



Metro IAF Local and State  
Criminal Justice Reform  
Victories: **2014-2025**  
**Power. Action. Justice.**



# Who We Are

## Metro IAF

Metro IAF is a part of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the nation's first and largest network of multi-faith, multiracial, citizen power organizations. We partner with religious congregations, civic organizations, nonprofits and unions at the local level to build broad-based, strictly nonpartisan citizen power organizations, creating leadership development and citizen-led action opportunities and relationships across the lines that often divide our communities. Through the power of local organizing, we've won tough battles on housing, health care, education, living wages, immigration rights and other issues at the local, state, and national level. Our 17 affiliate organizations are located in New York; New Jersey; Maryland; Washington, D.C.; Virginia; North Carolina; and Illinois, with additional exploratory organizing work in West Virginia, Michigan, Indiana, South Carolina/Georgia, and Maine.



East Brooklyn Congregations leaders gathered at Mt. Lebanon Church to hear firsthand the challenges facing formerly incarcerated individuals and to push for greater representation in the fight for justice.



On March 6, 2024, 65 clergy and community leaders with New Jersey Together met with DOC Commissioner Victoria Kuhn at Bethany Baptist Church in Newark, securing her commitment to expand efforts to ease fines, fees, and legal barriers for people reentering society.



In 2022, over 350 Justice United leaders and community members packed the District Attorney Candidates' Assembly, securing commitments from both candidates, Jeff Nieman and Kayley Taber, to fully adopt Justice United's criminal justice reform proposals, including racial disparity tracking, treatment over prosecution for personal drug use, expanded diversion, and sentencing review.



Gov. Wes Moore announced forgiveness of \$13 million in unpaid parole debts for over 6,700 Maryland residents, a move supported by BUILD and Turnaround Tuesday as lifting an unfair burden on returning citizens.

# Victories in Criminal Justice Reform

Serious criminal justice reform is desperately needed in the United States. As a country, our patchwork of federal, state, local and tribal criminal legal systems, including private, for-profit prisons, impacts millions of lives, from the incarcerated themselves to their families, friends and communities. According to the Prison Policy Initiative's March 2025 report, "these systems hold nearly 2 million people in 1,566 state prisons, 98 federal prisons, 3,116 local jails, 1,277 juvenile correctional facilities, 133 immigration detention facilities, and 80 Indian country jails, as well as in military prisons, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. territories — at a system-wide cost of at least \$182 billion each year."

This system affects justice at all levels. Metro IAF and our affiliates can have the biggest impact at the state and local levels, however, and that is where change at the federal level often begins. Here are a few of the hard-fought victories we've won over the past 10+ years.

## Low-level warrants erasure

**We started our campaign for criminal justice reform focusing on erasing warrants for low-level offenses.**

- > In 2015, [St. Paul Community Baptist](#), an [East Brooklyn Congregations](#) member, organized to **erase warrants for low-level offenses**. Invited by Reverend David Brawley, 800 East New York residents lined up outside St. Paul's on a Saturday morning in September to meet with a judge and attorneys from District Attorney Kenneth P. Thompson's office to participate in Thompson's *Begin Again Initiative*, which was trying to deal with New York City's backlog of 1.2 million open warrants for small offenses and low-level misdemeanors that can escalate into legal problems and prevent persons from securing jobs, education aid, and housing. **This action is the spark that inspired all of Metro IAF's affiliates to act on criminal justice reform, resulting in the reforms detailed in this brochure.**

## Fees, fines and debt

**Our organizing helped end financial penalties against returning citizens in two states; these penalties are barriers to reentry, impeding returning citizens from securing housing, jobs, education loans and more.**

- > In 2024, [Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development \(BUILD\) and Turnaround Tuesday in Maryland](#) won a major victory when **Governor Wes Moore signed a bill ending parole fees**, as well as alcohol and drug testing fees statewide. He took further steps to cancel \$13 million in parole fee debt for 6,700+ formerly incarcerated people.

- > Also in 2024, [New Jersey Together and Essex Together](#), [Morris Together](#), and [Jersey City Together](#) celebrated **New Jersey Department of Corrections Commissioner Victoria Kuhn's commitment to expand a plan** to help people clear fines, fees, warrants, and other legal entanglements prior to their release, supporting their reintegration into society.



Durham CAN's research on racial bias in stop-and-search policies led to a new policy on written consent.

## Clean Slate laws

**In Connecticut, we helped pass and implement a law erasing certain criminal records under certain circumstances.**

In 2021, [Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut \(CONNECT\)](#) won a huge victory when **Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont signed the Clean Slate bill into law**. The bill, the strongest of its kind in the country at the time, requires that certain kinds of criminal records be automatically erased after a certain amount of time, as long as the individual with the record stays out of the criminal justice system after their release. CONECT continued fighting to overcome barriers to this law's implementation through 2023, with that implementation happening in 2024. It's estimated to impact [about 200,000 individuals](#).

## Fair Chance housing laws

**We ended discrimination against returning citizens in housing in New Jersey and held landlords accountable for policies that create lack of safe, affordable housing, one of the most fundamental barriers to successful reentry that directly affects formerly incarcerated individuals' ability to transition to work, support their families and rebuild their lives.**

- > In 2021, the first of these laws passed in New Jersey thanks to the hard work of [New Jersey Together](#), [New Jersey's Fair Share Housing Center](#), and [coalition of others to pass the first-of-its-kind Fair Chance in Housing law in the U.S.](#) that ended discrimination for most returning citizens in housing, making it illegal for landlords to discriminate against them.
- > [The very next year](#), New Jersey Together continued the fight by **holding landlords who refused to comply with the new law accountable**. Since the law was passed, hundreds of landlords have been held accountable by the state's Attorney General.

## Accountability for law enforcement

Across five states, we won victories for police accountability in the form of new laws and consent decrees to stop abusive and discriminatory policing practices and institute constitutional relational policing.

- > In 2020, New Jersey Together [led the push to replace the Morris County prosecutor](#) who oversaw some of the worst racial disparities in the state. Within a few days of the start of a public push, the prosecutor announced his retirement.
- > In 2020, the [Greater Boston Interfaith Organization's tireless work](#) with organizers, legislators, Black and Latino Legislative Caucus members, and Governor Charlie Baker led to the **passage of the Justice, Equity and Accountability in Law Enforcement law** aimed at ending racial profiling, excessive force, and no-knock warrants throughout Massachusetts.
- > That same year, a similar law was passed and signed by Governor Ned Lamont in Connecticut [thanks to the efforts of CONECT leaders](#) and multiple allies; **an independent inspector general will now be in charge of all cases of police abuse** and use of force in the state.
- > In 2018, BUILD and Greater Cleveland Congregations worked with the U.S. Department of Justice to hold Baltimore and Cleveland police accountable following the deaths of Freddie Gray and Tamir Rice, helping to lead to the U.S. Department of Justice **consent decrees mandating that the police departments reform their unconstitutional practices** in both cities.
- > Also in 2018, CONECT demanded and won a commitment from the Bridgeport chief of police to get **body cameras for all officers** and to train them in de-escalation and anti-bias tactics.
- > In 2017 in a first for Ohio, Greater Cleveland Congregations won **the creation of a Civil Rights Division** for the Cuyahoga County prosecutor for cases involving possible civil rights violations and deadly use of force cases.
- > In 2014, [Durham CAN](#) won a major victory by using 11 years of statistics on vehicle stops and searches to get Durham, North Carolina, to require **written consent to search any stopped vehicle**, unless the police have probable cause. It was one of the first local written consent requirements in the country and [profiled in the New York Times](#).
- > In 2014, BUILD's work in Baltimore neighborhoods in the wake of Freddie Gray's killing led to the **firing of the Baltimore City police commissioner** and the hiring of a new commissioner, with whom BUILD worked to build trust and accountability within the community.

## Sentencing reforms and fair representation

In three states, we ended mandatory minimum sentencing for certain offenses, created a Public Defender's office and passed a law for fair treatment for juvenile offenders.

- > In 2021, [New Jersey Together worked with the ACLU of New Jersey and the state's Public Defender's Office](#) to **end mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent property crimes and drug offenses**; the bill that passed used legislative leadership and an Attorney General's order to end the practice throughout New Jersey, including retroactively.
- > In 2020, [Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement \(VOICE\)](#) won the fight to **create the first-ever Public Defender's office** in Prince William County to better represent the county's majority Black and Brown, low-income residents.



Al-Tariq K. Witcher, an organizer with New Jersey Together, testified at a State Legislative Committee Hearing on eliminating mandatory minimums in sentencing.

- > In 2014, [Greater Cleveland Congregations](#) (GCC) held a 1,000 person public action that ultimately **won fair, equal treatment of juvenile offenders**, whatever neighborhood they're from. Before the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Timothy McGinty signed an agreement with GCC, 90% of offenders from urban locations were jailed, versus half of offenders from suburban locations.

## Driver's license restoration

Our work led to the restoration of 625,000+ driver's licenses across two states. Driver's licenses are critical to returning citizens being able to work and be good parents, but the government often withholds them for non-payment of fines and fees.

- > In 2023, [Orange County Justice United won a slate of commitments from the incoming District Attorney](#), including mass relief and license restoration. As of 2025, 5,835 individuals received this debt relief, remitting all their fees and restoring their driver's licenses.
- > In 2019, [VOICE's](#) long fight to stop Virginia from suspending driver's licenses over unpaid court debt came to an end with **Governor Ralph Northam and the state legislative leaders acting in a bipartisan way to restore licenses** to 627,000 formerly incarcerated Virginians.

## Jobs for returning citizens

**We secured strategies to place returning citizens in living wage jobs in Maryland. Along with access to affordable housing, jobs are the best correlator to reduced recidivism and to returning citizens leading productive, prosperous lives to support themselves and their families.**



BUILD and Turnaround Tuesday secured a commitment from new Governor Wes Moore in front of 1,200 people to open state jobs in transportation, public works, and other fields to Turnaround Tuesday graduates.

- > After Freddie Gray's 2015 murder and the resulting unrest in Baltimore, [BUILD](#) created the [Turnaround Tuesday](#) jobs movement, which has trained and placed 2,500+ returning citizens and low-income Baltimoreans in living wage jobs with benefits and career paths at anchor institutions like Johns Hopkins and University of Maryland hospitals, with an 80% 2-year retention rate. In 2023, [BUILD](#) and [Turnaround Tuesday](#), BUILD's jobs movement, secured a commitment from Governor Wes Moore to **open state jobs in transportation, public works, and other fields to Turnaround Tuesday's returning citizen graduates** and secured a grant of \$500,000 towards developing and implementing a strategy to expand Turnaround Tuesday's work. BUILD and Turnaround Tuesday are still fighting to hold Governor Moore to his commitment.

## Access to health care

**We won inmates access to better testing during COVID-19, which is an ongoing problem for incarcerated persons, whose health care is often either lacking or inferior to community norms.**

- > In 2020, New Jersey had the highest death rate for COVID-19 in state prisons in the country. [Research by New Jersey Together and organizing with directly impacted families](#) helped show that the only way inmates could receive access to a COVID-19 test was if they were hospitalized for COVID-19. So New Jersey Together worked with the Correction Officers Union to **press for access to COVID-19 testing**, winning consistent, proactive COVID-19 testing throughout the state's prisons.

## Victories in Decriminalizing Mental Health

Right now, [data from the National Alliance on Mental Illness shows that two in five incarcerated people have a history of mental illness](#), which is twice as many as in the overall adult population. This means that multiple individuals who need and deserve mental health treatment are instead sitting in jails or prisons, often without access to their medications and any treatment. Our organizing work focuses on decriminalizing mental health, emphasizing de-escalation training for police officers, the creation of crisis receiving centers and other proven effective approaches to keep people experiencing mental health crises out of the criminal justice system.

Metro IAF and our affiliates have fought to win key victories for those with mental health and addiction challenges, including the following:

### Crisis intervention training for law enforcement

**In three states, we trained or got a commitment to train police in crisis intervention.**

- > In 2021, New Jersey Together [won a commitment from the Morris County Prosecutor's Office to initiate crisis intervention training in Morris County](#). At the time, Morris County was one of two counties in the state that did not conduct this training; it also had some of the highest racial disparities in the state in who was sent to state prison.
- > From 2017 through 2020, Metro IAF affiliates in Illinois, including DuPage United and Lake County United, have worked with local law enforcement to ensure that **their personnel receive crisis intervention training**. In DuPage County, 700+ officers have been trained since 2017, with a commitment from State's Attorney Robert Berlin to train all 3,000 within 6 years. In Lake County, by May 2025 nearly 100 percent of their deputies had received this training. By 2017's end, over 90 percent of the Durham, North Carolina, police force was trained in crisis intervention, thanks to Durham CAN's organizing.
- > In 2016, multiple Metro IAF affiliates in Illinois **won funding and a commitment for this training** for over 1,600 officers.

### Crisis stabilization response sites

**We got crisis stabilization units expanded.**

- > In 2025, Metro IAF New York City secured a commitment before 2,000 leaders from Mayor Zohran Mamdani to develop and fund **10 crisis stabilization centers** as a start to address the city's mental health crisis, which means \$100 million for capital to build the centers and \$80 million for annual operational funding.

- > In 2023, **a crisis stabilization unit opened** at Ascension Mercy Hospital in Aurora, Illinois, thanks to the work of the Fox River Valley Initiative, who fought beginning in 2017 to get approval for the unit and \$450,000 in start-up capital for it.
- > In 2022, [VOICE](#) saw **their first crisis receiving center** in Virginia get underway, thanks to their tireless efforts to end the incarceration of those with mental illness and addiction when what they need instead is treatment. Their work helped secure **\$12 million in state funding** for these centers.
- > In 2019, DuPage United, Fox River Valley Initiative, United Power, and Lake County United worked with five hospital and behavioral health systems across Illinois to **expand crisis stabilization units**, and Metro IAF IL. won a commitment to increase Medicaid/Medicare funding from Governor J.B. Pritzker to cut down on the number of individuals being incarcerated instead of treated at these units. Also in 2019, United Power for Action and Justice successfully fought to secure funding for a behavioral health crisis stabilization Unit at Holy Cross Hospital in Chicago for those experiencing mental health issues as an alternative to the emergency department or jail.
- > For more than 2 years, New Jersey Together in Jersey City [pressed for the creation of a mental health crisis response program](#); after consistent pressure and negotiations with community partners, allies, and public officials, the work [resulted in \\$2 million invested](#) in 2024 to begin this work.
- > In 2020, Fox River Valley Initiative organized **to improve mental health patient outcomes and reduce jail time for mentally ill individuals** charged with misdemeanors in Illinois, instead sending those individuals for mental health treatment at Elgin Mental Health Center.
- > In 2019, Greater Cleveland Congregations discovered that people being diverted from jail to addiction treatment by Ohio's Drug Court were 85-90% white, so they went to work, winning a new Drug Court that will allow **more people of color the chance to enter treatment rather than jail**.
- > Also in 2019, in Illinois and in New York, Fox River Valley Initiative and Long Island CAN worked to **remove barriers to medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for opioid use disorder** in the community and in jails, including through providing peer support, cognitive behavioral therapy and MAT in parole.

## New mental health/addiction centers

### We won the approval and money for new mental health centers.

- > In 2022, thanks in part to the hard work of [United Power for Action and Justice](#), the community of Evanston, Illinois, approved **\$900,000 for the creation of a "Living Room,"** a safe space for adults experiencing mental health crises, so they don't have to call 911 for help.
- > In 2020, Greater Cleveland Congregations (GCC) won their three-year battle to **create a crisis diversion center to treat mentally ill and addicted individuals** rather than sending them through the criminal justice system.
- > In 2018, Lake County United won **state approval to build a behavioral health hospital** with a total of 146 beds to serve adults and teens who might otherwise be sent to jail as a result of behavior caused by their mental health issues.

## Community mental health care access

### In four states, we improved community mental health care through bilingual staff, increased access to care and equity in treatment.

- > In 2024, [Orange County Justice United \(OCJU\) and North Carolina Congress of Latino Organizations \(NCCLO\)](#) won **major funding to hire bilingual community mental health workers**. The program proved so successful that it has become a statewide model, funded by NC Department of Health and Human Services, and now provides mental health services for all marginalized communities. The total investment so far for Orange County alone has been over \$3 million.



Metro IAF NYC's 2025 elections action secured a commitment from Mayor Zohran Mamdani to get 10 new mental health centers funded and built.

## Organizer recruitment and training

### NJ-STEP/Rutgers University Prison to College Program and Organizer Recruitment

The [New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prisons \(NJ-STEP\) initiative](#) is a partnership among multiple higher education institutions in the state plus the State of New Jersey Department of Corrections and the New Jersey State Parole Board. This group works together to give incarcerated people the ability to achieve a college degree during their incarceration and then helps them transition to life successfully after their release.

Metro IAF has worked with NJ-STEP at Rutgers University to recruit new organizers who've earned their bachelor's degree in this program. To date, we have hired seven new organizers (all of whom are African American or Hispanic). We've found these returning citizens to be our best source of organizing talent due to their political knowledge and interest, their deep desire to have meaningful public careers, their drive to make change, their excellent writing skills, and their broad knowledge and reading in politics, history, and social change. They're currently at work in some of our organizing strongholds, and our ultimate goal is to expand the reach of this program to other universities and locations to recruit more returning citizen college graduates.



**Profile: Hanif Parker, Queens Power, New York, New York:** “I organize because I have an affinity for justice work, and IAF power organizing is the most pragmatic, sustainable way to create real change in the disadvantaged communities that shaped me. IAF organizing has developed my

political thinking via a power lens that allows me to understand that you must organize people and money in the civic sector to compel change. The victory I am most proud of is organizing a campaign that handed out over 300 violations from the Human Preservation Department and the Department of Buildings to a slum landlord that preyed on elderly and mentally challenged folks in a low-income apartment building in Queens.”



**Profile: Marquis Howard, BUILD, Baltimore, Maryland:** “I became an IAF organizer because I had a lot of misplaced anger and didn’t understand the roots of my rage. Organizing with BUILD/IAF has taught me how to channel that anger into something positive and productive,

understanding that it’s the pilot light of organizing, the spark. This work has led me into communities where people share that same anger, frustration and distrust, allowing me to listen, learn, research and take collective action with them. Through organizing, the victory I’m most proud that we achieved is eliminating \$1.5 million in all parole fees and drug and alcohol testing costs in Maryland, and organizing further to remove \$13 million in outstanding parole fee debt from parolees in the direct pipeline. I’m growing as a power organizer with IAF by understanding that real change requires action, and action requires power. In our communities, power comes from organizing both people and money. My mission is to help others learn to channel their anger into purpose—to build power and create lasting change.”



**Profile: Lawrence Bell, Metro IAF NY/ Nehemiah HDFC, New York, New York:** “I organize with IAF because it offers me the opportunity to affect real change in the world and amplify the voices of those who have historically been silenced. As a returning citizen, I have a deep

understanding of what it means to be silenced and appreciate the reclaiming power of becoming a power organizer. Through my work with EBC and Nehemiah HDFC, we’re constantly working to build the power needed to address the affordable housing crisis in the city and across the country. The IAF victory I’m most proud of is the Public Land for Public Good campaign focusing on Creedmoor, an underutilized state psychiatric center in Queens where Metro IAF NY won a commitment from Governor Kathy Hochul to build 2,000 affordable Nehemiah homes and apartments. From an organizing perspective, it was transformative to be a part of and witness to our leaders raising their voices, demanding to be heard, and ultimately creating a seismic shift in the Creedmoor plan.”



**Profile, Stephon Whitley, One Wake, Raleigh, North Carolina:** “I spent the first 45 years of my life frustrated because I watched my family, my friends, and my community suffer more injustices than I can remember; and I experienced as much injustice as anyone I know. My frustration

was due to me not knowing how to change those injustices. The IAF helped me to understand how to make change and utilize that frustration as fuel to motivate myself and others to do something about the injustices we experience. As a lead power organizer, the win I’m most proud of is a campaign in which we were able to get the county to put \$5 million into a program to help longtime low-income homeowners offset their property taxes, an issue that was displacing elderly African American people, who were having difficulty paying their property taxes. The reason that win means so much to me is because I worked with individuals who, in the beginning, did not believe they could change their condition. But through the principles of organizing that I shared with them, not only did they play a part in changing their condition, they also changed their perception of power, and realized they too can have power when they organize together.”



**Profile, Christopher Talib Charriez, East Brooklyn Congregations, New York, New York:** “I grew up in prison. I was placed behind those walls at 15 years old. I returned to the world at 41 during the COVID pandemic. I know what powerlessness and injustice look and feel like. The rigor

of coursework at Rutgers University via NJ-STEP taught me the universals to build the power to compel justice. At Boulevard Houses, a New York City Housing Authority development in East Brooklyn New York, I worked to develop leaders to get concrete wins: installing functional intercoms and ADA-compliant automatic doors after decades of neglect, pressing a private developer to hire a director of security, and improving communication between public-housing management and tenants. Most importantly, we’ve developed a core team of Boulevard leaders who set priorities, negotiate and hold public officials and institutions accountable. This is the bridge from academia to action: turning analysis and academic jargon into organized power and organized power into results.”



**Profile, Boris Franklin, New Jersey Together:** “I organize with the IAF because it is the first organization I’ve seen that comes into poor communities and starts by listening instead of imposing solutions. It allows people to shape their own answers, building dignity, leadership, and real power. I’m growing as

a power organizer with the IAF by learning that power flows through every part of life—and that justice is only realized to the degree that we can build power to achieve it. The victory I’m most proud of is securing COVID-19 testing for everyone in New Jersey’s Department of Corrections because it was the first time someone brought me a problem and I discovered I had the vocation, tools and relationships to help solve it.”

# Our Ongoing Work

**For Metro IAF and our affiliates, this work never stops. Three examples of our current priorities include the following:**

- > We want to grow our organizer pipeline. Through our partnership with NJ STEP/Rutgers University Prison to College Program, Metro IAF has found seven full-time associate and lead organizers in New York, New Jersey, Maryland, and North Carolina, and they're receiving ongoing training and mentorship toward potential lead-organizer roles. We intend to extend this model to 8-15 additional Alliance for Higher Education in Prison (AHEP) programs east of the Mississippi, covering the cost of a full-time organizer leading our strategy and outreach, including new organizer salaries and supporting new organizer training.
- > In Baltimore, BUILD and Turnaround Tuesday are fighting for increased access to housing for returning citizens through work to pass a Fair Chance Housing bill in Maryland. Modeled in part on New Jersey's first-in-the-nation law, this bill restricts background checks and encourages individualized assessments. Although it made significant progress in the 2025 legislative session, it didn't pass. BUILD and Turnaround Tuesday are preparing for the 2026 legislative session with legislators, allies, and others by cataloguing stories, training leaders, and developing new allies.
- > Metro IAF is also fighting to expand living wage jobs for returning citizens through anchor institution employers in Baltimore and wants to replicate the nationally recognized Turnaround Tuesday jobs movement by working with other Metro IAF affiliates to share how they can organize to achieve the same victories, including winning returning citizens increased housing access. Our goal is to expand to 3-5 new locations.

Our goal is to expand the winning reforms outlined in this brochure across affiliates. We're seeking funding over the next 5-7 years to add two organizers per affiliate, paired with returning-citizen leaders, and to have cross-affiliate learning to help each other learn the strategies to win multi-issue criminal justice reform campaigns. Because this type of reform is primarily a state and local matter, IAF/Metro IAF has the greatest power locally and is strategically positioned to act and win in our own communities.



**Industrial Areas Foundation**

3938 W. Belle Plaine

Chicago, IL 60618

[www.industrialareasfoundation.org](http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org)

[info@industrialareasfoundation.org](mailto:info@industrialareasfoundation.org)



**Metro IAF**

89-60 164th Street

Jamaica, NY 11432

[www.metro-iaf.org](http://www.metro-iaf.org)

[info@metro-iaf.org](mailto:info@metro-iaf.org)



**West/Southwest IAF**

704 E. Wonsley Drive #200

Austin, TX 78753-6504

[www.swiaf.org](http://www.swiaf.org)

[info@swiaf.org](mailto:info@swiaf.org)