

JUNE

Teenth

FREEDOM DAY

JUNE 19th



CELEBRATION



June Teenth Freedom Day

Project Sound Off
WE DEMAND TO BE HEARD
Criminal Justice
Reform Advocate



Juneteenth became part of Black history the moment freedom finally reached the last enslaved people in the United States.

Although President Lincoln signed the **Emancipation Proclamation in 1863**, enslaved people in Texas were kept in bondage for more than **two extra years. On June 19, 1865**, Union General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston and announced that all enslaved people were free — a moment that sparked shock, celebration, tears, and the first taste of liberation for thousands who had been deliberately kept in the dark.

That day became known as **Juneteenth**, a blend of “June” and “nineteenth,” and it grew into a sacred tradition in Black communities — a day to honor ancestors, celebrate survival, and claim joy after centuries of enslavement.

Juneteenth connects directly to the story of Black history and slavery because it marks the **true end of chattel slavery** in America — not the legal promise on paper, but the lived reality of freedom. It stands as a reminder of how long justice can be delayed, and how powerful it is when it finally arrives.

Juneteenth isn't just History it's a call to End Mass Incarceration Today

Juneteenth reminds us that freedom in America has always been delayed — first by slavery, then by laws designed to control Black people long after 1865. That delay continues today through mass incarceration.

The 13th Amendment ended slavery “except as punishment for a crime,” creating a system that still targets Black and Brown communities. Prisons replaced plantations. Surveillance replaced chains. And thousands of people in Illinois remain locked up or trapped on restrictive parole that can send them back for technical violations, not crimes.

Juneteenth calls us to face this truth: **Freedom is still unfinished.** Ending mass incarceration is part of the same struggle our ancestors fought for — dignity, safety, and the right to live fully free.

This year, as we celebrate freedom, we also recommit to the work ahead: **Fighting for parole reform. Demanding dignity for those inside IDOC. Ending the criminalization of poverty. And building a future where freedom is not delayed — but delivered.**

Juneteenth is not just a date on the calendar it is a promise. And we honor that promise by fighting until everyone of us is free.

Our freedom was fought for. Our rights were earned. Now it's on us to protect them.

Juneteenth reminds us that liberation has always required courage — from our ancestors who claimed their freedom in 1865 to the communities today fighting against mass incarceration, voter suppression, and every system built to hold us back.

We honor their struggle by continuing the work. We defend our future by using our voice. And we move closer to true freedom every time we stand up, speak out, and show up for one another.

The fight isn't over. But neither are we.



President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama

A Built Legacy



The story of Black America is written in both struggle and triumph. **When construction on the White House began in 1792**, enslaved Africans were forced to quarry the stone, forge the materials, and raise the walls of a house they would never be free to enter. Their labor built the seat of American power, even as freedom was denied to them.

More than two centuries later, in 2008, history turned. Barack Obama, a Black man, was elected President of the United States. For Black America, his victory was more than a political milestone — it was a spiritual one. A house built by enslaved hands was now led by a descendant of those same people. The joy was deep, ancestral, and unforgettable. It felt like a door our ancestors built but never walked through had finally opened.

That full-circle moment continues today on the South Side of Chicago, where the **Obama Presidential Center is rising** — not just as a museum, but as a living symbol of community, culture, and empowerment. And in a historic first, the Center is being constructed by an **all-Black coalition of Black-owned construction firms, ensuring that Black labor, Black skill, and Black excellence** are centered in building a landmark that will stand for generations.



The Obama Presidential Center



This arc — from enslaved people building the White House under force, to Black Americans building the Obama Center by choice, leadership, and ownership — aligns powerfully with Juneteenth, the day in 1865 when the last enslaved people finally learned they were free.

Juneteenth marks freedom delayed. Obama's presidency marks freedom realized. The Obama Center marks freedom reclaimed.

Together, they tell one sweeping story: **From bondage to ballots. From forced labor to Black leadership. From the enslaved who built the White House to the Black coalition building the Obama Presidential Center — our history continues to turn struggle into strength, and freedom into legacy.**

TPN: The Street Poet





Chicago was the place to be for the grand opening of the Obama Presidential Center — a moment that filled the South Side with pride, history, and cultural brilliance. The city came alive as icons like Stevie Wonder, Jennifer Hudson, Common, John Legend, Christina Aguilera, Tems, Bruce Springsteen, Eddie Vedder, The Roots, and Bono & The Edge took the stage to celebrate this historic milestone for Chicago and the nation.

In the middle of all this energy, **Willie JR Flemming, Community Outreach Director for Project Sound Off, was on the ground covering the event, capturing the spirit of the people, the power of the performances, and the deep significance this moment holds for our communities.** His presence reminded us that PSO stands where the people stand — in the heart of the movement, witnessing history as it unfolds.

This wasn't just an opening — it was a homecoming, a celebration of legacy, and a reminder of Chicago's role in shaping the story of justice, democracy, and community power.



Past Presidents and their Wives

Photo Gallery



Michell and Obama



State Rep Theresa Mah and JR



Lt. Governor Candidate Christian Mitchell



Kevin Warren, Chicago Bears and JR



Ex States Attorney, Kim Fox and JR

Supporting House Bill

HB4303

The Parole Fairness Modernization Act



A message of Gratitude and Determination



The Project Sound Off team, want to extend our deepest thanks to our community and to the State Representatives who stood with us and helped move HB4303 out of the House Judiciary Committee.

Your calls, emails, testimonies, and unwavering presence made this progress possible. Every step forward reflects the power of a community that refuses to be silent.

Although the bill did not advance through the full legislative process this session, **our fight is far from over**. HB4303 is now scheduled to be heard again during the **November Veto Session**, and that gives us a renewed opportunity to push this bill to the House floor — and onward to the Senate.

Your support will be essential in November 2026. We will need your voices, your advocacy, and your commitment as we prepare to mobilize once again. Together, we have already shown what collective action can achieve. Together, we will finish what we started.

Thank you for standing with us. Thank you for believing in this work. And thank you for being the force that keeps justice moving forward.

TPN News Team

Parole Fairness Modernization Act (HB4303)



Today, Illinois operates under two supervision systems:

- Modern determinate sentences: capped MSR of 1–3 years
- Pre-1978 indeterminate sentences: parole potentially lasting decades or life.

HB 4303 eliminates this disparity by aligning supervision terms for pre-1978 sentences with the same MSR caps that apply to everyone else in Illinois. *This bill:*

- Promotes fairness and equal treatment
- Maintains accountability through defined supervision
- Reduces unnecessary long-term administrative supervision
- Impacts a very small population (approximately 34 individuals currently on parole supervision).

This legislation does not release anyone from prison, reduce underlying sentences, or compromise public safety. It simply modernizes supervision policy for a small remaining group subject to outdated statutory language.

- Approximately 34 individuals are currently on parole supervision
- Similar numbers are still incarcerated

Population Impact

What the Bill Does	What the Bill Does NOT Do:
● Amends 730 ILCS 5/3-3-8(a) ● Eliminates indefinite parole supervision for pre-1978 sentences ● Applies MSR caps consistent with 730 ILCS 5/5-8-1(d)	● Does not release inmates from prison ● Does not reduce sentence lengths ● Does not eliminate supervision ● Does not affect victim notification requirements

November is Our Battle for Democracy



“VOTE”



November 3rd, 2026

The Midterm Battle for Justice

Across the country — and right here in Illinois — voting rights are under pressure. Civil-rights organizations have documented actions by the current Trump administration that have made it harder for Black, Brown, Indigenous, young, and working-class voters to cast a ballot. As we head toward the **November 3, 2026 midterms**, Illinois must stay alert and ready.

Even though Illinois has strong protections, national attacks on voting rights shape the environment our voters face. Here’s what civil-rights groups have identified:

- **Aggressive voter-roll purges** in multiple states that disproportionately removed minority voters.
- **A blocked citizenship question on the Census**, which experts warned would undercount Black and Latino communities — including across Illinois.
- **A federal commission seeking extensive voter data**, which Illinois refused to hand over due to privacy and civil-rights concerns.
- **Support for restrictive state laws** that cut early voting, closed polling places, limited drop boxes, and imposed strict ID rules.
- Reduced federal enforcement of the Voting Rights Act, leaving states with less protection against discriminatory laws.



“VOTE”

- **False claims of widespread voter fraud**, used to justify restrictive voting measures.
- **Attempts to limit mail-in voting access**, creating confusion that disproportionately affected vulnerable communities.

These national trends matter for Illinois. Our communities — from Chicago to Waukegan, from Rockford to East St. Louis — rely on strong turnout to protect representation, resources, and justice.

November 3, 2026, is not just another election. It is our chance to defend our rights, our power, and our democracy.

Illinois has long been a stronghold for democracy, **but no stronghold is safe when voting rights are under attack nationwide**. When voter rolls are purged, when misinformation spreads, when federal protections weaken, it is our communities — Black, Brown, Indigenous, immigrant, young, and working-class — who feel it first.

This is bigger than politics. This is about **our voice, our power, and our future**.

As we head toward the **November 3, 2026 midterms**, Illinois must stand firm. We must stay informed. We must stay organized. We must show up. Because the surest way to protect our democracy is to use the very power some forces are trying to take away — our vote.

The TPN News Team

Returning Citizens

When Does Freedom Start



People who are incarcerated spend years imagining the moment they will finally walk free — the day they can return to their families, rebuild their lives, and reclaim the freedom they've been denied. That hope is what carries many of them through the darkest moments inside.

But in Illinois, the reality is far more complicated. Because once a person enters the criminal legal system, **freedom is never as simple as walking out the door.**

For thousands of people, release marks the beginning of another system of control: **Mandatory Supervised Release (MSR)** — a structure that mirrors incarceration in everything but the walls. Curfews, movement restrictions, mandatory programs, and constant check-ins create a daily pressure that can feel just as confining as a cell.

Illinois' MSR system is one of the most restrictive in the country:

- **Thousands of people** are returned to IDOC each year for technical violations — not new crimes, but rule-based infractions like missing an appointment or lacking stable housing.
- These technical returns make up a significant portion of Illinois' prison admissions annually, costing taxpayers **hundreds of millions of dollars.**
- Families shoulder the financial burden of reentry: transportation, program fees, lost wages, childcare, and compliance costs that can total **\$2,000–\$5,000** per year.
- Nearly **70% of people on MSR** rely on family support to meet these requirements — a hidden economic strain on communities already impacted by over-policing and incarceration.

This is the part of the system the public rarely sees: freedom that comes with a price tag. So we ask the question that sits at the heart of this crisis:

When Does Freedom Start



Does it start when a person walks out of prison? When they complete years of supervision? When they finally pay off the costs tied to their own release? Or does it start when the system stops punishing people long after their sentence is over?

In Illinois, the answer remains unclear. Because for too many people, freedom is not a moment — it's a moving target. A conditional status. A promise delayed by policies that keep individuals and families trapped in cycles of surveillance, debt, and instability.

Until we confront this reality, the idea of “freedom” will remain incomplete — not just for those returning home, but for the communities that carry the weight of a system that never truly lets people go.

In Illinois, MSR doesn't just follow one person home — it follows the whole family. Every rule, every fee, every missed appointment becomes a weight everyone carries. And that's the hardest truth: freedom isn't just delayed for the person returning home. It's delayed for everyone who loves them. So we ask again — when does freedom start?

If you have any comments, please send them to us at our email address. **Office@Projectsoundoff.org**



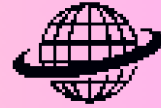
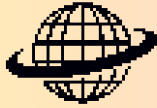
The Importance of community and relationships

Racial and Social Justice is under attack in the United States of America. **The 13th, 14th, and 15th, amendments are being striped away and death of our freedom is on the horizon.**

The circumstances of poverty, poor education, poor health care and housing is producing a class of citizens that are in crisis. **Now the current administration is attempting to reverse the gains made after the Civil Rights Movement and to return us to what happen during and after the civil war.** To strip those, they deem to be nonwhite Anglo Saxton people to being less than human.

Ubuntu is a South African philosophy and way of life. While there is no direct English translation, it is often understood to mean kindness, humanity, compassion, and goodness. **One of the meaningful interpretations is: “*I am because we are.*” In other words, our humanity is deeply connected to one another.**

To me, Ubuntu represents the foundation of community and healthy relationships. **In this moment, when our collective freedom and humanity are under assault, we must return to what we know works best caring for one another and strengthening our communities.** Our survival depends upon rebuilding relationships rooted in mutual respect, support, and shared responsibility.



The current power structure in the United States has made it clear that it embraces white supremacy and marginalizes Black people and others whose ancestors came from regions outside of Europe. Including Jewish, Muslim, and Persian communities. **These divisions are designed to weaken us.**

I am calling on everyone who cares about justice, dignity, and our collective humanity to work intentionally within their communities. **We must educate one another about what is at stake and encourage civic participation, especially voting in the upcoming midterm elections. Regardless of our difference, we must unite to reject efforts that would return this country to the era of Jim Crow segregation.**



TPN: The Project News
By: Edith Crigler



Darlene Veal,
Project Sound Off

Reflecting back on Mother's Day



As I reflect back on the struggles of our sisters confined behind steel and concrete, my heart goes out to them. With much love and compassion, I truly hear your stories of injustice and feel your pain as a mother. You are never forgotten.

Every day, women inside are fighting battles most people will never see — battles to stay connected to their children, to keep their families whole, and to hold onto hope in a system designed to break them. Their strength is not quiet; it is powerful, it is resilient, and it echoes through every letter, every phone call, every prayer whispered in the dark. And we do not carry this work alone.

To the mothers who refuse to give up, to the families who hold their loved ones close even from miles away, and to our coalition partners who stand shoulder-to-shoulder with us — your love is a lifeline. Together, we show our sisters inside that their stories matter, their pain is seen, and their freedom is worth fighting for.

Through Project Sound Off, we continue to lift their voices, honor their journeys, and remind them that they are part of a community that refuses to let them disappear behind the walls. This is family work. This is heart work. And this is the work we will continue — until every woman comes home.



Cook County Jail Mother's Day Rally

PHOTO GALLERY



CCJ PHOTO GALLERY



TO MY ADVOCATE SISTERS

To my advocate sisters Jasmine Smith and Jazmine Salas, I send special love and deep gratitude for the work you do and for standing with PSO as we fight these battles. Your strength and solidarity mean everything.

I also want to give mad love to all the women I've met, embraced, and walked beside in this struggle for change. Each of you has touched my heart. Your resilience, your stories, and your friendship remind me why this work is personal — why it's family.

As women, as mothers, and as sisters in the movement, we lift each other up. We carry each other through the hard days. And we refuse to let any woman's voice be forgotten behind steel and concrete. From my heart to yours — thank you for your love, your power, and your presence in this fight.