

# Impact Report

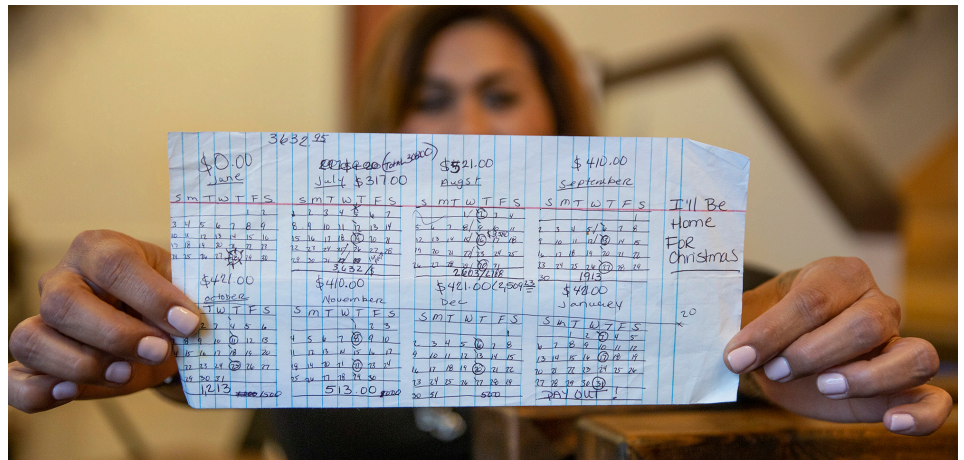
Spring 2020

The Marshall Project

The Marshall Project tracks the impact of our journalism on lawmakers, advocates and other media. Some recent examples:

## CALIFORNIA CHANGIN'

- While working on "The New Price of a Plea Bargain in California," reporter Abbie VanSickle asked legislators about the San Diego district attorney, who was trying to limit the effects of future reforms on people receiving plea bargains. Even before our piece was published, an assemblyman whom Abbie had consulted filed a bill to bar this practice. That bill was signed into law by Gov. Gavin Newsom on Oct. 8, 2019.
- Our April 2019 story, "Who Begs To Go To Prison? California Jail Inmates," tackled an unintended side effect of prison reform in the state: more people serving long sentences in jails ill-equipped to treat or manage them. The investigation, which ran on the front page of The Los Angeles Times, helped spur Sacramento into settling a lawsuit brought by incarcerated people in its jail.



Julia Gonzales holds a calendar she made to estimate when she would earn enough money to be released from a restitution center. ERIC J. SHELTON/MISSISSIPPI TODAY, REPORT FOR AMERICA

- A California legislative aide included our 2018 story, "The \$580 Co-pay," in a factsheet distributed to members of the legislature about a bill to eliminate medical copays in the state's prisons and jails. Given the incredibly low wages people earn,

relying on gangs to keep the peace. Mississippi Congressman Bennie G. Thompson cited our work in a letter to the U.S. Department of Justice urging an investigation into the state's deadly prison conditions. In February, the Justice Department's

Civil Rights Division announced it was opening a probe into four of the state's prisons, including Wilkinson.

**"[Your story] helped us to put these expensive copayments in perspective... We appreciate the dedication of Marshall Project journalists to exposing the injustices of our criminal justice system."**

— CALIFORNIA STATE ASSEMBLY MEMBER MARK STONE

- The Marshall Project teamed up with the nonprofit Mississippi Today to investigate

our piece put into perspective the \$5 co-pay the state's jails charged for visits to the doctor and dentist. The bill, which was signed into law in October 2019, eliminated copayments for all such visits, as well as for equipment such as dentures or artificial limbs.

## MISSISSIPPI BURNING

- We published an investigation in June 2019 revealing that the warden of Mississippi's Wilkinson County Correctional Facility admitted to

Mississippi's modern-day debtors' prisons, where people are sentenced to an amount of money rather than time. Our first-of-its-kind data analysis showed that black people are disproportionately sentenced to these centers to pay off fees and fines. The story was published by USA Today and in half a dozen local papers across the state, including the Jackson Clarion-Ledger and the Meridian Star. State legislators subsequently filed several bills that would end the restitution program.



A still from *Tutwiler*, a new documentary from The Marshall Project and Frontline (PBS).

## FACTS OVER FEAR

On January 17, the Washington State Senate passed a bill outlawing discrimination against residents applying for housing, jobs, or public accommodations based on citizenship or immigration status. In presenting

**“We should stick to the facts when we’re debating this policy and not get carried away with things that are not true. We’re not about fear-mongering.”**

— WASHINGTON STATE SENATOR PATTY KUDERER

her case, one state senator cited our 2019 data investigation which found undocumented immigration does not lead to higher crime rates.

## SUE THE POLICE

The Memphis Shelby Crime Commission is technically a nonprofit, but its board includes top public officials and its chief function seems to be channeling secret corporate donations to the police department. In reporting a story about the Memphis police in 2019, The Marshall Project asked for basic documents about the Commission’s operations. The Commission refused—until we sued, in collaboration with the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. In February, the Commission finally agreed to make records of donations it received public, along with contracts, tax forms, emails and internal reports. Local media continue to follow the story.

## PREGNANT IN PRISON

Over the past year, Marshall Project reporter Alysia Santo and Academy Award-nominated filmmaker Elaine Sheldon followed a group of pregnant women incarcerated at Alabama’s Julia Tutwiler Prison. The resulting

documentary, “Tutwiler,” produced in partnership with Frontline (PBS), examines the successes of an innovative doula program inside the prison, and the inevitable tragedies

of women giving up their newborns 24 hours after delivery to return to a life behind bars. The film raises critical questions about how our nation is handling the growing crisis of incarcerated mothers, mothers-to-be, and the children who are starting their lives without them.

“Tutwiler” premiered at the Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival and was screened at the New Orleans Film Festival, where it won the 2019 Audience Award for Documentary Short. It has also been screened for Alabama state corrections officials, who have vowed to provide better support to women post-partum. Next up: three public screenings in Alabama, a screening in Tutwiler prison itself—and a PBS broadcast on Mother’s Day 2020.

## LEGACY IN THE SOUTH

One of The Marshall Project’s priorities has been expanding our regional reporting initiative in the high-incarceration states of the American South. In October, the full staff and board of The Marshall Project convened in Montgomery, Alabama, to dive deeper into the history and current landscape of the region. The emotional focus of our trip was a visit to the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice, created by Bryan Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative. We also heard from Georgia politician Stacey Abrams, Alabama corrections commissioner Jefferson Dunn, and a wide range of other speakers. We feel more determined than ever to pursue journalism that will have a real impact on the criminal justice system, recognizing its antecedents in slavery and Jim Crow.



From top: Stacey Abrams addresses The Marshall Project’s staff and board; Jefferson Dunn discusses Alabama’s prisons; Bryan Stevenson in conversation with Lawrence Bartley and Carroll Bogert. BRIAN PALMER FOR THE MARSHALL PROJECT