

## The Marshall Project tracks the impact of our journalism on lawmakers, advocates and other media.

Criminal justice is primarily decided on the state and local level, and many of the officials overseeing the system can be held accountable by voters in their community. In 2020, we focused on investing in regional partnerships and spurring local change. Some recent highlights:

**MAULED** In 2020, many Americans woke up to the reality of endemic police brutality. Our ground-breaking series [Mauled](#) was the first to focus on the violence perpetrated by police dogs. Working with a network of local partners —AL.com, IndyStar and the Invisible Institute —plus USA Today, we found in [our year-long investigation](#) that thousands of people every year are viciously attacked by police dogs. Some bites are strong enough to tear through sheet metal, and in places like Ferguson, Missouri, and Los Angeles County, most of the victims are Black.

- Days after our first story was published, the Indianapolis police publicly promised significant changes in its use of dogs. Indianapolis had the most police dog bites in any city we found.
- Indianapolis city councillors relied on our reporting in pressing police chief Randal Taylor for answers on what's driving racial disparities in police dog bites in their city.
- We've fielded inquiries from the policymakers in a number of states, including New Jersey and Washington state, where lawmakers asked for our published pieces as they crafted a law aimed at severely limiting the use of police dogs to bite people.
- A national police think tank is now working on guidelines for K-9 units throughout the country.
- The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press is filing FOIA requests for the federal Department of Justice guidelines on police use of dogs.



- Our investigation was cited by national news outlets such as the Associated Press, as well as local Fox, CBS and NBC stations. Our reporters were interviewed on WNYC's [The Takeaway](#), [FOX59](#) in Indianapolis and [WUSA9](#) in Washington, D.C., which also spoke with Ayanna Brooks, one of the dog bite victims featured in our reporting. [Mauled](#) connected with a broad audience. On The Marshall Project's channels alone, we reached over 270,000 readers, with another 1,200,000 reading our work on platforms like Apple News. Our network of local and national partners extended our reach by hundreds of thousands more readers

**MISSISSIPPI MILLIONS** A recent [investigation](#) from The Marshall Project revealed that the nation's third-largest private prison company has pocketed an estimated \$8 million it owes to Mississippi taxpayers, and was co-published in multiple papers across the state. Management & Training Corporation is contractually obligated to have a certain number of guards on every shift at the three prisons it runs in Mississippi. When positions go unfilled, which they frequently do, making the prisons more dangerous, MTC is supposed to repay the state for the wages plus a 25 percent penalty. But in two of its prisons, the company didn't repay a single



penny from 2013 to 2019. “Based on some of the facts we saw in your report, we are investigating,” said Mississippi State Auditor Shad White.

**#BLM ON TRIAL** In July, The Marshall Project [told](#) the story of Crishala Reed (above), a Black woman who said she supported Black Lives Matter—and was promptly struck from a jury pool. A California appeals court will soon decide if removing jurors like Reed violates the constitutional ban on excluding prospective jurors based on race. The MacArthur Justice Center cited our story and quoted from our interview with the juror in their amicus brief in the case, and advocates used our reporting in their push for a bill in California to prohibit juror discrimination. **Once the legislation landed on the governor's desk, one of the bill's main proponents wrote to our reporter, Abbie VanSickle, to say thank you “for helping to tell this story and mak[ing] this result possible.”**

**ENDLESSLY INDEBTED** The Mississippi auditor's office released a blistering report in December, confirming findings from The Marshall Project's January investigation into the state's "restitution centers." These modern-day debtors' prisons compel incarcerated people to work for private companies to pay off fees and fines; they are sentenced for an amount of money rather than a period of time. The audit confirmed that the Department of Corrections was not informing people when they had repaid their debt.

**NO COMPASSION** In the first three months of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 10,000 people in federal custody applied for compassionate release, which is meant to free elderly or terminally ill people who pose little risk to public safety. Our investigation, published in partnership with NBC News, found that wardens denied or simply did not respond to almost all of those requests, approving only 156—less than 2 percent. A grand total of 11 people were released. Time and again, the only way incarcerated people were able to win their freedom was by taking the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) to court. U.S. Rep. Hakeem Jeffries referred to our article while questioning BOP director Michael Carvajal on the paltry number of releases during a House hearing. Senators Schatz and Lee sent a bipartisan oversight letter to the federal Bureau of Prisons, asking them to explain the high rate of denials. And our investigation was cited in a federal court ruling allowing district courts to reduce sentences for incarcerated people in "extraordinary and compelling" circumstances—essentially, to counteract the Bureau of Prison's reluctance. That court decision also cited data from our 2018 investigation with The New York Times on the rare use of compassionate release—even before the pandemic.

**THE PANDEMIC BEHIND BARS** As COVID-19 spread across the country this year, our reporters began contacting prison authorities in all 50 states and the federal system to gather weekly updates on the number of people inside prisons who have tested positive, and those who have died. We also joined forces with the Associated Press on the data collection, which ensured that our findings were distributed to journalists in hundreds of local newsrooms around the country.

Prisoner Transportation Services, urging them to immediately start COVID testing before transferring incarcerated people between facilities. Their letters cited our reporting on the spread of the virus behind bars, as well as our investigation with VICE News into how the U.S. Marshals Service helped spread COVID-19 throughout the federal prison system.

**HOW THE MEDIA CREATED "SUPERPREDATORS"** The term "superpredator" was coined 25 years ago,

when Princeton professor John DiIulio warned of a coming wave of remorseless teen killers in a cover story for *The Weekly Standard*. Though juvenile crime was already falling in America by the mid-1990s, the media quickly gobbled up his "superpredator" theory.

The Marshall Project's president, Carroll Bogert, examined the term's spread through the news—and the lasting human toll of that coverage—in "['Superpredator': The Media Myth That Demonized a Generation of Black Youth](#)," published in partnership with NBC News. Our data analysis found more than 250 articles using the term "superpredators"

from 1995-2000, particularly in editorials, oped pages and newsmagazines. By the end of the 1990s, virtually every state had changed its laws to make punishments harsher for kids. Hundreds of people in America are still serving life sentences for convictions that occurred when they were children in the 1990s.

Carroll Bogert and Lawrence Bartley, director of our print publication "News Inside," appeared in an NBC News segment looking at how the term "superpredator" shaped the criminal justice system and the lives of young Black men within it. Our story was also featured on Apple News, and as an audio feature on their new podcast platform.

The media need to acknowledge their own responsibility for driving the crisis of mass incarceration. At The Marshall Project, we aim to do better.



These weekly updates have become the "go-to" resource for other media organizations, who have cited us more than 670 times in their own pandemic coverage. Government agencies rely on us as well. The Washington State Department of Corrections is using our data on their website to track COVID-19 cases across the country. The Iowa Department of Corrections has begun linking to our tracker in its press releases. "I think it might help give other journalists a reliable place to gain perspective on this topic from around the country," one official told us. "Please keep up the good work."

This fall, Senators Elizabeth Warren and Cory Booker, along with Congressman Ted Deutch, sent letters to both the United States Marshals Service and