spent a great deal of time in the Pontiac Correctional Center law library. This is where we discussed legal action, as well as great ideas and positive thoughts for the overall betterment of prison life and conditions, and the betterment of our communities inside and out.

While at the Menard Correctional Center from 2019 to 2022, Uncle Willie and I spent a great deal of time helping people move toward their freedom, and creative, bountiful, and blessing-full energy was captured as we carried forth in a multitude of ways. The programs blossomed from our unity and sincere efforts that brought positive and constructive change in the lives of youth inside and outside of prison.

Uncle Willie lived in the Lawndale Community in Chicago, where Dr. King had resided during his stay amid the civil rights movement and struggle. I was also born in this community, and after the 1968 riots, moved into the Austin district. Uncle Willie was one of the original universal lords, a soft-spoken, tender, thoughtful, and helpful human being. He would always refer to himself as a prison advocate and jailhouse lawyer.

I was hurt the second time upon receiving my most recent *Stateville Speaks* edition, when I discovered that no one had even mentioned Uncle Willie's passing. He and I were two of the early contributors to this prison publication, thanks to Prof. Bill Ryan. So, this was a painful reality to learn that he had been forgotten up until now.

I now recognize this beloved community member, who was working on various prisoners' clemency petitions when he was overtaken by prostate cancer. Those legal pleadings could be seen from outside of his cage. Uncle Willie died while attempting

to free others, enduring much physical hardship, never giving up the ultimate objective: freedom of all sorts.

I will continue to remember Uncle Willie often (as I'd want the exact same of others upon my passing), as I'm mindful of our bond, friendship, and the tasks at hand: freedom of toil, the struggle that captivity has found us in, and most of all, helping humanity while pleasing Allah (God), earning his favors, blessings, and bounties in this lifetime and the hereafter.



Courtesy of David Nazeeh Bailey

Mr. Wilson's Chair

BY DAVID NAZEEH BAILEY

Content note: mention of suicide.

Mr. Wilson passed away December 2022, less than a week after his birthday and after Uncle Willie D. Scales' passing. The last week of December 2022 was a painful reminder that life in prison captivity could end at any given moment in time.

"Every soul shall have a taste of death; and only on the day of judgment shall you be paid your full recompense. Only he who is saved far from the fire and admitted to the garden will have attained the object (of life): for the life of this world is but goods and chattels of deception" (Quran 3:185).

As 2022 came to a close, several prisoners committed suicide at the NRC here at Stateville Correctional Center In Illinois, and a Caucasian elderly man also passed away before his release. All of them, in reality, served a life sentence. Whether or not a judge sentenced them to life, that's what their sentence resulted in: life and death while serving time.

Mr. Wilson was a humble, kind-hearted man who had a number of health issues, having already suffered a stroke and heart attack. Several claim his eating habits hadn't changed much, as he was remarkably known for his baking skills. As a dietary supervisor, Mr. Wilson taught countless prisoners the best ways

to mix and bake. As cakes, cookies, and pies were his main specialties, he would actually sit in his chair from kitchen area to area as he did what he did: put his daily ideas into motion.

Although I had just recently met Mr. Wilson upon moving to the Charlie Cell house, our dietary shifts differed; he was on the first and I the third. We rarely crossed paths, but when we did, we always greeted one another.

I have endured the pain and suffering of a multitude of comrades, having now been incarcerated for 40 consecutive years of captivity (a lifetime). This was especially true during Covid: Charles "Saint" Huddleston, Gerald "G" Jones, Edwin "Big Baki" Jones passed away, to name just several. These prison comrades' deaths certainly have had an adverse effect on me.

The last four decades have wiped out my complete family (with the exceptions of my offspring, who I do not have a bond with), and this explains why prison comrades have played such a critical role in my life, and their deaths have had such an impact.

There was James Calvin Jones, who I wrote a short story about, entitled, "It's Bad to Die in the Streets Young, but the Worst to Die in Prison Young"; and Cornell "Bille-EI" Steel; Alvin "Mustafa Al" Toney; Imam Abdullah Ricco Cranshaw (who spoke five languages and aided in the growth of a movement); and Phillip "Bull" Wallace, all of whom not only took a part of me with them, but also left behind their memories and a part of themselves in my heart.

But none left behind a structure, idol, or monument (to my knowledge) like Mr. Wilson. The very chair he moved from station to station in the kitchen area stands to this day as a reminder that Mr. Wilson was once here and sat in this chair. Someone wrote on it in bold letters, "MR. WILSON'S CHAIR," and various of us followed through with our inscriptions, like "we miss u unc." And of course I'd add, "From ALLAH (God) we come, and TO HIM WE MUST RETURN" on Mr. Wilson's chair. ●

Stateville Speaks wants to honor those we have lost.

You can send eulogies to:

**Stateville Speaks c/o Justice Studies
LWH 4062 Northeastern IL University
5500 N. St. Louis Ave.
Chicago, IL 60625-4699**

ANNOUNCING THE 2024 STATEVILLE SPEAKS AWARDS!

Do you know someone who is incarcerated who continues to be a force of power and generative change? A person whose art — poetry/spoken word, drawing, music — is transformative and mesmerizing? Nominate that person for recognition in an upcoming edition of *Stateville Speaks!*

As this newspaper aims to uplift the voices of the incarcerated, nominate your inside Advocate of the Year and/or Artist of the Year. In your own words, tell us who they are, and why they need to be recognized. What are they doing, and why do they inspire you?

In a one or two-page letter, please describe why this person deserves this award. Include specific examples of their actions, qualities, art, or achievements.

Respond to as many of these questions as are relevant:

1. How has this person made a positive impact on the lives of incarcerated individuals or a positive change within the prison system? Offer examples.
2. How has the Inside Advocate/Artist demonstrated leadership and/or creative ingenuity within the prison community?
3. Have you personally benefited from the advocacy or the creative energies of the Inside Advocate/Artist? If so, how?
4. How has the Inside Advocate/Artist inspired or motivated you?
5. What initiatives or projects do you think this Inside Advocate/Artist should focus on in the future?
6. Would you like to be more involved in supporting the Inside Advocate/Artist? If so, how?

In your nomination, also include the following information:

Your Name:
 Name of Nominee:
 Your Relationship to the Nominee:
 (Optional) Supporting Documents:

(You may attach letters of recommendation, photos, or any other materials that further illustrate why the nominee should receive this award.)

DEADLINE for Nominations - September 1, 2024

Mail your nominations to:

**Stateville Speaks 2024 Awards
 % Justice Studies Department
 Northeastern Illinois University
 5500 N. St. Louis Ave
 Chicago IL 60625**

The award review committee is convened by Renaldo Hudson. The award will come with a small monetary prize and recognition in an upcoming issue of *Stateville Speaks!*

In her own words, Janet Jackson speaks to *Stateville Speaks* after being released Feb. 2, 2024: "I want to thank everyone who supported me all those years I was incarcerated. You gave me hope and fed my spirit, keeping me strong. Freedom is amazing, scary and wonderful. I'm still learning each and every day how much the world has changed yet remains the same. I've got a phone that didn't exist when I was first incarcerated. I've been on Zoom, connected with people all over the world. I pray for my sisters and brothers each day, and I have not forgotten any of you and I'm still fighting. I'm working for and supporting HB2045 and 5219, plus the women's justice bills. I've been in contact with the other death penalty advocates who hope to abolish Life Without Parole sentences. Still fighting, stay strong, be blessed -JJ."

An insightful upcoming event, "**Parole Illinois Throughout the Years**," is aimed at shedding light on the evolution of parole systems in this state. Through panel discussions and fundraising efforts, the event seeks to engage attendees in meaningful conversations surrounding parole reform and its impact on communities. Please encourage your loved ones to attend.

The event is Thursday, May 2, 2024, 6-8 p.m. at **Co-prosperity, 3219 S. Morgan St. Chicago.**

Panelists include: Jimmy Soto, Kevin (Swack) Blumenberg, James Lenoir, Ben Austen, Shaneva McReynolds, and host Ashton Hoselton.

Coalition to Decarcerate IL wants to wish you blessings as this new year unfolds and update you on our efforts to address the water crisis in Illinois prisons.

In 2023, we set out to gather information about the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) violations found in multiple Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) facilities. After collecting information on violations, we connected with lawyers from Northwestern University. Now, we are drafting a petition to bring attention and relief to the water crisis that you are faced with daily. We would love to include your concerns in this petition. Please share any concerns or solutions that you feel should be included.

We welcome your input and believe that those who are closest to the problem are closest to the solution, yet furthest from the

resources. Ensuring directly impacted people are part of this process is necessary for any real impact.

Lastly, please send us the names and email addresses of your loved ones on the outside who might want to be involved in this work. Write to **1006 S. Michigan Ave #604, Chicago, IL 60605.**

Pushing Envelopes Chicago (formerly Black and Pink Chicago) is grounded in prison abolition and builds lgbtq+ community across bars through penpal relationships, legal aid, and re-entry support. 'To push the envelope' is a phrase that means to extend the limits of what is possible or take radical risks. We recognize that surviving incarceration is a radical and transcendent risk, and every day is an incredible act of resilience, particularly for lgbtq+ people.

We are accessible to every prison and jail in Illinois for people who identify as lgbtq+ and/or are living with HIV. We believe that no one is disposable, that abolition is inextricably linked to lgbtq+ liberation, and that our work is not finished until everyone is free from all forms of imprisonment, surveillance, and punishment.

We collaborate with other organizations in Chicago to fight against criminal registries and housing banishment laws that perpetuate homelessness and reincarceration, to support clemency campaigns and lawsuits against IDOC, and to ensure that our folks have the tools they need to survive, both while locked up and for those who are released.

If you identify as being a part of this community, would like a pen pal or are getting released soon, don't hesitate to write to us. We will try our best to support. **Pushing Envelopes Chicago, P.O. Box 577942 Chicago, IL, 60657** or **pushingenvelopeschicago.org**. Sending lots of love to you all!

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Submit Your Essays for the Keeley Schenwar Memorial Essay Prize!

The Truthout Center for Grassroots Journalism is proud to host the annual Keeley Schenwar Memorial Essay Prize, for work authored by people who are currently or formerly incarcerated. We award two prizes for an original essay of 1,500 words or less on the topic of prisons, policing or a related subject. It may be written as a first-person narrative (although that is not a requirement).

Each of the two winners is awarded a prize of \$3,000. The essays are published in Truthout.

This prize is in honor of Keeley Schenwar, who was a devoted mother, daughter, sister, friend, writer and advocate for incarcerated mothers, who was incarcerated, on and off, over the course of 14 years and died in 2020. This prize is given in the spirit of Keeley's desire for the kind of world where everyone can live a good life.

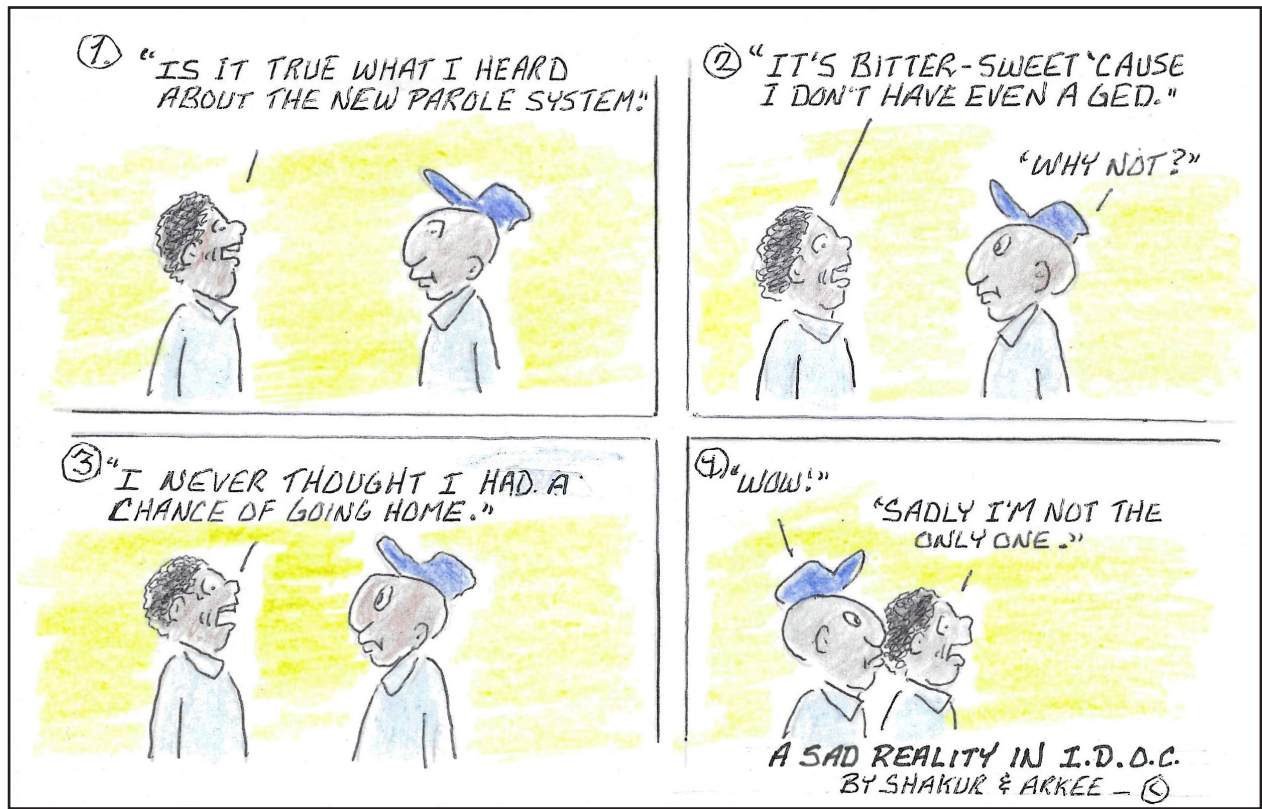
The deadline for submissions is May 15, 2024. Prizes will be announced by September 19, 2024.

Essays can be mailed to:
**Keeley Schenwar Memorial Essay Prize
 Truthout
 PO Box 276414
 Sacramento, CA, 95827**

Essays can also be submitted on your behalf to:
essayprize@truthout.org

Let us know if you or your organization have a community announcement for future issues! See submission info on pg. 2.





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