



# Colorado Justice Report

Founded in 1999, CCJRC is a network of organizations, faith communities, and individuals working to eliminate the overuse of the criminal justice system and advance community health and safety in Colorado.

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## 2025 Legislative Session Update

By Kyle Giddings, CCJRC Deputy Director

We're now past the halfway point of the legislative session and calling it eventful would be an understatement. We're diligently pushing forward our priority bills and supporting other positive justice reform legislation. At the same time, we're collaborating with community partners to resist harmful bills that aim to revive the 'tough on crime' era and undo years of hard-earned progress. Here's an update on what's happening and where we're headed.

### CCJRC Priority Bills:

**HB25-1214: Concerning Measures to Make Appropriate Use of Prison Beds**

This bill addresses prison admissions and parole eligibility. It expands the requirement to exhaust remedies for those convicted of F5 and F6 offenses, in addition to DF4 offenses. The DOC must notify the court when individuals convicted of F5, F6, DF4, and DF3 offenses are admitted to prison within 90 days of their parole eligibility for automatic sentence reconsideration. The Parole Board can only deny parole by a majority vote and must provide monthly reports. The bill also adds sober living as a parole placement option and allows the DOC to notify the Public Defender Liaison to resolve warrants or detainers for community corrections eligibility.

**SB25-190: Offender Release from Custody (changes to special needs parole)**

This bill standardizes the definition of "serious impairment that limits

a person's ability to function" to align with medical diagnoses. It removes the stricter medical standard for special needs parole eligibility for individuals 55 years old or younger. Those under 55 must serve a meaningful portion of their sentence (25% or 10 years, whichever is shorter) before qualifying. The bill allows doctors familiar with the patient's condition, including those outside the DOC, to assess medical eligibility. It also includes technical corrections and directs the Legislative Council to study existing and missing placement options for elders and special needs parolees.

**SB25-01: Colorado Voting Rights Act**

With so much uncertainty whether the federal government will protect and defend the federal Voting Rights Act, Colorado is being proactive by introducing the Colorado Voting Rights Act (COVRA) as SB-001 to strengthen protections against discrimination in voting and to ensure fair elections. CCJRC worked on an amendment that was adopted to protect eligible voters in jail.

**FY25-26 DOC Budget (aka the "Long Bill")**

It's a really rough budget year in Colorado and the state needs to cut up to \$1.2 billion from the current \$40 billion state budget in FY25-26. The DOC budget for next year is still being finalized by the Joint Budget Committee (JBC) but we expect it will be millions higher than our current budget. However, there are some highlights we can share. The prison population is still growing but at a slower rate than was projected last year so DOC is going to have to cut some beds in their FY25-26 budget.

Similar to last year, DOC recommended closing Skyline Correctional Center and relocating the Beacon program. Also similar to last year, CCJRC, people incarcerated in Skyline and their loved ones mobilized and were successful in convincing the Joint Budget Committee to keep Skyline/Beacon open! Congratulations to the families and those living at Skyline who worked tirelessly to make this happen!!! Your emails and letters really helped JBC members understand the value of the Beacon program and why Skyline was the best facility for it to be located. The JBC decided to cut some funded but unused beds at Delta, instead.

JBC members also had a compelling discussion about the need for minimum-security prisons, ways to address technical parole violations that are sending so many people back to DOC, and the broader philosophy behind the purpose of prisons. This marks a significant shift from previous JBC discussions and, in our view, opens the door for meaningful conversations about genuine reform in future legislative sessions.

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## The Good and the Bad

While CCJRC's priority bills are front and center, numerous other bills directly impact the prison population. Some are positive, while others are harmful. Fortunately, CCJRC, in collaboration with our community partners, successfully defeated many harmful bills, though some persist.

### The Good:

All these bills are moving forward through the legislative process, and we have some confidence that they will pass both Chambers and be signed into law.

#### **SB25-155: Legislation Inside Advisory Council**

Bill Summary: Formally creates the Legislation Inside Advisory Council to ensure people incarcerated in state prisons can be involved in policy discussions and design recommendations on the issues, interests, and needs of people incarcerated in DOC.

#### **HB25-1013: Department of Corrections Visitation Rights**

Summary: Establishes visitation as a fundamental right for individuals confined in Colorado prisons. DOC rules must not impose restrictions beyond what is necessary for safety and cannot restrict visitation as a form of punishment.

#### **HB25-1026: Repeal Copayment for Department of Corrections Inmate Health Care**

Summary: Eliminates copays for medical care, mental health services, dental, and optometric care. Prevents DOC from charging fees for missed medical appointments.

#### **HB25-1116: Department of Corrections Search Court Records Before Offender Release**

Summary: Requires DOC to conduct warrant checks at intake, six months after admission, and three to six months before release. DOC must work with the public defender to resolve any active warrants.

### The Bad:

#### **HB25-1171: Possession of Weapon by Previous Offender Crimes**

Summary: Adds motor vehicle theft in the first, second, and third degrees to the list of felonies that prohibit firearm possession. Hasn't been heard in its first committee yet.

#### **SB25-044: Synthetic Opiates Increasing Criminal Penalties (bill died in committee)**

Summary: Would have made the manufacture, sale, or possession of synthetic opioids like fentanyl a level 1 drug felony, regardless of quantity. It also removed protections for those unaware their drugs contained fentanyl and the option to downgrade a felony to a misdemeanor upon completing probation or a community program.

A number of other bills that would increase sentences have also died in committee including **HB25-1141** (Gift Card & Retail Property Crime Penalties), **HB25-1142** (Increase Criminal Penalty for Failure to Exit Premises), **HB25-1072** (eliminate PR bonds for people charged with violence offenses), and **SB25-66** (pharmaceutical company power grab to reduce competition to distribute Narcan, an opioid antagonist that reverses overdose).

We remain committed to pushing for meaningful reforms and standing against the resurgence of the 'tough on crime' narrative and bills in Colorado. Look for the full legislative wrap up in our next newsletter! If you have an email address, you can also sign up for our weekly legislative update which has a lot more information on the bills, hearing dates, and other useful information.

## Spotlight on Colorado Radio for Justice: A New Era of Media by and for System-Impacted People

By Jennifer Dillon, CCJRC Communications Coordinator

On April 15th, Colorado Radio for Justice (CRJ) launches as the first and only 24/7 radio station dedicated to amplifying the voices of those impacted by the criminal legal system. Emerging from the legacy of Inside Wire: Colorado Prison Radio, CRJ is empowering system-impacted individuals to tell their own stories.

With a diverse program lineup—music, talk shows, interviews, journalism, and resources for people affected by incarceration—CRJ is more than a radio station; it's a movement. Apprenticeships and on-the-job training ensure system-impacted hosts and producers develop the skills to take ownership of the narratives shaping public understanding of justice.

Beyond its programming, CRJ provides both respite and resources for those navigating the impacts of incarceration. It also challenges those who believe they are untouched by the criminal-legal system to recognize how it affects everyone—through policy, family, or societal structures.

CCJRC has been honored to share our space with CRJ's talented team of producers and hosts in the past few months as they recorded spots for their reboot. Now, they have secured their own space just in time for their relaunch.

### From Inside Wire to Colorado Radio for Justice

CRJ traces its roots to Inside Wire: Colorado Prison Radio, which launched in 2021 as the first 24/7 station broadcasting from inside prison to all Colorado correctional facilities and the public. Created through the University of Denver Prison Arts Initiative, Inside Wire trained incarcerated producers, providing them with University of Denver certification in audio production.

The station quickly became incredibly popular with its incarcerated audience, offering a rare space for creative expression, connection, and dialogue within the prison system. It gave those inside a voice and a way to engage with one another, as well as with the outside world.

In July 2023, the Colorado Department of Corrections abruptly ended its partnership with the University of Denver Prison Arts Initiative which shut down all of those programs, including Inside Wire. While the Inside Wire Audio Archive remains available, the team behind it saw an opportunity to continue the mission—leading to the path of Colorado Radio for Justice becoming a nonprofit organization.

### Why CRJ Matters

For too long, mainstream media has excluded or misrepresented incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. CRJ challenges these dehumanizing narratives by providing a platform for authentic storytelling and open dialogue about justice reform. By sharing real experiences and giving people an insider look at the criminal legal system, CRJ seeks to replace false narratives of crime and punishment with a more humane and just perspective.

"We envision a Colorado and a country that are caring, just, and human-

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centered,” says CRJ co-director Ryan Conarro. “Our goal is to foster connection and community, cultivate joy and reflection, and empower truth, possibility, and justice.”

### What to Expect on CRJ

- **Music and Entertainment** – A mix of genres curated by system-impacted DJs.
- **Talk Shows and Interviews** – Conversations with advocates, legal experts, and formerly incarcerated individuals.
- **Long-Form Journalism** – Investigative pieces on incarceration, reentry, and justice reform.
- **Resource Sharing** – Practical support for those transitioning out of incarceration, including employment, housing, and mental health resources.

### CRJ is not just about telling stories—it’s about creating change.

CRJ’s RELAUNCH BLAST-OFF takes place on Tuesday, April 15th, from 5:30 to 9:00 PM, marking the station’s official 24/7 broadcast launch and weekly release of original podcasts.

Expect live music, storytelling, and community connection at this free event. Can’t attend? Consider supporting CRJ by becoming a monthly donor to sustain its mission.

### How to Listen and Support

Starting April 15, tune in to Colorado Radio for Justice:

- Webstream: [radioforjustice.org](http://radioforjustice.org)
- The CRJ Mobile App: coming soon to Apple Store and Google Play
- Smart Speakers: “Alexa, play Colorado Radio for Justice.”

By tuning in, supporting, and sharing CRJ, you become part of CRJ’s work to reshape how justice, crime, and rehabilitation are understood.

## Pushing back on biased and misinformed reporting by Colorado Public Radio

As many of you are aware, in December of last year, Colorado Public Radio (CPR) published a series entitled Cash for Car-ing. The articles were an egregiously misleading and grossly negative portrayal of the Caring for Denver Foundation (CFD), which misrepresented its grantmaking, financial stewardship, and community impact. Additionally, the reporting perpetuated racial bias and stigma, inaccurately characterizing community-based grantees—many of whom are led by and serve people of color—while failing to recognize their leadership and contributions to the fields of mental health and recovery.

CCJRC has since helped to lead and coordinate a community response which has included organizing the attendance of over 200 community members who showed up to the City Council Public Comment session on December 9th in protest, writing a letter to CPR which demanded retractions and corrections and was cosigned by 50 other organizations, and several media appearances. All of this, and additional efforts from community partners, culminated in CPR agreeing to a facilitated meeting which was held on February 21st.

The meeting was facilitated by Kenneth Crowley, CEO of the Crowley Foundation who has been helping to lead the community opposi-

tion to the CPR articles. Individuals present on behalf of the community response included Malik Robinson (President and CEO of Cleo Parker Robinson), Wendy Talley (present as a community member), Jason Vitello (CCJRC) and CEOs from two Colorado foundations. Attendees representing CPR included Stewart Vanderwilt (CEO), Andrew Villegas (News Director), Kevin Dale (Executive Editor), Sherkiya Wedgeworth (Managing Editor, Accountability and Outreach), and Chuck Murphy (Investigative Editor).

Our side presented our objections, ultimately attesting that the real scandal revealed throughout this ordeal wasn’t C4D’s grantmaking—but CPR’s misrepresentation of the facts. CPR did not offer any substantive responses and requested time to review and reflect on our written objections. An offer is on the table to have further dialogue - so long as CPR commits to a process of repairing harm and potentially rebuilding trust. Our written objections

## A Huge Welcome to CCJRC’s Newest Team Member



Hey folks, we just wanted to share this great news about our newest team member. Manigé Blackburn-Giles (Muh-knee-zha) is a lifelong advocate for justice, equity, and community empowerment. As CCJRC’s Community Organizer, she works to amplify the voices of people impacted by the criminal legal system and build collective power for change. With over two decades of experience in grassroots organizing, public health, and justice reform, Manigé has dedicated her career to ensuring that those most affected by systemic inequities have a seat at the table. She has led local and national outreach efforts, including as Director of National Outreach at Nurse-Family Partnership, where she supported communities in 43 states, and as the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Swing By Street Supply, an organization providing barrier-free resources to people navigating homelessness, incarceration, and reentry. Her work is driven by the belief that change happens when communities organize, support one another, and refuse to be silenced.

Manigé’s commitment to supporting justice-impacted individuals extends beyond advocacy, she has worked directly with incarcerated people, providing education and support. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, she taught birth classes to confined women in Colorado, ensuring they had access to critical reproductive health knowledge and support. She holds an individualized degree in Gender, Sexualities, and Human Services from Metropolitan State University of Denver, along with certifications in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), Lean process improvement, and advanced leadership. She is also a birth and legal doula and a Lifespan Sexuality Educator, equipping her with the tools to support individuals and families through many of life’s critical transitions. As a first-generation Coloradan, a dog and human mom, and a dedicated advocate, she understands the power of community and the importance of building a movement that includes everyone—whether inside or outside of prison walls. At CCJRC, she is committed to organizing for policies and programs that support successful reentry, reduce harm, and dismantle systems of oppression. In her free time, she enjoys listening to everything from Sam Cooke to Teddy Riley and petting her five fur babies on the porch.



CCJRC 821 22nd St., Denver, CO 80205

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## 16th Annual Voices For Justice

Wednesday, September 10, 2025

5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m

Doors open at 5:00

COCKTAILS AND CUISINE

BASKETS AND BUNDLES SILENT AUCTION

MILE HIGH STATION

2027 West Lower Colfax Denver, CO.

CATERED BY FOOTERS

PLEASE JOIN US FOR ANOTHER WONDERFUL EVENING!



YES! Count me in! I want to support CCJRC and help eliminate the overuse of the criminal justice sysem in Colorado.

Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution!

***Your support makes all the difference!***

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- Individual \$35
- Household \$50
- Sustainer \$100 or more
- Freedom Fighter \$\_\_\_ charge me monthly/quarterly
- Low Income/senior \$15
- Prisoner **Free in 2021**

Credit Card #

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Please return to:

CCJRC 821 22nd St., Denver, CO 80205

On Wednesday September 10, 2025, we will celebrate our fifteenth annual night of fun and fundraising with an open bar, delicious food, and silent auction at Mile High Station in Denver, Colorado. We would like to invite you to attend or become a sponsor of this event. Tickets go on sale June 1, 2025.

Please go to the website at [www.ccjrc.org](http://www.ccjrc.org) for more information.

Looking forward to seeing you!