



# The Project News



## February changes for 2025



As we usher in the new year, the Project Sound Off newsletter is getting a fresh new look! We're excited to announce a comprehensive overhaul that will bring you more engaging and relevant content. Our revamped newsletter will feature in-depth articles, insightful interviews, and powerful stories from those directly impacted by the criminal justice system. We'll also include updates on community initiatives, upcoming events, and ways you can get involved. Our goal is to create a more informed and engaged community, driving meaningful conversations and actions. Stay tuned for a dynamic newsletter that truly resonates with your voices and experiences.

**As we embark on this exciting new chapter, we are seeking dedicated and talented individuals to join our esteemed team.** We are currently recruiting volunteer editors, interviewers, news reporters, and photographers who are passionate about bringing the community's stories to life. If you possess a keen eye for detail, a flair for storytelling, or a talent for capturing compelling images, we invite you to join us.

## Project Sound Off

WE DEMAND TO BE HEARD



Please send your emails and letters of interest to our team.

**Newsletter@Projectsoundoff.org**  
**Office@Projectsoundoff.org.**

Together, we can create a newsletter that truly reflects the voices and experiences of our community.

Additionally, if your organization or community wishes to post events or inform the community of protests, or celebrations we are here to support your efforts. Simply send an email to our office detailing your event. We will contact you with follow-up details before publishing. Let's work together to amplify your message and make a meaningful impact.

## Spotlight Notables



At The Project News Family, we are dedicated to bringing you compelling and noteworthy stories that resonate with our community. Our mission is to highlight the struggles, triumphs, and everyday experiences that shape our lives. Whether it's a powerful documentary, a personal journey, or an inspiring act of kindness, we aim to share stories that matter to you.

**By Project News Editor**



## Lake County Sheriff Christmas Toy Drive



### Project Sound Off, Board Treasurer Mrs. Darlene Veal

This holiday season, Project Sound Off has made a significant impact by donating funds to the Lake County Sheriff's Department. Their generous contribution will support the department's annual toy drive, ensuring that children in need within the community receive gifts and experience the joy of Christmas.

In addition to their financial support, Project Sound Off has committed to volunteering alongside the Lake County Sheriff's Department next year. Their dedication to helping others and fostering a sense of community is truly inspiring. By working together, they aim to bring smiles to the faces of countless children and spread the spirit of giving.

This collaboration highlights the power of unity and compassion, reminding us all of the importance of coming together to support those in need. Project Sound Off and the Lake County Sheriff's Department have shown that through generosity and teamwork, we can make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

The When I asked Mrs. Veal how she finds the time to work on issues both in Chicago and Lake County, she broke out in laughter and said, "Hard work and great volunteers!" But if you ask me, I think it was the mascots and the Grinch that made her job so fun.

Imagine Mrs. Veal, surrounded by cheerful mascots and a mischievous Grinch, tackling community issues with a smile. The mascots' goofy antics and the Grinch's infectious positivity turn every challenge into an opportunity for laughter and connection.

So, while hard work and great volunteers are key, it's the mascots and the Grinch that add that extra sprinkle of magic to Mrs. Veal's incredible journey.

By the street Poet



## Congratulation to Ronnie Carrasquillo



The Project News Family congratulates Ronnie Carrasquillo and Attorney Chick Hoffman for their impactful documentary, **"In Their Hands."** This film highlights the challenges within the Illinois parole system and Ronnie's fight for freedom after nearly 47 years in prison. Despite his transformation and contributions, the documentary exposes the political biases and lack of transparency in the parole process. Hoffman's advocacy for criminal justice reform underscores the need for a more just and humane system.

Ronnie Carrasquillo's transformation is a powerful story of resilience and redemption. Convicted at 18 for the tragic killing of an off-duty Chicago police officer in 1977, **Ronnie was sentenced to an astonishing 200 to 600 years in prison. Despite the harsh sentence, he chose to turn his life around while incarcerated.**

During his time in prison, Ronnie co-founded the Hispanic Culture Exchange Committee, a program aimed at fostering unity and education among prisoners. This initiative brought together individuals who had once been adversaries, allowing them to collaborate on activities like picnics, baseball games, and basketball tournaments. The committee's focus was on educating one another and preparing to return to their families and communities as better men.

Ronnie also earned a bachelor's degree in theology, further demonstrating his commitment to personal growth and rehabilitation. Despite his achievements, the Illinois Prisoner Review Board repeatedly questioned whether his transformation was genuine or merely a facade.

**The documentary "In Their Hands" highlights Ronnie's journey and raises critical questions about the fairness and transparency of the Illinois parole system.** The film delves into the political factors influencing parole decisions and the unwavering support of Ronnie's family, who stood by him through more than 30 parole rejections.

Ronnie's story is a testament to the power of change and the importance of second chances. His journey from prisoner to the subject of a compelling documentary underscores the need for a more just and humane criminal justice system.

Ronnie Carrasquillo's story is one of many juvenile tragedies where young individuals are sentenced to life in prison. Over the past 35 years, the Illinois Parole Board (PRB) has faced criticism for its lack of functionality and transparency. Fearful of losing their jobs, board members often hesitate to show mercy or compassion, resulting in many rehabilitated individuals, now elderly, being denied parole. This failure to embrace second chances highlights the urgent need for reform within the PRB to ensure a more just and humane system.

### In Thier Hands



By The TPN Team



# Mr. Shawn Mulcahy

Someone you should know



While reading my emails one day a friend of mine had forwarded an article to me from the Appeal.org group. It was eye catching and informative about our Illinois Parole system. My first reaction was “who wrote this article?” In essence he was telling my life journey. I later found out his name was Shawn Mulcahy. Now I’m a big fan of his work. As well as Ben Austen, another great investigative reporter. **A Champion for Criminal Justice Reform.**

Shawn Mulcahy has been a tireless advocate for criminal justice reform, particularly through his work with **The Appeal and his focus on the Illinois Parole Board (PRB). His dedication to exposing the flaws and biases within the parole system has brought much-needed attention to the challenges faced by incarcerated individuals seeking a second chance.**

Mulcahy's investigative journalism has highlighted the political games that have hamstrung the PRB, trapping thousands of rehabilitated individuals in prison. His work underscores the importance of transparency and fairness in the parole process, advocating for a system that prioritizes rehabilitation and reintegration over punishment.

Through his efforts, Mulcahy has shed light on the broader implications of criminal justice policies, emphasizing the need for a more humane and just system. His commitment to elevating the voices of those impacted by the criminal legal system has made a significant impact on the community, inspiring others to join the fight for reform. Hum did you know this young man is no older than 28 years old he is truly an old soul.

Keep fighting a good fight because 2025 is going to be a challenging year for prison reform and pushing effective legislation for our aging prison population.

The criminal justice system is rife with procedural deficiencies, due process violations, and disproportionate sentencing. The erosion of constitutional protections, such as the Fourth Amendment's safeguard against unreasonable searches and seizures, and the Sixth Amendment's guarantee of a fair trial, has profound implications for the rights of individuals, particularly marginalized communities.

Moreover, the rollback of affirmative action and the discontinuation of federal grants and assistance through executive orders threaten the very fabric of our social safety net. **Programs that provide reentry housing assistance and support for returning citizens are under siege, exacerbating the challenges faced by formerly incarcerated individuals as they reintegrate into society.**

For Shawn Mulcahy and your team, it is imperative to continue your diligent reporting on criminal justice issues and the ongoing erosion of our constitutional rights. Your work shines a light on the systemic injustices and legal inequities that plague our society.

Your investigative journalism and in-depth analysis are crucial in exposing the legal and constitutional ramifications of these policies for 2025. By highlighting the impact on returning prisoners and the broader community, who advocate for a more just and equitable legal system.

**By Johnnie Khalif Veal**  
Executive Director, Project Sound Off



# The Sentencing Project



**Kara Gotsch**



**Kara Gotsch is indeed an inspiring figure in the field of criminal justice reform. As the Executive Director of The Sentencing Project, she has dedicated over 25 years to advocating for sentencing reform and ending mass incarceration and racial injustice in the U.S. criminal legal system. Her work has been instrumental in advancing significant legislative changes, such as the **First Step Act in 2018 and the Fair Sentencing Act in 2010.****

Kara's leadership at The Sentencing Project has involved managing and leading staff in strategic planning, organizational oversight, communications, public education, research, and advocacy. **She has also been recognized for her efforts by Congresswoman Maxine Waters before the Congressional Black Caucus in 2011.** I first met Kara in 2024 in Tulsa Oklahoma at a Second Look Network event with Becky Feldman. She was inspiring and her words of positive thinking and focus was priceless. The bond and friendship with both of these amazing women continue to inspire my efforts with Project Sound Off.org.

The Sentencing Project policy priorities envision the full inclusion in society of people with criminal records and an end to extreme punishments. Their aim is to center the leadership, voices, vision, and experience of those directly affected by mass incarceration to make the rationale for systemic change vivid, credible, and compelling. With this vision in mind I wanted to congratulate you and your extraordinary team on a well-researched and impactful report on the effects of mass incarceration titled "**A Matter Of Life**"

Our readers and I congratulate your entire team on a well written report that was felt by all communities impacted by the criminal justice system. We congratulate all the behind-the-scenes hero's as well.

 **Cyndi Sutton  
Ashley Nellis  
Celeste Barry** 

As a dedicated advocate for criminal justice reform, I strongly encourage you to engage with our coalition partner, The Sentencing Project, and support their vital efforts. Their recent report, "**A Matter of Life,**" **provides critical insights into the impact of life and long-term imprisonment in the United States. This report is an invaluable resource for understanding the systemic issues contributing to mass incarceration and the racial disparities within our criminal justice system.** I urge you to read and share this report with at-risk young adults and communities affected by these issues. By doing so, we can collectively work towards creating a more just and equitable society.

By Johnnie Khalif Veal  
Executive Director, Project Sound Off

