Impact Report

Helping Shape the ‘Style Bible’ of American Journalism

Reporters and editors have long believed that terms such as “inmate,” “felon” and “offender” are clear and neutral. In 2021, we published The Language Project, which included our own essay explaining The Marshall Project’s decision to avoid labels that can marginalize and dehumanize people. As part of the project, we also pulled together essays from formerly incarcerated people, corrections officers and language experts on the issue.

This May, The Associated Press issued a new edition of its Stylebook, widely seen as the style standard throughout the industry. It included a new chapter on criminal justice that encourages people-first language and discourages writers from using terms like “felon” and “convict.”

In a press release announcing the new section, the AP said that the chapter was “primarily written by a team of AP criminal justice reporters and editors, who attended trainings by Poynter and others and consulted with the Marshall Project among additional research.”

Wrongful Death

Bobby “AJ” Everson featured prominently in our 2022 story about how Thomson federal prison in Illinois became one of the nation’s deadliest. Everson was killed in his cell in December 2021. For months prior to his death, he had been writing to his family describing the dangerous conditions. In May, his father, Bobby Sr., mother, Sabrina, and sister, Ebony, filed a federal wrongful death lawsuit. Our reporters were the first to provide the family with details of Bobby’s death, and they cite our reporting in their complaint.

Too Hot

A federal lawsuit, accusing the Texas Department of Criminal Justice of violating prisoners’ rights by failing to mitigate extreme heat behind bars, prominently cites our 2017 story on the lethal toll of hot prisons. The lawsuit opens with our quote of a former TDCJ union official, “The incarceration is their punishment, not cooking them to death.” The lawsuit also cites some of our original findings regarding the hundreds of thousands of dollars paid by TDCJ in workers’ compensation claims stemming from heat illness and injury.

MOM’S HOME

Cherie Mason (center) of Oklahoma is finally home. She was originally sentenced to 12 years for manslaughter for a stillbirth in 2017, but was released from prison early because she got a new legal team after we featured her case in our reporting on prosecutions for pregnancy loss. She is now spending time with her daughters, Tiffani Wallace (left) and Courtany Sanders, and reconnecting with family.
Legislative Happenings in Ohio

Our local newsroom in Cleveland continues to have an impact. Be sure to subscribe to our Cleveland newsletter for the latest updates.

Driving Forward

Last year, we revealed that hundreds of thousands of Ohio drivers do not have a valid driver’s license because of suspensions for not having proof of insurance, failing to pay court fines or missing child support payments. A proposed law that promised to ease pathways to restoring driving privileges passed the Ohio Senate unanimously in May. The legislation must now be approved by the Ohio House.

Decriminalizing HIV

In March, we partnered with The Buckeye Flame to report on how Ohio is one of 34 states that criminalizes HIV, with many of the laws now decades-old, having been established at the height of HIV and AIDS. A bipartisan coalition in the state legislature introduced two bills in April that would repeal most of the HIV criminalization laws we wrote about. The bills are currently in committee.

Look Who’s Reading

Since February, The Marshall Project’s YouTube channel has gained more than 15.3 million views and over 33,000 new subscribers. Between its 2014 launch and mid-2023, our YouTube had about 6 million views and 18,000 subscribers total. In the last year, we’ve been regularly posting Shorts (produced originally for TikTok but tweaked for YouTube), and engaging users with image and text posts in our Community tab. Be sure to check it out!

Federal Bureau of Prisons Director Colette Peters recently posted to LinkedIn about our Life Inside from 2020 about the benefits of visiting Norwegian prisons, showing that our work is being read at the highest levels of prison leadership.

Several North Carolina mitigation specialists — who search for reasons why jurors should vote against harsh punishments like the death penalty — printed copies of our comic “The Mercy Workers, Illustrated” to hand out at a career fair.

Look to the Sky

In December, the 15th issue of our News Inside print magazine circulated to more than 1,350 prisons and jails nationwide. It included information on a special effort by NASA to enlist incarcerated people and children whose parents are behind bars to observe and take notes on what they saw during the upcoming eclipse in April. NASA representatives told us afterward that because of News Inside, the organization connected with more than 100 people across the country as part of the Eclipse Soundscapes Project. They also said that thanks to connections made through The Marshall Project, NASA was able to distribute eclipse glasses and other materials to numerous correctional facilities.