

# **Professional Portfolio**

## *Of*

# **Rodney Derrickson**

Rodney Derrickson

Founder & Executive Director – Prisoners’ Lives Matter Pennsylvania Campaign

Founder & CEO – Justice Now Consultings, LLC

## **Professional Summary**

Rodney Derrickson is a dedicated legal advocate, paralegal, and nonprofit leader committed to advancing criminal justice reform, protecting prisoner rights, and supporting individuals impacted by incarceration. With expertise in legal research, prisoner advocacy, peer support, nonprofit leadership, and public speaking, he has built partnerships with universities, community organizations, and coalitions across the country.

Drawing on over two decades of experience as a jailhouse lawyer within the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections and eight years as a Certified Peer Support Specialist inside the DOC, Rodney combines lived experience with professional training. He is a member of the Jailhouse Lawyers Initiative (JLI), NYU Bernstein Institute, and the Cumberland County Re-Entry Coalition (PA). He has spoken at Harvard, Georgetown, Princeton, and community organizations such as Making a Change Group (MAC) in Chester, Pennsylvania. His voice has reached broader audiences through numerous podcasts appearances and his published articles.

## **Core Competencies**

- Paralegal & Legal Research – Case preparation, post-conviction support, legal drafting, appellate advocacy.
- Jailhouse Lawyering – 19+ years of legal advocacy for incarcerated individuals in the PA DOC.
- Prisoner Rights Advocacy – Campaign leadership, litigation support, and policy reform
- Peer Support & Navigation – Ten years as a Certified Peer Support Specialist inside DOC; extensive re-entry support.
- Nonprofit Leadership – Founder and executive director with strategic planning and coalition-building expertise.
- Training & Facilitation – Emotional intelligence workshops, re-entry simulations, and peer leadership training.
- Public Speaking & Media – Podcast guest, published writer, and national presenter.
- Academic Collaboration – Supervision and mentorship of law student advocacy projects.

## **Professional Experience**

### **Founder & Executive Director**

Prisoners' Lives Matter Pennsylvania Campaign (PLM-PAC) | Pennsylvania

Dates: June, 2021

- Founded and leads a statewide nonprofit initiative advocating for prisoners' rights, re-entry support, and criminal justice reform.
- Supervised and mentor law students from Harvard, Georgetown, Penn State, Penn State Dickinson Law, and Pitt Law in research and advocacy projects.
- Build partnerships with grassroots groups and coalitions to amplify the voices of incarcerated individuals.
- Coordinate community-based re-entry support around housing, employment, education, and peer navigation.

### **Founder & CEO**

Justice Now Consultings, LLC | Pennsylvania

Dates: August, 2025

- Provide consulting, training, and advocacy services for nonprofits, re-entry programs, and agencies.
- Facilitate emotional intelligence and peer support workshops for justice-involved individuals.
- Support organizations with grant writing, advocacy strategy, and program development.
- Deliver specialized consulting in prisoner rights and re-entry advocacy.

### **Certified Peer Support Specialist (DOC)**

Pennsylvania Department of Corrections | 2014– 2024

- Served for ten years as a Certified Peer Support Specialist inside Pennsylvania state correctional institutions.
- Provided peer mentoring, recovery support, and emotional guidance to incarcerated peers.
- Facilitated peer-led groups focused on re-entry, resilience, and personal transformation.
- Collaborated with correctional staff and outside service providers to improve peer programs.

### **Jailhouse Lawyer**

Pennsylvania Department of Corrections | Approx. 2005– 2024

- Served as a jailhouse lawyer for 19+ years, assisting incarcerated individuals with legal filings, appeals, and rights education.
- Drafted and supported petitions for post-conviction relief, appeals, and civil rights complaints.
- Provided legal education and advocacy to peers navigating the criminal justice system.

- Built a reputation as a trusted legal resource inside the DOC, laying the foundation for post-release advocacy.

## **Legal Impact and Case Contributions**

### **Pabon v. Superintendent SCI Mahanoy, 654 F.3d 385 (3d Cir. 2011)**

Rodney Derrickson’s advocacy and legal research contributed to the landmark Third Circuit decision in *Pabon v. Superintendent SCI Mahanoy*, a case that remains a cornerstone of federal habeas corpus jurisprudence on language access and equitable tolling.

In *Pabon*, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit ruled that a non-English-speaking prisoner’s inability to understand English—combined with the absence of translation assistance or foreign-language legal materials—can constitute “extraordinary circumstances” warranting equitable tolling of the one-year limitations period under the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA).

The court adopted reasoning Rodney argued in the Certificate of Appealability (COA) from the Ninth Circuit’s *Mendoza v. Carey* and the Second Circuit’s *Diaz v. Kelly*, aligning the Third Circuit with those rulings and solidifying national recognition of language-barrier equitable tolling. Since *Pabon*, several other circuits have cited its rationale favorably when evaluating language-access tolling claims, expanding its influence beyond the Third Circuit’s jurisdiction.

### **Commonwealth v. Brandon Summers, (unpublished opinion)**

Rodney has assisted in the successful post-conviction effort for Brandon Summers, a pro se juvenile defendant who had been sentenced to mandatory life without parole. Under the Supreme Court’s decision in *Miller v. Alabama*, which held that mandatory life without parole for juveniles violates the Eighth Amendment, *Commonwealth v. Brandon Summers* resulted in vacation of the original sentence and a resentencing opportunity consistent with *Miller*’s constitutional protections for children. Rodney’s contributions included legal research, drafting the appellant’s brief, general support, and advocacy emphasizing the unique developmental and constitutional considerations applicable to juvenile offenders — work that helped secure a life-altering remedy for a justice-impacted youth.

### **Derrickson v. Sluzevich, (unpublished opinion)**

In *Derrickson v. Sluzevich*, Rodney successfully challenged administrative and constitutional violations within the Pennsylvania’s correctional system, addressing a first impression equal protection claim regarding access to employment as a prisoner serving life without parole. The case reflected his deep knowledge of prison law and constitutional litigation, and demonstrated his ability to achieve tangible legal victories through meticulous research and strategy.

## **Broader Significance**

Together, these matters highlight Rodney Derrickson's lasting influence on equitable tolling, juvenile-sentencing relief, access to courts, and prisoners' rights law. From the early 2000s through present, his jailhouse-lawyering and paralegal work inside the Pennsylvania DOC produced precedents and outcomes that continue to inform advocacy, litigation, and policy reform. His legal work embodies the principle that justice must be accessible, particularly for non-English speakers and children who face the harshest sentences.

## **Paralegal & Legal Advocate**

### **Independent Legal & Community Advocacy | Pennsylvania**

- Expanded legal advocacy work post-release, providing support in legal writing, case preparation, and appellate research.
- Direct individuals and families to proper legal and social service channels.

### **Academic & Public Engagement**

- Harvard University – Guest speaker; collaborated with law students on the Justice Impact Project and social justice advocacy projects.
- Georgetown University – Making an Exonerate Project – Spoke and worked with students on his wrongful conviction case.
- Penn State Rising Scholars Reentry Stimulation at Penn State Dickinson Law – Participant and lead character “Chance” in the Re-entry Simulation Project.
- Restorative Justice Initiative at Penn State University Rising Scholar Alum.
- University of Pittsburgh School of Law – Supervised and partnered with volunteer students working on (PLM-PAC) projects.
- Making a Change Group (MAC), Chester, PA – Featured community speaker on youth mentorship and advocacy.
- The Jailhouse Lawyers Initiative (JLI), NYU Bernstein Institute – Member advancing leadership of incarcerated jailhouse lawyers and formerly incarcerated legal advocates
- National Lawyers' Guild Foundation, New York;
- Cumberland County Re-Entry Coalition (PA) – Member working to improve re-entry services in the county.

## **Media & Publications**

- Podcasts – Featured guest on multiple criminal justice reform and re-entry podcasts - The Re-Entry Connect PODCAST, with Keenan Hudson, E2 Reframe to Reform, with Callie Saiz, and Prison Stories - “Corrections Reflections,” wherein his essay titled “Innocent” was read live on air by a commutator.
- Articles – Published writings on prisoner rights, peer support, and re-entry (featured on [LinkedIn](#)).

- Public thought leader and commentator on mass incarceration, parole reform, and lived experience in justice advocacy.
- Pennsylvania Mental Health Customer Association, Harrisburg, PA

## **Certifications & Training**

- Certified Peer Support Specialist (CPS) – Pennsylvania Certification Board
- Emotional Intelligence Trainer & Facilitator – Paralegal Studies – Graduated with Highest Honors, Stratford Career Institute
- Re-entry & Peer Navigation Training
- Continuing Legal Education Workshops – Criminal Justice Reform & Civil Rights

## **Selected Accomplishments**

- 19+ years as a jailhouse lawyer supporting incarcerated individuals with legal advocacy.
- Eight years as a Certified Peer Support Specialist within the Pennsylvania DOC.
- Founded two justice-focused organizations (Prisoners' Lives Matter PA Campaign and Justice Now Consultings, LLC).
- Speaker at Harvard, Georgetown, and MAC (Chester, PA).
- Published writer and podcast guest amplifying justice-impacted voices.
- Member of Jailhouse Lawyers Initiative, Pennsylvania Mental Health Customers Association, and Cumberland County Reentry Coalition.
- Mentor and supervisor of law student advocacy projects nationwide.
- Restorative Justice Initiative at Penn State University Certificate of Achievement.

## **Contact**

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