



# 2024 Annual Report



**UnCOMMON LAW**  
JUSTICE DONE **DIFFERENTLY**



[www.uncommonlaw.org](http://www.uncommonlaw.org)

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we reflect on our impact in 2024 and navigate the troubled waters of 2025 together, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to every partner, client, community member, advocate, and donor who has been part of UnCommon Law's journey. Your support has been instrumental in helping us advance our mission: to transform the prison and legal system through trauma-informed justice and to foster healing and safe pathways home for those impacted by incarceration.

Today, we are at a pivotal moment. The rhetoric driving today's policies threatens to undo years of progress, pushing us toward cycles of harm rather than pathways of healing. Fortunately, we have seen what is possible when we choose a different direction. Change is happening from inside the most volatile places: maximum security prisons. It is being led by incarcerated people who are taking accountability, healing, mentoring, and helping build safer communities inside and outside the prison walls. Through our trauma-informed healing approach, those who were once caught in these cycles are now breaking them, reclaiming their futures and paving the way for others to follow. They are living proof that healing-centered transformation is not only possible, it is essential.

To prevent cycles of violence and crime, we must intervene early, providing support and resources before harm occurs. Unfortunately, systemic disparities and insufficient support for those at risk mean that harm is perpetuated long before someone enters the system. The need for a healing-centered approach to trauma and violence exists across our entire society, not only within prisons. Imagine the impact if we applied these principles more broadly, making healing the cornerstone of how we respond to adversity.

Despite the challenges ahead, I remain hopeful. With your continued support, we will not only bring people home safely but also break cycles of harm, transform lives, and drive systemic change. Together, we can move toward a future where healing, not punishment and incarceration, reduces violence inside prisons and in communities everywhere.

Thank you for standing with us.

Keith Wattlely  
Founder & Executive Director  
UnCommon Law



# Trauma- Informed Legal Representation



*"If it weren't for UnCommon Law, I'd still be in prison. I was in prison for 41 years, and I've been committed to going to NA and AA for 35 years—and I'm still going. I completed over 25 self-help groups while inside. I'm not the same person I was 41 years ago. I worked very hard to become who I am today. Every day, I choose to stay out of trouble. I choose good."*

—UnCommon Law Client

Today, too many people remain incarcerated in California, with more than 30% serving life sentences. Nearly two-thirds of the prison population has been convicted of serious or violent offenses, and Black and Brown people continue to be disproportionately represented, making up nearly three-quarters of the state's total incarcerated population. Behind these numbers are thousands of people navigating a parole system that is both highly discretionary and deeply inequitable. UnCommon Law supports as many as possible with pro bono trauma-informed legal representation.

Our legal model is distinguished by its healing-centered lens. We recognize that the overwhelming majority of people in prison have experienced significant trauma, which often goes unaddressed. Although understanding and recovering from trauma is a key part of California's discretionary parole process, there are limited resources to help people do that work, and the prison environment itself is often re-traumatizing.

Our attorneys, social workers, and counselors work collaboratively with each client to explore the root causes of harm, develop greater emotional awareness, and build a path toward accountability and growth. This human-centered approach improves parole outcomes and fosters long-term healing.

When we're unable to offer full representation, we provide individualized written consultations. These are detailed, holistic reviews of a client's legal history, parole hearing transcripts, and psychological evaluations, paired with personalized guidance on the next steps toward parole readiness.

Our litigation team amplifies this work through strategic legal challenges, including habeas corpus litigation and class action lawsuits, aimed at improving systemic fairness. We've brought cases all the way to the California Supreme Court, fighting to reduce the harm caused by unlawful parole denials and board practices.



## Our Legal Impact

### In 2024, we:

- Saw 12 of our clients come home to their communities
- Filed 10 habeas petitions (6 superior, 3 court of appeal, 1 CA Supreme Court)
- Delivered 23 consultations
- Represented clients at 61 parole-related hearings
- Achieved a 59% grant rate in parole hearings held

In addition, we continued to develop and refine tools that help incarcerated people understand their rights, build insight, and participate meaningfully in their legal journeys. This legal advocacy helps improve outcomes not just for our clients, but for thousands more navigating the system.

In 2024, this included:

- ***People v. Reed*** Guide: A comprehensive resource that explains the implications of the Reed decision, which impacts parole terms and conditions. The guide outlines eligibility for relief and provides step-by-step instructions for filing habeas petitions to secure relief.
- Updating our ***Working with Your Attorney*** Guide: A practical guide to help people in prison navigate relationships with their parole attorneys and understand their rights, particularly for those who have state-appointed attorneys. It includes tips for communication, setting expectations, and building collaborative legal strategies.
- Updating our ***Book Report*** Guide: A reflective tool that guides people in engaging with books in ways that promote insight, emotional growth, and accountability. It includes questions for reflection and suggestions on how to communicate those insights effectively to the parole board.
- ***In re Poole*** Fact Sheet: A summary of our impact litigation that challenges the systemic deficiencies in the state-appointed parole attorney system. The fact sheet explains how inadequate legal representation harms parole applicants and how this case seeks to strengthen due process protections.
- ***Home After Harm*** Lessons for non HAH participants: A condensed suite of materials adapted from our in-depth HAH program, made accessible to incarcerated people who are not formal participants of the program.

# Policy Advocacy

UnCommon Law's policy team focuses on transforming the discretionary parole consideration system, one of the most complex and least transparent elements of California's justice system. We work to ensure that people serving extreme sentences for serious and violent crimes have access to due process, resources to address past trauma, and a fair opportunity for release.

We support legislation that advances these goals and mobilizes against harmful bills that seek to make the parole consideration process even more restrictive and inequitable. This work includes collaborating with coalitions like the California Alliance for Parole Reform and the California Justice Coalition, producing data analysis, providing expert testimony in legislative hearings, and meeting directly with policymakers to educate them about key issues.

Beyond legislative advocacy, our broader policy change work includes monitoring the Board of Parole Hearings (BPH), leading strategic litigation, increasing access to critical data, educating the public, and engaging community members in advocacy opportunities.

## In 2024, we:

- Collected input from incarcerated people through interviews and surveys, directly informing our successful push to improve language access for people who are Limited English Proficient (LEP).
- Obtained a landmark dataset through a Public Records Act (PRA) to support deeper analysis of parole hearing outcomes from 2012 - 2024.
- Increased collaboration with researchers and data analysts to better understand systemic barriers for parole candidates.
- Engaged system-impacted community members by supporting public testimony, coordinating letters to legislators, and encouraging participation in public comment.

*"I tried to read the legal documents and understand them, but I couldn't. I had no one I could ask questions to. No one helped."*

*—Anonymous Parole Candidate with  
Limited English Proficiency*





A client of UnCommon Law, released in 2024 after 43 years in prison, continues to dedicate his life to improving California's prison system. His relentless advocacy against solitary confinement, efforts to end prison violence, and promotion of rehabilitative programs have impacted thousands of lives.

## Our Coalition Work in 2024

As a founding member of the California Alliance for Parole Reform (CAPR), UnCommon Law helped formalize the coalition in 2023 alongside partners including the Ella Baker Center, Initiate Justice, Californians for Safety and Justice, the ACLU of Northern California, and the California Coalition for Women Prisoners.

The formation of CAPR marked a critical step toward more coordinated and sustained advocacy for parole reform across California. In 2024, CAPR gained meaningful traction as a statewide force for change, culminating in a major legislative milestone: the passage of AB 2310, the coalition's first sponsored bill.

A key focus of this legislation was improving language access in the parole process. Through surveys and ongoing correspondence with incarcerated people across California, we consistently heard from limited English speakers about serious barriers to fair participation in their parole hearings, such as inadequate interpretation, lack of translated materials, and ineffective communication with parole attorneys. These insights drove the development of AB 2310, which requires the Board of Parole Hearings to translate essential parole hearing documents into the five most commonly spoken languages in California's prisons. We are now monitoring the implementation of AB 2310, creating resources for LEP parole candidates, and pushing for higher quality, certified interpreters in parole hearings.

# In-Prison Programming

## *Home After Harm & Pathways to Parole Success*

*“After this program, I realized that my relationships are what I make them, and that my contributions can create positive change, support others, and help prevent conflict and harm.”*

—Home After Harm Graduate



*Home After Harm* (HAH) is transforming the landscape of rehabilitation in California’s maximum-security prisons. This peer-led, trauma-informed program is designed for people preparing for parole and is co-created and facilitated by people with lived experience of incarceration. Over the course of 10 months, participants unpack the root causes of harm by processing trauma, developing emotional literacy, and taking accountability. Through healing circles, legal education, and mentorship, participants develop the tools to grow and the confidence to advocate for themselves before the parole board and beyond. By building therapeutic communities rooted in trust, mutual support, and accountability, HAH is shifting prison culture from the inside out.



In 2024, we proudly celebrated two powerful graduating cohorts of HAH:

- Salinas Valley State Prison (SVSP), Cohort 1: 23 graduates
- California State Prison, Los Angeles County (LAC), Cohort 2: 19 graduates and 3 peer mentors



For facilities where HAH is not yet in place, we offer *Pathways to Parole Success* (PPS), a condensed workshop that introduces key concepts from the HAH curriculum, including harm, accountability, and the structure of parole hearings. PPS provides participants with a foundational understanding of the parole process and practical tools to begin preparing for their hearings.

In 2024, we successfully hosted five PPS workshops, serving a total of 342 participants across the following facilities:

- Substance Abuse Treatment Facility
- California Health Care Facility
- Folsom State Prison
- Mule Creek State Prison
- Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility

*"It helped me create a clear path on the work that needs to be done and showed me that I could do it."*

*—Home After Harm Graduate*



## Survey Results from *Home After Harm* participants in 2024

The following summarizes key findings from the post-program surveys completed by HAH participants in both 2024. The percentages below reflect the portion of participants of combined cohorts who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement.



understood the parole hearing process as a result of the program



felt a strong sense of community with others inside the program



understood healthy ways to cope with negative events in their life



understood the emotions of shame and guilt



reported having access to tools and skills for a successful transition to life in the community



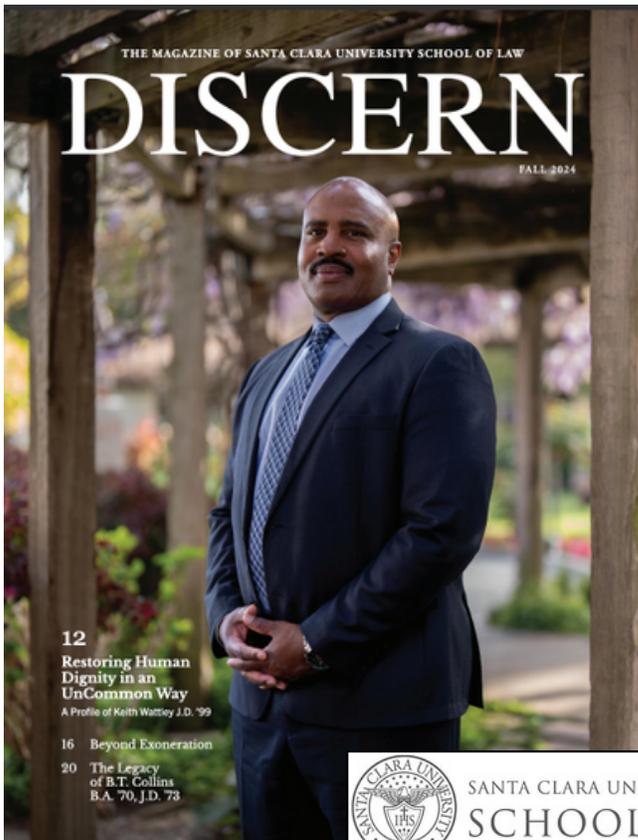
said the program helped them identify past trauma in their life



understood the negative character traits that contributed to their offense



felt safe discussing their case and personal story with their attorney or legal assistant



## Shifting the Narrative

### Keith Wattley Honored by Santa Clara Law

Last fall, we were proud to see our Founder and Executive Director, Keith Wattley, honored with the 2024 Katharine and George Alexander Law Prize and featured in the Fall issue of Santa Clara Law's *DISCERN* magazine. The profile explores Keith's personal and professional background, his early influences, and how those experiences shaped the trauma-informed legal model UnCommon Law uses today.

[Read the article →](#)

*"The prison and criminal justice systems tend to dehumanize people, removing all of the complexities that make them human in order to justify what we do to them in prison."*

—Keith Wattley,  
Founder and Executive Director  
of UnCommon Law



### KQED Reports on Court Delays for People Granted Parole

A *KQED* article reported how a federal court order prevented hundreds of incarcerated people who earned parole from returning home. The piece features our Parole Success Advocate, Steve Berenti, who speaks about the emotional toll these delays had on those working hard to rebuild their lives.

[Read the article →](#)

### Passage of AB 2310 Featured in SFGATE

*SFGATE* covered a pivotal moment in parole reform advocacy: the statewide push behind AB 2310, a bill co-sponsored by UnCommon Law and championed by the California Alliance for Parole Reform (CAPR).

[Read the article →](#)

### Forbes Spotlights Healing-Centered Legal Advocacy

*Forbes* highlighted Keith Wattley and UnCommon Law's trauma-informed approach to legal representation in a piece about preparing for parole through healing. The article shines a national spotlight on the power of compassion, emotional insight, and dignity to create real change in people's lives—and in the systems that have long failed them.

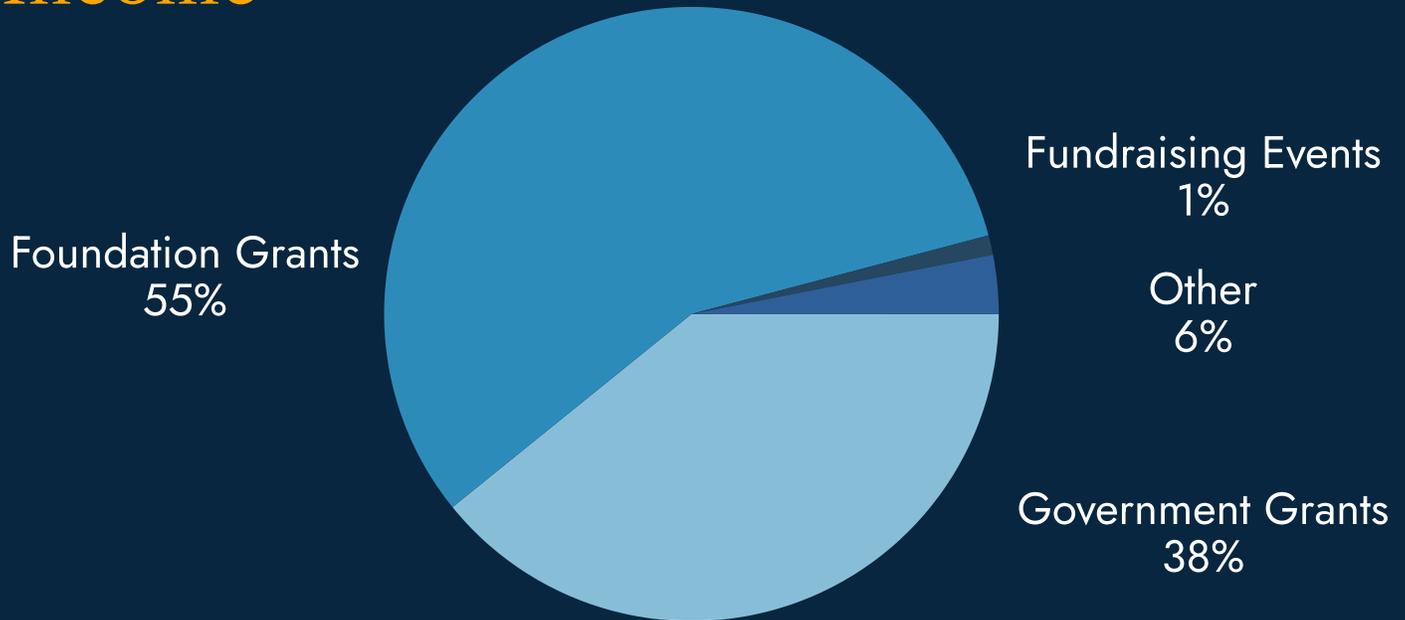
[Read the article →](#)

*"Language access is a barrier for over 10% of currently incarcerated people in our state prisons," said Thanh Tran, a policy consultant for the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights. "AB 2310 is a vehicle to support those incarcerated folks who are non-English speakers in getting a fair shot at freedom in their parole hearings."*

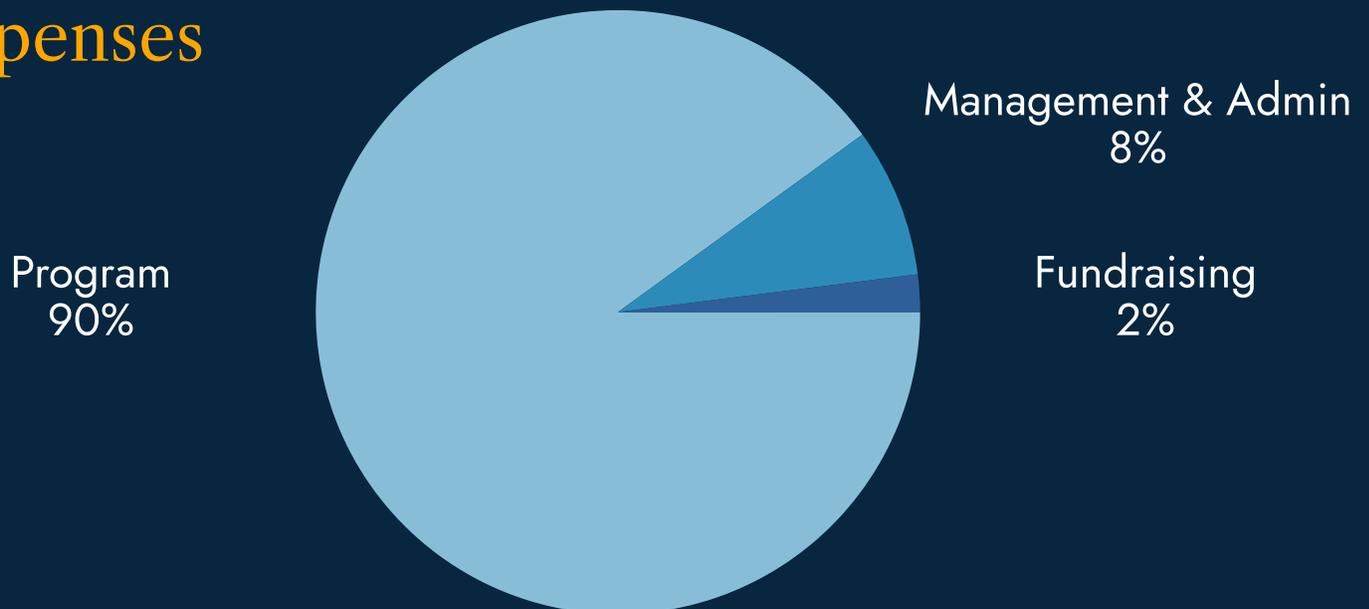
— SFGate, Bay Area Advocacy Groups Endorse Parole Reform Bill in Town Hall

# Financial Statements

## Income



## Expenses



Disclaimer: These figures are based on internal financial records from the 2024 calendar year and are not audited. Our audited financial statements will be available after June 2025.

Thank you to our supporters for standing with us and helping move our mission forward. Your commitment makes our work possible.  
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