

# Trauma Matters

A quarterly publication dedicated to the dissemination of information on trauma and best-practices in trauma-informed care

Happy Pride!

Summer 2025

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

## The Eyes of a Silent Son

by Kelvin Young, RSS (he/him/his)

Look into my eyes, and tell me what you see.

Is it a lost soul with no control trying to be free?

As I look into the mirror and stare into my eyes,

I see all the anger and self-hate, hypocrisy and lies.

I see resentment, frustration, embarrassment and pain,

I see jail bars and fancy cars as I cruise down memory lane.

I see the feelings I repressed, going back to childhood.

I need to let go of all those feelings, and I would if I could.

I see the hurt I caused to the ones I love the most.

I see my brother on his wedding day as we celebrate with a toast.

I see the good and the bad times that I experienced in my life.

But it's so hard to let go of all that bitterness and strife.

There's a sense of sadness when you look into my eyes.

Like the ones you see when a close relative dies.

But this death is not a physical; it has to do with the soul.

It's that morbid feeling we get when our

spiritual energy is low.

It's like nothing matters anymore, like that day when I was fired,

Feeling depressed and weak can't sleep, but I'm so tired.

I'm tired of all the pain, the hurt and the rain.

From that cloud that keeps following me, sometimes I think I'm insane.

But when I look out my window and see the beauty of the lake.

It reminds me of good times, like when I was nine and things were fine.

And with the sunrise I feel the presence of the Creator.

When I look out my window, I see me in the beauty of nature.

I'm a part of God's creation, nature and humanity!

The loving spirit that's in Jesus is also in me!

So I've learned to love myself and others just for who we are.

And I learned about this love looking out my window with jail bars.

*Kelvin Young, RSS is an award-winning sound healer, recovery support specialist, and co-founder of both Toivo and Soul Care Love, LLC. Sober from alcohol and other drugs since March 6, 2009, Kelvin's recovery journey led him to integrate holistic healing into the behavioral health system, focusing on stress management, trauma healing, addiction, and mental health recovery through sound healing. His passion for vibrational sound therapy began during his incarceration, where he first experienced its profound*

*impact on calming the mind and body. Kelvin has shared his expertise internationally, presenting at conferences and facilitating healing sessions in diverse settings, including yoga festivals, addiction treatment centers, psychiatric hospitals, and mental health agencies. His work has been recognized with numerous honors, including the 2021 Deron Drumm Excellence in Integrative Medicine Award and the 2023 100 Men of Color Award. Kelvin is known for his warm, compassionate nature and his dedication to creating healing spaces where people can find strength, recover, and thrive.*

## Creating a Trauma-Informed Justice System for Women and Gender-Diverse People

by Stephanie Covington, PhD, LCSW  
(she/her/hers)

Over the past decade, there's been a growing realization that trauma can leave deep and lasting marks on people, families, and entire communities. This is especially true for those who the justice system has impacted. Trauma doesn't only stem from large-scale disasters or public tragedies. Often, it begins in private, with experiences of abuse, neglect, and violence that many women and gender-diverse people face from a young age. And unfortunately, many end up in jails and prisons without ever having received any real help or support to heal.

### What Do We Mean by Trauma-Informed?

A number of different terms are often used, including trauma-sensitive, trauma-informed, trauma-responsive, and trauma-specific. Here are some definitions:

- *Trauma-sensitive* means simply being aware that someone has likely experienced trauma.
- *Trauma-informed* means knowing how trauma affects people's mental, physical, and emotional health.
- *Trauma-responsive* goes a step further: it means creating systems and policies that actively avoid re-traumatizing people and instead support recovery.
- *Trauma-specific* refers to direct treatment approaches focused on healing from trauma.

A truly supportive justice system weaves all these levels together. It's not just about knowing trauma exists—it's about changing the culture. It is essential for everyone—from correctional officers to administrators—to understand how trauma shows up in people's

behavior and be committed to creating supportive and safer environments.

### The ACE Study: Why Childhood Trauma Matters

One of the biggest breakthroughs in understanding trauma came from the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. Researchers found that people who faced four or more types of childhood trauma—like abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction—were significantly more likely to develop both mental and physical health problems later in life. Women in the ACE study were 50% more likely than men to have five or more traumatic experiences as children.<sup>1</sup>

### Justice Systems Can Re-Traumatize

Most people in prisons and jails have experienced trauma at some point in their lives. But prisons aren't designed for victims—they're built for offenders. This means the system often overlooks the fact that many people, especially women and gender-diverse people, were victims long before they broke the law and committed a crime.

The sad truth is that our justice system often re-traumatizes people. Routine practices like strip searches or loud commands can trigger past trauma. Even being confined in a cell can feel like a repetition of earlier experiences of being trapped or powerless. These everyday practices can trigger old wounds and lead to impulsive or aggressive behaviors that are hard to manage. This can create a vicious cycle, where trauma leads to behavior that gets punished, which causes more trauma. This is why custodial settings that are trauma-responsive (as per the definition above) can break this cycle and make correctional environments that are safer for staff and residents.

When prisons adopt trauma-informed and trauma-responsive practices, things can start to change. For example, at a women's facility in Massachusetts, after trauma-informed training and policy changes were implemented in a mental health unit, assaults on staff dropped by 62%, inmate-on-inmate assaults fell by 54%, suicide attempts went down by 60%, and there were fewer mental health crises overall.<sup>2</sup>

### The Five Core Values of Trauma-Informed and Trauma-Responsive Practice

To make these changes work, organizations need to follow key principles<sup>3</sup>:

1. **Safety:** Both physical and emotional safety are top priorities.
2. **Trustworthiness:** Staff are open, honest, and maintain clear boundaries.
3. **Choice:** People are given as much control as possible over their own treatment.
4. **Collaboration:** Staff and prison residents work together, sharing power and decision-making.
5. **Empowerment:** The focus is on building strengths and confidence.

This approach also means understanding how trauma affects behavior, minimizing power imbalances, explaining what's happening and why, and always working to prevent re-traumatization.

These values don't just make prisons safer—they make them more humane and effective for everyone involved. This means these principles are also essential for the staff's well-being.

### Women in the System: A Closer Look

The statistics are sobering. Between 77% and 90% of women and gender-diverse people in US prisons and jails have experienced trauma as children. Up to 90% of women report ongoing abuse by partners as adults. Compared to men, women and gender-diverse people in prison have faced more childhood trauma, more abuse, and more mental health challenges.

This isn't just a U.S. problem. This is true for women worldwide. For example, in the UK, 49% of women prisoners suffer from anxiety and depression (compared to 19% of women in the general population), 46% have survived domestic abuse, and over half report childhood abuse. In Switzerland, nearly half of justice-involved women have been victims of violence by someone close to them, and a quarter have experienced sexual abuse.

It doesn't stop when women enter prison. About 10% of women report being sexually victimized while incarcerated, and those with a history of abuse are three to five times more likely to be victimized again in prison. The abuse in prison statistics is also high for gender-diverse people.

### Changing the Culture: What It Takes

Transforming a correctional facility into a trauma-informed environment isn't simple. It takes a visionary leader who can inspire staff and show them why it matters. It takes time

(three to five years) and full organizational commitment. Leaders need to help staff understand that trauma shapes behavior, some of which is often a coping mechanism for trauma. There are safer, more respectful interactions that can lead to better outcomes for everyone. This is challenging for a system whose foundation is one of punishment.

One resource used in multiple countries is *Becoming Trauma Informed: A Training Program for Correctional Professionals*<sup>4</sup>, which includes practical guidance, exercises, and discussions. Staff are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences (including vicarious trauma), understand the effects of trauma, and learn how to communicate in ways that don't escalate conflict. Even simple changes, such as saying "hello" and "goodbye," or avoiding harsh commands, can significantly shift the atmosphere.

### A Training Example: Spotting and Avoiding Triggers

Triggers—like yelling, touching, or invasive medical exams—can send a trauma survivor into panic or dissociation. Staff training teaches how to spot these triggers and respond appropriately. For example, before conducting a search, staff should explain what they're doing and ask for cooperation rather than using force.

#### Other thoughtful strategies include:

- Using the person's name instead of a prison number.
- Offering choices when possible (e.g., contact vs. non-contact visits).
- Conducting exams or searches privately and respectfully.

Additionally, there is *Moving from Trauma-Informed to Trauma-Responsive: A Training Program for Organizational Change*<sup>5</sup>. The video, facilitator guides, and other resources help to guide organizations in the change process.

A trauma-informed correctional organization makes sure everyone, from officers to administrators, understands the impact of trauma and integrates this knowledge into everyday practice. The goal is to create a culture where healing is possible, and where women and gender-diverse people are seen not just as offenders, but as people with complex histories who deserve a chance to recover and rebuild their lives.

## Trauma-Specific Programs That Work

There are several trauma-specific interventions that have been tested and shown to help justice-involved women and gender-diverse people. Some examples include:

- *Helping Women Recover and Beyond Trauma*: programs designed to address trauma and addiction.<sup>6,7</sup>
- *Beyond Violence+*: focuses on women and gender-diverse people who have used violence, addressing both trauma experienced and perpetrated.<sup>8</sup>
- *Healing Trauma+*: a brief, six-session program that can be led by staff or peers.<sup>9</sup>

These programs have shown real impact—decreasing symptoms of PTSD, depression, anxiety, and improving emotional regulation and social connectedness.<sup>10,11,12,13</sup>

### Case Examples: England and California

In England, all 12 women's prisons joined a trauma-informed initiative supported by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Services. Staff were trained, and each prison created a "Guide Team" to oversee the changes; many then began offering the Healing Trauma program.

In California, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation implemented Beyond Violence and Healing Trauma+ in women's prisons, including in Secure Housing Units. These efforts led to documented reductions in PTSD, depression, and anger. Staff also received trauma-informed training, and the success led to the expansion of programs for men as well.

### Why This Matters

Trauma-informed justice isn't just a buzzword. It's a meaningful shift in how we view and treat justice-involved women and gender-diverse people. It acknowledges their histories, creates safer environments, and offers real tools for recovery. It helps staff understand and manage behavior more effectively. Most importantly, it gives people a chance to heal.

Adopting trauma-informed approaches throughout the justice system isn't just compassionate—it's also practical. It reduces violence, lowers recidivism rates, and supports the well-being of all individuals involved.

*Note: for a comprehensive discussion of women in the criminal legal system, see Hidden Healers.<sup>14</sup>*

## Ask the Experts: An Interview with Jessica Bloomberg, LCSW, and Officer Bridget VanSlyke

By Alicia Feller, LCSW  
(she/her/hers)

The Fairfield Connecticut Police Department's Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) was formed in June 2011 and is team of police officers who undergo intensive, specialized training—typically a 40-hour program—focused on understanding mental health and substance use disorders. The curriculum includes modules on behavioral health diagnoses, suicide risk, trauma-informed care, and developmental disabilities. Officers are trained in de-escalation techniques, active listening, conflict resolution, and how to recognize symptoms of crisis versus combative behavior.

Founded in 2022, the Fairfield Police Behavioral Health Network meets quarterly to discuss trending issues, current best practices, training opportunities, debrief on shared investigations, and evaluate how to best serve communities and each other when responding to incidents involving behavioral health. Representatives from DMHAS, the Greater Bridgeport Community Mental Health Center, the Child and Family Guidance Center, Mobile Crisis Intervention Services, Operation HOPE, the Department of Children and Families, Fairfield Senior and Social Services, and many other agencies and treatment centers participate in the collaborative.

In 2022, Jessica Bloomberg, LCSW, joined the department as the embedded social worker. With prior experience as a Stamford police officer, Jessica spearheads initiatives aimed at enhancing services in the realms of mental health and addiction support.

Officer Bridget VanSlyke has been a member of the Fairfield Police Department since 2021. She joined the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) in 2023 and has been committed to providing support to the residents of Fairfield alongside LCSW Bloomberg.

**ALICIA FELLER, LCSW:** Jessica, when do you go out on a call?

**JESSICA BLOOMBERG, LCSW:** It varies, but the common denominator is once the scene is safe. I have a radio and can hear when there's a call, and sometimes I'll just leave and head in that direction. Once I speak to the



boss on the scene, I'll come. I'd say 95% of the time it's after a suicide or untimely death, so police can focus on the investigation and someone's there for the family. [I'm there] after domestic violence incidents, anytime someone has a substance use problem, needs housing, or connection with services [when] there's no criminal matter, so someone needs support rather than arrest.

**ALICIA:** Officers responding to crisis situations are typically CIT-trained, correct? Can you tell us what CIT (Crisis Intervention Team) training is?

**OFFICER BRIDGET VANSLYKE:** It's a voluntary program, but most of our officers are CIT-trained. It's a 40-hour, week-long program focused on people with mental health disorders or substance abuse problems. It emphasizes de-escalation tactics, active listening, all that good stuff.

**ALICIA:** So, as an officer, if you go to a call, you're able to read the situation differently?

**OFFICER VANSLYKE:** Absolutely. I work 3:00 PM to 11:00 PM. When I hear a call about someone in crisis, I'll say, "Hey, I'm CIT-trained. Do you want me to head to that?" and I'll go. Whether it's an elderly [person] with dementia who's lost, someone being arrested who's having an emotional response, or someone suicidal: anything crisis-related, I respond and use my training.

**ALICIA:** Are there times when you'll say, "Okay, let's bring Jessica out here"?

**OFFICER VANSLYKE:** Absolutely. Like she said, [she'll come] when the scene is safe, and the person is calm and willing to accept help. I always tell people what I'm doing and ask, "Are you open to resources? Do you want my social worker to come speak with you?" If they say yes, great. Either way, I call her. On a DOA (Dead on Arrival) call, I could tell the family was struggling. I called my supervisor and said, "We need Jessica here." She came in about 10 minutes. She supports the family while we focus on the investigation, which is huge.

**ALICIA:** That must be really helpful and settling for the family too.

**JESSICA:** In a moment of crisis, people are more open to intervention. It's an opportunity to build a connection and help in the moment. After the police leave, they still have someone to reach out to. I guide them through the process and offer resources. It's a tailored re-

sponse; there's no cookie cutter.

**ALICIA:** If you get a call that appears [to be] a criminal complaint, and once you're there realize they're responding to internal stimuli or they're depressed, how does the response change?

**OFFICER VANSLYKE:** For example, someone at CVS appears to be shoplifting and is upset and irate. If we recognize they're having a mental health episode, we likely won't prosecute. We'll take them to the hospital, connect them with Jessica, or contact a family member. But if the person has a high recidivism rate and is repeatedly offending, criminal action might be appropriate so the court can mandate treatment. Still, our goal isn't to arrest someone having a mental health crisis. We send them to the hospital and connect them with resources.

**ALICIA:** Let's say in this case, they get paroled to the ER. Does the FPD then follow that person?

**JESSICA:** If I can get to the scene before they go to the ER and they're competent to sign a release, that's ideal. I can then advocate and share the community's impression of the person, because ER behavior can differ from community behavior. For example, yesterday a 10-year-old was sent to the ER. This morning, I called the family: "I work in the Police Department. I heard your daughter was sent to the ER. Tell me how I can help." People are surprised to get a follow-up call from police. I make sure the family has resources to stay safe at home, especially with a child.

**ALICIA:** Connecting people with resources must help decrease recurrence of police contact.

**JESSICA:** It's huge. If you're shoplifting because you're hungry, we connect you with Operation HOPE or a list of food pantries in the area.

**ALICIA:** If someone you work with ends up incarcerated, do you follow them through incarceration?

**JESSICA:** There are three women and two men who've signed releases [authorizing me to] speak to the DOC or [whose conservator authorized me]. That's ideal. I want to help them re-acclimate and ensure they have supports so we don't end up in the same situation a week later.

**ALICIA:** That's great to hear. Are there specific goals you have with the department

around your role and CIT?

**JESSICA:** Calls for service wax and wane. There may be more when it's hot or very cold, so nobody sets an artificial number. I get a copy of every shift report. Officers like Bridget will say, "I heard a call last night." Then we do a home visit, separate from her shift [and while she's dressed casually], to offer support in person without the agitation of a uniform.

**OFFICER VANSLYKE:** They're calmer, not in crisis anymore, and more likely to talk with us. It's called a CIT follow-up. CIT officers also meet to go through calls from the last two weeks or month, review the incidents, and give them CIT tagging—mental health episode, demographics, actions taken. Deputy Chief Weihe tracks it. When I see someone wants to speak with Jessica, I print the report, put it on her desk, go off duty, and we do the visit together.

**JESSICA:** It's great to meet people differently. The Fairfield Police Behavioral Health Network—started by Deputy Chief Weihe about 2, 2 ½ years ago—meets quarterly. I learn about resources through that network. Sometimes I'll text people, "Do you have resources for this?" or "Where can I get someone help with that?" People often text me too: "There's a new place opening up. Want to come learn about it?" We started with about 12 people. There are now about 60 around the table.

[Deputy Chief Weihe] has this ability to think ahead. We have our first summer intern starting June 2, and a pile of resumes for a fall social work intern. That's going to make a big difference. Social work in police departments is still new in Connecticut, [so] it's interesting to see the backgrounds and perceptions people bring to the role.

**ALICIA:** Thank you both for your time.

*To add further context, a representative from the FPD shared this comment: "We have observed a noticeable decrease in recidivism among individuals who had previously contacted us frequently due to mental health crises. In particular, one of our more consistent callers—who might have otherwise relied heavily on police response—has been successfully connected with the resources and support provided by our embedded LCSW. As a result, she now either contacts the social worker directly or no longer feels the need to reach out as often. That said, it's important to note that outcomes vary on a case-by-case basis. Each individual has a unique set of circumstances, and the level of engagement and follow-through with services can differ greatly. For that reason, it's difficult to provide a blanket assessment. However, what has stood out to us overall is how im-*

*peaceful it has been to have a trained social worker provide immediate, specialized support. This has helped reduce the strain on emergency services while more effectively meeting the needs of those in crisis."*

## **A Father's Legacy, A Son's Reckoning: Germano Kimbro on Incarceration, Healing, and the Weight of Inheritance**

**By Carl Bordeaux, CPRP, CARC  
(he/him/his)**



Germano A. Kimbro is a peer recovery advocate, reentry specialist, and community educator with over 20 years of lived and professional experience in behavior-

al health and justice reform. His work centers on healing, dignity, and the power of peer-led transformation. Drawing on his own history of incarceration and recovery, Germano has provided trauma-

informed support to individuals returning home from prison, struggling with addiction, or rebuilding their lives. He has held roles as a recovery coach, case manager, and mentor, and has served on statewide advisory boards such as the Connecticut Reentry Collaborative. Germano is recognized for his powerful storytelling and public speaking, frequently addressing audiences on the impact of incarceration, trauma, and the importance of second chances.

His leadership is both personal and systemic, helping communities and institutions design more equitable, compassionate models of care. The son of Warren Kimbro—a civil rights activist and director of Project MORE—Germano continues a legacy of advocacy rooted in justice and redemption. His work affirms the human spirit and the possibility of healing across generations.

*Editor's Note: The following excerpt is adapted from Warren Kimbro's 2009 obituary, originally published in The New York Times. It is included here to provide historical context for the events discussed in this article.*

Warren Kimbro, a former member of the Black Panther Party who was convicted in a notorious 1969 murder in New Haven but later rebuilt his life and became a respected

community leader, died in New Haven on February 3, 2009.

Mr. Kimbro's life was marked by a dramatic fall from grace followed by a long journey of redemption. Since 1983, he had led Project M.O.R.E., a New Haven-based organization that provides job training and rehabilitation for formerly incarcerated individuals and advocates for alternatives to incarceration. His work with Project M.O.R.E. became central to his efforts to atone for his past.

"Every morning he prayed about it," said Paul Bass, who co-authored *Murder in the Model City: The Black Panthers, Yale, and the Redemption of a Killer* (Basic Books, 2006) with Mr. Kimbro. "He really wanted to come clean."

Mr. Kimbro's crime was the 1969 killing of 24-year-old Alex Rackley, a fellow Panther who had been accused of being a police informant. Mr. Rackley was held, interrogated, and tortured for three days in Mr. Kimbro's apartment before being driven to a swamp in Middlefield, Conn., where he was executed. Mr. Kimbro confessed to firing the first shot and pleaded guilty to murder. He was sentenced to life in prison with a minimum of 20 years.

The killing, and the subsequent charges against several Black Panther leaders, including national chairman Bobby Seale, drew national attention. Mr. Seale, who was in New Haven at the time to deliver a speech at Yale, was accused of ordering Mr. Rackley's execution. His impending trial sparked mass protests and a student strike at Yale.

Mr. Seale's trial ended in a hung jury, and he was released in 1971. Mr. Kimbro, who said he regretted his actions from the moment he pulled the trigger, testified for the prosecution. He stated that Mr. Seale had visited the apartment during Mr. Rackley's captivity, but could not confirm whether Mr. Seale had ordered the execution.

Warren Aloysious Kimbro was born in New Haven on April 29, 1934. His father worked in a factory. Mr. Kimbro dropped out of high school and later served in the Army during the Korean War. Upon returning home, he held a variety of jobs, including managing a dry cleaning store.

Disillusioned with bureaucracy and frustrated by the slow pace of change, he joined the Black Panther Party in 1969. At 35, he was older than many of his peers and had been a member for just six months when

the killing occurred. He later said he feared for his life if he refused to participate in the execution.

In prison, Mr. Kimbro edited the inmate newspaper and mentored other prisoners. On work release, he directed a youth drug counseling program and returned to prison each night. His sentence was eventually reduced to 4½ years. After satisfying his parole requirements, he enrolled at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education to study social work. He later became an assistant dean at Eastern Connecticut State University.

In addition to his son, Germano, of New Haven, Mr. Kimbro is survived by a daughter, Veronica, of Brookline, Mass.; a brother, Joseph, of New Haven; five grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

Reflecting on his journey in a 1973 interview with *The New York Times*, Mr. Kimbro said, "I was just a kid out there who didn't know how to handle himself, and it was a slap in the face with cold, hard reality that turned me around back to what I was. I'd lie awake in my cell at night trying to figure out what makes me tick, and I succeeded. I'm now what I was before 1969."

### **Part 1: A Legacy of Service**

#### ***A Legacy of Service: Germano's Present-Day Purpose***

When Germano Kimbro speaks about his work in the community, it's not from a place of obligation or performance—it's a reflection of his DNA. "Community work is just a part of me," he says plainly, but with a weight that carries generations. It began with the patriarchs and matriarchs in his life—his grandmother volunteering at Goodwill, his Aunt Teresa preparing meals on Dixwell Avenue, giving away clothes, and serving anyone in need. "My mother's side of the family were God-fearing, hard-working entrepreneurs, my father's side were intellectuals with a desire to serve," particularly within the community. His earliest memories are of service.

His father, Warren Kimbro, added another layer to that example, walking through neighborhoods and reaching out to young men who had no guidance, no structure, no fathers. He recruited them into local sports teams, giving them something to belong to. Germano jokes that he was a "real water boy," carrying buckets during halftime. But beneath the laughter is something more solemn—he

was absorbing a model of how to show up for others, even when you're struggling yourself.

"I have an employer who cuts my check," Germano admits, "but where God signs my paycheck is in my community." That work, he explains, was shaped not from privilege but from survival—watching those who had little still try to give to others. It's not just community service to him. It's a calling passed down through blood and hard-won experience.

## Part 2: Falling Through the Cracks

### *Falling Through the Cracks: The Early Roots of Incarceration*

When asked about his own journey through incarceration, Germano listens as the question is posed: "What was your personal experience with incarceration? And how did it affect your view of justice, trauma, and healing?" "Well, that's a mouthful, there," I say with a knowing tone. Germano responds without pause, opening the door to a past marked by difficult choices, painful associations, and the long road to healing.

He didn't set out to be incarcerated. Germano's early years were filled with promise—he did well in school and stayed out of trouble. But the environment around him told a different story. Outside the doors of his home, much of the neighborhood was steeped in New Haven's street culture—bars, barbershops, clubs, and pool rooms filled with men carrying trauma like swagger. The allure wasn't the drugs or the danger—it was the absence of real guidance. "My dad was incarcerated himself," Germano explains. "So my role models were people trying to survive, any way they could."

And like many young men navigating systemic poverty and community trauma, Germano slipped into that blurred space between legitimate hustle and the streets. His worth became entangled with how well he could "grind up a few dollars"—even if it meant making poor choices or being misled by those who were themselves deeply wounded.

In his words, incarceration became a "rite of passage," a twisted benchmark of manhood in an environment where jail time was normalized and even respected. "You got credibility if you didn't inform, didn't lose your composure, didn't lose your manhood." But underneath that mask was pain.

### *Seeds of Trauma: Early and Unrelenting*

Germano traces the roots of his trauma to childhood. "My father did what was done to him," he reflects, pointing to physical discipline, household conflict, and controlling behavior as common experiences in his upbringing. These early seeds of trauma didn't just grow—they thrived in silence, shaping his worldview before he even had the words to name them.

For years, Germano functioned in environments where trauma was camouflaged as toughness. Even those who "played by the rules" or clocked into factories daily, he suggests, were acting out their own unresolved pain. "Their consistency," he says, "was a form of trauma." It wasn't until much later that he encountered language like "post-traumatic slave syndrome" and realized that trauma wasn't just personal—it was generational, cultural, and historical.

Still, he kept moving forward. "I see myself as the world's big brother," Germano says. "I'm always looking for someone to help." It's the same spirit he grew up around—ordinary people in survival mode, still reaching out to lift others.

That kind of silence leaves a mark. Not the kind you can see. The kind that shapes how you measure your own worth. Germano wasn't looking for a shortcut. He was looking for a place to belong inside the very legacy he had watched his father build.

### *The Prison Within the Prison*

But nothing could prepare him for what incarceration would truly be like. He describes it not just as confinement, but as a kind of dehumanization that defies reason. "There was very little rehabilitation," he says. "You're asking yourself the questions and answering them, like a dog chasing its tail."

There's no sense of justice or correction, only control. He speaks of brutal, inescapable routines—numbers barked over loudspeakers, clanging metal doors, the constant thrum of televisions and radios. "Sometimes it's not even the physical stuff," he says. "It's people acting out their trauma." Yelling through walls. And then there's the cold. "Your toilet stool is a piece of steel," Germano explains. "You don't even have the decency of something to sit on." So men get creative—"cutting cardboard, wrapping it in toilet paper, taping it into something more comfortable just to sit while they use the toilet. Somebody in the upholstery shop might even make a cushion," he adds. "It's what you do to hold on to a sliver

of humanity."

Germano is clear: these aren't isolated cases. They are reflections of a system built not to rehabilitate, but to reinforce power structures. He points to the racial and class disparities in how incarceration plays out, recalling how some of the most violent offenders received the cushiest prison jobs. "It doesn't make any sense," he says. "But it's by design."

### *Trauma's Echo: Long After the Gates Close*

Even now, Germano lives with the echo of that trauma. "The system brutalizes people," he says, "and it follows you." The hurt isn't always visible, but it's there—in broken families, in mistrust of authority, in a deeply rooted fire that sometimes simmers just beneath the surface.

"I wasn't even able to label it as trauma until years later," he says. "I thought I was just feeling life." It was only through time, reflection, and education that he came to understand how deeply embedded the pain was—from childhood into adulthood, from community to confinement.

Yet, in the wreckage, Germano found something to hold onto: a purpose. He may never fully heal. But by reaching out, by sharing his story, by continuing the work his family began generations ago, he's helping others find the words, the truth, and maybe even the beginning of their own healing.

### *Making Time Work for You: Survival, Creativity, and Resilience Inside*

While Germano's account of incarceration is filled with stark truths about trauma and dehumanization, he also speaks to the ingenuity and resilience that can emerge even in the harshest conditions. In an environment designed to strip away identity and hope, he found ways to reclaim meaning—if only in small, defiant ways.

"You find a way to make it work," he says. For Germano, that meant adopting a mantra passed down from his father: "Don't let the time do you—do the time." He committed to making each day count, starting with prayer and the pursuit of knowledge. This intention was not just survival—it was a quiet rebellion, a choice to evolve when everything around him pushed for stagnation.

Inside, necessity breeds invention. Lacking even basic dignity, incarcerated individuals use



scraps of cardboard to create toilet seat covers, as mentioned, or craft heating devices out of makeshift “stingers” to boil water. “People think the most important survival tool is a shank,” Germano reflects. “But really, it’s a small piece of mirror—to see down the hall, to maintain a sliver of human connection.”

From soap-carved cityscapes to hand-stitched comforts, Germano witnessed firsthand how creativity became therapy, a release valve for the emotional pressure of confinement. But none of that should be mistaken for healing. “The trauma is ongoing,” he says. “And the way society is trained to treat incarcerated people—it doesn’t relieve it. It exaggerates it.”

### ***“Today’s Prisoner Is Tomorrow’s Neighbor”***

Germano returns often to his father’s wisdom, but one line seems especially poignant: “Today’s prisoner is tomorrow’s neighbor.” It’s a truth often overlooked in policy and practice. If we brutalize people behind bars, they don’t return rehabilitated—they come home more wounded than before.

That truth motivated Warren Kimbro’s life after incarceration. While serving time, he earned an educational release, attended Harvard, graduated, and ultimately became an assistant dean at a college. Yet he didn’t stay in the safety of academia.

He returned to New Haven—a city brimming with political tension, racial disparities, and institutional resistance—and built an empire of second chances through Project M.O.R.E.

That choice—to return to “the belly of the beast,” as Germano describes it—wasn’t just remarkable. It was revolutionary. His father could have opted for a quiet, secure life. Instead, he built pathways for men and women impacted by incarceration to reclaim their dignity.

### ***Healing is Ongoing—If It Comes at All***

When asked whether he’s healed from his own experiences, Germano is honest: “I would love to say that I am healed. But healing is ongoing.”

The trauma he endured was never clinically diagnosed. No one named it, treated it, or offered a road map through it. Instead, the weight of his pain was often misinterpreted—as defiance, aggression, pathology. “You

figure it out many years later,” he says, “that you’re being further traumatized. And some people aren’t mentally strong enough to survive that.”

He believes real healing—especially for Black men—requires more than the standard clinical model. “Society doesn’t care enough about Black men to provide us with outlets for real healing,” he says. Even non-traditional approaches like retreats, movement therapy, and cultural expression are rarely funded or supported through systems like health insurance. “Everything in America is about the dollar,” he says. “And we’re just a product of it.”

Even when healing moments do occur—during a men’s circle, through peer-led trauma recovery—they are often fleeting. “They’re momentary,” he says. “They don’t last.”

### ***Healing for Us, By Us***

“I mean native Black American men—those born in America and descended from enslaved Africans. That’s a very specific experience. And the legacy of that experience wants to be erased,” says Germano.

In a society that offers protection to nearly every group but Black men, the trauma is compounded. Germano names a painful double standard: “We protect pets, we protect Asians, the LGBTQ community—anybody but Black men. And we’re being shot down, unarmed, by the hundreds.”

Until about a decade ago, Germano reflects, he rarely heard people talk about trauma at all. “Before that we looked at tragedy as trauma.” What was labeled “tragedy” was simply survival. And even now, trauma has been monetized—turned into clinical coding, funding categories, and superficial interventions. “There’s a difference between tragedy and trauma,” he says. “Trauma is when your ability to cope has been overwhelmed.”

### ***Normalizing Pain, Unseen Trauma***

Germano recalls sitting in trauma training sessions, learning about the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study, and suddenly realizing how deeply he—and so many around him—had been impacted. “If you score four or more out of ten, they say you’re more likely to develop illness or trauma later in life,” he explains. “But those ten things—they were our norm. We normalized them.”

And because they were normalized, no one saw the trauma. Functioning was mistaken for wellness. As long as a person could work,

speak, or move through the world, the pain beneath went unseen.

That’s why Germano sees healing not as an end goal, but a continuous, evolving process. “It’s not an end game,” he says. “It’s ongoing. But we need something that’s built by us, for us, if we’re ever going to truly get there.”

### ***Remembering Warren Kimbro: A Father, Not Just a Figure***

As the conversation turns to Germano’s father, he’s asked to recall not just the public figure or activist—but the man. “I do have memories of him,” he begins thoughtfully.

Warren Kimbro, one of nine siblings, grew up in a part of New Haven that was eventually bulldozed for highway construction—Oak Street, Spruce Street. Germano recounts how his father’s life was shaped by broken promises: neighborhoods cleared for “progress,” communities displaced in the name of development, all with no follow-through. “They were promised better housing, schools, opportunities,” he says. “But it was a bridge to nowhere.”

Still, his father was a deeply disciplined man. Though poor, he believed in education. He worked multiple jobs, organized his neighborhood, and somehow still found a way to send Germano and his sister to Catholic school. He was strict—but he had a vision, and he carried that vision with unwavering intensity.

### ***From Visionary Leadership to Personal Trauma: Remembering Warren Kimbro***

As Germano Kimbro continued to reflect on the deep-rooted experiences that shaped his life, his recollections shifted from personal trauma to the towering presence of his father, Warren Kimbro. The memories painted a portrait of a man driven by visionary leadership, relentless commitment to community, and a profound sense of responsibility.

Warren Kimbro was more than a community organizer—he was a man of action, one who juggled multiple jobs with tireless devotion. Whether it was running youth centers, bartending, or operating a cleaning business, he kept his hands busy, his heart invested, and his mind focused on a greater mission. But it wasn’t just his work ethic that stood out to Germano; it was the scale of his father’s dreams.

In the 1960s, long before large-scale reentry programs and restorative justice initiatives were widely embraced, Warren was leading a

Residential Youth Center (RYC) at the corner of George and Dwight Streets in New Haven. This was no ordinary shelter. It was a four-story facility, fully remodeled and dedicated to offering boys a structured, supportive environment. That same bold vision carried over to his expansion of Project M.O.R.E., which grew from a modest site on Baldwin Street into a major reentry center on Grand Avenue, and later into New York State. His halfway house on Howard Avenue housed 67 beds—far exceeding the norm of 15–16 elsewhere in the country.

### ***A Father's Discipline, A Son's Understanding***

Despite his achievements, Warren Kimbro was not without his complexities. Germano described his father as a strict and sometimes emotionally distant figure—one who had little tolerance for failure and high expectations of his children. These pressures left a mark, particularly during the early years of Germano's life.

Yet as he grew older, Germano began to contextualize his father's anger—not as personal malice, but as the expression of a man burdened by systemic injustice and generational frustration.

Warren's life straddled two realities: he was a man who demanded discipline and excellence from his children, yet he was also deeply scarred by the failed promises of the so-called "Model City" initiatives that left Black communities like Oak and Spruce Streets in New Haven bulldozed, displaced, and betrayed.

"He just wanted more for people," Germano said, "more from society... a world that was a little more humane."

### ***A Legacy of Vision and Resistance***

Germano Kimbro's memories paint a powerful portrait of his father—an unrelenting visionary, community builder, and complex man whose reach extended from residential youth centers to grassroots organizing and national policy impact. One of the most enduring impressions Germano shares is his father's bold foresight—transforming buildings into institutions, expanding reentry programs far beyond state lines, and building infrastructures like the halfway house on Howard Avenue that were unprecedented in scale and ambition.

"He didn't think small," Germano emphasized, recalling how his father's ideas manifested into tangible spaces of care and recovery.

Whether he was running youth centers, coaching Little League football, or guiding boys off the streets of New Haven, Germano's father believed deeply in the potential of young Black men. But with that brilliance also came inner conflict.

### ***Shock and Awakening: The Black Panther Era***

Germano's narrative took a sharp turn as he recalled the events that led to his father's incarceration during the Black Panther trials. As a child of just eight or nine, the sudden immersion into the movement's epicenter was jarring. He described coming home from Catholic school—blazer, tie, polished shoes—to find their apartment transformed into what felt like a revolutionary headquarters.

Gone was the structured household routine. In its place were leather jackets, berets, and Black Panthers milling through the home. There were visible guns, whispered strategies, and the palpable intensity of a movement on the edge. What started as a proud transition to a better apartment in the co-op at Ethan Gardens quickly became a frontline experience in the battle for Black liberation.

Germano described the swirl of emotions and confusion that came with this transition—from roach-infested cold-water flats to revolutionary fervor. He was raised in the midst of civil rights marches, "burn, baby, burn" riots, and the tragic assassinations of Malcolm X and Dr. King. Yet he had no framework to process these moments—only the visceral exposure to a world shaped by survival, ideology, and systemic resistance.

### ***At the Door: A Child's Trauma***

The most searing memory Germano recounted was the night his home was raided. After a suspected informant was interrogated and left injured in his sister's bed, Germano and his sister shared a room for the night. What followed was a sudden, violent police raid in the early morning hours.

### ***Traumatized and Transformed***

The memory of federal agents raiding their home remains etched in Germano's mind: Guns. Flashlights. The flipping of mattresses. Even now, Germano can vividly recall the blinding lights, the fear, and the instinct to reach for his sister.

"They busted into my room...guns and flashlights in my face."

That night, he and his sister were taken barefoot and in their underwear from their Orchard Street apartment and marched past handcuffed adults, including his parents, down the four-block walk to their grandmother's house. He remembers the sound of law enforcement declaring, "These are just kids," a grace note in an otherwise terrifying encounter.

This moment—traumatic, humiliating, and unforgettable—was a turning point. It signaled not only the unraveling of his family structure but also introduced Germano to the raw reality of state power and racialized policing. "These are things that, you know, just my personal experience," he said. "I can still see it. As a nine-year-old boy... reaching for my sister... guns in my face."

In the aftermath, his father was incarcerated, and Germano began to experience a slow unraveling of normalcy. He tried to normalize the trauma—"I found a way to normalize that"—but it manifested in complex ways. He describes missing his father, driving by Whalley Avenue jail yelling out his name after hitting a Little League home run, hoping he'd hear it. He never saw his father's face—just a hand in the window.

### ***Navigating Trauma and Mixed Emotions***

Germano speaks candidly about the contradictions of loving a father who could be both deeply admired and painfully absent. "There was a part that wanted his love and acceptance," he said, but there was also "a sense of relief" when his parents divorced. "That unfortunate part... never fully healed," he admitted.

His father's quote—"If you want to move past it, you have to admit it and apologize"—resonates deeply. As someone active in 12-step recovery, Germano understands the arduous path of making amends. "We did many people great harm, but most of all, we harmed ourselves," he quoted from recovery literature. His father may never have directly apologized to his family, but Germano suggests that perhaps Project M.O.R.E. was itself a form of penance—a public amends for private pain.

### ***A Complicated Inheritance***

Germano's reflections on his father's transformation—from inmate to Harvard graduate to community leader—are filled with admiration and frustration. He acknowledges the inspiration but also the distance. When his fa-



ther tried to reconnect by bringing him to Wil-  
limantic or inviting him into recovery work,  
Germano was too lost—self-medicating with  
drugs and alcohol, drifting further into the  
streets.

Ironically, Germano's own path mirrored  
his father's in many ways: incarceration, edu-  
cation behind bars, and a desire to give back.  
Yet his father's strict nepotism policy meant  
Germano couldn't work with him at Project  
M.O.R.E.. "It was almost like we had separate  
worlds," he said. Despite this divide, Germa-  
no carved his own identity, launching a highly  
impactful fatherhood initiative that received  
national recognition—entirely independent  
of his father's influence.

His work with substance use, pardons, harm  
reduction, and legislation became a form of  
legacy in its own right. "People thought that  
my success had something to do with him,  
and it had nothing to do with him," Germano  
clarified, proud but also wounded by the lack  
of collaboration. "If that fatherhood program  
wasn't yours, I would have taken it," his father  
once told him.

Still, the shared DNA of purpose and pub-  
lic service is undeniable.

### ***Building Systems of Redemption***

Though they walked parallel paths,  
Germano's work was undoubtedly shaped  
by the values his father instilled—second  
chances, redemption, and the belief that  
incarcerated people deserve dignity. "What  
does a person need to change their life?"  
became Germano's guiding question as he  
helped build systems to support reentry,  
recovery, and transformation. He organized  
and facilitated groups, understood anger,  
advocated for educational and employment  
access—all while ensuring others didn't follow  
the path that had ensnared him.

"I kind of built the Fathers Initiative...as a  
Trojan horse that could support incarcerated  
men and women returning back into the  
community," he said, explaining how he used  
mainstream funding to push underground  
reform.

### **Part 3: A Father's Legacy, A Son's Path: The Intersections of Trauma, Healing, and Redemption**

#### ***A Child's Search for Love and Meaning***

Germano Kimbro's journey is threaded  
with memories that reflect both the innocence

of a child and the profound emotional weight  
of growing up with a father behind bars. One  
moment, which he reflects on earlier in the ar-  
ticle, captures this duality with haunting clar-  
ity: the joy of hitting a Little League home run,  
and the heartbreak of driving past Whalley  
Avenue Jail, calling out to his father, hoping  
he could hear. All he saw was a hand through  
the bars—a fleeting and painful substitute for  
a father's embrace. That image, first etched  
in the aftermath of trauma, echoes here as a  
powerful reminder of longing, love, and the  
early emotional rupture that shaped Germa-  
no's path toward healing.

He speaks with vulnerability about the con-  
flicting emotions surrounding his father—  
yearning for his love and guidance while also  
feeling a sense of relief when his parents di-  
vorced. His mother, though not abusive by in-  
tention, taught him how to survive in an em-  
otionally volatile environment. That survival  
sometimes came at the cost of unresolved  
trauma, which he admits is still a part of his  
healing journey.

#### ***Embracing Accountability: Amends and Redemption***

Germano, through 12-step recovery, has  
spent time understanding the layers of harm  
caused—not just to others, but to himself. He  
reflects on the process of making amends,  
noting that it's often not as simple as saying  
"sorry." Sometimes the amends must be made  
indirectly, especially when direct engagement  
could cause further harm.

Project M.O.R.E. may have also been a  
form of amends for his father's crime, a way  
of giving back to the community, of offering  
something redemptive after a tragic act that  
took another person's life. Germano acknowl-  
edges the gravity of his father's actions and  
the possibility that the victim may not even  
have been guilty. This layered truth makes the  
concept of redemption especially complex.

Despite any unresolved apologies between  
his father and his family, Germano recognizes  
the broader good his father accomplished and  
the ripple effects of his leadership—even in-  
fluencing individuals who now hold high po-  
sitions in public service. Still, that recognition  
comes with a bittersweet undertone, especially  
when reflecting on what might have been in  
their personal relationship.

#### ***Inherited Fire: The Weight of Protection and the Anger Within***

Revisiting the night of his father's arrest,

Germano describes a shift in his world—not  
necessarily a single defining trauma, but the  
planting of a seed that shaped how he would  
see fear, authority, and manhood. Suddenly, he  
found himself the male figure in a household  
with his mother and sister. Germano assumed  
the role of protector. "There's no substitute  
for the love, protection, and guidance of a  
father," he noted. His father's "tough love"  
style became something he felt he had to em-  
ulate—protective, even aggressive, not out of  
cruelty, but necessity.

He speaks candidly about how this anger,  
though often masked or managed, still burns  
inside. It's a fire fueled by trauma, injustice,  
and survival. This internal conflict—between  
who he had to be and who he wanted to be—  
continues to be part of his ongoing healing.

### ***Second Chances and Separate Worlds***

While his father's reentry journey served as  
a powerful model for transformation, it wasn't  
one that included or embraced Germano.  
Despite his own involvement in community  
leadership, advocacy, and education, Germa-  
no felt excluded from the legacy of Project  
M.O.R.E..

This exclusion wasn't just personal—it was  
institutional. His father, citing a strict nepo-  
tism policy, refused to allow Germano or oth-  
er family members to join the organization, a  
decision that still puzzles him. After all, Ger-  
mano had the lived experience, the vision, and  
the commitment to carry the mission forward.

His frustration is palpable when he re-  
counts the irony of people with criminal  
records being denied jobs—even in systems  
built by those with the same past. His father,  
a man once incarcerated for murder, rose to  
prominent positions of influence, yet seemed  
to judge others with similar pasts as unworthy  
of similar trust. Germano's own success—in  
harm reduction, legislative advocacy, and fa-  
therhood initiatives—was built entirely inde-  
pendently of his father's involvement, and  
that independence became a point of both  
pride and pain.

#### ***Redefining Reentry: From the First Day of Incarceration***

One of Germano's most compelling in-  
sights is the belief that reentry should begin  
not 60 or 90 days before release—but from  
day one of incarceration. He critiques the  
existing system as reactive, not proactive. He  
explains that those early days—between cold  
bologna sandwiches at Union Avenue and the

psychological toll of being paraded through courtrooms—are the most destabilizing. That’s where intervention is most needed.

He passionately describes the efforts he made while incarcerated to seek out every program, every class, every service that could help him change. But he also knows that many do not have the same awareness or access. Infractions, waiting lists, and systemic barriers often block people from opportunities for growth.

His own transitional housing model, designed to support returning citizens, reflected a holistic view of reentry—one that didn’t wait for release but began with education, guidance, and skill-building early on.

### ***The Bigger Machine: Systemic Failures and Perception***

Germano doesn’t mince words when addressing Connecticut’s reentry system—or the broader criminal justice system itself. He calls it “criminal in itself,” pointing to its dysfunction, its resistance to change, and the barriers created by unions more concerned with overtime and control than with rehabilitation.

He challenges the shallow assessments and treatment plans done upon intake—often irrelevant to Black and brown men with deeply rooted traumas. He stresses that correction cannot happen without understanding the context of a person’s life before incarceration.

As someone who has worked in halfway houses, Germano illustrates how many returning citizens lack even basic life skills—not because of personal failure, but because incarceration doesn’t teach them. “They don’t get [life skills] by osmosis,” he says. Cooking, cleaning, managing money—these are often foreign tasks to men who’ve spent years institutionalized without the opportunity to practice.

### **Part 4: Perception, Power, and Possibility**

#### ***A Father’s Legacy, a Son’s Vision—and Reimagining Healing and Justice for Black Men Impacted by Incarceration.***

As Germano Kimbro reflects on the complexities of fatherhood, justice, incarceration, and healing, he offers a deeply personal meditation on what it means to inherit a legacy—while also daring to rewrite it. From his father’s towering achievements to his own quiet moments of reckoning, Germano explores how the power of perception, the pursuit of healing, and the possibility of purpose can

shape not only personal transformation, but also the collective reimagining of what trauma-informed justice must look like for Black men impacted by incarceration today.

### ***The Heart of the Issue***

The heart of the issue, Germano explains, is perception. We criminalize untreated trauma, and until we change how we see and value people with lived experience, real change will remain elusive.

Though dismantling the system may be ideal, Germano takes a more pragmatic stance—suggesting that integrating professionals with lived experience into the system may be one of the most impactful steps we can take now. But even that approach faces resistance. The system doesn’t want change. It wants control.

Still, Germano continues to hope. When asked how his and his father’s stories might help other families affected by incarceration and generational trauma, he’s honest: this interview may be the beginning of that answer. Writing his story has been delayed in part because of the pain it brings—but also because the healing that may be offered within those pages demands he confronts the hardest moments of his past. Even picking up his father’s book was an emotional trigger. Reading about the violent moments he remembers firsthand brought him back to the top of the basement stairs, hearing screams and seeing flashlights. And yet, he bought his own copy of the book. Somewhere in those pages, he believes, is his power.

As Germano says, “You can’t treat a mask.” To begin healing, he must embrace his authentic self—compartmentalized parts and all. Whether others can see his father as more than a murderer is not something he can control. But he knows the tension of carrying shame, guilt, and pride all at once—the complexity of fighting for freedom while also being the child of someone imprisoned for taking another life.

That paradox is his inheritance. And perhaps, as he begins to tell it, it may become someone else’s roadmap to healing.

### ***A Hero Complicated by History***

As Germano Kimbro reflects on his relationship with his father, what emerges is a picture of complex admiration—love braided with hurt, longing, and a persistent search for acceptance. Germano’s father had always wanted to be his hero. And in many ways, he

was: a man who rose from incarceration to earn a Harvard degree, become a college dean, and build one of Connecticut’s most notable reentry programs, Project M.O.R.E..

But Germano’s truth was layered. He couldn’t help but feel a sense of marginalization—excluded from the very legacy he so admired. “I felt like there was no acceptance somewhere,” he admits, recalling repeated moments where his desire to work with and learn from his father was met with rejection. This absence of collaboration deepened existing trauma, compounding the pain of growing up with a father who was physically absent and, later, emotionally distant.

Still, Germano’s voice never wavers from gratitude, clarity, or resolve. He acknowledges the monumental standard his father set. And while that bar often felt unreachable, it also became a beacon—guiding Germano’s own journey into advocacy, fatherhood, and healing.

### ***Fatherhood, Redemption, and the Power of Story***

The realization of how essential fathers are came to Germano later in life, through his involvement in the national fatherhood movement. It opened his eyes not just to what he missed, but to what he could offer to his own children—and to others still navigating the aftermath of incarceration, addiction, and generational trauma.

He now dedicates himself to helping others understand that life after incarceration is not only possible—it can be purposeful. “You make mistakes, but you can overcome them,” he says. The past may inform who you are, but it does not define your future. Through guidance, support, and preparation, Germano helps returning citizens find the path back to themselves and their communities.

His story—marked by trauma, recovery, and resilience—is already helping others. By sharing it, he hopes it will inspire those who feel trapped by their circumstances to believe in their capacity to change.

### ***A Message to the Next Generation: Defining Trauma in Black Men***

In his final thoughts, Germano addresses directly those reading *Trauma Matters*: especially young people, system-impacted individuals, and those searching for healing after harm. His message is clear, urgent, and deeply personal:

“Trauma in Black men is unique. It has not been fully assessed and defined. There needs to be those at the table who can give it meaning—so others can understand what we’re experiencing.”

He calls attention to a historical gap in the way trauma is diagnosed and treated. While systems like the DSM offer frameworks for understanding mental health, they are often shaped by individuals who lack lived experience—particularly the experience of being a Black man in America. Germano insists that for healing to be real and relevant, it must come from within the communities most affected.

There’s no such thing as an even start, he says. The trauma faced by Black men—rooted in poverty, systemic racism, incarceration, and intergenerational pain—requires its own language, its own lens, and its own solutions.

He acknowledges the work of The Connecticut Women’s Consortium and its efforts to explore trauma in men, but calls for a more aggressive, focused investment in understanding trauma as it uniquely manifests in Black men. “It needs to be designed by us, for us,” he says with conviction.

### *Closing Thoughts*

With humility and courage, Germano Kimbro has opened the door to a story long held in the quiet corners of his life. Through this interview, he has begun what may one day become a book, a movement, a deeper legacy. He does not pretend to have all the answers—but he knows the importance of asking the right questions, of sharing the truth even when it hurts, and of forging pathways for others to walk through pain into purpose.

As the interview comes to a close, one thing is clear: Germano is no longer just a son of a legacy—he is creating one of his own.

## **Ending Sexual Violence in Custody: The Ongoing Work of PREA**

**By Alana Valdez, MA (she/her/hers)**

Over two decades ago, the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 (PREA) was signed into federal law, aiming to end sexual violence in all types of correctional facilities nationwide, from local, overnight lockups to federal prisons. PREA’s standards<sup>15</sup> were final-

ized by the Department of Justice in 2012 and require agencies to establish a zero-tolerance policy for sexual abuse, train staff on sexual abuse prevention, provide safe housing based on inmates’ risk of being sexually abused, provide survivors of sexual abuse with multiple pathways to report, and ensure survivors can get appropriate medical and mental health care.

Though PREA empowers victims of abuse and harassment to report and provides protections for vulnerable inmates, the number of reported incidents of sexual victimization has increased from 24,661<sup>16</sup> in 2015 to 36,264<sup>17</sup> in 2020. Optimistically, in Connecticut, the number of all reports (substantiated, unsubstantiated, and unfounded) decreased from 82 reports in 2022<sup>18</sup> to 60 reports in 2023<sup>19</sup>. This data is aggregated from 12 adult correctional facilities, one youth correctional institute, and parole and community services administered by the Department of Corrections.

It must be noted, however, that actual instances of sexual violence may be underreported. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)<sup>20</sup>, more than 2 out of 3 sexual assaults outside of prison go unreported to law enforcement. When incarcerated, victims are subject to factors like overcrowding, inadequate staffing, a lack of accountability, and power dynamics among staff and other inmates,<sup>21</sup> which may dissuade them further from reporting their assaults.

PREA’s protections are a step towards a justice system without sexual violence, but there is still progress to be made. Just last year, the federal government was ordered to pay an estimated \$116 million settlement to resolve lawsuits surrounding sexual abuse committed by staff and subsequent cover ups in a California prison.<sup>22</sup> In Connecticut, former inmates allege threats of increased prison time and retaliation after filing a PREA report continue to generate fear.<sup>23</sup>

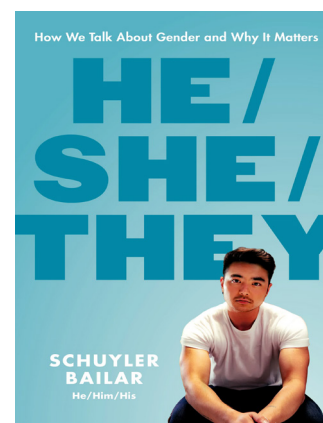
Further positive strides continue to be made by grassroots organizations and legislative efforts alike. Impact Justice is an organization that provides technical support and grants to facilities who may lack the resources to fully implement PREA effectively through their PREA Targeted Implementation Planning and Support program. They also host a federally-sponsored website, the PREA Resource Center, with publicly available resources including training curricula to help agencies address the challenges of adhering to PREA standards.

At the state level, Senate Bill 1196 (2023) was signed by Governor Lamont, requiring the Commissioner of Correction to issue a request for proposal for procurement of full-body x-ray machines to reduce the number of strip searches performed.<sup>24</sup> The Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence’s website<sup>25</sup> offers resources to support survivors of sexual violence who are justice-impacted, including free webinars from presenters at Just Detention International, an organization working to eliminate sexual violence in carceral settings.

Ensuring PREA’s promise to end sexual violence against incarcerated people requires a holistic approach. Trauma-informed and gender-responsive education, awareness of how sexual violence impacts people of all genders, increased funding for facilities struggling to meet compliance, and further legislation to strengthen and update guidelines are all critical measures. With sustained commitment and accountability, we can continue to move towards a justice system that truly protects the vulnerable.

## **Featured Resource** ***He/She/They: How We Talk About Gender and Why It Matters***

**By Eileen M. Russo, MA, LADC  
(she/her/hers)**



*He/She/They* by Schuyler Bailar (2023) is one of those books you will want to buy in hard copy so that you can underline, highlight, and flag key paragraphs and pages. This book is part memoir, part research, part education, part validation, and part do’s-and-don’ts for trans people and allies. While, at times, Bailar describes his own experiences as a trans man, he does so to invite us, as the readers, to take a deeper dive into the meaning of gender, explore our own gendered experiences, and gently face unconscious bias. *He/She/They* is a warm and welcoming read that validates confusion and stands against actions



based on hostility by stating, “emotions are always valid; actions are not” (p. 116).

Perhaps the most moving chapter is titled “Love Transcends.” In this chapter, Bailar shares his experience coming out as a transgender man to a great-aunt and his Korean immigrant grandparents. I offer a spoiler alert before you read this quote: “My grandparents and great-aunt had every excuse I can think of to reject me: language, religion, age, generation, and culture. But they chose instead to lead with love” (p. 313). Bailar concludes by asking all of us to fight with him for the day when kindness is “freely given” and love transcends “all barriers” (p. 313).



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