

DREAM.ORG

Justice

Program Overview



DREAM.ORG

closes prison doors and opens doors of opportunity. We bring people together across racial, social, and partisan lines to create a future with freedom, dignity, and opportunity for all.



We dream of a world beyond mass incarceration. We build communities with fewer prisons, safer neighborhoods, and transformed lives. Our criminal justice system is broken, and no one knows that better than people directly impacted by mass incarceration.

The Justice program brings together leaders impacted by the criminal legal system with unlikely allies spanning the political divide to push for bold and innovative solutions. We build consensus for reform among Republicans and Democrats at the state and federal level.

DREAM.JUSTICE

→ **Organizing**
(The Empathy Network)

→ **State Campaigns**

→ **Federal Initiatives**

→ **Justice Innovation**

Together, we create second chances and work to transform our criminal justice system.

In 2020 we made a commitment to support justice impacted individuals with leadership training, mentorship, and peer support each year through the Dream Justice Cohort . **This program has had an exponential effect. In 2022 – in partnership with our Cohort alumni – we passed 6 state bills, more than we’ve ever passed in a single year before.** We now have more than 70 alumni, representing a sustainable movement at the grassroots level powerful enough to lead dozens of state campaigns in the next decade.

The investments Dream.Org makes in uplifting Empathy Network leaders fuel our success. From 2018's historic First Step Act, which has brought 20,000+ people home, to our Dignity for Incarcerated Women campaign's 16th state bill passing, to the creation of a cross sector coalition driving the EQUAL Act to passage, our campaigns are successful in permanently shrinking the size of the prison system because we center directly impacted voices.



MEET OUR



ORRIN JACKSON

Orrin Jackson, is a son, a brother, a cousin, and a father. In 1990, he began serving an 80 year sentence for a crack cocaine and weapons charge. Orrin was convicted at a time when the average federal drug sentencing for crack cocaine offenses were 49 percent higher for African Americans than for white people. His daughter, Ashley Jackson, was only 6 months old when he turned himself in.

In December 2018, Dream.Org helped pass the historic First Step Act in Congress which gave Orrin Jackson the second chance he needed. A pathway to freedom was created by retroactively reforming outdated sentence disparities between crack and powder cocaine. Ashley helped advocate and petition for the release of her father, uncle, and cousin, who all served thirty-one years in federal prison. Now she can hug her father as a free man, talk privately, take a walk in the park, have a meal, or simply have the time to sit in silence...together. Today, Orrin Jackson serves on the Dream.Org Federal Advisory Council, and is our North Carolina Empathy Network leader. Stories like Orrin's are what move us to continue the fight to end mass incarceration and transform our criminal justice system.

CHANGE MAKERS

CYNETRA FREEMAN

As a formerly incarcerated woman, Cynetra Freeman noticed the lack of resources justice-impacted people in Mississippi had and wanted to make a change. She created the Mississippi Center for Re-Entry (MS Reentry) in 2017 to build safer communities while empowering justice-impacted individuals.

Her passion is providing second chances to those who desire one with the hopes of reducing Mississippi's high recidivism and mass incarceration rates.

She enrolled in our Dream Justice Cohort in 2022, where she first began to formulate the strategy to create a campaign for legislation that would reduce financial burdens on incarcerated Mississippians while helping incarcerated parents on the path toward a thriving family. She built this campaign from scratch during the training. After graduating she launched the campaign, which was ultimately successful in cementing [SB 2082](#) into law on July 1, 2023. Thanks to Cynetra's tireless efforts, thousands of incarcerated Mississippians will have a better chance at re-entering society debt free, given them a level playing field to rebuild their lives.





PROGRAMS & IMPACT

Dream Justice Cohort

Each year, Justice trains directly impacted advocates through our Dream Justice Cohort. Over 4 months, they receive the training and peer support they need to become leaders in the reform movement. In this way, we build sustained power at the grassroots level and leave our leaders with the tools they need for a lifetime of work in the reform field. To date, we have trained 70 leaders who have gone on to start their own 501(c)3s or teamed with Dream.Org Justice as state campaign leaders.

State based legislative reform

We leveraged local power to run reform campaigns that are the most meaningful to our Empathy Network Leaders' communities. 2023 marked our most successful year yet! In alignment with our values to create shared solutions across differences, for 5 of the bills we passed we were able to secure bipartisan support.

Federal Reform

In partnership with our Federal Advisory Council of directly impacted advocates, we grow relationships with key decision makers in Washington to keep criminal justice reform top of mind. We've already passed the First Step Act- on a bipartisan basis- and will continue to leverage our power to drive the EQUAL Act to passage.

Justice Innovation

We harness the power of technology to innovate solutions, through Justice Tech fellowships, events, and our national Justice Innovation Prize competition. To date, we have driven more than \$11M of capital into companies with system-impacted founders.

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

The Dream.Org team is deeply committed to changing the landscape of criminal justice advocacy around the nation. Our work would not be possible without this shared commitment by our funders.

**Arnold Ventures | Clean Slate Initiative | David Rockefeller Fund | Ford Foundation | Just Trust
Justice Action Network | NBA Foundation | Sony Music Group | Vital Strategies**



STATE WINS

- **Kentucky:** HB 353 officially passed the Kentucky legislature and was signed by the Governor this summer. This bill decriminalizes fentanyl testing strips – reducing the number of fatal overdose deaths and moving us away from the overuse of jails and prisons toward a public health response. This bill would not have passed without the large coalition of groups and directly impacted leaders who fought for this important policy change.
- **Mississippi:** We passed SB 2082 with the invaluable work of our Empathy Leader Cynetra Freeman. Cynetra was a member of Dream.Org’s Empathy Cohort in 2022, where she first began to formulate the strategy to create a campaign for legislation that would reduce financial burdens on incarcerated Mississippians. With Dream.Org’s continued support, after graduating she launched the campaign, and successfully advocated for the bill which went into effect on July 1, 2023.
- **Oregon:** HB 2535, a bill that provides access to doulas for pregnant people who are incarcerated, was signed by the Governor. This is a huge win for our Empathy Leader Nova Sweet, partnering organizations, and so many directly impacted mothers, who fought for this change for years. Thanks to their dedication and perseverance, mothers and babies will now have the supportive services that they need in the future.
- **Pennsylvania:** After years of working in partnership with the American Conservative Union and our Empathy Leader Tonie Willis, the PA Dignity for Incarcerated Women bill was signed into law on December 15, 2023. Please read our full blog here: [Advocates Celebrate Passage of Bipartisan Pennsylvania Bill Humanizing Pregnant Incarcerated Women.](#)
- **Washington:** We spent the year working on HB 1324 – a landmark bill to modernize Washington’s sentencing system and stop juvenile records from automatically increasing a person’s sentence, bringing it into better alignment with brain science research. Our Empathy Leader Eugene Youngblood attended the ceremonial signing and we will be back next year to push for retroactivity for this powerful policy.



COMING UP

Our work is guided by our 10 year goal to create a 50-state network of directly impacted leaders, working with Dream.Org s we win 50 state reforms and 3 federal reforms by 2032.

2024 Programs to support our goal include:

- **Continued State Reform:** Our 2024 priority state portfolio includes deepening campaigns in 8 states, and scaling to 4 new states- all while keeping directly impacted leaders front and center.
- **Expansion to Youth Cohorts:** With support from the NBA Foundation, we will target a special population for future Dream Justice Cohorts, 18-24 year olds at risk of increased involvement with the criminal justice system. In the next two years, we will provide 80-100 cohort participants with the skills to access employment and leadership opportunities instead of prison.
- **Deepening the Field of Justice Innovators:** We will continue to grow the pipeline of justice-impacted innovators by increasing the percentage of justice tech representation to comprise 25% of our Entrepreneurs Network membership by the end of 2024, and providing additional resources and capital to system impacted entrepreneurs.
- **Advocacy and Movement Building:** Creating long term power in the field is critical. We will expand support for Day of Empathy events with training in 15 states to build the capacity of local leaders and elevate our work through a shared day of in-person events, media outreach and movement building. At the federal level, we will execute a Dream.Org "Hill Day" – bringing Empathy Network leaders to D.C. to shift hearts and minds of decision makers through empathy-based storytelling and humanizing narratives.
- **Continued Movement in D.C.:** We will continue advocacy work to pass the EQUAL Act until Congress breaks, support passage of the BOP Prison Oversight legislation, pressure Appropriations to defund the construction of additional federal prisons, and push for the least harmful federal solutions being considered in response to the fentanyl crisis. We will achieve all of this by reaching across the aisle.

JOIN US

The scale of our work is ambitious. But we remain radically committed to finding common ground across partisan, racial and social lines—an approach that has benefitted us greatly in enacting our state and federal level reforms. By addressing crucial issues like criminal justice reform through a systems change approach and encouraging people to come together to solve problems collaboratively, we know we can achieve our goals.

We invite you to dream with us as we strengthen our proven model of bipartisan bridge building to end the era of mass incarceration in America.

Please contact Katherine Young, Development Director,
to learn more at
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