Emerging Stronger

PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SOCIETY

2021 ANNUAL REPORT



The challenges brought on by the past year have been described as unprecedented, historic, and unforgettable. Our report shares how we navigated through them and ultimately came out of this extraordinary year

stronger.

For PA's prisons, the post-pandemic "normal" may be worse than the old normal.

Twenty months into the global pandemic, few things are totally back to normal. But for many of us, myself included, there are glimpses of a brighter post-pandemic future—the winter holidays will be with my whole family and we might even get to see "The Nutcracker".

But for people in Pennsylvania's prisons and their families, the post-pandemic future looks bleak.

Here is what the post-pandemic "new normal" may mean for people in prison and their families.

Less access for families

A number of county jails remain closed to family visits entirely as they face the threat of a coronavirus resurgence and struggle with low vaccination rates. While state prisons—which have done a solid job of vaccinating their residents—have restarted visits, they've done so with limited hours that make visiting near impossible for working families and those who live hours away from the prison housing their loved one.

Many prison officials we speak to predict that limited visiting hours and reliance on video-visits will continue once the pandemic is over. They cite the convenience of video visits and note that staffing visiting rooms takes a lot of staff time.

What this means is that many families who used to regularly see and hug their sons, daughters, or siblings won't be able to again with any frequency.

Less movement and activity

For much of the pandemic, prisons have imposed near constant "lockdowns" with people

confined to their cells for much of the day, food delivered to cells, activities cancelled, and access to libraries and law libraries suspended. This is still the case in many of Pennsylvania's prisons, while in others, more movement is returning, and a few programs and educational classes have started back up.

While all of us will have lasting effects from the isolation and anxiety of the pandemic, for people who have been confined to prison, these extreme and lengthy lockdowns will have an untold traumatic impact.

Which is why, the Prison Society was surprised to learn of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections' decision to permanently close dining halls and continue to serve food on trays to people in their housing units. Many people in custody have written to us worried about this change. "This is just about keeping us locked in our units longer," "this means more isolation" and "the DOC just wants to encourage laziness" are some of the comments we have received.

More need for transparency

As you will read in these pages, over the course of the pandemic we have been innovating, strengthening, and growing. Today we are having more of an impact than ever before—getting the vaccine to people in jail, pressuring prisons to reopen for family visits, and calling out policies and practices that degrade the health, safety, and dignity of Pennsylvanians in prison.

While post-pandemic life in prison looks more restrictive and isolating than ever, together we can write a different future.



CLAIRE SHUBIK-RICHARDS
Executive Director

Our volunteers are a lifeline —

Together, with our statewide network volunteers, we have eyes on the inside, monitoring 85 state and county correctional facilities. We respond to individual requests for help and advocate for the health, safety, and dignity of people who live behind bars.

"Request to visit a person in custody who is exhibiting post-stroke symptoms." —SCI Sommerset

We received a letter for help on behalf of a young man who suffered a stroke just before his trial at age 19. The young man's speech and cognitive functioning were noticeably impacted.

Our volunteer visited the young man and discovered he had not received any therapy during his three years of confinement. We advocated on his behalf and after meeting with the appropriate prison administrators, therapy was granted.



MISSION CHAMPIONS

"THROUGH THEIR PASSIONATE ADVOCACY AND NETWORK OF VOLUNTEERS, THE PRISON SOCIETY PLAYS A CRITICAL ROLE IN PROVIDING A VOICE TO INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS AND THEIR LOVED ONES."

—JOHN WETZEL, FORMER PENNSYLVANIA CORRECTIONS SECRETARY

"Received several letters from people in custody with safety concerns as COVID-19 spreads." —Centre County Jail

During the height of the pandemic, we received multiple letters from incarcerated people worried about contracting the coronavirus.

Our volunteers went out and discovered that people in custody were worried about officers bringing the virus into the jail from the outside. With little information and access to the outside, they were concerned about what they were hearing (and not hearing). We also found that they were asked to clean but did not have adequate cleaning supplies and masks.

Our volunteers met with the warden and elevated these concerns. The jail took action to improve communication and increase access to cleaning supplies.



"Mother called concerned that her son is not receiving several medications for his mental health. She has not heard from him in two weeks." —Philadelphia County Jail

Our volunteer visited and found that he was being held in solitary confinement. He was wrapped in only a rough blanket and was disheveled. He described being harassed by guards and other incarcerated people, and reported that when he reacted he was placed in solitary where he had languished with no clothing, activities, or medical evaluation.

Our volunteer followed-up with the prison's health services department and advocated for a re-evaluation of his medical records and disciplinary charges. He was provided with his necessary medications, taken out of solitary and was able to stabilize. Throughout the process, our monitor communicated with loved ones on the outside, bridging the information gap.

Introducing Our

Community Advisory Council VEAR!

This year, we established a Community Advisory Council (CAC) of formerly incarcerated people and family members, several of whom also volunteer with the Society. They are a remarkable group of prison-life experts who play an invaluable role in helping us continuously improve our services and outreach.



SANDRA JOHNSON



JOSE LUIS ALAMO



ADRIAN PERRY



TERRI MINOR SPENCER



FELICIA DUSHA



VIRGINIA HAMMOND



RICHARD GARLAND



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JOANN WYJADKA



PAMELLA SUPERVILLE



THOMAS ROACH



ERIK VANZANT

Meet our 2021 Award Winners

Every year, for the past 234 years, we've honored people who exemplify our mission. This year's honorees are living proof that steadfast work and small actions can have a large impact.



MARION DAMICK
PRISON SOCIETY

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Allegheny County

At 96 years old, Marion has been a volunteer for more than two decades and has been involved with the Society for even longer. She is respected by prison staff and fellow volunteers alike who are inspired by the work they see Marion doing in the county prison.



PAUL SCHLUETER

INCARCERATED PERSON OF THE YEAR

SCI Camp Hill

Paul Schlueter has served over 35 years of a life sentence and is known for his profound impact on the people he has lived with in prison. Paul was nominated for this award by someone who served time with him, was deeply helped by Paul, and is now thriving in the community.

Unfortunately, we're unable to show Paul's face due to a dehumanizing PA rule that we are fighting to change.



CHERYL STEBERGER

CORRECTIONAL
EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR
Lancaster County Prison
Warden

Warden Steberger
was honored for her
compassionate leadership
during this unprecedented
year and commitment to
actively ensuring the health,
safety, and dignity of those
in her care. She believes
programming is of vital
importance and strives to
make life better for everyone
under her care.





Making News

We are the go-to resource for the unbiased truth about what's happening in Pennsylvania's prisons and jails. This year, we deepened our reach across all of our media channels and are publishing vital information you can't find anywhere else.



Our supporter update following has increased 50% since the start of the pandemic reaching 4,600 inboxes and 9,300 social media followers.



FEATURED CONTRIBUTOR



Joel Wolfram JOURNALIST AND RESEARCHER

Joel has been tracking COVID-19 in Pennsylvania state prisons and county jails, and reporting on pandemic prison conditions through our weekly supporter updates. This work covers 23 state prisons and 62 county jails, and is an important way the Society is promoting transparency and accountability in county jails amid the decline of local

journalism. Our weekly updates are the main reason our earned media mentions more than doubled.

Their impact is also increasing. The Inquirer, Morning Call, Pike County Courier, and Spotlight PA have either directly quoted from our updates or based their reporting on them.

2021 Highlight

IMPROVING VACCINE ACCESS IN COUNTY JAILS

Nearly a month after vaccines first became eligible, incarcerated people still lacked access in half of Pennsylvania's county jails, despite being given priority in the state's plan. Together with our supporters, we urged The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) to address this gross inequity for people confined to county jails. The DOH responded by releasing 8,500 doses of Moderna and J&J vaccines to county jails within the week. Getting vaccines to county jails was a major step forward in protecting incarcerated people and correctional workers across Pennsylvania from the virus.





VIEW OUR
INTERACTIVE
TRACKING MAP
TO SEE HOW
COUNTIES HAVE
RESPONDED TO
THE CORONAVIRUS
CRISIS.



"Our unique access gives us the ability to tell the truest story of pandemic prison conditions, providing the information necessary for the public, our elected representatives, and prison administrators to make informed decisions that not only save lives, but dollars while protecting people in custody and those who pay for them to be in custody."

—Anton Andrew, Education & Advocacy Fellow

Taking Action:

THE END OF PRISON GERRYMANDERING

Through the legislative redistricting process this year, Pennsylvania had a once-in-a-decade opportunity to end "prison gerrymandering," a practice that distorts our democracy by reducing representation for predominantly Black communities, and by shifting electoral power from cities to rural regions. We were especially proud that at least 100 of our Society supporters responded to our call to action and submitted public testimony directly to Pennsylvania's Redistricting Commission (LRC). Our voices were heard and made a difference—the LRC voted to end prison gerrymandering. This change was championed by our board member State Representative Joanna McClinton (D-191).



100 PRISON
SOCIETY
SUPPORTERS
SUBMITTED
PUBLIC
TESTIMONY TO
END PRISON
GERRYMANDERING

MEDICAL COPAY SUSPENSION CONTINUED

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have called for the elimination of the \$5 medical copay, and have made significant progress towards ending this barrier to health care behind bars for good. Thanks to our increased outreach, state officials and elected representatives who have the power to end this policy have tuned in and are taking up our call to action.

AT THE STARTING SALARY RATE OF 19 CENTS/HOUR, IT WOULD TAKE OVER 26 HOURS OF WORK TO AFFORD THE \$5 COPAY, MAKING HEALTHCARE INACCESSIBLE FOR MANY.



"From all angles, the smartest option is to permanently eliminate medical co-pays for people who are incarcerated."

—Prison Society Board Member State Senator Camera Bartolotta (R-46)



2021 Highlight

PRISONS OPEN FOR VISITS AGAIN

When PA announced plans to re-open much of the state by Memorial Day, prisons were left out of the plan. The Prison Society put out a call to action to our supporters, and state prisons responded by beginning the process of opening to in-person visits. This was a big victory for incarcerated people and their loved ones, who had endured agonizing isolation going through the entire pandemic without an in-person visit.

FOR EVERY
PERSON IN PRISON
CUSTODY, THERE
IS A COMMUNITY
DEVASTATED BY
THEIR ABSENCE.



One in two Americans has a loved one who is or has been incarcerated

81,000

children in PA have an incarcerated parent



"The intense isolation incarcerated people have endured over the past year has taken an incredible toll on mental health, as many people in custody have spent the majority of the pandemic confined to a small cell for 23 hours a day. Research conclusively shows that visiting is important in preserving mental health, supporting successful reintegration, and contributing to a safer prison environment. There remains much work to be done to improve connection within PA prisons, and the Society remains committed to mitigating the isolation prison creates by design."—Kirstin Connell, Social Services Director

Building Connection:

FAMILY SUPPORT HELPLINE

For families with a loved one behind bars, the Pennsylvania Prison Society is a primary and invaluable source of reliable information; information about how to stay connected, information about what is happening in a particular facility, information that because of our unique history, relationships, and legal authority only the Prison Society can provide. The Prison Society's Family Support Helpline alleviates some of the burden incarceration causes by helping families understand the system, access resources, and become more informed self-advocates.

5,000+ LOVED ONES CALLED OUR HELPLINE FOR HELP AND INFORMATION THIS YEAR. WE ANSWERED EVERY CALL.

"I really care about the families who contact us and feel their pain and frustration in dealing with a system that isn't gracious to older folks, disabled folks, folks in poverty, or anyone really. Every person who calls me gets a response within two business days, and I do my best to find the right resources for them. Often, people are totally shocked that I even called back at all, and express how grateful they are for someone to at least speak with them—so many people I speak with are given the cold shoulder by prison administrators."

—Lara Bros, Administrative and Family Support Associate

MENTORING & HOPE ALIVE

By adapting our mentoring curriculum to be conducted virtually, we were able to restart this much relied upon, much valued support despite the cessation of in-person programming in all state prisons. Our Hope Alive support group also relaunched virtually after a hiatus of eight months. The development of a remote option has allowed us to explore options to expand this programming to reach even more underserved people in the Commonwealth.

OUR FIRST YEAR OF REMOTE MENTORING HAS BEEN SO SUCCESSFUL WE'RE POISED TO EXPAND THE PROGRAM ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH.

GRATERFRIENDS

Graterfriends, a newsletter by and for incarcerated people, has been in print since 1981. Our subscribership grew by 20% over the course of the last year as incarcerated people looked for ways to collectively process and grieve the devastation wrecked by the pandemic. Authors mourned lives lost, voiced frustration about living conditions, and collectively expressed concern for each other and their communities back home.

MORE THAN 900 INCARCERATED PEOPLE SUBSCRIBE TO GRATERFRIENDS, WITH READERSHIP COVERING ALL 23 STATE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND MANY COUNTY PRISONS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE OF PENNSYLVANIA.

PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SOCIETY

2021 Highlight

MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC'S SECOND WAVE

Congregate care settings like prisons were ground zero for the explosive second wave of COVID-19. As the state's independent corrections monitor, we made it our business to understand how well the measures put in place by the Department of Corrections (DOC) were being implemented. To get a first-hand perspective, we conducted our first-ever survey of incarcerated people that some 650 people in Pennsylvania state custody filled out. Our findings were published in two reports that surfaced concerns and actionable recommendations related to communication, hygiene, and access to medical care. The DOC committed to addressing many of the concerns and policy makers and officials alike have quoted extensively from the report.



"The Department of
Correction's actions in
response to our Covid-19
survey report are a perfect
example of the value
of independent prison
monitoring. At it's best,
our work sheds light on
the places where policy
and practice do not align,
and assesses the less
quantifiable aspects of
prison life—vital issues
such as health, safety, and
dignity."

—Noah Barth, Prison Monitoring Director



Our survey revealed that the more often and effectively prison officials communicate with people in custody, the more they reported feeling safe.

Ending Abuse:

PROACTIVE MONITORING

We ramped up our systematic monitoring visits this year and made major strides in documenting prison conditions. Our prison monitoring team began utilizing proactive monitoring approaches including facility walkthroughs and surveys. We shared our detailed findings (observations, interviews with individuals, and recommendations) with prison officials so they could take action.

"I hear from the representatives of the Pennsylvania Prison Society. I'll ask questions and get information that I can take action on."

—District Attorney Fran Chardo, Dauphin County





MONITORING REPORTS ARE PUBLICLY AVAILABLE ON OUR

This year, the Adams County volunteer chapter helped persuade the county prison to issue an ID to people being released from custody, greatly easing the transition home.

NEW OVERSIGHT TOOLS

We returned to in-person visiting this year, ready to pilot new oversight tools for recording our observations and structuring our discussions. With these new tools, we were able to make major strides in documenting prison conditions, significantly contributing to the body of solid data available on Pennsylvania's prisons and jails. This has been a boon to both our volunteer chapters and their counterparts in county government and prison administration. Better tracking our monitoring efforts has led to more pointed and effective advocacy as well as a better informed public.

"The importance of independent oversight is being recognized around the country. This year, we were asked to provide testimony to the Arizona and Virginia legislatures, both of which have bills creating independent oversight agencies."

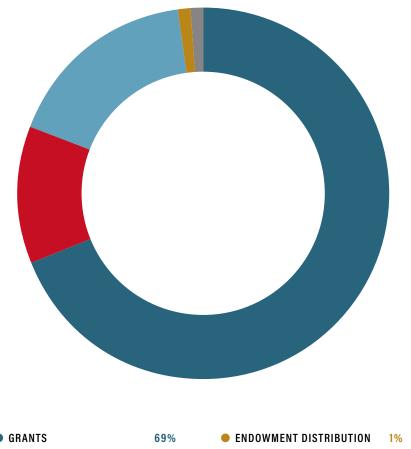
-Claire Shubik-Richards, Prison Society



PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SOCIETY

Financial Report

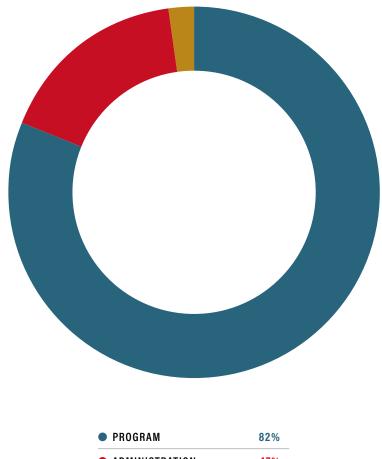
Revenue



69%	ENDOWMENT DISTRIBUTION	1%
12%	• OTHER	1%
17%		
	TOTAL REVENUE \$1,048,00	00
	12%	12% • OTHER

"THROUGH STRONG FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP AND THE SUPPORT OF MANY GREAT PEOPLE AND INSTITUTIONS, WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO PURSUE GROWTH INITIATIVES, EXPAND OUR CAPABILITY OF SUPPORT, AND PURSUE REFORM OF OUR PRISON AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM."—CHRIS COVINGTON, TREASURER

Expendatures



PROGRAM	82%
ADMINISTRATION	17%
FUNDRAISING	2%

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Kim Paymaster

PRISON SOCIETY MONTHLY

DONOR

"When I moved to Fairmount in late 2016, I was looking for a way to support efforts around criminal justice reform. I went to a number of events at Eastern State Penitentiary and learned about some of the efforts happening across Philadelphia, the state, and around the country. Very soon after, I started volunteering with the Philadelphia Bail Fund which has done incredible work before and during this pandemic. However, with so many still incarcerated and conditions deteriorating during the pandemic, I really wanted to support an

organization that was advocating for those behind bars, while connecting with their families and pushing for policy change. The Prison Society has done an incredible job over the last couple years in particular in keeping those in the community informed about what is happening (and not happening), while fighting for those that are often overlooked and ignored. My husband and I have been trying to provide more of our contributions through monthly donations since we know this provides consistency and stability to nonprofits as they do their work."

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THE WORK OF THE PRISON SOCIETY IS NEEDED NOW MORE THAN EVER. THANKS TO THE EFFORTS OF THE VOLUNTEERS, SUPPORTERS, STAFF, AND BOARD, WE ARE MEETING THAT NEED NOW MORE THAN EVER. TOGETHER, WE ARE CREATING A FUTURE IN WHICH THE HEALTH, SAFETY, AND DIGNITY OF ALL INCARCERATED PENNSYLVANIANS WILL BE PROTECTED AND HONORED.

-REBECCA HILLYER, BOARD PRESIDENT

LOOKING FORWARD

While we've made tremendous strides this year, emerging stronger from one of the most challenging periods imaginable, there is still so much more we can do—so much we must do.

Across the Commonwealth, our work is needed now more than ever. Each week, we receive dozens of requests for help from incarcerated people who are experiencing violence, lack of food, inadequate supervision, and prolonged confinement while awaiting trial. For people living behind bars and their loved ones, we are often the only place to turn for help.

We exist to hold our local elected officials accountable and provide direct assistance to those who are suffering needlessly as a result of this broken system.

With your help, we can write a different future. Join us.

DONATE. VOLUNTEER. SUBSCRIBE. FOLLOW.





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