

House Judiciary

04/28/2025 Upon Adjournment

SB25-155 Legislation Inside Advisory Council

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
Joao Simmons For themselves	I want to keep Uber in Colorado!
Billy Edwards For Legislation Inside - Representative	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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,</p> <p>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.</p> <p>I thank you again for letting me testify in favor of SB25-155.</p>
Jesse Miller For Legislation Inside	<p>My name is Jesse Miller DOC #112534, and elected representative to Legislation Inside for Trinidad Correctional Facility. I support this bill.</p> <p>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.</p>

	<p>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.</p>
<p>Paulette Joyce For Legislation Inside - Representative</p>	<p>Legislation inside has given my peers and I an opportunity to use our intelligence and lived experience in a collective effort to create and share innovative ideas that have the ability to foster better individuals within the prison system and build bridges between the community and those who will eventually reintegrate. My personal experience with Legislation Inside has been remarkable and life changing. I wasn't knowledgeable in a political and legal sense but Legislation Inside has given me a birds eye view into the criminal justice system. Now I am able to inform my peers about the things going on which have negative and positive effects on our lives. Because of Legislation Inside I'm now equipped to advocate for and update my peers in an intelligent manner without spreading lies and propaganda and/or giving people false hope.</p> <p>It has been an honor for us to come together and swap perspectives with the other side being DA's, victims impact groups, DOC, house representatives/senators and so on...</p> <p>It provides us an even balance of hope and reality. This has been a learning experience for everyone involved and I believe that this program and our collaborations will be conducive to the success of the prison community as well as society when the people who are incarcerated one day re-enter. Our virtual meetings are very proactive, the discussions had hold a lot of substance and are insightful and the solution we form are very meaningful.</p> <p>I plan to continue with Legislation Inside for as long as I'm allowed because it has helped me gain greater civic knowledge and to extend this information to those who are interested in what we are currently doing. This program is empowering, impactful, and beyond beneficial in the grand scheme of things. The people elected to represent this group are pillars of their community that they reside in and have the power to make great change inside and out.</p> <p>I appreciate your time. Thank you.</p>
<p>Maurice Engelby For Legislation Inside - Representative</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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</p>

	<p>studies. Mike Dell sent a copy of the tracking sheet on bills in session. I was hooked after that.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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,</p> <p>Thank you,</p> <p>Maurice Engelby</p>
<p>Waylon Robitaille For Legislation Inside</p>	<p>Waylon James Robitaille, Legislation Inside Representative Fremont Correctional Facility</p> <p>Subject: Legislation Inside Codification Testimony: SB-25-155</p> <p>As an incarcerated person my voice has been silenced from our democracy.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>

	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
<p>Daniel Sopiwnick For Legislation Inside</p>	<p>I have been a working member of Legislation Inside (L.I.) at Fremont Correctional Facility (FCF) for about one year now. In that year I have traveled the emotional spectrum regarding my involvement. When I began attending meetings I was passionate about the group and their collective cause. Soon after, I became angry about what the group was unable to accomplish. I quickly found myself moving beyond despondency and into a support role when the group here at FCF asked me to be the typist. I am not particularly adept at speed typing, I do however have a skill for listening through chatter and remembering details verbatim.</p> <p>I am admittedly not extremely well versed in criminal law, especially not compared to many of the other people who participate in L.I.. That happens to be one of my "superpowers" in the group. Often, when people are passionate about the law, they begin to speak in what incarceration-impacted people call "Leagleze," citing caselaw and statute as if it is doctrine that we all grew up learning every Sunday. Oftentimes, I find myself asking the group to explain things as if I am a third grader. When I understand the importance, or non-importance, of an issue I am then able to concisely and succinctly present it to many people (our constituency at FCF) in a way that they too can understand. I believe that my other strength in the group is objectivity. I do not seek relief in my own case or circumstances, which allows me to operate with an interest for others.</p> <p>One important aspect of L.I. is our desire to tackle issues that affect a majority of incarceration- impacted people. As a group, we work to improve the criminal legal and carceral systems as a whole. In the midst of our discussions, one will often hear conversation about the concerns for The Community, taxpayers, fiscal implications and most importantly Restorative Justice Practices and Victim/Survivor Impact. This group of individuals works extremely hard to remain respectful and responsible while attempting to affect change for future generations. I am Proud to be a member of L.I.. After the recent SMART ACT hearing where our group was allowed to present remotely to the Joint Budget Committee, my family is proud of our involvement too.</p> <p>I have been incarcerated for almost a decade. I have seen more programs leave the department than are currently offered at FCF. This is why I fully support Legislation on the Inside being codified. The old adage goes – all good things must come to an</p>

	<p>end. My personal experience of incarceration is – all good things must come to an end quickly.</p> <p>The experience of feeling empowered by having a right to speak, is one that our forebearers fought and died for. The disassociation one feels when that voice is taken away, is a feeling I wish I could prevent anyone from ever feeling again. But the rapture of being given your voice back, especially when you feel like you don't deserve it, is a feeling every silenced person deserves and one I am lucky to have experienced.</p> <p>— Daniel Sopinwik- Inmate #174736</p>
<p>Norman Vasquez For Legislation Inside - Representative</p>	<p>Hello everyone,</p> <p>I would like to thank you for your time and calling me to be here today. My name is Norman Vasquez Jr and I have been a part of the Korey Wise Legislation Inside Council for over four years. As a child I was raised in a broken home and lived in poverty. My father was incarcerated and having no one to turn to, I turned to the gang lifestyle at a very young age. This led me to accept a very inherently belief system and engage in destructive behavior which ultimately landed me in prison with a 65 year sentence. However, fortunately enough, as time has it, all will evolve within. In concession to this concept, I stand before you today as a law maker not a law breaker.</p> <p>Being apart of this council has had a profound effect on my life and continued to shape it as we speak. The feelings that accompany raising the awareness of this civic knowledge is unparalleled. I have yet to experience the pleasure and excitement that I have until I became a part of this council. The relationship I have built with staff while collecting stories and experiences from those who are not part of this council, may have never happened if it was not for this group.</p> <p>We are only at the onset of the potential benefits that this group can bring. As has been seen by many professionals including this body, we have had the opportunity to display that this group is nothing of an asset. Our contribution at the SMART Act hearing has give "this body further insight and allowed you to decipher a facet that is only now emerging. The attention this group is receiving as well as the buzz it has created, has strengthen the desire to have ones' voice heard. This will further promote safety in these facilities as one has to adhere to the bylaws of this council.</p> <p>The codification of the council will be beneficial to all parties that are involved. The state would be assured that all pieces of the puzzle are now on the table, and it is up to us to put it together collectively. A communication gap has existed for years as state entities as well as ourselves have built up a rival actions against each other. Now is our chance to break down their boundaries and close that communication gap as we create effective solutions.</p> <p>I look forward to my future and the hope that it entails with the passing of this Bill. The importance of network has been reiterated in my life as I have met</p>

	<p>several prominent individuals who have met with our group on several occasion. To know that I have the support that I have and the assistance to help me achieve my goals as I prepare to reenter society is a comfort I cannot explain.</p> <p>The authority you possess contains the strength to change many lives as well as your own and the colleagues around you. Allow us to be the impetus and compelling force to create much needed change in the broken system. Vote yes on Senate Bill 155.</p>
<p>Lisa Lesyshen For Legislation Inside - Representative</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 ting 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.</p> <p>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</p>

	<p>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.</p>
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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

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.

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

Thank you.

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