
The Justice, Equity, and Opportunity (JEO) Initiative

Chaired by Illinois Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton

Annual Report 2024



JULIANA STRATTON
OFFICE OF LT. GOVERNOR

Opening Letter

In reflecting on our journey toward a more just and equitable Illinois, the Justice, Equity, and Opportunity (JEO) Initiative team finds ourselves at a pivotal moment. The lessons learned during and after the COVID-19 pandemic reaffirmed that we cannot simply acknowledge the deep-rooted traumas within our communities—we must also engage in transformative practices that promote both healing and justice. The JEO initiative works diligently on this transformation through its initiatives and boards/task force responsibilities.

This is the first year the JEO Initiative takes a Healing Centered Engagement lead towards its transformative justice lens of reimagining public safety. Throughout 2024, the JEO Initiative provided administrative support to the Healing-Centered Illinois Task Force. The Task Force's work centers on the importance of strengthening collaboration across sectors. We believe that integrating healing-centered approaches in the policymaking process is essential to address some of the most potent effects of trauma. The recommendations crafted will serve as a comprehensive blueprint for transformation, one that prioritizes mental health resources and supports holistic recovery. Healing-centered engagement is not merely an ideological framework; it is an intentional process meant to align our institutions with the needs and priorities of our communities. To conduct this transformation, we must be diligent in creating spaces where open, honest conversations about healing can take place. Ultimately, our stories of struggle become sources of strength.

The JEO Initiative's work with the Restore, Reinvest, and Renew (R3) Program continues to reflect as an instrumental tool of transformative justice to repair systemic harms. Since its inception, the R3 Program has invested over \$280 million into communities disproportionately impacted by the War on Drugs. The Healing Beyond Harm restorative justice pilot create opportunities for healing and accountability by providing a mechanism for crime survivors to request a facilitated restorative dialogue with person who committed harm, and a process for person who committed harm to express responsibility and accountability.

Moving forward, we have a moral obligation to remember that this work is deeply personal. Our guiding lights are the children, families, and communities who look to us for support. The impact of our actions extends beyond policies and programs, carrying the potential to reshape the fabric of our society.

In closing, I submit this report with deep gratitude for the passionate dedication of all those involved in the JEO Initiative's portfolio of work. I look forward to our continued collaboration as we strive to build a healing-centered Illinois.

Respectfully,



Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton

The Justice, Equity, and Opportunity (JEO) Initiative: An Introduction

On February 11, 2019, Governor JB Pritzker signed [Executive Order 2019-09](#) to establish the Justice, Equity, and Opportunity (JEO) Initiative. Led by the Lieutenant Governor, the JEO Initiative helps fulfill the Administration’s vision of reimagining public safety and equity for the State of Illinois through a restorative and healing-centered lens. The JEO Initiative serves as a national model, convening stakeholders and state agencies in a collaborative effort to transform the criminal legal system. This includes supporting research and pilot programs that will test groundbreaking efforts, promoting restorative policies and practices, and analyzing data to assess program efficiency and guide new efforts.

As a first-of-its-kind effort in Illinois, the JEO Initiative serves as a national model for reformative justice efforts by:

<p>Creating a collaborative environment and convening discussions between stakeholders, state agencies, and organizations with which they organize and bolster enterprises;</p>	<p>Improving communications across state agencies to ensure a coordinated, holistic effort to transform and implement changes to address issues of equity and injustice;</p>
<p>Supporting research and pilot programs that test efforts to implement healing, trauma-informed, and equitable policies and practices while providing data analysis to assess program efficacy and guide new efforts; and</p>	<p>Advising the decision-making process to ensure the different branches of Illinois’ government are working proactively to create a fairer and more equitable justice system.</p>



JEO Initiative staff (left to right: Ariana Correa, Angel Pantoja, Chelsey Varela, and Yaacov Delaney), September 2024

The JEO Initiative’s short-term and long-term efforts are driven by four guiding principles:

1. Address the social determinants of crime and incarceration.
2. Improve equitable deflection and diversion opportunities from the criminal legal system.
3. Improve conditions and address the needs of vulnerable populations impacted by historical disinvestments and trauma.
4. Support positive re-entry outcomes to reduce recidivism.

JEO Initiative Deliverables

The JEO Initiative advanced various deliverables for each of the following goals in 2024:

Goal #1: Address the social determinants of crime and incarceration

The Restore, Reinvest, and Renew (R3) Program

On January 1, 2020, Illinois legalized adult-use cannabis under the [Cannabis Regulation and Tax Act \(CRTA\) 410 ILCS 705](#). The CRTA also established the Restore, Reinvest, and Renew (R3) Program, dedicating 25% of adult-use cannabis tax revenues to fund grants for communities most affected by economic disinvestment, violence, and the devastating impact of the War on Drugs.

In collaboration with ICJIA, the JEO Initiative manages the R3 Program Board. The Board, chaired by the Lieutenant Governor, has awarded more than \$280 million to over 400 organizations across the state. Board members include, but are not limited to, appointed and elected officials, violence prevention experts, community-based

providers, residents who live or work in R3-eligible areas, and most importantly, individuals formerly involved with the criminal legal system.

Responding to feedback from the R3 Board and first round of R3 grant applicants, ICJIA focused on improving grant management and creating pathways to sustainability for smaller organizations. In 2023, the Institute 2 Innovate (i2i) began offering small community-based organizations tailored support to strengthen infrastructure, increase sustainability, and address critical capacity needs. This support ensures organizations can continue to serve their communities efficiently, driving positive change for years to come.

On August 15, 2024, the R3 Program Board voted to approve recommended applicants for the R3 Program's third round of funding awards and distributions. On August 29, 2024, ICJIA

R3 Board members engaging in discussion at the first quarterly meeting in Chicago (left to right: Bethany Little, Pablo Mendoza, Dagen Brown, Marlon Chamberlain), January 2024



announced the award of almost \$36 million in grant funding to 89 organizations and their collaborative partners. ICJIA received 574 completed applications for its third round of funding.

Healing-Centered Illinois Task Force

In 2023, the Illinois General Assembly passed legislation establishing the Healing-Centered Illinois Task Force (HCITF or the “Task Force”) to develop a plan for the state to become trauma-informed and healing-centered. Led by Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton, the Task Force formally launched in January 2024.

The Healing-Centered Illinois Task Force was created to advance the State’s efforts to become trauma-informed and healing-centered through improved alignment of existing efforts, common definitions and metrics, and strategic planning for long-term transformation.

The Task Force has been intentional about building upon existing public and private trauma-informed and healing-centered initiatives in Illinois and leveraging best practices nationally. It examined models for managing and sustaining state-level initiatives, metrics to track progress over time, effective community engagement practices, strategies for supporting and developing the workforce, policies and systems transformation, and trauma-informed and healing-centered frameworks.

Throughout the year, leaders from across the state have contributed their time, knowledge, and expertise towards researching and developing recommendations that will be outlined in the forthcoming HCITF report.

Healing-Centered Illinois Task Force members listen to a presentation by Task Force member Dr. Dana Weiner, September 2024





Lieutenant Governor Stratton on stage with panelists at the JCCC event in Peoria (left to right: Mayor Rita Ali, Speaker Pro-Tempore Jehan Gordon-Booth, Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton, Nikki Romain, and Lyrah Alexander), March 2024

Justice Collective: Community Conversations with the Lieutenant Governor

Before Governor Pritzker and Lieutenant Governor Stratton took office in 2019, their transition team convened a group of approximately 50 individuals from various backgrounds to determine what the administration’s justice reform priorities should be in the upcoming years. This meeting became known as the first Justice Collective: Community Conversation (JCCC). In fact, one of the group’s original recommendations led to the formation of the JEO Initiative.

Entering the administration’s second term, the JEO Initiative decided to re-assemble this group of stakeholders for the following objectives:

- Update stakeholders on the JEO Initiative’s work
- Receive feedback/suggestions
- Build and maintain strategic relationships with stakeholders
- Raise visibility of the JEO Initiative’s work

The first Justice Collective: Community Conversations with the Lieutenant Governor took place on October 19, 2023, at BUILD Inc, an R3 grantee site located in the Austin area of Chicago. On March 11, 2024, the second community conversation was held at Artists ReEnvisioning Tomorrow (ART), Inc., an R3 grantee site in Peoria. The theme of this conversation was “*Investing in Our Youth.*” The Romain Arts & Culture Community Center (The RACC) houses the programs of ART Inc. The RACC sits in a 50,000 square foot school building—formerly the Greeley School—in Peoria, Illinois. In the age of STEAM-based education, the center offers arts education programs and rental spaces for community events, entrepreneurs, businesses, and artists. ART, Inc. provides after-school care, spring and summer camps, arts workshops, and field trip programs to Illinois’ youth regardless of their family’s ability to pay. R3 funding provided

ART, Inc. with the opportunity to hire 20 youth leaders and develop its Change the Narrative initiative which educates participants on how to identify and stop engaging in harmful behaviors.

In celebration of Women's History Month, the JEO Initiative convened an all-women panel that included Lieutenant Governor Stratton; Nikki Romain, Co-Founder of ART, Inc; Rita Ali, Mayor of the City of Peoria; Jehan Gordon-Booth, Speaker Pro-Tempore for the Illinois House of Representatives; and Lyrah Alexander, a youth participant at ART, Inc. Over 100 guests attended, including local city council members, educators, community leaders, and youth

advocates. The conversation touched on topics such as women in leadership, the importance of listening to the needs of youth, and the significance of R3 Program funding in youth development programs throughout the state.

The JCCC is intended to serve as a series of ongoing conversations between stakeholders and the community. In-person convenings will continue to take place throughout the state to employ insightful discussion, expand awareness, and encourage the exchange of ideas for further transformation within Illinois.

Mayor Rita Ali, Speaker Pro-Tempore Jehan Gordon-Booth, Lieutenant Governor Stratton, Nikki Romain, and Lyrah Alexander pose for a photo after the JCCC event, March 2024





Lieutenant Governor Stratton and community members from Centro San Bonifacio, a second round R3 grantee, pose in front of a mural outside Café Fenix, September 2024

Goal #2: Improve equitable deflection and diversion opportunities from the justice system

2024 R3 Grantee Site Visits

Through R3 grantee site visits, Lieutenant Governor Stratton and ICJIA staff have borne witness to the resilience, creativity, and aspirations of people in communities often overshadowed or underserved. The visits convey a powerful message of recognition—that the individuals in these neighborhoods, their dreams, and their struggles, are seen and valued by executive leaders. To each child who shares their art, to every teacher and leader working to uplift their community, these visits affirm that the State of Illinois is committed to investing in their potential.

For many R3 grantees, these encounters are a reminder that their work is part of a larger, shared journey toward equity and renewal. The Lieutenant Governor's genuine engagement, her

willingness to listen, participate in activities, and connect, embodies the spirit of “Sawubona”—an indigenous greeting that means “I see you.” The Lieutenant Governor's active engagement with R3 grantees is a tangible acknowledgment of both the achievements and the challenges faced by these communities. The greeting speaks to the mission of the R3 Program itself: to restore hope, reinvest resources, and renew opportunities in places that have been historically marginalized. Through these visits, the Lieutenant Governor brings a vision of possibility, demonstrating that these communities are integral to the future of Illinois, and that they, too, have a voice in the state's unfolding story.

In 2024, ICJIA and JEO Initiative staff visited the following R3 Program second round grantees:



Lieutenant Governor Stratton, R3 Program Board members, Senator Javier Loera-Cervantes, Alderwoman Nicole Lee, and Bridge to Freedom staff as well as program participants engage in a group discussion during an R3 site visit at Bridge to Freedom's Black Box Theatre, March 2024

Bridge to Freedom's Black Box Theatre

Region: Cook – Chicago Western / March 2024

The Black Box Theatre at Bridge to Freedom provides returning residents with a space to express creativity (skits, plays, poetry, etc.), receive life application classes (anger management, stress management, budgeting, decision making skills, drug rehabilitation, and counseling services), as well as job readiness trainings (resume writing, interviewing techniques, mock interview, maintaining employment, relationship reconciliation workshops, and house purchase planning).

The Springfield Project at CAP 1908

Region: Central / May 2024

The Springfield Project's CAP 1908 provides aspiring entrepreneurs with a co-working space to access classes, workshops, and mentorship opportunities. Program participants learn essential professional skills, including business development, financial literacy, marketing strategies, and effective leadership.

West Point School of Music

Region: Cook – Chicago Southern / June 2024

West Point School of Music provides free music education and performance opportunities to young people from the South Side of Chicago. Using music as a conduit for personal and academic growth, West Point fosters a supportive environment where students can discover their talents, build confidence, and connect with their community.

Centro San Bonifacio at Café Fenix

Region: Cook – Chicago Northern / September 2024

Centro San Bonifacio’s Café Fenix is dedicated to empowering immigrant and underserved Latino communities through education, workforce development, and health initiatives. By offering resources such as ESL classes, job training, and wellness programs, the center helps individuals and families build stronger, more resilient lives rooted in self-sufficiency and community support.

Lieutenant Governor Stratton speaks to students at the West Point School of Music during an R3 site visit, June 2024



Commission on Children of Incarcerated Parents

The Commission on Children of Incarcerated Parents (CCIP) was established through legislation in 2023 stemming from the Children of Incarcerated Parents Task Force report recommendation in 2020. The CCIP is composed of members from government, state departments, community-based organizations, and those personally impacted by policies related to children of incarcerated parents. The Task Force conducted research and reported on the scope of parental incarceration

and its enduring effects on children who were impacted. The purpose of The Commission is to coordinate the implementation of the Task Force's recommendations by various state agencies.

The Lieutenant Governor's JEO Initiative provided administrative support for the Task Force. Chelsey Varela, Program Manager for the JEO Initiative continues to serve on The Commission as a designee for the Office of the Lieutenant Governor providing expertise in the development of policies that seek to reduce and prevent trauma experienced by children of incarcerated parents.

Goal #3: Improve conditions and address the needs of vulnerable populations in correctional facilities

Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice: 21st Century Transformation Model

The JEO Initiative continues to work with the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ) to advance the transformation committee's recommendations. As IDJJ continues to transform the experiences of youth in custody, a new facility in Lincoln, Illinois is expected to open in early 2025.

In January 2024, St. Charles Illinois Youth Center was repurposed and downsized. It now functions as the Phoenix Emerging Adults Career Education (PEACE) center, serving high school graduates between the ages of 17-20, with a focus on life skills and career readiness.

As IDJJ prepares to extend high school educational services to emerging adults (18-22 years of age) without a high school diploma, the JEO Initiative has collaborated with Director Robert Vickery to develop an educational/re-entry pathway for this specific population.

Additionally, to help remove barriers people encounter in the re-entry process, IDJJ has modeled the Illinois State Identification for Returning Residents Program for individuals leaving the Illinois Department of Corrections to provide an Illinois State Identification card to youth prior to release from custody.



Lieutenant Governor Stratton and members of the JEO Initiative meet with Higher Education in Prison (HEP) providers in Chicago, October 2024

Higher Education in Prison

Over the past year, the JEO Initiative convened and met with the IDOC leadership staff, the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), Higher Education in Prison (HEP) providers, the Illinois Coalition for Higher Education in Prison (ILCHEP) and HEP alumni to assess the current landscape of Illinois' prisons. Providing individuals returning from incarceration with the necessary tools to thrive in the free world is a matter of public safety. This understanding requires us to look beyond the metrics of recidivism; we want to ensure people who are exiting correctional facilities are not only “not re-offending,” but actualizing an equitable second chance. It is vital that these community members are given opportunities to live purposefully and contribute meaningfully to the restoration of their families and communities.

There is no greater transformational tool than education. Countless studies have identified the key to successful re-entry is the education that was

acquired during incarceration. According to the RAND Institute, “people in custody who receive general education and vocational training are significantly less likely to return to prison after release and are more likely to find employment than peers who do not receive such opportunities.”

Illinois was once a proud leader in prison education: “The State of Illinois became a national leader in Higher Education in Prison (HEP) in the early 1950s and 1960s. By 1962, it was the first state in the nation to offer a full-time, degree-granting college in-prison program and, by 1992, every prison in the state of Illinois offered some form of HEP. Unfortunately, implementation of restrictions on state funding in 1989 and federal funding in 1994 caused nearly all of these early HEP programs to collapse” (Education Justice Project, 2023).

Currently, there are only two adult correctional facilities in Illinois where a person in custody can earn an associate degree. Twenty-six IDOC facilities only offer vocational certificates. People in custody

that have already obtained an associate degree or the required credits can request a transfer and be placed on a wait list to one of the following programs: Northwestern University, DePaul University, North Park University, Augustana College, Knox College, Adler University, Northeastern Illinois University, Lewis University, University of Illinois, or Eastern Illinois University. There are 10 HEPs in the Illinois Department of Corrections, yet according to the Education Justice Project report, less than 3% of incarcerated individuals in Illinois have access to these programs.

Current challenges of HEP within IDOC is people in custody experience a lack of access to college academic classes; people with extensive sentences are bypassed on the waitlist for Adult Basic Education and General Education Development due to the length of their sentence; Lake Land College is contracted to provide educational services to 25 adult Illinois prisons, but has only provided academic courses at one of those facilities.

Looking ahead, the JEO Initiative envisions greater collaboration from the 48 community colleges in Illinois, greater investment from the 78 four-year colleges and universities throughout the state, and expanding access to technology for people in custody to aid in the educational process. Ultimately, our hope is that every person in custody receives the support needed to reenter their communities as productive citizens.

The Office of the Lieutenant Governor, in partnership with the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, will host a Higher Education in Prison (HEP) Conference in 2025. This event will convene state agencies, educators, formerly incarcerated students, and legislators to address barriers to expansion and envision a stronger, more inclusive future for HEP in Illinois.

Women's Justice Reform

Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton and First Lady MK Pritzker have demonstrated their shared commitment to addressing the unique challenges faced by women impacted by the criminal legal system through a series of facility tours and community engagements. These efforts included visits to correctional facilities (Cook County Jail, Joliet Inpatient Treatment Center, and Fox Valley Adult Transition Center)—featuring conversations with staff, residents, and advocates to identify as well as address the critical needs of incarcerated women and those in transition.

Through the First Lady's office, substantial progress has been made in reducing the women's prison population—by 50% during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a consistent reduction of 46%. This success highlights the ongoing collaboration between key partners, including the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, the Office of the Governor,



Lieutenant Governor Stratton, First Lady MK Pritzker, and others visit Joliet Inpatient Treatment Center, November 2024

and various state agencies, non-profits, and service providers, all working together to identify and address the root causes of incarceration. The ultimate goal of this partnership is not only to reduce incarceration rates but also to provide women with opportunities to avoid incarceration altogether, helping them build more promising futures.

The Women's Justice Roundtable brought together justice advocates, government leaders, and service providers to share insights and discuss ongoing initiatives aimed at addressing the specific needs of women in the justice system. Topics such as mental health support, trauma-informed care, and comprehensive re-entry programs were key focal points, as participants strategized on how to sustain and expand these efforts in the years to come. The Lieutenant Governor also highlighted the work of the Illinois Council on Women and Girls and the upcoming report from the Healing-Centered

Illinois Task Force, which will provide important recommendations to guide trauma-informed and healing-centered initiatives across the state.

A central theme throughout the roundtable was the need to minimize siloed efforts and encourage greater collaboration across sectors to achieve meaningful, lasting change. The tours and discussions underscored the importance of continued collaboration between the Office of the Lieutenant Governor's JEO Initiative and the First Lady's office in advancing women's justice reform. This partnership has already produced significant outcomes, such as the State ID Program for Returning Residents, which ensures that individuals can obtain vital identification as they transition back into society, furthering the state's commitment to supporting successful re-entry and reducing recidivism.

Goal #4: Support positive re-entry outcomes to reduce recidivism opportunities from the justice system

Illinois State Identification Card to Returning Residents Program

The Illinois State Identification Card to Returning Residents Program is designed to provide state identification (ID) cards to persons being released from IDOC facilities. Obtaining state identification is one of the most critical barriers to successful re-entry facing thousands of formerly incarcerated individuals in Illinois each year. Possessing a valid state ID card significantly reduces recidivism, while lacking a state ID card often prevents recently released individuals from accessing safe and supportive housing, employment, educational, and/or social services.

The State ID to Returning Residents Program aligns with the JEO Initiative's goal of supporting positive re-entry outcomes to reduce recidivism.

In May 2023, Illinois took a significant step toward supporting individuals returning home from the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) with the passage of House Bill (HB) 3345. This legislation requires IDOC to obtain vital documents and ensure individuals in custody receive a state ID card prior to their release. By amending the Illinois Identification Card Act, HB 3345 removes longstanding barriers to securing identification, a critical resource for accessing employment, housing, and other essential



Lieutenant Governor Stratton, First Lady MK Pritzker, Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias, Willette Benford (Senior Advisor to the MK Pritzker), Colette Payne (Director of the Women’s Justice Institute’s Reclamation Project), and others stand behind Governor Pritzker as he signs Senate Bill 2803 into law, August 2024

services. This landmark effort was realized through the collaborative work of the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, the Office of First Lady MK Pritzker, the Secretary of State’s Office, and the Illinois Department of Corrections as well as other vital statistics departments.

Since launching the initial pilot in 2021, more than three thousand state ID cards have been issued to individuals exiting IDOC facilities.

Some of the current challenges of the State ID to Returning Residents Program reveals there is still a percentage of people exiting IDOC facilities without a state ID card in hand. The reasons vary case by case, from a person being born outside of Illinois or outside of the country to a person not knowing their social security number and being unable to confirm their identity. Additionally, the

program has encountered unforeseen barriers posed by a Social Security Administration policy that restricts Departments of Correction from requesting replacement social security cards more than 6 months prior to the individual’s release date.

Possession of vital documents and a State ID card significantly improves the re-entry process for individuals exiting IDOC facilities by ensuring a smoother process to access public benefits and other supportive re-entry resources. Proactive collection of these vital documents also helps to navigate unforeseen hurdles resulting from strict state department policies and requirements to obtain re-entry services.

With the passage of Senate Bill 2803 on August 6, 2024, the goal is to allow for more people to meet eligibility requirements to receive a state ID card

prior to release from IDOC custody. Sponsored by Senator Belt, Senate Bill 2803, now [Public Act 103-0782](#), expanded the Secretary of State identification requirements to allow a person in custody within Illinois to receive a state ID card upon meeting two conditions:

- Verification through the Secretary of State that the person previously possessed an Illinois State ID card or Illinois Driver's License; and
- Confirmation of the person's social security number with the Social Security Administration.

Opportunities for At-Risk Women

In 2025, through the partnership of the Office of the Lieutenant Governor and Office of First Lady MK Pritzker, the issues of women impacted by the criminal legal system will be prioritized through some of the work of the Task Force on Opportunities for At-Risk Women. We are shifting from punitive approaches toward more restorative and inclusive practices and that starts with recognizing the full humanity of every person who is justice-involved. By working directly with women who are impacted by the criminal legal system and facility staff, we can better understand how to implement meaningful reforms that create real pathways to rehabilitation and strengthen Illinois families.

Healing Beyond Harm Restorative Justice Program

Healing Beyond Harm (HBH) is a restorative justice pilot project that aims to foster healing between people who were harmed and the people who caused the harm. Healing Beyond Harm involves two trauma-informed restorative elements designed to support healing and learning after harm has occurred:

- Apology Letter Bank; and
- Restorative Conferences (Healing Dialogues).

An Apology Letter promotes meaningful healing by allowing an individual in custody/a person who caused harm, to write a letter of apology addressed to the crime survivor(s). Survivors are notified of the HBH program and must consent to receive or deny a letter that's addressed to them. Additional support by a trained trauma-informed expert is provided for both the survivor and person in custody.

21 participants have successfully completed Project THAWW (Transformation, Healing, Accountability, through Written Word) a trauma-informed workshop for people in custody, and their letters were approved to be submitted into the Apology Letter Bank.

A Restorative Conference (Healing Dialogue) offers another avenue of healing to both parties. The conference is a face-to-face interactive dialogue between the crime survivor(s) and the person who caused the harm. A Restorative Conference can only be initiated by the crime survivor, can only proceed upon the consent of both parties, and is primarily focused on the emotional and mental well-being of the participants. It is not designed to further appeals or parole.

Other Engagements

The JEO Initiative's work to reimagine public safety and equity for the State of Illinois cannot be accomplished without the collaborative partnerships of state agencies, stakeholders, and community members. In fact, the JEO Initiative's ability to engage with community-based organizations and people with lived experience makes it a uniquely impactful initiative within an executive office.

The JEO Initiative's effort to infuse the voices of the people with lived expertise into transformative justice policies is a direct reflection of Lieutenant Governor Stratton's mission to make sure communities that have often been ignored are now welcomed to the table and encouraged to participate in our democracy.

Deputy Chief of Staff/Director of the JEO Initiative, Yaacov Delaney, at the Illinois Justice Project (ILJP) 2024 Collaborative event – Maximizing the Moment: What are the Next Steps for Illinois Re-entry, April 2024



Live Free De-Carceration Fellowship / January 2024

The Live Free De-Carceration Fellowship aims to improve individual outcomes and opportunities for recently returning citizens through a highly structured leadership and community organizing training curriculum. The Fellowship endeavors to equip future leaders with skills to challenge overly punitive and racially charged criminal justice policies and practices.

Yaacov Delaney, who serves as Deputy Chief of Staff to Lieutenant Governor Stratton and as the JEO Initiative's Director, was invited to be a keynote speaker after the program's day-long leadership training. He discussed his personal insights on leadership, the journey through re-entry, and the importance of having people with lived expertise in policy discussions concerning criminal legal system reform.

Coalition to End Permanent Punishment Forum at Jane Addams Center for Social Policy / February 2024

The Coalition to End Permanent Punishment forum focused on the Coalition's campaign to remove legal barriers for people with records through legislative action. The JEO Initiative's Director, Yaacov Delaney, was featured on one of the panels to discuss the JEO Initiative's collaborative work around re-entry solutions and reducing the recidivism rate.

Illinois Justice Project 2024 Collaborative (ILJP) Event — Maximizing the Moment: What are the Next Steps for Illinois Re-entry / April 2024

The ILJP 2024 Collaborative was a day-long event that featured different panels focused on solutions to one of the state's most pressing legal reform topics: how state and local governments can meet their obligation to create and invest in re-entry policy and practices that are grounded in restoration, dignity, and opportunity.

The JEO Initiative's Director, Yaacov Delaney, served on a panel—"Leadership from Within: Reflections about Doing the Work in Government with Directly Impacted Re-entry Leaders" – where he discussed some of the JEO Initiative's policy work on re-entry. Director Delaney spoke about how having a State Identification card in hand prior to leaving the Illinois Department of Corrections facilities removes re-entry barriers for people returning to the community, and how the work of the Healing-Centered Illinois Task Force directly intersects with re-entry.

Becoming A Man (B.A.M.)—Youth Guidance Circle at Orr High School / May 2024

The JEO Initiative's Director, Yaacov Delaney, was invited to participate in a Restorative Justice Circle and speak with 12 members of the B.A.M. youth guidance circle at Orr High School. Director Delaney shared his own lived experiences growing up in the Chicagoland area, his interaction with the criminal legal system as a teen, and how his lived expertise as a restorative justice practitioner is a significant factor that helps to guide the JEO Initiative's policy work through a trauma-informed lens.

Live Free—Mental Health Awareness Month Symposium / May 2024

The JEO Initiative's Director, Yaacov Delaney, was featured on the Trauma & Re-entry panel along with Jerry Davis-EL to discuss the traumatic impacts of incarceration and how re-entry is affected. Director Delaney highlighted the JEO Initiative's collaborative efforts to remove barriers that tend to perpetuate systemic trauma by developing pilots and initiatives such as the Illinois State Identification for Returning Residents Program for individuals leaving the Illinois Department of Corrections, the Healing Beyond Harm Pilot, and the Healing-Centered Illinois Task Force.

Conclusion

As we look ahead, the JEO Initiative remains unwavering in our mission to build a more just and equitable Illinois. Grounded in the understanding that those we serve are not numbers but individuals with stories, struggles, and dreams, we recognize that progress is not merely a destination but a continuous journey. Each partnership we forge and every policy we propose reaffirms our commitment to a future rooted in justice, equity, and opportunity. Together, we are crafting a legacy and reimagining our state — this is only the beginning.

Community quotes from people impacted by the criminal legal system who our team continues to advocate and collaborate with.

**"Ideal family may not reconcile with my real family,
but at least I get to choose family."**

J. Mapp

**"I never would have thought that 20 years later, I would
be explaining my background for a sentence I already
served time for. Freedom doesn't mean FREE!"**

T. Boyd

**"Without making a DELIBERATE effort to walk in the shoes of
another, it may be impossible to understand the gravity of one's
pain. Without EMPATHY, there can be no real HEALING. Without
HEART, there can be no real LOVE. Ending Permanent Punishments
will take deliberation, empathy, and a heart filled with love."**

G. Chambers

**"People with arrest or conviction records must continue
leading the charge in creating new opportunities, because
we've proven time and again that when given a chance, we
not only rise to the occasion but exceed expectations."**

M. Chamberlain

**"Every step that you take should be directed toward
the direction you're heading for tomorrow."**

M. Harrell