A MESSAGE FROM OUR TEAM

Community,

The new year is off to an amazing start, but we want to take a moment to reflect on 2023 and thank you all for your ongoing support. Over the last year we continued to fight to advance policy change for our impacted communities, we held and participated in more community events all over the state, amplified the impact of our legal team, grew our organization, and underwent a redesign of our logo and branding including a new website. Though there have been some changes within our organization, the focus remains the same: YOU, our community.

We appreciate your continued partnership in the work and we can’t wait to see what else we accomplish TOGETHER.

With gratitude,

Civil Survival
Civil Survival’s policy and advocacy team kicked off 2023 with a productive and impactful legislative session. Aligned with the organization’s mission, the policy and advocacy team drove forward a series of priorities and made significant advancements in Washington’s reentry landscape. We ensured the passage of HB 1169, eliminating two mandatory legal financial obligations (LFOs), which have been a consistent barrier to reentry for justice impacted Washingtonians, eliminating all remaining juvenile LFOs, and rendering historic juvenile LFO debt uncollectible. This victory, combined with our 2022 success in passing HB 1412 which expanded avenues of relief from the imposition and historic burden of LFOs, means that Civil Survival has made monumental changes in the ways in which LFOs impact Washingtonians. In the new LFO landscape, incarcerated people can seek relief, individuals can obtain relief from restitution obligations, including interest, and historically unwaiveable LFOs can now be waived, freeing many from years or decades of debt. Civil Survival is dedicated to its LFO work and will continue to fight for the rights of people burdened by criminal legal debt so that they may thrive in their communities.

During the 2023 legislative session, Civil Survival launched a first-of-its-kind effort in Washington to ensure that people incarcerated in state prisons are assured minimum wage for their labor. Although HB 1024 was an uphill effort, we will continue to dedicate our efforts to this policy that provides people with just compensation and a means to reenter their communities with the stability of financial resources. Civil Survival priorities such as restricting the use of solitary confinement and improving access and removing barriers to jail-based voting will continue to be issues to which we will devote our time and resources.

At Civil Survival, we have always done our work in coalition with community, centering the lived experience of justice-impacted people and working in partnership with other advocacy organizations. All of our legislative advances are the product of moving in coalition with those who are impacted and whose voices must be heard, and led by our formerly incarcerated staff members.
ADVOCACY DAY

Civil Survival’s community-based, collaborative approach extends past individual legislative efforts to educationally-oriented advocacy day in Olympia aimed at bringing more voices into conversation with legislators. In 2023, our organizers worked alongside thirteen other community-based organizations to create an advocacy event to remember. The event focused on educating people both familiar and unfamiliar with the legislative process, and facilitating a connection with their legislators. A key aspect of the lobby day was to work with justice-impacted youth and adults to craft their lived experiences and stories into compelling narratives that convince legislators of the importance of their policy proposals. With more than 100 people in attendance, 2023’s advocacy day was a success!

VOTING RIGHTS MURALS

Core to Civil Survival’s advocacy priorities are voting rights for people with prior convictions. We have gained enormous traction over the years to recapture the right to vote and to give voice to the thousands of people with prior felony convictions in Washington. We have crafted a hybrid approach, utilizing every strategy available. For example, HB 1078 in 2021 restored the right to vote to people who were no longer in prison and our 2023 bill, HB 1174 sought to increase voting access in jails.
VOTING RIGHTS MURALS (CONTINUED)

To build upon these legislative efforts, in 2023 we embarked on an artistic, community-based educational series of murals which brought attention to the unjust manner in which we strip people with felony convictions of the right to vote. Disenfranchisement is rooted in this country’s long history of racism and the murals sought to drive this point home in Spokane, Tacoma, and Yakima, which all displayed striking murals representing the pain caused by disenfranchising justice-impacted people, and the freedom of liberation from this burden. The artists themselves come from a diversity of lived experience and poured those experiences into the murals.

Artists Erik Gonzales with the Urbanists Collective and Jacob Johns represented by the Backbone Campaign, were the two main artists. Jacob, who is Hopi and Akimel O’odham, has dedicated his life to Indigenous and climate justice. He is a skilled muralist and speaker, and specializes in non-violent, peaceful “artivism”.

VOTING IN JAILS

Our organizing team continued their efforts to increase access to voting in jails by going into facilities to ensure that people are aware of their right to vote, and register to vote. In 2023, Civil Survival’s organizers went into three different facilities, Kitsap County jail, Green Hill and Echo Glenn, to connect with and educate people who were currently incarcerated in those institutions. This inreach into facilities is a core aspect of Civil Survival’s work and, as always, we welcomed the partnership in this work of organizations in the juvenile justice space who are dedicated to reaching our youth.

GAME CHANGER MEETINGS

As an organization we know we must remain rooted in the community that we serve. Justice-impacted people and communities are at the heart of our mission and will remain so into the organization’s future. Civil Survival has always brought people with lived experience together through weekly Game Changer meetings, and at those meetings people can commune about the challenges they face in the community and share resources with one another. Our organizers devoted their time to ensuring robust agendas for these meetings, in which institutional, organizational, and community-based partners attend and discuss policy issues relevant to reentry and the barriers to reentry that people experience in their day-to-day lives.

ADVOCACY WORKSHOP IN YAKIMA

In 2023 we also held our first Yakima-based advocacy workshop! Civil Survival is a statewide organization and a continuing priority is to reach out to communities across Washington. Our workshops aim to bring justice-impacted people into the work and centralize their narratives in policy and legal change. The workshop walked attendees methodically through the legislative process, and provided participants with the tools and strategies they needed to move policy proposals through the legislature. Our workshops are one of the many ways that we support our justice-impacted neighbors to effectuate systemic change and multiply the power and voices of community members.
Unconstitutional Drug Possession Convictions 11.6%

Criminal Record Vacate or Sealing Cases 32.3%

Legal Financial Obligation Cases 56.1%

Criminal Legal Debt Eliminated over the course of only six months $1,523,194

Cases Taken on by Our Legal Team 1,095

Breakdown of Cases

Assisted Clients Incarcerated at Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women in 146 Cases

Number of People Provided with Copies of Their Criminal Histories 782

Number of Different Courts Our Legal Team Appeared at Across Washington 92
Civil Survival launched several new initiatives to bring reentry legal assistance directly into prisons around Washington. By helping people before release, we can prevent barriers to successful reentry such as wage garnishment. In the Spring, Civil Survival launched a legal clinic at Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women. Through the clinic, Civil Survival attorneys assist the women at Mission Creek in reducing legal financial obligations (LFO) and vacating unconstitutional drug possession convictions. Through referrals from the Black Prisoners Caucus, we have also assisted clients across the state reduce their LFOs and access a wide variety of reentry legal assistance. For the first time ever, incarcerated clients were able to participate in a mass assistance day, receiving thousands of dollars in LFO relief for cases in Skagit County. Finally, for those we cannot help directly, Civil Survival partnered with the Washington Office of Public Defense to introduce court forms with detailed instructions on how to obtain LFO relief in all Washington prison law libraries.

This summer, Civil Survival welcomed its first Formerly Incarcerated Reimagining Equity (FIRE) Intern, expanding legal career opportunities to law students directly impacted by the criminal legal system. Through the FIRE Internship, Civil Survival provides a law student with lived experience in the criminal legal system a $10,000 stipend and mentorship in reentry law from an experienced Civil Survival attorney.

Over the last year, Civil Survival has deployed a multifaceted approach to advocacy. In addition to direct representation, we have engaged in legal advocacy aimed at broad-based advancements in reentry law. Our amicus advocacy, for example, has blossomed over the last year to cover all the focal points of the organization, including community members with unconstitutional drug possession convictions and those with court fines they could not afford to pay. Like almost all of our work, the amicus briefs we filed were a collaborative effort with other legal and grassroots organizations, strengthening our collective power in the courts. Civil Survival also leveraged community partnerships to expand access to legal financial obligation relief. We organized a coalition of 21 community and legal organizations, successfully requesting that the Washington Supreme Court simplify and expand the relief provided by court forms that must be used in thousands of legal financial obligation cases each year.
GENERAL REPRESENTATION

In 2023, Civil Survival helped more clients than ever! Our team provided legal representation in 1,095 cases, focusing on legal financial obligation (LFO) relief, criminal record vacation, and vacation of unconstitutional drug possession convictions, among other areas. We also expanded opportunities for the community members to receive support in filing their own LFO, vacate and other reentry legal relief paperwork. Civil Survival launched an Attorney Office Hours program, where members of the public can easily schedule a meeting with an attorney to receive a summary of their eligibility for LFO relief or record vacation. We also continued to provide community members with free copies of their criminal history—the only service of its kind in Washington. In total, Civil Survival provided 782 criminal histories, allowing recipients to understand what might appear on a background check and which cases might be eligible for LFO reduction or record vacation.

PARTICIPANT SPOTLIGHT

Through expanded outreach to serve individuals who are incarcerated, Civil Survival became connected with Charles Longshore, an incarcerated individual at Washington Correction Center. For over a decade, Charles sought to waive his outstanding financial obligations with no success. Due to the age of Charles’ cases and advancements in the law, Charles was eligible to have the majority of his financial obligations waived; however, he was unable to effectuate this relief due to the many barriers he faced in filing petitions while incarcerated without an attorney. Once connected with an attorney at Civil Survival, Charles was able to successfully petition the Mason County Superior Court to waive $26,432.73 in criminal legal debt across all eight of his cases. Charles continues to work with Civil Survival to waive an estimated $1,482.58 on his last remaining case out of Lewis County.

Since connecting with our legal department, Charles has begun working with our policy team and quickly become a fierce advocate for legislation to reform our criminal legal system. He has joined the leadership team of our voting rights coalition working to end felony disenfranchisement and is a member of our Legal Financial Obligation (LFO) coalition. Charles has also authored his own bill, HB 2001, the Judicial Discretion Act, which gives judges the option to take a second look at long sentences. He has built a large and powerful coalition from behind bars with stakeholders across the state, including judges, lawyers, elected officials, and multiple community organizations. Civil Survival is excited to partner with Charles in passing this legislation and bringing relief to the many Washingtonians unnecessarily sitting behind bars.

Charles Longshore pictured here in January 2024, during his testimony for HB 1798: Concerning allowed earned release time for certain offenses and enhancements.