

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!

SEPT 2023



Artwork by Donald Diggs (AOUON Member)



Welcome Home Ruchell!

Ruchell Magee was just released from prison after 67 years caged!

by Claude Marks
Reprinted from SF Bay View Newspaper

July 28, 2023 – Ruchell Magee is 84 years old and has spent most of his life behind bars. Throughout his 67 years of unjust captivity, Ruchell has been one of the first and most consistent prisoners linking mass incarceration and the U.S. prison system to slavery. Ruchell Magee took the name Cinque from the enslaved African Sengbe Pieh, who led an 1839 rebellion to commandeer the slave ship La Amistad, arguing that Africans have the right to resist “unlawful” slavery. Ruchell maintained that Black people in the U.S. have the right to resist this new form of slavery, which is part of the colonial control of Black people in this country:

“Slavery 400 years ago, slavery today. It’s the same but with a new name.”

“My fight is to expose the entire system, judicial and prison system, a system of slavery ... This

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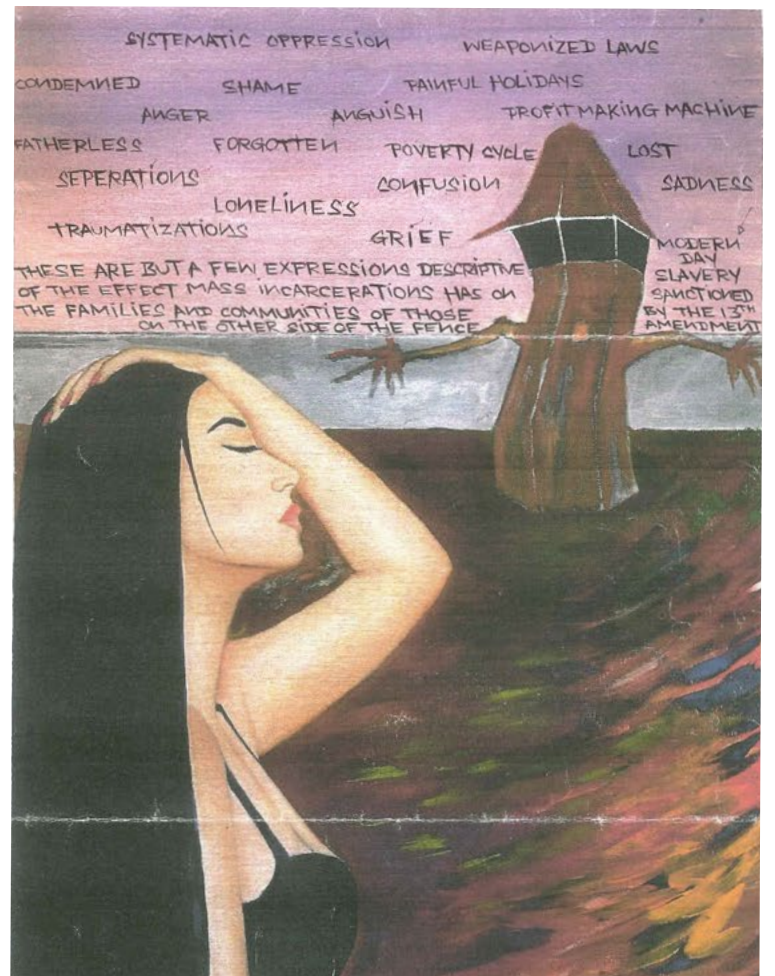
VERSE & VISION

EDITION

ShatteRed Authority

by Valerie Nessler (Central California Women's Facility)

Who **DO YOU** think you are pressing around here doing as you please? Don't you **KNOW YOU HAVE** destroyed so many lives? You are on punishment, a threat to society. What gives you **THE RIGHT TO LIVE LIFE** and why are you **SMILING**? I'll teach you, turn around, I'm going to pat you down and take anything that gives you comfort as a matter of fact, **LET'S GO!** behind the curtain. I'm going to humiliate you. Coughing while squatting. That outta do the trick. When you walk out. **I HOPE YOU FEEL** “Less than” because I'm **IN CONTROL OF YOU. YOU HAVE** been stripped of your **RIGHTS**. It doesn't matter if I was even born then, I'm still your authority. Why are you talking and laughing? Get to work, I'm the boss. No one knows I'm a crook, just like you. Do what I **SAY** or I'll write you up. That feels great. **I HAVE** no **CONTROL** in my aspect **OF MY LIFE**, so I'll take it out on you because you live in this place of human wreckage and **YOU DESERVE IT.**



Artwork by Marlon Siguenza (Soledad, CA)



ALL OF US OR NONE
NEWSPAPER

(Vol. 4, Issue 9)

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Ruchell Magee Was Just Released!

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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



AOUON Editor in Chief: TaSin Sabir
4400 Market Street, Oakland, CA 94608



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



Artwork by Joe Widby (California State Prison, LA)

During a war long long ago

by Mark G., AOUON member

During a war long long ago

After I had faced myself and who we are

I walked onto a high school campus, leaflets in hand.

Come to say what I had done and seen - what for them remained unknown and unseen

Campus security told me, "Can't do that, had to leave"

PUFF!!! Dealt with that

So he returns in trail of two adults, one in uniform - no gun - so, I got to leave, but I do it real slow, givin leaflets as I go.

Front of the school when the rollers show

That's how I come to be in court, a felony me, when mama and her three lady friends approached the bench dressed in they Sunday go to meet best Coats over they left arms, mama was 65 to 105, and the ladies too

Baby faced, blond, blue eyed uniform holdin a one pound can of planters peanuts waits at the bench - with the judge

Now mama starts singin and dancin - tellin her tale about dem peanuts

She turns this way, she turns that way, spinnin round - round - round - tellin that judge where it's at

Heads look on up - you see that - hear how she talks to the judge

Buzzin through the court room feelin it build

People start smilin, making eye contact

Buzzin through the court room feelin it build

She talkin like that to the judge maybe we can too!!

Buzzin through the court room feelin it build

Now, mama still singin and dancin telling her tale to the judge, about a one pound can of planter peanuts

And the ladies in support come with it

That's right!

Amen!

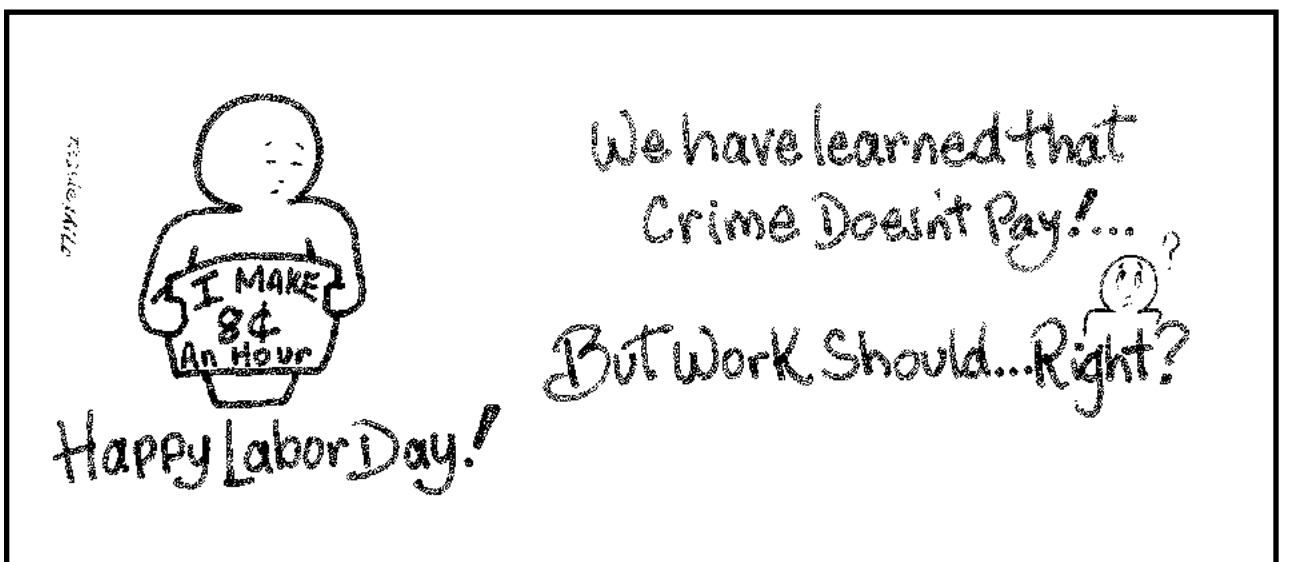
You tell him sister!!!

And BLAMMM!!! Down! Come the gavel

"One year, county work house, Next case!"

Comic by Jessie Milo

(San Quentin, CA)





AMERICA'S LEFTOVERS

Artwork by TaSin Sabir, 2004

This country does not know what to do with its Black population now that they are no longer a source of wealth, are no longer to be bought and sold like cattle.¹ America is the world's greatest jailer, and we are all in jail. Black spirits contained like magnificent birds of wonder.² It is a sad feeling to be afraid of one's own country.³ I've been in slavery my whole life ain't nothing changed by the address.⁴

Quotes: 1. James Baldwin, 2. Larry Neal, 3. Harriet Jacobs, 4. James Brown

Jesse's Corner

by Jesse Burlison LSPC/AOUON In-Custody Program Coordinator



I want to keep ACA 8 and ACA 4 front and center. ACA 8, The End Slavery Act, would change the California Constitution and make it illegal for the state to discipline a prisoner for refusing to work. That's huge! Many people don't even know that prisoners are "coerced" into working. If an incarcerated person refuses to work, he or she will receive disciplinary actions and can be forced to stay in prison longer. If you work or don't work while in prison you are still living in slave quarters. But if you are assigned a job then, whether you are Black, White, or Brown, you are an active slave. Why? Because you can't say "no" to that job without being disciplined for doing so. The writing pen has become the modern-day whip. That law needs to change and ACA 8 would change it. ACA 8 would

give you the right to say "no". You would have the power to choose.

ACA 4, Eligibility to Vote, would make everyone inside prison eligible to vote. That means if ACA 4 passes 90,000 new voters are born! There are over 90,000 persons currently incarcerated in the California state prison system. But there are also over 1 million (1,000,000) formerly incarcerated eligible voters in California who did state time. And, there are another 8 million formerly incarcerated eligible voters in California who did county time. Together, we have the numbers to not only engage mainstream politics, but to be heavy weights in mainstream politics.

Prayers for Tommy Acosta



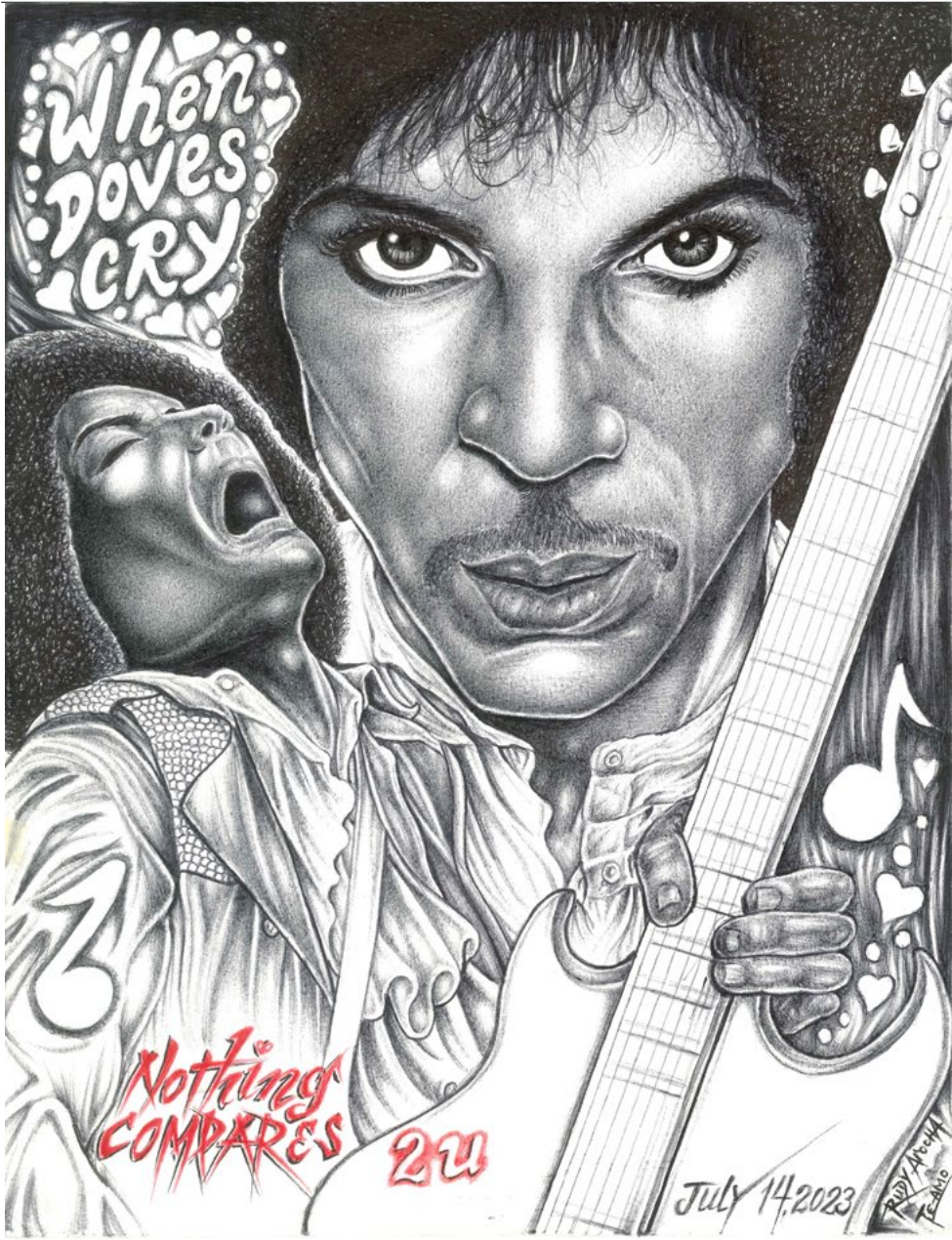
Tommy Acosta is a co-founding member of the first All of Us or None Chapter outside of California; 18 years ago in San Antonio, Texas. They say that everything in Texas is big and there may be some truth to that, the task of working in the community under any circumstances is no little feat, from the mission, to the people who carry it out, it takes big thinking and big hearts. That's why he is the National Ambassador of the Carnalismo Brown Berets. Tommy has taken big steps in hopes of creating change in small communities with very big problems.

Tommy founded Big homie street mentoring/Ministry in 2017 collaborating with ministries throughout San Antonio mentoring people of all ages and helping those experiencing homelessness but primarily, focused on serving youth and young adults from underserved areas. From organizing families to empowering and educating at-risk youth he has fought on every corner of the city confronting many issues facing struggle all along the way.

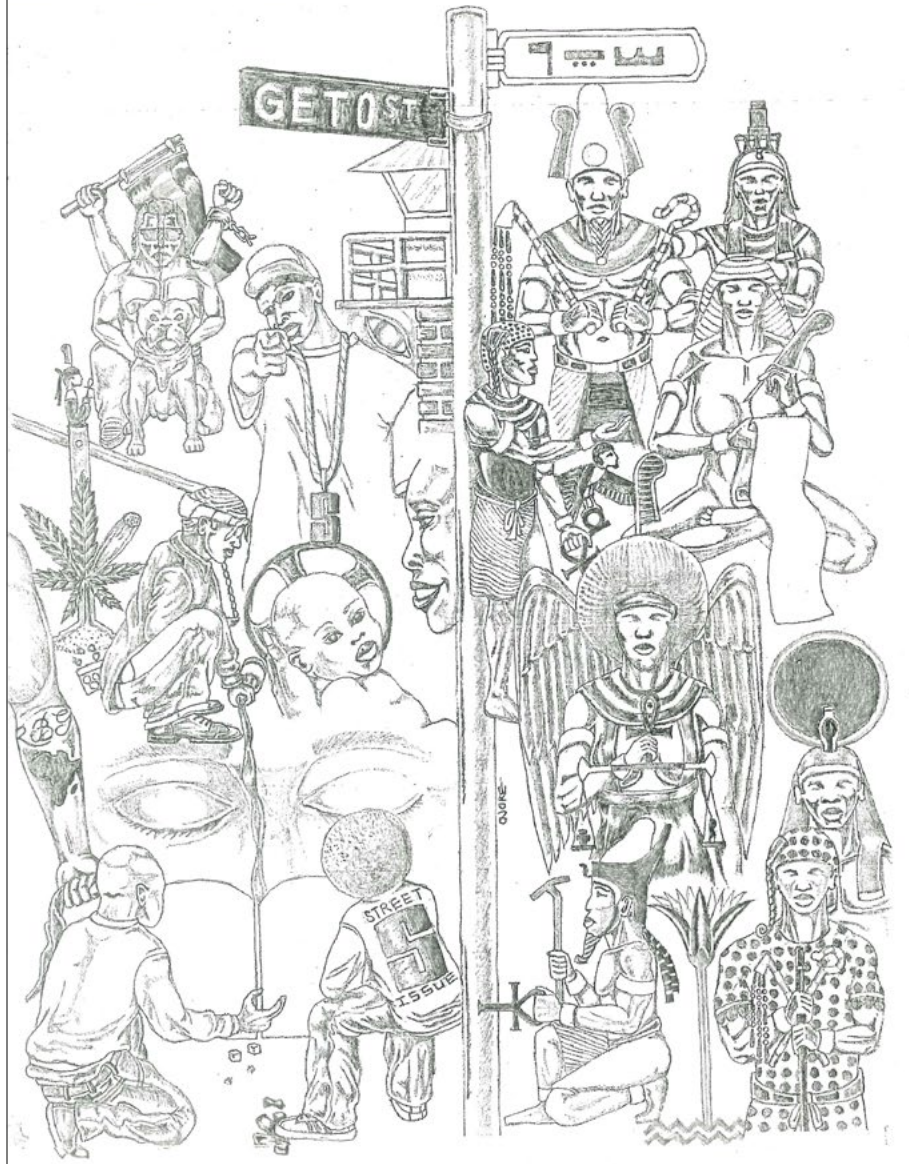
It is with great sadness to inform you that Tommy Acosta was diagnosed with stage 4 liver cancer permanently altering his life path forward. We are reaching out and humbly asking family and friends and those of you in our community who understand just how devastating Cancer can be to one's life for your help. He has contributed over 18 years of organizing the All of us or None Chapter to improve and advance our communities. Since his diagnosis he has been quietly and bravely fighting this disease, enduring multiple doctor visits and receiving oral Chemotherapy once a week which has come with a cost of insurance denying a large portion of medical treatment. Donations are needed and appreciated, and even if you are not able to donate to this cause, prayers will be incredibly helpful.

Donate at:
gofund.me/bab9ac52





Artwork by Rudy Arocha (Soledad, CA)



Artwork by Ojore Mckinnon (San Quentin, CA)



Artwork by Donald Diggs (AOUON Member)

The Alchemy of Forgiveness

by Bruce Swenson (California State Prison, Corcoran)

While it is recognized that the terms "forgiveness" are to be avoided in one's remorse letter, still we do need to give way to the spirit of healing for all concerned.

Healing is a choice. And in any healing process the alchemy of forgiveness will be there in that process too. So, forgiveness does have its place.

When expressed appropriately, we may say we have forgiven yourself. In this way we are providing an example of past traumatic growth from within our own awakened being; we are showing our change is real.

Victims may also choose to accept their own healing. However, this can only occur when their embrace of forgiveness broadens enough to include themselves and others concerned.

Forgiveness is not to be expected of any victim. God's hope is that they too will eventually find healing, in their own time, through their own choice for internal peace. In this way the alchemy of forgiveness serves in fullness for all concerned.

Deadman Talkin'

by Ojore McKinnon (San Quentin, CA)

Look who's talkin,
A deadman walkin,
Coming live from death row,
Payin a debt a jury says I owe,
My life, was decided by who put on the best show,
My innocence, never was an issue,
The D.A. said, "I'm out to get you,"
Now I'm waitin in the attorney line,
Behind the guilty, who admitted their crimes,
Where are the protesters for my injustice,
Where are the people I entrusted,
I'm a deadman talkin with disgust,
After this, they will want to censor my written talk,
They already scan my nuts
And eye my butt,
But I have no intentions on shuttin up.
Let me tell ya, the death penalty is no deterrent
When murder continues to be a reoccurrence,
Just admit, it's revenge
A systems means to an end,
Sin begets sin,
Cruel and inhumane treatment is your trend
But I will bare it and grin,
Even when your torture makes me bend.
Sentenced under the anti-terrorism effective death
penalty act,
My terror, my rights being attacked,
Suspending my due process and illegal search and
seizure under your
Patriot act,
This has happened,
For talkin, I'm labeled an enemy combatant,
How do I fight against your terrorism
And state bred racism
And every other one of your isms,
My public tribunal was of your peers,
Judgin me not on evidence, but on their fears.
Instant terrorist,
And united snakes politricks,
The same Dick and Bush shit

They fuckin you and me
And got me communicatin with T.V.,
Respondin to the propoganda I see and hear.
A deadman talkin
Got to watch where he's walkin,
I live under the gun,
Walk under the gun,
Patiently waiting on my execution date to come
And live T.V., will be banned
But I seen the execution of a woman in Afghanistan.
Yes, they will execute the innocent,
They have done it before, what makes me different?
The same they, that professed the innocence of Jews
in Iran
And went as far as makin release demand,
DAMN!
And I'm a stipulated Amerikan.
Y'all don't hear me,
Did I tell ya, most plead guilty?
Society I object,
To your legal right to inject,
Me with murderous poisons,
You already got me illegally in prison,
Told me ignorance of the law is no excuse,
You should've told that to the attorney you appointed
for my use
And addressed the government's misconduct and
abuse.
You make 'em, you break 'em,
They are your laws,
You raised reasonable doubt and won on probable
cause,
I'm too black for you to see your flaws
And the nerve of you, to require me to sign the death
certificate
Or it's the choice of your wish,
Gas or electricity,
Isn't this a crime against humanity?

Ruchell Magee (Continued from page 1)

cause will benefit not just to myself but to all those who at this time are being criminally oppressed or enslaved by this system.”

“You have to deal on your own tactics. You have a right to take up arms to oppose any usurped government, particularly the type of corruption that we have today.” – Ruchell Magee

Ruchell’s political stance and writings point out the need for a prison abolitionist movement to seriously address the historical legacy of slavery and slave rebellions in order to truly be in solidarity with the millions of people incarcerated in the U.S.

Early life

Ruchell Magee, was born in Louisiana in 1939. In 1956, he was sentenced to 12 years of forced labor for the alleged attempted rape of a white woman in August 1955. But all the circumstances indicate that this case was replete with racist and false identification – at first the alleged victim failed to identify Magee, but at a second opportunity, all of a sudden, she did. It is clear that this was a case of “Southern justice” – the jury was all white, the trial lasted just one day and it took the jurors just a fraction of that time to send Magee away for 12 years. Also Emmett Till was murdered in August 1955 for a similar unfounded accusation.

He spent almost seven years under a brutal labor regime in the infamous Louisiana State Penitentiary known as “Angola” and was released on parole in 1962. Ruchell moved to Los Angeles. He got involved in a quarrel about 10 dollars worth of marijuana ending in a kidnapping charge for which there is very little evidence and which he denies to this very day.

He was sentenced to a prison term of seven years to life for aggravated kidnapping which carried a penalty of up to five years. This trial lasted two days. He had spent only a few months in freedom after his release from Angola.

Ruchell’s conviction appeal was denied in 1965. He spent the time after his conviction in San Quentin prison where he started “jailhouse lawyering” and he met prison activist George Jackson, who also had a California-type sentence of one year to life. The parole boards regularly denied their releases. Ruchell became a major participant in the movement for prisoner rights and continued the fight for his release.

By Aug. 7, 1970, Ruchell had spent almost 15 years in prison for charges that he continues to deny. That day, he was called along with another prisoner, William Christmas, as a witness in a prison murder case. Suddenly, George Jackson’s younger brother Jonathan entered the courtroom with a number of weapons, which he distributed among the defendants in the case – James McClain, as well as Magee and Christmas. They took the judge, an assistant attorney, and three jurors hostage, demanding liberty for George Jackson and the guarantee of safe conduct for themselves.

However, when the group went to a waiting van that Jonathan Jackson had brought with him and tried to leave the Marin County Courthouse premises, the Marin County police and San Quentin guards opened fire. When the shooting stopped, Judge Harold Haley, Jonathan Jackson, William Christmas and James McClain lay dead. Ruchell was unconscious and seriously wounded as was the prosecutor.

As the sole survivor of the group, Ruchell was charged with simple kidnapping, aggravated

kidnapping and murder, along with Angela Davis, who was alleged to have provided Jonathan Jackson with the guns. The trials against Angela and Ruchell were then separated; Davis was acquitted of all charges in 1972.

According to an affidavit by the jury foreperson, Ruchell’s own 1973 trial ended with a hung jury and then voted unanimously to acquit him of the aggravated kidnapping charge, voted 11 to 1 to acquit him of the murder charge, and found him guilty of simple kidnapping. During the trial, an autopsy of the judge who had been killed clearly showed that Ruchell had not been responsible for his death. Even so, parole commissions deciding on Ruchell’s release and the media have regularly mentioned his responsibility for the murder.

Even though there isn’t the slightest piece of evidence that Ruchell Magee knew anything about the planned liberation of prisoners in the court in San Rafael at any time before Aug. 7. On Jan. 23, 1975, Magee was sentenced to life in prison. After his conviction he was moved from San Quentin prison to the high security Folsom prison.

Once the facts can be clearly established and shown to the people, where these dogs are practicing slavery under the color of law, then this automatically requires a special investigation by the people to look for themselves. They will find that these judges are criminals.

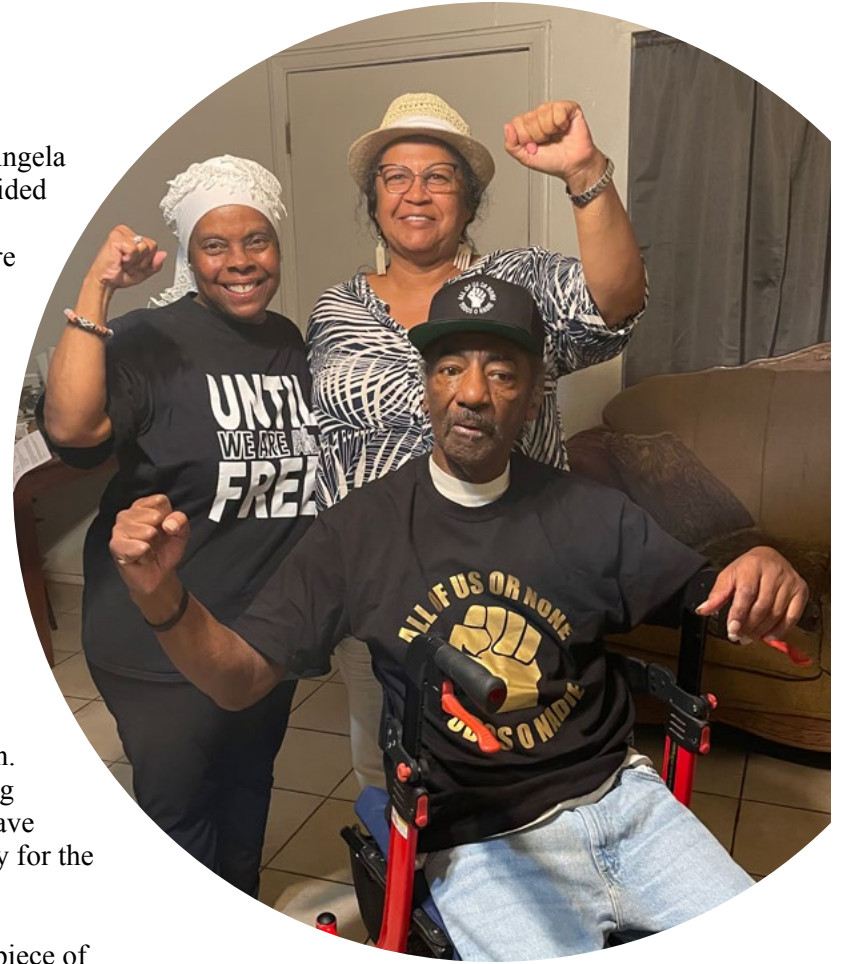
—Ruchell Magee

This is where his first of 16 parole hearings took place. Ruchell also spent nearly 10 years of his sentence in the infamous Special Housing Unit at Pelican Bay. Given the way the facts of Aug. 7, 1970, were presented and the way Ruchell himself was characterized, the results were hardly surprising – it was taken for granted that Ruchell had in fact killed Judge Haley, even though the autopsy presented at the 1973 trial showed that he had not, and even though the prosecution itself had dropped the murder charge after that first trial.

These parole hearings also demonstrated the political character of Ruchell’s continued incarceration. The parole process decided that the prisoner cannot be released for explicitly political reasons, namely because he rejects the legality of his conviction and because he refuses to pronounce himself guilty.

In fact, Ruchell has always insisted that the reason for his participation in the abortive 1970 rebellion was the very fact that he had been “unjustly put behind bars” and therefore had the right to liberate himself. This position is the basis for arguing that slavery for many has not ended – especially for Black prisoners facing a parole process that insists on the admission of guilt and responsibility as the basis for release consideration.

Ruchell Magee has over the decades been one of the most consistent and successful jailhouse lawyers and an advocate for other prisoners.



Ruchell Magee in center with Hamdiya Cooks-Abdullah (l) and Vonya Quarels (r) on August 2, 2023

Ruchell secures his freedom

On July 15, 2021, Ruchell was denied parole for the 16th time. In 2023, Ruchell Magee signed a petition for compassionate release after incessant work to challenge the legitimacy of his imprisonment.

It’s important to note that the specific way Ruchell is being released is through the new California compassionate release law, Assembly Bill 960, which many prison justice organizations worked to put through. AB 960, which went into effect on Jan. 1, 2023, added Penal Code §1172.2 and changed the basis for compassionate release from six months left to live to someone who has a serious and advanced illness with an end-of-life trajectory or who is found to be permanently medically incapacitated.

Also, it created a presumption that the person is entitled to release unless there is an unreasonable risk that the incarcerated person will commit a new violent felony. The risk has to be based on the person’s actual capacity and not just speculation. The new law takes the decision for release recommendations out of the hands of the punitive prison system hierarchy and gives them to the prisons’ medical executives, who at least for now are more humane than the guards who’ve worked their way to the top of the system. Finally, the new law lets prisoners or their family ask the top doctor at each prison to review their case and set things in motion.

These small reforms proved to be the pathway for freedom for Ruchell, along with a lot of organizing work and a great lawyer.

“But even with the new law, it was a pitched battle. We had to sue the prison bureaucracy to force them to ask the courts to release Ruchell, and then we had to fight the Attorney General, who lied about Ruchell and clearly wanted him to die in prison,” said Mark Kleiman, Ruchell’s lawyer. Significantly, there are many other people in California’s prisons who should also be able to win release through this new law, according to Kleiman.

The Coalition to Free Ruchell Magee and other supporters are raising money to ease Ruchell’s transition from prison. Please consider making a donation. Visit: www.bit.ly/Ruchell



Artwork by Selina Flores (Dublin, CA)

Elegy

by Ojore McKinnon (San Quentin CA)

*I cry:
To cleanse my psyche and thoughts of resonating pain and regrets that haunt me. This natural baptism, purifies my emotion and sentiments, opening the way for healing those festering wounds and spoiled thoughts. The deluge from tear ducts allow new growth to unfurl and my empathy to reconstitute.*

*I cry:
Due to my past immaturity and irresponsibility, that mischaracterized my manhood and hampered my fatherhood. The result of my decisions is the cause of the chasm that's continually widening, becoming a longing absence between my daughter and I. Mirroring the chasm between my father and I. My only relief from my betrayal, my lamentation and making amends for forsaking her. I sob for duplicating the actions of my absent father.*

*I cry:
Due to the obstructions. The obstructions that prevent me from living up to family status and solidifying that kindred love to my abandoned love one. Simultaneously, I'm denied the outpouring of affection from their open hearts and arms that extend from my young admirers. Yet, many of them regularly console me and make me feel loved; infusing me with vigor and sincerity. In my solitude, my shuttered eyes*

shed tears, as my thoughts flicker, playing back records of images of my family. It's their ever present vibrant faces I plaster to the walls of my confinement. I mask my sorrow every time we disconnect at the conclusion of our five hour visits that humble and humanize me.

*I cry:
Tattoo tears that permanently mark my face, denoting the scarification of my seconds and decades of incarceration; and reveals the pillage of my freedom and the pilfering of my mind and body. The consequence of injustice, and the inability to weigh rectitude, opposite my birthmark on the scales of justice. Instead I'm burden by the ever present thumb on the scales; blindfold shielding the sight of my grimace and the blood in my eye.*

*I cry:
For the identical reasons I write.
To release what excites me; and to express what ails me. My tears scroll over flesh streaking emotions that can only be read like the scrawls on my palms. Tear drops imbue on paper; to be absorbed through the pupils of my fellow readers
Who are moved to a wordless cry.*

Yes, we lament together.

Tookie "Ajamu" Williams

by Oba Shabazz (FCI Herlong, CA)

Your youthful agility motivates me to catch a glimpse of unfiltered power.

A cultural initiation that sprawl leaders

I salute you

I salute the pride that activated the way you stepped...

The light that caused you to stand

Re-birth like a phoenix

I salute you...

For challenging your own genius which was the way you let your excellence shine

Your story standing still in the motion of time

Claiming your spirit, greeting your mind

I salute you...

How you refuted the expectations and flipped the odds of the beast by breaking their chains you approached death while

giving life by speaking to the souls of those entering Black thought, modeling a change.

I salute you...

As my comrade marching in unison to a destined place that is preserved by our ancestors

Unified in aim, purpose and cause...

No doctrine could manifest a more beautiful place

I salute you

I salute your intellect which represents the infinite universe where the stars twinkle bright

You discovered cosmic wisdom while facing your fate in life

I salute you Ajamu

I salute you with Black Love!

Ase' Ase' Ase'

Doing my Time

by Oba Shabazz (FCI Herlong, CA)

*Reflecting on how to do mine
Building my spirit when sharpening my mind
Mastering situations and seizing time
Meticulously deciphering the law, staying on my grind
Orchestrating disciplines for the faith so in the future they will hold the line
Proactive in my approach to make sure I am not lost in time
Freedom, justice and equality while praising Ma'at,
I can't straddle the line
Fist tight, raised high, unapologetically is how I do mine!*

Defiance

by Michael-Patrick Brian O'Connell

(Pleasant Valley State Prison, CA)

*Beautiful memories fade
Hope becomes illusive
The weary body whispers torment*

*Yet, hidden in the dark caverns
Behind the man's heart
A candle flame flickers*

*The spirit refuses to yield
Burning brightly in defiance
The surrounding darkness
Will not touch it*

Jailhouse

by Tyquarius Bush

(Elmira Correctional Facility, New York)

*In cell, 4 walls, one gate
Caving in
In a cell thinking to myself how
I got here again?
Jail food, jail rules, ignorant fools
And dept I got to listen to
But in my mind it's misconceive
Through all the foolery, games, lies
And court times 'cause every second it breaks time
Commissary to phone time everything cost money now
I got dreams in my mind of everything
I think of people signing in like
What are they scared of
I see shit hear shit politics everywhere
But I'm built strong enough to be here
They ask me what do jail stand for
I say Just Another Ignorant Lie
But I got one more chance to break this cycle
'cause this jailhouse ain't my life..!*

Legal Corner

by Debra Slone, LSPC Staff Attorney

Last Thursday, I attended a panel on Progressive Prosecutors, with Alameda County District Attorney Pamela Price & Former San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin.

As a former defense attorney myself, and seeking liberty and freedom for all of us, I am not a big fan of DAs. But when they are reasonable, and try to do the right thing, they can limit some of the harms imposed by the system on our people. Progressive District Attorneys understand that excessive sentences do not increase public safety, but rather destroy hope for those incarcerated long after they have shown growth and rehabilitation. They lean into implementing the resentencing laws passed by the legislature and reviewing and modifying excessive sentences. And it has proven successful: despite the significant increase in the number of paroles granted to incarcerated persons serving long sentences (8,000 parole grants in the last 10 years), the recidivism rates for these formerly incarcerated persons remains very low, at 2-4% percent for general recidivism

and less than 1% for recidivism involving felony crimes against persons.

But because progressive DAs are trying to do something good, they are facing important pushback. Chesa Boudin was recalled last year, on the same day that DA Price was elected—and less than a year later, a recall effort for DA Price is underway too. Los Angeles DA Gascon faces similar headwinds, as do a few other progressive prosecutors around the State, elected by voters who live with, and those who understand, the effects of over-policing, crime and over-sentencing.

But the work to reduce excessive sentences will not end with the recall of progressive prosecutors. While reviewing and modifying excessive sentences is not universally supported, legislators continue to respond to voters' demands to remedy excessive sentences with new and amended laws offering more access to resentencing.

For instance, the Racial Justice Act will soon expand relief eligibility for people serving a sentence for a felony conviction in prison, county jail, or the DJJ no matter when they were charged or convicted (AB 256).

Another recent bill allows resentencing for certain people convicted of felony murder (SB 775/SB 1437). Elder parole

also allows for people 50+ years old who have served at least 20 years to be eligible for an elderly parole hearing. SB 483 requires the court to review cases with sentencing enhancement for certain prison priors and SB 567 requires the court to impose the middle term of a sentence under certain circumstances. These laws are retroactive, meaning they apply to criminal cases no matter how old they are.

SB 1209 provides for resentencing for veterans who suffered trauma. The RISE Act (SB 483) authorizes courts to retroactively remove 1-year prison prior and 3-year drug prior enhancements. AB 1540 requires counsel to be appointed for a defendant requesting resentencing within 30 days, and most importantly, creates a presumption favoring recall and resentencing for the defendant. SB 567 provides for resentencing if the middle term is not applied without aggravating circumstances on the record. AB 960 made significant changes to the compassionate release procedure as well.

We at LSPC, along with many of our allies, are working to pass laws that will help to reduce long and unfair sentences for people who are more than ready to come home.





Artwork by Selina Flores (Dublin, CA)

Toward Enlightenment

by Michael-Patrick Brian O'Connell (Pleasant Valley State Prison, CA)

I try now to keep the darkness at bay
Banishing negative thoughts as they arise
The cure is love: for other, for self
Love for each and every passing moment,
Fierce love that knows life is fleeting

It does take effort
Awareness of thinking combined with a choice
The only control we actually have
is over the environment inside our heads

It does make a difference
Everything a bit smoother, a bit kinder,
With laughter closer than not
Having patience as hard time pass

It will take practice
Perfection is impossible,
But a journey cannot be made without
taking steps towards a goal

A Mother's Love

by Nathan G (Fresno, CA)

My love for my mother is like no other
Thank you for always being a wonder
One day I hope to repay
So thank you for always...
And for the blessings
For helping me see through things
True love is your love
Thank you
Mom
Love, always

Charity Hospital for Mama

by Wanda Sabir, AOUON Member

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Black folks traveling through a passage. A womb. The middle passage as birth canal. Hum. In vitro. Misshapen. Elbows high. Fists up. It is contorted. A tight uncomfortable space. There are too many of us. Dying to live. Some of us swim by. We don't breathe. Breath memories. Toxic shock syndrome operates in this narrow landscape we cannot escape. A rite of passage for some, a death chamber for siblings we forget remember to push through. Survival instinctive. Death its opposite. Darkness surrounds us. How long? There is only silence. Pain its own vocabulary. Its own language. Later, we do not remember this. The passage. The ship. Conception. Rebirth. The dead we left behind. The dead we carry in our faces. We are their presence and if we survive, their tomorrow. We lie hidden in fallopian tubes. Urinary tracks. Esophagus escape routes mapped and uncharted territories. Freedom not a conscious goal. We have no words just an urge to stay alive. Knowledge that darkness is not forever that red is not the color of freedom. There is so much red. Is blood the color of life then? Shared umbilical cord spirals out detached. Lips puckered body encased by an amniotic fluid cell block. We cry holy. We cry for a mother who avoids us. Where is she? How did we get here? "There is no time for thought." Silence greets our attempts at logic. Feelings leak into the toxic bath. We try not to swallow as hands reach in and yank us out. Battered by the journey, bright lights are blinding. It is cold now. Still wet. We blink our way through the swamps. Hands? Feet? Separate bodies where we were one. The channel a memory we cannot articulate even now even if we wanted to. It was long and horrible. We got used to dying. Rebirth a form of death. We hoped to stay a slumber . . . a spell we participated in for such a short time. A net too small for shelter. With shut eyes we swam; bruises mark the journey. Not home. No, we are not home. We traded confinement for confinement we can see. We see captors. It's like holding up a mirror sometimes. The other side of this story (of the) this journey gets confusing. So much harm. So much pain even now. Even now we have left the mechanical wombs. Cut the cords. Tied knots into relationships. Survival strategies developed in the dank dampness darkness covering everything except this hope. A spark of light we swam toward. Baby fishes without arms. Tails wrapped around waists.necks.pulling each other through what would have killed one but not the many. We vowed to remember. No words. No audible memory. Got to have words to remember. Pain remains, the rest fades. The channels the relationships the chains the enveloping red landscape that we come from fades disappears eyes filled with a different reality. A newer reality. A danger we have to face this time alone.

There was a way I felt connected in the darkness I no longer feel now that the world is illuminated. I still have no language to talk about this. Who I lost stuck in my teeth. Memories toothpicks. My Mama said they pulled my teeth, cauterized the flesh. It is my first memory of pain. No. It is her first memory.

I just fear white men in gloves and white robes. They want to hurt me. This memory is based on fact. My body remembers.

I...

by Matthew Schwartz (FCI Milan, Michigan)

I'm at the podium
I bare my soul
I spend a day
I pay the toll

Every night
I retire to my cage
I'm finally starting
to show my age

Gray around the edges
Dirt on my face
My shirt is now ripped
I'm such a disgrace

But still I go on
to a better tomorrow
I go through today
The pain and the sorrow

I'm locked in a prison
I did it to myself
On top of the world
Now I'm on the shelf

I've been to the high
I've been to the low
But right now I'm trapped
Nowhere to go

I'm all by myself
One day at a time
I now pay the price
Because I did the crime

Please read my letter
Please take my call
Please don't forget me
I've taken a fall

But I'll stand back up
I'll be back around
I'm hurt but not dead
They can't keep me down

I was on top
They knocked me down
But I'll be back soon
I promise you

I'll be better than ever
When I come back
I'll take you by storm
A whirlwind attack

For now I'm down
I'm totally in the dumps
I fucked up hard
But I wont give up

But this is not for long
I'll be back on top
I'll do it again
And this time I wont stop

Don't pity me please
I'm better than that
Just wish me good luck
With a tip of your hat

Some think I'm a villain
Some call me a fool
Some take me for granted
But I'm nobody's tool

On the brink of destruction
I went over the ledge
I lost my balance
I lost my edge

I lost it all
I destroyed my whole life
I sliced it to bits
With a drug laced knife

Buy I'll get it back
All that and more
I've not been destroyed
by that girl from next door

I go thought the motions
Each day is the same
I hope I survive
This sick twisted game

I miss my kids I miss my friends
I miss my mom and dad
I miss the girls I miss my dogs
I miss them all so bad

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.



Chapter Contacts



Scan to Join AOUON

National AOUON Headquarters
 c/o Legal Services for Prisoners with Children
 4400 Market St., Oakland, CA 94608
 Phone: (415) 255-7036 x337 | Fax: (415) 552-3150
 AOUON National Organizer: Oscar Flores
 oscar@prisonerswithchildren.org

Oakland, California

4400 Market St., Oakland, CA 94608
 Regional Chapter Coordinator
 Oscar Flores: (415) 255-7036 x337
 oscar@prisonerswithchildren.org
 Outreach Organizer: John Cannon
 (415) 625-7045 john@prisonerswithchildren.org

Bakersfield, California

Ucedrah Osby: AOUONBakersfield@gmail.com

Los Angeles/Long Beach, California

c/o A New Way of Life Reentry
 PO Box 875288, Los Angeles, CA, 90087
 Phone: (323) 563-3575
 Fax: (323) 563-3445
 Stephanie Jeffcoat (657) 262-0670
 sjeffcoat@anewwayoflife.org

Orange County, California

Stephanie Jeffcoat:
 stephaniejeffcoatocaouon@gmail.com
 Danielle Dancer: ddancernap@gmail.com

Riverside, California

1390 W. 6th St.
 Corona, CA 92882
 Shaun Leflore: shaun@startingover.inc
 Fidel Chagolla: fidel@startingover.inc

Sacramento, California

PO Box 292967, Sacramento, CA 95829
 Henry Ortiz: henry@prisonerswithchildren.org

San Bernardino, California

c/o A Time for Change Foundation
 PO Box 25040, San Bernardino, CA 92406
 Phone: (909) 886-2994
 Fax: (909) 886-0218
 Kim Carter: kcarter@timeforchangefoundation.org

San Diego, California

Curtis Howard: allofusornonesandiego@gmail.com

Las Vegas, Nevada

MariaAgnes Jones
 mariaagnesjones87@gmail.com

Idaho

Mary Failing: maryfailing@my.cwi.edu

Central Illinois

P.O. Box 3026, Peoria, IL 61612-3026
 Phone: (309) 232-8583
 General Parker: centralillinoisouon@gmail.com

Chicago, Illinois

Richard Wallace: Chicago.IL.AOUON@gmail.com

Louisville, Kentucky

Savvy Shabazz: AOUONLouisville@gmail.com

Hopkinsville, Kentucky

Cinnamon Watts
 cinnamonwatts40@gmail.com

St. Louis, Missouri

Patty Berger: AOUON.StL@gmail.com

Durham, North Carolina

Andrea "Muffin" Hudson:
 AOUONNC@gmail.com

Eastern North Carolina

Corey Purdie: AOUONENC@gmail.com

Charlotte, North Carolina

Kristie Puckett Williams:
 AllOfUsOrNoneNC@gmail.com

Greater Cincinnati, Ohio

Zaria Davis: CincyAOUON@gmail.com

San Antonio, Texas

Steve Huerta: AllOfUsOrNoneTexas@gmail.com

New York

Ivelisse Gilestra: AOUON.NewYork@gmail.com

Northern New Jersey

P.O. Box 9812, Newark, NJ 07104
 Tia Ryans: AOUON.NJ@gmail.com

South Jersey

Ronald Pierce (732) 608-4752
 rpierce@njisj.org

Eastern Washington

Megan Pirie: EasternWAAOUON@gmail.com

Madison, Wisconsin

Caliph Muab-el: WIAOUON@gmail.com

Georgia, Atlanta

Waleisah Wilson
 (404) 860-2837

Greenville, South Carolina

Angela Hurks
 (864) 991-1388 (m) (854) 236-1393 (f)
 stepbystephopeproject@charter.net
 www.stepbystephopeproject@charter.net

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