



# JHA 2021 Annual Report

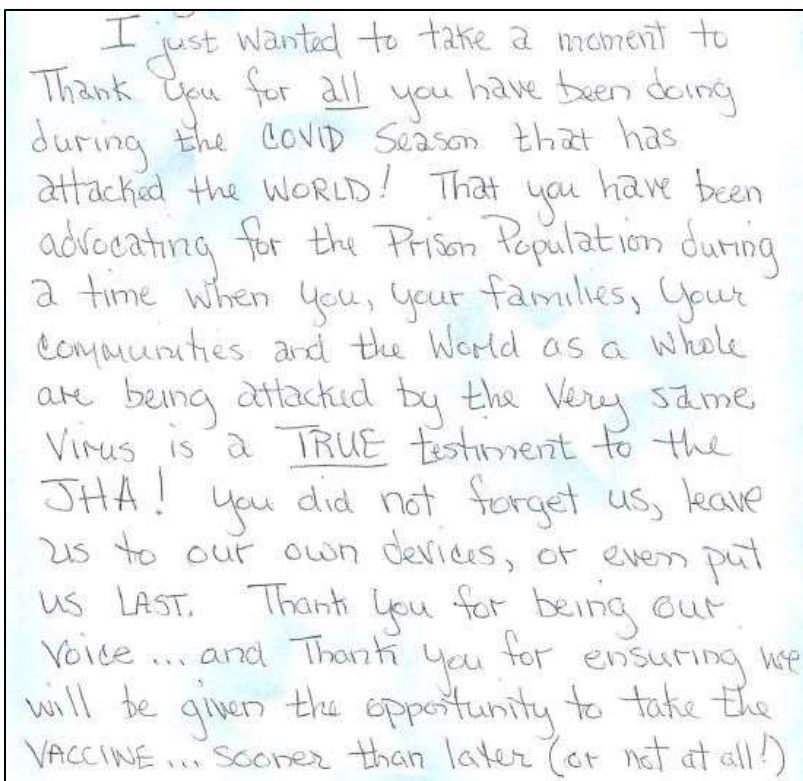
& 2022 Preview

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# 2021 in Review: Our Impact

## The Pandemic Inside Prisons

- **2021 began our second year of focusing on the health and safety of those living and working inside prisons during the COVID-19 pandemic.** JHA and our partners successfully advocated for the prioritization of incarcerated people to be included in the initial phase of people eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine, understanding that this population was and continues to be among those at highest risk of contracting and suffering from the virus. Throughout the year we continued to advocate for increased opportunity for people to be vaccinated, the staff vaccine mandate, and for boosters to be made available.
- JHA continued to **press for lines of sight into prisons** to gauge what was happening inside prisons during the pandemic, and to push for transparency of the Illinois Department of Correction's (IDOC's) COVID-19 response to raise public awareness.
- We released [a statement](#) in March marking one full year of prison lockdowns, and in August we [published](#) data on COVID deaths within IDOC that had not previously been made accessible to the public.
- We also [continued to share](#) information we received via letters, calls, and emails about the realities of life in prison, including reporting on what people told us about their challenges and ability to [access information](#).
- We launched a [COVID-19 Resources section](#) on our website, providing information on diverse topics relevant to COVID and the justice-involved.



I just wanted to take a moment to Thank You for all you have been doing during the COVID Season that has attacked the WORLD! That you have been advocating for the Prison Population during a time when you, your families, your communities and the World as a whole are being attacked by the very same Virus is a TRUE testament to the JHA! You did not forget us, leave us to our own devices, or even put us LAST. Thank you for being our Voice ... and Thank you for ensuring we will be given the opportunity to take the VACCINE ... sooner than later (or not at all!)

## IDOC Population and COVID-19 Data

On March 15, 2020, the population of IDOC was 37,648. On March 29, 2020, the first person incarcerated in IDOC (at Stateville) died of COVID-19 at an outside hospital.

### Cases and Testing

On January 20, 2022, IDOC's population was 27,402, down more than 25% or 10,000 people since the start of the pandemic. On that date, amidst the Omicron variant wave, IDOC reported that 1,194 staff and 3,673 individuals in custody were positive for COVID-19. Since the start of the pandemic, there had been 8,740 staff and 19,167 people in custody reported positive. IDOC had conducted 405,383 COVID tests of staff and 1,030,996 tests of people in custody.

***At least 90 people incarcerated in IDOC and five staff members have died as a result of the coronavirus.***

### Vaccination Rates

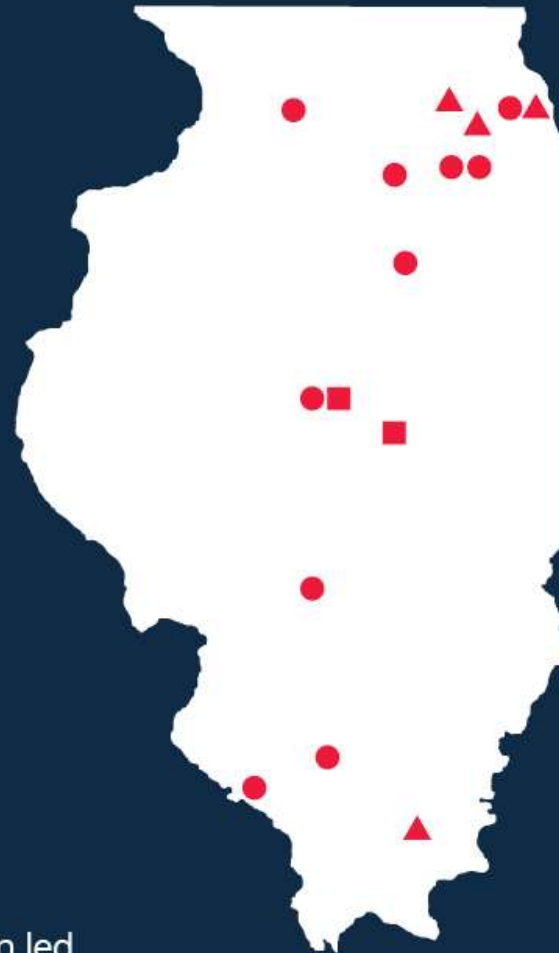
As of December 28, 2021, IDOC reported 65% (8,566) of staff and 74% (20,651) of people incarcerated were vaccinated. They also reported 1,609 staff and 12,292 individuals in custody had booster vaccinations. The staff vaccination mandate went into effect after several delays on January 31, 2022. [IDOC reported](#) 73% of staff had had one or more shots by February 4, 2022. JHA will continue to monitor vaccination and booster updates.

## Prison Monitoring & Advocacy

- At the end of March 2021, **JHA was able to resume in-person monitoring visits of IDOC prisons after more than a year's suspension due to COVID-19 lockdowns.** While our visits have had to be adapted due to evolving COVID-19 and variant concerns, it was important to be able to observe the realities of prison life firsthand and to hear directly from people who live and work in state facilities.
- JHA visited 12 IDOC adult prisons, including both female prisons, and four Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ) juvenile facilities during the year with visits to: Lincoln, Graham, Stateville, the Northern Reception & Classification Center, North Lawndale Adult Transition Center, Sheridan, Decatur, Pontiac, Pinckneyville, Logan, Illinois Youth Center (IYC)-Harrisburg, Menard, IYC-St. Charles, IYC-Warrenville, Dixon, and IYC-Chicago.
- JHA published reports based on our visits to [Lincoln & Graham](#), [Stateville & NRC](#), [Logan & Decatur](#), [Sheridan](#), and [IYC-Harrisburg](#).

## 2021 Illinois Prison Visits

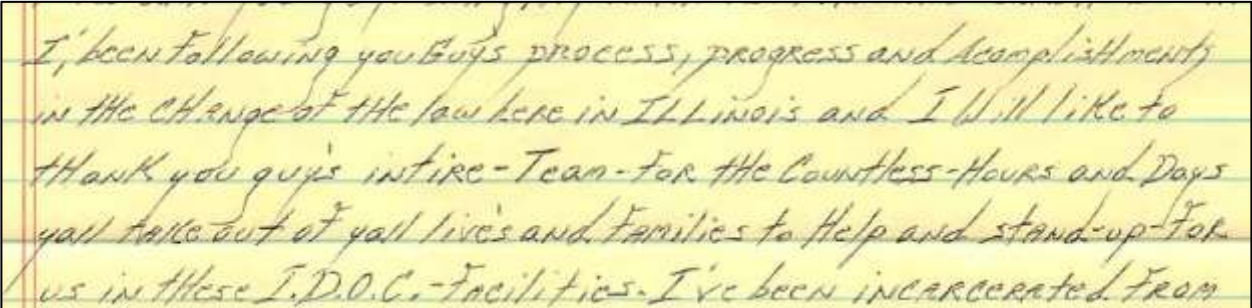
In 2021, John Howard Association led monitoring visits to 16 male, female, and juvenile correctional facilities throughout Illinois.



- Male Facilities
- Female Facilities
- ▲ Juvenile Facilities

- JHA partnered with other advocates to advance criminal justice omnibus legislation, known as the [SAFE-T Act](#); it included two important pieces of legislation JHA fought for:
  - [Death in Custody Reporting Act \(DCRA\)](#): The DCRA expanded reporting requirements of deaths occurring in criminal justice agency custody. More information about individual instances is critical to better understanding and holding government actors accountable for the safety and treatment of people in custody.

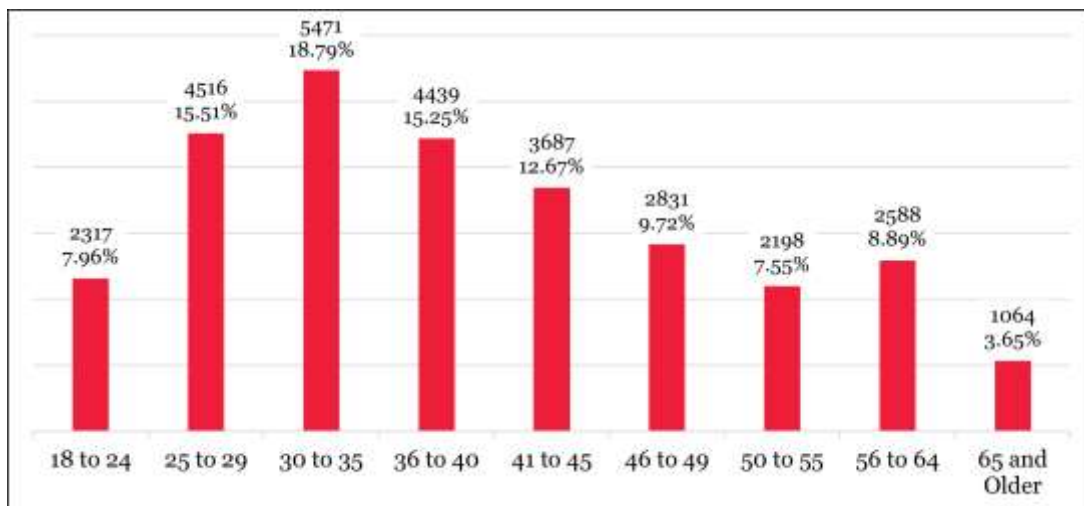
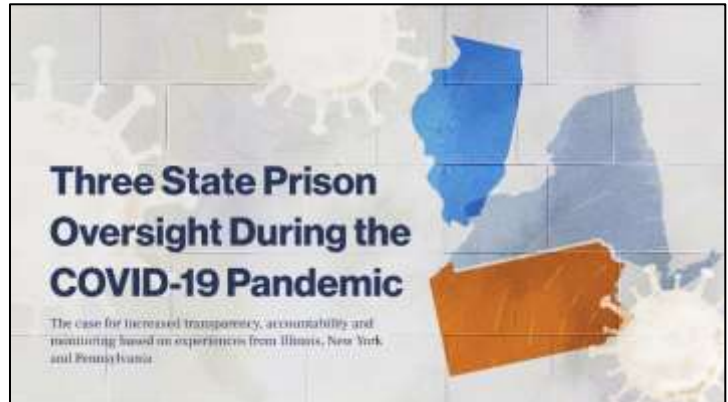
- **Mandatory Supervised Release (MSR) reforms:** This bill included first steps towards modernizing the statute governing post-release supervision in order to shorten MSR terms and reduce the likelihood of unnecessary and detrimental reincarceration.



- Through our ongoing prison communications and on our monitoring visits, JHA was able to document and raise concerns publicly about the increased deprivation experienced by people in state custody due to **issues of unstocked prison commissaries**. This is an ongoing issue that has led to increased hardship for a population already living in difficult conditions. We sought information from IDOC and shared it with the public, made recommendations to IDOC to better serve people in custody, and continue to follow up by seeking updates and pressing for solutions.
- JHA continued to collaborate with stakeholders to **close the five remaining Illinois Youth Centers** and to transform Illinois' juvenile justice system to focus on treatment and rehabilitation utilizing community-based supports and interventions, rather than incarceration.
- **We sought strengthened independent correctional oversight as a vital part of law enforcement accountability by:**
  - Publishing [a report](#) calling for improved standards of care for Illinois' 16 juvenile detention centers as well as the expansion of the Office of the Independent Ombudsman for IDJJ to also include oversight the detention facilities so that any youth in county or state custody (as well as their guardians and loved ones) has access to the information and protections afforded by this office.
  - [Pushing for](#) the establishment of an Independent Ombudsman Office for IDOC.
  - [Testifying](#) in support of increased prison oversight in other states such as Virginia.
  - Providing education and information to stakeholders in North Carolina as they work to build independent citizen correctional oversight of the state prison system.



- We also continued our **collaboration with the [Correctional Association of New York](#) and the [Pennsylvania Prison Society](#)**, jointly publishing [a three-state report](#) on prison oversight during the pandemic thanks to support from Arnold Ventures.
- JHA called renewed attention to **Stateville’s water quality issue**, repeating and strengthening the call for routine health and environmental inspections inside prisons.
- After years of calling for [free State ID cards to be provided](#) to individuals upon release from prison, [such a program is finally in place](#) at several IDOC facilities and is being expanded. The importance of providing people with IDs for re-entry success cannot be overstated.
- We released [statistical profiles](#) and analyses of IDOC’s incarcerated and Mandatory Supervised Release populations based on available IDOC datasets. JHA believes this information should be shared with the public to assist all citizens and stakeholders in understanding who we put in prison and why, so that this information can be used to help inform future policy reform. *(Note: Chart below shows age of IDOC’s incarcerated population as of 12/31/2020)*



- [JHA provided testimony](#) about **IDJJ and IDOC's use of resources**, including providing recommendations to strategically determine and utilize resources in corrections to improve conditions, treatment, and outcomes.
- We continued to **highlight the need for legal assistance and information services** for people in prison in Illinois in our conversations with government leaders and stakeholders. This is an issue we are keenly aware of due to our communications with people in prison who share with us their inability to access needed information.
- **We maintained our call to address the failures of the IDOC grievance system** for people who are incarcerated. In May 2021, IDOC hired a Chief Inspector charged with improving the system. JHA has been in conversation with the Chief Inspector and others about plans to assess and change the current system. We will continue to note current concerns, put forward recommendations, and monitor implementation of changes to the grievance system.
- JHA staff members shared the information we receive from people in prisons and observe during our monitoring visits and utilized our criminal justice expertise by serving on a variety of **task forces, commissions, working groups, stakeholder convenings, and advisory boards**, including the Mayor's Re-entry Task Force, Illinois Re-entry Council, Detention and Correctional Facilities Committee of the Disabilities Task Force, and the IDJJ and IDOC Advisory Boards.
- **We issued 24 influential reports, statements, updates, and testimonies.**
- JHA continued to **read, track, and respond to letters, calls, and emails** from incarcerated people, their loved ones, and concerned community members. This information is a vital part of our monitoring work, giving us both qualitative and quantitative information which allows us to spot trends, learn more about issues, and connect with those inside prison walls. This year, [we received more than 2,200 communications](#), including over 1,500 letters and more than 800 calls/emails from incarcerated people and people on the outside.

**WE THANK YOU ALL AT JOHN HOWARD FOR THE HELP**

# 2021 in Review: JHA in the News

In 2021 JHA continued to be a leading source of information on Illinois prisons and system change for the press. We are grateful for journalists highlighting our reports and statements which helps fuel awareness and reform efforts, leading to more system change.



A sample of JHA in the news in 2021:

- [Illinois inmates to be part of next COVID-19 vaccine phase](#), ABC7, 1/8/21
- [6 Key Reforms in the Massive Criminal Justice Bill Illinois Lawmakers Passed Last Week](#), WBEZ, 1/20/21
- [Standards, Oversight for Jailed Kids Need to Improve: Watchdog Report](#), NPR, 4/7/21
- [Illinois Prison Watchdog Organization Leader Glad About Restart of In-Person Visits](#), WCBU 89.9FM, 4/16/21
- [Inmate Fatally Beaten in Prison 'Blind Spot' Highlights Failure to Oversee Jail Guards, Watchdog Says](#), CBS, 7/2/21
- [Watchdog report details shortages of basic supplies in Illinois prison commissaries](#), WCIS ABC, 12/10/21
- [A water crisis decades in the making has come to a head at a prison just outside Chicago](#), Injustice Watch, 12/16/21
- [64% of Illinois prison workers are now vaccinated as their union fights the mandate](#), WBEZ, 12/23/21



[Visit our website](#) for more press featuring JHA.



# Virtual Annual Event 2021

**F**or the second year in a row, we held our annual luncheon online this year due to the pandemic. JHA's one-hour virtual event "[Prison Oversight: Important Every Day; Critical in a Crisis](#)" took place in September, raising more than \$180,000 in gross revenue for our prison monitoring and advocacy work. Event highlights included:

- Opening remarks from **Senator Dick Durbin**
- A panel discussion on the importance of prison oversight with **Kathy Bankhead** (former Independent Juvenile Ombudsperson for the Department of Juvenile Justice), **Marlon Chamberlain** (Campaign Manager, Heartland Alliance), and **Scott Semple** (retired Connecticut Commissioner of Correction 2019, current expert consultant with Falcon INC)
- The personal story of **Bernida McWhite**, Business Solutions Manager at North Lawndale Employment Network/READI Chicago



We also recognized the following Annual Award Winners ([click here to watch their acceptance videos](#)):



Daniel Goering  
Volunteer  
of the Year



Sen. Robert Peters  
Legislator  
of the Year



Rep. Justin Slaughter  
Changemaker  
of the Year



Shannon Heffernan  
WBEZ  
Journalist of the Year



Dedication Awards: Bas Kniphorst, Pete Senechalle, Joseph Vosicky Jr.

**Our generous event sponsors included:** **Host:** Anonymous **Diamond Anniversary:** Bluhm Family Charitable Foundation, Project 1-11 **Platinum:** Frederic J. Artwick; Paul & Sarah Jane Titterton/GATX Corporation **Gold:** Anonymous, Ariel Investments; Exelon Corp; Terry & Annette Faulk; Kadens Family Foundation; John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; Brian Massengill; Kevin McCall/Jenner & Block LLP; Amanda Penabad & Stephen Brokaw. [View a full list of sponsors here.](#)

# Our Supporters

Thank you to everyone who has supported JHA this past year; we could not do our work without your generosity and partnership. More than 409 donors made at least one gift in 2021, and we particularly thank our John Howard Legacy Supporters who donated in honor of our 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We would like to recognize the following funders for their 2021 support of the John Howard Association:

Arnold Ventures  
Baskes Family Foundation  
The Baskin Family Foundation  
Bluhm Family Charitable Foundation  
James B. & Jane R. Bradford Endowment  
Chicago Community Trust  
The Kadens Family Foundation  
Lotta Fund for Aiding Discharged Convicts

John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation  
Robert R. McCormick Foundation  
Michael Reese Health Trust  
Mills Family Charitable Foundation  
Project 1-11  
Charles & M.R. Shapiro Foundation  
Tawani Foundation  
Woods Fund Chicago

*“Thanks, as always, for what you do.  
My son, his cellmate, and many others  
that they are talking to about  
sharing their stories with JHA  
feel heard  
and that their voices make a difference.”*  
- From the mother of someone incarcerated in Illinois

JHA was proud to have one of our many fantastic volunteers, Mike Sehr, recognized as the [Serve Illinois volunteer of the week on April 5<sup>th</sup>](#). We thank all of our volunteers and interns for all of the time and assistance they provide to JHA; they are an invaluable resource for us and deeply committed to our mission.



JHA also thanks [Gerrel Jones](#), author, educator, influencer, and founder of Pneuma Gallery Inc for joining JHA for our spring virtual event and sharing his inspiring story. We appreciate our event sponsors The Kadens Family Foundation and Project 1-11. We also thank all those who spoke at and sponsored our virtual events [“Transforming Incarceration through Education”](#) and [“Ballots Behind Bars: A Discussion on Incarceration and Voting Rights.”](#)



# Looking forward to 2022

**2021** marked the 120<sup>th</sup> year that JHA has been monitoring Illinois' prisons and advocating on behalf of those who live and work in prisons. We deeply appreciate all of our supporters, partners, allies, donors, volunteers, board members, and employees. Our success is based on the efforts of everyone who works for and with JHA, as well as all those who support the organization in countless and myriad ways.

As we head into 2022, the health and safety of those working and living in prison during the ongoing pandemic remains a key priority for JHA. We continue to seek data on the impact of COVID-19 in our prisons and to push on IDOC to share information publicly; knowing how many people are vaccinated, boosted, hospitalized, and succumb to the virus is critical information that will help us determine what else needs to be done to go forward in safer and more humane ways. We continue to call for ways to release more people more expeditiously from prison, reducing the size of Illinois' prison system and use of incarceration, and for improved conditions for those working and living in prison. JHA is currently focused on getting IDOC to address [ongoing commissary shortages](#), noting the State's failures to meet its obligation to provide hygiene and clothing items, linens, and other necessities to people in custody. We are also working to highlight the need for more programming (including increased post-secondary education opportunities) and improving access to functional technology at no cost to people in prison. Ongoing areas of concern, focus, and advocacy include better fostering of family connections, increasing visit opportunities and options, improving access to information for people in prison, and improving medical and mental healthcare.





JHA hopes to be monitoring prisons in-person again shortly, having had to pause our visits due to the Omicron variant wreaking havoc in every community, both inside and out of prison walls. We also look forward to continuing our survey work in 2022. As part of this we will be collecting information as part of a collaboration to create standards in the field of prison oversight and to increase transparency around the perceptions and experiences of people in prison. It is the information we learn from people in prison that guides our work and establishes JHA's priorities.

**JHA's 2022 agenda also includes:**

- Continued efforts to increase independent oversight inside carceral settings, including the establishment of an Office of Independent Ombudsman for IDOC as well as the expansion of the existing Ombudsman office for IDJJ, the state-run juvenile prison system, to include oversight of Illinois' 16 juvenile detention centers.
- Pushing for implementation of the existing reforms and further modernization of MSR to improve outcomes and to better allocate resources and efforts.
- Advocating for the reinstatement of the Parole system in Illinois.
- Fighting to change the conversation around retroactive application of criminal justice reforms and increasing understanding of opportunities and debunking myths around constitutional constraints.
- Monitoring implementation and compliance with the Death in Custody Reporting Act in Illinois by IDOC and ICJIA.
- Pushing for the creation of a more functional grievance system for the people incarcerated in IDOC.
- Advocating for increased access to legal assistance and information for people incarcerated in Illinois' prisons.
- Working to close the remaining five Illinois Youth Centers and to use resources to better support and rehabilitate youth in communities.
- Monitoring the implementation and compliance of revised standards used to monitor county juvenile detention centers, increasing transparency of such facilities.
- Pushing to update the standards for county-run adult detention centers
- Increasing the call for prisons to receive routine inspections by state and local health departments – for prisons should be held to the same health and safety standards as every other public institution.

- Calling on IDOC to make policies publicly available so that people have access to the policies and rules that impact every aspect of their lives.
- Building the field of independent citizen correctional oversight in conjunction with our partners in Pennsylvania and New York.
- Continuing to make ourselves available to educate and guide other jurisdictions working to build independent correctional oversight.

Thank you all for your continued support and your commitment to prison reform during this past year. We look forward to working together to improve the safety and well-being of everyone in IDOC and IDJJ and to achieve increased transparency, and system change in 2022.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Vollen-Katz  
Executive Director, JHA



I Thank Ya For monitor the  
Create Transparency within the  
facilities system: ~~and~~ if every Body  
were To Ignored & not cared  
what Goes on In these Prisons  
Things would Be far more worse  
than what were experiencing now!!

*\*Quotes shown throughout are taken from letters written to JHA from people incarcerated in IDOC facilities unless otherwise indicated*

# Get involved!

Illinois' criminal justice and prison systems impact the public safety and community health of all Illinois residents. It takes significant resources to fully understand and monitor these complex systems. JHA hopes that you will learn more about Illinois prisons and our justice system, fight for critical reforms, and support our work. There are many ways to do this:

## **Be the first to receive our reports and statements**

Please visit [our website](#) to sign up for our email list.



## **Invite us to speak to your organization**

JHA regularly visits schools, community organizations, religious institutions, working group meetings, and other events large and small to speak on issues related to prison reform.

Use [our online contact form](#) to tell us more about your event.



## **Join our Young Professionals Board!**

This group supports JHA by encouraging young professionals to prioritize systemic criminal justice reform among humanitarian concerns and engaging the Chicago community to address targeted needs of people who are incarcerated. Apply via [our website](#).



## **Donate today**

We rely upon the generosity of individuals, foundations, and corporations to fund our programming – your support makes our work possible. Please [donate online](#) today.



Media inquiries should be directed to JHA's Executive Director Jennifer Vollen-Katz at (312) 291-9183 x205 or [jvollen@thejha.org](mailto:jvollen@thejha.org)