

The National Council Is Taking Back the Legal System

June 7, 2019

In January, the National Council expanded its activities to include legal work under our guiding principle: *nothing about us without us*. We will amplify our message of prison abolition by engaging in impact litigation, giving testimony before Congress and state legislatures, filing administrative complaints, and any other activity that will enable us to vindicate the rights of those ensnared in the criminal legal system.

Most recently, we urged a federal appeals court to reconsider its disastrous opinion that said Michigan could suspend driver's licenses of drivers who cannot afford to pay their court debt. Two Michigan drivers had sued Michigan, arguing that the suspension policy was unconstitutional. The lower court ordered Michigan to stop suspending licenses of people too poor to pay but the Sixth Circuit, which sets federal law for Michigan, Tennessee, Ohio, and Kentucky, took that victory away.

[Dēmos, a non-profit organization](#) that develops and implements progressive ideas to promote social justice, partnered with us in submitting this [“friend of the court” brief](#). We explained why the judges' decision was incorrect legally and harmful to the people living in the Sixth Circuit. Our brief highlighted the story of National Council member whose driver's license was suspended twice, costing her a well-paying job and with it any chance of ever paying the government back. We wanted the judges to face the human cost of their decision.

Like everything else the National Council does, all our legal work will amplify the voices of women and girls behind bars and those who have made it home. Our ultimate goal is to shut down the prison-industrial complex. This is not an easy task. It will take time and resources. The defendants in our cases will use every legal trick in the book to stop us. But we are determined to make sure those in power will have to answer for their treatment of incarcerated women and girls.