

Our All of Us or None newspaper serves to link those of us who have been locked up, those who are locked up, as well as our families and allies in this struggle.



# ALL OF US OR NONE NEWSPAPER

We want to ensure that the voices of our people inside are heard and the inside artists are recognized for their contributions to this movement.

Your stories matter!



Some of the women staff of LSPC in front of the Freedom and Movement Center with Hamdiya Cooks-Addullah in gold. Photo by John Cannon

## Matriarch of the Movement

### Hamdiya Cooks-Abdullah's 20 Years of Service

by Alissa Moore, 2022 Elder Freeman Policy Fellow



Hamdiya Cooks-Abdullah speaking at a prison protest. Photo by Scott Braley

Hamdiya Cooks-Abdullah has been with Legal Services for Prisoners with Children (LSPC) and All of Us or None (AOUON) for 20 years. Today she is the organization's Administrative Director, but her journey began in San Bernardino California in the early 50s.

Growing up she was deeply affected by white supremacy and the overall structural racism that shaped her young life. As a result of this Hamdiya describes her younger self as rebellious and radical which was inflamed by witnessing the Watts Riots. "I was a young girl then and everyone was rioting in schools and in our neighborhood." Hamdiya recalls, "I didn't realize how much I was invested in justice for our people until then." This inquisitiveness and the innate courage to question the status quo were the precursors to the Matriarch she would become.

Hamdiya is a devout Muslim, mother, wife and at 28 years old she was sentenced to 50 years in prison, a few things that don't even belong in the same sentence. As barbaric as this seems, this was her path as well as that of her family. "The hardest part of my incarceration was accepting that I had fifty years and not understanding what that meant because I had never been in any prison or jail before. Accepting that I would be away from my 13 year old child and possibly not being able to see my parents again. All of that along with dealing with being locked up," Hamdiya says.

Hamdiya was forced to leave her family behind, while at the same time struggled to comprehend the magnitude of her sentence. Parenting from the inside was a battle as many have come to learn and it takes a great deal of energy, persistence and resilience to maintain and nurture a family bond from behind bars.

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The Sister-to-Sister visiting team for CA Coalition for Women Prisoners (CCWP): Hamdiya Cooks-Abdullah (Administrative Director, Legal Services for Prisoners with Children), Hafsah Al-Amin (Program Coordinator, CCWP) and Wanda Sabir (Professor, Writer & Activist) visiting CCWF in Chowchilla doing legal advocacy.

## Sister to Sister

by Wanda Sabir, Guest Journalist, Wanda's Picks

California Coalition for Women Prisoners (CCWP) had a visiting team called Sister-to-Sister that I participated in for a number of years. The team no longer exists, but I really enjoyed being with other black women dedicated to the liberation of other black women. Many of the women visited have been released one way or the other. By that I mean death.

It's another door of no return. Some sisters returned. That swinging door that slaps us crazy. There are no winners, just survivors. How one survives is why CCWP support as well as spaces like the Freedom and Movement Center which, houses CCWP and Legal Services for Prisoners with Children and All of Us or None, are so important.

I remember one of my Sister-to-Sister (S2S) visits in January of 2009. I was so excited to finally be able to visit black women in a Sister-to-Sister visiting program set up by CCWP, an advocacy and policy making organization. An active member of CCWP and a long time advocate for the abolition of prisons and for restorative justice and other such models of equity and justice for victims and perpetrators.

When we arrived that day it was the usual security processing nightmare. There are security checks and then there are security checks. With a name like mine, I still haven't found anything as bad as airport security, but yesterday at the California Women's Prison, the details and the inconsistency between the three black women checking in and the five white women who followed, all from the same agency, CCWP, was noticeable.

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**ALL OF US OR NONE**  
NEWSPAPER

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*All of Us or None is an organizing movement started by people who have been in prison in order to challenge the pervasive discrimination that formerly incarcerated people, people in prison, and our family members face. Our goal is to strengthen the voices of people most affected by mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex. Through our grassroots organizing, we are building a powerful political movement to win full restoration of our human and civil rights.*

[www.prisonerswithchildren.org](http://www.prisonerswithchildren.org)



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**SELF DETERMINATION  
PLEDGE**

**As members of All of Us or None,  
we pledge:**

**To demand the right to speak in  
our own voices**

**To treat each other with respect  
and not allow differences to  
divide us**

**To accept responsibility for any  
acts that may have caused harm  
to our families, our communities  
or ourselves**

**To fight all forms of  
discrimination**

**To help build the economic  
stability of formerly-incarcerated  
people**

**To claim and take care of our own  
children and our families**

**To support community struggles  
to stop using prisons as the  
answer to social problems**

**To play an active role in making  
our communities safe for  
everyone**

# 2023 Irvine Award Win

by TaSin Sabir, AOUON Newspaper Editor and LSPC Communications Manager



Dorsey Nunn, Executive Director of LSPC and Co-Founder of AOUON. Photo courtesy of James Irvine Foundation

**A**OOUN's very own Dorsey Nunn was one of the seven leaders selected to win the James Irvine Leadership Award. Every year the Foundation honors California leaders that are working on solutions to improve the lives of the people in their community. The Foundation selection process is very competitive and recipients are chosen based on the effectiveness of the leader's work. The recipients receive a \$250,000 grant to support their work, a public art installation to help share their message, and meetings at the capital with policymakers to share their mission and goals. Nunn was joined by his family, friends and colleagues to celebrate with him at the award ceremony February 13, 2023. With this award Nunn will continue to fight for dignity, freedom and opportunities for people currently or formerly incarcerated and the families affected by mass incarceration. These campaigns include Abolishing Bondage Collectively, which aims to end slave labor, Fair Chance Housing, which would ban the box on housing applications, and Visitation as a Right, so loved ones can maintain physical contact with their families inside.

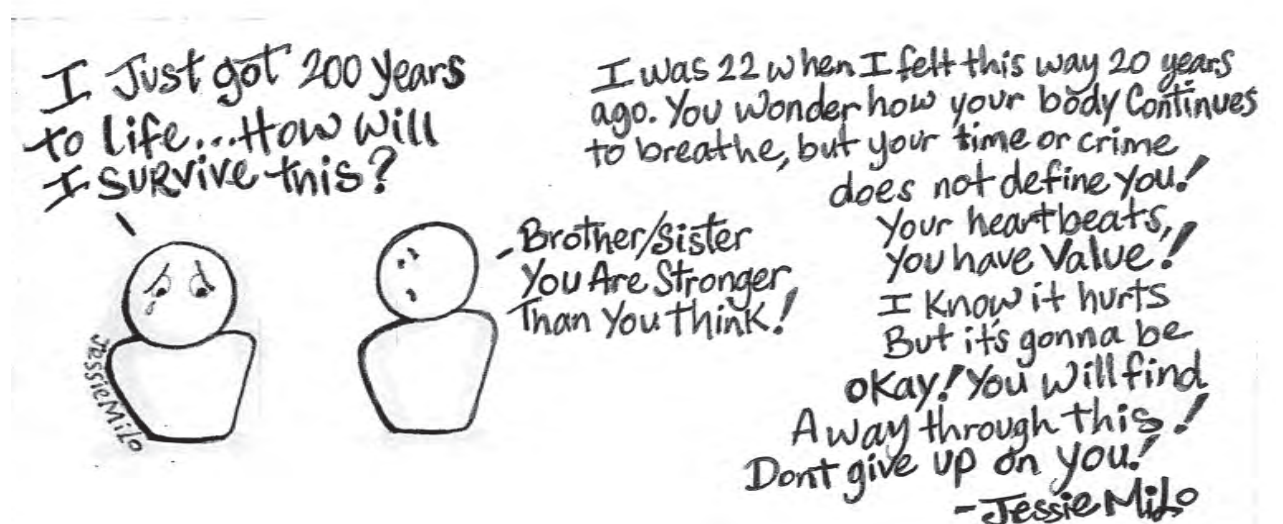
*Congratulations Dorsey Nunn for your continued dedication to the movement!*

## Movement Maker

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- CELEBRATE
- HERSTORY
- MONTH
- SUPPORT
- WOMEN
- VALUES
- STRUCTURE
- MATRIARCH
- MOVEMENT
- HEARTBEAT
- INSPIRATION
- FIGHT
- COMMUNITY
- BUILD
- STORIES
- RESENTENCING
- CONGRATULATIONS
- STRENGTHEN
- ORGANIZING
- DETERMINATION
- HOPE

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Comic by Jessie Milo - California State Prison - Corcoran



# Managing Director Tanisha Cannon

Interview by Jesse Burluson LSPC/AOUON In-Custody Program Coordinator



## Jesse's Corner Women's History Month

I had the pleasure of sitting down with Tanisha Cannon All of Us or None (AOUON) Member since 2018 who in 2022 became the Managing Director for Legal Services for Prisoners with Children (LSPC). Cannon was drawn to the organization's critical approach to advocacy combined with her personal lived experience. Tanisha explains more about this in our interview.

### How are you doing today?

I'm doing well. Thank you, Jesse.

### So we're just gonna go straight into our interview and I don't have that many questions so it shouldn't take much time. My first question is, tell some about your prior work and educational background?

My educational background initially started when I was younger. I always knew that I wanted to help people so I got into sociology for my undergrad. I wanted to work in the probation offices to help folks in probation, thinking I could help individuals on a case-by-case management system, and I quickly found out that wasn't the case. So, I minored in criminal justice and majored in sociology, started working, doing case management, and recognized that one-on-one case management wasn't really helping folks because the systems are so flawed. So I decided to go back to school and get my Master's Degree in Public Administration so I could make changes within the system as a manager. Soon after, I realized that even as a manager I was not able to make changes as much as I thought I would be able to, because the research and the data that they were collecting was not answering the right questions and the way that they were collecting the data wasn't accurate either. I recognized that the way they collected data was mostly quantitative, about numbers and using surveys, and they weren't really listening to people's stories. They needed to hear people's stories in order to provide them with needed services. So I went back to school for research and to get my educational leadership doctorate in social justice. That's kind of my educational background.

### What brought you to LSPC/AOUON?

The Movement. It was more about the critical approach to this work, where they're really more interested in the narrative, in the storytelling, in the lived experience. And focusing on those lived experiences from those that are directly impacted is powerful. And it's the opposite of my experience in the public sector, where the public sector was just making up their ideas of what they thought people needed.

AOUON and LSPC asks the people what they need. They directly ask those impacted how we can help and they use their stories to change policy. And so it's that critical approach what brought me here, speaking in our own voices. Being grounded to the work, that grassroots. It's like this is more than grassroots. It's like out the mud, you know. And so, there's a lot of people that talk the talk, but I think LSPC walks the walk.

### What work are you most passionate about that this organization does?

I think that the work I'm most passionate about is the community organizing and mobilizing people. Really creating a space for people to feel welcome to feel accepted and supported and needed. It's to empower the people. Just to be in community with folks is what I'm really passionate about. And



marks. He doesn't have to say that his mother didn't have a high school education. You know what I'm saying? So yeah, I'm directly impacting generations already.

### What are some things that LSPC is working on currently that helps women?

Currently, the organization is working on the Proximity bill [AB 1226 - a bill that would allow prisoners to transfer closer to home if they have a child under 18], which I think is very powerful, especially because as a child I was not able to see my mom often because she was in prison. We were hours and hours away from her, which requires so much money just to get there, and requires so much time that our caregivers didn't have to take us. So because of that we had to grow up away from our mother. So I think the Proximity bill helps families in general, but specifically it helps children be reunited with their family and stay in contact with their mothers and fathers. So I think one of the most powerful efforts that we have in place right now would have to be that Proximity bill, keeping mothers connected to their families. And shout out to the Visiting Rights bill as well. [AB 958 - which would "restore the right to personal visits"] That is a great bill also.

teaching and educating people and helping advocate for their rights.

### What are some of the challenges that you face in the work you do?

I would say one of the challenges, but also one of the gifts, is dealing with multiple personalities. It is a challenge because you definitely have to learn more about yourself in the way that you interact with other people, but it's also a gift because you learn more about yourself and the way you interact with other folks and being able to listen to people and their experiences and where they came from, but there's always time constraints to that as well. So the biggest challenge is balancing time. Time management is the biggest challenge because I would love to take more time to deeply and truly know people and their experiences. So finding the time to do the work, but also be in community in a way that is genuine.

### What figures or role models or experiences helped form your ideas or inspire you?

I've always been inspired by revolutionaries. Che Guevara, Huey P. Newton, Audrey Lorde. So people that resisted. The resistance has always been an inspiration to me because I've always known that I want to push back against the system. So to have examples of my ancestors that were successful in resisting and sticking true to who they were. I will say that is my inspiration. The struggle is the inspiration. And knowing that I don't have to, that I am the master of my own destiny. And also just knowing that any of these generational things that have happened to me, I have power in changing that for the next generation.

One of my biggest inspirations would be coming from the struggle and then having my son and knowing that he doesn't have to come from that struggle, and that I'm changing the trajectory for my family in the future for generations that will come behind me. I'm the first person, the first of my 10 siblings to graduate high school. I want to be the first person ever in my family to get a doctorate. And that right there is just changing the trajectory of the rest of the generations to follow behind me. Because I used to mark that on my FAFSA application to get money. Are you the first in your family to graduate or to go to college? That used to be yes, but that's not going to be something my son

### How do you see women's role in this movement?

I see AOUON really highlighting women's experiences and perspectives. Historically, women have always led this movement from behind, and not being, you know, acknowledged as much as the men. We think back to the likes of Martin Luther King and Coretta Scott. I know that there's always a strong black woman somewhere holding up a black man. But I think what we're doing in this movement right now is really highlighting the women in leadership and putting more women in these leadership roles, where they are being acknowledged, highlighted, advanced and uplifted. So I see AOUON really bringing women and black women specifically to the forefront of the movement. And as we transition over and we see one of our strongest women out for her retirement, Mrs. Hamdiya, and I say that like that because when I look at her what comes to mind is a matriarch. You know, she's a matriarch in every way, a matriarch of the movement. And so that's how I see AOUON highlighting this movement and with women at the forefront.

### Finally, how can incarcerated women support the movement?

I think incarcerated women can support the movement in multiple ways. One would be just sharing their story, uplifting their voices in their narratives, letting us know what they're experiencing. I think it's important to get that counter narrative. So the best way that women incarcerated can support is storytelling.

### So how can we support getting their stories heard?

This newspaper is a great platform. I encourage women to submit their stories so that their voices are heard by not only the people inside but the people outside. To know what's going on, relate to their stories, identify with them, and hopefully, you know, be able to support causes and actions that are coming from the inside.

### What is the submission process?

Mail submissions to: AOUON Newspaper  
4400 Market Street, Oakland, CA 94608



## Matriarch of the Movement (Continued from page 1)



Hamdiya Cooks-Abdullah speaking at the National Conference in September 2016. Photo by Scott Braley

Despite all this pain Hamdiya remained the woman we know and love today. During her twenty year imprisonment, Hamdiya fought to expand access to Islamic rights for incarcerated women such as the right to wear their hijabs, Islamic diet options, as well as bringing awareness of the AIDS crisis to the women in prison. She was a community leader, organizing black culture workshops in the Federal Correctional Facility in Dublin, CA. She tirelessly committed herself to this role and her community for over fifteen years. Organizing the incarcerated community inside not only uplifted the women she helped through support and education, but it also gave Hamdiya the tools that she would need to mobilize the masses in her future work. Hamdiya has helped countless women garner the tools to stand up for their own rights.

Hamdiya is relentless in her work, having at one point worked many of the positions in the organization. Today as the Administrative Director, she goes above and beyond to make herself always available and is always working for the greater good of the Movement. Wielding her experience and considerable influence like a finely tuned instrument, sharing what she has learned the hard way over time. She is a mentor that uses her experience and knowledge to help us avoid the pitfalls of her own past. She teaches us how to get back up when we fall down. She is a leader that leads by example. Hamdiya's heart work here at LSPC/AOUON has benefited the individuals and families involved but also has created a positive ripple effect on society as a whole. Her work has helped reduce recidivism rates, promoted family sustainability, stability, and strengthened our community.

While there is no way any one of us independently could fill her shoes, Hamdiya has demonstrated and taught her team of staff how to collectively engage our community and to understand the needs of current and formerly incarcerated people so that we can carry on her legacy of serving our people. When asked what her hopes for the future of LSPC, were she stated, "What I would like to see for LSPC is to put good leadership in place that has a long term vision for this movement and end mass incarceration in general. If you don't have that passion and the right people in place it won't last. LSPC has lasted because the right people were at the lead. I am really excited to see who we bring into this fold. I think Tanisha Cannon is amazing and that's a great start but it's going to be more difficult to replace Dorsey Nunn. For AOUON I would like to see AOUON staff really get involved in support of the membership because we have people out there that really want to get involved and we have to figure out how to make that path for them."

Hamdiya's passion for social justice has earned

her numerous accolades. Here at The Freedom and Movement Center, the epicenter of the movement on the corner of 44th and Market in Oakland, CA. This formation that stands before us and shelters us, is the result of the time and work she did to make the Freedom and Movement Center a place All Of Us can call home. As mothers who read this know there is no accolade, achievement, accomplishment or award greater than building a home for your family. For those of us in this office, we could not be more humbled by her service and vicious commitment to our future success both personally, and professionally.

Many of our family members and friends alike have been asking what's next for Hamdiya? She has assured us there is no rest in sight! She has a family that needs her as well as operating a safehouse for women in Phoenix, Arizona where women are able to come and rebuild their lives. In addition to this she has promised to come into the office occasionally! We will for sure look forward to seeing Hamdiya gifting bikes on behalf of incarcerated loved ones at the annual Community Giveback, an event that she has organized for over two decades.

When asked if she had any advice for people still inside, Hamdiya said, "My advice for people inside is don't give up. Don't give up hope that there is another life after incarceration. Because I remember many days and years of feeling hopeless, but also hopeful, because I had good support on the outside. It's important to make those connections with people on the outside that care because that is a really big factor. Making sure that women inside know that they have people outside that care and will go to bat for them. For recently released women it's important to find mentors and people that care about your life beyond incarceration. Establishing AOUON



Hamdiya Cooks-Abdullah in the center, delivering a prayer at a Standing Rock protest to stop the construction of the Dakota Access pipeline.

"I would hope that people recognize that something historic is happening in this country, and that they can be a part of it, whether they've been affected by incarceration themselves or not. Because I think the success of any one of us, speaks to the success of all of us."

-Hamdiya Cooks-Abdullah



Hamdiya Cooks-Abdullah at the 2023 Community Giveback. Photo by TaSin Sabir

was huge for us and for me, because we didn't have that initially, but I did have support from the Muslim community. If people have any spiritual or religious background make those connections real. Keep in contact with people who care about your life and don't go back to the same ol' stuff."

As we near Hamdiya's retirement, fear not family, she has left us with a clear vision for the future of this movement and a home base for our community. She is a matriarch first and foremost in this community and beyond. This is a testament to her dedication to making real and radical changes. She will be sorely missed by all of us and it suffices to say that Hamdiya's legacy is in **All of Us**.



# Fighting Fires for \$1/hour

by Aaliyah Muhammad, Sr. Organizer for AOUON Sacramento CA

**M**y name is Aaliyah Muhammad, I'm employed with Legal Services for Prisoners with Children and a proud member of All of Us or None.

When I was a slave of the state I was known as W029515. I was an inmate firefighter at Camp Puerta La Cruz, in Warner Springs, CA. The training we received was hiking. We would hike 3 1/2 miles several times a week. We depended on and learned from the more experienced inmate firefighters once fire season began.

While I was at fire camp my pay slot was at the top of the CDCR pay scale. While others earned 8 cents, 11 cents, 34 cents per hour in their designated pay slots,

I earned a whopping \$1/hour, but only while fighting a fire. If we stayed overnight, (where we slept on the ground) I earned \$24 for that day.

These are the same furious fires that caused fatalities and loss of homes and structures, that we have been experiencing here in California in the past few years. Inmates, too, fight those fires.

I was blessed to have family and friends support me while I was at the camp. But there were other women who didn't have the support and no funds available until there was a fire. How far can \$24 dollars go, when Dollar Store items are sold on the commissary for \$4.95?

When fire season starts this year, and you see coverage on your local news, look for the people in the orange jumpsuits. These people are your inmate firefighters on the front line, risking their lives for \$1/hour.

Keep your eyes open, because in California, punishment makes slavery look invisible. I support Assembly Member Wilson's "End Slavery in CA Act" and you should too.



Aaliyah Muhammad, Sr. Organizer for AOUON Sacramento CA. Photo by Jasmin Sabir.

# Lori Wilson Announces Introduction of The End Slavery in California Act



Assemblymember Lori D. Wilson on the left looks on as Jeronimo Aguilar, LSPC Policy Analyst, speaks at the End Slavery Press Conference in Sacramento CA, February 15, 2023. Photo by Tanisha Cannon

**O**n Wednesday, February 15, Assemblymember Lori D. Wilson (D - Suisun City) announced the introduction of The End Slavery in California Act. The act is an Assembly Constitutional Amendment that will remove involuntary servitude from the State Constitution, which currently allows the California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation to force incarcerated people to work for little to no pay.

*"This ACA is a massive step in California's quest to end systemic racism. The Constitution of the State of California should espouse true equality for all people, and not perpetuate the lineage of American slavery."* Sam Lewis, Executive Director, Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC)

*"Slavery is a stain on our society that continues to promote the treatment of human beings as property, vessels of economic exploitation, and less than humane. Slavery isn't a theory in our state, it's a practice that must be ended."* - Jeronimo Aguilar, Legal Services for Prisoners with Children

# Policy Update

by Jeronimo Aguilar, LSPC Policy Analyst

**C**amaradas, we are at the start of yet another legislative session, which means that we have begun introducing legislation that can take up to the next two years to get passed. We thank you all for your policy ideas, contributions, and feedback. We are also excited with last year's passage of SB 1008 by Senator Becker, which will allow us to connect with our incarcerated membership on a much deeper level. Further, we can engage our inside membership in our policy work in ways that were not possible in past years. Let's keep building and serving our people! It's an honor to be leading our policy efforts and watch the changes we advocate for creating real change in people's lives. From finishing our ancestors' mission of abolishing slavery through ACA 8 to restoring the right to visit our loved ones, LSPC-AOUON is coming hard for the legislative session 2023-2024! Join us and join the movement!

## End Slavery in CA ACT |ACA 8 – Involuntary Servitude (Wilson)

Article 1, Section 6 of California's Constitution prohibits slavery and involuntary servitude except as punishment to a crime. This measure would remove that exception. Slavery must not be a pillar of CA's Justice System and this amendment will remove the exception from our state's Constitution.

## Visitation as a Right |AB 958 – Prisons: Inmate Visitation (Santiago)

Legal Services for Prisoners with Children's own Coalition for Family Unity has introduced the Visitation as a Right, Not a Privilege Bill. Currently CDCR is able to suspend someone's visitations at their discretion. Not only is that inhumane toward the incarcerated individuals, but also their families, children, and loved ones who should have every right to maintain physical contact with their families inside.

## CA Wage Increase for All |SB – Wage Increase (Kalra)

All working Californians deserve a livable wage that affords them the ability to support themselves, their families, and communities.

## Fair Chance Housing | SB 460 – Hiring of real property: Criminal history (Wahab)

Access to stable housing is a fundamental need for every person, including those with criminal records. Fair Chance Housing dismantles the barriers of stigma and discrimination people with criminal records suffer by giving everyone a fair chance at housing.

## Ban The Box 2 | SB 809 – Employment (Smallwood-Cuevas)

This bill would build on the Fair Chance Act (2017) to ensure that conviction history does not prevent qualified candidates from employment. Employers

would be prohibited from conducting criminal background checks on job applicants and in making employment decisions on that basis, unless otherwise authorized by state or federal law. The bill also strengthens the ability of applicants and the state to enforce the law against violating employers.

## The B.A.S.I.C(s) ACT |SB 474 – (Becker)

The Basic Affordable Supplies for Incarcerated Californians Bill will alleviate cost pressures for incarcerated people and their families by eliminating price markups on items purchased in California's prison canteen stores.

## Youth Restitution |AB 1186 – Restitution: Youth. (Bonta)

Youth Restitution would replace our current youth restitution system with a state-funded compensation model where people who are harmed do not have to rely on payment from a young person and their family and youth can participate more appropriately. The REPAIR (Realizing Equity while Promoting Accountability and Impactful Relief) Act.

## Bench Warrants |AB 1266 – Warrants (Kalra)

Bench Warrants have been utilized to further criminalize, disproportionately, Black and Brown communities for minor infractions that have no bearing on our State's Public Safety.



# Call to Protect Black Women

by TaSin Sabir, AOUON Newspaper Editor and LSPC Communications Manager



Councilmember Carol Fife, in center, supported by All of Us or None. Photo by Alissa Moore

Black Women and allies came together February 9, 2023, on the steps of the Frank Ogawa Plaza in Oakland, CA for a press conference to support the safety of black women, specifically, those working in politics and social justice. Hosted by Carol Fife, councilmember for Oakland CA District 3, started off by saying, “I am so proud to be here with so many people for the same purpose, but it is bittersweet because why we are here is a problem and a growing problem in this country.”

The problem being the increase of violence and harassment towards black women. Not only has the frequency increased but the threat level has escalated.

During Fife’s opening remarks she pauses mid sentence, looks down at the podium and says, “I’m not going to be emotional.” The crowd claps in support. Fife continues, “because I’m angry. And I know the people that are sending these emails and voicemails, they want a reaction.”

State Senator Aisha Wahab was the first speaker who touched upon the fact that there is a history of dehumanizing black women and emphasized that

black women are subjected to “the weighty combination of anti-black racism and misogyny.” Wahab continues to state that, “It is our humility that makes us good allies. Our humility keeps us curious about others life’s experiences. Our humility prevents us from believing we know exactly what it must be like to be a black woman and instead reminds us we can’t possibly know and that is why we need to show up in support and solidarity. I call upon all men sharing space with people who make casual jokes about violence towards women to shut them down. Don’t

just ignore it. Tell them you are not okay. Because your silence will be misinterpreted as support and that misinterpreted support emboldens the men who imagine an army of like minded men behind them to enact the hate and violence we have seen across this country. Other speakers included Assemblymembers Liz Ortega and Mia Bonta. Mia Bonta, who represents Oakland, CA at the state capital reminded the crowd that being a woman in politics is a hard journey. She talked about sacrifices, prejudices and the fear of safety. “To be a black woman, a woman of color who steps up and decides to take a position of power, to take an elected position -- it is a long hard journey. The questions that we ask ourselves are, will our children be safe? Will our mothers be safe? Will I be safe. As i walk the street, as i walk in the city hall, as i walk in the state capital? And the real answer is no. The real answer right now in this moment is no.”

Fife put out a call to action to support the backbone of our community, black women and women of color. This call is to remind us that we are strong and that we will continue to support and protect each other. Council President Nikki Fortunato Bas was one of the speakers and offered her solidarity and appreciation for black women. I understand

that the reason why I am here as the first Filipino councilmember of Oakland and a member of our Asian community in this role is because I stand on the shoulders of black women who have achieved so much to pave this way for other women of color”.

All the speakers offered their support for black women and told their personal stories of harassment they have received by not only the public, but from elected officials.

Everyone deserves dignity and respect and the right to feel safe. These public leaders are mothers, wives, sisters, and not only do they have to think about their safety but the safety of their loved ones.



Carol Fife speaking. Photo by TaSin Sabir

Fife concludes that she doesn’t feel it’s fair that the people who are being harassed have to pay for their own security out of their campaign or community money they have raised. “We should have a system that is actually keeping us safe. That should be intrinsic when you step up.” Says Fife.

Fife is in conversations on how to remedy this and put in place a structure that funds and ensures the safety of political and community leaders.

## Food is the Foundation for Thriving Transitions

by Alissa Moore, 2022 Elder Freeman Policy Fellow

Each year the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation releases 35,000 individuals from prison and 900,000 from jails. The majority of these individuals lack equitable, statewide access to what many would consider basic needs, like food, housing and employment, and other supportive services needed to create a thriving transition. In fact, surveys recently released show that one in five formerly incarcerated individuals has limited access to adequate food. The challenges I faced during my transition home are similar to the thousands of Californians who have also struggled to return to their communities.

I entered the legal system when I was 17 and spent 23 years in it. That means I got an education in the criminal legal system and learned valuable life skills inside the walls of a prison versus from my community. With that lack of education and socialization, comes severe challenges when returning home. It’s a daunting change – to say the least – finding a job, a place to live, and rebuilding relationships with loved ones. These changes are all amplified by poverty and food insecurity. After being released from prison or jail, many of us lack substantial support systems.

I grew up in Mendocino and battled a history of drug use and had experienced extensive trauma. I was 42 years old when I left prison and had to rebuild

my life and move forward. I was able to secure a temporary job and begin focusing on reintegrating into society. Although I was able to start my transition with a car and a job, this is far from the norm for most individuals when they leave prison or jail. My temporary job, access to a car, and housing were not a result of support I received from the California Department of Corrections - they were made possible because of supportive friends and family. As I prepared to leave prison, there were no conversations about what was next or how to connect to services.

Today, I mentor other women leaving the legal system, and I continue to see the cracks in the current infrastructure. There are few to no state sponsored resources, and the ones that are meant to help are often difficult to access. This lack of support is highlighted by the majority of individuals leaving the legal system who have no job opportunities or connections to the community. The majority of Californians who have been impacted by the legal system, including myself, have felt a lot of shame as we’ve returned to our communities without a clear plan. This stress combined with informational and financial barriers only continue the cycle of poverty and ultimately lead to recidivism.

An essential element of reducing this destructive cycle is access to the food individuals need to thrive. Food insecurity, defined by the United



Photo: Shutterstock

States Department of Agriculture (USDA) “as a lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life, widening the barriers to a thriving transition back to community. The current system lacks statewide integration furthering inequity and should be addressed. California has an opportunity to submit the statewide federal waiver necessary to ensure that CalFresh is included in the transition process prior to release from California’s prisons and jails and back to community. Everyone in California should have access to nutritious food. Incorporating CalFresh into the statewide re-entry process is one step of many toward creating a thriving transition for individuals returning home from jail or prison.



# Sister to Sister (Continued from page 1)

After taking off everything I thought would make the alarms go off, including my earrings, the bobby pins in my hair, my bracelets, my coat, a pen, which I gave to a CCWP comrade, it still took three tries to get through security. I wore all black, a scarf with an African print and earrings shaped like the continent of Africa. I thought my adornment would cheer the sisters up and when the guard looked skeptically at my earrings and then at me and started to tell me I couldn't wear them, his eyes centered on the Horn of Africa...I had to press my lips together and not speak as he left to consult a colleague.

I let out a sigh of relief when he returned and made no comment.

The three of us, Hafsa, Hamdiya and I, were running late. The women had been waiting since 9:30 a.m. when we arrived at 10:00 a.m. We only got lost once—we couldn't find Hwy. 238 to get back to I-580 E, but after backtracking we figured it out.

In the prison parking lot we ran into the other CCWP team: "the white team," which included an attorney, board members and volunteers. Once we'd all cleared security and set up, we then proceeded to meet with the women who'd signed up in advance to visit with us. Files were pulled out and materials: informative articles and the CCWP newsletter, "The Fire Inside," were given to each woman. We bought refreshments for the women, including hot food, salads, and fresh fruit which included oranges and avocados, which many women hadn't had in a long time. We also bought popcorn, candy and sodas for the women. I called it going shopping and had to press the women into not being thrifty, just asking for what they wanted so we could treat them.

I felt an immediate affinity with the first woman I met. She and I hit it off and felt so connected and happy to be talking to each other. We knew some of the same people like Steve Champion, a good friend of Stanley "Tookie" Williams. She was the first female member of the Crips, she said. She and Stanley were like brother and sister and she was happy to hear I was in touch with Adisa (Steve). We discovered we'd also read a lot of the same books, like Edwidge Danticat's "Krik Krak," and agreed philosophically on a lot of issues, especially the role of women in Islam.

It was with reluctance that we ended our conversation when I was told our time was up --there were other women waiting to come in to speak to me, and they weren't allowed in until the others returned, sort of like a tag team or what I'd call a bureaucratic red tape relay. There was no one in the huge room except us. There was plenty of room for the women to hang out afterwards and relax. But I didn't create the stringent rules of engagement, was new on the front line and didn't want to rock any boats--after all, this was a prison. I even let the guard put a stamp on my wrist so if there was a question of who was incarcerated or not, the infrared bulb would verify my right to leave. Yes, I know the language is horrible. Of course all the women should have the right to leave, especially given the horrible treatment the sick women, the women in skilled nursing, were receiving.

And so it went all day--"time's up in 10 minutes Wanda", until my last conversation.

My last interview was with a cute kid, petite, hair braided, she reminded me of Sister Souljah's character "Winter," in looks. There the parallel ended. She was 15 when the ordeal began. A straight A student at the time when she ran away from home, this young woman has spent 13 years behind bars serving a life sentence. I met her last, and couldn't help but see my daughters reflected in her face. Bright, she could be my child. One impulsive action changed her life forever. It was the same with other women I met; most charged with murder or accessory to murder, the minimum length spent behind bars 30 years. These were not old women either. The 28-30 year sentences started when most of the women were 19-20 years old, which meant all of them were either my age or a little younger. I thought about what a waste of human potential and human life these crazy long and punitive sentences were. And then I reflected on the added burden youth or disability added to the situation.

I sit here the day after heavy with the knowledge that if more citizens understood what goes on behind bars and the important work organizations like the California Coalition for Women Prisoners, Sister-to-Sister project, do, the passage of laws like the recent Proposition 9 which makes it harder for those incarcerated to get paroled, would cease.

My heart went out to the woman I met whose butchered body and chronic pain didn't stop her from smiling and caring about the women who were not seated in the room with us, as she asked me to address the pressure administration placed on her to have surgeries which are not only ineffective, they are often unnecessary and dangerous to her health.

**"In a panel I facilitated in 2007 we asked the question, "Who are California's incarcerated women and why should we care?" The answer is they are our mothers and sisters, aunts and grandmothers, neighbors, even daughters. They are American citizens with rights going unaddressed and ignored."**  
- Wanda Sabir

I met women writers whose stories reflect a reality and an ideology which is often life affirming and filled with success based on a belief that if one doesn't advocate for one's rights, a right to decent treatment and a right to freedom and release from bondage, one will never be free. One woman shared her insight into the criminal justice process, a recent one, when she said she believed in the process. She thought if she did what she was told, she would be freed. She learned that this system is not concerned with what is right, it is concerned with continuing a corporation which employs generations in one family.

Children in California's Central Valley look at law enforcement and the prison industrial system as potential career opportunities. I don't know the percentages, but with the shrinking agricultural segment of our economy, with the demise of family farming, dairies, ranching and other agriculturally based incomes, the prison system has become the career of choice for physicians, psychologists, high school graduates and drop-outs, police, and veterans of war. Corporations are able to find cheap labor. The imprisoned laborers are the new indentured servants or sharecroppers or sweatshop employees. One doesn't have to look at Haiti or Korea or Taiwan, look at California's vast pool of incarcerated women and men and children, and one sees the reasons why blue collar jobs are disappearing, why factories are closing.

Legal advisers are cautioning their clients against going before parole boards unless their cases are airtight, but when is justice ever on the side of a client whose life is dependent on the will of an appointed judiciary body who often sees their job as one which makes it nearly impossible to ever get out of prison?

I sat speaking to a woman who has organized fundraisers for an organization which reunites mothers with their children. She said the recent fundraiser was her 99th. The amount raised was \$65,000. The way she did it was to connect with a vendor who could supply the items she wanted to sell such as large bottles of body lotion, buckets of fried chicken, and other items, and then had the women purchase these items. With a population of 4000 at the prison and the quality of the merchandise, coupled with the need, the sale seemed an easy one.

I thought about how great it would be if this same entrepreneur raised such funds for CCWP and for organizations like Ida McCray's Families with a Future, which seeks to unite children with their incarcerated parents, providing support—specifically psychological support, outside the prison and within for both.

By the time I spoke to the last woman yesterday, I was brain dead, literally. I couldn't remember my

name and all the stories were one. I took a water break to clear my head, so I could focus. I began to appreciate what Hafsa said on the way down to the prison, that she often felt like crying as she listened to the stories of suffering, let me add, unnecessary suffering, these women have been subject to. When I think about one woman's inability to get denture cream so she can chew, her dentures 35 years old. That she is ineligible for a kidney transplant because she is incarcerated, yet the renal problems the result of 15 years incarcerated in a place where the drinking water was polluted (Valley State Prison for Women). She was transferred to the medical facility because it has dialysis. I met another woman who was sentenced to Central California's Women's Facility the year after it opened in 1990, and has been there ever since. Still another woman requested a transfer to CCWF from a Southern California facility so she could continue her job preparation in information systems. CCWF is where women are executed, and is the larger of the two facilities. Both are over crowded. CCWF has a juvenile facility where young offenders are housed until they are 18. My last conversation was with an incarcerated woman who turned 18 at CCWF, once she was aged out of youth correctional facility in Ventura and Sacramento.

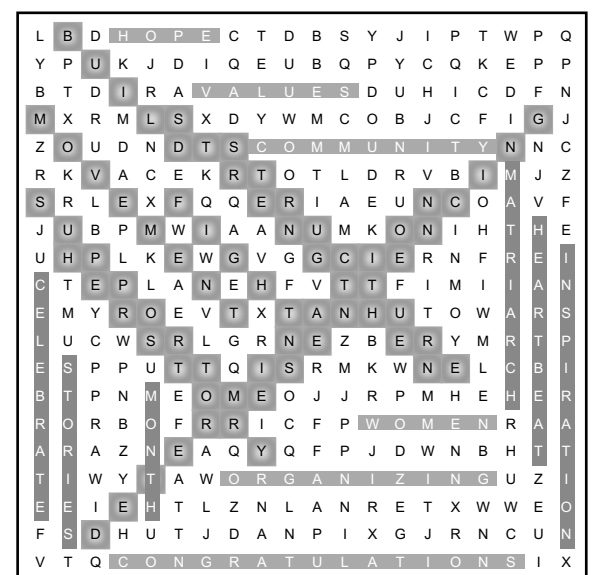
I am full and this year, as I figure out the second half of this journey and who and what I want to take along for this next portion of the ride, I monitor my energy and think long and hard about not allowing myself to linger in despair or entertain hopelessness. I can't, these women need me. I wasn't given these stories to hold, rather it is my job to move them along, to find resources to address the medical malpractice issues facing one woman, the pending board hearing facing another and the righteous anger, grief and regret facing another.

As I reflect on these women, their desire to live and help each other live, I am encouraged, because given the personal stories, so many could choose to end their lives. In more than one conversation I learned of suicide attempts. My second conversation was with a woman who tried to kill herself more than once. She was sitting with us because a "sister" made it possible for her to see us as an emergency appointment. The woman I saw was in crisis and crisis trumps race.

In a panel I facilitated in 2007 we asked the question, "Who are California's incarcerated women and why should we care?" The answer is they are our mothers and sisters, aunts and grandmothers, neighbors, even daughters. They are American citizens with rights going unaddressed and ignored.



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# ALL OF US OR NONE

Slave, who is it that shall free you?  
Those in deepest darkness lying,  
Comrade, only these can see you  
Only they can hear you crying.  
Comrade, only slaves can free you.  
Everything or nothing. All of us or none.  
One alone our lot can't better.  
Either gun or fetter.  
Everything or nothing. All of us or none.

You who hunger, who shall feed you?  
If it's bread you would be carving,  
Come to us, we too are starving.  
Come to us and let us lead you.  
Only hungry ones can feed you.  
Everything or nothing. All of us or none.  
One alone her lot can't better.  
Either gun or fetter.  
Everything or nothing. All of us or none.

Beaten one, who shall avenge you?  
You, on whom the blows are falling,  
Hear your wounded comrades calling.  
Weakness gives us strength to lend you.  
Come to us, we shall avenge you.  
Everything or nothing. All of us or none.  
One alone his lot can't better.  
Either gun or fetter.  
Everything or nothing. All of us or none.

Who, oh wretched one, shall dare it?  
We who can no longer bear it.  
Counts the blows that arm our spirit.  
Taught the time by need and sorrow,  
Strikes today and not tomorrow.  
Everything or nothing. All of us or none.  
One alone our lot can't better.  
Either gun or fetter.  
Everything or nothing. All of us or none.

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956)

**AOUON is a grassroots organizing project of Legal Services for Prisoners with Children (LSPC) fighting to restore the civil and human rights of formerly and currently incarcerated people and our families. Started in California in 2003, AOUON currently has chapters all over the country advocating effectively to Ban the Box, restore voting rights, increase access to housing and education, and end mass incarceration. We demand a voice in building healthy communities.**

**LSPC organizes communities impacted by the criminal justice system and advocates to release incarcerated people, to restore human and civil rights, and to reunify families and communities. We build public awareness of structural racism in policing, the courts, and prison system, and we advance racial and gender justice in all our work. Our strategies include legal support, trainings, advocacy, public education, grassroots mobilization, and developing community partnerships.**



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## All of Us or None Membership Form | Yes, I want to become a member of ALL OF US OR NONE!

Name & Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Country of Origin: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have children? YES / NO. Do you need support with family issues? YES / NO

Earliest Parole/Release Date: \_\_\_\_\_ County of Parole/Probation: \_\_\_\_\_

- I can organize & facilitate group meeting
- I can help with membership outreach
- I can distribute materials & resources
- I can address & pass along feedback

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