

# FREEDOM CHARTER

FOR THE DECRIMINALIZATION AND DECARCERATION OF CIS AND TRANSGENDER WOMEN AND GIRLS AND GENDER NON-CONFORMING (GNC) PEOPLE & (RE)UNIFICATION WITH OUR CHILDREN AND OUR FAMILIES

Adopted at the Sister Warrior Freedom Coalition founding convening in Oakland, California on February 2018, updated August 2019.

*The South African Freedom Charter was written in 1955 as a compass for the movement against racial apartheid. For 40 years it inspired the long-struggle to end apartheid, finally won in 1994. Inspired by this movement, we, as formerly and currently incarcerated and systems-involved cis and transgender women and girls and GNC people, have written and adopted our own Freedom Charter to guide our movement to end the mass incarceration and criminalization we experience and of our children, families and communities.*

WE, cis and transgender women and girls and GNC people who are formerly and currently incarcerated, systems-involved and sexually exploited, declare to the United States and the world:

- that the prison, policing and family separation systems are rooted in histories of the colonization of indigenous people, slavery, Jim Crow laws and continue to reflect racial apartheid in the United States;
- that these and other public systems are designed to maintain this systemic inequality and that poverty is a key driver of incarceration, family separation and recidivism;
- that cis and transgender women and girls and GNC people experience gender-based and sexual violence not only by individuals but by these and other systems that are rooted in histories of slavery, colonization, patriarchy, homophobia and transphobia;
- that we are punished for the ways we survive the abuse, violence and exploitation we experience and the historical trauma and oppression of our families and communities;
- that family separation is a continuation not a healing of these histories;
- that our families and communities have been denied our humanity, basic human and civil rights and healing;
- that only a society based on equity, transformative justice, the recognition of full human rights, the protection of and access to basic needs for all – without discrimination based on race, gender, sexuality, class, immigration status, ability or age and that seeks to reverse intergenerational poverty and historic trauma – can call itself truly democratic and free, and realize liberty and justice for all.

And therefore we, cis and transgender women and girls and GNC people who are formerly and currently incarcerated, systems-involved and sexually exploited and our loved ones, families, communities and allies adopt this Freedom Charter.

Those most impacted by incarceration and systems of criminalization and family separation are the rightful leaders of the movement to realize its goals.

We pledge to strive together until the decriminalization and decarceration of all cis and transgender women and girls and GNC people and our loved ones and communities is achieved and our families – as we define them – are (re)united.

## **THIS INCLUDES SECURING THE FOLLOWING RIGHTS:**

**We have the right to self-determination.** We must determine what success looks like for ourselves. We have the right to lay our own paths free from punitive and controlling systems and the right to input and voice around all services impacting our lives.

**We have the right to be free from sexual, gender-based and physical violence, abuse and exploitation** perpetrated by our families, partners, community, the state, & institutions. We have a right to defend ourselves from intimate, community, state and institutional violence.

**We have the right to make our own medical care decisions and to access quality medical care and on-demand preventative care** for our physical, mental, emotional, dental, vision and reproductive health.

**We have a right to access cultural, holistic, and professional methods of healing** to address the trauma we are exposed to while we are involved in the system and when we leave them. We have the right to access healing prior to coming into contact with systems and as a key to preventing systems-involvement. We should not be punished for our pain, exploitation and trauma. We need healing, not punishment, when we self-medicate for our trauma & grief.

**We have the right to be treated with dignity** regardless of our legal or immigration status, past history of arrest or incarceration, or classifications given by the state or institutions.

**We have the right to redeem ourselves,** to break the cycle of abuse and violence. We have the right to heal, to own and make amends for our mistakes, and the right to resources and support to seek transformation on our own terms. We claim the right to be free from discrimination based on our own or intergenerational histories of arrest and incarceration.

**We have the right to economic opportunities.** In order to escape cycles of poverty, exploitation,

**We have the right to be consulted when institutions want to create, revise and eliminate policies, legislation, rules or laws** that will impact the way we experience systems. We are best positioned to identify alternatives to incarceration, criminalization and family separation. We should have insight over the systems and institutions that most impact us.

incarceration and abuse, we need employment and other economic opportunities that recognize our value, transferable skills and dignity.

**We have the right to be declared free from any debt to the justice system** and to our confidentiality when we have completed our time. We should have equal pay for our labor while inside to comparable work on the outside.

**We have the right to access education, knowledge, and technology** while incarcerated, as we re-enter, and move through systems that will allow for us to keep up with the world we anticipate returning to post-system-involvement.

**We have a right to permanent, safe and affordable housing** that does not feel like the institutions that have harmed us. We deserve homes where we can rest, be at ease and are safe, can raise our children and build our families. We have a right to be part of deciding our placement within jails, prisons, transitional housing, foster care and/or group homes, including transferring to other facilities or placements.

**We have the right to access (touch, hear & see) our children, family and loved ones** when we are in the systems that criminalize and control cis and transgender women and girls and GNC people. We have a right to inform who cares for our children while we are unable to due to incarceration, homelessness, poverty or other conditions. We have a right to get support and resources to stay connected to and reunite with our children as soon as we are able.

**We have the right for our gender and sexuality to be respected** and to be free from limiting conceptions of masculinity and femininity and the gender binary, to access hormone therapy and not have it withheld, to express our gender and sexuality while inside systems, on the streets and in our homes without fear of homophobic and transphobic discrimination, harassment and/or assault.