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CENTER FOR JUSTICE RESEARCH: 2021

# ANNUAL REPORT







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# ABOUT THE CENTER FOR JUSTICE RESEARCH

The Center for Justice Research is devoted to creating a more equitable criminal justice system. We provide a culturally responsive research approach to the issues of mass incarceration, criminal justice reform, policing, and gun violence to develop data-driven solutions.

Founded in January of 2018, CJR is located in the heart of Houston, Texas, at Texas Southern University, an HBCU. Houston is home to the third-largest criminal justice system in the United States, putting CJR in a unique position with ample opportunities for impact. We work closely with community partners, research institutions, and local, state, and national criminal justice systems to offer input to policymakers, leaders, reporters, and other stakeholders. Importantly, we provide diverse criminal justice reform experts who create data-oriented, evidence-based solutions.

**We are devoted  
to creating a more  
equitable criminal  
justice system.**



# LETTER FROM FOUNDING DIRECTOR

## 2021: THE YEAR OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE RESEARCH

In 2021, there was a clear need for solutions to a broken criminal justice system. After another year of police reform, a presidential election, and COVID-19, communities of color were left devastated and in need of positive change. While 2020 highlighted a lot of issues, 2021 had to bring solutions.

The Center for Justice Research responded to the need by engaging in culturally responsive research. Much of our scholarly research, reports, media engagements, and community collaborations focused on policy change and community reform to address problems such as gun violence, mental health and its impact on communities of color, COVID-19, incarceration, and even the state of American democracy. The research and topics we engaged with throughout 2021 were culturally relevant and ones that were still in the spotlight from the chaos of 2020. To make change in these areas, we first had to establish the need for change and the type of change we hoped to see. For this, we needed data. In 2021, CJR focused on collecting data and exemplifying the severity of issues presented in 2020, in addition to presenting evidence-based recommendations for practice.





Our researchers also helped engage others in the conversation by partnering with organizations like the NHL and Chevron to help them realize and act upon their corporate social responsibility. They hosted training for academics on conducting culturally responsive research and continued to work directly with the local community in Texas, engaging with policy leaders and local community members to understand how these issues had an impact right here at home.

In reflecting on 2021, our researchers have made significant strides toward responding to urgent needs. I look forward to another year of discovery and progress toward our goals of reforming the criminal justice system.

Sincerely,

*Howard Henderson*

Dr. Howard Henderson

Founding Director, Center for Justice Research

**“In 2021, the need for culturally responsive research became clear. In the year ahead, we look forward to continuing to contribute to research that helps lead to positively reforming the criminal justice system for communities often overlooked.”**

- DR. HOWARD HENDERSON



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# IMPACT SUMMARY

With the support of our sponsors, partners, advocates, government, community leaders, and researchers, the Center for Justice Research continued to turn data into solutions in 2021. The Center made significant progress in continuing our mission to reduce mass incarceration through targeted, culturally-responsive, evidence-supported solutions and strategic engagements.





**5** Major Academic Publications



**35** Appearances in the News



**15** Discussions with Academics and the Community (Panels, Presentations, and Workshops)



**20** Impactful Reports and Articles



**>\$1.5M** Funding Awards



**150** Members of the Houston Community Engaged Through Focus Groups

# PROJECT SPOTLIGHTS

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## PROJECT SPOTLIGHTS



## KEY PROJECTS

### Working With Organizations Through Corporate Social Justice Partnerships

In September, CJR spotlighted the work they have been doing surrounding corporate social justice, releasing a brief and two reports that highlighted the shift in corporate stakeholders' interest in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) and the urgency to push the boundaries of corporate social responsibility to make lasting change in corporate America.

The events of 2020 spurred a corporate movement around DE&I. In reaction to the murder of George Floyd, businesses stepped up in a way they had not done before. In fact, in 2020, America's largest corporations pledged \$50 billion to address racial inequality. Organizations also began displaying their commitment beyond donations by seeking to take purposeful action in creating cultures that support social justice initiatives. They coordinated with academics, researchers, and policymakers to address barriers faced by groups commonly impacted by social injustice and educated themselves and their organizational staff on how to make their workplaces open and inclusive through hiring practices.

CJR jumped in and launched an initiative to work with organizations that have dedicated goals and desires to shift from a passive corporate social responsibility approach to a progressive, solutions-oriented corporate justice strategy. Throughout 2021, CJR worked closely with the National Hockey League (NHL) and Chevron to support the development of social justice strategies, activities, and reports. View the full reports [here](#).

### Researcher Development Workshop Series

Throughout the first half of 2021, CJR hosted a four-part workshop series focused on researcher development. Researchers participated in monthly 4-hour instructor-led workshops that covered topics such as research methods and design, approaches for pursuing culturally-relevant research, evidence-based data analysis and statistics, scholarly writing, and an integrated week-long researcher development bootcamp. Participants walked away from the workshop with an active research agenda, access to real data sets, a year of access to SPSS data analysis software, and opportunities for additional research engagement.

The audience of the workshops included students, faculty, recent graduates, and post-docs. Each workshop provided an intimate experience, limited to 35 people to allow participants to work closely with the instructors and receive valuable feedback. CJR aimed to solve a big problem in the research world: the lack of flexible, cost-effective, comprehensive research training. We partnered with the NHL to provide an affordable and comprehensive experience, and in the end, the workshop exposed students and faculty to diverse, culturally responsive research approaches and solutions. We hope that by providing diverse strategies and perspectives, we will drive an increase in the number of graduate students and faculty that pursue culturally-responsive research and justice-oriented careers in higher education. More details about the workshop can be found [here](#).

## KEY PAPERS & REPORTS

by annelies goger  
david j. harding  
howard henderson

With a focus on reentry after prison, we formulate an evidence-supported action plan for enhancing transitions from prison to society

that focuses on increasing independence, reducing racial and ethnic disparities, and achieving public safety. Prisoner reentry is a critical piece of any racial justice agenda as the lack of education or vocational training within carcer institutions impose barriers to job opportunities that, coupled with societal stigmas, often make reintegration extremely challenging. Noting that changes in policies with significant potential to improve reentry outcomes extend beyond federal agencies traditionally involved in the administration of justice, we include ways to reduce reentry barriers such as housing, education, employment, health, and political rights.

The paper is divided into short, medium and long-term recommendations. The short-term recommendations pertain to existing funding streams and discretionary authority regarding administrative rules and regulations, funding decisions, and rule enforcement. Medium-term recommendations involve the creation of new legislation, infrastructure, and funding appropriations. In the long-term, recommendations include changes in laws to achieve fundamental re-orientations of existing policy frameworks, and approaches that require substantial new funding appropriations.

the current challenge of reintegration

Over 640,000 people return to our communities from prison

46 contexts.org

# rethinking prisoner reentry

each year. However, due to the lack of institutional support, statutorily imposed legal barriers, stigmas, and low wages, most prison sentences are for life—especially for residents of Black and Brown communities. More than half of the formerly incarcerated are unable to find stable employment within their first year of return, and three-fourths of them are rearrested within three years of release. Research has demonstrated that health, housing, skill development, mentorship, social networks, and the collaborative efforts of public and private organizations collectively improve the experience of transitioning out of incarceration and into society—a process commonly known as reentry.

Prisoner reentry should be understood as a critical piece of any racial justice agenda. Imprisonment rates are five to eight

## Rethinking Prisoner Reentry

In November, the Center for Justice Research published a report focused on reentry to society after prison. The comprehensive report formulated an evidence-supported action plan for enhancing individuals' transitions from prison to society that prioritized increasing independence, reducing racial and ethnic disparities, and achieving public safety. The importance of this research is rooted in the racial justice agenda. The lack of education or vocational training within prisons paired with societal stigmas for people of color makes reintegration into society difficult. This is what makes access to housing, education, employment, health care, and political rights so important once a formerly incarcerated individual enters back into society. Our researchers recommended a shift in funding decisions and appropriations, as well as new legislation and changes in laws to achieve true policy change and create real support systems that will assist prisoners in successfully reentering society. Download the full report [here](#).



## An Exploratory Study of Environmental Stress in Four High Violent Crime Cities: What Sets Them Apart?

In December, the Center for Justice Research rounded out the year by publishing a report unpacking the social contexts that feed into violent crime. Focusing on four major cities—Houston, TX, Baltimore, MD, Jackson, MS, and Wilmington, DE—we examined data to take a deep dive into health outcomes and correlates of crime. After studying both health and crime data in these areas, our results suggested common social contexts, such as high STD rates, air pollution, single-parent homes, insufficient food resources and sleep, residential segregation, and housing cost, all appear to correlate with crime. We took our research a step further and analyzed data at the community level, uncovering even more social correlates to crime, such as unemployment, community stress, and median household income. By identifying correlations to crime, CJR presents evidence that policymakers can leverage in introducing proactive crime reduction measures. Read more about the exploratory study [here](#) and check out the larger project and partner study [published](#) earlier in April 2021 that provides evidence-based solutions to reduce gun violence amongst African American males.

Article

### An Exploratory Study of Environmental Stress in Four High Violent Crime Cities: What Sets Them Apart?

Sven Smith<sup>1</sup>, Christopher J. Ferguson<sup>1</sup> , and Howard Henderson<sup>2</sup>

#### Abstract

Understanding the social contexts of violent crime remains controversial in the literature. In the current study, we examine common social contexts in four cities (Houston, TX, Baltimore, MD, Jackson, MS, Wilmington, DE). Data were examined in two studies. In the first, each city was compared to national county-level data on health outcomes. In the second, communities within the four cities were examined for correlates of crime. Results suggest that some common social contexts emerge: high STD rates, air pollution, single-parent homes, insufficient food resources and sleep, residential segregation, housing cost burdens, comparatively few older adults and comparatively more females, were common among the four high-violence cities. By contrast, all four cities unexpectedly had uncommonly low suicide rates compared to the national average. At the community level, unemployment, community stress, median household income, and population density all correlated with criminal outcomes. High-violence cities tended to have higher proportions of Black residents, however community level evaluations suggested that class-related issues, not race per se, was correlated with violent crime.

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Crime & Delinquency

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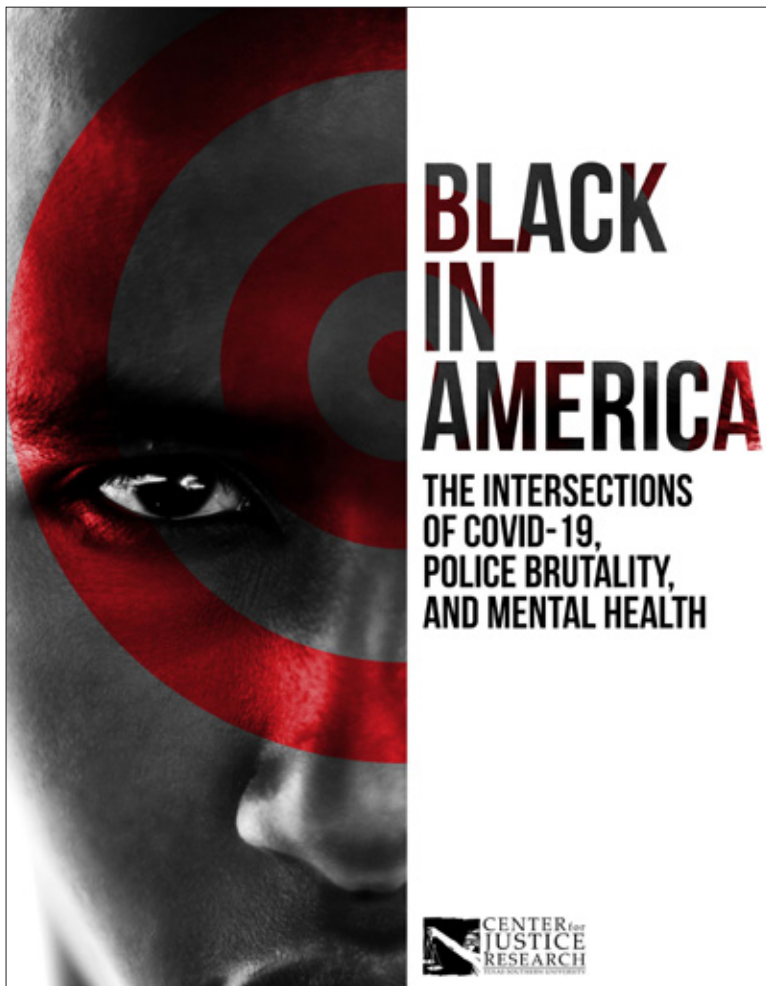
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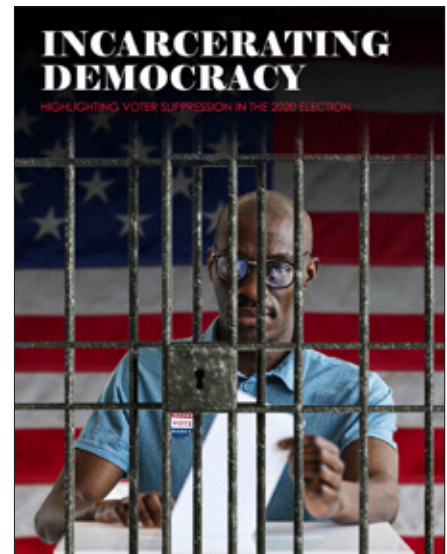


## COVID-19, Police Brutality, and Mental Health

A year after the staggering events of 2020, CJR revisited the overlap of COVID-19 and the rise of police violence to investigate the impacts these events had on the mental health of Black Americans. In 2020, the numerous police-involved killings of Black people dominated the news cycle and social media leading to a national reckoning on systematic racism. The remainder of the news cycle in 2020 surrounded COVID-19 and the rising death toll, where the mortality rate for Black Americans was highest among all racial groups. CJR gathered evidence, finding that adverse mental health conditions are directly associated with police killings of Black Americans and that racism as a whole is associated with things like stress, depression, and anxiety. Researchers at CJR found that the post-pandemic mental health needs of Black Americans must be guided by accessibility and cultural responsiveness. We drew attention to the barriers to access and the importance of not only having Black health care providers but also providers that have empathetic awareness of the challenges faced by Black Americans. In 2021, CJR called for a culturally aware response to the mental health disparities in the Black community. Read more [here](#).

## Incarcerating Democracy

The year 2020 also presented the build-up to a presidential election ripe with controversy and contention. CJR saw this as an opportunity to take a deep dive into the ongoing and emerging approaches that limit a representative government with a specific focus on the crime of voter suppression itself. We produced a brief that highlights the current tactics used to implement voter suppression and discusses the strategic measures that can be taken to combat disenfranchisement tactics. The policy brief assessed previous research and found that descendants of the slave trade, first nations people, women, the economically disadvantaged, and those with criminal convictions have never had the same access to voting as men of European descent. Based on this finding, CJR advocates for the rights of convicted felons to vote. Currently, at least 16 states place some sort of voting restriction on disenfranchised prisoners and parolees, making them a target group to begin restoring American democracy. Our policy brief provides strategies for countering voter suppression for policymakers and advocates to consider. Read more [here](#).



## Penalizing Black Hair

In 2021, Black people still faced scrutiny surrounding their hair in school, the workplace, and even at home. However, the support to make Black hair acceptable in these arenas is growing, and researchers and reformers agree that this discrimination is damaging and should be stopped. CJR worked to expand the narrative on what hairstyles are deemed as “professional” or acceptable. In March of 2021, CJR published an article with the Brookings Institution on school suspensions, noting that 70% of discretionary school suspensions are disproportionately represented by Black students and result from reasons unrelated to student misconduct, such as their hairstyles. The [article](#) outlines recommendations to reduce the number of discretionary school suspensions and aims to modify current school dress codes and rules surrounding appearance. CJR did not stop there. In May of 2021, we hosted a discussion called “I Am Not My Hair: The Criminalization of Black Hair” as a part of the SOPA Research Forum Series. The panelists represented Black students and staff from numerous departments at TSU and all shared experiences of being either reprimanded or enduring insensitive comments about their hairstyle choices. Watch the discussion [here](#).



## KEY SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

### Congressional Hearing

In March of 2021, Dr. Howard Henderson, CJR's director, provided expert testimony before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security. Dr. Henderson's testimony focused on federal drug policies that are impacting Black communities, which underscores CJR's mission to reduce mass incarceration. Dr. Henderson presented the federal policies on controlled substances in the United States and offered an evolutionary overview of the federal government's approach to drug addiction, highlighting biased incarceration mandates. The testimony also suggested an equity-based reframing of national drug policies. When asked questions by Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas and Rep. Val Butler Demings of Florida, Dr. Henderson suggested solutions such as decriminalizing marijuana and following the LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion) program that allows officers to divert individuals to treatment and social services. Watch the full testimony [here](#).

### Legal Aid and Social Policy

The Earl Carl Institute is the institute for legal and social policy at TSU. They are dedicated to identifying potential implementable solutions to legal and social issues that disproportionately impact communities of color and other disenfranchised populations. In February of 2021, Dr. Henderson was invited by the Institute to participate in a virtual national conference that opened the discussion on the disproportionate use of force by police when interacting with Black people and the disparate treatment of Black protestors. The ability to partner with other academics at TSU dedicated to creating research that is responsive to our criminal justice system needs is a huge highlight of 2021.



## A GLANCE AT CJR IN THE NEWS

The Center for Justice Research appeared throughout the nation in 2021 on several news outlets. Locally, CJR remained active in Houston and appeared numerous times on ABC-13 (Houston). CJR's outreach coordinator, Blair Lee, [proposed](#) the idea that redistricting is silencing minority communities, and Dr. Howard [discussed](#) removing racial bias in the classroom. CJR reached beyond Houston's news outlets to Spectrum's newsroom in Austin, where Dr. Henderson [discussed](#) new gun legislation and its impact on shootings in Austin, as well as how Black and Brown communities [grapple](#) with the impact of gun violence. CJR continued making press engagements throughout the South, stopping in Raleigh, NC, to [push](#) for systematic police reform and in Atlanta, GA, to [evaluate](#) their curfew restrictions.

Moving to the North, CJR appeared in NYC a few times to [discuss](#) police reform. At the national level, CJR discussed police reform in many newsrooms. Dr. Henderson spoke with [NBC LX](#) on the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2021 passed by the House, and he visited the Department of Justice's Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) [podcast](#) to discuss the importance of engaging community partners, policymakers, and police to gain an understanding of the issues taking place at the ground level and to produce the most relevant and impactful research possible. CJR is thankful for the platforms provided throughout 2021 to help spread the findings of our research and to have thoughtful discussions about positive change in our nation.



The background of the entire page is a photograph of a group of people, likely students and faculty, sitting and standing on a set of concrete stairs. The image is covered with a semi-transparent red overlay. Large, bold, white text is superimposed on the left side of the image, reading "STUDENT AND FACULTY SPOTLIGHT".

# STUDENT AND FACULTY SPOT- LIGHT

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**STUDENT  
& FACULTY  
SPOTLIGHT**

## JENNIFER WYATT BOURGEOIS

PHD GRADUATE (SUMMER 2021) - ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE



Dr. Bourgeois joined CJR in the summer of 2018 where she progressed from a graduate research fellow to a postdoctoral fellow and recently graduated with her Ph.D. in the Administration

of Justice. During her time with CJR, she co-authored two nationally recognized reports in the areas of pretrial diversion and prosecutor caseloads and served on CJR's National Police Advisory Group, leading the creation of the ["Reimaging Policing Action Briefs."](#)

Dr. Bourgeois created a research agenda that focused broadly on the intersection of race, gender, and class disparities in the criminal justice system, diving into topics such as parental incarceration, predictive bias, the intersection of forensic science and criminal justice, racial disparity in pretrial diversion, school disciplinary practices, discretionary decision-making, and program evaluation. She aligned with CJR's culturally responsive research approach and remained focused on turning data into solutions and recommendations that could be leveraged and shared. In fact, Dr. Bourgeois' work can be found in a number of publications, including the *Journal of Black Studies*, *Lone Star Forensic Journal*, *Drug Science, Policy, & Law*, *Texas Tribune*, *Forward Times*, *Inside Sources*, and a book chapter in *Springer Nature*.

"The CJR has had a tremendous impact on my professional endeavors. By working at a research center housed at a HBCU, my research, organization, leadership, and data analysis skills are from a culturally-responsive vantage point. Due to applicable and hands-on research experience I gained from my time at the CJR, I am currently a Data Specialist for a yoga non-profit organization (Yoga 4 Change) that achieves lasting, demonstrative change for veterans, individuals who are experiencing incarceration, youth, and people living with mental health conditions through a purpose-driven yoga curriculum.

As I refine my skills as a researcher, I am appreciative for Dr. Henderson's guidance and support. I am excited to see what the future holds as I continue to learn and use my skills to help the Center for Justice Research achieve its mission to reduce mass incarceration through targeted, culturally-responsive, and evidence-supported solutions."

Keep an eye out for Dr. Bourgeois at TSU, where she now serves as adjunct faculty, or you can find her teaching trauma-informed yoga at a women's residential facility in Houston called the Santa Maria Hostel.

## DR. JULIAN SCOTT

### RESEARCH FELLOW



Dr. Julian Scott joined CJR in February of 2021 as a research fellow, where his research agenda focused on judicial discrimination. Dr. Scott has collaborated on projects such as the State of

Houston project and a joint TSU-Prairie View A&M research project on cultural identity and its impact on police integrity. Within his first year with CJR, Dr. Scott excelled in many ways and was recognized for his success. He was awarded first place for an oral presentation with Jack Sevil at the Texas Southern 2021 Research Week.

“The Center for Justice Research has given me a unique opportunity that is humbling. I am improving upon a plethora of skills, and I am engaged in various topics related to justice reform on a daily basis. I enjoy working with everyone connected with the Center for Justice Research. Everyone has unique talents and experiences that expands each other intellectually.”









# SUPPORT FOR CJR

## FUNDING

CJR wants to give a huge thanks to our partners and investors. With their help, CJR continues to work towards our mission to reduce mass incarceration through targeted, culturally-responsive, evidence-supported solutions and strategic engagements. We could not do it without your support!

Thank you to the **Houston Endowment** for donating **\$1.5 million** to advance racial equity and justice.

Thank you to **Chevron** for donating **\$50,000** and serving as a sponsor for many of our initiatives throughout 2021.



## PARTNERSHIPS

- The Houston Endowment
- Chevron
- National Hockey League
- Institute for the Quantitative Study of Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity
- Center for Advancing Opportunity
- Charles Koch Foundation and Koch Industries
- National Collaborative on Gun Violence Research
- Thurgood Marshall College Fund
- Vanderbilt University Initiative on Race Research and Justice
- Institute for Justice Research & Development at Florida State University
- Computational Justice Law at Claremont Graduate University
- Center for Neighborhood Revitalization and Research at Delaware State University
- Bishop L. Robinson Sr. Justice Institute at Coppin State University
- Department of Criminal Justice and Sociology at Jackson State University

# HONORS & AWARDS

In 2021, CJR received outstanding honors and awards that speak to the work we do at the Center for Justice Research. We were recognized in the following ways:

- Re-appointed to the Brookings Institution as a nonresident senior fellow in the Governance Studies program
- Appointed to the advisory committee on Florida State University's Forensic Behavioral Health Professional Certification program
- Appointed to the Dr. N. Joyce Payne Advisory Committee
- Appointed to the Board of Directors for the Houston Recovery Center
- Appointed to the editorial advisory board for Law 360
- Invited to join the *International Journal of Criminology & Sociology* editorial board
- Invited to join the editorial board for Criminal Justice and Behavior
- Invited to serve as a board member of the Harris County Office of Managed Assigned Counsel
- Invited to lecture at Kentucky State University's Atwood Institute for Race, Education, and the Democratic Ideal's









# YEAR AHEAD

The year 2021 was filled with collaborative opportunities and progressive research. In 2022, we are ready to further our mission-focused work by continuing to think critically about our judicial system, develop and advance the field of criminal justice research, and provide culturally responsive research that thoughtfully addresses the disparities within our criminal justice system.

In the year ahead, our researchers will be hyperfocused on our judicial system. Continuing to work in tandem with our partners, we will hone in on judicial biases to understand systematic issues crippling our communities and identify data-backed solutions. We will also further examine the incarceration system, specifically studying the role of mass incarceration and residential segregation in Black-White disparities in the risk of stillbirths. Lastly, we will work to develop actionable recommendations for state prosecutors through a cost-benefit analysis that examines prosecution

systems across four states. Producing culturally responsive research for our judicial and criminal justice systems remains at the forefront of our focus throughout 2022.

In addition to producing our own research, we hope to continue to spread knowledge about the power of research to others. We are continuing our researcher development program that allows participants to work with faculty in an intimate environment to develop culturally responsive research approaches and solutions. Through our relationships with our corporate partners, we will remain committed to our local communities and the research community at large by continuing to offer comprehensive research training that is flexible and cost-effective. Our research training will increase the number of graduate students and faculty pursuing research and justice-oriented careers in higher education.

Lastly, we hope to continue to nurture our current partnerships. From our corporate partnerships with Chevron and the NHL to our academic partnerships with universities across the nation and our local relationships with donors such as the Houston Endowment, 2021 proved to be a successful year for collaborative progress. We hope to continue to build new relationships in 2022 that will help us do more and push further. Relationship building remains at the foundation of our ability to make change.

The year ahead presents new opportunities, partnerships, and conversations that will help produce change in support of our mission. We are looking forward to the work.





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