

INITIATE JUSTICE ACTION - EOYR 2024



2024 END OF YEAR REPORT

DECEMBER 2024

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
CORE AREAS OF WORK	5
IJA ACCOMPLISHMENTS	6
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	7
POWER BUILDING	8
ELECTIONS	9
POLICY ADVOCACY	10
MAJOR GOALS FOR 2024	11-12
CONCLUSION	13

INTRODUCTION

Our 501(c)(3) sister organization, Initiate Justice, has built the political power of thousands of currently incarcerated people, formerly incarcerated people, and their loved ones since its launch in September 2016. Through their Inside & Outside Organizing training programs, system-impacted people have learned the basics of community organizing and policy advocacy, have helped us change state laws, and have built relationships with legislative offices across California.

Initiate Justice Action, as a 501(c)(4) political organization launched in 2022, has taken this movement building to the next level. IJ Action mobilizes the political power of system-impacted people through our four main areas of work: Power Building, Civic Engagement, Policy Advocacy, and Elections. Our work is achieved through pursuit of broad goals, which are to:

- Build the political power of and civically engage people impacted by incarceration across California
- Advance progressive policies in California aimed at ending mass incarceration
- Organize candidates and elected officials to commit to championing and supporting progressive policies



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our third full year in operation, 2024, was a momentous one for IJ Action. It was a year of pivotal battles in the legislature and on the ballot and changes to internal operations and infrastructure. This year was also the first full year that IJ Action began publicly framing our work across four major categories: Civic Engagement, Power Building, Elections, and Policy Advocacy. Defining our work across these four core areas has led to more seamless and simplified communication of IJ Action's strengths and accomplishments to current and prospective funders and allied organizations.



IJ Action also hosted our two annual events. Our summer **Juneteenth Celebration** was held once again at Clear Skies Ranch in Reseda, California, hosted by one of our closest reentry partners. The event brought together over 50 formerly incarcerated community members, political candidates, sister organizations, and allies in both celebration and a recommitment to ending the vestiges of slavery. In December, we hosted the **2nd Annual Community Impact Awards** in Downtown Los Angeles, which serves as both a fundraiser and an evening to rejoice and honor incredible advocates who are carrying forward IJ Action's mission.

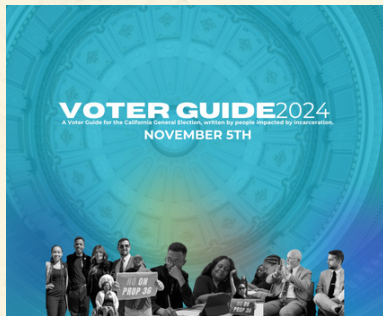
CORE AREAS OF WORK

NEXT ARE BREAKDOWNS OF IJ ACTION'S MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2024 ACROSS OUR FOUR MAIN AREAS OF WORK.

1. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
2. POWER BUILDING
3. ELECTIONS
4. POLICY ADVOCACY

IJA 2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

BROADLY SPEAKING, IJ ACTION'S 2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS CAN BE SUMMARIZED AS FOLLOWS:



2024 VOTER GUIDE

PUBLISHED COMPREHENSIVE VOTER GUIDES FOR BOTH THE 2024 PRIMARY ELECTION AND GENERAL ELECTION COVERING EVERY CANDIDATE FOR STATE ASSEMBLY AND STATE SENATE, AND EVERY STATE BALLOT PROPOSITION.



2024 LEGISLATIVE SCORECARD

PUBLISHED THE 2ND ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE SCORECARD, GRADING EVERY STATE LAWMAKER BASED ON THEIR VOTES ON KEY PUBLIC SAFETY BILLS.



SACRAMENTO LOBBY DAY

HELD A SACRAMENTO LOBBY DAY WHERE MORE THAN A DOZEN OF OUR IMPACTED MEMBERS ADVOCATED AGAINST HARMFUL INCARCERATION BILLS.

- Endorsed nineteen (19) candidates running for State Senate, State Assembly, Superior Court Judge, District Attorney, Mayor, or City Council - more than double our total number of endorsed candidates in the 2022 cycle. Thirteen of the nineteen candidates won their election.
- Organized eighty-one (81) different presentations, workshops, webinars, canvasses, phone banks, and tabling events in opposition to Prop 36, which was on the November 2024 General Election ballot.
- Increased our impact in Sacramento by publicly supporting or opposing ninety (90) different public safety bills and/or budget requests - more than double our rate in 2023.
- Conducted thirty-five (35) civic engagement workshops at reentry facilities across the state, including in the counties of Los Angeles, San Diego, Kern, and Fresno.

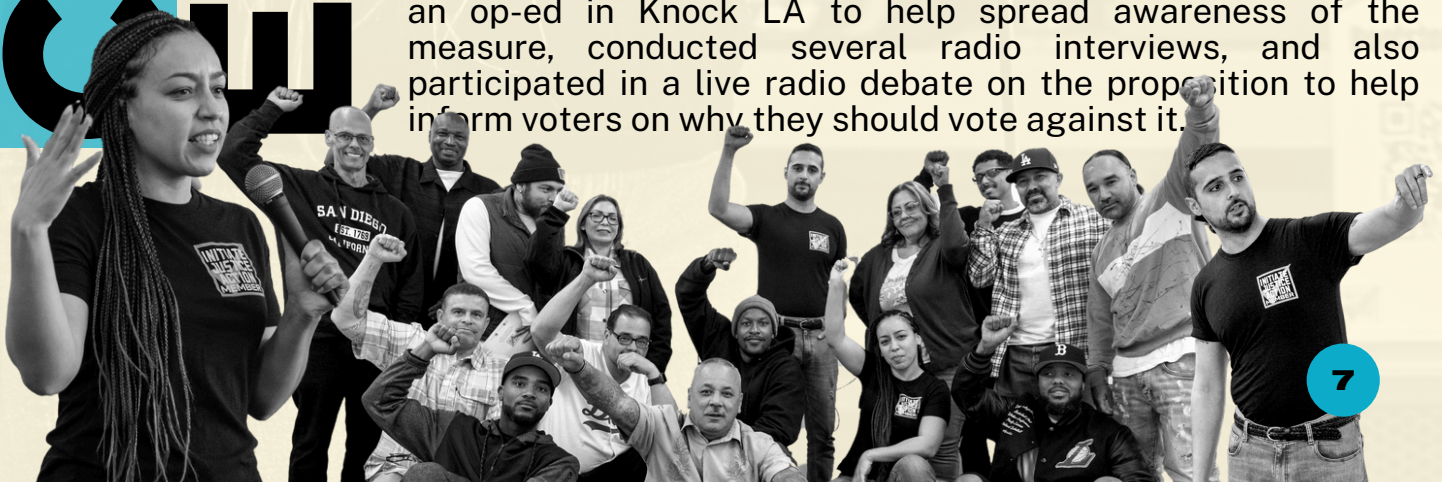
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In 2024 IJ Action stepped up its civic engagement activities, establishing more ambitious goals given that it was an election year. Leading up to the March Primary Election, IJ Action hosted fifteen civic engagement workshops at reentry facilities across Los Angeles County and Kern County, surpassing our goal of completing ten workshops for that period. For the General Election, we completed twenty civic engagement workshops between August and October, collectively reaching nearly a thousand participants. In total, IJ Action completed thirty-five workshops this calendar year.

Our civic engagement trainings gave participants a breakdown of voting rights for people impacted by incarceration, and highlighted the importance of voting, especially given how many races are decided by close margins. Our workshops covered our voter resources such as the Voter Guide and Legislative Scorecard, and gave attendees the opportunity to ask questions about our positions on various candidates and ballot propositions. This year we also published a new brochure that covers the legal landscape of voting rights for people currently or formerly incarcerated.

IJ Action made a significant effort to civically engage community members in opposition to Proposition 36, the most dangerous public safety measure California has enacted in decades. With Los Angeles being the most populous county in the state by far - and given that a third of California's incarcerated population originally comes from Los Angeles - we focused our efforts therein. IJ Action staff collectively organized eighty-one (81) different events to inform and engage people in opposition to Proposition 36.

These events included webinars for LA-based service providers who stood to lose millions of dollars in funding if Proposition 36 passed to door-to-door canvassing in various neighborhoods meeting voters where they were at. Staff also organized several phone banks to inform voters about the dangers of the measure, and gave several presentations at community colleges and other venues. IJ Action also published an op-ed in Knock LA to help spread awareness of the measure, conducted several radio interviews, and also participated in a live radio debate on the proposition to help inform voters on why they should vote against it.



POWER BUILDING

Building the political power, awareness, and engagement of impacted Californians is at the heart of IJ Action's mission, and this year we recommitted ourselves to this effort. For instance, IJ Action started the year by organizing virtual check-in meetings with several elected officials on their public safety priorities for the year, and each of these meetings included IJ Action Members. This gave elected officials the opportunity to hear directly from our impacted Members about their concerns and priorities for improving public safety, thus elevating their voice in the legislative process. IJ Action also organized numerous lobby days and advocacy opportunities for our Members, providing them with the chance to travel to Sacramento and meet directly in-person with their State Assemblymembers and Senators, and to provide "Me Too" testimony during policy committee hearings.

IJ Action continued to provide monthly virtual training opportunities for Members on various topics. These topics included the state appropriations process, wherein legislative staff gave presentations and answered questions; canvassing 101; discussing Proposition 36 with friends and family; and lobbying 101. We also deepened our engagement with currently incarcerated community members by visiting four prisons to conduct tabling events: California Correctional Women's Facility, Lancaster State Prison, Corcoran State Prison, and Valley State Prison.

These tabling events collectively reached several thousand Californians, wherein IJ Action shared newly developed brochures on voting rights for incarcerated peoples, literature on Proposition 36, and our election Voter Guides and Legislative Scorecards. In addition, while visiting Lancaster and Valley State Prison, IJ Action brought template letters for incarcerated folks to mail out to their respective State Assemblymembers and Senators, inviting them to visit the prison and learn first-hand about the conditions people face. Finally, IJ Action worked more closely with our Members to identify and secure new audiences for our trainings and presentations.

During the general election cycle, IJ Action also launched our first-ever Member competition to encourage more volunteer hours supporting our endorsed candidates and fight against Proposition 36. The competition was well-received by our members, with the winners receiving prizes for their time. A prime example of our members' deepening power came in the form of one of our endorsed candidates, who was recommended to IJ Action by one of our San Diego-based members. This marked the first time that a member brought a candidate to staff's attention for endorsement consideration.



ELECTIONS

IJ Action began its Candidate Endorsement process for the 2024 General Election in June, 2024. Prospective candidates were invited to submit written questionnaires testing their knowledge and positions on a wide range of public safety issues, including current hot topics in the state legislature. If selected to move forward, the candidate was then questioned by IJ Action staff and board members during a roughly 30-minute interview. After this process, staff and board members held a discussion and voted to either recommend the person for endorsement to the full membership body, or recommended against their endorsement. The final step was a vote on each candidate by the full membership, staff and board.

This election cycle, we broadened the list of prospective endorsements to include several candidates running for various local positions, including Los Angeles City Council, Los Angeles Superior Court Judge, Los Angeles District Attorney, Sacramento Mayor, and Oceanside City Council. The candidate for Oceanside City Council, whom IJ Action endorsed, was also the first candidate considered through a recommendation by an IJ Action member. A total of nineteen candidates were endorsed, and thirteen of them (68%) won their seats.

Similar to the last cycle, IJ Action's endorsement came with direct candidate support in the forms of monetary donations, staff and member assistance with voter outreach, and promotions through IJ Action's social media and General Election Voter Guide. Staff and members joined numerous canvasses, phone banks, and community events to assist our endorsed candidates in their respective races.

Furthermore, IJ Action continued its tradition of publishing comprehensive Voter Guides focused specifically on a candidate's public safety record, stated positions, and contributions. IJ Action published a physical Voter Guide for the 2024 Primary Election, and an electronic Voter Guide and condensed print version for the 2024 General Election. Members and community allies appreciated the condensed written version of the Voter Guide, which allowed for easy reference on-the-go, while the online version provided detailed breakdowns of a candidate's background, policy positions, financial contributions from law enforcement, and websites.

Finally, a significant portion of IJ Action's election work this cycle was spent fighting against Proposition 36. IJ Action was on the Steering Committee for Californians United Against Prop 36, led by the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights and including partners such as ACLU California Action and Vera California. Our staff and members led the bulwark of activities in Los Angeles County, organizing eighty-one (81) different community events to inform voters about the dangers of the ballot



POLICY ADVOCACY

This was a year defined by considerable defensive work against regressive, harmful legislation, and the first year that IJ Action had made significant commitments to fighting against bad bills. Across the 2023-2024 Legislative Session, there were 453 total public safety bills referred to either the Assembly or Senate Public Safety Committee - far more than any other policy area. IJ Action had submitted a formal position (i.e. support or opposition) on 128 of these bills, equaling 28% of all public safety bills introduced this past cycle. In the 2024 calendar year alone, IJ Action submitted position letters on 90 different bills or budget requests - 42 of them in support, and 48 in opposition.

Much of IJ Action's defensive work was done in coordination with the Three Strikes Working Group, which IJ Action co-led alongside the Ella Baker Center and the San Francisco Public Defenders' Office. Our working group was charged with leading defensive strategies against all bills attempting to expand California's Three Strikes law, the serious and/or violent felony list, and bills either seeking to curtail eligibility for resentencing or limiting good conduct credits under Proposition 57. Our working group was productive and successful, defeating every bill that attempted to expand the Three Strikes Law, limit credit-earning and resentencing eligibility, or broaden the serious and violent felony list.

Our Executive Director testified twice before the Assembly Public Safety Committee against two bills strongly opposed by IJ Action. These bills were AB 1990 (Wendy Carrillo) which would have authorized physical custody for petty shoplifting, and AB 3171 (Soria) which would have stiffened prison terms for drug possession and sale. Thankfully, both of these bills were defeated.

IJ Action also released its 2nd Annual Legislative Scorecard, and selected seven bills on which to grade each lawmaker's votes. This year, IJ Action included six good bills and one bad bill on the Scorecard - the bad bill being a key test of where lawmakers truly stood on criminal justice reform and the disastrous Proposition 36 in particular.



MAJOR GOALS FOR 2025

GOING INTO THE NEXT CALENDAR YEAR, IJ ACTION HAS PUT TOGETHER AN AMBITIOUS AGENDA TO CONTINUE THE MOVEMENT FOR PROGRESSIVE CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM AND PRISON ABOLITION. THESE GOALS ARE BRIEFLY SUMMARIZED NEXT:



2025 GOALS

- Launch a Member Ambassador program that gives more active members the opportunity to deepen their engagement with our mission and goals, and work more closely with IJ Action staff on policy issues and membership recruitment.
- Strengthen co-governance between IJ Action and our endorsed elected officials by organizing teach-ins for their staff on the criminal legal system and major policy needs and priorities.
- Spearhead state legislation to help end the vicious cycle of incarceration to homelessness, which impacts Californians with records at ten times the rate for the general population.
- Work collaboratively with new coalitions on diverse public safety issues, including the Debt Free Justice Coalition which works on ending the criminalization of poverty; the ICE out of California Coalition which focuses on ending the incarceration to deportation pipeline; and the California Interagency Council on Homelessness, which has taken a newfound focus on addressing homelessness among impacted community members.
- Build our engagement with reentry facilities to establish more frequent and recurring civic engagement workshops for returning Californians.



CONCLUSION

Despite some bruising losses in the 2024 General Election, IJ Action is poised as ever to continue the fight for real public safety and an end to mass incarceration. We are excited to partner with our endorsed candidates who won their seats and are ready to lead the charge on criminal justice reform. As we look to implement the structure of Member Ambassadors and give them greater responsibility and incentives for participation, we look forward to seeing how this new structure can also help with new member recruitment. Furthermore, with procurement of the Mobilize platform, IJ Action is positioned to streamline membership outreach and communications, which will expand our power and reach across California, and give our incarcerated community members a solid base from which to refine their advocacy skills and engagement.

