

# JUST DETENTION INTERNATIONAL



ACTION UPDATE

FALL 2023



## A BILL IN THE SENATE

In May, the Sexual Abuse Services in Detention Act (SASIDA) was introduced in the Senate. SASIDA is a historic bill that would help ensure that more survivors behind bars can get the support they need. The bill's lead sponsors are Senators Brian Schatz and John Cornyn.

SASIDA would create a grants program for community-based rape crisis counselors to work directly with incarcerated survivors. The bill also would establish a national resource center to build up the expertise of both counselors and corrections officials on providing appropriate care for people in custody. In short, SASIDA means more resources, and more help, for people who would otherwise be left to suffer alone.

JDI staff, board members, and Survivor Council members met with dozens of Congressional offices to lobby for support for the bill in September. You can help by asking your Senator to sponsor this pivotal bill. Visit [www.justdetention.org/SASIDA](http://www.justdetention.org/SASIDA) to learn more.



Survivor Council members and staff gathered in Washington, D.C., to advocate for incarcerated people's rights. From left: Esmerelda Soto, Cornelius, Leyla Dost, Dee Farmer, Robbie Hall, Johanna Mills, Edward Cervantes, and Ky Peterson.

## A CELEBRATION OF OUR MOVEMENT

On the 20th anniversary of a landmark law, JDI honors the people behind our movement

**W**hen Robbie Hall traveled to Washington, D.C., in September, her goal was to share her journey of healing.

A JDI Survivor Council member and an advocate for incarcerated people, Robbie has told her story before. But this trip to D.C. was a bit different. The people listening to her were some of Washington's most influential power players. Robbie, along with her fellow Survivor Council members and JDI staff and board members, met with more than 30 Congressional offices on Capitol Hill, and participated in a briefing and reception celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA).

For Robbie, a crucial person in her healing was Vanessa Sapien, JDI's Mental Health Program Director. PREA opened the door for advocates like Vanessa to come into prisons and jails and provide support to people who have endured sexual abuse in the community or behind bars — or both, as Robbie has. Nevertheless, many survivors still cannot get the

### *Incarcerated survivors deserve a chance to heal.*

compassionate support they need and deserve.

So Robbie emphasized what Vanessa meant to her when she was still locked up — and how all incarcerated

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

*“The more people we have on the ground pushing for these different policy changes and making sure the prisons do their part, the better it’s going to be for the people inside.”*

KY PETERSON, SURVIVOR COUNCIL MEMBER AND FOUNDER OF FREEDOM OVERGROUND

## THE RIGHTS ACT IN MASSACHUSETTS

We were thrilled to help our allies at Black and Pink Massachusetts develop the RIGHTS Act. The bill, which was introduced in February in the Massachusetts state legislature, would codify LGBTQI+ people's rights to safer housing, health care, and gender-affirming programming in detention facilities in the state while addressing the anti-LGBTQI+ attitudes that allow sexual abuse behind bars to thrive. Right now, the RIGHTS Act is in committee, and we will provide updates on the work to bring it past the finish line.

**Support incarcerated survivors this holiday season!** Every year, JDI invites people to write holiday cards to survivors, as part of our Words of Hope campaign. These messages mean the world to survivors, reminding them that people care and that they have not been forgotten.

**VISIT: [JUSTDETENTION.ORG/WOH2023](http://JUSTDETENTION.ORG/WOH2023)**





# Members of our Survivor Council, staff, and Board of Directors met with more than 30 Congressional offices on Capitol Hill to advocate for incarcerated people.

CONTINUED FROM COVER

Survivors deserve a chance to heal. In meetings with House and Senate staffers, she highlighted the need for Congress to pass the Sexual Abuse Services in Detention Act (SASIDA) — a bill that would ensure more life-saving services reach incarcerated survivors. “When I was incarcerated, Vanessa was the only person I felt safe talking to,” she told one Congressional staffer from California, her home state.

## HONORING THE MOVEMENT’S HEROES

After a day of advocacy, JDI hosted a Congressional briefing on the Hill. Our Executive Director, Linda McFarlane, led a panel discussion with board and Survivor Council member Jonas Caballero; Survivor Council member and founder of Fight4Justice Dee Farmer; Chief Operating Officer of Respect Together Yolanda Edrington; and President of the TransLatin@ Coalition Bamby Salcedo.

The panelists discussed PREA’s historic impact, while noting that the law has not yet fulfilled its promise of ending prisoner rape. As Representative Bobby Scott — an original PREA sponsor — explained in his remarks, “We can both recognize and celebrate the change we have effected, while also confronting how much more progress must be made.”

Following the briefing, JDI honored Representative Scott and his fellow lead PREA sponsors — former Senator Jeff Sessions and former Rep-



## ADVOCATING FOR INCARCERATED PEOPLE ON CAPITOL HILL

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Senior Program Officer Edward Cervantes (left), JDI Board Vice Chair Mateo de la Torre, and Survivor Council member Robbie Hall; Executive Director Linda McFarlane with Congressman Bobby Scott, an original PREA sponsor and long-time champion of the rights of incarcerated survivors; board member John Johnson (left) and Survivor Council member Cornelius.

representative Frank Wolf — with the John A. Kaneb Leadership Award. The award’s namesake was a driving force behind PREA. John believed deeply that human rights belong to everyone — a conviction shared by his son Stephen, who presented the awards. In addition to PREA’s lead sponsors, the other honorees included

Senators John Cornyn and Brian Schatz, SASIDA’s lead sponsors who are leading a new crop of champions on the Hill in the fight to end prisoner rape.

In celebrating a movement that was sparked by survivors, it was appropriate that the final word went to Stephanie Walker, a board and Survivor Council member.



With her fellow Council members surrounding her, Stephanie accepted a letter from Representative Scott and Senator Cornyn commending the Council for its years of advocacy. “We not only survived a horrifying ordeal behind bars,” she said, “but we spoke out against it, galvanizing a movement to stop this abuse from happening to others.” ■



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

## A Transformative Workshop for Incarcerated Men

Art workshops provide a safe place for incarcerated people to share feelings

**W**e provide art workshop programs in a handful of prisons in New York and California, including at the California Rehabilitation Center (CRC) — a men’s prison in Riverside County. Our staff facilitate all our CRC workshops in both English and Spanish, so that everyone can participate fully. During one recent series of workshops, participants opened up about their feelings and expressed gratitude for being able to connect with one another. A Spanish-speaking participant said that what he liked most about the workshops was being able to express his emotions with his peers and to hear from them as well. Jamila Cervantes, one of our Program Officers who facilitates the workshops, reflected on the experience of working with the group.

*I was so moved to see the impact of the workshops on our Spanish-speaking participants, all of whom were migrants from Peru and Mexico. Growing up in a Latine community, I learned that men were only allowed to express themselves in certain ways. In general, men were highly discouraged from being warm, caring, and emotive. It meant the world to me that our workshops allowed men to feel the range of their emotions and to share their feelings with each other. And the fact that they felt comfortable enough to share these feelings in prison — where it can be dangerous to do so, for fear of being seen as weak or vulnerable — it reminds me that there is hope. There are people actively working to break cycles of violence and to heal from painful experiences. People, like our participants, are championing a better world every day, where everyone can be free from abuse.*

### LEADING THE CHARGE ▶

Program Officer Jamila Cervantes co-facilitates art workshops in English and Spanish, to help all participants feel welcome and included



### ◀ FROM THE ARTIST

A puzzle piece drawn by Justin, an art workshop participant at CRC. At the end of the workshop, participants’ puzzle pieces were joined together to represent the community they had built during their time with each other



Jonas Caballero is a member of our Board of Directors and Survivor Council and a second-year law student at Suny-Albany.

## SURVIVOR’S PERSPECTIVE

# What This Movement Means to Me

In September, I had the honor of speaking on a panel at JDI’s Congressional briefing on Capitol Hill to celebrate the 20th anniversary of PREA. It was a thrill to be alongside other survivors and survivor advocates — people who share my deep conviction that no matter what crime a person may have committed, rape is not part of the penalty.

Toward the end of the briefing, we were asked to share our hopes for the next 20 years. One of my fellow panelists remarked that one important goal is for every incarcerated survivor to get support from community counselors — “just like Jonas had Rachel.” I couldn’t help

but smile. The Rachel in this case was Rachel Herzog, a rape crisis counselor who helped me when I was in a New York prison.

When I first spoke to Rachel, I was in a

**“Rachel gave me a lifeline. She taught me skills to cope with the trauma. She believed me. It meant everything.”**

deep state of despair. I had been sexually assaulted by staff at the prison and, before that, at Rikers. I exercised my right to report the abuse, but was ignored, mocked, and

humiliated. I was already suffering from PTSD before my incarceration, and my treatment by staff caused me to spiral further. I hit rock bottom.

And then I met Rachel.

Rachel gave me a lifeline. In individual, confidential sessions she helped me process what happened. She taught me skills to cope with the trauma. She believed me. It meant everything. And I was able to connect with Rachel because of JDI. When I reached out to JDI for help, they sent me a resource packet with local providers in the area of my prison, including the rape trauma center where Rachel works. Thankfully, the prison was one of the few where officials allow incarcerated people to meet confidentially with outside counselors.



By Linda McFarlane

# New Horizons

Welcome to our redesigned Action Update newsletter! Our aim was to create a newsletter that shares the bold, survivor-centered work that you are helping to make possible, along with our staff, Survivor Council, and other partners in our fight to ensure the dignity of people behind bars. We've introduced new exciting features that will take you inside the movement to end sexual abuse in detention. In addition to regular advocacy updates and first-person staff accounts from the field, each edition will include a column written

by a currently or formerly incarcerated survivor. We're excited to roll out this new format, and we hope you'll find it engaging, accessible, and representative of our movement's incredible diversity.

For this inaugural edition, we share highlights from our recent trip to Washington, D.C. To mark the 20th anniversary of the Prison Rape Elimination Act, we honored some of the people who made this law possible. It was gratifying to see these heroes get the recognition that they deserve, especially members of our

Survivor Council. In a proposed House resolution, Congressman Bobby Scott — himself one of PREA's heroes — put it best, writing "These courageous survivors have fought tirelessly to ensure that no one ever has to face abuse and to instill in all of us the principle that no matter what crime a person has committed, rape is not part of the penalty."

Following the example of courageous survivors, we continue to fight for that principle — and we are grateful that you are fighting with us!

# RAPE IS NOT PART OF THE PENALTY

Just Detention International is a health and human rights organization that seeks to end sexual abuse in all forms of detention.

*Rape is Not Part of the Penalty*



ACTION UPDATE // FALL 2023

### CONTACT US

WEB [www.justdetention.org](http://www.justdetention.org)  
EMAIL [info@justdetention.org](mailto:info@justdetention.org)

### HEADQUARTERS

3250 Wilshire Blvd,  
Suite 1630  
Los Angeles, CA 90010  
T (213) 384-1400

### EAST COAST

1100 H St, NW  
Suite 400  
Washington DC, 20005  
T (202) 506-3333

### SOUTH AFRICA

Norwood Place, 2nd Floor  
66 Grant Avenue  
Northwood, Johannesburg, 2192  
South Africa  
T +27 (11) 483 0989

IN THIS ISSUE

- Celebrating Twenty Years of a Landmark Law
- The Senate Introduces a Bill to Support Survivors
- A Survivor Shares His First-Person Account of Healing
- A Transformative Workshop in a Men's Prison

## WE ARE HERE TO HELP

All survivors of sexual abuse deserve support and compassion. JDI's online Resource Guide lists service providers in all 50 states that can help incarcerated survivors. **To view the Resource Guide, visit [www.justdetention.org/resources/survivor-resources/find-local-services](http://www.justdetention.org/resources/survivor-resources/find-local-services)**

Sexual abuse behind bars is absolutely preventable. You can help end it.

**[JUSTDETENTION.ORG/DONATE](http://JUSTDETENTION.ORG/DONATE)**

Scan this QR code to donate today!



# JDI-South Africa Survivor Council

Survivor-led advocacy has been a hallmark of JDI throughout our history. Indeed, survivors led the organization for more than two decades after our founding. JDI-South Africa's (JDI-SA) history has followed a different path. It grew out of a network of corrections officials who were appalled

by human rights atrocities in South Africa's prisons. But survivors have increasingly played a key role in JDI-SA, and earlier this year JDI-SA established a JDI-SA Survivor Council to deepen their work.

The council's role will mirror that of JDI's Survivor Council. They will serve as spokespeople for the organization, and help guide the strategic direc-

tion of the movement through their wisdom and experience. As Isak Sass, a longtime advocate and member of the newly created council, put it, "the greatest tragedy is not what happened to me in prison. The greatest tragedy will be for me and us to fail to stop this from happening to others and to forget about those who are still at risk of violence."



Isak Sass, a long-time survivor advocate and member of the JDI-SA Survivor Council

Joining Isak on the JDI-SA Survivor Council are Odwa Mbane, Tsakani Motshweni, Tebogo Mokobori, and Vusi Skosana. You can read more about the council members at:

**[SOUTHAFRICA.JUSTDETENTION.ORG/DESIGNATION/SURVIVOR-COUNCIL](http://SOUTHAFRICA.JUSTDETENTION.ORG/DESIGNATION/SURVIVOR-COUNCIL)**

