

## A Winning Cause - Joining Forces to Correct a Serious Injustice

*The 2021 session of the Colorado Legislature saw a concerted effort by Together Colorado, whose offices are situated at Montview, and by Montview members Marilyn Ackermann and John Howell to correct an injustice. Their success is worth noting and celebrating. The injustice involves the practice of showups: delivering to a crime victim or eyewitness a "suspect" police pick up on the street and asking him or her to identify the person (often a young Black man), who is handcuffed and flanked by police officers. Here is Marilyn's account:*

Praise God! I want to thank you all from the bottom of my heart. Thank you for telling your friends and family about showups, calling your representatives and senators, and for sharing this work with me and my Transforming Justice Together Colorado team. It has been one amazing journey.

For three years we've been learning how to correct an injustice that especially targets Black, Brown, Indigenous and low-income people. When our colleague Sharon Battle's son, Charles was wrongfully arrested three years ago by an eyewitness identification procedure called showups, our current journey for justice began. She called out to our mostly White organization, "You always ask, what can I do as a White person? As a Black woman I can't change the system, you White people have the power to, and I need your help to change this very broken system."

We heard her plea and decided to act, even when we didn't know where to begin. Thus, doing national research on eyewitness identification (and specifically showups) began. We spoke with Denver Police Chief Pazen, District Attorney Beth McCann and Attorney General Phil Weiser. AG Weiser became our champion and helped us navigate the process of changing a law that isn't being enforced and how to improve/restrict the practice of show-up identifications by police and DAs.

We worked very hard to build trust and a working relationship with Chief Pazen. **You all (more than 600) helped with that by attending Shorter African Methodist Episcopal Church in November 2019.** There, we publicly called on the chief to change policy to be less suggestive, to follow National Best Practices of DAs, to train all officers specifically on showups and to collect data so that we know how often and who is involved by race, gender and age. The AG's office also made a passionate appeal for the Chief and all of us to figure this out together. All of this was agreed to and Denver Police Department became the first police department in the nation to collect data, train and change procedures!

In August 2020, in the middle of a pandemic, Together Colorado (TC) decided to find bill sponsors and run a state bill to change the state law on show-up identifications and to demand data from all law enforcement in the state. We, mostly volunteers inexperienced in the ways of the Legislature, jumped in. With the guidance of TC lobbyist Tonette Salazar@strategies360, we took one step at a time. Because TC is a faith-based, multi-racial organization, we had gifts we were unaware of that could

help build power. Public officials and legislators were willing to meet with us to talk about changing this law or at least give us feedback on how we "didn't have the wording or the intent right."

TC is all about building relationships. Over the next nine months we met on Zoom, in teams of three to six with 63 legislators and more than 25 progressive DA's, Public Defenders, private defenders, sheriffs, police chiefs and deputies, DA Council reps, Chiefs of Police Association reps and Attorney General staff to create the law that was signed by our Governor on June 24! It was a heavy lift with many edits and curves thrown our way, but when taken in small bites over three years, it was accomplished with the help of people like you. I learned once again that the individual makes a difference and that all of us must answer "the call," especially for our Black and Brown siblings. We, in Colorado, now have the strongest regulation on show-up identifications in the United States. When, how and where this practice can be used and if they are to be allowed in court is now limited. This change moves us to have less wrongfully arrested people which greatly helps meet our goal of reducing incarcerations by 40 percent in 10 years.

June 24 was a day to celebrate and have hope. Let's look to God and ask what we can do to keep moving forward so every son and daughter can be safe in our communities no matter what we look like or where we live or whose neighborhood we are visiting? This victory in moving our state toward accountability began with this bill HB 1142 becoming law. <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb21-1142> Our community stepped up and together we got it done. Faith and hard work got us here. Thank you, family and friends, you made our work easier. I loved hearing from some of you along the way. You showed our legislators how we work together and how we listen and collaborate. In fact, many, many legislators and lobbyists commented that this was the most amazing bill to pass because we talked and listened to all sides of the law and the courts to make a good law that was passed with some bipartisan support.

Together Colorado is family to me, just as Montview Church is our family. The guidance we got from Representative Bacon, Senator Gonzales, Tonette Salazar, and Staff Organizer Kamau Allen was and is amazing! We look forward to doing more good works together as Together Colorado in the next years. Multiple legislators and the Attorney General have approached us to see if we will work them next Session on bills around court and prison issues that they would like to see get passed. It seems Together Colorado is now known as a force with which to reckon for positive change. Who knew we had this super power... other than God?

If this story moves you to get more involved in systemic change and helping Montview become more of an anti-racist church, reach out to me, Marilyn Ackermann, at [marilynn.ackermann@gmail.com](mailto:marilynn.ackermann@gmail.com). I have worked for 14 months with up to 25 Montview members to become Human Dignity Delegates (working on our White supremacy and moving towards becoming more anti-racist, while at the same time working on civic engagement activities to change unjust systems). Also, you can join one of the federated committees at Together Colorado that works on systemic change while

always doing work through an anti-racism lens (Transforming Justice, Affordable Housing, Health Care, Education, Immigration, Climate Justice, Labor reform). I'll help you find your niche.

As for Charles, he is regaining trust slowly. Trust in being a Black man walking and driving in Denver is a challenge. He is working to regain the last three years that were stolen from him. He is looking for meaningful work while he pursues his higher education. He appreciates all your prayers and your involvement in his pretrial appearances, and your work to make this law stick so other persons of color and all God's children can walk/drive more safely in Denver neighborhoods without being rounded up and accused of a crime they did not commit. He prays that others don't have to spend their days and nights worrying about being thrown into the judicial system. Charles considers himself one of the lucky ones only because a group of mostly White people advocated and helped him avoid incarceration by avoiding a plea bargain to another crime which he also did not commit or worse. His family thanks any of you who helped with small and large actions. May it be so for all Coloradoans of all ages. We will be monitoring!

*Luke 1:37 For with God nothing will be impossible.*