

# MEDIA ALERT

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## Groundbreaking Report Reveals Stories of Children Sentenced to Die in Prison

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On Thursday, February 6, 2025, Restore Justice released a report titled “More Than a Conviction: Stories of Children Sentenced to Life Without Parole.” This report contains analysis of the impact of juvenile life without parole sentences, insight from firsthand accounts, and journeys of transformation.

Between 1979 and 2012, 104 children received juvenile life without parole (JLWOP) sentences in Illinois. In 2022, Restore Justice began a multi-year project to share their stories. Accompanying the report are [personal narratives](#) that document the lives, experiences, and aspirations of people who were sentenced to die in prison as children and their loved ones.

This new report is authored by Michele Kenfack, Ph.D. and Corinne Kannenberg, Ph.D., American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) Leading Edge Fellows ‘22. This project is the product of a collaboration between Restore Justice and the ACLS.

Some key findings from the report include:

- Of the 104 children sentenced to life without parole in Illinois, about half have received new sentences following the U.S. Supreme Court *Miller v. Alabama* decision and have been released, but the other half remain incarcerated.
- The majority of children who received life without parole sentences in Illinois were Black, amplifying existing disparities within the criminal legal system.
- Lengthy incarceration is highly detrimental to physical and mental health and has long term effects on individuals, families, and communities.
- People who were once serving juvenile life without parole sentences have made enormous contributions to their families and communities upon returning home from prison. Their experiences underline the tremendous monetary and social costs of sentencing young people to a lifetime of incarceration.

Read the [report here](#) and [stories here](#).

“A lot of children got locked away, but they were still dreaming. Every exercise they did, every book they read, was the intention of getting here and showing the world something different,” shares Wendell Robinson, Executive Director of Restore Justice. He served over 25 years in prison as part of a juvenile life without parole sentence.

In 2023, Illinois became the 26th state to abolish life without the possibility of parole sentences for children, with the help of Restore Justice's advocacy. This legislation built on prior advocacy work including the bipartisan 2019 Youthful Parole Law, which created the first opportunities for parole in Illinois since parole was abolished in 1978. Yet these changes only apply prospectively. This report and the powerful accompanying narratives reveal the urgent need to enact retroactive changes to ensure fairness and consistency.

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*Restore Justice, which comprises [Restore Justice Foundation](#) and [Restore Justice Illinois](#), works to address issues faced by those serving life or de-facto life sentences, their families, and their communities. Founded in 2015 by a dedicated group of advocates that included the late former Congressman, Federal Judge, and White House Counsel Abner Mikva, Restore Justice trains and supports advocates, conducts research, nurtures partnerships, and develops policy solutions that will roll back ineffective "tough on crime" policies of the past, replacing them with compassionate, smart, and safe policies for the future.*