



Equality. Dignity. Justice.

# Who we are

The Southern Center for Human Rights is working for equality, dignity, and justice for people impacted by the criminal legal system in the Deep South. SCHR fights for a world free from mass incarceration, the death penalty, the criminalization of poverty, and racial injustice.

# Our History

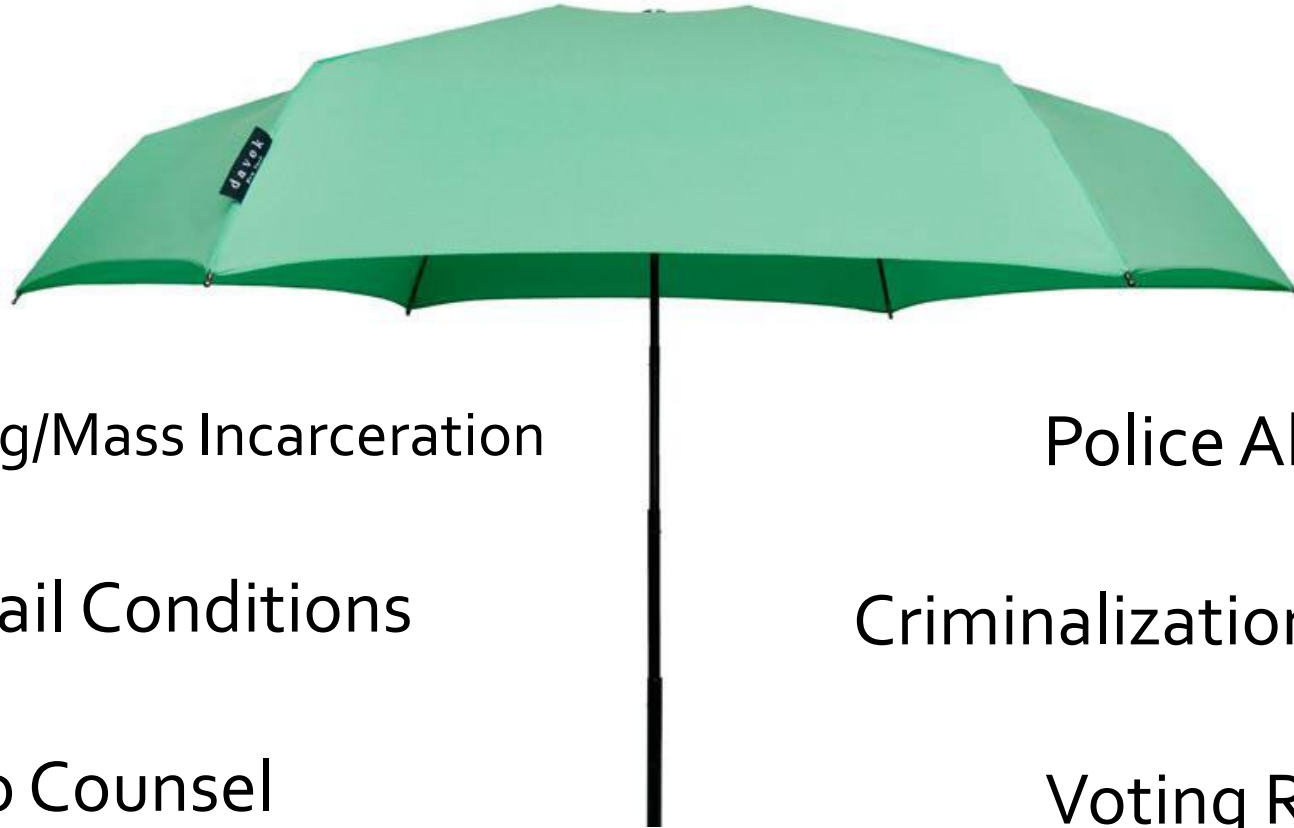
SCHR was founded in 1976 by ministers and activists concerned about criminal justice issues in response to the Supreme Court's reinstatement of the death penalty that year and to the horrendous conditions in Southern prisons and jails.

# IMPACT LITIGATION

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*In The Deep South*

# Impact Litigation



Extreme Sentencing/Mass Incarceration

Police Abuses

Prison and Jail Conditions

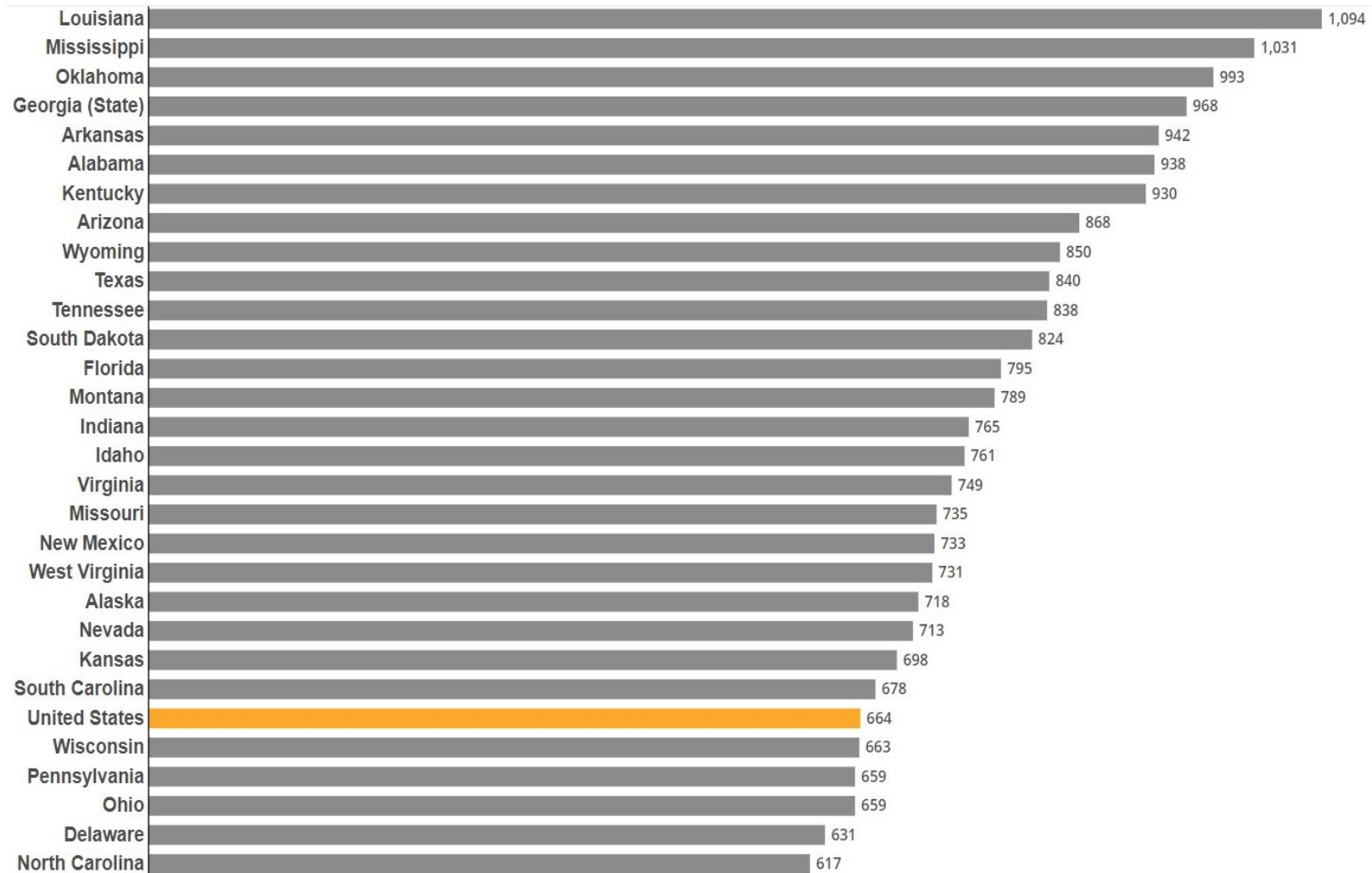
Criminalization of Poverty

Right to Counsel

Voting Rights

# Mass Incarceration

World Incarceration Rates If Every U.S. State Were A Country





# Prison and Jail Conditions

Here are staggering statistics about Lee Arrendale Prison:

- 70% staff vacancy rate
- 15 medical and mental health staff responsible for care of 1,100+ incarcerated people
- Women wear the same bloodstained clothes they delivered in days or weeks after leaving the hospital
- Women fed food labeled “unfit for human consumption”



## Suicides at GSP

25. Officers fail to respond to people experiencing serious mental health crises. Before I was on the Tier II Program, I was an orderly on DE-4, where prisoners with mental health “level three” are placed. This means that prisoners on DE-4 have serious mental health needs. When I was working as an orderly on DE-4, a man called out to me that he needed help. Through the rectangular window on the cell door, I could see him standing on top of his sink with a knife around his neck. He looked as though he was going to jump. I said something like, “man don’t do it. I am going to try to get you some help.”

25. I went to find Unit Manager Thomas. I told her that a man was attempting to kill himself. She said something like, let him do it. Later that day, as I was mopping the floor, I heard officers at the control booth remarking that a man had committed suicide. I also saw officers wheeling his body, which was purple in color, through the unit on a stretcher. Hours later, Unit Manager Thomas called me into her office and gave me chicken meals from Kentucky Fried Chicken.

26. It was traumatizing to see a man attempting to kill himself, and then to learn that he had succeeded. It is scary to realize that even in times of crisis, we may not receive help from officers or prison officials.

The screenshot shows a news article from WISN-TV. The main headline is "Unprecedented number of Georgia inmates who died in 2020". Below the headline, a sub-headline reads: "Bobby Thompson is one of at least 29 people who died by suicide at Georgia correctional facilities last year, a rate about three times the national average." The author's name, "Andy Pierrotti", is listed below the sub-headline. The article is set against a background image of a man's face. At the top of the page, there is a navigation bar with "ALIVE" in a red box, and links for "News", "Weather", "Near Me", "VERIFY", and "Watch Live". Below the navigation bar, there are several category links: "ADVERTISE WITH US", "COVID-19 IN GEORGIA", "VOICES FOR EQUALITY", "THE REVEAL INVESTIGATIONS", and "CONTESTS". At the bottom of the article, there are four small text boxes: "'HE'S GONE'", "'BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS'", "ONE OF AT LEAST 29", and "UNDERSTAFFED AND OVERCROWDED".

POLITICS

# Justice Department investigating Georgia state prisons after 44 inmate deaths, LGBT assaults



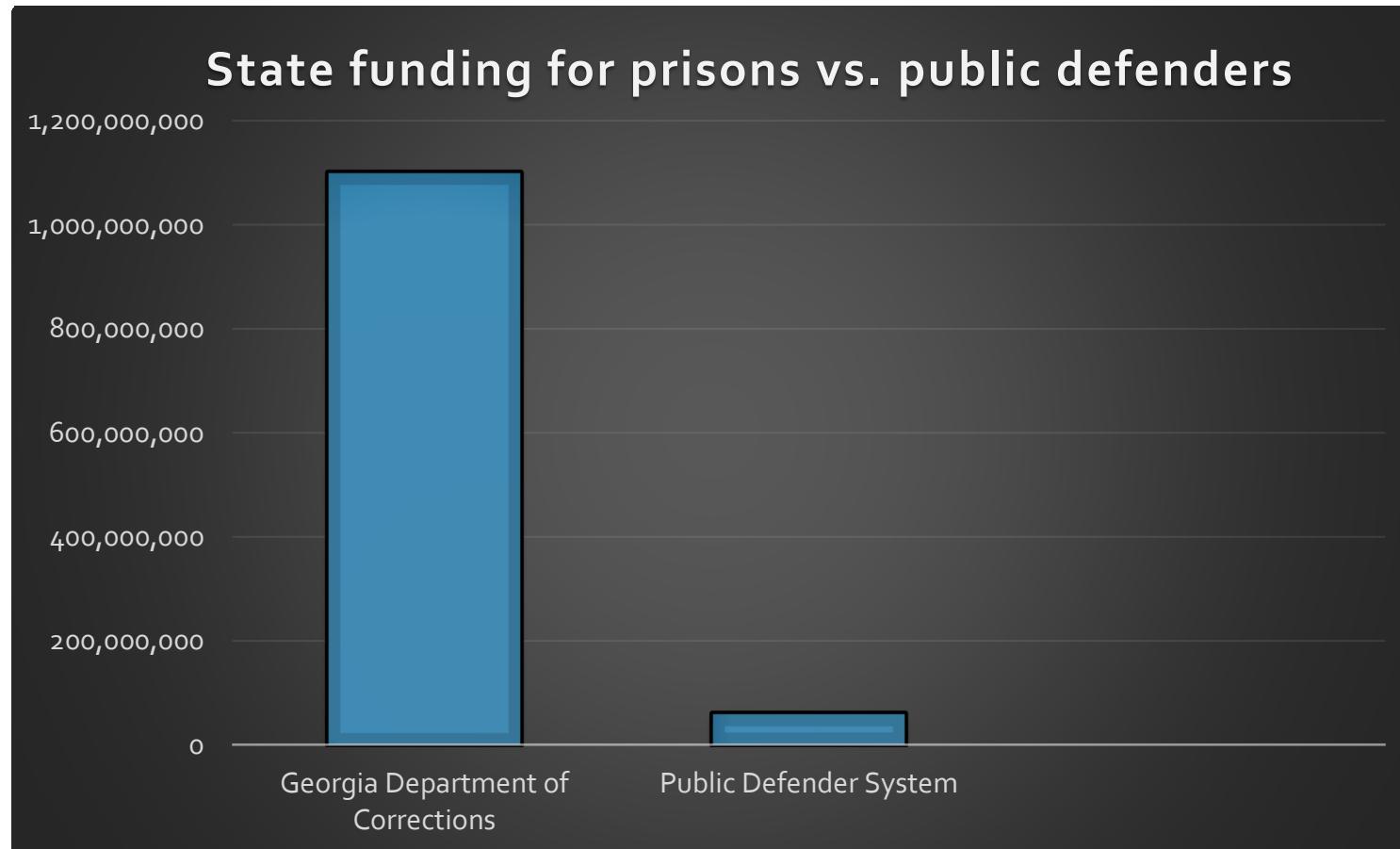
**Kevin Johnson**

USA TODAY

Published 12:12 p.m. ET Sept. 14, 2021 | Updated 2:23 p.m. ET Sept. 14, 2021



# Indigent Defense & Right to Counsel



EDITORIAL

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

OUR OPINION

## Georgia's poor get second-class justice

EDITORIAL

Imagine this:

You have been arrested and charged with committing a crime. You sit in jail for six months before meeting with a lawyer. Your lawyer is allocated \$50 for your case, and you meet him for the first time in the courtroom.

Can't happen in America? It happens every day right in our own state. But only if you are poor.

That's what the advocacy group, the Southern Center for Human Rights found in a report on Georgia's indigent defense system. Despite countless reform proposals over the past 20 years, Georgia lawmakers have failed to meet the mandates of the state and federal constitutions to provide competent counsel for indigent defendants.

At long last, the state's halfway justice is getting the attention of Gov. Roy Barnes and state Supreme Court Chief Justice Robert Benham, who is in the process of appointing a commission to recommend reforms — a request the Georgia Bar Association made almost a year ago.

Though it's too late for such a panel to make recommendations to the 2001 General Assembly, lawmakers can still take some simple steps to jump-start an eventual overhaul. A bipartisan House subcommittee, appointed by Speaker Tom Murphy and chaired by Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Martin (D-Atlanta), is already meeting on the issue.

The Legislature could take two actions next session: increase state funding to counties, unfairly saddled with 85 percent of the cost of providing indigent defense, and tie state funding directly to accountability for professional representation and reasonable caseloads. State support increased last year to about \$8 million annually, still among the lowest in the nation. Neighboring North Carolina, for example, allocates an annual \$70 million for indigent defense.

Many contract attorneys — those who agree to handle all of a county's indigent defense cases for a set fee — resort to assembly line justice, advising guilty pleas with no investigation of the facts and little consultation with their clients. (Recent increases set rates at \$45 per hour for out-of-court work and \$65 per hour in court. Compare that with the approximate \$300 per hour courtroom fees that some private criminal defense lawyers charge.)

Unfortunately, many of the state's judges and county commissioners oppose enforcing lower caseloads for lawyers providing indigent defense. That's because hiring more lawyers and having more cases brought to trial will cost their own local budgets dearly.

**Needed reform for providing indigent defense depends largely on the governor's leadership.**

Needed reform depends largely on the governor's leadership, Barnes, an attorney,

# 'This is fast-food justice, and it's no justice at all'

By Bill Rankin  
STAFF WRITER

**Thomson** — E. Purnell Davis, chief judge of the Toombs Judicial Circuit, peers impassively through his spectacles at the small group of men standing before him: a prosecutor, a defense attorney and one guilty felon. It is mid-January, but the court's air-conditioning system is humming softly.

When Davis pronounces a sentence of five months on probation, he is politely interrupted by one of the men before him. "Don't you mean five years?" the man asks.

"Five years, I meant to say. Strike that," Davis replies thankfully, adjusting the sentence before it can be recorded as the lesser amount.

That was the defense attorney. He is Bill Wheeler, who estimates he has represented 850 poor defendants in this rural east Georgia county in nearly five years as McDuffie County public defender. By his own count, he

has handled 12 jury trials during that time.

In the Toombs Circuit, a defendant's legal representation becomes acutely important because its judges hand down some of the longest prison sentences in the state.

While a sentence is largely determined by the judge and prosecutor, it also can be influenced by the preparation and negotiating tactics of the defendant's lawyer. The vast majority of sentences are negotiated in a plea bargain, a process that can take weeks of give and take. In McDuffie County, it can take a few minutes.

During arraignments Jan. 12, Wheeler met several clients for the first time and consulted with some for 10 minutes or less before entering a guilty plea.

Wheeler explained he had seen several clients at the jail last fall, but could not talk to others because they had already been released on bond. None of those clients had tried to see Wheeler

since then, nor had he tried to contact them, he said.

Wheeler said his representation is more than adequate. But others disagree.

"The right to counsel contemplates somebody who confers with a client early in the process, conducts an independent investigation of the state's case, researches issues of law and makes an assessment of the case based on all that work," said Stephen Bright, who heads the Southern Center for Human Rights in Atlanta, a group that represents death penalty defendants and litigates prison inmate lawsuits.

"This is fast-food justice, and it's no justice at all," said Bright, whose office has been investigating indigent defense in the Toombs Circuit. The center found that Wheeler filed only a few motions on behalf of clients during his first four years in the job, Bright said.

Wheeler said he resents Bright's characterizations. "I

SOUTHERN  
CENTER FOR  
HUMAN  
RIGHTS



# Police Abuses

## Protecting the 4th Amendment in Cartersville



# Criminalization of Poverty



Dear Sir / Madam:

You have an outstanding Past Due Fine balance in the amount of \$251.82

We have obtained judgment and a Fi. Fa. on this case. This balance has been added to your current City of LaGrange utility account.

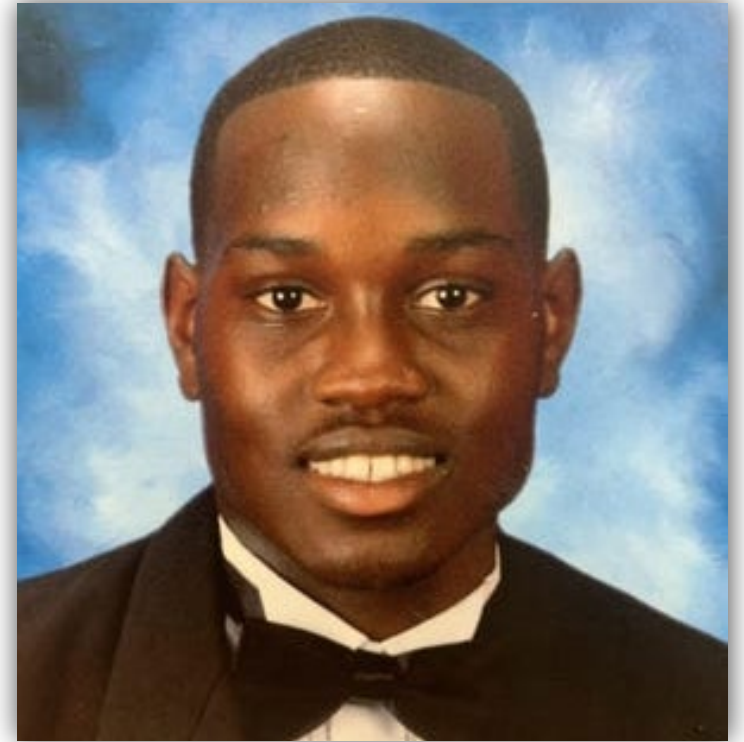
In order to avoid interruption of service, your utility account must not have an arrearage and you must contact the Collection Department, Room 103, at City Hall to make arrangements to pay the above fines.

City of LaGrange  
Collection Department

You have an outstanding past due fine balance of \$251.82. This balance has been added to your current City of LaGrange utility account.

In order to avoid service disruption, your utility account must not have an arrearage . . .

# Voting Rights







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