



**Abolitionist
Policy Platform**

Overview

Initiate Justice Action is an abolitionist organization led by people directly impacted by incarceration. We fight for statewide progressive policies that uplift and empower system-impacted communities. We believe that true public safety requires ending failed, punitive systems such as police, prisons, and jails, and creating safe communities through sustained investments in social and community services, reentry programming, democracy reform, and restorative justice.

We believe that it is the responsibility of government to protect the rights and dignity of all and create conditions where everyone, regardless of race, gender, status, sexuality, or income, has the opportunity to thrive. We believe that people impacted by incarceration must be the ones to lead the justice reform movement. We believe that a progressive state like California should be leading the nation in the fight for real justice and public safety.

The IJ Action Platform is a statement of our values and policy recommendations. It is developed by people who are directly impacted by incarceration - people in prison, formerly incarcerated people, and people with incarcerated loved ones. The IJ Action Platform is reviewed and ratified by our Membership and Board of Directors every two years.

Values

- IJ Action believes in cultivating safety and accountability through investment in the community and implementing restorative, not punitive, means of addressing harm.
- IJ Action is committed to supporting evidence- and community-based practices to prevent harm, bring people home from prison, and invest in their re-entry and transformation.
- IJ Action is committed to uplifting the voices, experiences, and leadership of those directly impacted by state violence. Everything we do should consider how directly impacted people are affected, and we should always look for ways to include and elevate directly impacted people at all times.
- IJ Action is committed to racial and gender justice - the dismantling of white supremacist, patriarchal, and heteronormative systems. We are only free when EVERYONE is free.
- IJ Action understands that abolition is a long-term vision, and on the road to complete abolition, we support non-reformist reforms.¹
- IJ Action believes that justice reform legislation must be retroactive or otherwise benefit people who are currently incarcerated, on parole, or their loved ones. We do not believe that it is fair or effective for policy changes to only be prospective.

Public Safety

Vision: Support policy efforts to end systems of punitive control such as policing and incarceration and replace them with transformative justice practices that focus on community care and wellness.

Background: Despite significant recent reforms, California still has one of the largest prison populations and among the highest racial disparities in incarceration rates nationwide. Under the guise of public safety, decades of “tough-on-crime” leadership has resulted in some of the most punitive criminal laws in the country, leading to massively overcrowded prisons and the highest number of people on death row.

These policies have destabilized countless low-income communities of color by diverting resources away from social and public health needs and towards militarized policing and mass incarceration. This has resulted in entire generations being upended by poverty and violence. We are past due for a radical reimagining of public safety that invests in systems of care and divests from failed carceral methods.

Policy Goals:

Fund community based emergency/crisis response programs that do not use police

- Growth of the police state has resulted in use of law enforcement in nearly all emergency situations, from domestic violence to child welfare to houselessness to crises of mental health. This has led to undue and severe harm for countless communities, primarily underserved Black and brown neighborhoods where public health and social infrastructure is often lacking or absent. Too many unarmed Black and brown people have been killed, arrested, or harmed by police while experiencing a mental health crisis, and this must stop. Police are not counselors or social workers, and should not absorb any of those responsibilities.
 - Instead, California must fully fund programs that send unarmed mental health and crisis responders instead of police in emergency situations, or use trained mediators to resolve conflict.
 - To be clear, IJ Action strongly opposes forced and/or coercive approaches to treatment for mental illness or substance use disorders. Approaches like CARES courts violate individual agency and inflict far more harm than good.

End sentencing enhancements (like Three Strikes) that keep people in prison for decades and perpetuate mass incarceration

- Despite recent reforms, California has over 150 sentence enhancements ranging from fire-arm possession to having a prior conviction. Roughly 36% of people currently in prison have a Three-Strikes related conviction, one of the most punitive enhancements on the books.
- Research has shown that enhancements do not deter crime or reduce recidivism, and are largely responsible for the overcrowding of California’s prisons.

End the death penalty and life sentence without possibility of parole (LWOP)

- Study after study has demonstrated the deeply arbitrary and discriminatory nature of the death penalty. Over 65% of people on death row are persons of color, and a third are diagnosed with serious mental illness².
- Similarly, multiple studies have shown that longer prison sentences such as LWOP do not deter crime or improve public safety, but have catastrophic impacts on families and communities. A whopping 79% of people convicted under LWOP are persons of color³.

End law enforcement qualified immunity

- While it will take a change in federal law to fully abolish the doctrine of qualified immunity, California must also take action to strengthen the rights of civilians to hold police misconduct and violence accountable.
- While SB2, enacted in 2021, made it theoretically possible for civilians to file lawsuits against law enforcement, it retains a high burden of proof wherein plaintiffs must show that an officer acted with “specific intent” to violate constitutional rights or that the interference was “deliberate or spiteful.”

End police associations

- Over the past 60 years, police associations - which are separate from worker unions - have enriched and consolidated their power nationwide, exerting unparalleled political influence. Since 2012, police associations have spent over \$71 million nationally to elect pro-police candidates, and another \$48 million on lobbying state and city governments⁴.
 - Over \$38 million was spent by police associations in California alone since 2012 on elections and lobbying.
- Alarming, police associations don't just collectively bargain over wages and benefits, but also disciplinary procedures. A Duke University investigation⁶ of 178 police departments found that they include clauses such as allowing officers to erase formal complaints on their record; limiting internal complaint periods for investigating misconduct; requiring municipal governments to indemnify officers; delaying misconduct investigations; and prohibiting use of polygraphs against cops under investigation.
 - Many of these protections are codified under California state law, namely the Peace Officers' Bill of Rights of 1976. In fact, California's legal protections for cops are some of the most stringent in the country. This is why departments like LAPD have not had to disclose which officers participated in the January 6 insurrection, or to release the names of the officers who killed Keenan Anderson in 2023.
- In summary, police association contracts protect officers from misconduct, severely limit transparency and accountability measures, and take power away from the public.

End slavery in California's prisons

- In 2022, the CA Legislature came very close to abolishing the practice of “involuntary servitude,” or slavery, within the state prison system. Its failure meant that California remains one of 9 states that constitutionally allow for involuntary servitude as punishment for a crime.
- All workers deserve living wages, and there should be no room in any society for forced labor.

End gender-based violence against women and Trans people who are incarcerated

- Trans people of color face the highest rates of gender-based violence including rape and physical assault. Trans people in prison are disproportionately impacted by sexual violence while incarcerated at the hands of prison guards and others in prison.
 - While SB 132, signed in 2021, allows non-binary and Trans people to request being housed according to their chosen gender identity, CDCR can still deny these requests based on “security” concerns. This points to a lack of enforcement of the law that must be rectified.
 - California must come into full compliance with all of the baseline protections codified under the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA).

Hold prison guards accountable for their acts of sexual violence against incarcerated women and Trans folks

A newly released federal Department of Justice report found that close to 70% of all incidents of prison staff violence against incarcerated people involved sexual violence and misconduct⁷.

- Despite high-profile cases like that of former warden Ray Garcia, who was convicted of multiple accounts of sexual assault against incarcerated women, the practice goes largely underreported and under-investigated. As a result, there is zero accountability for this rampant abuse.
- The Legislature must codify stronger measures to prevent this violence, such as by enacting stronger protections against retribution for reporting violence, immediate termination of prison guards who engage in sexual violence, and stronger oversight and transparency to ensure incidents are tracked, monitored, and reported.

Fully fund community-based reentry programs that ensure formerly incarcerated people get the resources they need

- Too often people are released from prison without access to adequate social resources such as education, healthcare, housing, and job placements. This leaves people ill-equipped for success post-release, and increases risk of recidivism. We must end the carceral system by ensuring that all communities, especially system-impacted people, have the necessary resources to thrive.
- This includes significantly increasing gate money for people who are released from prison, which has remained at \$200 since 1973 with zero adjustments for inflation.

Remove police from traffic enforcement, public schools, and from responding to homelessness

- Too many lives have been stolen by police officers during routine traffic stops. A broken tail light or expired vehicle registration should never be the reason for state-sponsored violence or death.
- Stationing police officers in schools does not improve school safety. They drain resources from services that students desperately need, such as more counselors and teachers. Law enforcement presence in schools perpetuates the school-to-prison pipeline and leads to more violent disciplinary action against BIPOC and students with disabilities.

Expedite prison closures and redirect state funds away from CDCR and towards reentry and social services

- Over the last decade, California has taken many positive steps towards decarceration including banning for-profit prisons, closing down several existing prisons, and passing new laws to reduce lengthy prison sentences.
- Despite these important changes, the annual budget for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) has steadily increased. In short, prison budgets should not be increasing while we work to end the harm of mass incarceration. Instead, we must divest from CDCR and move those resources into community-based public health, reentry, and social programming.
 - As an abolitionist organization, IJA understands and supports the need for a just transition for workers in the carceral system, many of whom obtain jobs in prisons because they are the only or highest paying jobs available in their community. However, efforts to provide a just transition to prison workers should be coupled with substantive steps to reduce prison budgets and expedite closures.

End civil asset forfeiture

- Civil asset forfeiture is an egregious practice that allows law enforcement agencies to seize civilian assets even when someone has not been charged or convicted of a crime. The practice disproportionately impacts low-income communities of color, and perpetuates cycles of poverty.
- From 2000 to 2019, California made \$1.7 billion in forfeiture revenue - \$1.3 billion came from federal equitable sharing, and the remaining \$400 million under state law⁸. In 2016, the state passed SB443 which enacted very modest civilian protections against asset forfeiture, but the practice continues.
 - In 2021, the total value of assets seized under state law was \$33.7 million, while an additional \$11.7 million in forfeiture revenue came from federal equitable sharing⁹.

End cash bail

- Over 44,000 Californians - nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of all people held in county jail - have not been sentenced or convicted of a crime, and thousands of them remain in jail because they are too poor to afford bail¹⁰.

While attempts to reform or repeal cash bail have stalled in California in recent years, the need for action remains urgent. Cash bail is a “tax on the poor” as former Governor Brown aptly said and must be abolished.

Prohibit cities, counties and municipalities from using any cannabis-related tax revenue to fund law enforcement

- The War on Drugs is largely responsible for the explosion of mass incarceration and militarized policing over the last four decades. Its policies have disproportionately torn Black, brown, and immigrant families apart, wherein thousands of young Black and brown people were arrested and sentenced to excruciatingly long prison sentences for simple cannabis possession.
- Tax revenue generated from cannabis therefore should not benefit law enforcement agencies and should instead benefit the communities most harmed by the War on Drugs.

Decriminalize sex work

- Sex workers - particularly BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and undocumented sex workers - face significant discrimination, violence, and police brutality. Criminalizing sex work does not keep our communities safer, nor does it protect sex workers from violence.

Democracy Reform

Vision: Strengthen the democratic process and civic engagement by guaranteeing all Californians can participate in local, state, and federal elections.

Background: Currently, Californians incarcerated in state or federal prison do not retain the right to vote in any election. Prison disenfranchisement disproportionately impacts communities of color, exemplified by how Black Californians comprise just 6% of the population but over 29% of people in prison¹¹. Because of the steep racial inequities in California prisons, disenfranchisement is equivalent to a Jim Crow-era poll tax or literacy test.

Policy Goals:

Guarantee voting rights for people completing their prison sentence

- From a moral perspective, a healthy democracy must guarantee all citizens have access to the ballot box regardless of incarceration status.
- California has a patchwork of laws around voting for system-impacted people. While no one incarcerated in state or federal prison can vote, nearly everyone incarcerated in county jails can vote - including people convicted of a felony who are serving their sentence in county jail.
 - This patchwork system has led to unnecessary bureaucracy and confusion, and created a slippery slope whereby different convictions have different impacts on voting rights.
- Restoring voting rights instills a greater sense of connection and belonging to community, which helps foster reintegration and lowers the risk of recidivism.
- In 2020, California voters overwhelmingly supported Proposition 17 which enfranchised people on parole. Californians incarcerated in county jails also retain the right to vote.

Many of our international allies, including Israel, Germany, and France permit voting while in prison. In fact, in Israel the right to vote is retained regardless of the crime committed.

Fund voter education initiatives targeting system-impacted communities to increase electoral participation

- As a historically disenfranchised community, many system-impacted people are unaware of their voting rights while in jail or on parole or probation.
- California can encourage greater civic engagement within this population by funding voter education and outreach initiatives that target system-impacted people.

Establish county jails as polling stations to increase access to voting for system-impacted people

- In addition to targeted voter education programs, California can foster greater civic engagement among system-impacted communities by making county jails polling locations.
- Access to the ballot box is far more challenging for people in jail than in the general population,

creating an unfair landscape that reduces civic engagement. Every Californian deserves a say in who is elected to represent them and their community, and by making jails polling places, we can help make that principle a reality for all.

Establish county jails, probation offices, and parole offices as designated voter registration sites

- The National Voting Rights Act (NVRA) mandates that states must designate “all offices in the State that provide public assistance” as voter registration sites¹².
- Since jails, probation offices, and parole offices provide direct services to people impacted by incarceration who are eligible to vote, these sites should be provided with the resources to ensure voter registration services are offered.

Youth & Education

Vision: Improve the quality of education at all levels by eliminating structural inequities and recognizing education as an inherent right.

Background: For too long, the school to prison pipeline has denied the right to a full education for low-income communities of color and has worsened poverty and joblessness rates. Dismantling white supremacy and healing our communities requires a full and honest reckoning with our history as a nation, and that reckoning begins in our school curriculums. IJA believes that education is a right, not a privilege, and we must ensure everyone regardless of zip code has access to strong and fully funded public education.

Policy Goals:

Close the achievement gap between Black and white students

- In the 2021-2022 school year, only 30% of Black students met or exceeded standards for English language proficiency and only 16% met standards for math. Comparatively, for white students, 48% met standards for math and 61% did for English¹³.
 - These stark disparities show that our state continues failing to meet the education needs of Black students.
 - The underinvestment and de-prioritization of education for Black youth is the modern day equivalent of Jim Crow era segregation.
- AB 2774, which Governor Newsom vetoed in 2022, would have amended school funding formulas to ensure that Black students received the resources necessary to improve academic performance.

Replace school police with school counselors

- Police officers do not belong in schools. Countless surveys and studies have shown that the presence of school police leads to more arrests and higher exposure to police violence for students of color and students with disabilities.
 - An ACLU study in California found that Black students, Latinx students, and students with disabilities were 7.4x, 6.9x, and 4.6x, respectively, more likely to face arrest in schools with cops than schools without cops¹⁴.
- A 2013 analysis by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) found zero causal relationship between police presence in schools and lower incidents of violence such as mass shootings¹⁵.
- While police presence in schools has increased dramatically in recent decades, access to school counselors remains woefully inadequate.
 - During the pandemic, California began making historic investments into expanding the number of school counselors, but it isn't enough. Currently, there is only 1 counselor for every 509 students, nearly double the recommended ratio as outlined by the American School Counselor Association¹⁶.

End punitive disciplinary actions that target students of color and students with disabilities

- Despite recent reforms, BIPOC students and students with disabilities continue to be disproportionately impacted by punitive disciplinary actions in K-12 schools.
 - Passed in 2019, SB 419 banned school suspensions in grades 4 and 5 for “willful defiance” while placing a moratorium on such suspensions for kids in grades 6-8 until 2025. High school students can still be suspended for willful defiance, with Black and Latinx students facing far higher rates.
- In the 2019-2020 school year, Black students equaled 5.3% of total enrollment but nearly 13% of expulsions¹⁷. Even more alarmingly, Black students accounted for 31.4% of all instances of mechanical restraint; 18.6% of all instances of physical restraint; and 24.6% of all seclusions (i.e. involuntary confinement in a room)¹⁸.

Prioritize investment in special needs education programs and programs for English-language learners

- Roughly 12% of California’s K-12 student population - about 725,000 kids - are identified as students with disabilities¹⁹. Federal law under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires the federal government to cover 40% of the cost of providing free special needs education; however, historically, the federal government has only supplied 11%.
- In 2021, the state finally received significant federal resources and was able to put \$1 billion towards special needs education. It is critical that this investment be sustained over time and not compromised during budget setbacks.

Enact universal childcare and pre-K

- As of 2020 in California, the average annual cost for childcare for an infant was \$16,945 - more than double the annual cost of in-state college tuition²⁰. That means that a family making median income (\$68,034) would have to spend almost 25% of their income just on infant child care²¹.
 - A worker making minimum wage in California would have to work 33 straight weeks just to afford childcare for a single infant. Black and brown families are far more likely to make below the median income, meaning lack of universal childcare leaves families of color even further behind.
- Lack of universal pre-K harms low-income and students of color the most, who face the most restrictions in access to early childhood education.

Decouple policing and child welfare, and end the foster-care-to-prison pipeline

- There is a direct connection between militant policing of Black neighborhoods and the over-representation of Black youth in our foster care and carceral system. Of the roughly 60,000 foster care children in California, over 20% of them are Black - a rate four times higher than Black youth’s proportion of California’s total youth population²².

- A Cornell University study found that Black families were twice as likely as white families to be investigated by police for child neglect or abuse²³.
- A significant percentage of people in prison have been part of the foster care system and Black and brown families are disproportionately impacted.
 - Policing and child welfare are incompatible. Instead of breaking families apart, California must invest in ending poverty, providing universal childcare, and use unarmed mental health professionals to address child abuse and neglect.

Create school programs that provide tailored support to youth with incarcerated parents/caregivers

- Students with incarcerated caregivers face higher rates of punitive disciplinary action in schools and lower educational attainment overall.
- Indeed, mass incarceration imposes a double punishment - on the individual and on their families. The challenges are then compounded across generations.

Fully fund after school programs for K-12 students

- Initiative Justice Action commends the 2022-2023 enacted budget for outlining over \$4 billion for afterschool programs, which will allow all K-6 schools to offer 3 hours of before- and after-school programs and six weeks of summer school.
 - We urge the Governor and Legislature to ensure these funds are maintained and increased in future budget acts.

Fully fund trauma-informed mental health counseling and services within K-12 schools

- While investments are improving, access to counseling - especially trauma-informed care - remains highly limited. California is short about 8,000 school nurses in reaching the recommended school-nurse-to-student ratio²⁴.
- Suicide rates among 10-18-year-olds increased by 20% during the onset of the pandemic, while a staggering 48.6% of LGBTQ-identifying high school students contemplated suicide²⁵.
- Lack of school counseling harms students with incarcerated loved ones at much higher rates, which makes it critically important that California prioritize funding for school mental health services.

Make all California community colleges, CSUs, and UCs tuition-free

- With skyrocketing tuition costs, more and more students are being priced out of higher education. With today's job market requiring a Bachelor's degree - and increasingly a Masters degree or higher - to qualify, it is both an economic and moral imperative to guarantee higher education for all Californians.

Invest in Critical Race Theory and ethnic studies programming in K-12 schools, CSUs, and UCs

- From police murders of Black and brown people to mass incarceration and systemic racial inequities in all categories of life - including education, employment, healthcare, and beyond - the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow are palpable and pervasive. That is because as a nation, we have never fully reckoned with our history of institutional racism and how it continues to shape the modern day.
 - To address racism at its root, it is critical that we educate current and future generations on the unvarnished history of racism in America.
- AB 1460, signed into law by Governor Newsom in 2020, does require all CSU students to take at least 3 units of Ethnic Studies in order to graduate. This is a good model that can be expanded to all schools in the state.

Partner with Tribal leaders and Indigenous historians to create K-12 school curricula on the history of Indigenous land theft and genocide in California

- Similar to the need for CRT, California can address its legacy of Indigenous genocide and land theft by ensuring that its history and modern-day impacts are taught in our schools. By empowering Indigenous historians and experts to develop and implement this curriculum, we can ensure this history is not forgotten while further honoring our obligations to Tribal Nations.

Expand restorative justice programs in K-12 schools

- Many schools in California have restorative justice conflict resolution programs in place that have been proven to lower rates of suspension, expulsion, and school violence²⁶.
- Funding at the statewide level should be made available so that existing programs can be expanded and new programs can be created in districts where they do not yet exist.

Healthcare

Vision: Guarantee comprehensive healthcare coverage and access for all, including for mental health and treatment for substance use disorder

Background: IJ Action fully believes healthcare is a human right and that both coverage and access must be free and guaranteed for all. Over the years, advocates and allied legislators have tried and failed multiple times to enact single-payer healthcare for all Californians.

Lack of healthcare coverage is a huge concern for system-impacted communities. People who are formerly incarcerated or have incarcerated loved ones face higher rates of chronic illnesses, carry more medical debt, and have less access to healthcare services than the general population²⁷.

Policy Goals:

Enact single-payer healthcare that guarantees coverage for all Californians, including people who are incarcerated

- For over 30 years California voters have tried to enact universal single-payer healthcare. Doing so would codify the principle that healthcare is a human right, and extend comprehensive coverage to every Californian without out-of-pocket expenditures.
- The Healthy California for All Commission, created by SB 104 (2019), released their final report in February 2022, endorsing a single-payer model and finding that unified financing can save the state anywhere from \$32 billion on the lowest end to \$535 billion on the highest end by 2031.

End the de-facto use of prisons and jails as mental health facilities and provide access to quality mental health care in the community

- The Los Angeles County jail system is the largest mental health provider in the country. Close to 40% of people in LA jails have a mental illness²⁸, thousands of whom lack access to care.
 - While laws like AB 109 were intended to reduce prison populations, they have dramatically expanded local jail systems. In LA County, nearly 70% of AB 109 dollars are spent on law enforcement, leaving less than a third for spending on alternatives to incarceration or rehabilitative programs.

End criminalization of mental illness and substance use disorder

- Decades of tough-on-crime policy and the War on Drugs has led to mass criminalization of people suffering from substance use disorder or mental illness, to the point where 56% of people in state prison report mental health challenges²⁹.
- We must guarantee everyone has access to, and coverage for, non-coercive mental health and substance use disorder services.

Fully fund re-entry mental health and substance use disorder treatment programs

- Despite the high prevalence of mental illness among people in prison, access to re-entry mental health programming is highly limited.

Protect reproductive freedom and expand access to reproductive health services

- IJA celebrates the passage of Proposition 1, amending the California state Constitution to guarantee abortion access. We must continue to protect reproductive freedom and ensure that all Californians in every zip code - including people in prison - have comprehensive family planning and reproductive healthcare access and coverage.

Guarantee healthcare coverage for transgender Californians, including for gender-affirming care

- As conservative states introduce hundreds of anti-trans bills intended to discriminate and oppress the trans community³⁰, California must take the approach of ensuring justice, care, and inclusivity for trans neighbors.
- These can include enacting anti-discrimination protections, expanding trans-specific health-care trainings for medical professionals, and guaranteeing coverage for gender-affirming care.

Invest in harm reduction services within and outside the carceral system

- As defined by the National Harm Reduction Coalition, “Harm reduction is a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use³¹.”
- Harm reduction saves lives because it meets people where they are at as opposed to viewing substance use disorder as a moral failure. Moreover, harm reductionists understand substance use disorder as a mental illness stemming largely from a person’s social and economic condition.
- We cannot criminalize our way out of these challenges. Dozens of studies³² have shown that harm reduction programs like syringe exchange, supervised consumption sites, and overdose-reversing drugs like naloxone not only save lives but also reduce drug use and increase treatment enrollment.

Invest in community-based public health services that train and hire health providers from within the community

- One of the best ways to expand local healthcare access is by investing in more community health centers and clinics. California can create health provider training programs that prioritize enrollment among formerly incarcerated people and underserved communities in general, and cover tuition costs in exchange for job placements in their very communities.
 - Tribal Nations in Alaska have operated programs like this successfully for years, training Community Health Aides from within a community to become licensed healthcare pro-

professionals who then serve the very communities they are from.

- California can create a re-entry vocational program that trains and hires formerly incarcerated people in health professions to serve their community.

Economic Justice

Vision: Build a just and inclusive economy that values the dignity, human rights, and financial security of workers over corporate greed and profit margins and abolish all racial and gender-based economic inequities.

Background: California may be the world's 4th largest economy, but millions of families are being left behind as wealth inequality continues pushing beyond the extreme. Our state has the highest poverty rate in the country at 15.4%, as measured by the Census Bureau's supplemental poverty measure (SPM) which takes into account the local cost of housing, utilities, and other expenses. Over 3.5 million families in California didn't make enough money last year to afford basic necessities. The widening gap between rich and poor is even more stark when broken down by race. Black and Latino households represent 43% of the population, but comprise 58% of the lowest-income families (bottom 10%)³³.

System-impacted communities face among the most severe economic disparities of any group. As abolitionists, we know that incarceration perpetuates cycles of poverty and leaves our communities heavily under-resourced and more vulnerable to violence. We must end the cycle by investing in economic security for all, regardless of zip code or incarceration status.

Policy Goals:

Enact a universal basic income

- A universal basic income (UBI) would help thousands of California families make ends meet and emerge out of poverty. With 63% of Americans nationwide living paycheck to paycheck³⁴, we have countless families that are one medical emergency or unexpected bill away from losing their housing or livelihoods.
 - Stockton California implemented a two-year UBI pilot project with great success. A total of 125 residents living at or below the poverty line were selected, and received \$500 monthly no-strings-attached cash payments. After two years, participants saw a 12 percentage point increase in full-time employment, reduced stress, and improved financial stability³⁵.

Eliminate all regressive criminal/civil assessments on system-impacted families

- We commend the Legislature for taking positive action on reducing or eliminating civil assessments in recent years, but far more work needs to be done.
- Civil assessments are additional fees imposed for failure to pay a fine (like a traffic ticket or felony-related fine) or appear in court. At \$300, California's civil assessments are exorbitantly high, and 80% of them are imposed for failure to pay a traffic ticket or infraction³⁶.
 - Because Black and brown Californians are more than twice as likely as whites to be pulled over and fined, these assessments disproportionately impact communities of color.
 - Upwards of 86% of people can't afford to pay the base fee and civil assessment without having to cut money from food, shelter, and other basic needs³⁷.

- It is also a huge conflict of interest that local courts rely on these fees for their operational funding.

End prison-based local economies

- Of the 34 prisons operated by CDCR, 23 were built since 1980. Many are located in rural towns, and represent the largest and sometimes only employer available in the area.
- As California closes prisons, it must revitalize these rural towns by helping them transition away from carceral economies. Prisons can be converted to uses such as housing, community gardens, storefronts, and other needs.

Enact reparations for Black Californians

- While chattel slavery may have been abolished, it still exists in the form of penal servitude. Furthermore, from steep economic inequities to police killings and mass incarceration, the legacy of slavery continues to oppress Black people in California. While many believe California was admitted as a “free state” the reality is far darker³⁸.
- California cannot build a just future without healing from its history of slavery and institutional racism, and that healing requires reparations.

Ensure cannabis-related tax revenue funds economic justice programs in communities torn apart by the War on Drugs

- Proposition 64, which legalized recreational cannabis in California, was intended to be a major step towards dismantling the War on Drugs. It imposed a state tax on cannabis sales and authorized local governments to add their own taxes.
- A 2020 study by Youth Forward examined how 28 cities that had passed local ordinances authorizing cannabis taxes were spending their revenue.
 - Spending on police increased by an average 19%. In Los Angeles, police spending from the General Fund increased by over \$230 million in just 3 years³⁹.
- Ending the War on Drugs requires that the state prohibits local governments from investing cannabis tax revenue into law enforcement
 - Instead, these dollars should flow into youth education, job training, substance use treatment, and public health programs for system-impacted communities.

Ensure a just transition for workers in the carceral system as prisons close

- Realizing this principle requires a just transition for prison workers, many of whom seek jobs in carceral settings because they are the only ones available in their community.
- We must end prison-based local economies by investing in education, housing, and job development to empower workers to find opportunities in other industries.
- Many of the rural communities whose economies currently rely on prisons are in need of infra-

structure development, from broadband to transportation to healthcare. Through job training and education programs that transition workers away from prisons, those communities can rebuild more resiliently.

Guarantee collective bargaining and unionization rights for all workers

- 2022 was a major year for labor organizing, marked by some of the largest strikes in decades. Over 48,000 UC workers went on strike to protest stagnant wages and rising housing costs, while thousands more healthcare workers walked off the job demanding more manageable workloads.
 - We commend the numerous laws enacted in 2022 that expand labor protections, including AB 2183 to help farmworkers, AB 257 to strengthen protections for fast food industry workers, and SB 951 to increase payouts for workers who need family leave.
- Despite these gains, only 17% of California workers belong to a union. It is critical that the Legislature work to end union-busting and guarantee all workers have the rights and protections to collectively bargain.

Fund programs that help formerly incarcerated people launch small businesses

- Formerly incarcerated Californians face major hurdles in building economic security and wealth after their release.
 - The Legislature should create re-entry programming that teaches formerly incarcerated people how to start a small business and provides them with seed grants to do so.

Ban predatory payday lending

- In 2019, Newsom signed AB 539 which capped interest rates at 38% for loans ranging from \$2,500 to \$9,999. However, for smaller loans under the \$2,500 threshold, APR rates can reach 460%.
 - Payday lenders target communities of color and formerly incarcerated people, trapping them in endless cycles of poverty. The Legislature must step in and ban this practice.

Establish a state-run public bank

- Due to decades of financial discrimination and racism in the banking industry, 44% of Black households and 42% of Latinx households in California are unbanked or underbanked⁴⁰. For system-impacted people, these percentages are even higher. Lack of banking can make it impossible to break cycles of poverty.
- California has made important strides to establish public banks, but these efforts have stopped short of creating a statewide and publicly owned bank like currently exists in North Dakota.
 - In 2019, Newsom signed AB 857 which authorized local governments to establish public banks, and signed follow-up legislation in 2021 (AB 1177) to create a commission to study the feasibility of creating a state-backed and no-fee debit account for Californians

- California can take the lessons of the Bank of North Dakota (BND), which has generated over \$1 billion in the last two decades, 40% (or \$400 million) of which has been invested in the state general funds.

Environmental Justice

Vision: Protect and guarantee the right to a livable future for all by addressing climate change as the existential problem that it is

Background: Climate change is a clear and present danger that is devastating our state and particularly our most vulnerable communities.

Across California, environmental racism and injustice runs deep. System-impacted communities face higher rates of chronic illnesses like asthma and cancer, live in more polluted neighborhoods, and face stark barriers in accessing healthcare resources. Environmental and racial justice go hand in glove, and we must prioritize the needs of system-impacted people in our efforts to prevent catastrophic climate change.

Policy Goals:

Require the Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS) and the State Teachers' Retirement System (CalSTRS) to fully divest all fossil fuel holdings

- California's CalPERS and CalSTRS pension programs hold a combined \$42.8 billion in fossil fuel holdings. Investing in dirty energy is incompatible with a sustainable future. It is absurd to tie a public employee's long-term financial stability to a dying and destructive industry.

Ban all new oil and gas drilling permits

- Despite campaign promises to end new permits for oil and gas drilling, Governor Newsom has approved 13,725 drilling permits since entering office in 2019.
 - Over 3,300 of these permits were awarded in 2022 alone.
- We commend passage of SB 1137, which imposes a new 3,200 foot buffer zone for drilling by residences, daycare centers, schools, and hospitals - a policy that provides long overdue protections especially for low-income and communities of color; however, the issue is not only drilling where people live, it is our continued reliance on unsustainable energy sources that are driving the climate crisis.

Ban fracking and offshore drilling

- Fracking is among the most dangerous and polluting forms of fuel extraction used today, responsible for everything from habitat destruction to groundwater pollution to release of thousands of noxious chemicals.
 - Governor Newsom directed the Geologic Energy Management Division to halt fracking permits by 2024. It is critical that the Legislature codify and strengthen this rule so that a future Administration can't roll it back.

Prioritize public transit construction and electrification

- While electric vehicles are part of the equation for reaching zero emissions, it will not supersede the significance of our public transit system.
- California has delayed or abandoned multiple opportunities to build high speed rail.

Ensure California invests at least 40% of federal infrastructure and climate funds into communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis

- California is slated to receive upwards of \$45 billion in its share of federal funds under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Billions more will be coming to California under the climate provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act.
- In 2022, AB 2419 was introduced to guarantee that 40% of upcoming federal and state investments into climate resiliency be directed to low-income Black, brown, and immigrant communities bearing the brunt of climate change's impacts. We urge the Legislature to reintroduce and pass this important measure.

Partner with Tribal Nations to implement Indigenous conservation and wildfire prevention strategies and programs

- Tribal Nations have been caretakers of the land since time immemorial, developing innovative and effective protocols to protect the environment, improve crop yields, prevent wildfires, and nurture strong ecosystems.
- AB 642 and SB 332 have made positive headway towards incorporation of Tribal planned burn strategies, but much more needs to be done to elevate and prioritize Tribal voices to lead wildfire prevention efforts.

Create a special Climate Corps re-entry program that hires formerly incarcerated people for living wage jobs in climate resiliency

- People impacted by incarceration are much more likely to face joblessness and be on the frontlines of the climate crisis. Creating a special re-entry program that prioritizes training and hiring formerly incarcerated people for jobs in climate infrastructure, engineering, and the like helps address both issues simultaneously.

Strengthen regulations to hold corporate polluters accountable

- Despite strong rhetoric, California is largely failing to hold corporate polluters accountable for destroying neighborhoods and ecosystems. For example, community members in Vernon, California have yet to receive restitution and are still impacted by the noxious fumes and chemicals, including lead, that leached into the community from the Exide Technologies battery recycling plant⁴¹.
- Legislators can bolster protections to keep communities safe by strengthening the oversight powers of the California Department of Toxic Substance Control.

Stop condoning corporate greenwashing tactics like carbon capture, water desalination, and wastewater conversion

- So long as corporations can get away with laundering their image through greenwashing, we will fail to meet the gravity of our climate crisis.
 - In addition to bills mandating reporting on emissions, companies that pretend to support “green energy” while doubling down on fossil fuels should face hefty financial penalties for misleading the public.

Guarantee safe drinking water for all and modernize water infrastructure

- It has been over a decade since California enacted AB 685, codifying the right to safe drinking water for all. Despite this, a 2022 audit by the State Water Resources Control Board found that upwards of 920,000 Californians are at heightened risk of cancer and liver and kidney problems because their water systems are not up to date⁴².
- The report found that two-thirds of the broken water systems are in low-income and historically disadvantaged communities in the Central Valley, San Bernardino County, and Imperial County.
 - California must enact a state of emergency over its water infrastructure to streamline delivery of resources and funding to modernize water systems.
 - With California receiving federal water infrastructure monies under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the time to address this public health emergency is now.

Prevent corporate overuse of our aquifers

- A report from Food and Water Watch California documents the grave depletion of our groundwater stemming from corporate overuse and pollution⁴³.
- Under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, local water agencies are not required to fully adopt sustainability measures until 2040. Further, many of the Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) submitted so far barely take human consumption and safety measures into account.
 - The Legislature can act by limiting corporate groundwater usage, and creating regulations that define water as a public trust resource rather than a commodity.

Housing Justice

Vision: Establish quality, affordable, and accessible housing as an inherent right while decriminalizing houselessness.

Background: The correlations between houselessness and mass incarceration are testament to a system built on criminalizing poverty. California's housing crisis disproportionately impacts low-income communities of color, and system-impacted communities. Nationwide, formerly incarcerated people are ten times more likely than the general population to experience houselessness. In California, roughly 70% of unhoused people have a history of incarceration⁴⁴.

From unconstitutional anti-encampment ordinances like 41.18 in Los Angeles to the high frequency of police-led sweeps to the role of sheriffs in evictions, so much of housing and houselessness policy are intertwined with policing and the criminal legal system instead of with public health. Combined with skyrocketing housing costs and lack of living wage jobs, these policies undergird why so many jails and prisons have become de facto housing providers. We must codify the right to housing, establish strong tenant protections, fully fund housing programs, and modernize land use policy.

Policy Goals:

Ban criminalization of houselessness

- Criminalizing houselessness is a massive policy failure that violates the U.S. Constitution. The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled multiple times - most famously under *Martin v Boise* and most recently under *Johnson v. Grants Pass* - that anti-encampment measures in the absence of adequate housing violate 8th Amendment protections.
- Federal agencies like the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have both issued reports and guidance urging local governments not to engage in harmful encampment sweeps. Despite this, local ordinances like 41.18 in Los Angeles continue to deprive unhoused persons of their constitutional rights.

End exclusionary zoning laws

- A relic of the Jim Crow era, exclusionary zoning is the practice of restricting land development beyond certain uses. In housing, it is used to prohibit construction of things like multi-family housing or mixed use (commercial and residential) development.
- In Los Angeles, for example, over 75% of residential neighborhoods are zoned exclusively for single-family homes⁴⁵.
 - Exclusionary zoning is a major culprit behind entire neighborhoods only being zoned for single-family houses, making it impossible for cities to grow and meet housing demand.

End the de facto use of jails and prisons as housing providers

- Criminalization of houselessness creates a vicious cycle whereby the unhoused are arrested, spend a night or two in jail, and are then released. But these interactions with the legal system not only lead to fines, but also can hamper their eligibility for housing assistance, further perpet-

uating the cycle of poverty.

- Instead of incarcerating people whose only crime is being poor, we must invest in permanent supportive housing. A RAND analysis of LA's Just in Reach Pay for Success (JIR PFS) program found that it achieved a 1-year housing stability rate of 82%⁴⁶, and dramatically reduced county jail time and inpatient mental health stays.

Invest in social housing construction

- Social housing, or public housing, describes models of ownership that ensure long-term affordability and democratic control. It seeks to decommodify housing through local government and/or tenant cooperative control so that "market pressures" are no longer used to justify massive rent hikes or decisions against housing construction.

Address the generational impacts of redlining by enacting special housing grants for Black and brown residents forcibly evicted, displaced, or denied loans

- While the final report from the California Reparations Task Force is set to be released in June 2023, the preliminary report analyzed the sobering history of redlining in California.
- Policies such as racist housing covenants, the denial of private or government-backed mortgages, and forced eviction of middle-class homeowners of color wreaked decades of havoc on Black and brown communities.
 - The state must rectify these wrongs by enacting policies that end banking discrimination, and finance home purchases for families victimized by redlining.

Enact a comprehensive tenant bill of rights

- There exists a patchwork of tenant protections at the state and local level, none of which provide the comprehensive protections tenants need.
- AB 1482, enacted in 2019, provided some statewide protections such as just cause and limited relocation assistance, but stopped short of needed policies like a guaranteed right to counsel or increased code enforcement to protect tenants from slumlords.
 - With mass evictions looming as COVID-19 related protections expire, it is imperative that the state enact a comprehensive tenant rights package. Such a package must include policies like a right to counsel, strengthened code enforcement and penalties on slumlords, ensuring tenants' rights to organize, and bolstering anti-discrimination protections for things like personal appearance, prior criminal convictions, and source of income.

Remove police from enforcing evictions

- Yet another example of how the police state has infiltrated every aspect of modern life, eviction notices are delivered and carried out by the police. Especially for system-impacted people, this can be extremely traumatizing and further illustrates how our system addresses poverty through the criminal legal system as opposed to the lens of public health.

Fully fund reentry housing programs

- Formerly incarcerated people face some of the starkest barriers in accessing housing and housing assistance. A national study found that 79% of people with prior criminal convictions face discrimination when applying for housing⁴⁷.

Overhaul Proposition 13

- Enacted by a voter-led ballot measure in 1978, Proposition 13 is one of the most infamously consequential housing laws ever enacted in California.
- The law limits annual property tax payments to just 1% of the assessed value (instead of basing it on market value) and limits annual tax increases based on the assessed value to just 2%. Alarming, there is no distinction for commercial versus residential properties.
 - The law has deprived local governments billions in taxes to pay for services like education and housing, and has allowed a government budgeting system to develop in its place to mitigate the lost property tax revenue.
- Thanks to heavy lobbying by corporate developers and others, an effort to try and fix the problem through a “split roll” system whereby the provisions would no longer apply to commercial properties failed.
- Proposition 13 has greatly benefited long-time homeowners while punishing future generations. First-time buyers continue to be shut out of home ownership due to skyrocketing costs.
 - Overhauling Proposition 13 by ending its benefits for commercial properties alone can help local governments raise millions every year to invest in public services like social housing construction and stronger schools.

Invest in beautification - not gentrification

- Everyone wants to live in safe, vibrant, and beautiful communities. But so often “community beautification” leads to forced displacement of low-income people, immigrants, and people of color to make room for wealthier residents and pricier goods and services.
 - Instead of raising rents and land prices to gentrify communities, we should empower local residents to be an active and lead part of revitalizing their communities. This can be done by investing in more green spaces, garden cooperatives, infrastructure repairs, access to transit, and subsidies for low-income people to start a small business in their own neighborhoods.

Repeal the Costa Hawkins Act and Ellis Act

- Both the Costa Hawkins and Ellis Acts are heavily pro-landlord laws that have hamstrung local and state efforts to curb rising cost of living.
- Costa Hawkins blocks local governments from enacting rent control on buildings constructed

after February 1995 and prevents local vacancy control measures that would prevent landlords from significantly raising the rent after a tenant moves out.

- Similarly, the Ellis Act allows landlords to evict tenants, even in rent-controlled units, in order to “exit the rental market” such as by selling the complex or converting them into luxury condos. Even more alarmingly, tenant protections like just cause do not apply under Ellis Act evictions.
 - According to the Coalition for Economic Survival, there have been over 28,000 Ellis Act evictions of rent-controlled units filed in Los Angeles alone since 2001, equating to over 3% of the rent-controlled market being lost⁴⁸.

Protecting Immigrants

Vision: Protect and empower California's vibrant and diverse immigrant communities.

Background: While state governments lack the legal authority to change immigration laws, they can certainly influence how those laws are enforced within their borders and the types of programs and services undocumented immigrants are eligible for.

IJA fully supports progressive policies such as abolition of ICE, enacting a legislative pathway to citizenship for DREAMers, modernizing and streamlining asylum laws, and decriminalizing border crossings. However, as a statewide organization, we lack the capacity and organizational focus to advocate for federal policy change. Therefore, our immigration policy platform outlines specific actions that the state of California can take to protect immigrants. Thousands of system-impacted people are undocumented immigrants, and it is essential that our efforts for abolition uplifts and centers their voices.

Policy Goals:

Expand sanctuary cities by enacting a statewide ban on local law enforcement coordinating with federal immigration authorities

- Several large local law enforcement agencies in California have voluntarily opted to not engage in the 287(g) program (which allows for state agencies to coordinate with federal immigration authorities) but their claims remain dubious. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, ICE raids targeted hundreds of undocumented Californians living in Los Angeles many of which likely could not have been carried out without cooperation from local police.
- While California has taken steps in the right direction by passing legislation ending all new private prison contracts (including for private immigration detention facilities), the work remains unfinished. We need a state law barring state and local law enforcement from aiding in the violent deportation of our community members.

Enact the VISION Act to prevent double punishment

- The VISION Act came close to passing last session, and it's imperative that the bill be reintroduced and supported by the Legislature. The VISION Act would have prohibited CDCR from transferring an undocumented immigrant to federal immigration authorities after completion of their sentence.
- Protection against double jeopardy is constitutionally guaranteed, yet double punishment is routinely used against undocumented immigrants, even undocumented Veterans.

Authorize local governments to pass ordinances allowing noncitizens to vote in local elections

- Permanent legal residents, DREAMers, and undocumented immigrants are an integral part of the fabric of our communities. They work, pay taxes, attend school, and care about the same kitchen table issues as everybody else.
- Yet because of our heavily backlogged immigration system, these people can wait years or decades before they become citizens and earn the right to vote.

- Californians who are noncitizens should not be prevented from civic engagement because of federal malfeasance and inaction. Authorizing local governments to allow noncitizens to vote in elections for school board, city council, county supervisor, and other local races not only nurtures local control but gives a fresh opportunity for California's vibrant immigrant population to play a more active role in shaping the communities they already live, learn, play, work, and worship in.

Protect access to social programs like unemployment, food assistance, and public health services for noncitizens

- California has been a national leader in recognizing the rights of noncitizens, but much more can be done. Noncitizens are able to receive in-state tuition and financial aid, Medi-Cal, cash assistance, and state-financed food assistance.
- These protections must be maintained and expanded. For example, right now only undocumented immigrants over the age of 55 qualify for food assistance. These programs must be made universal so that all Californians can benefit.

Indigenous Rights & Sovereignty

Vision: Support and expand Tribal sovereignty and self-determination, guarantee the rights of all Indigenous Californians, and invest in the principles of “Land Back”

Background: California’s history of Indigenous genocide and land theft is very often overlooked, despite being one of the most egregious. One of the very first laws enacted when California became a state targeted and criminalized Indigenous Californians using vagrancy laws, who were then forced into indentured servitude. The 19 treaties signed by California Tribal Nations and the United States were never ratified by Congress because they were filibustered by California’s Senators. Today this legacy persists through the carceral system, wherein Indigenous Californians are incarcerated at four times the rate of whites despite accounting for less than 2% of the state population⁴⁹.

IJA believes that abolition cannot exist without Indigenous sovereignty, and that is why we support centering Indigenous voices on land and water use and climate policy, fully embracing land back policies, and ending the crisis of gender-based violence on Tribal lands.

While fulfillment of treaty obligations remains a largely federal responsibility, California must play a direct role in rectifying the wrongs of genocide and empowering government-to-government relations with California Tribal Nations.

Codify requirements for prior informed consent and government to government consultation with Tribal Nations

- Respecting sovereignty requires California to recognize that when they are working with Tribal leaders, they are working with elected representatives of a sovereign nation.
- Too often state agencies will “inform” Tribes about pending regulations, but not actively seek and integrate their recommendations in policymaking. This must change.
- With a prior informed consent policy, the state of California could not implement any policy that directly impacts Tribes and Indigenous people without the prior and informed consent of those Tribes.

Provide unrestricted funding to Tribal governments to restore cultural and linguistic traditions and practices

- The state can work to rectify its history of Indigenous oppression by financing Tribally-led efforts to restore traditional medicines, cultural practices, and languages.

Employ a public health approach to address the urgent crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People and gender-based violence

- The MMIP/MMIW crisis is yet another example of the continued genocide of Indigenous people. The overwhelming majority of gender-based violence committed against MMIP is done by non-Natives, particularly white men.

- For years this crisis has been addressed largely or solely through a law enforcement lens, ignoring the environmental factors that make communities more vulnerable to violence in the first place - like poverty, food insecurity, and lack of education
- Moreover, many counties and municipalities do not collect complete public health data on Indigenous populations, which contributes to the invisibility of the crisis.
- The Legislature should enact programs that streamline public health data reporting and sharing across Tribal and local government health agencies so that cases of MMIP are better tracked and recorded.

Partner with and prioritize Tribal communities in land and water stewardship, conservation, and climate change resiliency programming

- Tribal Nations have been effective stewards of the land since time immemorial, yet their representation on various state authorized climate boards and panels is highly limited.
- The Legislature should codify measures to ensure Indigenous representation on these climate groups, and to prioritize consideration and implementation of Tribal best practices for climate resiliency and adaptation

Enact funding set-asides for Tribal communities to address housing, public health, education, and public safety needs

- While guaranteeing health and human services to Tribal Nations is inherently a federal obligation, state governments also have a direct role to play in partnering with Tribes to build social and economic welfare.

Work with Tribal governments and federal officials to restore Tribal jurisdictional control over crimes committed on Tribal lands

- California is what is known as a “PL-280” state, in which the state government has assumed criminal jurisdiction over crimes committed on Tribal lands and reservations. California is one of only six states that were mandated to be PL-280 by Congress. Yet this law deprives Tribes of their sovereignty and is built on racist assumptions that Tribes cannot keep their own communities safe.
- Protect Indigenous children by enacting a statewide Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) that would be triggered in the event federal protections are overturned
- ICWA is a federal law that prevents the arbitrary removal of Native children from their homes by public and private agencies. It was passed in 1978 in response to the alarmingly high rate of Native children being separated from their parents, extended families, and Tribal communities, including the horrific and genocidal legacy of US Boarding schools⁵⁰.
- In 2018 California passed AB 3176 to incorporate ICWA into California law. However, a federal lawsuit titled *Brackeen V. Haaland*⁵¹, which is currently before the U.S. Supreme Court, threatens to overturn the law and possibly upend many core tenets of Federal Indian Law.

- California must take further steps to protect Native children and empower Tribal sovereignty regardless of what happens federally.

End Notes

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