



THE HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER OF THE
SOUTHERN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS | AUGUST 2021





**SOUTHERN
CENTER FOR
HUMAN
RIGHTS**

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COVER

Top Image

March Against the Myth
June 27, 2020

Organized by JUSTGeorgia in collaboration with youth organizers, the rally demanded changes to conditions that enable state-sanctioned violence and honored those who have lost their loves across Georgia. JUSTGeorgia is a coalition of organizations, organizers, and lawyers working to transform the conditions of criminalization and racialized violence in Georgia.

Bottom Image

Press Conference for HB 101 and HR 28
January 19, 2021

Marissa McCall speaks at the press conference for the introduction of HB 101 and HR 28, legislation intended to end the practice of felony disenfranchisement in Georgia.

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

People incarcerated or returning home from prison are often referred to by antiquated, derogatory, and disrespectful terms such as “felon,” “convict,” “inmate,” or “ex-con.” These terms are no longer appropriate as they are unforgiving and do not reflect the individual’s humanity. Currently and formerly incarcerated people are people FIRST. Therefore, SCHR prioritizes using respectful, “person-first” language to uplift their humanity

– **Waleisah S. Wilson, Client Services Advocate**

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HOW DOES SUPPORTING SCHR'S MISSION ALIGN WITH YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL VALUES?

FROM MAUREEN F. DEL DUCA

Since I became an SCHR supporter several decades ago, I have felt intuitively that the mission of battling horrific impacts of the criminal legal system on people who are vulnerable—because of their race, poverty, disability, mental health, and/or unjust and inhumane incarceration—aligned with my values. My parents taught me to question the status quo and fight for justice, and my two now-adult sons with severe autism have reinforced my maternal need to protect the most vulnerable.



But this question forced me to articulate my values to myself. And, as I wrote them down, I saw in them every act of compassion, courage, and love that I have seen Southern Center staffers perform so heroically and selflessly over the many years I have watched them work.

- *Respect and advance a safe, dignified, fulfilling, and joyful life for every individual.*
- *Advocate for the most vulnerable.*
- *Embrace empathy. Act on compassion. Be kind.*
- *Commit to community, conscience, truth, equity, and justice.*
- *Fight selfishness, greed, hate, lies, abuse of power, and violence to civic discourse, minds, and bodies.*
- *Lead, agitate, persist, and be resilient in the constant struggle for equity, justice, and peace.*

These are my values, and SCHR lives them. Every day.

FROM MORRISON & FOERSTER

The past four years have repeatedly demonstrated that racism is not an isolated aberration, and that it has ongoing and profound consequences throughout the fabric of American Society—including our legal system. Morrison & Foerster has for many years valued equal access to justice and has fought discrimination within the legal system. **The law firm is honored to support SCHR's courageous mission to further equality under the law and to seek justice for people unfairly affected by the criminal legal system.**



David A. Churchill

Partner | Washington, D.C.

DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

SARA J. TONCHI



In March, the *Washington Post* ran an op-ed by former Alabama Attorney General Bill Baxley in which he declared that an innocent man is on death row. The man he is referring to is Toforest Johnson, whom the Southern Center for Human Rights has been privileged to represent for nearly two decades.

In the hours following the article being posted, I received literally dozens of calls, texts, emails, and tweets from members of the broader SCHR community. All who reached out not only declared their beliefs of Toforest's innocence but also shared the ways Toforest changed their lives.

Despite being held on death row, innocent, for the last 24 years, Toforest has had a profound impact on the lives of so many. His relationship with his family is strong and rich, despite the long time they have been physically separated.

Toforest's impression on our team has been equally deep. He has generously trained up generations of SCHR staff members and interns who have gone on to make major contributions in fighting the death penalty nationwide. For example, Toforest's impression on SCHR alum Ty Alper has been so indelible that Ty continues to co-counsel his case with us, 15 years after he left SCHR to lead UC Berkeley's Death Penalty Clinic.

This year marks the 45th anniversary of the Southern Center for Human Rights and my 20th anniversary here. We are both officially middle-aged. Our relationship with Toforest has spanned nearly half of our existence. I know I am not alone in saying that our team is extraordinarily grateful to have been able to stay in this fight with him for this long and for however long it takes.

One thing I have been struck by this year is that while SCHR's commitment to our longtime clients and causes persist, we are continuing to evolve and expand to meet the endless needs of this moment. Indeed, the uprisings for racial justice and the pandemic of 2020 made the fight for an end to mass incarceration, the death penalty, and racial injustice more urgent than ever. I am not being hyperbolic when I say that in our middle age, SCHR's potential has never been higher.

SCHR has emerged as the flagship organization for criminal legal reform in Georgia and beyond. SCHR is a leader in coalitions that are laying down strategies for transformative change, and we are the go-to resource and partner for so many, including unlikely allies.

One example of this dynamic is unfolding in real-time. Less than two weeks after the first anniversary of Ahmaud Arbery's death, the Georgia House of Representatives unanimously passed legislation that repeals our citizen's arrest statute.

The laws date back to medieval England and the United States' colonial period when it could take days for law enforcement to arrive at a crime scene. The racist implications of the law cannot be ignored. There are countless and tragic examples from the lynching era of white mobs claiming to exercise the right of citizen's arrest. And the same narrative continues into the current era—in 2020, after the killing of Ahmaud Arbery while he jogged in Brunswick. All 50 states have a version of the law in place.

In January, Georgia Governor Brian Kemp declared that the repeal of the citizen's arrest statute was his top priority in 2021, and he sought out the counsel of our office to make it happen. SCHR's Public Policy team, led by Marissa McCall, was central to the creation and shepherding of this important legislation. SCHR is proud of this work and thankful for the support of our diverse coalition partners who are standing with us in centering the truth about this law's racist history and brutal impact.

When this legislation was signed into law, Georgia lead the nation once more, as the first state in the nation to repeal this archaic law. It is one more step in holding our state accountable for racial terror and the horrors of our history that have continued into the modern-day.

This is a strange moment to be celebrating anniversaries. This last year has been heavy and hard for so many, worldwide. Our families and communities have endured losses beyond comprehension. SCHR has lost many loved ones, including our beloved Marissa. At times, our collective despair has felt palpable.

In these moments, I lean into Alicia Garza's wise words from *The Purpose of Power*:

“Hope is not the absence of despair, it is the ability to come back to our purpose again and again.”

This sentiment is reflected over and over again throughout SCHR's forty-five-year history.

In 2021, I could not be more grateful to be in this struggle with SCHR's dedicated team of miracle-workers. We will keep standing with those who are fighting for their freedom. We recognize the incredible privilege that we have been given and we seek to center, honor, and uplift the humanity, dignity, and experiences of the people we represent in all that we do.

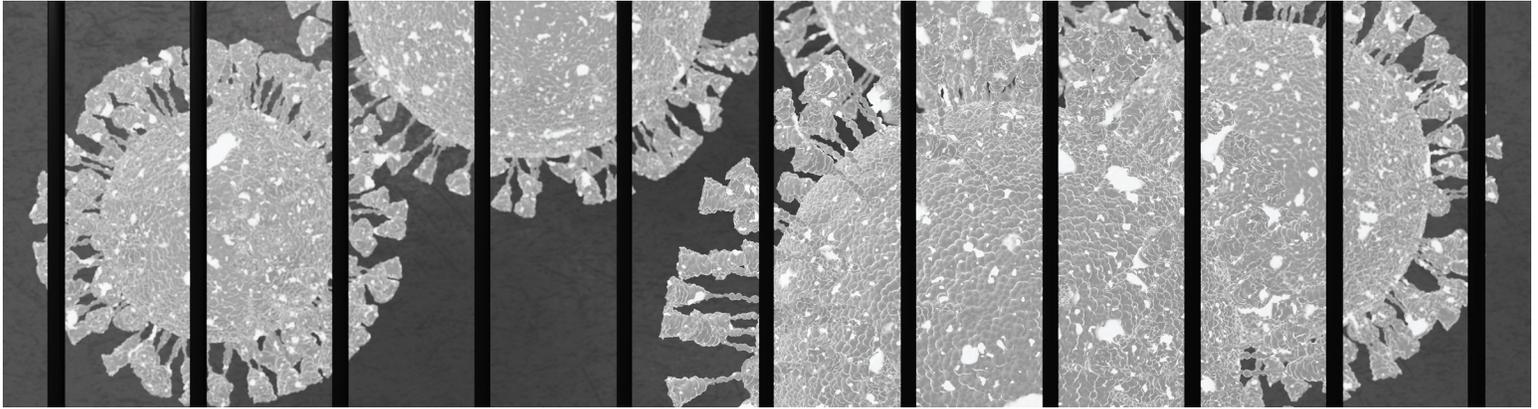
This anniversary and this work would not be possible without the generosity of SCHR's community of supporters. From the bottom of my heart, THANK YOU for your friendship and support that keeps us in the struggle for equality, dignity, and justice for people impacted by the criminal legal systems in the Deep South.

With hope,



Sara J. Totonchi

CHALLENGING INACTION ON COVID-19 IN PRISONS AND JAILS



“Expect the Unexpected.”

We’ve all heard this so many times that the saying has all but lost meaning. But to live the unexpected is a whole other story. To see every facet of life change. To see gridlocked commutes turn to eerie open roads. Multi-billion-dollar industries come to a standstill. World governments flummoxed. To see millions of lives lost across the globe. It’s indescribable.

No one could prepare for COVID-19, but at SCHR, we knew it was imperative to move quickly to protect the lives of people who are incarcerated. Prisons and jails are overcrowded and many people who are imprisoned are elderly or have health conditions. We knew it would be catastrophic if there were mass outbreaks of COVID-19 in prisons and jails across the Deep South. In a few short weeks, our staff became experts on viral epidemiology and how COVID-19 spreads in correctional facilities.

Since March 2020, SCHR has been sending recommendations for protecting incarcerated people and prison staff to the Georgia Department of Corrections and the Board of Pardons and Paroles, all 159 Georgia sheriffs and 500 municipal and state court judges in Georgia, and to the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice.

Additionally, SCHR sent out more than 3,100 packets to people in 70 facilities in Georgia and Alabama. The packets are filled with informational materials, CDC recommendations for COVID-19, and include a questionnaire about how prisons and jails are responding to this pandemic.

These advocacy efforts have led to some positive changes for people who are incarcerated. The Georgia Department of Corrections updated its websites to provide more information on the number of COVID-19 cases and suspended medical copay costs for people with COVID-19 symptoms. Prisons and jails have started to provide more cleaning products and PPE to people who are incarcerated and to correctional staff. Within the first few months of the pandemic, Georgia’s jail population decreased by 20% while its prison population decreased by 3%.

There is no doubt that our advocacy has increased transparency, strengthened safety protocols, and helped to protect tens of thousands of people. But that does not mean that every outcome has been positive.

When the average occupancy rate in jails across the state decreased from 77% to 57% capacity, the Clayton County Jail remained at near 100% capacity.

Despite the significant risks to detainees and staff members alike, the jail made few adjustments to their operations and did not provide people with proper PPE or adequate cleaning supplies. This contributed to an outbreak where more than 100 detainees contracted COVID-19 and at least one person died.

SCHR filed a lawsuit on behalf of the people held in the jail, and despite hearing accounts from dozens of people describing their horrific experiences, the judge denied our request for a preliminary injunction against the jail.

This ruling falls in line with many others from across the country where prisons and jails have not been required to do more and where the safety of people who are incarcerated has suffered.

Over the past year, it has been an uphill battle to ensure that our society does not lose sight of system-impacted people during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have cried tears of joy at seeing clients return home into the arms of their families, but there have also been tears of anguish when our clients lost their lives to this deadly disease. Our fight for safety and dignity is not a one-day or even a one-year battle. SCHR will continue to defend the well-being of system-impacted people across the Deep South long after this pandemic ends.

District Attorney and Birmingham Community Call for New Trial for Toforest Johnson

In 2020, the District Attorney's Office in Birmingham, Alabama, filed an extraordinary brief urging the court to grant a new trial for Toforest Johnson. Mr. Johnson was wrongfully convicted of murder and sentenced to death in 1998. He is represented by SCHR, the Berkeley Law Death Penalty Clinic, and Cardozo Law Professor Kathryn Miller.

The District Attorney's brief was filed after an extensive, nine-month evaluation of the integrity of Mr. Johnson's conviction. Ultimately, the District Attorney found five fundamental flaws with the conviction, including that the State never settled on a theory as to who shot the victim; the investigation was based on a 15-year-old girl who admitted to lying repeatedly; the State's main witness received a \$5,000 reward that was never disclosed to the defense; numerous alibi witnesses placed Mr. Johnson across town at the time of the murder; and the lead trial prosecutor has expressed concerns about the case and supports a new trial.

In response to the District Attorney's filing, SCHR and its co-counsel filed a second state post-conviction petition requesting that the circuit court grant Mr. Johnson a new trial. Several of the most prominent law firms in Alabama filed amicus briefs (also known as "friend of the court" briefs) on behalf of numerous groups in the Birmingham community including (1) former prosecutors, (2) former judges, (3) public defenders, (4) faith leaders on behalf of their congregations, (5) legal ethics professors, (6) Alabama Appleseed, and (7) the Innocence Project. These briefs called on the circuit court to respect the District Attorney's position and grant a new trial.

The Attorney General represents the State in the case and has not yet agreed to relief. The circuit court has not yet addressed Mr. Johnson's request, and he currently remains on Alabama's death row.

MOBILIZING TO PROTECT THE RIGHT TO PROTEST



On February 23, 2020, Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old Black man, was fatally shot by white vigilantes in Glynn County, Georgia, while out for a run. In the weeks and months that followed Mr. Arbery's murder and the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks, people across the country took to the streets to protest against white supremacy and police violence. 2020 was a year of righteous uprisings, and yet in Georgia (and across the nation), protests were met, as they have been in years past, with brutality.

Standing up for the right to dissent is foundational for the Southern Center for Human Rights. In September, SCHR and co-counsel jointly filed a civil complaint on behalf of Representative Nikema Williams, activist Mary Hooks, and others who were wrongly cited, arrested, and jailed after peacefully protesting voter suppression in the Georgia State Capitol rotunda in November 2018. The rotunda of the Georgia State Capitol is a public forum and has historically been used as a location for protests and press conferences. While peacefully congregated in the Capitol's public rotunda, some Plaintiffs briefly chanted "count every vote!"

Then, as Mary Hooks was speaking, Georgia State Patrol officers unlawfully arrested the plaintiffs, including Rep. Williams, knocking several to the ground.

"I stood peacefully next to my constituents because they wanted their voices to be heard, and now I'm being arrested," Representative Williams said on that day as an officer walked her out of the Capitol with her wrists zip-tied. The lawsuit seeks immediate changes to specific protest-related statutes.

More recently, as protesters for Black lives marched in the streets of Atlanta last summer, they were met with battalions of police and National Guard forces. Protesters were rounded up, tear-gassed, shot at with rubber bullets, and arrested and jailed by the hundreds. The vast majority of the charges levied against those arrested were curfew violations and other minor misdemeanors.

As other mayors and prosecutors around the country in cities like Los Angeles, Manhattan, Chicago, and Dallas have realized, arresting protesters fails to respect the free speech rights of citizens.

People exercising their First Amendment rights should not be facing jail time, a long-lasting impact on their employment, and potential immigration consequences. The injustice of these arrests is only compounded by the fact that they took place during a global pandemic.

In response to Atlanta's inaction, SCHR worked to coordinate representation for all those arrested protesting for Black lives in the city and sent multiple advocacy letters to Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, City Solicitor Raines Carter, and City Council President Felicia Moore, urging them to drop the charges. After months of pressure, charges are beginning to be dismissed. We will continue to push for mass dismissal of all protester cases.

A citizens' right to speak their mind—whether through protest or not—is core to the First Amendment rights we all share. The Southern Center for Human Rights will continue to support all who rise up against racial injustice and the abuse of power.

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Caption (Image 1): Protestors led by Southerners on New Ground gather at the Georgia Capitol to demand the State count every vote during the 2018 gubernatorial race. Photo courtesy CBS 46, November 14, 2018.

UPCOMING SCHR EVENTS

At SCHR, we will always prioritize the health and safety of the people we serve, our supporters, and our staff. In response to COVID-19 and ongoing vaccination efforts, our Decriminalizing Race & Poverty Lecture and Frederick Douglass Awards Dinner will be hosted virtually.

We will continue to update you as we adapt to the rapidly changing environment created by this pandemic.

SAVE THE DATE

DECRIMINALIZING RACE & POVERTY LECTURE

SEPTEMBER 2021

Virtual Broadcast

SCHR's Decriminalizing Race & Poverty Lecture will explore the impact of the criminalization of race and poverty and ways to end these policies and practices. The lecture will also explore individual and organizational approaches to challenging mass incarceration, strategies to dismantle bail, arrest policies that negatively impact people who are impoverished, and more.

SAVE THE DATE

2021 FREDERICK DOUGLASS AWARDS DINNER

OCTOBER 27, 2021 @ 6:30 PM EDT

Virtual Broadcast

The Frederick Douglass Awards Dinner is SCHR's flagship gala to recognize and celebrate those who demonstrate exceptional courage and tenacity in the defense of human rights and equal justice.

RSVP to upcoming events at
www.schr.org.

SUPPORTING REENTRY SHATTERING STIGMA



Caption: SCHR client Johnny Gates votes for the first time in his life. Mr. Gates walked out of court a free man on May 15, 2020 after 43 years of incarceration.

Where am I going to live? Will I be able to get a job? How will I pay for my medicine? Will I be able to blend in to a world that is no longer the way it was when I was first incarcerated? These are just a few of the questions that may enter the mind of an incarcerated individual once they are told they are being released. These are legitimate and very real concerns considering that there are a plethora of obstacles that can impede their ability to be successful in their reentry.

These concerns include a lack of family support; difficulty securing housing and employment; and not having access to education and occupational licensing, health care, mental health care, and substance abuse treatment. However, the most important challenges they will likely face are the stigmas associated with being a formerly incarcerated person and trying not to re-offend.

Most of the clients that receive SCHR's reentry support are people in their late-sixties who have served decades in prison. The world they once knew not only looks and runs differently; the people are different, and the stigmas are worse. Living in this new world isn't easy. Most have never had a job or are no longer able to perform the type of jobs they used to.

Their health has declined, and at ages where their peers are spending time with grandchildren and preparing for retirement, our clients are trying to find their way into a new post-COVID, technological world where almost everything is done online via telephone or video. Therefore, although free from incarceration, they are not free from the struggles that come with rebuilding their lives on the outside.

When people are released from prison, they need support to STAY out. This is where reentry experts and reentry case managers can help. My work as the Client Services Advocate here at SCHR builds off my prior experience as a case manager but, most importantly, off of my challenges with reentry and accessing much-needed resources after my release from prison over nine years ago. Through my personal experiences with the obstacles to reentry, I can build an expansive network of resources to address the needs and goals of our clients—resources that I needed at that very challenging time in my life.

It is my goal to not only support SCHR's clients in accessing the resources needed to be successful in their reentry but also to empower them to be confident, instead of uncertain, about their new journey.

I aim to ensure that they become whole, healthy, restored, and self-sufficient individuals with economic stability, renewed family bonds, regained trust, and restored community and social ties. Most importantly, I want to help them rewrite the narrative that defined them by their criminal convictions instead of their contributions to humanity and society. I'm proud to say that of the dozens of clients that SCHR has assisted in obtaining release and are receiving reentry support, none have re-offended. That is a testament to the importance of reentry support for newly released and formerly incarcerated people.

WALEISAH S. WILSON

Client Services Advocate



**APPROXIMATELY 275,089 GEORGIANS
COULD NOT VOTE IN 2020 BECAUSE THEY
WERE INCARCERATED, SERVING PROBATION,
OR ON PAROLE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES.**

SCHR Seeks to Empower Incarcerated Voters

Decades of organizing work have placed a spotlight on the scourge of voter suppression and disenfranchisement in Georgia. Often overlooked in these important discussions are those barred from voting due to entanglement with Georgia's expansive criminal legal system. Approximately 275,089 Georgians could not vote in 2020 because they were incarcerated, serving probation, or on parole in their communities. 53% of these disenfranchised Georgians are Black while only 32% of Georgia's population is Black. In addition to those legally barred from voting, tens of thousands more are effectively barred due to their incarceration in local jails where access to the ballot is severely limited.

In 2020, SCHR set out to change this anti-democratic state of affairs, furthering our mission to amplify incarcerated voices in Georgia. In partnership with Demos, the New Georgia Project, and the Georgia NAACP, SCHR embarked on an incarcerated voter empowerment plan, seeking to educate thousands of incarcerated voters in Georgia's jails. SCHR created comprehensive Know-Your-Rights fact sheets and voting materials that explained the intricacies of felony disenfranchisement. These fact sheets outlined the process for voting while incarcerated in Georgia's 143 county jails for those awaiting trial or serving misdemeanor sentences.

Between February and December 2020, SCHR sent more than 16,000 voter packets to those incarcerated in jails across the state: from rural Sumter and Glynn counties; suburban Cobb and Gwinnett; to urban Fulton, DeKalb, and Chatham counties; and many more. Beyond simply providing voter education, these packets included voter registration forms and absentee ballot applications, allowing those incarcerated in jails to cast ballots that may have been some of the very first votes to come from Georgia's jails. As Georgia elections have remained at the center of national attention, SCHR intends to continue our work in uplifting the voices and votes of those most marginalized and disempowered by state oppression.

COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS TO BUILD POWER



SCHR's community engagement team spent much of the summer working to support those who were arrested amid the uprisings in defense of Black lives. Collaborating with community organizations such as the Atlanta Solidarity Fund, SCHR assembled a team of over a hundred local attorneys to provide representation for those who were arrested and led a campaign calling on the city of Atlanta and Fulton County to dismiss the charges. After months of pressuring the city of Atlanta and Fulton County to drop the charges, we are beginning to see charges be dismissed. Even still, we are continuing to push for the mass dismissal of all protester cases.

For the past several years, SCHR has served as a member of the Communities over Cages Alliance, working on the campaign to close the Atlanta City Detention Center (ACDC), reduce pretrial detention in Atlanta through bail reform, and decriminalize race and poverty. This year, SCHR joined the Alliance as an anchor partner, continuing to campaign for the closure of ACDC and defending against attempts to roll back bail reform and detain those who are most vulnerable.

While the coronavirus pandemic limited the community engagement team's ability to travel across the state, we continued to build connections and community across cities.

In Savannah, we partnered with Deep Center, an organization focused on juvenile and racial justice, and the Vera Institute for Justice to participate in the *In Our Backyards* program. Through *In Our Backyards*, we gathered new data on the specificities of incarceration in Chatham County and led workshops both with local policymakers and members of the community.

Perhaps most importantly, following the killing of Ahmaud Arbery in February of 2020, SCHR joined with several community and advocacy organizations to form JUSTGeorgia, a coalition dedicated to building power and transformative change across the state of Georgia, especially in Southeast Georgia.

Since May 2020, JUSTGeorgia has built a policy platform aimed at ending state-sanctioned violence; held direct actions to oppose white supremacy and police violence; formed solidarity committees to support families and individuals impacted by racist policies and practices; and launched a hotline for communities across the state to report racial violence, and offered youth leadership and organizing training through the newly created Esther F. Garrison Institute.

SCHR is proud to be a convening partner of JUSTGeorgia as we continue to collaboratively build toward a Georgia free from systemic racism and violence.

Caption (Image 1): Members of JUSTGeorgia meet at Brunswick City Hall to discuss reforms.

Caption (Image 2): Carey Jenkins of JUSTGeorgia with Thea Brooks, loved one of Ahmaud Arbery.

SCHR'S INVESTIGATION FOUND THAT FROM JANUARY 2015 THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2016, APPROXIMATELY 90% OF RESIDENTS THREATENED WITH UTILITY DISCONNECTION DUE TO COURT DEBT WERE BLACK.

LaGrange No Longer Conditions Utility Access on Payment of Court Fines, Ending Racially Discriminatory Practice

Several years ago, Calvin Moreland, a Black native of LaGrange, Georgia, moved into a new home. Like every other new tenant, he applied for water, electricity, and other utility services. But, unlike tenants in virtually every other city, Mr. Moreland soon saw his utility services threatened more than \$800 in unpaid fines from a 12-year-old shoplifting conviction. Under a municipal ordinance, the city added Mr. Moreland's unpaid fines to his new utility account and threatened him with service disconnection if he didn't pay the fines. Mr. Moreland, who lived paycheck to paycheck at the time, started working nonstop to avoid utility service disconnection.

LaGrange's treatment of Mr. Moreland was not only inhumane but discriminatory. SCHR's investigation found that from January 2015 through September 2016, approximately 90% of residents threatened with utility disconnection due to court debt were Black. But this was not the only utility policy that impacted residents of color. Another city policy denied utility services outright to people who lacked certain government-issued identification, a practice that disproportionately harmed LaGrange's Latinx community.

Desiring to see an end to these discriminatory practices, Mr. Moreland joined other impacted residents, the Troup County NAACP, the Georgia NAACP, and Project South in challenging LaGrange's policies in federal court in 2017. They remained persistent through a lengthy appeal to the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals that was ultimately decided in the plaintiffs' favor. In October 2020, the plaintiffs' perseverance paid off when they achieved a historic settlement agreement ending both of LaGrange's discriminatory policies. Because of their efforts, LaGrange no longer conditions access to basic utility services on court debt payments, nor withholds utilities from people unable to obtain United States-issued identification.

The plaintiffs were represented by Alexa Milton and Reed Colfax of Relman Colfax PLLC; Nick Barber, Cody Cutting, and Atteeyah Hollie of SCHR; and Meredith Cabell, Robin Goldfaden, Kevin Herrera, and Mayra Joachin of the National Immigration Law Center.

Mourning Our Losses

In the wake of a year full of tragic losses, the Southern Center for Human Rights mourns beloved clients and friends.

In their memory, let us recommit to fighting against the cruelty and horror of this system as we uplift the humanity of all who are impacted by it and those who have fought to transform it.

MOZEL ANDERSON

TREY ABSHER

ROBBIE BROWER

MURPHY DAVIS

ARTHUR LEE GILES

AL RICO MAPP

MARISSA MCCALL

SHAUNTRICE MURRY



REMEMBERING

MARISSA MCCALL

Marissa served as SCHR's Public Policy Director beginning in 2016. Marissa's political acumen, irresistible personality, and unshakable and effective advocacy launched SCHR's policy efforts into the national sphere, bringing acclaim and hugely necessary resources into Georgia. She built a robust, dynamic, and effective policy practice within SCHR and was the go-to changemaker for so many people and organizations across the state. Even in incredibly tough and unfriendly rooms, she did not mince words or pull punches as she fought for and alongside people whose lives had been harmed by racial injustice and mass incarceration. Marissa passed away on May 21, 2021. The following remarks were delivered by Tiffany Williams Roberts during the Marissa's Celebration of Life on June 12, 2021.

I first would like to send my love to the family. And I mean that sincerely from Marissa's entire village. What a blessing she continues to be to us. When I thought about what I could say about Marissa, I kept thinking about how much she has taught us all. And I wanted to narrow it down to some of the most profound things I think Marissa embodied, so that we can carry those things with us as we move forward. I came up with four things: cherish our children, love and protect your people, tell uncomfortable truths, and there can't be any half-stepping.

So first, cherish our children.

We all know that Marissa loves and adores AJ more than words can describe. She woke up every morning to cook him a hot breakfast and some of us would say, "Girl you wake up and cook every morning?" But she did it. She borrowed hours from the night and borrowed them from the morning so that she could be the mother he deserved.

Another thing Marissa did was she loved our children, and she loved them deeply and sincerely. She cared for them and she prayed for them, and she created special moments just for them. Not too long ago, AJ, Marissa, my daughter Marielle and I, we had a staycation as soon as Covid let us

get together. And we planned to swim but we couldn't do that but we spent all night together playing and she always made time for the special children in her lives that was just for them.

And so I hope that we remember that she did that because she understood the promise in our children, that they are our greatest resource. They are the ones who will save us. And I will never ever let go of that truth and I hope that we'll all hold on to that as we relate to one another and our young ones.

The second one was, love and protect your people.

Everything that Marissa did in her life, whether it be in her professional life or her personal life, was done out of a sincere love for others, especially people who needed her care. And sometimes that love looked like holding someone accountable for the things that they would do to marginalize people or just special people in her life. Sometimes it meant imagining things so great that other people thought you were out of your mind. She held on to the love for her people, and she did it even when people turned their backs on her, even when she could not count on her natural allies, she always came back to the table because of her love for people and her desire to alleviate human suffering. She did it with courage and she did it with compassion, and I think we can all take with us that love is courageous. It is not as Dr. King called it, "feeble and anemic." It is courageous and bold. And she carried that with her, and we carry it with us as we move forward.

The third one was telling uncomfortable truths.

It is really easy to think about the ways Marissa stood at podiums just like this and told the truth no matter who wanted to hear it and who didn't want to hear it. Yesterday, I moderated a panel that Marissa was supposed to do with me. And one of the panelists was our own mayor. And we talked about how it didn't matter who Marissa was talking to or how uncomfortable it made them, she would tell them the truth. The truth that required action. I used to tell her, she would tell Jesus Christ he was wrong. And I believe it. And we are better for that. And she also told the truth in her personal relationships. You could trust that the words you were hearing were what she truly believed. And because she was always willing to do that, whether or not you wanted to hear it, you were better for it. She believed that courage and the truth should never be at odds with one another. And we believe that's true today.

And lastly, no half-stepping.

After Marissa transitioned, I can't remember which of our friends I was talking to when we were recalling stories, and my friend said, "Well, she didn't half-step." And that means that when she showed up, she transformed the space. She had an unapologetic brilliance that did not allow her to shrink to suit anyone's comfort. Her offerings were unimpeachable. And they were unimpeachable at times when people were often too lazy or too busy to do the work that she was doing. And so when we think about the fact that there was no half-stepping coming from Marissa, we've also got to ask ourselves the question, how will we step up in this moment? How will those who passed her labor off as their own learn to do their jobs? How will those who mistreated her, and figured she would be there next session, recover to better our communities, our village, our people?

Because what we know is in her 37 years on this earth, she did more than many could have hoped to do in a lifetime. And that is because she believed in what Dr. King called the fierce urgency of now. That the time is always right to do what is right. She was not intimidated by anyone's age, position, status, station, or wealth. She knew who God called her to be and she walked in that every single day.

So no half-stepping. We will step up. We will live as Marissa did, in the fierce urgency of now, in all things. Our love for you the family, our love for all of her friends, and our love for our village and our community, to whom she gave so much. May we demonstrate that we deserved Marissa McCall Dodson. Thank you so much.



DONOR SPOTLIGHT

TY ALPER AND TAMAR TODD



Ty Alper is a Clinical Professor of Law and Co-Director of the Death Penalty Clinic at Berkeley Law.

Tamar Todd is the Legal Director at New Approach PAC, which supports progressive ballot initiatives nationwide, and a Lecturer at Berkeley Law.

Q How did you first become interested in supporting the work of the Southern Center for Human Rights?

A We each spent our first summers in law school as interns at SCHR, so we were exposed to the brilliance of the organization from the very beginning of our legal careers, and it was a formidable experience for us both. Soon after graduating from law school, Steve Bright offered us an opportunity to come work at SCHR, defending clients on Death Row in Alabama. It was the opportunity of a lifetime, and we jumped at it. Neither of us even applied for any other job. Being a lawyer at SCHR means getting to work with committed advocates who understand what it takes to achieve racial and social justice in individual cases and on a systemic level. What we learned at SCHR has stayed with us and shaped us throughout our careers, and we feel personally indebted to the organization.

Q What part(s) of SCHR's work is most compelling to you?

A SCHR advocates are fearless. They are creative. And they know how to organize for real change in a system that is desperately, tragically in need of change. They can—and do—take on whatever kind of advocacy they believe is needed to address the injustices they witness. Is it litigation? A groundbreaking report? A media campaign? Passage of a needed law reform bill (or blocking a regressive proposal)? Whatever it is, if it has a chance to improve the lives of people who have suffered oppression and racism in the South, SCHR will be there, taking on the unpopular and difficult work.

Q Why have you chosen to support SCHR so consistently?

A When we were SCHR staff attorneys in the early 2000s, Sara Totonchi had just started working at the office. Back then, she was working with other colleagues at SCHR to create a blueprint for a model of advocacy that leveraged traditional litigation with community organizing and political lobbying in the service of both saving the lives of individuals facing incarceration and execution and also effecting lasting systemic change on a broad scale. SCHR was a pioneer in this kind of multi-faceted, community-based advocacy, and it continues to set the gold standard under Sara's leadership.

Q Would you encourage others to support SCHR? If so, what would you tell them?

A We would tell them that every dollar donated to SCHR is well-spent. We know it first-hand. If you want to support an organization that efficiently uses its resources to fight both the death penalty and the criminalization of poverty in all its many forms, there is no better outlet for your generosity than SCHR.

5 WAYS TO GIVE



PILLARS OF JUSTICE SOCIETY

The Pillars of Justice Society provides a consistent source of funding that the Southern Center for Human Rights can rely on to plan for current and future advocacy. This sustained support enables us to spend less time fundraising and more time doing the work so desperately needed.



EMPLOYER MATCHING

Did you know that you could double or triple your impact on transforming the criminal legal system by requesting a matching gift from your employer?

Many companies match donations made by their employees to the Southern Center for Human Rights. In some cases, even gifts made by retirees or employees' spouses will qualify for a matching gift.



PLANNED GIVING

Through planned giving, your heart for justice can continue to beat. When you name the Southern Center for Human Rights as a beneficiary in your will, retirement plan, savings account, or insurance policy, you make a commitment to securing equal justice for generations to come. Plan now to impact the future.



STOCK/SECURITIES GIFTS

When you make a gift of appreciated stock, bonds, or mutual funds to the Southern Center for Human Rights you receive great tax benefits, such as zero capital gains tax and a charitable deduction while funding our work to achieve equality, justice, and dignity in the criminal legal system. To make a gift by stock, provide the following information to your broker:

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To ensure that your gift is properly credited and acknowledged, please contact Terrica Ganzy at tganzy@schr.org or (404) 688-1202 to alert us of the name of the stock, number of shares, and date of transfer.



SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITY

The Southern Center for Human Rights hosts four major fundraising events throughout the year as well as several lectures, film screenings, and discussions focused on educating our communities about the perils of the criminal legal system. We are always seeking community partnerships in the form of sponsorships and in-kind contributions to support these events. **For additional information, please contact Terrica Ganzy at tganzy@schr.org or (404) 688-1202.**

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