



CHICAGO
APPLESEED
CENTER FOR FAIR COURTS



ANNUAL **ACCOMPLISHMENTS** **REPORT**

AUGUST 2021 - 2022

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EXECUTIVE STATEMENT

Friends,

For over 25 years, Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts has fought to make our courts less harmful, less racist, and more accessible for all people. Our research helps identify injustice and our advocacy makes the courts fairer and therefore, more effective. We work in partnership with community members and grassroots organizations to devise strategies to implement creative solutions, inform the public about how our court system works, and encourage our neighbors to get involved.

In 1997, I founded this organization. Our mission to improve lives by improving courts was important at the outset, but is even more important now. I'm proud of how far we've come, but our work to make systemic improvements in the court system is far from over.

This report highlights the impact of several of Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Court's most notable recent accomplishments over the past year. Our work is possible because of our community partners and volunteers that support our efforts.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Malcolm Rich
Executive Director
Collaboration for Justice



MISSION + VISION

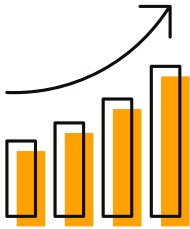
MISSION

Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts works to interrupt cycles of poverty, mass incarceration, and racial injustice perpetrated by all aspects of the legal system.

WE'RE IMPROVING LIVES BY IMPROVING THE COURTS.

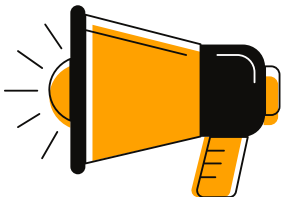
VISION

Few people anticipate ever needing to be in court, so most people are unsure what to expect if and when that time comes. Whether for a divorce or child support matter, a criminal charge, or an eviction, the legal system is opaque and difficult to navigate — especially for those unable to afford their own attorney. We advocate for a legal system that is equitable, accessible, and fair to all people; efficient so justice is not delayed; and effective in seeking solutions to social injustices.



We conduct and assist interdisciplinary research to support community-led solutions with data.

We educate people on how to access their rights in court and teach lawyers + legislators, how to fight for these rights for their clients + constituents.



We advocate for anti-racist policies + practices that make the legal system less harmful.

COLLABORATION FOR JUSTICE

For 25 years, Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts and the Chicago Council of Lawyers have formed a "Collaboration for Justice" to investigate the causes of systemic injustice in courts, propose effective solutions, and work toward implementation.

The Council is a lawyer organization focused on advocating for a fair and efficient administration of justice.

Together, the two organizations work to investigate the causes of systemic injustice in our courts by researching and proposing effective solutions and working for their implementation.

Chicago Appleseed is a research organization focused on remedying systemic injustices in courts.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Our joint Collaboration for Justice Program Committees are groups of between 10-100 volunteer lawyers, academics, organizers, and others who meet monthly and, cumulatively, provide thousands of hours of pro bono research and advocacy work for our collaborative initiatives annually. Our work focuses on the civil courts, the criminal courts, and promoting judicial excellence; we have five diverse, volunteer-led committees which oversee our projects in these areas: Access to Justice, Civil Liberties & Police Accountability, Criminal Legal System, Family Law & Courts, and Immigration Court Reform.

COLLABORATIONS

Everything we do is guided by community initiatives. Our diverse team of staff and volunteers collaborate with community organizations, academics, and court actors to strategically support community-led solutions to systemic problems with data and empirical evidence.

The **Reducing Barriers to Recovery Coalition** is fighting to end the over-incarceration of people convicted of drug-related felonies. The Reducing Barriers to Recovery Coalition includes the ACLU of Illinois, Communities United, Chicago Urban League, The Perfectly Flawed Foundation, Heartland Alliance, TASC, CGLA, The Law Office of the Cook County Public Defender, the Cook County Justice Advisory Council, the Shriver Center on Poverty Law, Live 4 Lali, the Illinois Justice Project, and Learn 4 Life.

The **#StopShotSpotter Coalition** is pushing for the City of Chicago to cancel the contract with ShotSpotter, an audio surveillance technology that supposedly informs police of gunshots, but continually misreports and has led to fatal interactions for community members with police.



The **Transit Table Coalition** is a group of advocates and other stakeholders working to eliminate structural barriers that keep people out of work and in poverty. The Transit Table has focused on driver's license suspensions, excessive ticketing and fines, and other regressive, driving-related punishments. We made incredible progress by passing the License to Work Act, which cleared 75,000 license suspensions, and portions of the SAFE-T Act that limit ticketing for non-driving related financial punishments.

The **Illinois Blueprint for Peace** is a growing coalition of organizations and individuals committed to supporting and advocating for proven approaches to bring peace and healing to our communities. The Coalition opposes "solutions" to gun violence such as policing, criminalization, and incarceration - which have caused continued harm in the name of "public safety" - and proposes anti-racist and decarceral policies focused on community-led alternative conflict resolution initiatives.

Chicago Appleseed, the Exoneration Project, the Chicago Bar Foundation, Cabrini Green Legal Aid, and others created the **Coalition to End Fines and Fees**, which helped pass the Criminal and Traffic Assessment Act (CTAA) in 2019 and have continued to advocate for its efficacy.

CHICAGO APPLESEED, 2019

The **Anti-Gender-Based Violence Legislative Advocacy Committee**

includes local legal aid and anti-sexual assault/domestic violence advocates meeting regularly to share updates, feedback, and cross-collaboration from civil, criminal, and survivor legal advocacy spaces.

The **Coalition to End Money Bond (CEMB)** and the **Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice (INPJ)**

are working to end wealth-based incarceration and significantly reduce pretrial detention in Illinois. Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts was a founding member of the Coalition to End Money Bond in 2016, along with the Chicago Community Bond Fund and others. In 2020, the Illinois General Assembly ended money bond in Illinois, effective 2023, and we remain a key partner in helping implement that policy.

The **Judicial Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Coalition**

is a group of advocates and journalists working together to make Illinois' judiciary more transparent. Under current law, Illinois Courts are not subject to FOIA laws, which leads to an unacceptably low level of transparency and data access. Nearly all other states have judicial transparency laws; the Judicial FOIA Coalition seeks administrative and legislative solutions to this problem so Illinois can join the rest of the country in having reasonable access to information about our courts.



CHICAGO APPLESEED, 2016

Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts convened the **Coalition to Ensure a Court Record** with the goal to ensure all proceedings in Cook County are recorded and transcribed. In 2019, we successfully advocated for this in the trial courtrooms and continue to work to expand that progress.

The **Chicago Data Collaborative** is a cooperative effort by newsrooms, academics, and nonprofit researchers to help each other understand our criminal legal system. The group works together to gather and organize data from public agencies in an effort to paint a comprehensive picture of the criminal legal system as a whole. The Chicago Data Collaborative includes *Injustice Watch*, *DataMade*, *Invisible Institute*, *Chicago Appleseed*, *Lucy Parsons Labs*, *Northwestern's Bluhm Legal Clinic*, the *Chicago Reporter*, and others.

We also serve on several committees convened by government and court stakeholders, such as **Pretrial Fairness Act Workgroups**, **Illinois Supreme Court's Statutory Court Fees Task Force**, and **Circuit Court of Cook County Committee on Domestic Violence Courts**.

YEAR IN REVIEW

2021 AUGUST

Cook County judges report as many as 85% of the litigants who appear before them in civil court are self-represented. To alleviate this burden on family court litigants, Chicago Appleseed helped create and is monitoring the Hearing Officer Program. Over 90% of litigants reported that Hearing Officers were fair and impartial.

REPORT: "Solutions Rather Than Obstacles" - Evaluating Cook County's Domestic Relations Hearing Officer Program

SEPTEMBER

While Cook County takes pride in its progress lowering the number of people in the jail over the last decade, the County has drastically increased its use of electronic monitoring. In September 2021, over 3,000 people in and around Chicago are on electronic monitoring - an increase of 23% from April 1, 2020.

REPORT: 10 Facts About Electronic Monitoring in Cook County

PRESS COVERAGE: "Cook County Electronic Monitoring Program, Used Widely, Slammed In New Report" - ABC-7 News (September 24)

OCTOBER

On October 5, our Director of Policy Sarah Staudt, was joined by Illinois State Senator Robert Peters and Garien Gatewood of the Illinois Justice Project to discuss the abolition of money bail. On October 19, we featured two keynote speakers: Illinois Attorney General, Kwame Raoul, and Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court, Honorable Anne Burke.

EVENTS: Hidden Injustices Series on October 5 and October 19

NOVEMBER

Chicago's Mayor Lori Lightfoot announced a plan to "start suing gang members to 'take their assets'" in an attempt to curb community violence. We issued a statement explaining while it's essential that Chicago avoid adopting another policy that unjustly penalizes poor people, further harms our communities, does nothing to reduce violence in the city.

STATEMENT: "Chicago City Council Must Vote NO on the Mayor's Proposed Civil Asset Forfeiture Ordinance (02021-4130)"

DECEMBER

In the first few weeks of April 2020, the Cook County jail population shrunk by about 25%, down to 4,000 people, after a significant push by advocates - including Chicago Appleseed - to decarcerate for public health. In December 2021, the number of people incarcerated "swelled...beyond pre-pandemic levels," to 5,949 people.

PRESS COVERAGE: "Coronavirus Cases Rising in Cook County Jail Despite Widespread Vaccines and Testing: 'It's Devastating'" - Block Club Chicago (December 2)

2022 JANUARY

In January 2022, the Pretrial Fairness Act's provisions to improve people's quality of life on electronic monitoring by allowing more movement went into effect. Sarah Staudt explained to the media: "The reason those laws were passed were because the program as it existed was a human rights violation."

PRESS COVERAGE: "Changes to electronic home monitoring drawing criticism" - WGN News (January 27)



FEBRUARY

Our first progress report on Cook County Circuit Court Clerk Iris Martinez's first full year found that the administration has made meaningful progress, but much remains to be done to bring the office up to the standards of technological competence and customer service that are needed in a twenty-first-century public agency.

REPORT: *Year One Progress Report - New Directions for the Clerk of the Circuit Court Of Cook County*

PRESS COVERAGE: *"Watchdog Groups Dig Martinez on Slow Tech and Transparency Reform but Praise 'Progress' on Shakman" - The Daily Line (February 25)*

APRIL

We collaborated with immigrant rights organizations in Chicago's Albany Park, Brighton Park, Little Village, Pulaski Park, Ravenswood, and Downtown, and as far as the northwest suburbs of Mount Prospect, to deliver "Know Your Rights" presentations in English and in Spanish to over 190 people dealing with immigration legal issues.

RESOURCES: *"Know Your Rights" in Immigration Courts*

MAY

Every summer, Chicago experiences heightened violence and the Mayor announced plans for increased police and stricter curfews. More than 65 organizations in Chicago came together to call for the Mayor to focus on root causes instead of punishment.

STATEMENT: *"More than 65 Community Groups Call on the City of Chicago to Focus on Root Causes of Violence Instead of Punishment"*

JUNE

Since the Pretrial Fairness Act, the Sheriff has claimed people on house arrest move around unmonitored, but as Sarah Staudt notes: "There's no way to check their work—which is concerning, given that those numbers have been found to be suspect."

PRESS COVERAGE: *"False Alarms" - Chicago Reader (June 9)*

Seeds of Justice, our annual pro bono acknowledgement event, honored Sharon Mitchell, Jr., Public Defender of Cook County, and featured a keynote by Joe Ferguson, former Inspector General for the City of Chicago.

EVENT: *Seeds of Justice Awards on June 21*

MARCH

Chicago Appleseed spoke out in opposition of HB 1091, one of the most regressive pieces of criminal legal legislation introduced in years. HB 1091 targets people who are alleged to have engaged in a non-violent retail theft, even though retail theft is at its lowest level in decades (43% lower than in 2019).

STATEMENT: *"Organized Retail Theft" Bill is an Extreme Approach to an Imaginary Problem"*



JULY

We urged the Illinois Courts to improve the means for data collection surrounding the Pretrial Fairness Act.

STATEMENT: *Illinois Pretrial Practices Data Oversight Board Provides Few Solutions*

AUGUST

In the first comprehensive evaluation of its kind, Chicago Appleseed reviewed best practices for specialized domestic violence courts, interviewed over 30 Cook County judges and social service practitioners, and completed at least 180 courtroom observations to understand the functioning of Cook County's Domestic Violence Division.

REPORT: *"Slipping Through The Cracks" - An Evaluation of Cook County's Domestic Violence Division in Chicago*

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

MALCOLM RICH

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Malcolm (he/him) is a lawyer who has been the Executive Director of the Chicago Council of Lawyers since 1987 and of Chicago Appleseed since its creation in 1997. His project work focuses primarily on administrative law and issues surrounding judicial elections.

STEPHANIE AGNEW

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Stephanie (she/her) is our Director of Communications and a Licensed Social Worker. She oversees our internal and external communications strategy and execution, and works with the program staff to successfully implement our advocacy strategies.

NAOMI JOHNSON

DIRECTOR OF PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

Naomi (she/they) is our Director of Program Management. They have a Masters in Social Work and manage our research and policy projects – centering community voices alongside evidence-driven approaches.

ELIZABETH MONKUS

CIVIL COURTS PROJECT DIRECTOR

Elizabeth (she/her) came to Chicago Appleseed in 2010. She is currently our Civil Projects Director, focusing on domestic relations, domestic violence, and judicial elections.

SARAH STAUDT

DIRECTOR OF POLICY

Sarah (she/her) has led our criminal legal system efforts since 2018 and now oversees our legislative portfolio. Her policy research work focuses on pretrial issues, including leading our involvement in the Coalition to End Money Bond, which was instrumental in advocating for the groundbreaking Pretrial Fairness Act in 2021.

KAREEM BUTLER

PRETRIAL JUSTICE FELLOW

Kareem Butler (he/him) is our Pretrial Justice Fellow, where his work primarily focuses on the statewide implementation of the Pretrial Fairness Act, passed in 2021, with the Coalition to End Money Bond and the Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice.

KAITLYN FILIP

APPLESEED NETWORK FELLOW

Kaitlyn (she/her) is a JD-PhD student in Communication Studies: Rhetoric and Public Culture at Northwestern University. Her fellowship projects focus on the Domestic Relations and the Domestic Violence Divisions, including the use of hearing officers.

JENNIFER WON YOUNG LEE

JILL DUPONT MEMORIAL FELLOW

Jennifer (she/her) is the first Jill Dupont Memorial Fellow of the Collaboration for Justice. Jennifer coordinates our court-watching program and assists with projects that focus on the quality and independence of judges.

GET INVOLVED

There are a variety of ways for organizations and individual community members to get involved with Chicago Appleseed.

COMMITTEES + PROJECTS

Program committee members give a few hours of pro bono time per month to attend our monthly standing meetings. During this time, they connect with the most dedicated advocates in Chicago to bring about meaningful change in our legal system and help guide our mission to make the courts more accessible. Members who wish to provide additional support help design our research projects, work with community partners, and devise remedies and advocacy strategies in order to restructure our courts. These program committee guide our pro bono projects, which provide opportunities for teams of various sizes – including volunteer lawyers, data analysts, social workers, and others to assist in research or provide other support to our projects.



COURT-WATCHING

Our court-watchers observe proceedings to collect case outcome data, observe judicial behavior and culture, or to understand general court functioning. A court-watcher's purpose in the courtroom is to assess the atmosphere, culture, and character of the courtroom to understand how judges influence the environment and collect data to inform future advocacy efforts and our ongoing research.



JOIN US:
[CHICAGOAPPLESEED.ORG/GET-INVOLVED](https://chicagoappleseed.org/get-involved)

DONATE

We appreciate every dollar of contribution. Small donors in a large enough volume become major donors in the aggregate: in 2020, over 40% of our fundraising came from individual donors.

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Contributions to Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts are an investment with the return being a better, fairer, and more just society.

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