

Guild Notes

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photo above from NLG Arkansas Chapter

***In this issue: NLG Statements, Chapter Updates,
Week of Abolition, Voting Results, and more!***

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Welcome to our New Jailhouse Lawyer Members

If you are receiving this newsletter, that means that we have processed your request to be added as a member. The NLG is a membership association of lawyers, law students, legal workers, and jailhouse lawyers. Membership is open to anyone incarcerated who writes to the NLG National Office expressing their interest in becoming a member, and there is no cost. Membership lasts for three years, after which you can write to us again to let us know to renew and if you have a different mailing address. Formerly incarcerated members have the option to annually renew their membership once they are released, with a waiver if needed. Your membership will be as a national member, not affiliated with a local chapter.

Jailhouse Lawyer Membership Consists of:

- a subscription to *Guild Notes*, which comes out 2 or 3 times a year
- The *Jailhouse Lawyers Handbook* (currently 2021 edition - write to us if you need one!)
- Ability to vote in our annual elections on bylaws and resolutions
- Opportunity to submit writing to the *Beyond Bars* column in *Guild Notes*:
Think about what in your experience as a jailhouse lawyer might be beneficial to share with other jailhouse lawyers around the country. Drawing upon personal experience as an illustration of a broader topic is encouraged. There is a word limit of around 1000 words. You can send to: GN Submissions, National Lawyers Guild, PO Box 1266, New York, NY 10009. (Please also let us know if you would like your full name published). Unfortunately, we cannot write back to everyone who sends us an article, and there is no guarantee that an article will be published. We do, though, appreciate every submission we receive.
- Beyond these, the NLG staff unfortunately *don't* have capacity to facilitate further benefits, including:
 - Access to legal representation or to have a lawyer read through your legal documents
 - Ability to return any legal documents you send
 - Marking anything as "legal mail"

2023 Resolutions Voting Results

NLG membership voted in favor of the following substantive political resolutions:

- Resolution Against U.S. Coercive Economic Measures
- Resolution to Commemorate 75 Years of Nakba and Rectify NLG History on Palestine
- Resolution to Free Alex Saab, Venezuelan diplomat imprisoned by the U.S.
- Resolution to Support the APSP/Uhuru 3 and Challenge FARA Persecution
- Resolution Opposing Perpetual War
- Resolution on the Struggle to Respect, Protect, and Fulfill the Right to Health in the U.S. and Support Resistance to Privatization of Health Case Programs for Seniors and Veterans

NLG Statement on the International Court of Justice's Order of Provisional Measures in South Africa's Case Against Israel

“Third States are now on notice of the existence of a serious risk of genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza. They must, therefore, also act independently and immediately to prevent genocide by Israel and to ensure that they are not themselves in violation of the Genocide Convention, including by aiding or assisting in the commission of genocide. This necessarily imposes an obligation on all States to cease funding and facilitating Israel’s military actions, which are plausibly genocidal.” – South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation

The NLG International Committee welcomes the provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice today, January 26, in South Africa’s case against Israel at the ICJ under the Genocide Convention. The ICJ order is a clear rebuke to US officials who deemed the case “baseless and meritless” and their Israeli, Canadian and German counterparts.

“The ICJ order makes clear that South Africa has presented such a plausible case that it must order immediate provisional measures to protect the rights of the Palestinian people from a potential ongoing genocide.” stated NLG President Suzanne Adely. Therefore, we must demand that U.S. officials and the U.S. government immediately end their complicity in this ongoing genocide by imposing sanctions and an arms embargo on the Israeli regime, rather than continuing to facilitate the genocide through arms sales, security coordination, technology transfers and vetoes in the United Nations Security Council.”

The ICJ’s order for provisional measures requires that the Israeli regime must, “take all measures within its power to prevent the commission of all acts within the scope of Article II of this Convention, in particular: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members

of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; and (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group. The Court recalls that these acts fall within the scope of Article II of the Convention when they are committed with the intent to destroy in whole or in part a group as such... The Court further considers that Israel must ensure with immediate effect that its military forces do not commit any of the above-described acts.”

While the Court did not issue an order – as requested by South Africa – for Israel to immediately cease its military aggression, as noted by South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor, “in exercising the order there would have to be a ceasefire, without it the order doesn’t actually work.” “It is clear that the Israeli assault on the Palestinian people in Gaza – based on the mass killing and displacement of civilians, that has taken over 25,000 lives already and targeted residential homes, schools, hospitals, universities and other centers of civilian life as the primary targets of its carpet bombing – is fundamentally an act of genocide and the only way to implement an order to stop the genocide is to end the bombing and invasion immediately.” stated Charlotte Kates of the NLG International Committee.

We are also concerned that the Court did not note in its order the right of the Palestinian people to resist, firmly recognized in international law, nor did it note that the Israeli claim of a “right of self-defense” against a people under occupation and colonialism is baseless. These omissions weaken the Court’s own declared mission to uphold international law and promote international justice, seemingly in the interests of appeasing the parties it assesses as requiring provisional measures to alleviate the risk

of genocide. We view this as fundamentally reflective of the insufficiency of international legal bodies and institutions in addressing the crimes of imperialist powers and their allies.

Given the overwhelming evidence already provided by South Africa, and the Court's reference to numerous international reports as well as the genocidal comments of Israeli officials, expressing clear intent to commit genocide, we are certain that any sense of justice will lead South Africa to prevail in the merits phase of the case. However, the people of Palestine cannot wait years for justice and accountability.

For these provisional measures to have meaning, the United States must immediately cease its arms sales and trade with the Israeli occupation, cut off its billions of dollars in financial flows to the genocidal regime, and immediately stop arming the war on the Palestinian people.

We firmly support all efforts in international and domestic law, including Defence for Children International Palestine v. Biden, whose arguments are being heard today in a California federal court regarding U.S. officials' responsibility for genocide. We urge full support for all such initiatives to hold the U.S. accountable for its participation in genocide in domestic and international courts, and to highlight the legitimate rights of Palestinians to live free in their land.

We also note that legal action, while critically important, is insufficient to achieve Palestinian liberation, and that the people of Palestine, inside Palestine and in exile, particularly in Gaza, and throughout the region, particularly in Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq, are bearing the brunt of taking meaningful action to bring not only the genocide pursued by the occupation since October 7, 2023 to an end, but to bring the ongoing Nakba and colonialism in Palestine for over 75 years to an end.

Here, this means escalating the boycott campaigns against Israel, holding corporations accountable for

investing in and profiting from genocide, holding politicians and officials legally and politically accountable for facilitating genocide, defending Palestinian, Arab and Muslim communities and the Palestine solidarity movement against repression, and imposing sanctions, including a full arms embargo, on the Israeli regime.

As the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation noted, "Third States are now on notice of the existence of a serious risk of genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza. They must, therefore, also act independently and immediately to prevent genocide by Israel and to ensure that they are not themselves in violation of the Genocide Convention, including by aiding or assisting in the commission of genocide. This necessarily imposes an obligation on all States to cease funding and facilitating Israel's military actions, which are plausibly genocidal."

We also reiterate our condemnation of the US/UK led attack on Yemen that comes in violation of both US and international law. We underline that the actions of the Yemeni people, their armed forces and the AnsarAllah movement are practical measures to implement the provisional measures ordered today and bring the ongoing genocide to an end.

We salute South Africa for its leading role in working to enforce legal accountability on a global level. This important step is raising the bar of international legal action in defense of Palestinian rights and for Palestinian liberation. We look forward to escalating our efforts and doing everything in our power to isolate and sanction Israel, bring the genocide to an end, and hasten the Palestinian people's achievement of a free Palestine.

- *NLG International Committee Members*

2024 Haywood Burns Fellows

The Haywood Burns Memorial Fellowship for Social and Economic Justice has its roots in the NLG's established tradition of providing legal, political, and educational support to the important progressive movements of the day. Named after Haywood Burns, long-time radical lawyer, law professor, and former NLG president, they are designed to encourage students to work in the NLG's tradition of "people's lawyering." The program exists to help students apply their talents and skills to find creative ways to use the law to advance justice. Burns Fellowships provoke law students to question traditional notions of how one must practice law and to provide a summer experience that will enrich and challenge them.



Jessenia Class is a first-generation college and law student at Harvard Law. Before law school, Jessenia worked on impact litigation for social and economic justice at a public interest law firm. Last summer, she interned with Rights Behind Bars, working on movement-lawyering direct litigation and appellate litigation aimed at dismantling the carceral system. As a fellow, Jessenia will work at Public Justice, where she'll have the opportunity to learn from their conditions of confinement and environmental work, among many other project areas under Public Justice's General Litigation Summer Clerk program. Through this experience, Jessenia hopes to stitch together a theory of change to combat environmental harms at prisons, jails, and immigration detention centers nationwide.



Emily Cole (she/they) is a 1L at the Univ. of Oregon School of Law. Prior to embarking on her legal journey, Emily dedicated herself to social work, advocating for youth transitioning out of the foster care system. Drawing inspiration from the impactful organizing and scholarship work of Derecka Purnell, Emily aspires to become an abolitionist lawyer, addressing the multifaceted dimensions of institutional violence pervasive in our capitalist society. Their experiences, particularly with LGBTQ+ youth, fueled her fervent commitment to dismantling systemic injustices and championing the rights of marginalized communities. This summer, Emily anticipates delving further into avenues for building a legal career centered on community care, driven by their unwavering dedication to social justice.



Helina Haile is an Ethiopian immigrant and peacebuilder interested in the intersection of health & human rights. Helina is committed to the principles and values of somatic-trauma healing, healing justice, and prison abolition. Prior to law school, her work in international development, racial equity, health advocacy, and trauma healing informed her approach to using law as a tool for individual and communal healing. Through the Haywood-Burns Fellowship, Helina will spend her 2L summer at Movement Law Lab, an organization committed to providing long-term and rapid-response legal needs to grassroots social movements domestically and internationally. After law school, Helina hopes to use her law degree as a tool to work alongside communities and movements pursuing a justice that heals.



Christopher Licameli is 4L at Capital University Law School in Columbus, OH. He has been involved in community organizing with local organizations like Capital Law ACLU, Affordable Housing Columbus, and Yay Bikes! During his time at Capital Law, he reactivated the Capital Law NLG Chapter. He helped organize law school events around Affordable Housing in Columbus, Alternatives to Policing in Columbus, Abolition of Police & Prisons, the Illegal Occupation of Palestine, Labor Law and Labor Organizing, and Ranked Choice Voting. Christopher will be working in a 10-week summer associate position at Cohen & Green, a small NYC-based civil rights firm that focuses mainly on cases involving police misconduct. Their work has been related to violations of individuals' constitutional rights in the context of protests and in prisons. Other practice areas will include LGBTQ+ rights, equal protection, and employment.



Victoria Paul is a 2L at American University College of Law. Her experience as a first-generation student and child of two Haitian immigrants drives her commitment to elevating the voices of marginalized communities through systemic change. Her time serving as an intern in the FL legislature allowed her to contribute to the advocacy on behalf of those impacted by the carceral system. Victoria actively demonstrates her dedication to addressing civil rights issues by exploring the development of injustices within education, voting rights, and the criminal justice system. As a Haywood Burns Fellow, Victoria will support the Second Look Project to exercise D.C.'s sentence review mechanism for those unconstitutionally sentenced to life in prison for a juvenile offense. Ultimately, Victoria is eager to build the practical skillset necessary to support her future career goal of impacting the development and enactment of legislation that expands the rights and liberties afforded to the marginalized.

Want to support future Haywood Burns Fellows? Our Haywood Burns Fellowship is 100% funded by donations. To help guide the next generation of people's lawyers and legal workers, visit www.NLG.org/HaywoodBurns

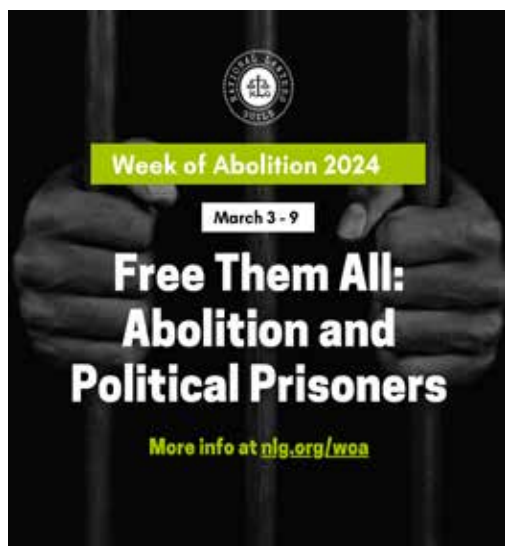
2023 Guild Grant Recipients

The NLG Foundation (NLGF) is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2023 Guild Grants! Since 2014, the NLGF has been investing in building the capacity of NLG chapters and committees by providing small grants up to \$7,500 each. These grants aim to build the Guild by funding innovative projects that will lead to an increase in membership while also strengthening programmatic work and enhancing coordination across the Guild as a whole.

In the latest grant cycle, nine projects were selected from a total of 30 requests for funding. Many of the selected chapters and projects are collaborating with community partners to provide critical resources to the broader community while creating opportunities for members to deepen their involvement with the Guild. Whether it's by organizing and training legal activists or improving outreach and engagement, each of the selected grantees exemplify an unwavering commitment to fighting unjust systems of economic, social, and political oppression. These grants will increase the effectiveness of this work and ensure the NLG can continue to provide critical legal support and solidarity to communities fighting for a better world. Here are the grant recipients:

- **Atlanta NLG Chapter** for a membership recruitment, retention, and engagement campaign to strengthen their Legal Observer program
- **Central Florida NLG Chapter** to fight proactive policing by tracking and exposing racially biased, geographically-targeted policing practices in Orange County
- **Detroit & Michigan NLG Chapter** for the Copwatch training program to deter police violence and harassment and hold police accountable by empowering community members to stop, observe, document, and record police encounters
- **Los Angeles NLG Chapter** for a Civil Rights Roundtable and Advancement Forum
- **NLG Queer Caucus** for Erasure Resistance Project to keep queer voices and bodies visible by providing legal support to people arrested or fired for resisting anti- LBGTQIA+ legislation
- **NLG-San Francisco Bay Area NLG chapter** for a Law Student Organizing and Support Campaign
- **Ohio NLG Chapter** for a Field Organizer to focus on different geographic areas in the state and engage a new law school student population
- **University of Montana School of Law NLG Chapter** to respond to the displacement of people experiencing houselessness through Know Your Rights training and Legal Observation
- **University of Toledo College of Law NLG Chapter** to partner law students with local attorneys in assisting pro se individuals with completing paperwork needed for sealing criminal records

NLG Week of Abolition



Following the National Lawyers Guild Law for the People Convention in October 2015, NLG membership adopted a resolution calling for “the dismantling and abolition of all prisons and of all aspects of systems and institutions that support, condone, create, fill, or protect prisons.” In honor of this resolution, in 2016 the NLG expanded our annual Student Day Against the Death Penalty to become the Week Against Mass Incarceration (WAMI). In 2024, we are re-naming this campaign the Week of Abolition to reflect the NLG’s evolving positions.

For the **2024 Week of Abolition (March 3-9)**, NLG Law Schools will be organizing events and actions related to the abolition of prisons and police, with a special focus on political prisoners. In past years, Guild members and chapters have organized

interactive workshops, community discussions, film screenings, tabling, letter writing campaigns, banner drops, visits to incarcerated youth, and panels on topics such as solitary confinement, the school to prison pipeline, immigration detention, transformative justice, and alternatives to incarceration. In 2024, we encourage NLG members to organize both in person and virtual events that highlight the many political prisoners who have been incarcerated for their activism. This can include panels and workshops, letter writing events, social media campaigns, research projects, tabling, and more!

Letter from Sundiata Jawanza, JHL VP

Salutation Comrades,

As a person confined and a member of Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, I’m standing inside at the forefront of the fight for prison abolition and the dismantling of the oppressive systems that perpetuate what we call mass enslavement and confinement of political prisoners. I’m writing to urge you to join us in participating in the NLG “Week of Abolition” from March 3 to March 9, 2024.

This week presents a crucial opportunity for you to come together, raise your voices with us and advocate for Abolition. As imprisoned individuals and activists, we have seen and felt firsthand the injustices and inequalities that pervade these prisons and legal institutions. We understand the urgency of the moment and the necessity of collective action.

The “Week of Abolition” provides an opportunity for national collective actions to amplify the message,

engage in meaningful dialogue, and advocate for agendas that prioritize liberating political prisoners. This includes prioritizing healing and restoration over punishment and prisons for those that fall short according to society terms. Through a series of events, workshops, and demonstrations, you can educate and mobilize our communities to free our political prisoners and actively work toward the abolition of prisons and the creation of alternative, community-based solutions.

By participating in this week of action, you can challenge the status quo and demonstrate your unwavering commitment to creating a more just and equitable society.

We encourage you to join us in this critical endeavor. Whether you are a legal professional, an activist, student or a concerned citizen, your participation is vital. Let us unite in solidarity, harnessing our

collective power to demand change and build a future where imprisonment is no longer the default response to social issues.

In the words of Angela Y. Davis, “Prisons do not disappear social problems, they disappear human

beings.” Let us work together to dismantle the prison-industrial slave complex and build a world where justice, compassion, and humanity prevail.

- Sundiata Jawanza, Jailhouse Lawyer VP

Towards Abolition in Our Lifetime

As a young activist in Atlanta trying to learn from everywhere I could, I heard a concept from organizers at Southerners on New Ground (SONG) and trainers at Project South: “liberation in our lifetime.” These very southern, amazingly aspirational words have stuck with me ever since. I don’t want to die before we get liberated, I want to live to see it! So the logical conclusion, under an abolitionist lens, is that I might as well live liberation, liberated in my lifetime.

I am very excited to bring this energy to the NLG as its new Director of Mass Defense. I won’t bore you with my experiences and resume; as an anarchist once told me during a jail visit, I passed their vetting process after their friend found me on Antifa Watch. I also won’t waste your time with reminders of how terrible things are, how fascism and all oppressive systems are killing us and this world. News channels and social media algorithms got that covered, 24/7.

Instead, I’ll share what I want to help build with NLG from this role. I hope to strengthen and grow our attorney membership, helping lawyers find ways to take movement cases amidst immense student loans and non-profit co-optation. I hope to be

responsive to organizers and activists on the ground, meeting them wherever they are: NLG members are creative, helpful and passionate, but at times also controversial, liberal and mistrusted, and we must hold these truths in our relationships. I hope to keep centering and valuing our legal workers and jailhouse lawyers, who know the streets and cages better than attorney supervisors, despite what the courts, professional rules of conduct and American Bar Association want to make us believe. I hope to support our chapters and programs so we can remain a trusted partner to the movement, showing up with humility and alignment next to those in the frontlines.

At our Leadership Summit, which certainly had its typical theoretical debates and interpersonal tensions, I at least learned that there is one value that ties us together: prison and police abolition. Not uncoincidentally, this year, the law school Week Against Mass Incarceration has turned into the Week of Abolition. With this in mind, let’s keep struggling for abolition in our lifetime, in all the ways that may look from our wingspan.

- Xavier T. de Janon, NLG Director of Mass Defense

“Tip of the Spear” - Book Review

According to American University professor Dr. Orisanmi Burton “[prisons] are war. They are state strategies of race war, class war, colonization and counterinsurgency.” In his meticulously researched and fascinating book *Tip of the Spear, Black Radicalism, Prison Repression and the Long Attica Revolt* (University of California Press, 2023) Dr. Burton sets himself apart from the vast majority of books and films on U.S. prisons. He does not focus on prison conditions, guard brutality and efforts at

reform. Instead Dr. Burton emphasizes the politics behind the prison rebellions. Prisons are “domains of militant contestation, where captive populations reject ... white supremacist systems of power and invent zones of autonomy, freedom and liberation.” Focusing on reform efforts, he posits, diminishes the revolutionary significance of what he terms the “Long Attica Revolt”.

Influenced in part by the wave of militant political activity in the streets in the late 1960's, captives in the New York State and New York City prisons became increasingly politicized. They began to see jails as tools of white supremacy and social control. In several New York City jails, captives rebelled, seizing hostages and demanding basic change.

The revolts had "dialectical relation" to repression on the street. Dr Burton points out that the captives rebelling at Branch Queens demanded an end to censorship including the right to read *The Black Panther* and *Palante*, the newspaper of the Young Lords Party. In 1970 at the state prison in Auburn captives demanded the right to "control our own destinies." Rebelling captives at Branch Queens demanded bail review for the thousands of individuals incarcerated pre-trial.

One of the most fascinating and heretofore unexamined aspects of the September 1971 Attica uprising is Dr. Burton's descriptions of Attica's D-Yard during the four days of that rebellion. Freed from the literal and figurative control of prison guards, Attica's D-yard "became an exuberant space of disalienation and oneness." It served – and serves – "as an example of what solidarity and revolutionary struggle could produce." Spokespeople were elected. A security system was established. Disputes were settled by majority vote. Captives walked D yard in twos and threes talking and reminiscing. Captive leader Roger Champion recalled inmates helping each other and even "tucking some brothers in for the night". One of the most moving passages in the book is the story of how one inmate saw another crying in the yard. He asked what was wrong. The sobbing inmate told him how he had not seen the stars in twenty-three years. Attica brother and security team leader Frank Big Black Smith stated "I felt good, ya know. I felt relieved. I felt, I guess, liberated."

Much has already been written about the violent retaking of Attica prison on September 13, 1971 and the brutality that followed. It was, according to Dr. Burton, a pseudo-sexual reassertion of white supremacist power. But as the author points out, there were more prison rebellions in 1972 than in any other year on record. For the State, a new

counterinsurgency strategy was necessary.

This new strategy, which Dr. Burton labels "pacification" had four stages: expansion, humanization, diversification and programification. "Expansion" involved the building of smaller, more tightly controlled prisons assuring minimal contact between politicized prisoners and the general population. Under "Humanization" the Department of Corrections (DOCS) instituted – or appeared to institute – internal reforms. Captives were supplied with better clothes, food and educational possibilities.

Under "diversification" power was taken from prison wardens and given to DOCS' Central Office. DOCS instituted the Central Monitoring Case (CMC) program. Many inmates, including virtually all of the political prisoners, were designated "Central Monitoring Cases". Their participation in programs was limited and they were housed in the prisons most distant from New York City and often placed in solitary confinement.

Under "programification" students, social workers, religious organizations and others participated in prisoprograms working for liberal reforms. The captives, however, recognized the programs for what they were: efforts to destroy radical thought. By the early 1980's the programs were dismantled. A fatal weakness of these "prisoncrats", according to Dr. Burton, is that they "are inimically opposed to the idea that ordinary people are capable of thinking for themselves".

The current fight against mass incarceration and for abolition is in many ways a product of the radical thought that influenced the prison rebellions of the late 1960's and 1970's. Attica, according to Dr. Burton, is not simply historical. "Attica Is".

- *Robert J. Boyle, NYC Chapter Member* (Robert J. Boyle is an attorney practicing in New York City. He has been the attorney in several civil rights actions against the New York prison system and has secured the release of several falsely convicted members of the Black Panther Party.)

Featuring NLG Authors!

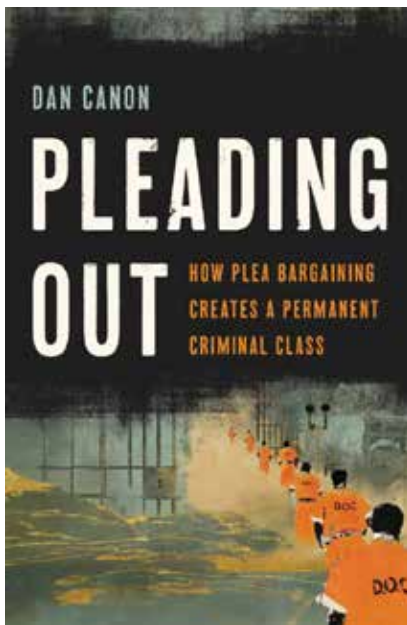
Michael Avery, Murder in Blue



In the second book in the “Susan Sorella Mysteries Series” by the former NLG president, Susan Sorella’s got her first murder case as a young lawyer. The deck is stacked against her client. An umpire shot in front of his hotel after making bad calls against the Red Sox. The murder weapon found in the defendant’s garage. The defendant with amnesia for the time of the crime.

Murder One looks like a sure thing—life in prison with no chance of parole. With the jury in the box, the judge on the bench, and only one day left in the trial, Susan turns to her ally, mob boss Frank Romano, in a desperate effort to identify the killer. Learn more about the book and author at www.michaelavery.work

Dan Canon, Pleading Out



Most Americans believe that the jury trial is the backbone of our criminal justice system. But in fact, the vast majority of cases never make it to trial: almost all criminal convictions are the result of a plea bargain, a deal made entirely out of the public eye.

Canon argues that plea bargaining may swiftly dispose of cases, but it also fuels an unjust system. This practice produces a massive underclass of people who are restricted from voting, working, and otherwise participating in society. And while innocent people plead guilty to crimes they did not commit in exchange for lesser sentences, the truly guilty can get away with murder. With heart-wrenching stories, fierce urgency, and an insider’s perspective, *Pleading Out* exposes the ugly truth about what’s wrong with America’s criminal justice system today—and offers a prescription for meaningful change.

Military Law Task Force on Perpetual War

The U.S. is engaged in a perpetual war - with its troops “advising” and fighting in conflicts around the world - and it’s escalating fast.

The perpetual war is in Africa, where the U.S. has multiple “cooperative security locations” with drones, surveillance aircraft, landing facilities for U.S. special forces, in addition to at least 29 named bases. The U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) headquartered in Stuttgart Germany, is described by Africa specialist Lion Summerbell as “the second most expensive unified command after CENTCOM (which covers the Middle East and Central Asia) and oversees the largest number of combat operations.” AFRICOM-trained officers were central to the military coups that have swept the continent in the past few years, from Guinea to Niger to Gabon.

The perpetual war is in Okinawa, which the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (PACOM) calls “The Western Pacific” and is digging in, expanding current bases over local objections and planning new ‘Marine Littoral Regiments’ of around 2,000 troops, the latter to conduct “reconnaissance and strike forces in contested maritime theaters.”

The perpetual war is in Atlanta, Georgia, whose proposed “Cop City” training facility would include shooting ranges, spaces for militarized drills, and a mock city complete with buildings and roads to allow APD to practice urban warfare tactics. The NLG is already engaged in the struggle against Cop City, representing those arrested in the months of protest and supporting opponents’ proposed referendum to allow Atlantans to determine its fate.

The perpetual war is in Texas, at the U.S.-Mexico border, where the U.S. is fighting against nationals of neighboring countries - using troops who, from the Border Patrol to the National Guard, swore an oath to protect the U.S. Constitution but ended up abusing immigrants instead. NLG’s National Immigration Project is also active on this big domestic front, as Texas’ Operation Lone Star adds National Guard troops to the Texas Guard’s “border

enforcement” campaign and includes intelligence efforts that routinely violate federal law.

How is this the NLG’s business? The military-industrial complex already drains massive amounts of U.S. resources, both financial and human, pulling them away from the communities we serve. Enlisted service members, engaged in proxy wars and preparation for war, tend to come from communities subject to racial and economic injustice. Many joined the military in what’s commonly called the “poverty draft,” presented with few alternatives.

Those are also the communities subject to the most militarized police, and where Junior ROTC programs are too often hailed as lifesavers for struggling schools. In 2022, there existed, 600 Army AJROTC units, 619 Navy JROTC units, 794 Air Force AFJROTC and 260 Marine Corps MCJROTC units (60% of whom are likely to enlist). JROTC, regarded by supporters as creating a role model for youth of color, becomes a substitute for other programs that might provide real discipline, excellence and community.

Meanwhile, NLG’s Military Law Task Force works to support service members, both in individual casework and advocacy. Our work challenges both militarism and oppressive military policies, service-wide racism and sexual assault/harassment, and supports those seeking discharge from the military or individual or collective dissent. We develop legal materials for and train attorneys and counselors, self-help materials for GIs, and work with ally groups to get the anti-war message to servicemembers. This ongoing resistance to U.S. war-making will need to redouble in the face of perpetual war.

Every NLG chapter or committee is affected by this perpetual war. All members - especially those in states full of military bases, like CA, TX, and NC - can help. You can secure training in the basics of military law (MLTF can help), and be on call for cases as needed. (All are welcome to join MLTF or one of its committees (e.g. Anti-Racism, Gender

Justice, Suicide and Moral Injury). Even if you don't work in reach of a military community, your state will have enough people affected by an authorization to keep you busy; hook up with local NGOs, whether abolitionist orgs, veterans' groups or branches of the National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth. Reach out to the Task Force to find out more about its plan to counter perpetual war and to talk about anti-war and related work in your area, By joining this effort, you'll be doing what the Guild does best-- fighting against an imperialist system and fighting for the most disempowered at a critical moment.

- Chris Lombardi, Military Law Task Force Member

Reflections on Palestinian Solidarity in Arkansas

The months since October 7th, 2023 have caused me to reflect on solidarity as a concept. Experience has shown me that solidarity has the power to transform people by virtue of their shared struggle toward a common goal. The Palestinian solidarity movement in Little Rock, Arkansas over these past months has been exemplary in transforming its participants, including myself.

I didn't know there was a Palestinian solidarity movement in Arkansas until I was looking at my phone in the Las Vegas airport the week of October 14 and came across photographs of a recent protest in Little Rock's River Market district. Seeing images of the tri-color Palestine flag flying in a familiar setting floored me. I soon set about finding the social media accounts of the protest organizers, sent them a direct message, and, by the time I was back home, set up a meeting.

At the time of writing, there has been a Palestine solidarity protest nearly every week – and often multiple protests in a single week – since I saw those images the second week of October, 2023. I have lived in Little Rock most of my life. I was active in the George Floyd 2020 uprisings. And I have never seen a protest movement with this kind of consistency, stamina, and staying power here before.

Even better – this movement is being led by Palestinian Americans and supported by a broad coalition of anti-Zionist Jewish organizers, Latin American trans folks, the local DSA chapter, Black bail fund organizers, and us – the Arkansas Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild. It has been beautiful to see a coalition of experienced organizers embrace the Palestinian American protest leaders here – who do not have the same deep wellspring of activist knowledge – and pour everything they have into this movement. It is as if we all implicitly understood Angela Davis's observation that "Palestine is the moral litmus test for the world" and acted accordingly.

I'm so proud of what my comrades and we have accomplished together. We disrupted events by President Bill Clinton and Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders. We protested in the pouring rain. We protested at outdoor shopping malls during Christmas. We have even been able to take a light-hearted approach to protesting during the holidays, singing kitschy Christmas carols with the lyrics changed to be about Gaza. I (as a Southern white guy raised culturally Christian) have participated in more Jewish and Islamic rituals during this time than I ever had in my life – Shabbat dinners, Chanukkah for Ceasefire, meetings at the masjid with local Muslim leaders. When I think of "tikkum olam" – repairing the world – I think about our Palestinian protest leader who said she was raised to fear Jewish people calling one of our anti-Zionist Jewish protest leaders her sister at a Shabbat Seder for Ceasefire. That's what solidarity looks like.

This movement has really brought home to me the value of our chapter's existence here and now. We were able to provide legal observers, know your rights sessions, and strategic movement lawyering counsel to the organizing coalition right away. Right now, the people of Gaza and the West Bank are still being bombed,

starved, killed, and humiliated. I am horrified and disgusted with my government for arming and funding this genocide – including making white phosphorous here in Arkansas at the Pine Bluff Arsenal. But I have never been more proud to be a lawyer than when I watched those courageous South African lawyers methodically lay out the case for genocide to the International Court of Justice. We are doing what we can in Arkansas – making lots of noise and applying pressure in our small corner of the empire.

Article above and photos below by Connor Thompson, NLG Arkansas Chapter Chair



In Memory of Bill Goodman



Bill Goodman, a former President of the National Lawyers Guild and long-time leader of the Michigan/Detroit chapter, died unexpectedly in his sleep on November 17, 2023, at the age of 83. Bill was an extraordinary human being and a staunch fighter for the creation of a society in which human rights take priority over the rights of property and capital.

Bill came naturally to his membership in the NLG. His father, Ernie Goodman, was a founding member of the organization in 1937. After his first year of law school at the University of Chicago in the early 1960s, Bill interned at a small Black law firm in Virginia, as part of the NLG Lawyers in the South program under Ernie's leadership. While there, he worked with well-known NLG civil rights attorney Len Holt and helped build desegregation cases throughout the South. As Bill told Metro Times in 2007, *"I became very engaged in what it means to be a part of history and work with real people in the struggle. That sort of moved me a great deal."*

After graduating from U of C Law School in 1965, Bill joined the NLG and returned to Detroit. He joined his father's law firm, Goodman, Eden, Philo, Robb and Crockett. The firm later became Goodman Eden Millender and Bedrosian. Early in his career, Bill, along with many other lawyers and legal workers from around the country, joined in the defense of prisoners charged in the Attica Prison rebellion of 1971. He went on to become one of the premiere lawyers working on behalf of victims of police misconduct, becoming a specialist in 42 USC §1983 litigation. He also fought for women's rights to access health services in the 1980s and 1990s. He sued on behalf of communities affected by environmental injustice, including, most recently,

victims of the Flint water crisis. He co-founded the Sugar Law Center for Economic and Social Justice in 1990 and served on the board until his death.

While Ernie Goodman was well known in the community as a lawyer who would take on unpopular cases, it was Bill who built the Goodman firm's practice around government and police misconduct, such as excessive force and fatal shootings, police chases, the use of tasers, and representing demonstrators who were assaulted by the police. Bill spent his legal career as a People's lawyer, pursuing justice, holding government accountable, and defending civil rights.

In 1961, Walter Bergman, a civil rights activist, was brutally beaten by the KKK during a Freedom Ride. The severe beating caused Walter to have a stroke, and he required the use of a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Many years later, after discovering the FBI knew in advance about the Klan attack and did nothing to protect Walter and others, Bill and others filed suit against the FBI. The government made every possible attempt to derail the case. Nonetheless, Bill and the rest of Walter's team prevailed, the case was tried, and the jury found that the FBI was responsible for Walter's injury, a huge victory.

In 1998, Bill moved to New York to become the Legal Director of the Center for Constitutional Rights, where he worked from 1998 to 2003 and again from 2005 to 2007. His work at CCR gave him a platform where he could more effectively fight government abuses both domestic and foreign. He represented Guantanamo Bay detainees, Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange, and the wrongfully convicted teens in the notorious “Central Park jogger” case. He took on the Bush administration, the New York City Police Department, and the New York state prison system. He led a class-action lawsuit on behalf of the hundreds of Muslim men who were arrested by the FBI and the Justice Department immediately after 9/11 and held under terrible conditions without any due process, some of them indefinitely. He made frequent media appearances and travelled across the country to talk about the excesses of the so-called “War on Terror.” From 2003 to 2005, Bill formed a law partnership with NLG attorney Jonathan Moore, where he continued to litigate police misconduct cases.

By 2007, Bill yearned to be back in Detroit, to be closer to his children. He returned, where he and Julie Hurwitz formed the law firm, “Goodman & Hurwitz,” now known as Goodman Hurwitz & James. As Julie notes, until his death, “there was no case or cause that Bill would turn away from our door; and no opportunity he would turn down to tell arrestees to ‘shut the fuck up,’ or to dress as Santa to deliver a copy of the Constitution to President Bush.” Bill was not only a lawyer, but a mentor, organizer, and valued member of his community. He mentored several generations of law students, lawyers, and legal workers. He taught Civil Rights Litigation for many years at Wayne State Law School. He was invited to many law schools to give talks about repression and government misconduct.

Bill encouraged law students and young lawyers who wanted to develop a civil rights practice, modeling for them how to be a “people’s lawyer” and about the importance of supporting the NLG. He was extremely active in the MI chapter of the NLG and served as chapter president for several terms. He was committed to active leadership on the board of the Sugar Law Center and continued to work in developing Sugar Law’s legal and political work.

Up to the moment of his passing, Bill continued to work vigorously on behalf of his clients and was still taking new cases: representing victims of unconstitutional police violence, people wrongfully arrested or convicted for crimes they did not commit, protesters against injustice who were arrested for engaging in civil disobedience, victims of horrific government or corporate abuse – it didn’t matter. And, of course, Bill had extreme pride to be part of the phenomenal Flint Water Team representing the survivors of that egregious travesty.

If there was a legal theory that would bring about some semblance of justice or change, or that would strengthen the protections of our Constitution, Bill would take it on. To his last day.

Julie Hurwitz remembers: “The last conversation we had the night before he died was how excited he was to begin to get involved in a case on behalf of victims of extreme racist violence being perpetrated against African Americans by the private police force that guards the Renaissance Center.”

In 2007, Bill spoke about what inspired him as an attorney: *“America, this democracy, was created around the very basic idea that power should not go unchecked, and the more people can say to one another, the more information people have, the better decisions people will make,”* Goodman said. *“That’s the First Amendment and the Fourth Amendment.”*

Bill is deeply mourned by his children Amy, Michael, David, Jacob, Nick, and Daniel, his four grandchildren, his partner Susan Gzesh, his longtime law partner and former wife (and mother of his younger three children) Julie Hurwitz, his brother Dick, his former wife (and mother of his older three children) Jane Saxe Goodman, and his many lifelong friends and colleagues.

Bill loved his family, his clients, his NLG comrades and other colleagues, and his friends. He loved life. As Che Guevara said, “A true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love.” A public memorial for Bill will be held in Detroit in June. Contact the NLG Detroit/ Michigan chapter for details.

BEYOND BARS: **Articles from NLG Jailhouse Lawyer Members**

.....PRISON REFORM MALARKY.....

The State of TX has come to a close on the 88th Legislative session with Governor Greg Abbott having called a special session that will primarily focus on property taxes, border security, and school savings accounts. In this session, we saw many prison reform bills that just ended up dying in committee. Many of these would have brought enormous change to how the TX Dept. of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) carries out guidelines and procedures that would affect programming and rehabilitation in the lives of TX prison residents. Legislators, however, made their position perfectly clear - prison issues are not a priority for the state.

If one were to examine the actions of the TDCJ and TX lawmakers, one would undoubtedly come to the conclusion that there is definitely malarkey going on. TDCJ currently has an Executive Director in Bryan Collier, who introduced a “2030 Plan” that envisions change for an agency that, by his own admission, has been plagued by a negative culture, and now, ironically, will use the same negative culture to carry out this plan. Governor Abbott and the state GOP are currently engaged in culture wars, property taxes, and border security issues, leaving no political will towards prison reform. TX has always cradled an “out of sight, out of mind” attitude towards prison issues.

What is disappointing and concerning is that both the agency and the lawmakers are paid by taxpayer money to get things done for the betterment of incarcerated individuals and public safety. Are they not on the same team? Wouldn't they both want the same outcome - rehabilitated and skilled individuals that contribute to better public safety? The failure to act and make meaningful change tells a different story.

A prime example is the malarkey known as HB 1424, a bill relating to an Individual Treatment Plan (ITP) for residents. The purpose of an ITP is to determine

eligibility for and participation in treatment programs aimed at promoting positive change in resident behavior. To provide some background, in 2017, during the 85th Legislature, lawmakers passed HB 2888, which required the agency to “at least once in every 12 month period, review each inmate’s IPT to assess the inmate’s institutional progress and revise or update the plan as necessary.” TDCJ did what was minimally required - they passed out ITPs without any true updates or revisions.

House Representative Campos built upon HB 2888 by adding three relevant provisions to HT 1424. Section 1 (a) (3) states to “ensure that the guidelines require consideration of an inmate’s progress on the inmate’s IPT and ‘in any other’ programs in which the inmate participated during the inmate’s confinement.” This language helps us to understand that neither the agency nor the parole board ever gave much weight to any progress the resident may or may not have made, and therefore, no serious effort was ever being made to rehabilitate. Parole is nothing more than the role of the dice. Remember, part of the TDCJ Mission Statement includes rehabilitating and reintegrating the individual, but apparently there was a need to make legislation because agency directives were not enough.

A second provision, Section 2 (e) (3) states, “Revise the inmate’s risk level to reflect the inmate’s completion of programming as required by the inmate’s ITP.” This provision re-enforces the claim that no real weight was ever given to any progress and would explain why the majority of all parole denials use the same two reasons: criminal history and the nature of the offense. On the same, general parole denial form, it states, “The institutional division will monitor your treatment plan and progress and will report it to the board of Pardon and Paroles.” If this were true, denials would do more than consider criminal history prior to incarceration.

Lastly, Section 1 (a) (5) states “implement guidelines.” Because of TDCJ’s past failures in carrying out directives, it wasn’t enough to introduce bills seeking to promote positive change within the agency, but there was the foresight that the bill must also include provisions that would bring about accountability down the road when attitudes supersede laws. BH 1424 is just one of many bills that were introduced seeking to reform the broken and fiscally wasteful TX prison system. Although the focus has been primarily on the agency’s failures in recent times, we know lawmakers in Austin, TX are just as much to blame because they knew these bills were never going to pass, yet legislators continue to get paid, campaign for votes for their reelection, and rally for support under the guise of “correcting errors

within the criminal justice system”.

This legislative session has been a reminder of how a small number of people can control political narratives and determine which issues are deserving of attention. It also is a grim reality that the current TDCJ population, the negative culture and unsupportive staff are the frontline workers for those residents who do want to change their lives. The role of the dice will continue, concern for public safety will remain a facade, and recidivism rates will continue ensuring careers in the TX criminal justice system and state capitol. Malarkey at its best.

-Ezra Ortega, Jordan Unit Resident Advisor and Co-founder of the Douglass Department Writers Collective, Pampa, TX

.....OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND IN VIRGINIA.....

Criminal Justice and Prison Reform in the VA Judicial system and DOC is oblique and destitute well far from only unjust.

There are a multitude of reasons why and causes for the issues, such as a lack of national organizational support and attention. In the mass of newsletters and publications there’s information and organizations willing to help in CA, NY, TX, and PA to name a few with several pages of information but VA usually is either missing or has the usual handful that have reached their capacity or can’t be of assistance at the moment or at all.

The Courts refuse to allow pro se “self representing” inmates proceed without the assistance of counsel, which is the reason inmates seek pro se status due to lack of financial ability in which the courts are taking advantage of us with.

The Prison system welcomes all inmates to file complaints utilizing the grievance procedure because the end result will be an unresponsive or unfounded decision leading to medical deaths for numerous reasons. A friend of mine a few years ago was having a heart attack and medical staff sent him back to his cell alleging he had gas; he died shortly of heart complications.

I was previously housed at River North Corr. Ctr. who infamously practice racial discriminatory treatment towards black and brown inmates, derogatory comments like “boy” and “yall people” among some or writing false institutional disciplinary charges against inmates. There are complaints going unaddressed by prison officials, even state and federal agencies.

For nearly 20 years I’ve been attempting to obtain evidence that was withheld from my lawyer, myself, and jurors which can prove my innocence; instead I’ve been repeatedly denied.

We need a voice, a seat at the table of justice, help and assistance. If you hear me, help us VA inmates give us a presence. We need national and local organizations willing to help. We need pro bono legal representation or low cost representation. We need more innocence program providers other than the only two we have that stay swamped and not taking any cases. We need to finally shed a spotlight on VA in both unjust criminal Judicial Justice and Prison Reform. National organizations I’m calling on you as well, stop deferring to us.

(con’t. on page 20)

Lastly, NLG, I've been reading about your chapters throughout the nation, please send me info. on how to create a VA incarcerated chapter. [editor's note: if anyone in VA wants to help with this, let us know!]

- W. Shanklin, Waverly, VA

.....**Confronting Criminal Cycles**.....

“Before there can be federal court intervention in the management of state prison systems, there must be a violation of a constitutional right”

The above quote is from Chapter 9 (“Prisoner Disciplinary Proceedings”) of the *Constitutional Rights of Prisoners*, by John Palmer. I highlight this because Chapter 9 deals with the procedural safeguards and rights involved in prison disciplinary processes on the receiving end of the disciplinary regime at some point or other; jailhouse lawyers more than most. It is more prudence and logical to learn what are the rules of the game.

True, the courts, generally, are inclined toward a hands-off posture, allowing state penal systems and prisoncrats a wide berth of latitude in management and operations of state prisons. There are still certain, concrete mandates and regulations that establish guidelines and limit the otherwise tyrannical authority exercised by prisoncrats and correctional officers.

Knowledge is power. I advise everyone concerned with the grand injustice of mass incarceration to read the entire chapter; it is only 54 pages, an hour of your day to become better informed. Close attention should be paid to section 9.3, 9.3.6, 9.3.8, 9.3.9, 9.3.12, and 9.4. My favorite sections are the ones in “Impartiality” and “Evidence”. In prison the former is oft times not a fact; the latter, severely lacking. One of the most obvious differences from criminal court standards is that there is no “beyond a reasonable doubt standard”. Penal disciplinary proceedings only gauge the questions of “substantial evidence”, credible the prisoner in question is guilty of the Rule infraction(s) alleged. The credentials of a past are generally sufficient.

Several years ago, a prison shank (i.e., a homemade knife) was found in the cell I had been assigned. I

was serving time at Sterling Correctional Facility, one of the then most dangerous prisons in CO. To ensure one prisoner is not wrongfully held accountable for contraband or any damages left in a cell by a previous prisoner, the Department has an administrative regulation dictating guards are supposed to conduct a search and check of each cell upon vacation of an occupant and prior to it being assigned to a new prisoner. There is no specific paperwork to be filled out by the guard and prisoner. In my instance the regulation was not complied with. At the disciplinary hearing I was found guilty because, although the correctional officers failed to follow procedure, I had a colorful file of prison misconduct - the credentials of a past.

The year 2020 saw me confronting a criminal information charging me with a class five felony. Before the judge I argued that evidence was lacking in the questions of possession or, even, knowledge of said prison shank's existence in the cell, and that the hearings officer had violated my constitutional rights by being a biased fact-finder. After entering into court record, as evidence, the disciplinary hearing recording (in CO all such hearings are audio-recorded), the judge dismissed the criminal allegation in full.

Knowing and understanding your constitutional rights is important. Because, while prisoncrats, correctional officers and employees may act (or truly believe) as if they are above the rules, learning the law and asserting your rights is the only way to bring them back to reality. Penal administrative regulations are meant to protect as much as restrict individual prisons. If I had not dedicated a couple of hours to learn about my rights during a disciplinary hearing, I would be filing appellate motions instead of writing this article.

- E.C. Theus-Roberts, Pendleton, IN

Subscriptions to other Outside Publications (for Incarcerated Members)

We wanted to provide information for how to subscribe to a couple of other **free** publications that may be of interest to those incarcerated. If you happen to know of any that are in alignment with the values of NLG that would be valuable to share with others, let us know! In addition to the ones listed here, remember you can order the *Jailhouse Lawyers Handbook* (2021 edition) by writing to us at our main address (National Lawyers Guild, PO Box 1266, New York, NY 10009). It usually takes at least 4-6 weeks to be sent out.

For a full resource list, mail: Prison Activist Resource Center, PO Box 70447, Oakland, CA 94612.

“News Inside”

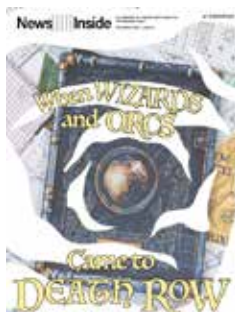
News Inside is a free, award winning publication which is a compilation of criminal justice news from the **Marshall Project** (a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization that seeks to create and sustain a sense of national urgency about the U.S. criminal justice system). It is produced by Marshall Project editors and writers along with incarcerated contributors.

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“The Abolitionist”



The Abolitionist is a bilingual (English/Spanish) publication dedicated to the strategy and struggle of abolition which was launched in 2004 by Critical Resistance, a national organization which seeks to build an international movement to end the prison industrial complex by challenging the belief that caging and controlling people makes us safe. It is free to prisoners and is supported by paid subscribers on the outside.

Two times per year, **Critical Resistance** prints different issues of *The Abolitionist*, exploring a range of topics. From analyses of racial capitalism and imperialism, to housing, education, land struggles, mental health, confronting gender violence, fights to build life-affirming infrastructure for community self-determination and more, each issue is packed with fresh analytical articles, reflections, poetry, visual art, and organizing resources and tools for resistance inside and outside of prisons.

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Letter from Jailhouse Lawyers Initiative Founder

Dear Esteemed Members of the NLG Jailhouse Lawyers Community,

I am writing to you with great respect and solidarity as one of your own. My name is Jhody Polk, and I am the proud founder of the Jailhouse Lawyer Initiative (JLI), A project of the Legal Empowerment and Advocacy Hub (LEAH) and housed at the Robert and Helen Bernstein Institute for Human Rights at NYU Law School. Our initiative is rooted in the belief that legal empowerment is not just a method but a movement that bridges the gap between law and justice for those directly affected by the carceral system.

At the heart of JLI's mission is the recognition of the invaluable role you play as jailhouse lawyers. Through a multifaceted approach encompassing legal education, movement building, participatory action research, and community peacebuilding, we aim to elevate the visibility and impact of jailhouse lawyers. We strive to ensure that jailhouse lawyers have the necessary tools and resources to engage with the law not just as users but as shapers and transformers within a legal empowerment framework. This framework is designed to transfer power, knowledge, and resources to communities most affected by the justice system, empowering them to lead their struggles and author their paths to liberation.

My journey to founding JLI in 2018 as a Soros Justice Fellow was deeply personal. As a jailhouse lawyer myself during my time in the Florida Department of Corrections, I experienced firsthand the transformative power of legal knowledge and advocacy. This experience cemented my commitment to making legal education accessible to those who need it most, inspired by the global movement of legal empowerment I encountered in my travels abroad.

JLI's vision extends beyond support for jailhouse lawyers in the U.S. We aim to be a conduit for connecting jailhouse lawyers to broader decarceration and abolition movements, recognizing the unique insights and contributions you bring to these critical conversations. Our goals are ambitious but clear:

1. To establish a national network of current and former jailhouse lawyers.
2. To co-create and deliver legal education and empowerment trainings tailored for incarcerated individuals.
3. To amplify the role of jailhouse lawyers as indispensable to the legal ecosystem.
4. To forge pathways that enable jailhouse lawyers to apply their legal acumen within their communities, both during and post-incarceration.

We are proud to report that JLI currently unites over 700 members across all states, and we are on a mission to establish a presence in every U.S. prison by 2025. Of our collective membership 23 are advisors to the JLI. Our unique model interweaves the expertise and experiences of jailhouse lawyers (both incarcerated and formerly), legal professionals (including law students), and institutions (spanning law schools to correctional facilities) to create a collaborative and healthy legal ecosystem.

The JLI humbly invites you to be a part of a revolutionary community dedicated to redefining justice and empowerment from the inside out. We operate on the foundational values of Legal Empowerment, Participatory Action Research (PAR), and Community Peacebuilding, aiming to democratize legal

knowledge and make the law a tool for personal and collective liberation.

Our work includes developing national legal modules on critical topics such as FOIA Requests, Data Justice, Legal Writing, Research, Innocence Claims, Human Rights Law, Federal Habeas Corpus and Advocacy. While we receive hundreds of letters, we are unable to respond to every member, but please know every letter is read, valued and informs our efforts to support and connect with you.

Looking ahead, we are excited to launch Flashlights this summer. Flashlights is a digital archive born from our members who expressed a need for visibility and voice. This platform will showcase letters, oral histories and insights of jailhouse lawyers, contributing to social change and highlighting the power of their advocacy. In addition to hosting the letters, art and voices of our members, Flashlights will also have sections dedicated to the impact that jailhouse lawyers have had on the law and their communities both in and outside of prison, and “Us Too”, dedicated to women identifying jailhouse lawyers and the relationship between gender and the law. This year, the JLI will also facilitate the development of the the International Incarcerated People’s Congress (IIPC), a global network of currently and formerly incarcerated jailhouse lawyers, human rights defenders, and organizations and advocates on the outside working in support of movements to protect and advance the human rights of incarcerated people across the globe. The IIPC aims to ensure that incarcerated human rights defenders can meaningfully participate in and shape movement- building and legal and policy advocacy in domestic, regional, and international forums.

As we continue to grow and evolve, your membership, feedback, and vision are vital to our collective journey. We hope that you will consider becoming a member of the JLI to engage with our community and resources. You are invited to share your insights, and join us in using legal empowerment as a tool to disrupt the cycle of incarceration in the US and globally. Together, we are not just navigating the justice system; we are seeking to transform it.

In solidarity and with great anticipation for the work we will accomplish together,

Jhody Polk

Founder, Jailhouse Lawyer Initiative

***If you are interested in becoming a member of the JLI,
please write to us at:
Jailhouse Lawyer Initiative
c/o Tyler Walton Esq.
Bernstein Institute for Human Rights
139 MacDougal Street, Office B22
New York, NY 10012***

National Lawyers Guild Foundation
PO Box 1266
New York, NY 10009

