ACLS Leading Edge Fellowship

**Position Title:** Policy and Communications Analyst  
**Organization:** Restore Justice  
**Location:** Chicago, IL  
**Stipend:** $62,500 in the first year, $65,000 in the second year, plus health insurance and professional development funding  
**Start Date:** September 2022

**ORTHOGANIZATION DESCRIPTION**

Restore Justice is the only policy organization in Illinois specifically working to address issues faced by those serving life or de-facto life sentences. We advocate for fairness, humanity, and compassion throughout the Illinois carceral system, with a primary focus on those affected by extreme sentences imposed in their youth. We advocate for compassionate changes to the Illinois criminal code, for policies that allow more people to come home sooner, and for legislation that helps families with loved ones who are incarcerated. We have helped pass a range of legislation, including the Youthful Parole Law, which created the first new opportunities for parole in Illinois since the state abolished parole-for-release in 1978; a measure that moved some children away from mandatory minimums and instituted judicial discrepancy; and bills that expanded and protected the right to in-person visits for people who are incarcerated. We also have an apprenticeship program for people who served long sentences, equipping them to lead nonprofit and social justice work. Our goal is to continue hiring more people with lived experience; currently, nearly half of our staff has been directly impacted by prison. In addition, we train and support advocates, conduct research, and convene support groups. Learn more at [https://restorejustice.org/](https://restorejustice.org/)

**POSITION DESCRIPTION**

The Policy and Communications Associate will work with the Executive Director, Policy Director, and Communications Manager to produce an in-depth report about juvenile life without parole sentences in Illinois. The fellow will interview people who had or have juvenile life without parole sentences, talk with experts about these sentences, research the history of such sentences, and compare Illinois’s laws to those in other states. Twenty-five states and Washington, D.C. have banned juvenile life without parole sentences, while six others have no one serving such sentences. Illinois is in the minority of states still using such sentences. These sentences defy the abundance of research about youth and brain development and set the United States apart. In fact, these sentences violate international law. In Illinois, there were 167 children serving these sentences, as of 2018, the last year for which public information is available.

In Illinois state prisons today, roughly 2,625 individuals taken into custody before the age of 26 are serving sentences of life and de facto life, defined by the U.S. Sentencing Commission, as termed sentences longer than 40 years. That’s about 11 percent of Illinois’s prison population. Further, Restore Justice has found racial disparities in sentencing are even greater among people serving life or de facto life for crimes committed in their youth than they are among the entire prison population; almost 68 percent of this group is Black and 66 percent of these people are from Cook County. The criminal legal system, in design and practice, has trapped Black Americans in generations of incarceration and poverty throughout our state’s history. While we have always advocated for changes to the system, we know that we are at a pivotal moment. COVID-19’s grossly disproportionate effect on the incarcerated and in communities of color exacerbated inequalities across racial and economic lines. We are continuing to find

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opportunities for our networks to engage in advocacy efforts that support both our long-term policy goals and the short-term issues and challenges that have arisen due to COVID-19. In 2022, our team will keep pushing for Illinois to abolish juvenile life without parole sentences and will seek to identify ways to re-sentence people with extreme prison terms.

Reporting to the Communications Manager, the Policy and Communications Associate will create a report that will help us change the narrative about juvenile life without parole sentences. The report will contain in-depth text and information, in addition to photos, videos, and graphics, produced with the support of the Communications Manager. The report will also be displayed on an easy-to-navigate website. The ultimate goal is to motivate the Legislature to eliminate these sentences. After finishing the report, the Associate will help create fact sheets and other distributable materials, and work with the Restore Justice team to host live video or in-person panels to talk about juvenile life without parole sentences.

The fellowship tenure is 24 consecutive months, with an expected time commitment of approximately 37.5 hours per week.

Responsibilities and tasks:

- Create a report on juvenile life without parole sentences, including in-depth text and information, in addition to photos, videos, and graphics, produced with the support of the Communications Manager.
- Create fact sheets and other materials to distribute and share the report’s findings.
- Plan and facilitate panels with experts, legislators and constituents about juvenile life without parole sentences.

Qualifications:

- PhD in any field of the humanities or humanistic social sciences. Read more about eligible fields in our FAQ;
- Confident writer with excellent personal communication skills. Able to write well, quickly; and, willing to take the time to work with colleagues on writing for our audiences;
- Comfort creating and maintaining relationships with legislators, legislative staff, colleagues, and constituents;
- Demonstrated deep commitment to issues relating to long-term incarceration.

APPLICATIONS

- Information on the Leading Edge Fellowship Program: https://www.acls.org/competitions/acls-leading-edge-fellowships/
- All applications must be submitted through the ACLS Online Fellowship Application System (ofa.acls.org)
- Application deadline: March 28, 2022, 9pm EDT