On Aug. 6, 2018 a day of action and rally to #DROP LWOP! took place in Sacramento, CA on the steps of the State Capitol. About 100 people—formerly incarcerated, family member advocates, community activists—held signs, banners and posters with our loved ones’ photos and heard messages from people inside serving LWOP. It was a WONDERFUL, powerful and very emotional day.

Continued on p. 3
**SB 1437, BESTT Practices Act:** Signed! SB 1437 changes CA’s felony murder law so that those who did not commit murder or knowingly participate in a murder, are charged to reflect their actual role in the crime. It retains felony murder liability for the person who kills during the course of certain felonies. It would abolish felony murder liability for a person who did not personally commit the murder or intend that a homicide occur. It also limits judicially-created doctrines for second-degree murder liability. SB 1437 is retroactive. However people with LWOP first need to get their LWOP vacated through a habeas petition, such as Banks or Chiu before they can petition for relief under 1437. People can start petitioning for resentencing January 1, 2019.

**SB 1393, Fair & Just Sentencing Reform Act:** Signed! This legislation changes the cruel mandatory sentencing enhancements for people with prior felony convictions by restoring judicial discretion. This will reduce the extreme sentencing and reduce racial disparities in the criminal justice system. Judges will be allowed to strike the 5-year sentence enhancement for prior conviction (aka, the nickel prior), one of the most-commonly used enhancements.

**AB 2845, Pardon & Commutation Reform Act:** Signed! Effective as of January 2019, this bill increases transparency and accessibility in the pardon and commutation process, including a requirement for BPH to notify applicants when they receive a pardon or commutation application, and when they issue a recommendation to the Governor.

**SB 10, No Cash Bail.** Signed by Gov. Brown. While this bill was initially supported by CCWP and many other progressive organizations, it was substantially changed—not for the better—and now many of us do NOT support it. SB 10 makes CA the first US state to fully eliminate cash bail, abolishing the practice that has allowed wealthy criminal defendants to buy their freedom pre-trial while people without money stay locked up for minor charges. While there was bipartisan agreement that cash bail reinforces inequality in the criminal justice system—increasing mass incarceration by forcing low-income defendants to spend months or longer behind bars without a conviction while losing their jobs, homes and families—SB 10 as passed does NOT change this reality.

SB 10 calls for an assessment “algorithm” to create an individual “risk score” that supposedly reveals the likelihood of re-arrest or failure to appear in court if released. Computer software would compare one person with other people with “similar profiles,” which means using data from a criminal justice system that has already been documented as discriminatory at every step—including racial biases in police stops, searches and arrests. The new law gives courts far-reaching authority to determine if someone is a “public safety threat,” giving local authorities wide discretion to decide what is considered “high risk”. This potentially makes it easier for prosecutors and judges to keep people in jail, and expands the use of technology that could intensify racial biases in pre-trial detention.

**AB 2533, Dignity & Care Act, Improving Access to Basic Needs for Prisoners in Poverty:** Signed! Under this measure, people in prison who have $25.00 or less in their Inmate Trust Accounts for at least 30 days can get financial help for communicating with the courts (including notary public services) without being charged a copayment. Current law requires only $1.00 or less. The bill also requires the CDCR to supply indigent inmates with basic hygiene supplies. CCWP thanks Romarilyn Ralston, CCWP Policy Coordinator, who initiated this important bill.

**SB 960 Annual Reporting on Suicides:** Signed! This law requires annual CDCR reporting on suicides, suicide attempts, and training compliance. SB 960 legislates that CDCR must make changes to its emergency notification policy. This provision addresses a devastating and dangerous pattern of neglect by CDCR, with family members receiving delayed or no notification about their loved one’s death or serious injury, including suicide attempts. CCWP worked hard with Sen. Connie Leyva to push through a statewide audit of all prison suicide prevention policy, protocol and reporting in 2016. This bill is a step forward in demanding accountability from CDCR for the well-being of our loved ones in prison.
While the rally was going on, delegations went to visit approximately 22 state legislators to speak to them about ‘extreme sentencing’ and the need for Penal Code reform. The delegations spoke about supporting SB 1437 (Felony Murder) and SB 1393 (Sentence Enhancements), as well as support for commutation for those serving LWOP. There were so many formerly incarcerated and family members participating in the delegations that the stories and emotions were flowing all day. Legislators definitely got an earful and an eyeful of our beautiful movement!

A small delegation delivered the signed letter to the Governor’s office, along with over 30 state members, poem, the CCWF paper banners and other artwork from people serving LWOP. Two family members of people serving LWOP—Joanne Scheer and Christina Mendoza—handed all of the materials to the Assistant Director of External Affairs. We later heard from a representative in the Office of Legal Affairs that they were deeply moved by all of the materials, most especially by the banners from CCWF.

This day of action was successful because collectively we have built a movement, a growing coalition of organizations, including family members and formerly incarcerated, to support eliminating Life Without Parole sentencing. Judith Barnett, one of our elders serving LWOP at CCWF wrote, “Who ever thought we would build a movement like this?” Help us expand this campaign and keep the pressure on. Contact CCWP to get involved in the campaign: Write: CCWP, 4400 Market St., Oakland, CA 94608; Phone: 415-255-7036 ext.4 info@womenprisoners.org DROP LWOP!
El duro trabajo que llevo a el éxito del 6 de agosto, 2018 Día de Acción para Eliminar LWOP(Cadena Perpetua) en Sacramento, nos enseña como seguir continuando con esta campana a futuro. El numero de grupos que participaron incluyendo a un gran numero de personas que estuvieron encarceladxs y familias activistas, así como el enorme trabajo y liderazgo desde dentro de las prisiones, es lo que nos da una solida base de fuerza, experiencia y determinación.

Esta campaña está creando momentum dentro del estado. El gobernador Brown continua emitiendo conmutaciones para las perdones que están en cadena perpetua sin libertad condicional en numeros nunca vistos, incluyendo 18 personas mas el 17 de agosto, 2018. Laverne Dejohnette, quien ha servido 24 años de su cadena perpetua, fue una de las que recientemente recibio una conmutacion de 25 a por vida. Ella escribio a CCWP, “Ustedes son familia, CCWP es familia. Ustedes son la razón por la que la presente (la aplicación para la conmutación) en primer lugar. Quiero reconocer a CCWP de alguna manera. Si Natasha nunca me hubiera entrevistado para el proyecto de historias para oportunidad para vivir, hubiera estado ‘tranquila’ estando enjaulada. Los amo a todos y no puedo esperar y estar afuera para involucrarme. Ustedes son lo máximo.”

Mientras sabemos que al Gob. Brown le va a ser casi imposible lograr estas metas para enero del 2019, estamos construyendo la base para continuar con este sistema, cambiando el activismo para el siguiente gobernador. Nuestras metas incluyen:

• Conmutar las sentencias de todas las 5000+ personas que actualmente están sirviendo sentencias de LWOP en las prisiones de CA.
• ELIMINAR la sentencia de LWOP del Código Penal de California.
• REINTEGRAR en el Código de Regulaciones de California la politica Título 15, que requiere la revision de libertad condicional para personas condenadas a LWOP, cuando hayan servido 30 años en la cárcel.

• TERMINAR en todas sus formas, la discriminación en contra las personas que están sirviendo LWOP, como por ejemplo: Impidiéndoles programas de rehabilitación, incluyendo la mayoría de los programas estatales de auto-ayuda; No solo ser elegibles para trabajos que pagan el salario por hora más bajo, aunque estén obligados a pagar restituciones. Las personas que están sirviendo LWOP usualmente no tienen los medios para pagar las restituciones, y este peso económico suele caer en sus familias; y tambien no tener posibilidad para Libertad Condicional para Adultos Mayores y Libertad Compasiva, para aquelxs envejecidos con una enfermedad terminal.

Queremos mejorar la vida de muchas personas ahora, dentro de las restricciones de las leyes existentes, y al mismo tiempo trabajar para fundamentalmente cambiar el sistema. Si como nuestros miembros dentro suelen decir, “¡Construye Esperanzas. Sigue con la Lucha!”

Durante el 2018 y en todo el 2019, seguiremos distribuyendo peticiones, la carta al Gobernador y la guía para Conmutaciones. Expandiremos el grupo estatal que trabaja para oponerse a la Cadena Perpetua (LWOP) y vamos a formar estrategias para trabajar juntes a futuro. Este incluye expandiendo nuestro apoyo y trabajo en conjunto con las personas que están sirviendo LWOP dentro de las prisiones de hombres en CA y sus familias fuera de ellas. Continuaremos trabajando de cerca con los grupos de apoyo CCWF LWOP, CIW Lifers y LWOPs y otros muchos activistas.

ELIMINEN LWOP forma parte de un movimiento que esta creciendo en todo el país, retando Cadena Perpetua sin Posibilidades de Libertad Condicional y otras maneras de sentencias extremas. Una de las demandas de la huelga de prisiones a nivel nacional (ver pg. 6) dice, “Ningún ser humano debe ser sentenciado a Muerte por Encarcelamiento o servir ninguna sentencia sin posibilidad de libertad condicional.” En Pennsylvania, La Coalición para Finalizar Muerte por Encarcelamiento se ha estado organizando por varios años y ahora trabaja para pasar el proyecto de ley 942, el cual haría a cualquiera elegible a libertad condicional después de haber servido 15 años. En NY, los activistas han tomado cuenta de la cantidad de conmutaciones que el Gob. Brown a firmado para presionar al Gob. Cuomo a permitir conmutaciones. Aprendiendo de estrategias en otros lugares de los Estados Unidos, así como uniendo fuerzas con estos grupos es esencial para finalizar con esta barbarie de sentencia como es la Cadena Perpetua. ¡CONMUTEN TODOS LOS 5000! ¡ELIMINEN LWOP!
The hard work that lead to the highly successful Aug. 6, 2018 Day of Action to Drop LWOP! in Sacramento, informs how we move this campaign forward. The number of groups that participated (see Update pg. xx), including so many formerly incarcerated people and family advocates, and the strong work and leadership from inside the prisons, is what gives us a solid foundation in strength, experience and determination.

This campaign is gaining momentum throughout the state. Gov. Brown continues to issue commutations for people serving LWOP in numbers we have not ever seen, including 18 more people on August 17, 2018. Laverne Dejohnette, who has served 24 years of an LWOP sentence, is one of those who just received a commutation to 25 to life. She wrote to CCWP, “You are family, CCWP is family. You all are the reason I even put it (commutation application) in in the first place. I want to acknowledge CCWP in some way. If I never got interviewed by Natasha for a living change story project, I’d still be ‘comfortable’ being caged. I love you all and I can’t wait to get out there, in there and get involved. You rock.”

While we know Gov. Brown is unlikely to accomplish all of these goals by Jan. 2019, we are laying the foundation to continue this systems change advocacy with the next governor. Our goals include:

- Commute the sentences of all 5000+ people currently serving LWOP sentences in CA prisons
- DROP Life Without Parole sentencing from the Penal Code of California.
- REINSTATE the California Code of Regulations Title 15 policy that required parole review for people sentenced to LWOP by their 30th year of incarceration.
- END all forms of in-prison discrimination against people serving LWOP, such as: Being barred from rehabilitation programs, including the majority of state-run self-help programs; Being eligible for jobs that pay only the lowest hourly wage, currently eight cents per hour, even though they are required to pay restitution. People serving LWOP often cannot afford to pay restitution and this economic burden falls on their families; and Being ineligible for Elder Parole and Compassionate Release when aging and terminally ill.

We want to improve people’s lives right now within the constraints of existing state laws, and simultaneously work to fundamentally change the system. As our members inside say, “Build Hope. Keep up the Fight!”

During the rest of 2018 and throughout 2019, we will continue to distribute DROP LWOP postcards, petitions, the Letter to the Governor and the 40-page Commutation Guide. We will expand the statewide working group to oppose LWOP and strategize next steps forward together. This includes expanding our support for and working relationships with people serving LWOP inside CA men’s prisons and their family members outside. We continue to work closely with the CCWF LWOP Support Group, CIW Lifers and LWOPs and many other advocates.

DROP LWOP is part of a growing movement across the country challenging Life Without Parole and other forms of extreme sentencing. One of the demands of the national prison strike (see p. 6) stated, “No human shall be sentenced to Death by Incarceration or serve any sentence without the possibility of parole.” In Pennsylvania, The Coalition to End Death by Incarceration has been organizing for several years and is now working to pass Senate Bill 942 which would make everyone parole eligible after 15 years. In New York, activists have cited the number of commutations that Gov. Brown has signed to put pressure on NY Gov. Cuomo to grant more commutations. Learning about strategies in other parts of the U.S. and joining forces with these groups is essential to ending the barbaric sentence of Life Without Parole.

COMMUTE ALL 5000! DROP LWOP!!
Between August 21st and September 9th, people in prisons across the U.S. participated in actions to demand changes (see The Ten Demands below). August 21, 1971 was the date that prisoner activist and Black Panther George Jackson was killed at San Quentin and September 9, 1971 was the date that prisoners rose up at Attica prison in New York in response to George Jackson’s murder and to call for fundamental changes. Forty-seven years later the U.S. prison population has grown by almost 700% and conditions have only gotten worse.

This year’s strike was sparked in part by a serious incident at Lee Correctional Institution in South Carolina where seven incarcerated men, six of them African American, died and at least 22 were injured. Spokespeople point to the terrible conditions underlying a prison lockdown and solitary confinement as factors leading to the violence.

Prisoner organizers called for actions including work stoppages and slowdowns, hunger strikes, boycotts of commissary, sit-ins and even moments of silence. Well before the start date, prison officials began to target possible organizers through solitary confinement, prison transfers, prison lockdowns and other forms of retaliation.

Despite all the efforts to crush the strike activities and keep the word from getting to the public, outside organizers around the country were able to get the message out and supporters mobilized against retaliatory acts. Media coverage has been widespread and largely positive. Thanks to the courage and actions of people in prison, awareness about the fundamental injustices embedded in the U.S. prison system is shifting.

The Ten Demands

1. Immediate improvements to the conditions of prisons and prison policies that recognize the humanity of imprisoned men and women.

2. An immediate end to prison slavery. All persons imprisoned in any place of detention under United States jurisdiction must be paid the prevailing wage in their state or territory for their labor.

3. The Prison Litigation Reform Act must be rescinded, allowing imprisoned humans a proper channel to address grievances and violations of their rights.

4. The Truth in Sentencing Act and the Sentencing Reform Act must be rescinded so that imprisoned humans have a possibility of rehabilitation and parole. No human shall be sentenced to Death by Incarceration or serve any sentence without the possibility of parole.

5. An immediate end to the racial overcharging, over-sentencing, and parole denials of Black and brown humans. Black humans shall no longer be denied parole because the victim of the crime was white, which is a particular problem in southern states.

6. An immediate end to racist gang enhancement laws targeting Black and brown humans.

7. No imprisoned human shall be denied access to rehabilitation programs at their place of detention because of their label as a violent offender.

8. State prisons must be funded specifically to offer more rehabilitation services.

9. Pell Grants must be reinstated in all U.S. states and territories.

10. The voting rights of all confined citizens serving prison sentences, pretrial detainees, and so-called “ex-felons” must be counted. Representation is demanded. All voices count.

End Solitary in California Prisons!

On August 21, 2018, four prisoner leaders of the struggle to end solitary confinement in California — Todd Ashker, Arturo Castellanos, George Franco and Sitawa Nantambu Jamaa — met with representatives of the CDCR in a court-ordered meeting at the Federal Building in San Francisco. The meeting came about after Judge Claudia Wilkins ruled that CDCR was not complying with the terms of a 2015 settlement to the lawsuit Ashker v. Governor of California regarding abusive conditions of solitary. Many of those who were released from the security housing units (SHU) initially have been transferred to extremely restrictive conditions in Level IV prisons or in Restricted Custody General Population units, which have conditions similar to those in the SHU.

At a rally outside the Federal Building, Marie Levin, sister of Sitawa Nantambu Jamaa, told the people participating, “Our fight is against solitary confinement, no matter what they call it or what forms it takes.” The plaintiffs are still awaiting a decision about next steps.
Don’t We All Deserve a Second Chance?
Ruby Padgett, CIW

My name is Ruby Padgett. I was arrested at the age of 20 in 1985 for a robbery/murder and have been incarcerated for 33 years. I grew up in a household where verbal and physical violence was commonplace. Without a commutation grant to 25 years to life I may never receive a second chance. With a commutation, I will be eligible for parole immediately and scheduled under the juvenile law (Prop. 261).

I am fully aware of the magnitude of my crime and the impact and devastation it created in so many people’s lives. I am not trying to minimize my responsibility in any way, but because I received an LWOP sentence when I was over 18, I do not qualify for relief under the juvenile offender law. What has been proven—that the brain does not fully develop until age 26—so the juvenile mind doesn’t change because the justice system gives you different sentences.

When will justice be meted out fairly? I watch the news and see all these people who have money or their families have money and the public sees them in such a different light. How is it that the world, in all its fights for justice refuses to offer the poor who have made these bad choices the same objective view? How long must a person be punished till they deserve a second chance? These are not just questions that must be asked because we are LWOPs. What about the lifers who have done 30, 40 years and they are still not free? Recidivism rates are astronomically low for life prisoners and it decreases even more as we age. Don’t we all deserve a second chance?

CHCF Stockton LWOP Group

The sentiments discussed herein are reflective of a large majority of similarly situated prisoners throughout California’s Prison System.

In the 1970’s (when Governor Brown last exited office) governor and other state-appointed officials openly stated, “...if you were in prison for taking a life, the only way you’ll leave prison (under their watch) was with a tag on your toe or in a pine box...!” Such statements helped set the stage for an almost three (3) decades-long run of prison violence, a well-documented chaos and unimaginable human acts. From 1982 to 1985, Folsom Prison had ambulances lined-up in front of the prison each morning, waiting on the anticipated dying and injured to be carted off to local hospitals — that’s the level of violence we endured daily.

I can tell you first-hand, that hearing the screams and wailings of men being raped or witnessing the horror on the faces of those who had just been stabbed — reaching out to total strangers for help — with medical staff nowhere to be found... changes you forever. Now we are less likely to receive a review from the governor’s commission of commutation, based largely on the ill-fated ways we adopted (and as prison life dictated) in order to survive the hellish conditions the State of California housed us in.

Holding those inmates who “survived” the hellish environment of California’s Prison System personally accountable for their actions which are equal to a fight to stay alive, rather than become a victim of murder and rape themselves, sends a wrong message! The recent choices of the Commutation Board, in finding individuals suitable who were (mostly) incarcerated between 1990 to current and who did not receive any (or few) RVR’s, suggest that inmates from the era beginning in the late 70’s through early 90’s (the period of prison rage), are not suitable candidates for the commutation review process!

If the authorities who created and maintained those toxic prison environments, ones WE had to endure, are not being held accountable, in any form or fashion, then why continuously punish those of us who happened to survive? Our cases, too, deserve to be reviewed, on a case-by-case basis, for commutation equal to all other LWOP’s here in the State of California. AB-2845, as currently written, does not reach far enough (in language or intent) to ensure that [all] LWOP inmates will receive a full and fair review under its banner.

Sincerely,
Kenneth L. Moore
CHCF LWOP Group Coordinator
P.O. Box 31960
Stockton California 95213
LWOP Group <cspsolanolwop@yahoo.com>
my name is natalie demola and since the age of 16, i have been sentenced to die in prison due to being sentenced to life without the possibility of parole. i grew up in an environment at home that was abusive, but to the public, it seemed like a great place to raise any kid. then i came to prison at 16 and grew into a woman who has compassion and empathy, yet i was raised by the worst of the worst, so society says. having an lwop sentence has made me hopeless, but still in my hopelessness, i push forward. i do all i do to better myself not for a parole date, but for my sanity to know that i can help others as i should have out there. i have become a person that i am proud of and attempt to restore a piece of the peace that i took from others. i have made my death sentence a way to end my past distorted thinking and become a loving person. i may never get a chance to experience freedom outside these walls. but the freedom that i have within is priceless and something i searched for my whole life out there.

natalie demola, ciw

Listen! Hear the words of a 79-year-old woman who has been in prison for 38 years on lwop. Life without parole is a slow death sentence. It eats away hope — for the people inside, for their families. It is not justice. Drop LWOP!

Doris Roldan
(serving lwop at CIW)

Sentenced to death by incarceration wiped my hope with the sound of the gavel. Fortunately my spirit to survive surpassed the failing hope embedded in my heart. Now that there is hope amongst the lwop community, i feel like it took that gavel for me to rebel against its intention and to ultimately prepare for freedom. Drop LWOP!

Rae Harris
(trans man serving LWOP at CCWF)
An LWOP sentence is not an alternative to the death penalty, it is a slower, more devastating death penalty. An LWOP sentence presumes at the time of sentencing, even if the person is only 19 years old, that there is no possibility of rehabilitation.

The U.S. is one of a handful of countries that still uses LWOP. The population of people serving LWOP has tripled in the past two decades. This country is out of step with the rest of the world and out of touch with human dignity. I believe we should abolish LWOP and life sentences. Do we or do we not believe in the innate goodness of humanity? Do we or do we not believe in an individual’s capacity to change or rehabilitate?

As Viktor Frankl, Auschwitz survivor and psychotherapist said, “If we treat people as if they were what they ought to be, we help them become what they are capable of becoming.”

Jane Dorotik (a lifer, CIW)

I regret that I’m unable to join you, but please know that I’m with you in spirit and solidarity.

All forms of the death penalty must end! Lethal injections or lethal terms of imprisonment both end up at the same dreadful intersection... death. More than a year ago my life was restored to me, and I am grateful and humbled beyond words to have been so blessed.

I have worked since to live in such a way as to demonstrate that even someone buried in the prison system for 38 years can become a useful and productive member of society. I also recognize that I am the embodiment of so many of your hopes and dreams for your imprisoned loved ones, and I promise all of you to never let you down.

I will continue to participate in everything I can to help to reform and rebuild our criminal justice system in such a way as to make it truly just, to make it truly restorative, to make it fair and equitable. And I will remind everyone willing to listen that there should be no one denied the opportunity to appear before the Board of Parole Hearings and make their case. Thank you to all of you who have reached out to me and helped me in this very complicated transition. The time to end the other death penalty is now!

Ken Hartman
Hello everyone. I'm Emmanuel “Manny” Mendoza currently serving my 8th year on a Life Without Parole Sentence. I want to thank my beautiful wife, Christina, for her hard work and dedication to not only helping myself, but fellow LWOP’s. A piece I wrote:

Now I ain’t saying I am perfect cause I’m far from a saint, but I also understand one day we are all gonna meet our fate.

I would accept serving time, if my sentence fit the crime

Tell me what’s really wrong with putting faith in my God, I mean I’d rather do that then put my faith in the law

They are the ones that got it twisted when it comes to our youth, why are we the country building more prisons than schools

While the rich is getting richer, the poor is getting poorer,

They got the nerve to judge me for being a kid on the corner

I got my back against these walls with these demons surrounding me, they all swear that they are my friends, but they just trying to lie to me

So dear father my father who’s up above, will you please hear these cries from your son.

I confessed to you and only you, that I’m not a perfect human being but if you overlook my flaws I promise to be that soldier you need me to be.

Now every second is a blessing I got to take it day by day, it’s the only way to keep myself from stressing.

In every struggle there’s a lesson your either gonna conquer life or crumble, either way I hope you make it

now take it easy let’s be patient

I need this path through the dark away from sharks and I need your help to pave it

I understand that their hating on these changes, but just be strong it won’t be long I hear those voices fading.

Have you ever been on lockdown, kinda stressing staring at the wall daily praying for a blessing.

At this time I want to thank everyone that hasn’t forgotten about us and that is helping us fight this battle for a second chance at redemption, restore hope, DROP LWOP.

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Voices After the Aug. 6 Rally

I would like to thank everyone who took the time and effort to organize and attend the DROP LWOP rally. I feel it’s my duty, as a formerly incarcerated woman, to help the sisters and trans folks that I left behind with the intention of helping them to secure the very same freedom I enjoy today. And the rare and genuine appreciation from folks on the inside that propels me onward in the fight to #FREETHEMALL!

Aminah S. R. Colbert

Hello, Just received 10 pics from you OMG. I started crying when I saw you wearing a t-shirt with my face. Words can’t even express the gratitude I feel. Thank you for not only being a real friend to me...you’re like a little sister to me. Thank you for fighting for my freedom.

Arleen Dugmore, CCWF

I heard you went to Sacramento last Tuesday to advocate for the LWOP’s. I am super thankful to you for fighting for us. You are the best ever and have a beautiful heart. I love you friend.

Rosa Marin, CCWF
Tammy Garvin’s Story

At the time of her arrest in 1991, Tammy Garvin had survived physical and sexual trauma, including childhood sexual abuse, being sex-trafficked at age 14 and suffering ongoing physical and sexual abuse from her trafficker. She was 32 years old when her trafficker/abuser coerced her into robbing one of her clients with him. Tammy drove him to the scene and waited in the car. When it seemed like it was taking him too long, Tammy entered the building and realized her trafficker/abuser killed the client. Terrified and traumatized, Tammy ran from the scene with him.

As a result, Tammy and her trafficker/abuser were both charged with murder: the felony murder rule was used to hold them equally culpable, even though Tammy did not murder the client. Tammy’s trafficker/abuser threatened to kill her and her father if they testified against him. Under threat, Tammy revoked her testimony and her father refused to testify. Even though Tammy’s trafficker/abuser admitted to being the perpetrator of the murder, he was ultimately acquitted. She got LWOP.

During her trial in 1995, the criminal legal system ignored the patterns of violence inflicted on Tammy by her trafficker/abuser and her years of victimization since childhood. The court undermined Tammy’s right to a fair trial by failing to recognize her as simultaneously victimized by domestic violence and sex trafficking.

While in prison, Tammy has focused on healing from the abusive cycles. She developed meaningful insight into the traumatic impact of the abuse, how she found herself unable to understand or escape his ongoing abuse throughout her prosecution.

Throughout her 27 years of incarceration, Tammy has served as a peer educator on infectious diseases and a trained facilitator leading groups on Domestic Violence, Human Trafficking, Healing Trauma, Beyond Violence, Victim Impact, and Restorative Justice, among others. Tammy has become a leader amongst women serving life without parole, participating in various support groups and encouraging her peers to seek opportunities for healing.

Monica McCarrick’s Story

Monica is a testament that it is possible to rehabilitate and overcome, demonstrating that mental stability can be regained when properly treated with medication and therapy.

Monica suffered a psychotic break in 2010, during which she committed unintentional homicide of her two young twins and narrowly survived her own suicide attempt. Monica was found, hospitalized, and eventually revived still experiencing the psychotic episode.

She was diagnosed by five psychiatric experts and was deemed legally insane during this time, thus pleading not guilty by reason of insanity. However, she was sentenced to life WITHOUT possibility of parole.

Now seven years later after a proper diagnosis, medication management and thousands of hours of counseling and self-help, Monica has regained her mental stability. While living with her deep grief, she has made amends by becoming a certified addiction counselor as well as continuing her education to earn a college degree as well as reaching out to family and friends. She does not use her past abuse or addiction history as an excuse for her behavior nor does she play the victim role, but accepts full accountability for her actions.

Monica is now in a position to help others escape their tragic past. She serves her fellow inmates as a certified counselor. She never would have accomplished this without an understanding of her own suffering, replacing brokenness with self-respect and compassion for other. Since 2013, when she became determined to recover, she has grown leadership capability. Monica is a testament that it is possible.
Voices from the Aug. 6 Rally

That a movement! I never believed I would see it in my lifetime, this thing called “HOPE.”

Judith Barnett, CCWF

I used to believe in the justice system, but I no longer do. I am in prison doing LWOP for trying to protect and defend my family, home, and self.

A cousin of my husband, who by the way is an ex-con who killed a man by cutting his throat with a broken coke bottle back in the 1970s, was in our house in 2001 high on drugs and would not leave. Instead of calling 911 like we should have, my husband beat him up and he in turn asked me to help him. I tied up his feet and we dragged him out of our home. Now mind you, he is alive and well and my husband and I are in prison doing LWOP. Where is justice, I ask you?

Renee Gonzalez

In 1995, I was sentenced to Life Without Parole (LWOP) a.k.a. Death by Key. I was 37 years old then, I am 60 years old now. I have a number of health issues related to age. I decided long ago that I would die a better person. Through numerous self-help classes, I have learned that just saying “no” to old habits and routines makes a difference. I no longer want to be associated with criminally minded people or events. I desire only to be the right kind of cool.

Until recently, I was part of a dog program and personally assisted in the rehabilitation and training of nearly 40 dogs, all of which were deemed “irredeemable” and tossed aside.

It is said that Courage, Love, Friendship, Compassion, and Empathy lift us above the simple beasts and define Humanity. But sometimes it takes a dog to bring out the humanity in a person. I can personally attest to the fact that there is no such thing as irredeemable. All creatures have worth... even humans.

Samuel Gardner Eldridge, CSP-LAC

Change Is Inevitable
from Frankie Ledesma, read by his wife, Yolanda Ledesma

Hello my name is Frankie Ledesma, a 31-year-old man and proud husband of a beautiful woman, Yolanda Ledesma, reading this before you. She has become my voice like many of you gathered here are for someone special in your lives. Regardless of the individual fights, understand you’re not alone and together we are so much more powerful.

I am currently sentenced to die in prison from a single conviction 2 months after I turned 18. My story is like many others, leaving us with no hope from a system that is not only to provide justice but to be just as well. I can do many things — I can cry, I can give up, or do so much else — but I won’t. I cannot stop living as long as I am breathing. I was sentenced to LWOP not the Death Penalty, so hope still remains.

I wish to thank all of those who answered this call to address and correct an inhumane sentence. Change is inevitable, so we can’t stop now and nothing worth anything has ever come easy. Through each of you our hope for change is heard — look at where we are gathered today. We’ll remain steadfast and stand strong ensuring we treat everyone justly.

They can — and have — put many of us in prison, but the voices of those who know and love us cannot be locked up. Stand united in a system that is so divided. I wish to thank you, as we thank you. Love your people, protect your people, if we don’t, who will?
More Voices from the Aug. 6 Rally

LWOP doesn’t discriminate. Easy to obtain, pretty close to impossible to get rid of.

*Eileen Huber*

To believe a person is not capable of change and so therefore must live out the rest of their life in prison is the very meaning of cruel and unusual punishment.

*Mimi Le*

The most difficult part of LWOP is the unknown. Not ever being able to see a future for myself. No teenager deserves to die in prison.

*Ceona Harvey*

I might have been sentenced to life in prison but I’m free within my soul.

*Christina Martinez*

Hope is a feeling which cannot be taken away, unless you give it up.

*Ny Nourn (who is free!)*

The day I was sentenced to life without parole, my family too was sentenced.

*Winona Weathers*

We live and learn

*Rita Marie Lewis, CCWF*

As we live and learn, life shows up. When we are angry and act in a rage, life shows up. When we must explain our actions, life shows up. When you are loyal to someone who isn’t loyal to you and you realize you have just been used, life shows up. When you have learned to not show empathy, remorse, regret, life shows up. Every human being has a conscience, feels shame and guilt. When you have been abused and accused and you must be strong, life shows up. When you have sex, but you really want love, life shows up. That all you want is change, something better in life, it just shows up and it’s reality.

When you have nowhere else to go and you step out on faith because all you got is the grace and mercy of God, He will carry you through the bad situations, just show up and stand for righteousness. You must show up to be accountable for your own actions. For the mercy I find in your shade I will forever seek your face. On a day there is no shade at all I showed up for your Grace. Thank you Lord for easing my pain and for making me whole. I showed up and found space and time to keep the faith and Grace. I’ll never let you go because you didn’t let go of my hand.
Impact Justice has started a much-needed project for lifers coming out of prison, looking for housing and paroling to Alameda County. Folks can apply 6 months before they get out, and if accepted to the program, they’ll get a letter for the Board.

**The Homecoming Project** is an innovative reentry housing program that matches Community hosts with participants re-entering society after serving lengthy prison sentences. We combine our efforts to address the housing needs for returnees by using untapped resources in the form of an extra room inside a home. We match the participant and community host for compatibility while offering a daily stipend to the hosts for giving a returnee the opportunity to stabilize post-release.

“Returnees, hosts, and the entire community benefit from the program,” says Terah Lawyer, Project Coordinator for the Homecoming Project. “Hosts enjoy additional income while helping to rebuild lives, reunite families, and strengthen communities. Returnees gain a safe and stable environment to live in, greatly increasing their chances of obtaining employment, and reducing the likelihood of returning to prison. Our communities will also see reductions in homelessness and increases in public safety.”

You can reach Terah for more information at: tlawyer@impactjustice.org OR c/o Impact Justice, 2633 Telegraph Av. Ste. 104, Oakland CA 94612.

Ahed Tamimi was released from an Israeli jail on July 29, 2018 after serving an eight-month sentence. Ahed, the Palestinian woman who turned 17 while she was in prison, was filmed slapping an Israeli soldier who raided her home shortly after her cousin had been shot in the face at a protest (see FI #57 pg.6). Her mother was also imprisoned because she livestreamed the incident on Facebook.

“I learned a lot,” Ahed told the people gathered to greet her. “I learned how to stay patient, to be in a group. I did my best to use the time to study. I came out more educated, and understand the world better than when I went in.” She plans to study law with an eye to suing Israel in international court for the violations and war crimes of the occupation. Ahed praised the other women she was in prison with and expressed her hope that they all would soon be free.
California Coalition for Women Prisoners invites and encourages all women and trans people who have been or are inside women’s prisons to send us your writing, letters, artwork, or poetry.

Please send your stories, 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: __________________________________________________________

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

Legal Services for Prisoners With Children, CCWP’s fiscal sponsor and sister organization, has acquired a building in Oakland – the new Freedom & Movement Center. Since our founding, CCWP has had our office with LSPC and now we are excited to be moving with them to this beautiful community center!

Please write to us at our new address:
4400 Market St., Oakland, CA 94608
Our CCWP L.A. chapter address is PO Box 291585, L.A., CA 90029

CCWP joins with people around the country and the world to denounce the U.S. practice of separating immigrant children from their family members. Cruel and unnecessary family separation is deeply embedded in this country’s systems of detention and imprisonment. It needs to be exposed and opposed. Free All Our Families Now!
Come work with us!

CCWP SF Bay Area  
4400 Market St.  
Oakland, CA 94608

(415) 255-7036 x4  
www.womenprisoners.org  
info@womenprisoners.org

CCWP Los Angeles  
PO Box 291585  
LA, CA 90029

Yes, I want to support women prisoners!

☐ Please contact me to volunteer

☐ Enclosed is $25 contribution to help send a newsletter subscription to a woman in prison

☐ Enclosed is my contribution of $ _________

Name: ____________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________

Phone/email: ______________________________________

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

CCWP Mission

CCWP is a grassroots social justice 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.