Every year in the U.S. October is recognized as Domestic Violence (DV) Awareness month. CCWP took this opportunity to publicly launch the #ClosureIsPossible statewide campaign to close all California (CA) women’s prisons. We put a spotlight on DV survivors currently in prison, as well as the continuing trauma and abuse so many people experience at the hands of CDCr staff (see p. 7, Sexual Abuse). We also highlighted the connection between DV and the violence of the criminal injustice system. How many people are incarcerated in CA women’s prisons because they defended themselves or their children from DV?

According to CDCr, as of Sept. 2023, 3,798 people were incarcerated in CCWF and CIW, accounting for only 4% of the total state prison population. We know that a staggering number of these people—research shows that 77% to 90%—are criminalized survivors of DV and other trauma, having experienced emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse prior to incarceration. A disproportionate percentage of transgender people—especially Black trans people—also report significant trauma prior to incarceration, including experiences of bullying, criminalization, and mistreatment by police. All of these factors are associated with higher rates of incarceration, primarily due to a lack of investment in community based mental health services and non-carceral violence intervention.

The last two issues of Fire Inside, FI#68 (full issue) & FI#69 (pg.12), addressed how the punitive mass incarceration model that we currently have can be transformed. The over $80,000 per year currently spent by CDCr per incarcerated person, could be redirected into community-controlled services for healing, education, employment and housing.

Continued on p. 3
**#¡ElCierreEsPosible!**

Continuado de p. 1

Violencia que no sean carcelarias.

Las dos últimas ediciones de *Fire Inside*, F1 #68 (edición completa) y F1 #69 (p.12), abordan cómo se puede transformar el modelo de encarcelamiento masivo punitivo que tenemos en la actualidad. Los más de $80,500 por año que el CDCR invierte actualmente por cada persona encarcelada se pueden redirigir a servicios controlados por la comunidad que apunten a la salud, la educación, el empleo y la vivienda. Sabemos que mucha gente cree que no es posible cerrar las cárceles. Suele hacerse la pregunta de “¿cómo se responsabilizará a las personas por los daños que han causado?” Pero los $405 millones de dólares por año que gasta el CDCR en las dos cárceles de mujeres podrían usarse para financiar un modelo de reducción de daños muy diferente.

El acoso sexual, el abuso y los ataques a las personas en las cárceles de mujeres por parte de los oficiales penitenciarios (COs) en CA han sido continuos e incesantes. Sólo en 2023, más de cincuenta personas en cárceles de mujeres han iniciado demandas por abuso sexual a manos de los COs. En un estudio realizado sobre las personas encarceladas en cárceles de mujeres, un 19% reportó haber sido víctima de ataques sexuales durante su encarcelamiento, y el 45% de esos ataques fueron perpetrados por personal penitenciario (p. 7).

El abuso sexual está integrado en el ADN de las cárceles. ¿Cuál lesica forma segura de eliminarlo es cerrar las cárceles de mujeres? En palabras de Amika Mota, exreclusa sobreviviente: “Tu abusador tiene la llave de tu celda”. Si bien celebramos el cierre de cualquier cárcel, este NO es el cierre que queremos (ver el Plan Popular del CURB para Cierre de Cárcel, [https://curbprisonspending.org](https://curbprisonspending.org) para ver un marco sobre el cierre de cárceles). Cuando Romarilyn Ralston, miembro de CCWP, asistió a la Conferencia Free Her de 2023 (patrocinada por el Consejo Nacional para Mujeres y Niñas Encarceladas y Anteriormente Encarceladas), presentó las bases de la campaña Power and Justice, firmaron 83 personas. En Massachusetts, la campaña Free Her apunta a detener la construcción de una nueva cárcel de mujeres y a reducir la población carcelaria. California puede ser un líder nacional en terminar con la violencia estatal del encarcelamiento a cerrar sus dos cárcel de mujeres, liberar a las personas encarceladas y desarrollar alternativas no carcelarias de base comunitaria. #¡ElCierreEsPosible! Para recibir más información y unirse a la tarea: info@womenprisoners.org

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**#ClosureIsPossible!**

Continuado de p. 1

We know many people do not think it is possible to close the prisons. “How do we hold people responsible for harms they have done?” is often the question raised. But the $405 million dollars per year the CDCr is spending on two women’s prisons could certainly be used to fund a very different model of harm reduction. Sexual abuse, harassment, and assaults of people in the women’s prisons at the hands of correctional officers (COs) in CA have been continuous and relentless. In 2023 alone, over fifty people in CA women’s prisons have filed lawsuits against sexual abuse at the hands of COs. In one study of people incarcerated in women’s prisons, as many as 19% reported that they had been sexually assaulted while incarcerated and 45% of those assaults were by prison staff (see p. 7). Sexual abuse is built into the DNA of prisons. The only sure way to eliminate it is to close women’s prisons! As formerly incarcerated survivor Amika Mota said: “Your abuser has the key to your cell.”

People incarcerated in women’s prisons also experience and witness high rates of physical and emotional violence, perpetuating the trauma so many people have experienced because of incarceration. The CA Legislative Women’s Caucus was so concerned, they held a public hearing in Oct. 2023 to call CDCr to account, hearing powerful testimony from incarcerated and formerly incarcerated survivors. The Women’s Caucus endorsed Town Hall discussions in CCWF and CIW, with the participation of community organizations such as CCWF, Sister Warriors and Survived & Punished.

We believe that change is possible. Over the past decade, the CA women’s prison population has decreased by 70.8% due to consistent advocacy from many organizations. Folsom Women’s Facility was closed in January 2023, but people were not released. Instead, they were transferred to CCWF and CIW, disrupting programing and increasing the overcrowding in these two prisons. While we applaud the closure of any prison, this is NOT the closure that we want (see CURB’s People’s Plan for Prison Closure, [https://curbprisonspending.org](https://curbprisonspending.org) for a framework for closing prisons). When CCWF member Romarilyn Ralston went to the 2023 Free Her Conference (sponsored by the National Coalition for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls), she presented the foundation for the #ClosureIsPossible campaign—83 people signed on to participate. In Massachusetts, the Free Her campaign aims to stop the building of a new women’s prison and reduce the prison population. California can be a national leader in ending the state’s prior to incarceration, by closing its two women’s prisons, releasing the people incarcerated and developing community-based, grassroots non-carceral alternatives. #ClosureIsPossible!! For more information, and to join the work: info@womenprisoners.org •
El sistema penitenciario de Noruega.

- La población carcelaria total de Noruega es de menos de 3000 personas, inclusiones en donde se administran las cárceles en Noruega. Según el CDCr, el Modelo CA "tiene como objetivo desarrollar una cultura de sanidad en el sistema penitenciario de Noruega comenzará con reducciones significativas de la población encarcelada (de la caja de CURB al Consejo Asesor de San Quentin).

- Las personas encarceladas de Noruega suelen vestir sus propias ropas, cocinar en cocinas comunitarias y dar pasos que no sean del administrador o del personal. Trabajan, estudian, practican deportes y hacen las compras.

- No hay pena de muerte ni prisión perpetua. La pena media en Noruega es de ocho meses. Las personas encarceladas tienen los mismos derechos que el resto de los ciudadanos, incluido el derecho a votar.

Continuado en la p. 12

Norway’s prison system.

- The entire prison population for Norway is less than 3,000 people, including those detained pretrial — less than the population of prisoners in San Quentin alone. The first and most important step of a CA Model that is inspired by Norway’s prison system would start with significant reductions in the imprisoned population (from CURB’s Letter to the San Quentin Advisory Council).

- People incarcerated in Norway often wear their own clothes, prepare their own meals, shop for groceries, and move about unaccompanied by officers. They work, take classes, play sports, and shop for groceries.

- There is no death penalty or life sentence. The average sentence is a two-year bill, even though it passed the Assembly and the Senate, due to indications that Gov. Newsom would veto it.

Continued on p. 12
**The Fire Inside California Coalition for Women Prisoners**

**Youth Targeted for E-Carceralution**

The closure of the CA Department of Juvenile Justice (SB 823) went into effect on July 1, 2023, presenting the possibility of a reduction in the number of prisons for youth. However, a rise in electronic monitoring (EM) of youth is in direct opposition to abolitionist goals. EM includes an array of state-controlled digital surveillance technology that tracks and monitors an individual’s location and/or biometric data outside of a physical jail or prison. The most common EM is the ankle monitor. While EM allows a person to live at home, it is not an alternative to incarceration, but a form of "e-incarceration." EM doesn’t reduce jail populations, it actually increases the number of people being surveilled and controlled.

“People like to punish and they like to control,” educator, writer, and activist James Kilgore said. “They can justify taking people out of prison by putting them on a monitor, and be able to tell the public that they got them under control.” Kilgore, the author of Understanding Mass Incarceration and Understanding E-Carceration, described this as a product of “carceral humanism,” where a punitive carceral system is justified by repackaging itself as benevolent. EM is a way of keeping system-impacted youth incarcerated within their homes; but many youth aren’t safe in their home environment due to poverty, domestic violence, and other problems.

The cost of EM can put a strain on families already struggling to get by: EM’s set-up fee can reach $300 with daily fee ranging from $5 to $40. Failure to pay for such fees can lead to penalty fees, extended time on EM, or even jail. Technical issues, such as false alarms with EM are common, and “a setup for people to be sent back,” Kilgore said.

In California, there is a high usage of EM. A 2020 Berkeley Law Report found that 53 of CA’s 58 counties use EM in their juvenile systems. Kilgore described how this data collected with EM technology will become more important as the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology expands – increasing the use of formulas to ‘predict criminal behavior,’ often targeting Black and Brown communities. In Sept., Gov. Newsom released executive order N-12-23 that, in his words, will “shape[e] the future of ethical, transparent, and trustworthy artificial intelligence (AI).” If we are reaching toward an abolitionist future, we must hold AI technology, its creators, and those now seated at Newsom’s new “AI cyber table” accountable so that the system of e-incarceration doesn’t become the future of incarceration. •

**FREE PALESTINE**

Palestine has been under Israeli occupation for over seventy-five years, suffering many forms of control and oppression which amount to a system of apartheid. Now Gaza is being bombed relentlessly by Israel in their effort to eliminate the Palestinian resistance. A ceasefire is absolutely needed to stop more death and destruction. CCWF stands with Palestine and Gaza in their struggle for freedom and liberation. #CeasefireNow! #FreePalestine! •

**Sexual Abuse in Prison**

In Fl #70, we published an excerpt from an open letter titled “Your Abuser Has the Key to Your Cell,” initiated by the Solidarity Committee for Incarcerated Survivors which CCWF is part of. Since then over eighty local and statewide organizations representing survivors of sexual violence and other system-impacted groups have signed on to the letter.

On August 23rd, the CA Legislative Women’s Caucus heard testimony from formerly incarcerated survivors of sexual abuse. Amika Mota, Executive Director of Sister Warriors and formerly incarcerated at CCWF stated, “The entire system must be overhauled to prioritize the safety of victims and witnesses and create survivor-led programs to support recovery.” Colby Lenz, an advocate with CCWP and Survived & Punished (S&P), described how “CDCr’s responses to reports of sexual violence reinforce a closed loop of information that makes terrified survivors even more vulnerable.” Lenz went on to explain that “CDCr’s official protocol when survivors report sexual violence includes strip searching victims for ‘investigations’ and then isolating them in segregation.” Tess Borden from the Prison Law Office (PLO) described how people at CCWF came to her when she was visiting the prison in June 2023 and asked if they could tell her about staff sexual abuse. She explained that last spring after the revelations regarding CO Rodriguez came to light, the PLO recommended to CDCr that they make trauma-informed counseling available to anyone at CCWF who wanted it. CDCr rejected the recommendation.

In response to these serious problems, Senator Nancy Skinner got the legislature to allocate money in this year’s budget to fund a Sexual Assault Response and Prevention working group anchored by Sister Warriors. The Working Group is tasked with developing a report by March 1, 2024 which will “include recommendations regarding: (a) protections for sexual assault and harassment whistleblowers inside prisons or otherwise in the department’s custody; (b) improving and increasing access to trauma-informed supports for incarcerated survivors; (c) improvements to the process for handling allegations of staff misconduct that specifically involve allegations of sexual assault and

To support the input of currently incarcerated people at CCWF and CIW, each of the prisons will hold in-person Town Halls in November 2023. Representatives from outside community organizations will attend the Town Halls.

We hope that as many people as possible will attend these town halls to give voice to your feelings and ideas about what has been happening and make suggestions about the changes you want to see. If you participate in a town hall, please write the Fire Inside to let us know about your experience and suggestions you may have. •
A collage of all of this year's activities—Sacramento advocating events, tattoo events, beach outings, Geneva UN Human Rights Conference, & more. Wendy Howard, Marisela, Nataly, & many people coming home!
What Should CCWP Advocacy Be?

We asked our community members in prison to let us know what CCWP advocacy should focus on in the next year. Below are some of the responses.

Expanding education. In federal prison we don’t get computer programming which is available in state. I tried proposals several years ago to get BOP to start something, but the wardens keep changing and the next one wants me to start over. Also, to expand mental health programming. I’ve learned so much about coping skills, distorted thinking and changing for better, dialectical behavior, cognitive processing and even the ABC’s (activating behavior, belief and consequence).

- Sharon McMillan, FCI Dublin

One of the consistent issues I have noticed are the safety concerns. Women who have been assaulted or sexually abused fear retaliation from staff, and refuse to report it. They suffer in silence in order to feel safe from the ones that make them feel unsafe. It’s an oxymoron, however it’s our reality. Closing women’s prisons, especially the camps, should be at the forefront of advocacy. Women at the camps are already considered “out custody”, meaning we don’t need to be secured. Lack of programming is a perennial problem here at the camp; closing the camps would be the better option in terms of rehabilitation. Lack of resources for reentry is the norm.

- Tien Vo, CCWF

More focus on immigration in 2024. Having an immigration hold adds an extra layer of stress for people like me. Not only have I been incarcerated for decades, now if I parole, I may have to go to a country that is completely foreign to me. I don’t know a single person there, no family, no friends. It is scary!

- Sharon McMillan, FCI Dublin

One of the more disastrous effects of the current “leadership” of CIW is the decimation of the Honor Dorm system. Before the “Norwegian Model” there were Honor Dorms in CCWF and CIW. These worked for many years both as incentives for behavior improvements and preparation for release (rehabilitation). The Honor Dorms are still working at CCWF. As for me, I came to CIW from a CCWF honor dorm for the elderly and medically compromised. I now find myself back in general population. We are struggling to maintain our safe housing.

- Christine Reynolds, CIW

Remove governor’s ability to veto BPH suitability recommendations. Expand education and vocational training. CIW has no cosmetology or building maintenance. anymore and they haven’t been replaced with anything. What about a possible culinary program? Safety concerns for trans people, specifically for shower times to prevent sexual harassment.

- CIW Community Members

A message to people facing CDCR to ICE transfer: Keep fighting. Don’t give up. Keep faith in god. And know there are so many groups fighting with us and for us. I am part of CCWP, and I will be advocating for other people.

- Nataly Marinero

The tears of a clown my wall is falling down the cards are stacked against me a marked deck, and I didn’t know which was friend, and which was foe the fool, the joker, the jester they were all that I was ever meant to be the highlight of the show to juggle, to struggle to never know what it’s like, when things go silent at the end of the show so here I sit within my misery the music stopped and now its just me for so long I have been the puppet on a string I’m a shallow and empty being feelings are unknown to me, hidden amidst layers of rubble and debris the pieces that I hold in my hands are incomplete, I try and cry but none of it will bind together what I thought was real, was not

- Tien Vo, CCWF

The passage of time and the instinct to survive and to adapt have helped me to be complete, my reflection in the glass is now clear, eyes bright, reactions aware, a light within. A future I see with just me, no longer wounded or misunderstood, yearning to be like others. See me for I am free, these walls no longer contain me.

2010-2023: I started this poem in Pennington County jail in 2010, the second paragraph was in FCI Carswell 2013, and the last was Dublin FCI May of 2023.

- Sharon McMillan, FCI Dublin

Wisdom

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- Tien Vo, CCWF
Over the weekend of Sept 8-10, CCWP held a statewide membership retreat in Los Angeles. This retreat focused on our mission/values, political education, and questions about our organizational structure. We shared political victories and organizing updates, reflected on CCWP’s present and future and policy goals, and bonded over karaoke and food. Our long-term principle of caring collectively was on full display during the weekend. We welcomed new members and people newly home. For some, it was an opportunity to hug and see old friends/comrades. The camaraderie was powerful!

The group agreed upon a reorganization of CCWP into a statewide organization with a number of regional hubs. With members from the Central Valley, San Bernardino, Orange and Riverside counties, L.A. and Northern California, including the Bay Area, Stockton and Sacramento, we envision a structure that reflects our expanding outside membership.

We also know that between CCWF and CIW, our inside members are constantly transferred, and we need to be able to respond and support people no matter where they are. A lot of the specifics of the new structure and its logistics still have to be figured out. We are creating a working group to work on this restructuring and creation of hubs. If members are interested in working on this restructuring, please send an email to info@womenprisoners.org.

**REPORT卡multiracial and anti-Asian hate crimes, 2023**

The Department of Justice released a report on hate crimes in the United States in 2023. The report found that hate crimes based on race, ethnicity, and religion increased significantly compared to the previous year.

**Legal Updates**

**AB 1118 (KALRA) – RACIAL JUSTICE ACT 3.0**
In early October, Governor Newsom approved AB 1118. This bill makes technical changes to the procedures for claims under the Racial Justice Act (RJA) to ensure they are processed more efficiently. AB 1118 specifies the following:

- For RJA claims based on trial records, individuals may raise the claims on appeal
- If evidence outside the trial record is needed, individuals are allowed to request an appeal be stayed and their case sent to the Superior Court for an RJA motion to be filed
- Removes the language of “trial court” in the RJA motion filing process so motions can be filed in the Superior Court regardless of the status of the case

**AB 1306 (CARRILLO) – HOME ACT**

On September 22, 2023 Governor Newsom vetoed the HOME Act in spite of it being passed by a supermajority in both chambers of the legislature. The bill would have ensured that immigrant Californians who serve their time in state prisons and earn release could come home instead of being automatically transferred to ICE. Asm. Carrillo responded to Newsom’s veto stating he is committed to “reintroducing policy to end a dual system of justice in CA that treats immigrants as less than.” The ICE OUT CA Coalition denounced Newsom’s “cruel, callous, and cowardly decision to veto this common-sense solution. When policy-making is driven by vanity and crass ambition rather than sound judgment, all Californians suffer.” CCWP agrees!

**SB 94 (CORTESE) – FELONY MURDER**

SB 94, which would provide for judicial review of people sentenced to LWOP or death before 1990, was not able to across the finish line this year. Senator Cortese has held the bill over as a two-year bill in the Assembly. We will continue fighting in 2024. This is disappointing, but the DROP LWOP Coalition is forever committed to addressing the terrible injustices of Life Without Parole and other extreme sentencing.

**SB 81 (BECKER & SKINNER) – PAROLE REFORM**

Gov. Newsom vetoed SB 81 in October. The senate is considering a possible override of the Gov.’s veto. This bill would implement much needed improvements to CA’s parole process by increasing transparency and oversight into BPH commissioners’ decisions. These recommendations include:

- Requiring Board of Parole Hearing (BPH) to ensure denials are based on objective reasons that a person is a public safety risk
- Reducing parole decisions that may rely on bias around race, gender, disability, and more
- Informing parole candidates of their right to seek judicial review when denied and have an attorney for this process.

**AB 960–COMPASSIONATE RELEASE**

Signed into law in 2022 and went into effect in Jan. 2023. AB 960 created a presumption that the person is entitled to release unless there is an unreasonable risk that the incarcerated person will commit a new, violent felony. The risk has to be based on the person’s actual capacity and not just speculation. This new law changed the basis for compassionate release from six months left to live, to someone who has a serious and advanced illness with an end-of-life trajectory, or who is found to be permanently medically incapacitated. This reform, which proved to be the pathway for freedom for Ruchell Cinque Magee, should also win release for many others impacted in this system.

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**Welcome Homes**
**Precious Releases**

**CCWF FELLOWSHIP**
CCWP and Unapologetically Hers (UAHers) are collaborating on a one-year Fellowship for TWO people currently incarcerated at CCWF. Building off the success of Participatory Action Research Leadership Program UAHers conducted at CCWF this past year, we will hire two advocates to offer education, advocacy and support on current pathways to resentencing to others in our CCWF community. We are looking for dedicated community members with some peer-advocacy experience and willing to give time and support to others inside CCWF looking for resentencing relief. Each Fellow will receive training and mentorship throughout the year and earn $3,000 for their fellowship work. We plan to build on the experience at CCWF to offer this Fellowship at CIW in the future.

If you want more information and an application, or wish to nominate someone for the Fellowship, please write to us: CCWP-ATTN Fellowship, 4400 Market St., Oakland, CA 94608

**Ruchell Cinque Magee Rest In Power!**
After 67 years of wrongful imprisonment, Ruchell Cinque Magee was released from prison on Aug 2, 2023 through AB 960, the new Compassionate Release law. He reunited with family and community and was able to go home to Louisiana.
On Oct. 16, 2023, Ruchell returned to the ancestors. He was 84 years old. Throughout his 67 years of unjust captivity, Ruchell was one of the first prisoners linking mass incarceration and the US prison system to slavery. Ruchell Magee took the name Cinque from the enslaved African Sengbe Pieh who led an 1839 rebellion commandeering the slave ship La Amistad, arguing that Africans have the right to resist unlawful slavery. Ruchell maintained that Black people in the US have the right to resist this new form of slavery-prison which is part of the colonial control of Black people in this country. In Ruchell’s words: “Slavery 400 years ago, slavery today. It's the same but with a new name...My fight is to expose the entire system, judicial and prison system, a system of slavery...This will benefit not just myself but all those who at this time are being criminally oppressed or enslaved by this system.” Ruchell Cinque Magee Presente!

**The next issue of Fire Inside (#72) will focus on the #Closure Is Possible campaign, an update on the policy and legislation work in 2024, and some background and an update on the struggle in Palestine and international struggles for freedom. Please send us your thoughts, art and poetry.**

We will not use your name unless you check the box below:

- I want my name to appear in the newsletter

Name: ________________________________

Mail to: CCWP-ATTN Fellowship, 4400 Market St., Oakland, CA 94608

- I would like to get the next issue of The Fire Inside

Yes, I want to support folks in women’s prisons!

- Please contact me to volunteer

- Enclosed is my $_______ contribution to help send a newsletter subscription to a person in women’s prison

Name: ________________________________

Phone/email: __________________________

Please make checks payable to: CCWP/LSPC, 4400 Market St., Oakland, CA 94608

Anna Allen and Renee Pearce
Anna (right) is a former LWOP. Home after 27 years. Renee (left) is home after 27 years.

Nataly Marinero
On Sept. 7, 2023, Nataly came home after 18+ years in CDCr. This was a huge victory that CDCr removed the ICE hold on Nataly. He is currently in A New Way of Life in LA.

Leslie Van Houten
After more than 50 years inside, finally released!

WELCOME HOME AS WELL TO:
Sara Bravo
Mishelle Albanis

Anna Allen, Debra “Greenie” Holmes, and Renee Pearce

Ruchell Magee & Hamdiya Cooks-Abdullah

California Coalition for Women Prisoners
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#ClosureIsPossible!

Network on Women in Prison  
California Coalition for Women Prisoners  
4400 Market St.  
Oakland, CA 94608

COME WORK WITH US!

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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.

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