



# JHA 2019 Annual Report

& 2020 Preview

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# 2019 in review

## Highlights of JHA's year included:

- After seven years of persistent advocacy, we succeeded in abolishing the \$5.00 medical co-pay incarcerated people in Illinois' prisons must pay in order to see a doctor.
- JHA successfully pushed for expansion of programmatic sentencing credits, making them available to people traditionally excluded from such benefits including those who have been incarcerated for several decades.
- Executive Director Jennifer Vollen-Katz served on Governor Pritzker's transition team and participated in the signing of the Executive Order establishing the Lieutenant Governor's Justice Equity and Opportunity Initiative.
- JHA has established regular meetings with Illinois' new Director of the Department of Corrections to raise concerns and issues.
- We continued our regular prison visits to monitor for conditions of confinement and treatment of prisoners, bringing many new volunteers into prisons with us, observing facilities, interviewing impacted people and collecting surveys from incarcerated adults and prison staff.
- We issued our report entitled "*The Trouble with Reentry: Five Takeaways from Working with People Returning to Chicago from Prison*," exposing some of the threshold barriers which prevent success upon release. This report was widely cited in Illinois and other states, including by the Marshall Project. Look for in-depth follow up to this pioneering work in 2020 thanks to funding from the McCormick Foundation and Irvin Stern Foundation.
- We launched a new logo and website! Our exciting and dynamic new look and feel better reflect our organization's mission, and our redesigned website [www.thejha.org](http://www.thejha.org) makes it easier to find the information people need and want.
- We built an [online survey data dashboard](#) so that everyone can easily access our prison survey data and use it more effectively to find the information they are seeking.



# JHA by the numbers

## Prison Visits

We conducted **25+** adult and juvenile facility visits, including leadership of a visit to Stateville CC with Lt. Governor Stratton and other legislators

## Prison Response Program

**5,019** letters received from prisoners and their loved ones

**766** calls and emails received from loved ones of prisoners

## Publications

We issued nearly **20** influential reports and statements

## Prison Survey Project

**3,979** surveys collected from incarcerated adults

**277** surveys collected from prison staff

## Donors

More than **400** individuals and organizations made at least one gift to JHA during the year

## Volunteers

More than **75** volunteers donated **1,500+** hours of their time to support our mission. This is worth more than **\$40,000** to JHA.

*“I want to start by saying thank you for taking the time to talk to me. Really it is not every day people come through here and talk to me like I’m a human being.”*

*– from someone incarcerated in Pinckneyville Prison*

*“Without [JHA], people like me would have given up hope. Just to know that someone outside these prison walls cares about what happens to us does make a world of difference.”*

*– from someone incarcerated in Lawrence Prison*

# Growing JHA's Influence and New Collaborations to Expand Citizen Correctional Oversight both in Illinois and throughout the Nation

**JHA** continues to promote independent correctional oversight throughout the country because we believe that all closed facilities and systems should have independent citizen monitors coming in to inspect, observe and monitor. Democracy is founded on principles of checks and balances designed to impede the abuse that often accompanies absolute authority; nowhere is this equilibrium more inherently distorted than in corrections. Prisons are designed to be hierarchical and closed, allowing for little outside review or exposure of what goes on inside of them. Holding a system accountable is made more difficult when the behavior is conducted under the cloak of opacity and the claim of maintaining safety and security. This is why we must continue to demand increased access into our prisons for citizen inspection and fight for more transparency and public reporting of what happens inside prisons.

This year JHA was invited to present at the annual conference of the National Association of Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement to advance



the newly created Corrections Track. JHA presented with our national partners The Correctional Association of New York and The Pennsylvania Prison Society – we are the only three statewide citizen correctional oversight organizations in the country. Our unique role monitoring both adult and juvenile prisons allowed us to share our mission, methods and impact on prison reform with a wider audience. Feedback at the conference was that many people found our work educational and inspiring!



JHA participated in a national convening of formerly incarcerated individuals, loved ones and family members of people who are in prison, and oversight organizations, allowing us to network and inform a new audience of the role of oversight in advocacy. JHA was also invited to the first ever National Prison Oversight Workshop hosted by FAMM (FAMMilies for Justice Reform) in Washington DC. Learning from and sharing with other practitioners is critically important to constantly improving our work; it also helps JHA seize opportunities to expand and increase the impact of prison oversight in our state and throughout the United States.



# JHA in the News

In 2019 JHA was a leading source of information on Illinois prisons and system change for the media. Journalists not only help expose problems and inform the public about them, but also can help provide difficult-to-obtain and invaluable information to JHA through their investigative work. Highlighting our reports and statements and quoting JHA in articles in interviews helps fuel awareness and increases our impact.

A sample of JHA in the news in 2019:

- [Prisoners in Illinois will no longer have to pay to see a doctor \(WBEZ\)](#)
- [New criminal justice laws include barring state from suing for cost of incarceration \(The Center Square\)](#)
- [Pritzker Vows Support for Prison Death Transparency, Despite Previous Opposition \(WBEZ\)](#)
- [The Failures of Re-Entry for Returning Citizens and Their Communities \(The Appeal\)](#)
- [Watchdog: Assaults on Staff Down at St. Charles Youth Prison \(WBEZ\)](#)

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



Above: Men from St. Leonard's Ministries share their prison and re-entry experiences at a JHA event

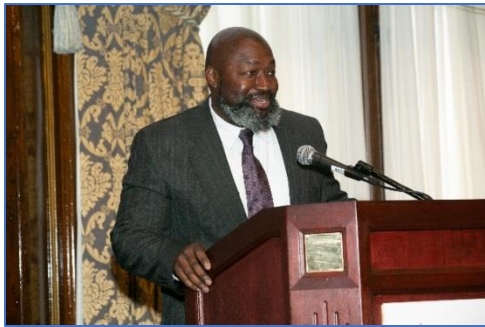
Right: JHA's Phil Whittington on one of his many trips to Springfield to seek legislative criminal justice reform



# Annual Luncheon 2019

**Our** 2019 Annual Luncheon was our largest and most successful yet with 300+ guests in attendance and revenue exceeding \$215,000! Thank you to those who attended and/or contributed to our 2019 Annual Luncheon. JHA was proud to honor the following for their commitment to criminal justice reform:

- **Legislator of the Year:** Senator Elgie R. Sims, Jr.
- **Changemaker Award:** Kathy Bankhead, Independent Juvenile Ombudsman for Illinois
- **Volunteer of the Year Award:** Sherise Anderson
- **Partnership Award:** Brian Massengill and Mayer Brown



We would like to thank Matthew Charles (left) for sharing his experiences both in prison and re-entering society. Matthew was the first beneficiary of the federal First Step Act, and now works within the prison reform movement sharing his story across the country.

We would also like to thank keynote speaker Dr. Homer Venters (right) for voicing his thoughts on prison healthcare and the need for increased oversight and information collection and reporting. He shared that he estimates that at least 1/4 of deaths in prisons and jails are “jail-attributable” - but also asks “why don’t we know this figure (instead of having to estimate it)?” He argued for better tracking of health outcomes in correctional settings, just as is done in other public institutions such as hospitals, schools, and nursing homes. JHA looks forward to working on these issues with Dr. Venters and others to champion the need for transparency around physical treatment of people in custody.



JHA appreciates the support of all of our sponsors, including Platinum Level Sponsors Frederic J. Artwick, Bluhm Family Foundation, Cynthia Kobel, Project 1-11, and Paul & Sarah Jane Titterton/GATX Corporation and Gold Level Sponsors Ariel Investments, Denton’s LLC USA, Exelon, Jawanza & Preeya Hughes/Goldman Sachs, The Kadens Family Foundation, and Kevin McCall/Jenner & Block. For a full list of sponsors, please visit [our website](#).

# Our Supporters

Thank you to all individuals, organizations, corporations and foundations for your donations and matching gifts; we could not do our work without your generosity and partnership. We would like to thank the following funders for your 2019 support of the John Howard Association:

Baskes Family Foundation  
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Michael Reese Health Trust  
Mills Family Charitable Foundation  
Kenneth & Harle Montgomery Foundation  
Project 1-11  
Charles & M.R. Shapiro Foundation  
Tawani Foundation  
Woods Fund Chicago



# Looking forward to 2020

**JHA** is working to make sure that 2020 brings more change and humanity to Illinois' prison system. We are putting forward legislative initiatives that will provide transparency and accountability of deaths that occur in correctional custody. Without more information, we cannot understand whether the deaths of people in Illinois' prisons and jails were preventable, if abuse occurred, and if needed treatment was provided. This must end. Information must be available to the public and to the loved ones of those who pass away so that light is shed on how and why people die in prison.

We will be asking policy makers to shorten the time people spend on Mandatory Supervised Release once they leave prison. This is a step towards designing a system of post-release supervision designed for success, not failure.

We will be monitoring implementation and compliance with new laws going into effect. We will be looking for numbers and feedback that confirm programmatic sentencing credits are being awarded, that data around application of all sentencing credits is tracked and reported, and that information about use of force and incidents of assault inside prisons is also collected and publicly reported.

We will be looking more closely at barriers to successful re-entry upon release from prison and working to make sure that people are much better prepared and connected with outside supports before they step outside of prison gates.

JHA will also continue to harness and put to work the extraordinary information we get from people in prison we speak with, those who write us and those who complete our surveys. Look for our 2020 surveys to shine a brighter light upon areas of concern and provide in-depth data.

JHA will continue to fight to expose problems, recommend needed reforms, and listen to the people so many have forgotten: those who are in our prisons. We thank you for your support and look forward to continuing our partnership to make Illinois prisons more fair, humane, safe, and rehabilitative. Together we will fight for and achieve more successful outcomes for everyone.

Jennifer Vollen-Katz, Executive Director



# 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.

## **Share your story**

We are interested in hearing about your experience with Illinois' criminal justice system and/or re-entry back into your community. Please visit [our website](#) to share your story with us.

## **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)