



Metro IAF's Top Local and State Criminal Justice Reform Victories: 2014–2025

Power • Action • Justice



Metro IAF, part of the Industrial Areas Foundation, is a network of 17 broad-based power organizations across NY, NJ, MD, DC, VA, NC, and IL with exploratory work in the South and Great Lakes regions.

For a decade, Metro IAF affiliates' local criminal-justice reform organizing has delivered change where policy is actually made—at the city, county, and state levels—by training and organizing returning citizens and their allies. We are proud of and determined to expand this work.

Highlights from 10+ Years of Victories

Low-level warrants erasure: Low-level warrants can escalate into legal problems and difficulty getting jobs, education, and housing. In 2015, St. Paul Community Baptist, an East Brooklyn Congregations member, organized to erase thousands of warrants for low-level offenses, of which New York City had a backlog of 1.2 million, **inspiring Metro IAF's affiliates to act on criminal justice reform.**

Fees, fines, debt reform and driver's license restoration: Financial penalties present returning citizens with barriers to reentry like difficulty getting a job, education, and housing, and make it harder to parent. In 2024, Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD) and Turnaround Tuesday won a major victory when **Maryland Governor Wes Moore signed a bill ending parole fees and alcohol and drug testing fees**, and canceled \$13 million in parole fee debt for 6,700+ formerly incarcerated people. In 2019, VOICE's long fight to stop Virginia from suspending driver's licenses over unpaid court debt ended when Governor Ralph Northam and state legislative leaders restored licenses to 627,000 formerly incarcerated Virginians.

Clean Slate and fair housing laws: In 2021, Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut (CONNECT) worked with Governor Ned Lamont to get **the then-strongest Clean Slate law in the country** signed, requiring the erasure of criminal records of people who remain crime-free for an extended period; and New Jersey Together, with other partners, won the first-of-its-kind statewide Fair Chance in Housing law, making it illegal for landlords to discriminate against most returning citizens.

Law enforcement and sentencing accountability: We're committed to ending abusive, discriminatory policing and sentencing practices. In 2021, **New Jersey Together and allies ended mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent property crimes and drug offenses.** In 2018, BUILD and Greater Cleveland Congregations worked with the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ) to hold Baltimore and Cleveland police accountable following the deaths of Freddie Gray and Tamir Rice, helping to lead to USDOJ consent decrees mandating the reform of both cities' police departments. In 2014, Durham CAN used 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, one of the first such requirements in the U.S.

Jobs for returning citizens: After Freddie Gray's 2015 murder and the resulting unrest in Baltimore, BUILD created the **Turnaround Tuesday jobs movement, which has trained and placed 2,200+ 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.

Health care access: In 2020, New Jersey had the highest death rate for COVID-19 in state prisons in the country until New Jersey Together worked with the Correction Officers Union and ultimately won **consistent, proactive COVID-19 testing throughout the state's prisons**.

Crisis intervention: Crisis intervention helps decriminalize mental health by diverting those with mental illness from incarceration into treatment. From 2017 through 2020, Metro IAF Illinois affiliates Fox River Valley Initiative, DuPage and Lake Counties United worked with local law enforcement to ensure that **1,800 officers received Crisis Intervention Training**. In 2019, Metro IAF Illinois affiliates worked with five state hospital and behavioral health systems to **expand crisis stabilization centers**. They also won a commitment from Governor J.B. Pritzker to increase Medicaid/Medicare funding to these centers, giving law enforcement a treatment option for individuals with mental illness. In 2020, **Greater Cleveland Congregations secured a commitment to build a crisis diversion center**, with a second on the way. In 2025, Metro IAF New York City secured **a commitment before 2,000 leaders from Mayor-elect 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.

Community mental health and addiction care access: In 2024, Orange County Justice United and North Carolina Congress of Latino Organizations won over **\$3 million to fund bilingual community mental health workers**—now a statewide model—providing mental health services for all marginalized communities. In 2019, in Illinois and New York, Fox River Valley Initiative and Long Island CAN **worked to remove barriers to medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder** in the community and in jails.

Organizer recruitment and training: Metro IAF has worked with NJ-STEP/Rutgers University Prison to College Program to create **an innovative organizer recruitment pipeline**. As of 2025, we've hired seven NJ-STEP/Rutgers graduates, all of whom are African American or Hispanic, as full-time associate & lead organizers working in some of our organizing strongholds: Baltimore, New York/New Jersey, and North Carolina.

WHAT'S NEXT?

We're focused on scaling our criminal justice reform organizing over the next 5–7 years by:

1. **Expanding winning reforms across affiliates**—for example, Clean Slate laws, housing access, fines/fees elimination, mental-health diversion, police standards, and living-wage jobs pathways—to reach a critical mass of change in cities, counties, and states.
2. **Growing the organizer pipeline.** We intend to expand the NJ STEP/Rutgers Prison to College Program organizer recruitment model to 8-15 additional Alliance for Higher Education in Prison (AHEP) programs east of the Mississippi.



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