A survivor of long-term childhood sexual abuse, part of the trauma I’ve learned has come to impact my life is having panic attacks during or as a result of gynecological exams. My first exam at CCWF, when I was first processed in, was a total nightmare, and subsequently I’ve refused every exam offered to me. I’ve had to navigate various forms of manipulation, coercion, condescension, etc. from medical personnel in this prison; during our (still ongoing) lockdowns for Covid, I have been both called into the nurse’s line and visited at my cell door regarding exams I never requested no less than 5 times. It moved beyond feeling disrespectful to feeling predatory. Every time, I reiterated the extent of my trauma and my choice to continue to refuse gyno exams from CDCr, I signed so many medical refusals that twice I didn't have to since it was so close to my previous signed refusal. No one seemed to take note of why I continue to refuse, to the extent that when a nurse came to my cell door to "educate" me about what an exam entails and why it’s important (like I don’t know), my response was met with the offer to have a woman exam me instead of a man. Anyone who knows anything about me knows that my long-term sexual abuse was at the hands of a woman, my mother, and that I find it offensive to assume only men are capable of such assault. This ongoing conduct only furthers my resolve to not consent to such exams while in prison.
La reciente decisión de la Corte Suprema de EE. UU. ha sido impactante para las personas en EE. UU. que han sido testigos de la revocación de una protección constitucional fundamental. Esta decisión llega en un momento en que California (CA) está lidiando con su propia historia de esterilizaciones forzadas: un ejemplo de opresión reproductiva infligida por el sistema penitenciario estatal. En 2021, después de décadas de activismo liderado por mujeres encarceladas y un temor creciente de que esto se convierta en la norma, la privación de la vida del feto es una práctica que se ha visto en el país, las personas encarceladas siguen estando sujetas a la criminalización ampliada de los cuerpos y la violencia sexual y médica. La opresión reproductiva ha sido constante en la vida de muchas personas Negras, Indígenas, y personas de color, que es una realidad cotidiana. La violencia sexual y médica en la prisión no sólo se trata de casos aislados, sino que es una opresión sistemática en la que el personal penitenciario tiene un poder ilimitado sobre las personas encarceladas.

En segundo lugar, ¿cómo la criminalización ampliada de los cuerpos y la atención médica de las mujeres afecta las tasas de encarcelamiento y la falta de control corporal para las mujeres, las mujeres trans y no binarias? En todo el país, las personas encarceladas siguen estando encadenadas durante el embarazo y durante el parto. Chelsea Becker, una mujer del condado de King, California, pasó 16 meses en la cárcel después de sufrir el trauma de una muerte fetal. Existe un temor creciente de que esto se convierta en la norma; su caso es un claro ejemplo de los límites de los derechos reproductivos en CA.

La violación y regulación de los cuerpos de las mujeres es una forma de control y castigo que se utiliza para despojar a las mujeres de su agencia y autodeterminación y para silenciar sus voces. Para muchas personas, la revolución de Roe v. Wade es una de las primeras veces que se enfrentan a esta posibilidad; sin embargo, para las personas encarceladas en prisiones de mujeres, que son predominantemente negras y otras mujeres de color, es una realidad cotidiana. La opresión reproductiva ha sido constante en la vida de muchas personas Negras, Indígenas, y personas de color. Se remonta a la esclavitud cuando la reproducción estaba controlada para el beneficio económico de los propietarios de esclavos.

La violencia sexual y médica en la prisión no es una forma de control y castigo que se utiliza para despojar a las personas encarceladas de sus derechos, sino que impone sus propias creencias a las personas encarceladas. La decisión de Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization plantea varias preguntas: Primero, ¿qué significa esta decisión para las personas encarceladas en prisiones de mujeres? Incluso en CA, un estado que controla el aborto, se ha escrito en la constitución estatal, muchas decisiones de salud reproductiva para personas encarceladas están disponibles únicamente para aquellos que tienen la capacidad de pagar y aprobación de personal de atención médica para la prisión que impone sus propias creencias a las personas encarceladas.

La violencia sexual y médica con frecuencia se enfrenta a reprobaciones. Sin embargo, los sobrevivientes de violencia sexual en las prisiones continúan liderando los esfuerzos para exponer las esterilizaciones forzadas que ocurren dentro de las prisiones de California. Continúan haciendo sonar la alarma sobre la violencia y el abuso que se enfrentan en el interior a diario. La anulación de Roe v. Wade significa que miles de personas pueden enfrentar cargos penales por buscar un aborto, tener un aborto espontáneo o nacimiento de un bebé muerto, o ayudar a un paciente o ser querido a buscar la atención médica necesaria. CCWP se compromete a participar en la defensa participativa, el trabajo de políticas y la educación y acción políticas para apoyar los derechos de todas las personas a la autonomía corporal y la autodeterminación. La abolición de las prisiones debe incluir la lucha por la justicia reproductiva para todos.
CCWP WELCOMES LEESA NOMURA

Elizabeth J. Nomura, or “Leesa” (she/her/hers), is the new Membership Organizer for CCWP. She is also a Project Rebound scholar studying Human Services at Cal State Fullerton. As a formerly incarcerated advocate, her life’s work is encapsulated in the empowerment of justice-involved women and their system-impacted families while working to end the systemic barriers caused by the prison industrial complex. She is a co-chair of a planning committee that hosted the First Annual Freedom Fest in October 2021, an event celebrating and highlighting the accomplishments of our women in CA beyond incarceration. Leesa also developed a community Facebook page, “Freedom Looks Good On Us,” that offers support, and community to over 1,700 justice involved men and women through positive programming and holding space for open communication. Leesa works within Orange County as a board member of the OC Community Action Partnerships (OCCAP) Alliance, which meets with service organizations throughout the county to foster partnerships in meeting the needs of our re-entry population. We are absolutely thrilled to have Leesa on board as CCWP staff!

Leesa Nomura: email: enomura@womenprisoners.org OR call me 747-301-0406. Let your voice be heard.
Sterilization Abuse in CA Prisons

As of January 1, 2022, people who were forcibly sterilized or sterilized for the purpose of birth control inside California prisons are eligible to apply for compensation from the state. Aminah Elster led CCWF’s lobbying efforts for the reparations program and is currently involved in supporting survivors of sterilization and conducting research about both the sterilizations and the reparations program.

How did you first become aware of the sterilizations that were occurring inside?

AE: Throughout my six years in the county jail, I met a lot of women who were going to prison for a very long time and we maintained correspondence and communication. As soon as I got there, folks were warning me about what was going on, like, “Protect your uterus,” you know? But I still did not really understand what it meant to be sterilized.

You were inside in 2013 and 2014 when the sterilizations became public and SB1135 was passed, the bill that declared coercive sterilizations illegal. What do you remember about that time?

AE: I was housed with someone who is a survivor of sterilization. I remember her coming out and seeing it, reading about the bill and just reliving all that she had gone through. It was devastating. I remember being there, listening and being a support for her. It was empowering for a lot of folks. They had not believed they would ever receive any justice. A lot of folks felt like nobody cared. So it helped to empower folks to get involved and to believe that there is power in their voices.

I’ve heard you talk about prisons themselves as eugenic the way they disrupt families. I’d love to hear your reflections on that.

AE: A lot of folks inside are parents. Sometimes you are lucky enough to have someone outside who’s willing to care for your kids and make sure you maintain communication and connection. However, the reality for many is that their children are going into the system or being left to other family members who would rather just write folks off and go on with their lives, you know? And that totally decimates family and cuts off communication. And then the fact that the population inside of women’s prisons is aging considerably. If they haven’t already been sterilized, it’s a fight, there is real fear. You never know what procedures or alternatives like in vitro or anything like that.

It feels like such a contradiction, the state offering reparations but still incarcerating women and limiting their ability to have children.

AE: That signifies that there’s still a lot of work to be done. We are putting Band-Aids on. We are going to give folks reparations for this harm, but on the other end, we are still perpetuating the harm. We just closed this door right here, but there’s always other doors, you know? There is so much more work to do.

What advice were you giving at the time to other people or what advice do you give people now for how they should navigate reproductive health decisions?

AE: Back then, the only advice was to steer clear and be careful with the doctors. It’s a reality for many people who have suffered medical neglect. Even today it’s kind of hard. We want folks to be healthy, we want them to seek regular care. But I also acknowledge that it’s a struggle and it’s a fight, there is real fear. You never know to their own trauma.

I have befriended one transgender female here in the 512 Honor Dorm (Suyakami). She has been pleasant, courteous, and respectfully aware of theatal (cis) female fears of SB 132 inmates in general. She is an IDAP (wheelchair pusher) worker in the unit. And yet, she has been d mind and verbally abused.

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The Fire Inside

Ground Zero

CCWF did not prepare the population for SB 132 inmates, nor did they prepare SB 132 transfer- ees for CCWF. Consequently, transsexual people have had a difficult transition/in- tegration at CCWF since Feb. 2021. The focus has been not on the person as a human be- ing doing their own time, but the “trans” or sex of the inmate. Hurt people hurt people through hate as a distraction to the new governor who signed it, CDCr that implemented it, should have provided for first-steps prior to the new law being put into effect, to prepare the women psychologically for the change. I notice what I call a ‘male prison guard harem mentality,’ where they see transwomen as men invading their harem and so they must come down on us. There’s a deep cul- ture of patriarchy here.

Being in a women’s prison has been one huge learning curve. Nevertheless, I don’t think these problems justify the hate. While there are legitimate concerns that should have been and can still be ad- dressed, there are many cis women who don’t have a problem with the new situation. There are more of these women at CCWF than haters. Haters of any stripe are a negative, counter-progressive ele- ment, whether from within the LGBT community or outside of it, within the prisons or outside of them, within a particular gender or outside of it. It is hate all the same, which any progressive political move- ment must avoid. In this place, the haters are crying wolf, transmitting false informa- tion and lies, and exploiting legitimate concerns.

Still, I’ve made enriching friendships (impos- sible in men’s prisons), am learning so much about female-female interaction, a lot of what being female is all about, things that could never be learned in men’s prisons. Spring is here! Flowers are blooming, petals of every color in the rainbow, so beauti- ful! The geese and birds and cats abound. Frogs hop along. The Sun’s rays warm us.

Mother Earth

I am a transsexual female. I came to a women’s prison because I am a female, regardless how anyone else cuts it. Being in a men’s prison was disturbing. Just physically being there hurt and bothered me deep inside. Being in a women’s prison I can be in harmony with the feminine energy that about to emerge.

Transsexualism is the most misunderstood psychosexual condition in the world. In my case, I struggled ever since 1984, when I transitioned, to get estrogen, SRS (Sexual Reassignment Surgery), female housing, female clothing, and makeup. We were not getting any of that as we are today. Many of us were traumatized without estrogen. Girls were cutting, hanging and starving ourselves, mutilat- ing our genitals, trying to kill ourselves, going to psych units, naked in a nut cell, drugged senseless with psychotropic medication, placed on 5-point re- straints (horizontal crucifixion), spoon fed. I person- ally went through all of that across the years, with so many others. Transsexualism is a very complex and serious illness. We are grateful for the transgender specialists who diagnose, understand, and treat us in the prisons and those rare politicians who make it possible for us to have our peace in the penal environ- ment.

To remember we have a new struggle; a new chapter of our history in the prisons has begun. CDCr didn’t go about moving us into women’s prisons in an ide- al way. It was a huge call, a deep psychological shift for the cis women and for us too. It was the first time such a thing was done in American prisons on such a mass scale. Those legislators who made the bill, the governor who signed it, CDCr that implemented it, should have provided for first-steps prior to the new law being put into effect, to prepare the women psychologically for the change. I notice what I call a ‘male prison guard harem mentality,’ where they see transwomen as men invading their harem and so they must come down on us. There’s a deep cul- ture of patriarchy here.

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California Coalition for Women Prisoners

Art: Suyakami (Eva Reeves), CCWF

Art: Micah Bazant

Art: Suyakami (Eva Reeves), CCWF

By Dana Gray, CCWF

By Suyakami (Eva Reeves), CCWF

By Dana Gray, CCWF

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The Fire Inside

Hurt people hurt people
Sharing experiences of sexual assault and reproductive healthcare—both the good care and the bad—is not easy. It takes courage. It takes knowing that we have a community committed to collective care and healing, a community that stands together and not only survives, but thrives.

Here are accounts of people's individual experiences, understanding that for people still incarcerated, there may be retaliation from COs or other prison staff for telling their stories of abuse. Some people choose to share experiences anonymously. And with all of these individual experiences, we know that we live in a system that does not respect the human right to health care, housing, food, and life for large parts of our community because of racism, economic, and gender oppression.

We are committed to healing from individual wrongs and to fighting against each unjust criminal case of survivors acting on their right to self-defense. We are also committed to fundamentally changing this unjust system.

On June 24, 2022, The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization that the right to reproductive health care choices—and specifically named the right to terminate a pregnancy—is not protected by the U.S. Constitution. This ruling overturns the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision in Roe v. Wade, that had recognized and affirmed the constitutional right of every woman to make their own choices regarding their body.

The right to self-determination has been a long fight in the U.S. for so many, and now all women and birthing people must again fight for the right to decide what happens with their bodies. We continue to build within our community and are committed to justice, to self-determination for each person, to mutual respect, and to abolition of all prisons.

I Was Only Eight
by Mayra Figueroa, CCWF

I’m sorry I couldn’t look back. Sorry I couldn’t come back. I didn’t save you.

Can I say this to you now? “I was scared.”

The words coming out of your mouth had pumped fear into my heart.

I didn’t want what was happening to you to happen to me.

I’m sorry I didn’t save you, do more for you.

I wonder about you, what became of you. Did you get saved?

I am sorry for not speaking up. I am sorry for your pain.

I hope you understand. I was only eight years old!

I was raped when I was 11 years old. This is the first time I've written the words on paper. I never told anyone for many years. I felt deeply ashamed, like I did something wrong. I wish I had been taught about rape and what rape is. In my mind it was a violent and bloody attack from the boogie man. I didn’t realize it could be someone you looked up to or someone revered in the community. I especially never thought it could happen at a religious gathering.

I wanted to go home and threaten to kill her for two days. Leah was jailed for nearly a year for defending herself against her abuser, who held her hostage, beat her, and verbally abused for almost twenty years by Wendy’s abusive partner. In 2019, their abuser attacked Wendy on her property. In fear for her life, Wendy was forced to defend herself and her family and her abuser died. Wendy was charged by the Kern County District Attorney with first-degree murder, and an additional gun enhancement. Her trial is scheduled for August 29, 2022. Wendy faces a sentence of 50 years to life if convicted. For More Info and to support: https://survivordandpunished.org

Marisela Andrade is a domestic violence and human trafficking survivor in ICE detention in Aurora, CO. After 13 years of horrendous abuse and being sexually trafficked around the state of CA by her husband and abuser, Marisela asked a friend to help stop the abuse. Her husband was killed and Marisela was sentenced to LWOP. After serving 15 years, her sentence was commuted, and her parole approved. But instead of freedom, Marisela was handed over to ICE by CDCr and now faces deportation. For more information and to support: www.womenprisoners.org

Leah Eggleson, a 22-year-old mixed-race survivor of domestic and sexual violence living in Washington State, faced a possible life sentence for defending herself against her abuser, who held her hostage, beat her, and threatened to kill her for two days. Leah was jailed for nearly a year in Pierce County, WA on a one million dollar bail. Thanks to community advocacy and the support of the Northwest Community Bail Fund and the National Participatory Defense Network, she was released on bail to be with her two sons and to fight her case. On May 21, 2022, Leah was found NOT guilty of attempted murder, but guilty of illegal possession of a firearm. She is expected to complete her sentence by November 2022. This is a huge victory and important to note the role of participatory defense and community advocacy. For more info and to support: https://liberateleah.com/

Wendy Howard and her daughters were physically, sexually, and verbally abused for almost twenty years by Wendy’s abusive partner. In 2019, their abuser attacked Wendy on her property. In fear for her life, Wendy was forced to defend herself and her family and her abuser died. Wendy was charged by the Kern County District Attorney with first-degree murder, and an additional gun enhancement. Her trial is scheduled for August 29, 2022. Wendy faces a sentence of 50 years to life if convicted. For More Info and to support: www.defendwendy.com/

Wendy and her daughters pictured
I am seeing the social backlash over the reversal of the Roe decision on TV. Some of it is violent. I expected the Supreme Court conservatives to put other decisions in their sights, like gay marriage, LGBTQ+ rights, contraceptives, but I was surprised that they went so far as to incorporate that expectation into the Dobbs ruling. That was bold and speaks to their arrogant confidence that it’s a new playing field judicially and politically, a new sheriff in town. Probably most think this will blow over in time, let everyone get it off their chest and we’ll be back to normal. But the violence tells me “not so fast.” We’ll see.

This is a dangerous development. It exposes the cracks in democracy. Most see the government as the office of the president in command, the judiciary and legislature in the background, with the separation of powers doctrine and the checks and balances scheme keeping the peace among these separate branches of government. But the judicial branch is acting in coup d’etat fashion. In fact, the courts have more power than the other branches. They can declare anything the others do as unconstitutional and nullify it, and the other two must obey. That's a tyrannical arrangement, not democratic. Call it democratic tyranny—same thing.

Sterilization Abuse in CA Prisons

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with those doctors. So trying to really balance that and then also helping folks to be informed about options and choices or what procedures entail. If we aren’t giving people information to make these more informed choices, the fear overrides.

So, finally, what advice would you give to people who are wondering, “Was I sterilized? Did this happen to me?”

AE: I would tell people, anybody who had abdominal surgery to fill out an application. I think there are a lot of people this has happened to and they don’t know. Some people may have not seen it as a sterilization before the bill passed. Now is the time to apply. If you need an application, check for availability at your prison or write to request one: CCWP, ATTN: Compensation Program, 4400 Market St., Oakland, CA 94608.

Welcome Home! Precious Releases

After 35 years behind bars and 9 parole hearings, Lynda Axell (L) was finally released on June 24, 2022. Many thanks to Sen. Connie Leyva’s office for sitting in on an elderly parole hearing, which contributed to Lynda finally receiving a suitability grant. She was welcomed to A New Way of Life by Alicia Phillips (M) & Jane Dorotik (R).
on May 11, 2022, Milena Ansari, the International Advocacy Officer from Addameer Palestinian Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, visited the CCWP/LSPC/All of Us Or None offices at the Freedom Movement Center in Oakland, CA. CCWP has worked closely with Milena and other organizations as part of the Art Against Imprisonment (www.artagainstprison.org) project, which features art from and about Palestinian and U.S. incarcerated people. CCWP has joined with representatives from Centro Legal de la Raza, Dolores Street Community Services, Rights Behind Bars, ACLU Nor-Cal and California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice, to form the Dublin Prison Solidarity Coalition.

SUPPORT SURVIVORS AT DUBLIN

CCWP has expanded the Writing Warriors correspondence program to Dublin and advocates have begun to conduct legal visits with people incarcerated there.

MILENA ANSARI VISITS FROM PALESTINE

On May 11, 2022, Milena Ansari, the International Advocacy Officer from Addameer Palestinian Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, visited the CCWP/LSPC/All of Us Or None offices at the Freedom Movement Center in Oakland, CA. CCWP has worked closely with Milena and other organizations as part of the Art Against Imprisonment (www.artagainstprison.org) project, which features art from and about Palestinian and U.S. incarcerated people.

Milena spoke about the terrible conditions Palestinians endure in Israeli prisons and drew out some important connections between the struggles of Palestinian and U.S. incarcerated people. She emphasized the predicament of the hundreds of Palestinian administrative detainees, held indefinitely in prison without charge or trials. She spoke of the abysmal lack of healthcare in Israeli prisons and the challenging long distance travel and restrictive, arbitrary regulations that families must deal with to visit their loved ones. Formerly incarcerated members of CCWP and All of Us or None shared their painful experiences of prison, family separation, and re-entry into the community. We are committed to stay informed and work in solidarity with our linked struggles for freedom.

Hamdiya Cooks, LSPC Administrative Director & Milena Ansari

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE RESENΤENCING

In 2021, Lynn Williams, the registered victim in the case of John E. Johnson, embarked on a restorative justice process with Mr. Johnson, his wife Latashia Burleson-Johnson, and his entire family. As a result of this process, Mr. Johnson has been resentenced from Life Without Parole (LWOP) to a twenty-five to life sentence. He will be going to the Board of Parole Hearings (BPH) in October 2022 to determine whether they will find him suitable for release.

In 2021, the San Mateo County District Attorney’s Office contacted Lynn Williams to ask her to write a letter relevant to Mr. Johnson’s commutation application. Mr. Johnson had already served thirty-one years in prison after being convicted of the felony murder special circumstances death of Ms. Williams’ sister, Elaine Marie Williams. Mr. Johnson, who was nineteen years old at the time, killed Ms. Williams when his car crashed into hers accidentally as he was driving away after committing a robbery. At the trial in 1990, the Williams family had opposed the death penalty for Mr. Johnson. However, they didn’t realize that he was sentenced to LWOP, condemning him to spend the rest of his life in prison.

After the D.A. contacted her, Lynn Williams initiated a correspondence with Mr. Johnson, his family members, friends, and officials within the prison to research his commutation request. This led to a restorative justice process through which she concluded that the LWOP sentence was disproportionate to his crime. She brought her conclusions to the San Mateo D.A., Stephen Wagstaffe, and as a result the D.A. submitted a motion for resentencing under PL1770 (d) (i). On December 2, 2021 Judge Susan Greenberg resentenced Mr. Johnson to 25 years to life, making him parole eligible. He is now preparing for his first parole hearing in October 2022.

Mr. Johnson was able to be resentenced by Judge Greenberg because he received his LWOP sentence right before Proposition 115 went into effect in late 1990. Prop 115 removed judicial discretion in sentencing for felony murder special circumstances. The Sentencing Reform Act, SB 300 sponsored by Senator Cortese, CCWP, the DROPLWOP Coalition and many other co-sponsoring organizations, is currently being considered in the California Assembly, after having been approved by the California Senate in 2021. SB 300 would restore judicial discretion and also eliminate a mandatory LWOP or death sentence for anyone convicted of felony murder special circumstances.

As Lynn Williams stated in her testimony to the Assembly Public Safety Committee on June 1, 2022, “My sister, Elaine would NEVER have wanted his sentence to be a virtual death sentence which is what LWOP is. His LWOP sentence contributed NOTHING to our healing… With Elaine’s voice, remember: There is no Justice without Mercy.”
For those who have never seen a prison cell in Central California Women’s Facility, allow me to give you a visual. The cell is approximately 16 feet by 16 feet. Looking from the hall into the cell window, you would see half the cell is used for 4 bunk beds set about 4 feet apart. The bathroom and shower are set to the back of the second half of the cell and provide a wall for one of the bunks, Bunk #4. There are also two sinks with wall mirrors and a table next to the shower/toilet area. There are lockers for each person that also help to create privacy walls, but Bunk #1 has no wall, no locker, zero protection from any and all activity going on in the room. 99% of inmates hate this bunk with good reason!

The bathroom is just over your shoulder and it’s hard to avoid the sight and smells there. The table is to the side where everyone cooks and gathers. The sinks are there where people brush their teeth, pretend to wash their hands, and wash their dishes. The shower is by the table so that the person showering almost always sees people and cannot get any privacy there.

When there is no curtain on the bathroom door, it feels like you are in the bathroom with the person using it, especially when 8 people live in one tiny cell. When a person is taking a shower they hang a towel or sheet over the window. Any officer walking by will have them remove it, so timing is essential. Anyone wishing to use the table to prepare a meal must time it to avoid people in the shower or other people making coffee or food. To the person in Bunk #1 Low, it doesn’t matter, because anyone at the table feels like they are right beside the bed.

Prison etiquette says not to jump into conversations, even when it’s literally right next to your head. Because of overcrowding, people end up talking—or arguing—over the body of the person laying in Bunk #1 Low. When people walk up and talk to the person in the upper bed of Bunk #1, their crotch is at eye level to the person laying in the lower bed. Everything feels like an invasion to the person laying in the Bunk #1 low. What bunk you are assigned greatly determines your quality of life.

The Fire Inside
California Coalition for Women Prisoners
CCWP MISSION

CCWP is a grassroots abolitionist organization, with members inside and outside prison, that challenges the institutional violence imposed on women, transgender people and communities of color by the prison industrial complex (PIC). We see the struggle for racial and gender justice as central to dismantling the PIC, and we prioritize the leadership of the people, families and communities most impacted in building this movement.

Funded in part by:

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