

## TACKLING THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

In light of the historic discrimination against African-Americans and people of color in the criminal justice system, **Metro IAF** has been fighting for equity by harnessing citizen anger in Metro **IL**, Baltimore, **MD**, Cleveland, **OH**, Durham, **NC**, Northern **VA** and other areas to change a system that permanently harms hundreds of thousands of African-American, immigrant, and low-income residents in **Metro IAF**'s cities and suburban areas. **Metro IAF** is dedicated to ending the communities-to-prison pipeline and creating alternatives that invest in people on the front end and ensure they receive a fair chance after being released from prison.

## 2019 HIGHLIGHTS

### **VOICE Delivers Justice to 627,000 Virginians: Drivers Licenses Restored for people with unpaid court debt, fees and fines.**



In 2018, **Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement (VOICE)** in Northern VA challenged Governor Ralph Northam to end Virginia's draconian practice of suspending driver's licenses over unpaid court debt, which almost exclusively impacts the poor and people of color. **VOICE** also pushed Governor Northam to allocate money in his budget to replace revenue lost from reinstatement fees, roughly \$9 million per year, which in the past was a major roadblock to passage of the legislation.

On Wednesday April 3rd, as a result of Gov. Northam's action to put the needed funding in his FY 2019-2020 budget, **VOICE** helped deliver a major victory to the 627,000 Virginians who have their licenses suspended over court debt with the passage of a budget amendment that bans the practice. This victory will enable thousands to drive to work so they can provide for their families as well as contribute millions in new tax revenue. In the preceding months, **VOICE** sent teams of leaders from local congregations to discuss this issue with dozens of key lawmakers including House Speaker Kirk Cox (R), whose support proved crucial. **VOICE** also helped to organize key Virginia allies such as business and denominational leaders, who have helped organize support for the bill in key Virginia districts. **VOICE** also worked effectively with Americans for Prosperity, Prison Fellowship, and Legal Aid Justice Center.

### **VOICE Packs the House for Criminal Justice Reform**

On October 2019, **VOICE** mobilized 600 of its Prince William County leaders for a standing room-only action with candidates for Board of Supervisors Chair, Commonwealth Attorney, and School Board Chair. Candidates strongly endorsed the creation of a Public Defender office in Prince William County. Prince William, the first majority people of color county in VA, is the only county in Northern Virginia that lacks such an office. Receiving political support from Commonwealth Attorney candidates to open a Public Defender office is unprecedented in VA. In December 2019, Governor Northam included \$2.7 million in funding for Prince William public defenders' office in his 2020-21 budget.



**connect . act . win**

24 Organizations in: CT, DC, IL, MA, MD, NC, NJ, OH, NY, VA, WI  
Affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation



## 2019 HIGHLIGHTS (continued)

### Greater Cleveland Congregations (GCC) Expands Alternatives to Incarceration

The Cuyahoga County Drug Courts have a long, positive history of diverting people with addiction problems from jail into treatment. But when **GCC** did research into the make-up of the Drug Court, they discovered that those being diverted were 85-90% white. **GCC** acted on this injustice by getting commitments from the Chief Administrative Judge and the County Prosecutor to establish a new Drug Court with less restrictive entrance criteria around prior felonies. This Court will allow far more people of color

a chance to get treatment instead of being warehoused in jail. **GCC** celebrated this win at an action in November, 2019. The new Drug Court began in January of 2020.

### Major Progress Toward Automatic Criminal Records Expungements in Connecticut

#### Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut (CONECT)

won introduction of Clean Slate Legislation in CT which would automatically expunge the criminal records of returning citizens who do not return to crime (3 years after misdemeanors and 5 years after non-violent felonies). Clean Slate legislation will give returning citizens hope and a promise that, if you remain crime free, your record will be expunged automatically. CT Governor Lamont committed to move it forward in 2020. “This important legislation will help level the playing field for Connecticut’s racial minorities,” said Rev. Anthony Bennett, Co-Chair of **CONECT**. “Despite important gains in criminal justice reform here in Connecticut, racial minorities are still far more likely to have a criminal record, even surpassing national averages. That’s just unacceptable here in Connecticut.”



### Metro IL working to end pipeline to prison with Crisis Stabilization Units

#### DuPage United, Fox River Valley Initiative, United Power for Action and Justice and Lake County United

engaged with five hospital and behavioral systems for the expansion of Crisis Stabilization Units across the four-county region. CSUs divert those in a mental crisis from jail and hospital emergency rooms, allowing people with mental illness to avoid incarceration and receive support by trained professionals in a therapeutic space that is safe and will be responsive to their future care needs. One CSU celebrated their opening in Chicago (Cook County) with one expected to open in Aurora (Kane County) in 2020. Metro IL pressed Governor Pritzker and won an increase of Medicare/Medicaid funding from \$28 per 8 hours to \$900 per 8 hours. This will help end the pipeline to prison and reduce Medicaid cost by diverting patients from crowded emergency rooms. In addition, Chicago Mayor Lightfoot committed to work with **United Power for Action and Justice** to end incarceration of people with mental illness and increase the number of Crisis Stabilization Units in Chicago.



### Increase in Crisis Intervention Team Training in DuPage County, IL

**DuPage United** increased Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training for Police to de-escalate situations involving the mentally ill in DuPage County. Sheriff James Mendrick announced since the county began their CIT program in November, 2017, 75% of the sheriff’s department has been CIT certified.

## WHO WE ARE

**Metro Industrial Areas Foundation** (Metro IAF) is affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the first and largest network of multi-faith, broad-based citizen organizations, which has eight decades of experience winning tough battles on housing, health care, education, living wages, immigration rights, and other issues in the US and abroad. Metro IAF’s 24 affiliates are in the East, Midwest, and Southeast United States (CT, DC, IL, MA, MD, NC, NJ, NY, OH, VA, WI).