



JHA 2020 Annual Report

& 2021 Preview

2020 in Review: Our Impact

The Pandemic Inside Prisons

- As of March, our immediate priority was protecting the health and safety of those who live and work in prison.

This included advocating for the

release of as many incarcerated people as possible; pushing for adequate PPE, social distancing, cohorting and healthcare for those working and living in prisons; calling for more data transparency on testing, positive cases, hospitalizations, and deaths; and seeking the prioritization of vaccines for those behind prison walls. We issued our [Recommendations for Prisons](#) in April, shared [regular communications reports](#) highlighting what we had been hearing from those in prison and their loved ones outside, and issued a number of statements on COVID-19 including:

- [COVID-19 Concerns and Recommendations for the Safety of Illinois Prisoners and Prisons \(3/10\)](#)
 - [Prison and Jail Populations Must Be Reduced Immediately: Base Decisions on Research and Data, Not Politics and Emotion \(4/17\)](#)
 - [COVID-19 Exposes the Detrimental Impact of Housing Restriction Laws on Releasing People from Prison \(5/27\)](#)
 - [Minimize COVID-19 Transmission Risks between County and State Correctional Facilities \(8/5\)](#)
- We also successfully executed our first IDOC-wide survey. Thanks to support from the John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, anonymous surveys focusing on COVID-19 and pre-paid return envelopes were issued to each incarcerated person; we saw an incredible 49% return rate with 16,351 responses and 6,000+ pages of comments. We also offered an online survey for prison staff. [Read our survey results and comment reports here.](#) (The picture above shows 10,000 of these surveys in JHA's office after arrival from the post office; we thank the residents of St. Leonard's Ministries for helping us open and sort them.)



Just some of the many comments we received from survey respondents:

JHA; Thank you for everything you all do for us prisoner's because our voice isn't always respected.

No cleaning
stuff for us.

Questions!
1. How can we protect ourselves from Covid 19 in prison?
2. How can we get tested for Covid 19 in prison?

Thank YOU
J.H.A.
FOR YOUR
SUPPORT!
GOD BLESS
YOU ALL!

mistake over a year. Please send some body
to come and walk through this place,
to see what I'm talking about.
Thank you and be blessed.

Why can't I even my way home?

the staff hap hazardly wears masks

Please help us we matter too.
NOT all of us are bad I have less than 80
days I'm here for drug poss. and retail theft. I'm
so scared I won't make it back home to my
family. Please help us. Thank-you

Still no hand sanitizer for us

Help us
Please + Thank you

Video visitations are being cut short or half the
time not even working at all. How can we see our
families at this time since 90% of the time visits
on the kiosk don't work + we are not allowed
regular visits.

IDOC Population and COVID-19 Data

On March 15, 2020, the population of IDOC was 37,648. On March 29, the first person incarcerated in IDOC (at Stateville) died of COVID-19 at an outside hospital. In response to urging from JHA and other outside groups, IDOC began reporting positive cases on their [webpage](#). Initially, there were just a few diagnosed staff and prisoner cases at mostly northern facilities; almost all of the positive cases were at Stateville.

On April 24, when JHA's COVID-19 survey distribution launched, IDOC's population was 35,309. There were at that time about 150 staff and 150 prisoner COVID-19 cases diagnosed, with more than 70% of reported staff and prisoner cases occurring at Stateville, and many facilities not yet reporting any COVID-19 positive cases. However, tests and results were not always available or timely.

On August 1, IDOC's population was down to 30,910, representing a more than **20% population reduction** within four and a half months. The factor that most impacted IDOC's population reduction was halting the intake of new prisoners from county jails in response to an [Executive Order](#) issued on March 26 by the Illinois Governor, which JHA supported. However, a [July 27 Executive Order](#) permitted intake to resume August 22.

On September 1, population was 31,168,¹ and IDOC reported that 519 staff and 898 prisoners were positive for COVID-19, of which 381 staff and 595 prisoners were considered recovered. At this stage **every IDOC prison had been impacted** with Stateville at this point accounting for only about a third of the reported cases. Continually, [JHA cautioned](#) against resuming intake without the use of enhanced protocols to prioritize the health of prisoners, staff, and the public.

On October 1, IDOC's population was 31,002. At that time, 842 staff and 1,798 prisoners were reported positive for COVID-19 by IDOC, of which 706 staff and 1,298 prisoners were considered recovered (presumably meaning that 636 cases among staff and the population still were considered active and not recovered on that date). By the end of the month, more than 1,100 staff and 2,300 prisoners had tested positive in IDOC.

By the beginning of 2021, IDOC's population reportedly approached a nearly 30-year low of 29,200, a population number not seen since the early 1990s. However, population reductions remained largely attributable to lack of intake and concerns about crowding and conditions within facilities during the pandemic persisted. Within IDOC, testing for COVID-19 had significantly increased and the total prisoner positive COVID cases had approached 8,900 and staff COVID cases exceeded 3,500, with a total of 2,150 prisoner and staff cases considered active.

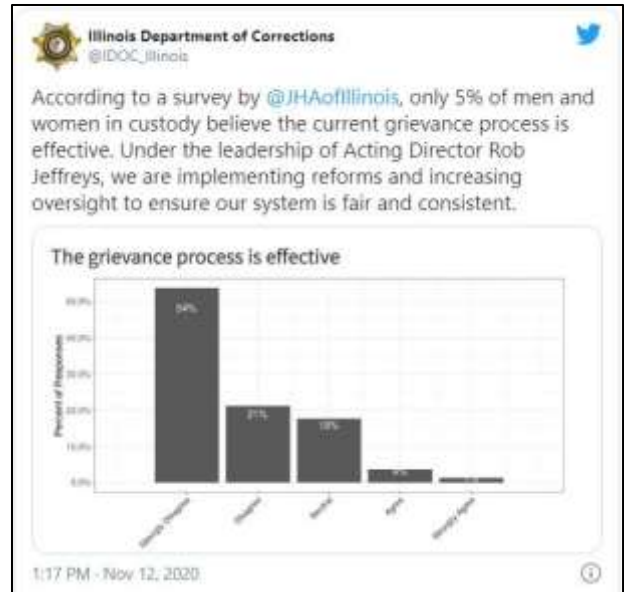
At least 70 prisoners and one staff person had died as a result of the coronavirus.

Prison Monitoring & Advocacy

- After starting the year with five IDOC monitoring visits, JHA was unable to enter prisons as of March 14th due to coronavirus restrictions. JHA nonetheless maintained our focus on prison conditions and need for ongoing reform. We communicated regularly with IDOC and IDJJ leadership, continued to maintain open lines of communication with incarcerated people and their loved ones, and collaborated with other criminal justice advocates.
- JHA published nearly 30 reports, statements, and updates. This included facility reports on [Pontiac Correctional Center](#) and [Joliet & Elgin Treatment Centers](#), highlighting ongoing changes to mental health treatment and use of restrictive housing within IDOC, as well as a statement on [Legionnaires' Disease at Pontiac CC](#), the latter of which yet again advocated for oversight of prison healthcare by state and local public health departments.
- We also testified before the Illinois General Assembly on the topics of [prison conditions](#) and the [need for sentencing reform](#).
- JHA worked closely with stakeholders to advance the push for closure of the five remaining juvenile prisons (Illinois Youth Centers) and to transform the state's juvenile justice system to focus on treatment and rehabilitation utilizing community-based supports and interventions rather than on incarceration. [We applauded Governor Pritzker's announcement in July](#) that Illinois is transforming the juvenile justice system and look forward to being a part of this work.
- January 1, 2020 saw the implementation of two important policies JHA successfully led the charge for: (1) [elimination of the \\$5 medical co-pay for prisoners](#) and (2) [expansion of sentencing credits for incarcerated people](#). Both policy changes turned out to be very timely as they greatly impacted the well-being of prisoners during the pandemic.
- JHA pursued two legislative initiatives in 2020, which were the Death in Custody Reporting Act (which would mandate tracking and reporting of all deaths in Illinois correctional institutions) and shortening the terms of parole (Mandatory Supervised Release (MSR)) for people leaving IDOC, will reduce MSR terms for the majority of people who leave prison after the bill is signed and implemented. After postponement due to pandemic-related cancellations of legislative sessions in 2020, these priorities were included in the Criminal Justice Omnibus bill which passed the House and Senate in January's lame duck session; the Omnibus bill currently awaits Governor Pritzker's signature.
- JHA continued to work to expose the failures of the IDOC grievance system for people who are incarcerated, [as highlighted in this WBEZ article](#). IDOC also acknowledged JHA's

survey findings regarding prisoners' lack of confidence in the grievance system pledging to implement reforms. Pushing for improvement of the grievance system will remain a key priority for JHA in 2021.

- [Report on IDOC Disciplinary Process](#): This report detailed key findings derived from research conducted for a graduate thesis written by a JHA staff member and made recommendations to reduce variation across facilities resulting in disparately severe sanctions, as well as calling for IDOC to make timely disciplinary data publicly available, partner with outside experts to conduct a deeper analysis of variance in disciplinary outcomes between prisons, and to use this information to ensure that disciplinary policies are consistently implemented throughout IDOC.



- [Comparative Prison Monitoring](#): In March of 2020 (prior to pandemic restrictions taking effect), staff from the Juvenile Justice Initiative, JHA and the Raphah Institute were part of an externally funded project to observe the German prison system firsthand. JHA staff participated in this comparative correctional systems work, touring and evaluating prisons in Hamburg, Germany that evidence a more humane, rehabilitative model and provide new specific ideas to fuel reform in Illinois.
- JHA continued to spread awareness of the need for legal assistance and information services for people in prison in Illinois, and to advocate for mandated prisoner legal aid.
- Thanks to support provided by Arnold Ventures, JHA has begun a joint project with other independent correctional oversight entities, the Correctional Association of New York and the Pennsylvania Prison Society and, to build the field; a key goal includes the creation of common prison monitoring metrics.

One more thing...

- We are proud to share that [JHA's website](#) redesign won a 2020 Silver Trumpet Award from the Publicity Club of Chicago.

2020 in Review: JHA by the Numbers

As the case for most industries, businesses, and organizations throughout the world, our work was deeply impacted by COVID-19. How we worked and what we did was dramatically altered, and these numbers thus reflect pandemic-related impact.

Prison Visits

We conducted **5** adult prison monitoring visits in Illinois prior to prison facilities being locked down mid-March.

JHA staff also toured and evaluated **2** prisons in Hamburg, Germany in order to compare and contrast them with Illinois' prisons pre-pandemic closures.

Prison Surveys

General survey: **1,444** surveys collected from prisoners prior to pandemic restrictions

COVID-19 Survey: **16,351** surveys collected from prisoners and **261** surveys collected from staff

Publications

We issued nearly **30** influential reports, statements, updates, and testimonies.

Prison Communications

2,571 letters received from prisoners and their loved ones

More than **1,416** calls and emails received from loved ones

Fundraising

More than **430** individuals and organizations made at least one gift to JHA during the year.

We hosted **3** virtual events for JHA supporters.

Volunteering

More than **83** volunteers donated **252+** hours of their time to support our mission from January 1st through mid-March. This is worth more than **\$6,861** to JHA.

2020 in Review: JHA in the News



In 2020 JHA was a leading source of information on Illinois prisons and system change for the press; we saw an 88% increase in our media presence vs. the year before. We are grateful for journalists highlighting our reports and statements and interviewing JHA to help fuel awareness and increases our impact.

A sample of JHA in the news in 2020:

- [Degradation, Neglect and Roaches: Inside Illinois' Largest Women's Prison](#), WBEZ, 1/2/20
- [As COVID-19 Measures Grow, Prison Oversight Falls](#), the Marshall Project, 3/17/20
- [Prison restrictions to combat coronavirus leaving monitors, families locked out](#), USA Today, 3/17/20
- [Watch now: Pritzker administration unveils overhaul of juvenile justice system](#), Herald & Review, 8/1/20
- [Public health should come first in setting prison policy](#), Chicago Sun Times, 9/10/20
- [From Roaches to Medical Emergencies, Illinois Inmates Say 'There's Nobody That We Can Really Go to For Help'](#), WBEZ, 12/2/20

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



Virtual Annual Event 2020

The pandemic prompted JHA to shift our primary fundraiser, the annual in-person luncheon, online this year. [JHA's one-hour virtual event "Illness & Injustice: The Pandemic Inside Prisons"](#) took place in October, raising more than \$175,000 in gross revenue for our prison monitoring and advocacy work. Event highlights included:



- Opening remarks from **First Lady of Illinois MK Pritzker** and **Illinois' Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton**
- A panel discussion with **Dr. Keesha Middlemass**, Howard University professor and author; **Mr. Rick Raemisch**, former Director of the Colorado Department of Corrections; and **Mr. Renaldo Hudson**, an advocate who served time in IDOC
- [Art and shared experiences from Mr. Arkee Chaney](#), an artist and cartoonist who was formerly incarcerated



We also recognized our 2020 award winners, including:

- Monitoring Volunteer of the Year: Judi Dansizen
- Prison Response Volunteer of the Year: Mike Sehr
- Data Management Volunteer of the Year: Bailey Pleva
- Legislator of the Year: Senator Jacqueline Y. Collins
- Partner of the Year: St. Leonard's Ministries
- Changemaker of the Year: Camille Bennett
- Dedication Award: Regenia Stein



Our generous event sponsors included: Frederic J. Artwick, Bluhm Family Charitable Foundation, Project 1-11, Paul & Sarah Jane Titterton/GATX Corporation, Ariel Investments, Exelon Corp., Terry & Annette Faulk, Jawanza & Preeya Hughes, Kadens Family Foundation, Cynthia Kobel, John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Brian Massengill/Mayer Brown LLP, Kevin McCall/Jenner & Block LLP, John & Bozena McLees, Joni Stahlman, Dick Sullivan, Patricia Unsinn, and Susan Warso. [See the full list here.](#)

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 their 2020 support of the John Howard Association:

Alliance for Safety & Justice, a project of Tides Center

Arnold Ventures

Baskes Family Foundation

The Samuel J. Baskin Charitable Trust

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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



Looking forward to 2021

This year marks the 120th year that JHA has been monitoring Illinois' prisons and advocating on behalf of those who live and work in prisons. Thank you to all of our supporters, partners, allies, donors, volunteers, board members and employees over the years for joining us on this journey; we would not still be here if it were not for you.

The health and safety of those working and living in prison during the ongoing pandemic will remain a key priority for JHA this year. We continue to call for releasing more people from prison immediately, and to improve conditions for those working and living in prison – including providing more programming/activities, re-starting visitation, improving access to functional technology, and improving medical and mental healthcare. JHA joined other criminal justice advocates in pushing for incarcerated people and prison staff to be prioritized to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, and we take heart in the decision to include this population in Phase 1B of Illinois' vaccine rollout. We will be monitoring how the vaccination process is executed, including information and education for prisoners, numbers of vaccines offered and received, and feedback from affected people about how the rollout was experienced.

JHA hopes to return to monitoring prisons in-person as soon as is it safe for everyone involved. In the interim, we aim to execute another system-wide survey to amplify the voices of those behind prison walls. Additional 2021 objectives include:

- Advocating for Governor Pritzker to sign the Criminal Justice Omnibus Bill into law, and once it goes into effect, monitoring implementation of new policies effective in July.
- Fighting for 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 juvenile detention centers.
- 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.

- Advocating for transitioning Illinois Youth Center facilities to IDOC to be used as special population and special use institutions to meet specific population needs and to provide needed targeted programming and treatment, as has been successfully modeled with former youth facilities Kewanee and Joliet.
- Improving standards used to monitor county juvenile detention centers, increasing transparency of such facilities.
- Pushing for prisons to receive routine inspections by state and local health departments.
- Continuing to push for all IDOC policies to be made available to the public.
- Using our communications with prisoners to fuel our monitoring work.
- Building the field of independent citizen correctional oversight in conjunction with our partners in Pennsylvania and New York.



Thank you all for your continued support and your commitment to prison reform during this past year. 2020 was filled with change, hardships, and worry for everyone; we look forward to improved health, well-being, increased transparency, and system change in 2021.

Best wishes for good health,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Vollen-Katz".

Jennifer Vollen-Katz
Executive Director, JHA



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