

2024

ANNUAL REPORT

CHICAGO

APPLESEED

CENTER FOR FAIR COURTS

A LETTER FROM OUR CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS DURING A TIME OF TRANSITION

Friends,

This year was a major transition period for Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts - the organization's founding Executive Director, Malcolm Rich, retired after 27 years at the helm; we monitored the first year of implementation of the Pretrial Fairness Act, which made Illinois the first state to end money bond; and we expanded our team and our project scope, building our Future Justice Lawyers of Chicago (FJLOC) program and Court Observation & Education Program (COEP).

With all this change comes growth, and we are incredibly grateful for the support of our community as we've grown this year.

We are honored to continue the important work of uplifting community voices through research and advocating for tangible change in our legal system. This year, we have worked to build out the infrastructure of our organization to lay the foundation for growth. In 2025, we will focus on honing our work so that we can make the greatest impact.

Your unwavering support allows us to make meaningful changes in the lives of millions of people who are impacted by the Cook County courts each year. We believe in the importance of local change work and we couldn't do this work without your support. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Agnew
& **Naomi Johnson,**
Co-Executive Directors

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MISSION

Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts is a community-driven advocacy organization using mixed-methods research approaches to interrupt cycles of poverty, mass incarceration, and racial injustice inherent to the legal system.

VISION

Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts envisions a world where justice is driven by community and not by the government.

The courts are a public institution, yet constituents rarely have the information or access to create grassroots change in their administration and day-to-day operations. We believe that public buy-in to this system is the first step in reducing the harms of a fundamentally inaccessible and unfair system; our work aims to reinforce the fact that courts are a branch of government that constituents have the ability to change.

We strive to bridge that gap by conducting collaborative, research-based advocacy and by offering education to communities on their rights as court users. We use a range of collaborative advocacy strategies to create lasting institutional change.

OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

DONNCHA CARROLL, CHAIR	Partner, <i>Lotis Blue Consulting</i>
KAREEM BUTLER	Law Student, <i>Loyola University Chicago</i>
MARÍA COLLADO	Site Acquisition Manager/Consultant, <i>LCC Telecom Services</i>
JIMMIE COVINGTON	Vice President & Counsel, <i>Alliance Bernstein</i>
ELLEN C. CRAIG	Consultant
ALEXANDRA DANIELS	Associate, <i>Baker McKenzie</i>
DR. NICOLE GONZALEZ VAN CLEVE	Associate Professor of Sociology, <i>Brown University</i>
CULLEN HURLEY	Corporate Real Estate Advisor, <i>Savills</i>
ANDRES KANEB	Investment Banking Analyst, <i>BNP Paribas</i>
HARLEEN KAUR	Litigation Associate, <i>Goldberg Kohn</i>
BRENT D. KNIGHT	Partner, <i>Jones Day</i>
FRANCES H. KRASNOW	Partner, <i>Harrison LLP</i>
ROGER A. LEWIS	Principal, <i>Goldberg Kohn</i>
STEPHEN McINERNEY	Associate, <i>Sidley</i>
FATIMA MONTEIRO	Project Manager, <i>From Prison Cells To PhD</i>
SONYA NAAR	Vice President & Senior Claims Counsel, <i>Attorneys' Liability Assurance Society (ALAS)</i>
DR. MARY E. PATTILLO	Harold Washington Professor of Sociology & African American Studies, <i>Northwestern University</i>
JENNIFER PLAGMAN	Associate, <i>Jones Day</i>
LIA RAVES	Equal Justice Works Fellow, <i>Illinois Prison Project</i> <i>sponsored by Greenberg Traurig, LLP & Discover Financial Services</i>
MALCOLM RICH, EX OFFICIO	Internship & Pro Bono Coordinator, <i>Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts</i>
ALECIA RICHARDS	Law Student, <i>Northwestern University</i>
MARISSA RIVERA	Associate, <i>Skadden, Arps, Meagher, Slate & Flom, LLP</i>
CHRISTOPHER ROHN	Principal, <i>PwC</i>
JOSEPH ROSELIUS	Partner, <i>DLA Piper</i>
DAVID SCHOENFELD	Partner, <i>Shook, Hardy & Bacon</i>
NICHOLAS SICILIANO	Partner, <i>Latham & Watkins LLP</i>

OUR TEAM



ALI LONGBOTTOM
development manager



ELIZABETH MONKUS
senior attorney + project manager



AUSTIN SEGAL
research + program manager,
jill dupont memorial fellow



JASON OLEXA
operations coordinator



MALCOLM RICH
internship + volunteer coordinator



CORA PATTERSON
communications assistant +
social work intern



NAOMI JOHNSON
co-executive director



STEPHANIE AGNEW
co-executive director

MAYA SIMKIN
appleseed network fellow

FELIX MITCHELL
malcolm rich future justice fellow

ALEXA CINQUE
research fellow

SHIANNE HEERAMAN
social work intern

DEREK ANDERSON
research intern

OUR PROGRAMS

RESEARCH + ADVOCACY

Our qualitative and quantitative research initiatives fall into one of three broad program areas: Access to Justice & Civil Courts, Criminal Courts, or Civil Liberties & Police Accountability. Guided by our volunteer-led program advisory committees, our team uses mixed-methods research, evidence-based advocacy, and community engagement opportunities to reduce the harms of the legal system.

Learn more at chicagoappleseed.org/library.

COURT OBSERVATION + EDUCATION PROGRAM

Our Court Observation & Education Program (COEP) is our volunteer court-watching program, which helps demystify the judicial process, hold judges accountable, strengthen our research and advocacy, and show solidarity with people navigating the legal system.

Learn more at chicagoappleseed.org/court-watching.

FUTURE JUSTICE LAWYERS OF CHICAGO

The Future Justice Lawyers of Chicago program is a joint program of Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts and the Chicago Council of Lawyers. The program is for local high school and undergraduate college students who are interested in becoming lawyers dedicated to serving justice in some way. We provide these students with opportunities to engage with the system and our research and to network with lawyers from different backgrounds.

Learn more at chicagoappleseed.org/future-justice-lawyers.

OUR IMPACT

12

RESEARCH REPORTS

Since 2022, we have published 12 research reports ranging from the criminalization of gun possession, electronic monitoring, Restorative Justice Community Courts, pretrial fairness and money bond, diversion courts, civil asset forfeiture, police perjury, and prosecutorial trends, to name a few. These reports combined research and advocacy to bring change to the criminal and civil legal system.

Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts staff have published 5 letters to the editor since the beginning of 2022, which have appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*. In 2024 alone, we were cited or interviewed for over 20 news articles and have also made several appearances on TV and radio news programs, podcasts, and a *Teen Vogue* video series.

20

MEDIA MENTIONS

300

COURT-WATCHERS TRAINED

In less than two years, we've trained over 300 community members across Illinois to court-watch. These volunteers have collected more than 3,000 observations in criminal, civil, and domestic violence hearings during that time in order to hold the judiciary accountable and supplement our research.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

MAJOR VICTORY REGARDING PRETRIAL ELECTRONIC MONITORING IN COOK COUNTY

On **November 21, 2024**, following budget hearings in which our research was cited many times, the Cook County Board of Commissioners voted to pass a budget amendment that significantly reduced funding for the Cook County Sheriff Office's electronic monitoring program. This puts the county on track to consolidate the two programs into one that's administered by the Office of the Chief Judge instead. Having spent years advocating for reform of pretrial electronic monitoring in Cook County, Chicago Appleseed is thrilled to see this direct result of our sustained advocacy. We will continue to monitor the state of electronic monitoring in Cook County under the Pretrial Fairness Act and advocate for changes that reduce its harms on people's lives.

EXPANDING CIVICS EDUCATION

Our website, VoteForJudges.org, has provided a central hub of information for people electing judges in Cook County since 2010. Historically, the site has reached over 60,000 people every election cycle; during the **November 2024** general election cycle, the site had a whopping 2,000,000 hits with over 100,000 unique individuals using VoteForJudges.org to research judicial candidates.

ONE YEAR OF THE PRETRIAL FAIRNESS ACT

On **September 18, 2024**, Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts - with our partners in the Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice - celebrated one year of the Pretrial Fairness Act, the legislation that made Illinois the first state to abolish money bond. We were pivotal in drafting and advocating for the Pretrial Fairness Act which has now made pretrial release the norm and restricted which cases are detention-eligible. Last year, we trained hundreds of people across Illinois to observe pretrial detention hearings and interviewed dozens of public defenders in multiple counties to track the impact of the change.



A SPECIAL THANK YOU

Our team would like to especially thank our founder, Malcolm Rich, who retired as the Executive Director of Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts and the Chicago Council of Lawyers in March of 2024.

Malcolm founded Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts in 1997 and facilitated our connection to the National Appleseed Network. As Executive Director, he built our organization into one of Chicago's first community-led policy-and-advocacy organizations working to improve the legal system for the benefit of underrepresented people. Under his leadership, our work has made real impact to interrupt cycles of poverty, mass incarceration, and racial injustice perpetrated by all aspects of the legal system. Malcolm leaves big shoes to fill, but we're confident that our team can lead the organization into its next successful chapter.



GET INVOLVED

CONTRIBUTE

almost a quarter of our annual budget comes from individual donors who support our fight for fair and effective courts. to show your support, visit chicagoappleseed.org/donate to contribute.

GET IN TOUCH

we have many opportunities for people to get involved in our work. if you're interested in volunteering your time or learning more, visit chicagoappleseed.org/get-involved.

COURT-WATCH

visit chicagoappleseed.org/court-watching to learn about our court observation + education program and opportunities to become a court-watcher.

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