

Gerek Wilderson 186834
Fremont Legislation Inside Representative
Codification Testimony

Members of the chair,

My name is Gerek Wilderson and I would like to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to give my testimony regarding SB25-155. I have served as one of the Legislation Inside representatives for three years now. Legislation Inside has given me a voice regarding the statutes and policies that affect the incarcerated population, Department of Corrections, their staff, and the safety and fiscal impact on the general public and taxpayers.

Working collectively with the state judiciary system and the Department of Corrections, we here at Legislation Inside can provide lived experiences and knowledge that will help maximize the efficiency of these statutes and policies. In addition, Legislation Inside gives every incarcerated individual a voice and current information through the Legislation Inside representatives at their facility. It instills hope to each individual that we are finally being looked at and valued as human beings again. It has revealed the level of talent and human potential wasting away behind the prison walls.

One of the greatest challenges we face as incarcerated individuals is the loss of programs such as this one. There is a proven history that many programs brought into the Department of Corrections from outside organizations have been shut down or removed for one reason or another. This is why we are asking that Legislation Inside be codified in legislation to protect our voice and our ability to continue working collectively to make positive changes from the inside out. Thank you again for your time and consideration.

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Hello my name is Steve Allen and I have been incarcerated for over 37 years. I appreciate this opportunity to speak in support of SB25-155, to explain how Legislation Inside has impacted my life and the great benefit that I believe this program is and will be to the incarcerated population as well as the state of Colorado as a whole. All my life I have been drawn to education and constantly seeking out ways to improve myself and find new and exciting learning experiences. After being incarcerated I began to educate myself in the law with hopes to improve my legal situation. I discovered that my high school government classes were inadequate and incomplete. Although I was mainly looking at my specific situation, I was also looking to help and guide others to find ways to help better themselves and their environment. I was blessed to be elected by my peers as a representative at the inception of LI 4 years ago, and I have realized a tremendous amount of change and growth during that time, not only in knowledge, but in a deeper sense of purpose and meaning to my life and incarceration. This has been such a great experience and I look forward to continuing to play a part in any and all forms of community involvement upon my release. Legislation Inside has provided an opportunity for open conversation about what is currently going on inside the legislature, and ideas of issues that may be relevant in the coming sessions. There have been many conversations and interactions with both staff and residents that would not have occurred without being recognized as a facility representative. One of the many external benefits of this program is in the amount of hope that it instills in the community when they get to hear about all of the people who are fighting for us and the issues that are being brought up concerning our community. Too many of the individuals who get incarcerated begin to feel like throwaways, who have been forgotten, this program shows them they are not alone and that there are people who care and that they still have a reason to hope for a better future. Being incarcerated for such a long period of time can lead to feeling inadequate and awkward in social situations, by providing opportunities for continued interactions with society, LI has definitely made a huge impact on me personally. Having these opportunities to engage with members of the public and administration in constructive conversation about real world issues has really helped restore and improve my social confidence. With the passing of this bill, I believe that the future is wide open for all of us, we're ensuring that all people realize that their voices and lives matter. Every individual needs to recognize the power and impact of civic engagement and this will help accomplish that goal. With this council providing a fuller perspective of all the individuals and groups affected by prospective judicial legislation we will be able to assist the legislature in ensuring that we come up with the best and most effective ways to govern our state. So, I pray that you will support this initiative and vote yes on SB25-155, helping to ensure that this positive, social, and rehabilitative program will continue to be an asset to the entire population of Colorado. Thank you.

The worst decisions are always the ones made on bad data. That's why anxiety of the unknown creates more problems on the inside than drugs or thugs. The true power of Legislation on the Inside(LI) is not the voice heard from the incarcerated. It's the voice that is shared through the incarcerated. The collaborative voice of informed representatives speaking to both sides of the wire was a by-product of this sharing.

So many well intentioned programs have come and gone while prosocial individuals that plan their futures are hurt the most. Those helping others reintegrate often incorporate opportunities that no longer exist because of misinformation. Some of these programs have a half life, they only operate for half the time that was spent developing them. Others only seem to be successful in different countries or states.

The only thing that remains is a hole. A gap in information feeding hopelessness and discontent. LI fills this gap with solutions and specifics based on qualified data. It is not an ask for special privileges or trending treatment. It is a desire to serve those inside that don't know the regulations, statutes, and legislative intent. It is a home grown collaboration of individuals from Colorado facilities that have learned the color of the law. Nobody has to wait and see what works because many of us have been waiting for a quarter century or more.

We have been waiting for a chance to serve the communities we represent as well as those we have harmed. We have already been here to help educate, inform, and assist those challenged by the world they see in here. It only makes sense to share this vision with people that cannot see inside. This collaboration is good for Colorado inside and out. It should be codified.

William Coney

Feb 13, 2025

LI Codification Testimony

I do not know what it's like to exercise my franchise. I've never had the chance to do so.

My name is Rhidale Dotson. I was a convicted felon at the age of 18 and an official recidivist at 22. I'm a Colorado citizen, born and raised, yet in addition to being incarcerated, being prohibited to vote had essentially made me invisible and voiceless. Tragically... I have never been alone in this regard.

Statistically, 1 in every 13 Black adults is left voiceless in the electoral process (The Sentencing Project, 2014). This has consequently weakened the political power of minority voters. (Ochs, 2006)

Fortunately, Legislation Inside (LI) is interrupting that cycle of powerlessness for me and others similarly situated.

Codifying the (LI) Advisory Council increases our potential to **create meaningful civic engagement opportunities**. Not only for people in the incarcerated community, but also for the home communities in Colorado we remain connected to.

Felony disenfranchisement made me question my personal degree of citizenship. I didn't feel any level of responsibility to society, and I highly doubted that I would ever fulfill any duties to serve in a participatory democracy.

That was a huge problem because, as incarcerated citizens, there is no buffer between us and the impacts of politics or policy.

LI turns that dynamic on its head. Things I do and learn here prove that I (a disenfranchised, currently incarcerated, adult Black cisgender male) still have power. Being a citizen with felony convictions does not obviate my ability to lead and influence. Family, friends, and neighbors continue to value my opinions, wisdom, and insights. Legislation Inside is expanding that influence.

LI is a platform that amplifies a message of inclusion and empowerment. By codifying it, Colorado is letting all of its citizens know, "There is no one here that does not matter."

I am more than ready to spread that message because now I have a legitimate reason to believe that we can make a difference.

Legislation Inside Codification Testimony

Rhidale Dotson

I love this work because it is a unique civic empowerment opportunity that takes aim at improving our individual and collective positions in society. How could that not inspire and motivate a person to be and become better?

The reason nobody calls a butterfly an ex-caterpillar is because certain changes produce transformative effects. Just show up to any Wednesday morning LI meeting and you'll witness this magically-metamorphic change happening. Legislation Inside functions as our chrysalis. Now you have the opportunity to institutionalize this powerfully diverse team of system-impacted changemakers. Thank you in advance for ensuring that tomorrow... we will continue to matter.

Rhidale Dotson

Legislation Inside Representative @ FCF

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Billy Edwards and I have been incarcerated for more than a quarter of a century.

During my incarceration I have been an advocate for humanity and an agent for change. LI has provided me the opportunity to reach more people. We have been able to dispel rumors and bad information.

LI has helped me to become more civically responsible and in turn helped to do the same for those around me. LI has brought hope to a place where many are hopeless, a voice to many who feel unheard and an opportunity to become maker of the law instead of breakers of the law,

Nothing about us without us is something that we hold dear. LI in collaboration with CDOC, the Legislative Body allows us to be a part of the solution. Individually we can inspire change, however, collectively we can be the change. Humanity is the sum of all of its parts. LI benefits the whole because we are the proverbial missing pieces of the puzzle. None of us know it all. The more input we have, the more informed our decisions become. LI and its members are an asset to the community and this platform allows us work towards helping and repairing the harm that we've caused by giving.

I thank you again for letting me testify in favor of SB25-155.

L.I. Testimony S.B. 25-155:

Let me begin by saying that I am a 30-years into what amounts to a life sentence, during the tenure of which I taught myself the law. I have done well through litigation, but was always interested in the genesis of that law I sought to enforce or overturn. Years ago I discovered how to investigate and track legislation but until I was able to participate in Legislation Inside I was unable to have a voice.

Legislation Inside expanded my horizons and hopefully has allowed our elected officials to have a unique and varied perspective. Legislation Inside has allowed me to have a deeper understanding of current, past and proposed legislation. Moreover, I am now able to glean the substance of various, relevant bills, in turn allowing me to disseminate them to my incarcerated constituents. This then enables me to receive extraordinary, articulate feedback and concerns respecting those bills directly affecting incarcerated persons.

Most of us who are incarcerated suffered from easily recognizable social dysfunctions which were exacerbated by substance abuse. That's no excuse for the actions which led us to commit the offenses we're incarcerated for. That said, we're hoping that by being able to participate in Legislation Inside, society will see us for who we really are, i.e., constructive members and not necessarily a bane upon their existence. Collectively, through Legislation Inside we will be able to give something back and lessen our impact by being involved in something that really matters.

On a personal note, I feel that participation in Legislation Inside has deepened my understanding of the concerns of society and thus the impetus behind legislation I don't always agree with. I also feel that our input has allowed the legislative body as a whole to comprehend the impact and sometime unrecognized collateral consequences certain pieces of legislation may have. Most definitely prisoners have a more profound understanding of the consequences of legislation directly impacting them. The old saying is you can't really appreciate another's plight until you've walked a mile in their shoes is true.

2.

In conclusion, I wholeheartedly support this bill and ask you most respectfully to vote yes.

Thank you.

David K. Jenner, #92839
Colorado State Penitentiary
Incentive Living Unit
P.O. Box #777
Canon City, CO. 81215-0777

My name is Jesse Miller DOC #112534, and elected representative to Legislation Inside for Trinidad Correctional Facility. I support this bill.

I have been incarcerated since 11/17/2000 and for the majority of time, I felt like I did not have a voice; like the life experiences of myself and my peers did not matter because we were just offenders. Legislation Inside gives incarcerated people both a voice and a platform, a seat at the table, so to speak. This beneficial not only for those of us in prison but for the community at large. I say this because when we have a say in our incarceration and also our rehabilitation, we are more likely to buy in, and less likely to re-offended when we re-enter society.

In its fourth year Legislation Inside is still a relatively new entity and with a new administration just around the corner, it is more important than ever to protect this body and the voice of incarcerated peoples all over the state. It is important to let us in here know that our lives are still valued even when our action in the past are not. We are all still people, we all deserve to be treated with basic human dignity, and the codification of Legislation Inside ensures that future incarcerated generation will be heard, no matter who the Colorado government may change. Thank you.

What does Legislation on the Inside mean to me? Well prior to becoming a LI representative I had no legal/law or legislation experience or knowledge whatsoever. I didn't even know what legislation means – laws made by a legislative body – now I do.

It was said by my grandfather, my mother's father, education is your freedom, learn everything you can and knowing is "half the battle" by the way which is an amazing GI Joe quote.

We've all made mistakes in life. We all have different upbringings, some from poverty, some from wealth, some of us less fortunate, and some more fortunate than others. But at the end of it, we're all people. But, not just people, we are people of the United States, and we all have a voice.

Legislation on the inside gave incarnated individuals a voice. I know I've made mistakes in life because look where I'm speaking from. In speaking from a place that at times, it can make you feel like less of a person, less of a citizen. But, I also understand this is my punishment for breaking the law, which I take full accountability for. But our past doesn't have to define who we are today.

LI renewed my hope. It gave me purpose and brought humanity back into my life, in more ways than one. LI challenges me as a person to learn new things that matter; things that matter for incarcerated individuals and society as a whole. Like the saying goes "there's nothing about us without us," because whether your inside here or out there, we're all people of Colorado and we all have a voice.

Thank you for your time,
Chuck Martinez DOC #115051
Currently Incarcerated at CCF
Job Title: DOC Peer Specialist
One fun Fact: I'm a light for others in a dark place.

My name is Maurice Engelby and I'd like to speak on the Legislation on the Inside group. Prior to coming on board I began my journey with legislative practices when first coming into the system in 2017. I met a man who actually ran against Jerry Sonnenberg and learned a great deal about the real process of legislative practices, politics, and recognizing the "proper atmosphere" of those politics.

At my first experience I collected newspaper clipping of everything legislative in session and out of session. I became very interested and reached out to Colorado CURE and asked if there were any thoughts that could help with my studies. Mike Dell sent a copy of the tracking sheet on bills in session. I was hooked after that.

Several years later LI was being created, and I was so excited even though I wasn't selected at that juncture. A good friend of mine George Chavez did get selected, and we would often talk about bills and his experience with talking to House Reps and Senators.

In 2024 I was able to participate in the LI and getting first-hand experience in what I can to genuinely love. Since being a part and hearing the conversation and getting to add my perspective in a professional setting has been instrumental to giving hope to people here in our facility. The information shared, working with Jamie, Jeanne, legislators and shared interest partners has made it easier to get really time information and stop rumor mill.

The collaboration with CDOD, Legislators, community partners and all the intelligence across the other facilities in the LI group has taken me to a new level of understanding and respect for all who are involved. I found something that interests me and wish I had been more aware of legislative practices and my love for learning about the very things that keep our communities safe and our great state running.

I can only thank LI, the many Legislators, and community partners for blessing me with this opportunity to have purpose and be a part of something so amazing,

Thank you,

Maurice Engelby

Waylon James Robitaille, Legislation Inside Representative
Fremont Correctional Facility

Subject: Legislation Inside Codification Testimony: SB-25-155

As an incarcerated person my voice has been silenced from our democracy.

I didn't know what this meant until I had been incarcerated for a few years. Laws pass by yearly and I am left in the dark until I am affected. I believe that at the bare minimum every voice is worth hearing. As a human being I am willing to hear you. I *do* hear from you every time a law is passed, denied, or vetoed. Every single time something changes in my life, because of your voice. My voice is no longer silenced because L.I. is amplifying my voice.

L.I. ensures that the voices of many more incarcerated people are being heard. Your affirmative vote would secure our right and ability to be represented by peers, not "incarcerators". Most importantly, codification secures this platform so it cannot be dismantled due to indefensible administrative adjustments and/or changes.

The involvement of incarcerated people in the legislative process, changes our engagement in the political environment. This allows us to learn more about democracy and become more like our community outside the prison walls. It gives us measurable public value that is priceless.

By voting yes, you can make a difference where it matters most: creating a more permanent neutral collaboration between the Legislature, CDOC, and Incarcerated People. When it comes to operational excellence there is no better path taken than the path which includes all parties that are affected.

Finally, as an incarcerated person, a Legislative Representative, and a returning member of our community; I strongly support this bill and I am confident you will do the same.

Hello,

My name is Shauntiel D Goree and I am a Legislation Representative on the inside. I am currently being housed at the LaVista Correctional Facility in Pueblo, Colorado. I am one of two LI Reps elected by my peers in 2021 and I have held the position ever since. I am also the clerk of the facility orientation mentor program, a peer led program that I lead. I am a co-facilitator of the trauma brain injury program, and recovery coach, trained and experienced in mental health first aid, a recent graduate of break through and currently participating in Pueblo Community College associate degree program in business ownership.

I am writing in total support of taking LI to the next level because there is an important need. I have experienced incarceration for a while and what I've seen over the years has not been working, so when this opportunity came about, I jumped on it, praying I would be elected. My goal is to change the narrative on incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people; to be a part of a progressive solution, no longer part of a regressive problem. I feel that the important thing about LI is that it gives voiceless people a voice and it shows that people who have committed a crime don't continue to be criminals – that we have the capacity to care about more than just ourselves and puts on display the fact that though the reason why we are incarcerated may not change. we as individuals have changed. We make strides to be a positive impact on the communities we are in, dealing in integrity as well as good character.

The lessons I have learned while being on the LI team is that no matter our background, we have common goals and ideas about what can work inside the prison that will better prepare us and our peers in leaving captivity, motiving into success upon our return to the community and our families. LI has heightened my determinations to be a safe, productive, and law-abiding citizen. To codify Legislation Inside will be beneficial to everyone involved because it serves the community inside and outside of these prison walls proving that if we work together there's no limit to what we can achieve. Now, on the flip side of that coin, not everybody agrees with our concept and that's okay. If we were all the same this world would be boring. However, isn't it the idea to get the lives of the people who have unfortunately found themselves incarcerated turned around, so that the behavior and action that led us down the road to prison can be corrected and no longer options? We are no longer the exception, we are the rule, helping others to find their own self-worth and greatness.

Our legislative team has gone from writing testimony on Bills we felt were important, some of which has passed into law – to writing our own Bill that we are very proud of, to actually having a seat from prison at the table of the 2025 SMART Act hearing was has huge! Years ago this would have never been heard of let alone having legislative reps who are inmates! Stopping to show immense gratitude to Jamie Ray

and The Second Chance Center and to Mr. Korey Wise, Team, Jeanne, and Madison. If it were not for their hard work, all that we've been able to accomplish with them would be hopes unfulfilled. They provided us with opportunities to be seen and heard by some very important people who have taken us seriously. People who saw our passion for helping other and making a positive and purposeful impacts.

In closing, I would like to state that we are not trying to impose our will on anyone. What we are trying to do is collaborate with everyone in order to create solution that are not only impactful, but beneficial that work to combat the problems that persist, because though change is difficult it is absolutely necessary. I believe that if people could come to a better understanding about incarceration and being incarcerated, we can get a better grip on the changes that need to take place, changes that will help everyone. Not in any way to minimize the accountability of the crimes committed, but to put in place mechanisms that address criminogenic needs and reduce the possibility of returning to prison. The goal should be to minimize educate and reform – it transforms lives. It should never be to encourage the repetition of returning to prison or creating addicts while in prison. To codify Legislation Inside will help all of us face these challenges and many more and allow us to combat them together on a much larger scale.

My name is Shauntiel Goree, I thank you for your consideration.

My name is Simon Sue DOC #118982, and I am the elected representative to Legislation Inside for Trinidad Correctional Facility. I have served as representative to LI since its creation in 2021. I support this bill and it states as follows:

LI has allowed my voice as a direct stakeholder to collaborate with the CDOC's Executive Team to find solutions to reduce recidivism and improve the operational efficiency of the CDOC as a whole. During LI meeting with CDOC officials and members of the Legislature, insights on the effects of policies and laws have allowed policy makers to craft policies that have the desired impact. LI has a vested interest in reducing recidivism, developing common sense and evidence based on policies and outcomes that promote public safety, accountability and fairness to all stakeholder in the criminal justice process.

I ask that this bill be passed and LI codified for the simple fact that the desire to muffle offender voices who speak truth to power can exist in future administrations. Rehabilitation of Colorado's inmates needs to be above partisan politics, and the codification of LI insures transparency in our prisons and accountability to those who administer them.

A society is only as strong as the weakest amongst them. Giving Colorado's incarcerated population a voice also gives them a share in their outcomes in life.

Lisa Lesyshen
166226

Testimony for Senate Bill 25-155

Legislation Inside changed my life. It created a platform that amplified our voices, voices that are imprisoned, allowing our direct experiences to produce better laws and criminal justice policies. We all have a role to play to make the prison system better and Legislation Inside gives us the framework and the validity to have a lasting impact on the criminal justice system.

Colorado Department of Corrections offers a multitude of classes and programs for incarcerated people but rarely do the participants articulate any praise about the classes except for how much earn time they receive. By contrast, every elected representative in Legislation Inside has been positively impacted by the time spent engaged in this program. Incarcerated people's voices are ignored, silenced and dismissed but Legislation Inside creates an environment where people from the outside benefit from listening to our unique and knowledgeable voices. This organization now has state legislators, criminal justice organizations and judicial professionals requesting to participate in our weekly meetings in order to gain insight from our life experiences while incarcerated which is a testament to the program's influence. We, as a group, are never satisfied with the status quo of the prison system and we work tirelessly to fight against misinformation that can translate into bad policies and laws. Our accumulation of knowledge and firsthand experience helps produce a more rational approach to public safety that makes better use of the state's limited resources for addressing crime.

At Denver Women's Correctional Facility, the Legislator Inside representatives hold monthly meetings to share the bills we are writing and issues we are focusing on. By engaging with the women in DWCF we hope to show them that their opinions matter and we look to them to voice their concerns and priorities. In addition, we produce a three ring binder for each unit that includes all bills that are being considered at the state level, any updated A/Rs and paperwork for clemency, integrity applications and Innocent project paperwork. Once the women see that we are working for them and on issues that affect their time prison, they become active participants in the process. Sharing information with incarcerated people empowered them to become experts on legal issues and how it affects the prison system. Various staff members reach out to Legislator Inside representatives to discuss what we are doing and what bills we were supporting which allowed us to open up a line of communication. It allows staff to see incarcerated people in a new and positive light.

Senate bill 25-155 is important to the longevity and productivity of Legislation Inside. It creates a framework that will guarantee the programs success. This organization promotes well-informed reformers who are critical for paving a new way for an innovative institutional model that can produce better strategies reducing crime and lessening prison population. Legislation Inside lets incarcerated people to be the force for change.

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