



**THE  
SENTENCING  
PROJECT**

**Annual Report**

**2024**



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# About The Sentencing Project

WHY WE FIGHT

**The Sentencing Project** advocates for effective and humane responses to crime that minimize imprisonment and criminalization of youth and adults by promoting racial, ethnic, economic, and gender justice.

## Our Policy Priorities



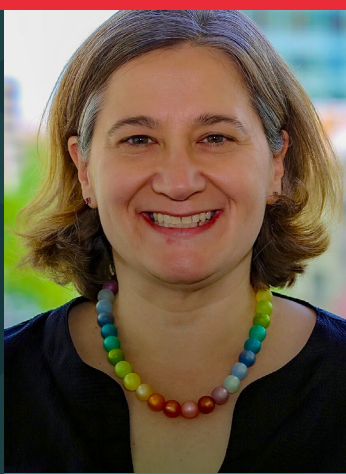
## Our Commitment to Racial Justice

We recognize that ending both mass incarceration and the ineffectiveness of our current criminal legal system cannot be achieved without addressing the rampant racism that supports it. This racism costs lives, inflicts atrocities, and prevents the United States from functioning as a true democracy. As The Sentencing Project works to expand our impact, we are guided by a strategic focus on racial justice and a commitment to amplifying the work, voices, and leadership of directly impacted individuals, families, and communities.



# Message from The Executive Director, Kara Gotsch

ROOTED IN PURPOSE



**I'm filled  
with pride  
for the  
progress  
we've made  
together**

**and gratitude for the unwavering  
commitment of The Sentencing  
Project's community in 2024."**

We accomplished important legislative milestones to expand opportunities for a second look at long sentences and increased voter access for incarcerated people. Our research documented critical new findings: dispelling myths about increased incarceration's impact on crime, how four million people were shut out of the 2024 election cycle, and how media misinformation about youth involvement in crime in Baltimore, Maryland likely contributed to legislative backsliding for young people impacted by the justice system. What we have learned through The Sentencing Project's signature research and advocacy we have shared with a vibrant community of partners, practitioners and allies who

believe deeply, like us, in building a more just and equitable criminal legal system.

Throughout 2024, our team remained focused on being not only a source of trusted research and advocacy but also a bridge connecting communities, lawmakers, advocates, and people directly impacted by incarceration. We recognize that meaningful change doesn't happen in isolation. It requires shared purpose, open dialogue, and a willingness to meet the moment with both urgency and care.

The Sentencing Project also spent 2024 looking inward to ensure our commitments to justice, fairness, and equity were represented in how we operate as an organization. We doubled down on our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging and for the first time the staff developed values and vision statements for the organization. Our organizational culture centers respect, dignity, and building healthy, thriving communities.

As we look ahead, we carry the lessons we have learned with us. We know the path to transformation is long, but we are committed to staying the course—and walking it in community. The Sentencing Project will continue to serve as a bridge, helping to close the gap between where we are and the future we know is possible.

Thank you for standing with us, believing in this vision, and being part of the movement.

**In community,  
Kara Gotsch**





# Where We Work

UNITED FOR JUSTICE

**The Sentencing Project brings unique value as a bridge organization, building grassroots advocacy capacity and uniting work on the ground with overarching policy changes at the national level.**



We currently partner with more than 80 national groups and over 300 state-level organizations who are working with us to end extreme sentencing, expand voting rights, promote youth justice, and eliminate racial disparities in our criminal legal system. In all of these partnerships, we are committed to centering the voices of directly impacted individuals and communities; and their direction informs and tailors our strategy.



# Racial Justice Fund

**In the wake of George Floyd's murder, The Sentencing Project launched the Racial Justice Fund to deepen our investment in grassroots leaders driving change in their communities. These targeted grants strengthen the capacity of state advocacy partners and expand the reach of their work.**

In 2024, we awarded nearly \$200,000 to organizations across 12 states from Colorado to Massachusetts to Texas, fueling local campaigns that challenge racial injustice and advance systemic reform.

## Impact Highlight

As part of our Racial Justice Fund, The Sentencing Project provided targeted support to the Colorado Criminal Justice Coalition (CCJC), enabling a local campaign that resulted in a landmark victory: Colorado became the first state to require polling stations in all county jails and detention facilities, granting incarcerated individuals the right to vote in person. This historic law significantly advanced democracy, racial equity, and reintegration. Together with CCJC, we hosted monthly advocacy sessions, supported press outreach, and provided critical grant funding to support civic engagement efforts.



**Thanks to The Sentencing Project support, we have made significant strides in voter turnout among justice-involved individuals, built new relationships with election teams in counties we had never worked with before, and identified key areas to expand our education programs further.”**

— **Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition**, 2024 Racial Justice Fund Grant Recipient



**The support of The Sentencing Project was instrumental in enabling Oklahoma Appleseed to mobilize communities, raise public awareness, and secure a major legislative victory through the passage of the Oklahoma Survivors Act. By integrating public education, art, and organizing, we successfully engaged diverse audiences and amplified the voices of criminalized survivors across the state.”**

— **Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law and Justice**,  
2024 Racial Justice Fund Grant Recipient





# The Second Look Network

Throughout 2024, The Sentencing Project's Second Look Network deepened its role as a national hub for advocates working to end extreme sentencing. With over...

**340 149**

INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

ORGANIZATIONS

**32**

STATES

the Network provided attorneys, mitigation specialists, and legal advocates with the tools, training, and support to secure

freedom for people serving decades-long prison terms.

This year, Second Look Network members helped win the release of at least 45 people through sentence reduction and review—a powerful testament to the collective strength of this growing community.

To support and sustain that momentum, the Network convened two in-person gatherings in 2024:

## Tulsa, Oklahoma (Spring 2024):

Tulsa, Oklahoma (Spring 2024): The Network's second annual convening brought together more than 115 advocates from nearly 20 states. Sessions focused on trauma-informed defense, litigation strategies, public messaging, and reentry planning. The gathering fostered peer learning, solidarity, and collaboration across state lines—building the collective muscle needed for this long-haul work.

## Stanford Law School, California (Fall 2024):

A West Coast convening offered targeted legal workshops and deep dives into emerging issues, such as discretionary parole models, the role of lived experience in post-conviction storytelling, and strategies for motivating prosecutors to use their resentencing authority. Co-hosted with Stanford's Three Strikes Project, the convening drew top legal talent and highlighted active casework, including *People v. Heard*, a major resentencing effort for youth with de facto life sentences.

Beyond convenings, the Second Look Network hosted over 30 virtual trainings and discussion forums, circulated regular strategy updates and case briefs, and maintained a robust legal resource library. In just one year, it became an essential infrastructure for legal teams fighting to restore hope and freedom to people unjustly incarcerated for far too long.



# Gathering in Community

➔ In August 2024, nearly 100 advocates, organizers, and academics from 30 states, Washington, D.C., and Chile gathered in Denver for The Sentencing Project's Civic Power: Unlocking Our Democracy convening.

For three days, participants engaged in plenaries, breakout sessions, and strategy labs focused on expanding voting access for justice-impacted communities, particularly individuals with felony convictions and those held in jails and prisons.

## Highlights included:

- Keynotes and panels led by directly impacted leaders who shared how grassroots momentum can dismantle voting barriers
- Workshops linking jail-based voting with broader restoration efforts, offering practical approaches to ensuring eligible incarcerated individuals can cast their ballots
- Collaborative strategy sessions, where participants built shared action plans to expand democracy and restore rights nationwide
- A highlight panel co-sponsored with PLAN (Prisoners Legal Advocacy Network), where impacted jailhouse lawyers explained how legal empowerment inside prisons complements civic advocacy on the outside

**By weaving together lived experience, data-driven advocacy, and legal expertise, Denver's convening affirmed a central truth:** true democracy requires restoring the vote for all—even behind bars.





# 2024 at a Glance

BY THE NUMBERS

## Publications

24

REPORTS, FACT  
SHEETS, & RESEARCH  
BRIEFS PRODUCED

26

OPINION PIECES  
PUBLISHED

## Public Education

127

PUBLIC TALKS &  
PRESENTATIONS  
GIVEN BY STAFF

9

WEBINARS HOSTED



2323

MENTIONS IN NATIONAL,  
STATE, & LOCAL MEDIA

800

WEBINAR REGISTRANTS  
AVERAGED FOR EACH

943K

WEBSITE PAGE VIEWS



# Publication Highlights

SHAPING POLICY



## A Weak Relationship

Over the past decade, 46 U.S. states successfully lowered both imprisonment and crime rates. While incarceration may play a limited role in crime reduction, the brief emphasizes that mass imprisonment isn't a necessary path to safety—and justice systems can instead invest in community-based, evidence-driven alternatives. The report calls for reforms to address the underlying safety needs of communities, including eliminating extreme sentences, expanding substance abuse treatment and diversion programs, and implementing “second look” laws to strengthen community safety without relying on prison growth.



## How Misinformation is Undermining Youth Justice Policy in Baltimore

This report examines youth crime coverage in Baltimore's six leading media outlets during the first half of 2024. Although young people under 18 represent about 5% of arrests, they appeared in 28% of crime-related stories, with one station (Fox45) featuring them in over 50% of its reports. Media coverage regularly used fear-inducing terms like “spike” or “crisis” and presented rising youth crime trends without sufficient data. Such sensational reporting helped fuel bipartisan support for Maryland's House Bill 814, which reversed earlier youth justice reforms in April 2024.



## Four Million Denied Voting Rights Due to a Felony Conviction

This updated report estimates that around 4 million Americans (1.7% of eligible voters) were barred from voting in the 2024 election due to felony convictions. Though this marks a 31% decline since 2016, significant racial disparities persist: 1 in 22 Black adults and over 1.5% of Latino voters remain disenfranchised. The majority, 70%, are living in their communities post-sentence. With most states continuing felony disenfranchisement, the report calls for national reforms to restore voting rights and bolster democracy.





# Spotlight on Michigan

SHAPING POLICY

**In 2024, The Sentencing Project joined collaborative amicus efforts** in three key cases before the Michigan Supreme Court, each challenging mandatory Life Without Parole (LWOP) for emerging adults:

An amicus brief is a document filed by someone who is not a party in a court case but wants to offer information, expertise, or insight to help the court make a decision. It means “friend of the court” brief.

**1.**

## **People v. Czarnecki:**

Joined with ACLU-MI and Juvenile Law Center, The Sentencing Project urged the court to extend individualized sentencing to 19-year-olds, arguing developmental science warrants protections beyond just 18-year-olds.

**2.**

## **People v. Taylor:**

In collaboration with the same partners, The Sentencing Project advocated on behalf of Montario Taylor, sentenced to LWOP at age 20. The brief emphasized that 20-year-olds share the same neurodevelopmental characteristics as younger youth, and should receive equal constitutional protection under Michigan’s ban as cruel or unusual punishment.

**3.**

## **People v. Poole:**

Filed to ensure that Michigan’s 2022 landmark decision barring automatic LWOP for 18-year-olds (People v. Parks) would apply retroactively, covering individuals currently serving those sentences without parole eligibility.



**Together, these briefs extend the logic and protections first established for youth—grounded in developmental science and Eighth Amendment jurisprudence, to older adolescents (18–20), widening access to just and individualized sentencing across Michigan.**



# Advocacy Updates

PUSHING FOR CHANGE

## Goal: End Extreme Sentences

In 2024, The Sentencing Project advanced sentencing reform through targeted advocacy at both the state and federal levels. We supported coalitions, briefed lawmakers, and equipped advocates with research-driven resources to challenge extreme sentencing practices.

Our work included influential publications, high-impact webinars, and participation in key legal cases through amicus briefs. By bridging research, policy, and public engagement, we helped shape a national conversation around more humane and effective responses to crime and empowered reform efforts in communities across the country.

## Goal: Expand Voting Rights

In 2024, The Sentencing Project continued to be a trusted national resource for research, strategy, and advocacy on voting rights for justice-impacted communities. Our team provided technical assistance and campaign support to partners in more than a dozen states, including California, Colorado, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Nebraska, and beyond. We also played a vital role as a convener, fostering cross-state collaboration and leading national conversations on expanding the vote. From policy development to coalition building, our advocacy helped strengthen the growing movement to dismantle felony disenfranchisement and protect democratic participation for all.

## Oklahoma Highlight

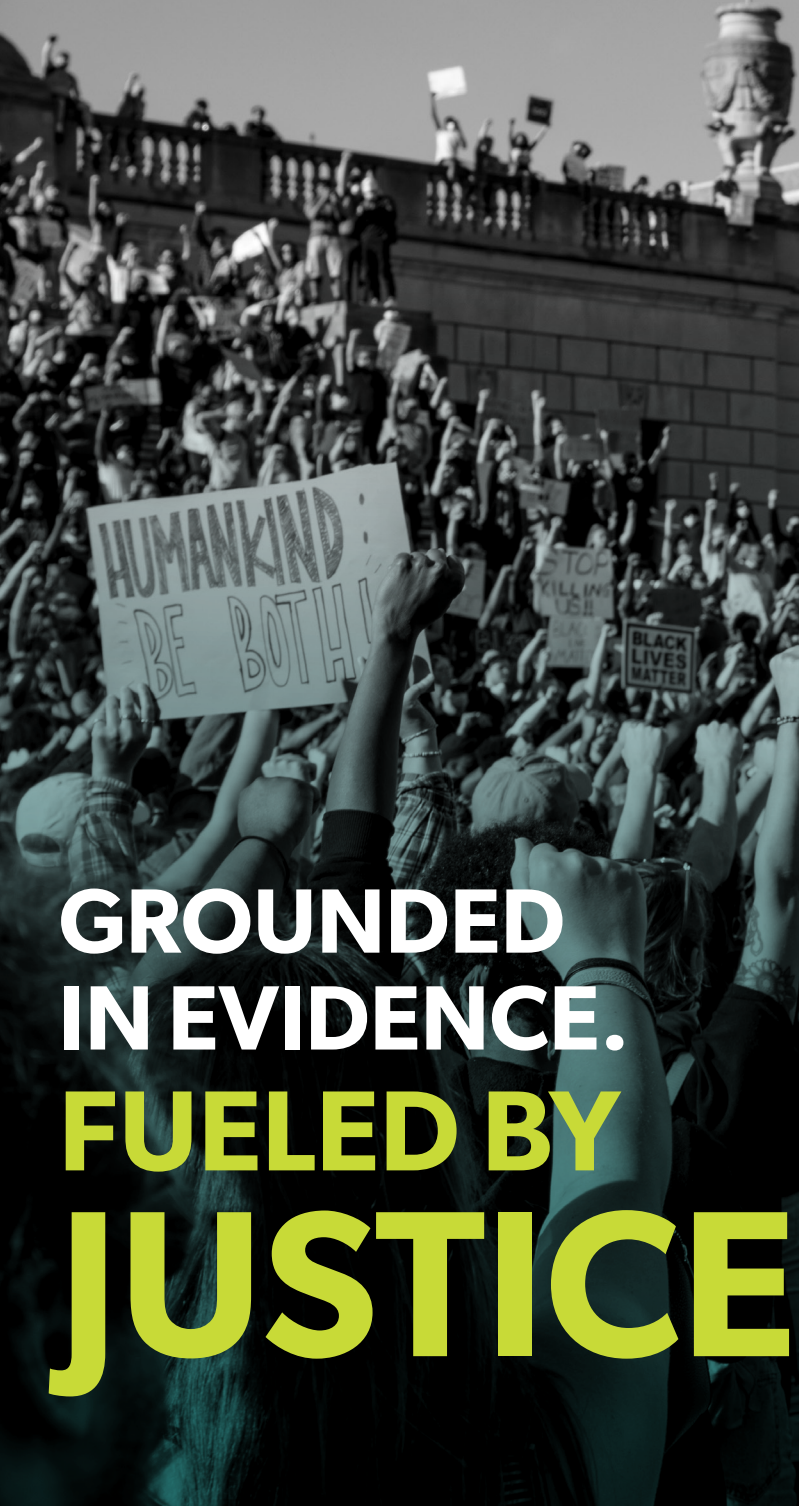
The Sentencing Project proudly supported state-based advocates in a major legislative breakthrough: the passage of the Oklahoma Survivors' Act. After two years of coalition organizing, this new law created a pathway for survivors of domestic violence to present evidence of their abuse during sentencing, helping to prevent overly punitive outcomes. Crucially, the law also opens the door for currently incarcerated survivors to seek resentencing if they can demonstrate that their experience of abuse was a substantial factor in their conviction. This reform marks a powerful step toward justice and healing for survivors.

## Nebraska Highlight

In April 2024, Nebraska lawmakers passed Legislative Bill 20, abolishing the mandatory two-year waiting period after sentence completion, a major reform that immediately restored voting rights to over 7,000 Nebraskans. The Sentencing Project took a leadership role by providing state-specific data, coordinating coalition strategy calls, mobilizing a national sign-on letter, and producing a policy brief on felony disenfranchisement and public safety in Nebraska.







# GROUND IN EVIDENCE. FUELED BY JUSTICE.

## PUSHING FOR CHANGE

### Goal: Promote Youth Justice

In 2024, The Sentencing Project supported youth justice advocates in Maryland, Wisconsin, Connecticut, Louisiana, Tennessee, Massachusetts, Illinois, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania.

As punitive proposals gained traction in several legislatures, we provided research, strategic guidance, and messaging support to help partners push back against harmful policy shifts. Grounded in evidence, our work emphasized that tough-on-youth approaches offer little public safety benefit and pose long-term risks to young people's well-being and future success.

### Maryland highlight

In 2024, The Sentencing Project played a leading role in defending youth justice reforms in Maryland. We contributed to the Maryland Youth Justice Coalition's report, *What's Best for Kids is Best for Everyone*, and engaged the public through virtual events and town halls. When harmful legislation was introduced to expand youth arrests and probation terms, we mobilized through testimony, media engagement, and a rally that drew over 100 advocates to Annapolis. While the bill ultimately passed, our efforts expanded the coalition and increased public awareness, laying the groundwork for future reform.



# Our Team

## THE SENTENCING PROJECT’S STAFF IN 2024

**Kara Gotsch**

Executive Director

**Warren Allen**

Campaign Associate

**Dan Barash**

Director of Finance and Operations

**Celeste Barry**

Program Associate

**Breanna Bishop**

Digital Communications Manager

**Kristen M. Budd, Ph.D.**

Research Analyst

**Becky Feldman**

Second Look Network Director

**Nazgol Ghandnoosh, Ph.D.**

Co-Director of Research

**Antonio Gutierrez**

National Convening Consultant

**Heather Koslov**

Development Director

**Florence Lee**

Development Manager

**Liz Komar**

Sentencing Reform Counsel

**Bob Libal**

Senior Organizing Consultant

**Morgan McLeod**

Director of Communications

**Richard Mendel**

Senior Research Fellow

**Olivia Naugle**

Youth Justice Campaign Strategist

**Ashley Nellis**

Co-Director of Research

**Sabrina Pearce**

Research Associate

**Leyda Pereyra**

Second Look Network Program Manager

**Nicole D. Porter**

Senior Director of Advocacy

**Joshua Rovner**

Director of Youth Justice

**William “Bill” Underwood**

Senior Fellow

**Jordyn Wilson**

Youth Justice Campaign Associate

## 2024 FELLOWS

**Annalisa Fratantoni**

**Destiny Daniel**

**Devyn Brown**

**Flannery Gallagher**

**Mackenzie Darling**

**Rachel Didner-Jollie**

**Safa Madar**

**Samantha Piszcz**



# Our Team

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Senior Counsel, Capital Punishment Project,  
American Civil Liberties Union

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Criminal Defense Attorney and Mitigation Specialist

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Founder, Get Clemency Now

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Director of the Prisons and Justice Initiative,  
Georgetown University; Founder and President,  
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#### **Cynthia Jones**

Professor of Law, American University  
Washington College of Law

#### **Marc Mauer**

Former Executive Director, The Sentencing Project

#### **Ebony Underwood**

Founder / CEO, WE GOT US NOW





# 2024 Supporters

## MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH OUR COMMUNITY

The Sentencing Project’s work is made possible through the commitment and generosity of our community. Thank you for standing with us in our fight for a more fair and effective criminal legal system. This listing includes all supporters who gave contributions of \$1,000 or more in 2024.

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Wellspring Philanthropic Fund  
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Williams, Mcgennis  
Williams, William



# Revenue & Expenses

## REVENUE

**84%**  
FOUNDATIONS  
\$6,805,538

**14%**  
INDIVIDUALS/  
CORPORATIONS  
\$1,144,549

**2%**  
OTHER  
\$142,067

## EXPENSES

**72%**  
PROGRAM SERVICES  
\$4,023,639

**15%**  
DEVELOPMENT  
\$838,967

**13%**  
MNGT  
& GENERAL  
\$736,793

These financials are presented using the Form 990 tax-method of accounting. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Our full audited financial documents are available for review at [www.sentproj.org/financials](http://www.sentproj.org/financials).





# Get Involved

## Learn

More about the issues, key criminal justice facts, and our recommendations for reform on our website at:

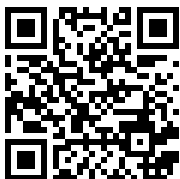
**SentencingProject.org**

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- LinkedIn.com/company/**the-sentencing-project**

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Sign up for our emails and text messages using the QR code below to receive invitations to join webinars, town halls, and advocacy events throughout the year!



**Scan QR Code**  
to support  
The Sentencing Project

## Donate

Your generosity makes it possible for The Sentencing Project to advance groundbreaking research, transformative advocacy, and widespread public education, driving us closer to achieving justice for all. Visit:

**SentencingProject.org/donate**

Donate to our mission today.





Together, we stand for  
racial justice and an end  
to mass incarceration.

**WE NEED YOU**  
to make it possible

**SentencingProject.org**



**THE  
SENTENCING  
PROJECT**

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