

How Our Journalism Contributes to Change

The Marshall Project seeks to make an impact on the criminal justice system with journalism, rendering it more fair, effective, transparent and humane. We look for instances where our stories have generated a change in the position or behavior of policymakers, advocates, or other media. Here are some of the clearest examples from the past four months:

TAKING OFF THE BLINDFOLD

Last August, staff writer Beth Schwartzapfel took an in-depth look at the laws governing “discovery,” the legal procedure by which each side in a case can obtain important evidence from the other. New York is one of 10 states with the nation’s strictest “blindfold laws,” allowing prosecutors to wait until the last minute before turning over witness names and statements. Critics insist this amounts to an unfair strategic advantage, and Gov. Andrew Cuomo appears to agree. In January, just a few months after our story appeared on the front page of the New York Times, he publicly committed to making prosecutors show their hands.

THE BUSINESS OF CARE

In December, our investigative fellow Taylor Elizabeth Eldridge revealed the byzantine and highly lucrative world of private prisoner care package companies in a feature co-published with Vox. In corrections systems across the country,



The print edition of The Tennessean, featuring our cover story on the practice of “safekeeping”.

friends and family members are barred from sending most items directly to their loved ones behind bars. Instead, they’re often forced to go through authorized private vendors, where prices are jacked up and options limited or unhealthy. Shortly after Eldridge reported that New York was joining the list of states mandating friends and family of the incarcerated use these services, Gov. Andrew Cuomo reversed his decision.

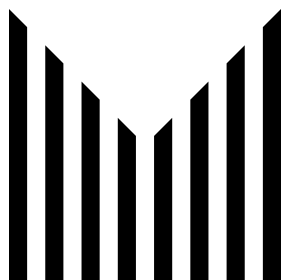
SICK IN SOLITARY

In 1858, a law went on the books in Tennessee allowing county jails to ship people awaiting trial to state solitary confinement if a judge deemed the facility “insufficient” to handle their medical problems, mental illness, or behavioral issues. That law is still in effect today. In an investigation published in partnership with the six newspapers that comprise USA Today Network in Tennessee, Allen Arthur brings us the stories of some of the 320 people declared “safekeepers” over the past six years, including Regenia Bowman, who spent 189 days locked in isolation

because she had a skin infection that cleared up long before she was released. A few days after the story was published, a spokesman for Tennessee’s lieutenant governor said two state Senate committees are looking into changing the 160-year-old law. And on February 23, Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam admitted that he was unaware of the issue before our reporting.

HOT IMPACT

Last October, we teamed up with The Weather Channel to reveal the effects of extreme temperatures from climate change on one of the country’s most vulnerable populations: people behind bars. Staff writer Maurice Chammah interviewed family members of prisoners in Texas who’d died from 100-degree-plus temperatures, and the inmates and guards who are fighting for livable conditions. Last week, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice agreed to settle multiple lawsuits over the heat issues, paying undisclosed sums to the families of prisoners who died of heatstroke and installing air-conditioning in a prison that houses heat-sensitive prisoners. A source close to the negotiations told us our story helped lead to this outcome.



In all of our work, we strive to educate and enlarge the audience of people who care about the state of criminal justice. In addition to direct impact, we are also continually striving to reach new and more diverse groups of readers with our journalism. Here are some recent examples of our greatest reach:

BROADCAST For the PBS NewsHour, our special correspondent John Carlos Frey traveled to Volusia County, Florida to find out how a self-styled progressive reformer and defender of undocumented immigrants got elected sheriff in Trump Country. Michael Chitwood's style is brash and uncensored; he shares the President's disdain for "political correctness." But the sheriff is using his forceful personality to shake up Volusia's culture of policing, emphasizing de-escalation, accountability and better community relations. The segment aired on January 23, along with a feature on our site by staff writer Simone Weichselbaum.

ON THE RADIO One of Trump's first actions after taking office was ordering a "surge" of judges to flood detention centers along the U.S.-Mex-



Screening of WE ARE WITNESSES at BRIC Media Arts in Downtown Brooklyn.
CREDIT: ANDREW EPSTEIN

ico border to speed up deportation cases. Contributing writer Julia Preston teamed up with This American Life to visit an immigration court in Laredo, Texas and find out how it's working. They witnessed bedlam: case files mislaid, an utter lack of lawyers, and detainees literally lost in the system. The story, our latest dispatch from the parallel criminal justice system that governs immigration in our country, was broadcast on NPR stations across the country and downloaded by thousands of podcast listeners.

ONLINE After the successful launch of We Are Witnesses, our rare 360-degree video portrait of the state of crime and punishment, we've worked with new media outlets to adapt the films for their wide digital audiences. NowThis, a viral news service, has been releasing each film on Facebook, where they've garnered over 5 million views so far. The cable news and digital media

startup Newsy has also made We Are Witnesses part of their regular programming over the past month, and featured creator Neil Barsky in an interview.

IN PERSON We're also the midst of an ambitious public outreach and educational campaign based on We Are Witnesses, including many live events. We premiered the films with a sold-out panel at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. In December, the films were shown at the BRIC Media Arts Center as part of their town hall on "Mental Health as a Civil Right." In January, they were screened before a packed crowd at the Bronx Documentary Center. In February, the New York Public Library held a major event for the films at their main Manhattan branch. And there are more events planned for the near future, including Columbia University on April 10, and the Brooklyn Historical Society on June 6.