

# TimesOC

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## Dolores Canales fights for an end to solitary confinement

BY BEN BRAZIL

Dolores Canales remembers the cold cement floor, indifferent brick walls and the thick metal door that separated her from the rest of the world.

Like many in solitary confinement, she craved a shred of human contact.

"You could yell out the door to people ... so we would do that sometimes as a form of communication," Canales said. "But at the end of the day, you still know you are in isolation."

"You still have those brick walls to stare at. You still have the anxiety that comes at night. It just feels like you are being buried alive."

Years later, Canales — decades removed from her drug-related struggle with the criminal justice system — advocated for her son, John Martinez, as he took part in hunger strikes at Pelican Bay State Prison to demand an end to indeterminate solitary confinement. The hunger strike was the largest prison protest in the state's history.

Canales and several families started the group California Families Against Solitary Confinement in 2011 to support and advocate for their incarcerated family members involved in the highly publicized hunger strike in

the state's highest-security prison.

The strike and a related lawsuit resulted in the end of indeterminate solitary confinement in California.

"Why did a thousand people even have to go without eating for a few days to get these things resolved?" Canales said. "It's the

only way to get people to listen."

Today, Canales, 60, of Fullerton, helps lead the group as they attend hearings, speak with legislators, hold rallies and advocate for an end to solitary confinement.

Canales has brought her advocacy to Orange County, where she's partnered with several

groups to work towards ending solitary confinement.

"She is the perfect example of why this work and movement should be led by impacted people," said Daisy Ramirez, Orange County jails conditions and policy coordinator at the ACLU.

"She knows firsthand what it's like to be confined in a cage for

years on end. She knows what the treatment is like behind bars. She knows what families go through when they have families that are incarcerated."

Ramirez and Canales have been working together since 2018, when Orange County inmates organized a seven-day hunger strike to protest jailhouse conditions.

Canales said Martinez committed second-degree murder as a young adult and is now incarcerated in the Theo Lacy facility in Orange. He took part in that hunger strike.

The ACLU has set its sights on solitary confinement for years.

"Long-term isolation costs too much, does nothing to rehabilitate prisoners, and exacerbates mental illness — or even causes it in prisoners who were healthy when they entered solitary," the ACLU's website says.

Ramirez said Orange County jails use solitary confinement but call it "disciplinary housing."

"Disciplinary housing is short-term temporary housing used for inmates who violate rules designed to keep themselves, other inmates and staff safe," Orange County Sheriff's Department spokeswoman Carrie Braun said in an email.

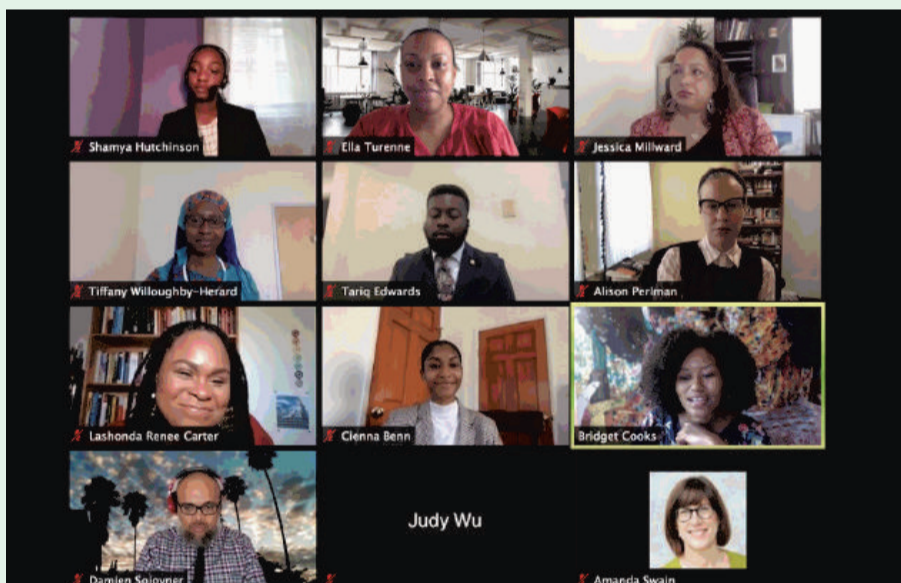


**DOLORES CANALES** co-founded the group California Families Against Solitary Confinement. "She knows firsthand what it's like to be confined in a cage for years on end. She knows what the treatment is like behind bars," said Daisy Ramirez, Orange County jails conditions and policy coordinator at the ACLU.

Scott Smeltzer | Staff Photographer

See *Solitary*, page R4

## 'A PEOPLE'S PROJECT': ACTIVISM IN THE O.C.



Courtesy of Jessica Millward

**A SCREENSHOT** is shown of one of the UCI-HBCU fellowship's meetings. The summer fellowship was conducted virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## UCI professors and HBCU students archive the work of living Black activists

BY VERA CASTANEDA

From the confines of a prison, journalist and former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal sent four students from the nation's historically Black colleges and universities a personal message during the first week of their research fellowship.

"One of the things he said to the students is, 'The work that you're doing is part of a really powerful inheritance of the best of the revolutionary spirit of our society,'" recalled Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, UC Irvine associate professor of African American studies.

Abu-Jamal, 66, was convicted of killing a Philadelphia police officer in the 1980s. To this day, he maintains his innocence,

and the case is widely described as unfair.

After nearly 30 years in solitary confinement on death row, his death sentence was dropped, and he is now serving life without parole. Abu-Jamal authored several books, including bestselling "Live From Death Row," "Death Blossoms" and the most recent "Have Black Lives Ever Mattered?" addressing prison life, abolitionist democracy and major political movements.

He's also a key figure in the HBCU students' fellowship. Tariq Edwards, Ebony Owens, Cienna Benn and Shamyia Hutchinson were partly tasked to work on the Activist Studio West, an open-

See *Activists*, page R5



Courtesy of Hannah Rooth

**A SCREENSHOT** of April Faith-Slaker, Wild Hum band member, performing live on Twitch.

## Irvine musician throws anti-racism virtual concerts

BY VERA CASTANEDA

Many people are continuing to look for ways to support social justice and civil rights movements a few months after protests pushed forward a conversation on race and policing.

Deaths like that of 46-year-old George Floyd, a Black man who died during an arrest May 25 when Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin pinned his knee on his neck for several minutes, put a spotlight on movements that have existed for years.

It inspired Hannah Rooth, a musician and recent Irvine transplant, to produce an Anti-Racism Fundraiser Concert series through Twitch livestream to financially support grassroots organizations and to educate the public, in particular

white people.

Rooth was in the process of finding new local musicians to play in her band Wild Hum and exploring ways to perform without physical access to traditional venues. She set up solo online shows to help highlight newly released singles. But she soon shifted her focus.

"I started to focus on activism because of how hard the pandemic is hitting a lot of people," Rooth said. "It's making people realize in a more profound way how much we need to change about how society functions and who it protects. So I've been trying to put a lot of energy into doing online organizing work."

Rooth's first virtual concert to raise funds for social justice organizations was

See *Concerts*, page R5

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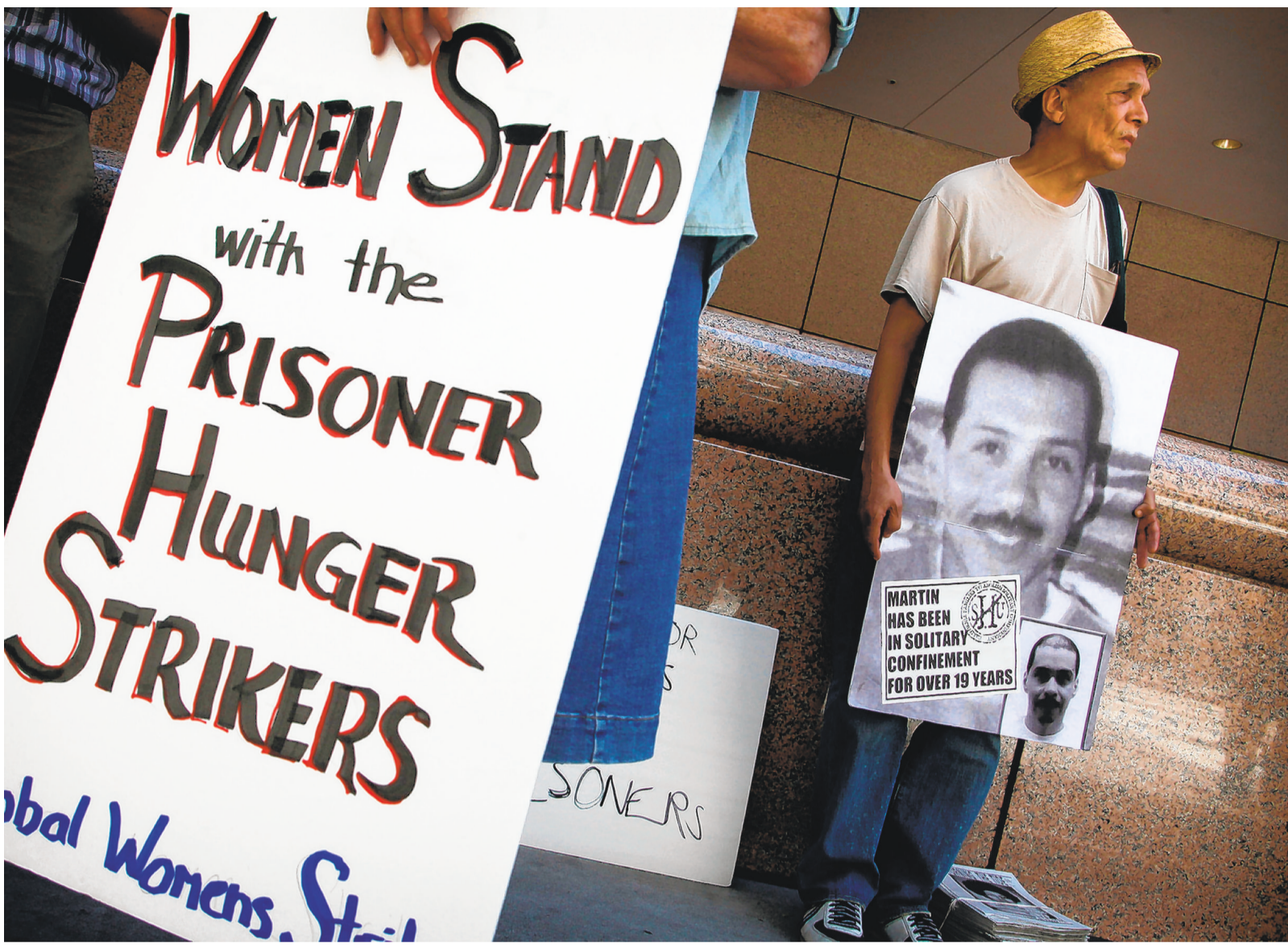
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Barbara Davidson | Los Angeles Times

**DEMONSTRATORS GATHER** in Los Angeles for a rally held in support of Pelican Bay State Prison inmates in 2013 during a prisoner hunger strike.

### SOLITARY

Continued from page R1

“We utilize a progressive discipline model for inmates who violate jail rules, and disciplinary housing is a last resort. The Orange County Sheriff’s Department is committed to providing a safe environment for the inmates entrusted to our care.”

Ramirez said inmates are confined for 23 hours a day with limited access. She said they hear from inmates who are placed in disciplinary housing for “arbitrary reasons.”

According to the Sheriff’s Department custody operations manual, Orange County jail inmates cannot be placed into disciplinary housing for more than 30

days without three “relief” days.

An inmate in disciplinary housing loses privileges for television, outdoor recreation, public visits, personal phone calls, access to newspapers and other publications, cards or games and “unnecessary inmate movement” outside of the cell.

Orange County jail inmates may be placed into disciplinary housing for not obeying directives from staff, not showing respect to staff or causing a disturbance in the jail, according to the manual.

Rules for respecting staff include not making “false statements” to jail staff and referring to them by their title — “Deputy,” “Sir” and “Nurse” are the examples given by the manual. In-

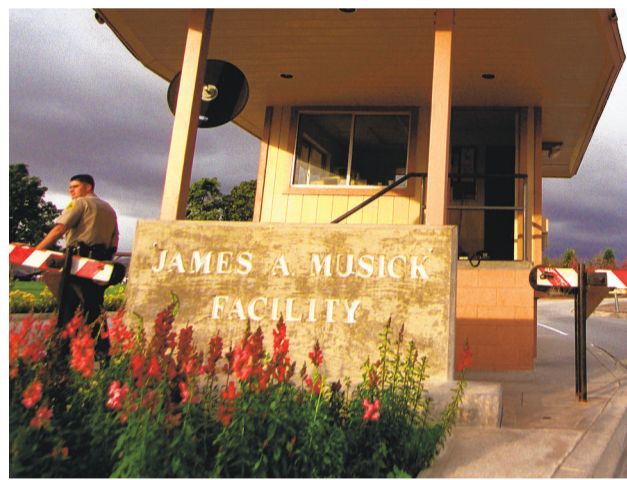
mates cannot call staff by their first name.

Medical and mental health staff is supposed to clear inmates prior to being placed in disciplinary housing.

However, Ramirez is concerned that inmates with mental health issues are wrongfully subjected to disciplinary housing, which further exacerbates their psychological issues.

“Someone in a full mental health crisis may be experiencing some level of paranoia and doesn’t really comprehend what is being asked of them — those folks are often written up for failing to obey a directive from jail staff,” Ramirez said.

“People with mental health needs are essentially being punished for being in



Alexander Gallardo | Los Angeles Times

**A GUARD STANDS** at the James A. Musick Facility in Irvine.

a mental health crisis and because the department has no idea how to deal with the situation, those people get written up and

thrown in the hole, which we know will only exacerbate the trauma they are experiencing.”

Canales and Ramirez said

the Orange County jails have been using disciplinary housing as a means to social distance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Braun denied that the department is doing this. However, the custody operations manual states that disciplinary housing may be used for “medical quarantine.”

More recently, Canales helped advocate for Orange County inmates during a hunger strike at Theo Lacy jail in early July. Inmates demanded a return to hot meals and family visitations, which had been discontinued due to the virus. Martinez took part in that strike as well.

Canales said she has been working to get the Sheriff’s Department to allow those in disciplinary housing to be able to purchase food from the commissary to supplement the minimal food they are getting during the pandemic.

The Sheriff’s Department manual states that inmates in confinement are suspended from using the commissary.

Canales said she doesn’t trust Orange County law enforcement due to a track record of misleading the public, pointing to the evidence mishandling and illegal jailhouse informant scandals. The Orange County jails were also caught recording thousands of calls between inmates and their attorneys over several years.

“There is zero accountability for misconduct in Orange County,” Canales said.

The ACLU has been working to get better conditions in Orange County jails and two Orange County Grand Jury reports over the last few years found deficiencies with jail conditions.

Canales said she will continue to advocate for an end to solitary confinement in Orange County and at the state level, drawing on her experiences and those of her son.

“There is no one better equipped to lead this fight,” Ramirez said.

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## ACTIVISTS

Continued from page R1

cess digital repository that will house a series of collections including the Campaign to Bring Mumia Home archives.

Willoughby-Herard and Jessica Millward, a UCI associate professor of history, received a three-year \$271,902 UC-HBCU Pathways Grant to partner with Morgan State University.

The purpose of the grant is to attract and retain potential undergraduate students from HBCUs to UC graduate programs, where Black students are underrepresented. From 2015 to 2019, UC data shows African American graduate student enrollment stayed at 4%.

While students learned how to apply to graduate programs and met with UC staff central to the application process, they also gained skills in Black digital humanities and became familiar with important people in the activist landscape throughout six weeks in the summer.

Millward initially brought the archiving project idea to

Willoughby-Herard at a coffee shop. She had followed Abu-Jamal's work and met with him years back.

"We knew we wanted to train the next generation of scholars who would be doing Black studies. At the same time, I have a personal relationship with Mumia ... But it's more than just finding a project for a grant," Millward said.

She describes the archive work as one part love letter and one part Black radical project born out of the desire to make records of people accessible to the masses and future generations.

"The campaigns both to keep him in prison and those to liberate him represents one of the largest social movements in the U.S. prior to George Floyd and between the civil rights movement ... To think that the papers associated with that movement and that man can disappear — as historians, as political scientists and as activists — that would be heartbreaking to miss this moment. How could we not document it?" Millward said.

The Activist Studio West archive collaborators in-

clude Johanna Fernandez, Gina Dent, Elvia Arroyo-Ramirez, Thuy Vo Dang, Krystal Tribbett, Jewell C. Debnam, LaShonda R. Carter and Ella Turenne.

"It was uniquely a project centered around a man, but it was actually a project that was really steeped in Black feminist theory and Black feminist practices," said Millward, referring to the efforts to digitize the Campaign to Bring Mumia Home papers.

The first fellowship cohort launched in summer 2020. Although the UCI professors partnered with Morgan State because it's close to the nation's capital and the campus has a tradition of mass communications and activism, the four students came from a variety of HBCUs — Claflin, Clark Atlanta, Howard and Lincoln universities.

"We really wanted to make sure that we got a spread of campuses and that enabled us to also get a kind of really general group of students ... HBCU students are not just from the U.S. South, they're from all over the world," Willoughby-Herard said.

**"The intellectual tradition of HBCUs are so rich. The students are so ready, willing and have the work ethic that you want on a project like this, a people's project. There were very few things we did that threw them a curve."**

— Jessica Millward

UCI associate professor of history

Due to COVID-19, the program was conducted virtually, but students engaged daily from their homes. Some also participated in protests in the wake of George Floyd's death.

"The intellectual tradition of HBCUs are so rich. The students are so ready, willing and have the work ethic that you want on a project like this, a people's project. There were very few things we did that threw them a curve," Millward said.

The first two weeks of the program consisted of an oral history boot camp honing in on research methods, and the remaining weeks were split with archive work and graduate training such

as writing research proposals and how to ace GRE exams. Damien Sojoyner, Alison Perlman, Judy Wu, and Bridget Cooks served as UCI faculty mentors.

Students also created their own projects documenting the life of a living activist — choosing Colin Kaepernick, Tarana Burke, Bev Ditsie and Joan Gray. They collected research that could lead to full-length dissertations.

"Having them be able to use the [research methodology and theoretical frameworks] of the Campaign to Bring Mumia Home papers was really important for them to be ready to ask the proper and really thoughtful

questions of these living activists who are more available to us than Mumia," Willoughby-Herard said.

The UCI professors are still in the process of acquiring and making collections available but plan to have a few things visible on the web page in the fall.

"We hope we've planted a seed that will carry some of them into their graduate career," Millward said.

Willoughby-Herard noted that parents often don't realize that degrees in humanities and social sciences are connected to great jobs. She said there is a lot of creative work to be done in the study of American political movements and humanistic research.

"Parents probably might rethink [their response] when students come home and say, 'I want to major in African American studies,'" Millward added. "If ever there was a moment that this nation needed to understand the diverse history, tragedy and triumph of African Americans, this spring is a perfect example."

vera.castaneda@latimes.com  
Twitter: @vera\_fyd

## CONCERTS

Continued from page R1

held June 13. It lasted nine hours with about eight acts ranging from classical solo performances, folk and blues tunes to puppeteering.

She described the days before the event advertised on social media as chaotic — consisting of finding musicians, multiple WhatsApp calls and making sure every performer had the proper equipment and software for a live stream.

The event raised \$2,000 and two donors matched the funds for a total of \$6,000, which was donated to Don't Shoot Portland, a Black-led civil rights agency that recently filed a class-action lawsuit against the city of Portland alleging that police used excessive force indiscriminately.

"I didn't know what to expect in terms of how much money we could raise or anything like that. But it

went really well and it was well attended. So I decided to continue," Rooth said.

A second show was held on Aug. 15 and raised \$1,158. The amount is less than half of the funds raised in the first concert so Rooth extended the donation time period through Aug. 22.

Nikolas Cayden Henson, an Austin-based pianist and singer, who performed last Saturday under the moniker Caydmo, said he found out about the concert through Craigslist and wanted to contribute his musical skills to its cause.

"Back in 2017, when the Charlottesville tragedy took place, I was living in China. Reading about the gross injustices occurring in my home country, I felt far moved and unable to help. Still, I knew I wanted to help in some way, and so at that point I started to educate myself on the realities of racism and privilege," Henson said.

Another performer Carlos Vandal, lead singer and

guitar player of the Chilean band Amoníaco, said he found out about the concert through other musician friends and the protests in the U.S. reminded them of police brutality in Chile.

"We are supporting these kinds of activities [because of] the current situation around the world [and] in Chile, our country. We are suffering from police and military violence, especially in the south where native Chileans are being killed and oppressed," Vandal said.

Both concert videos and donation information are available on Rooth's website. The total will be donated to Critical Resistance, an international organization created in 1997 whose founders include the likes of Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Rose Braz.

The organization is focused on ending the prison industrial complex by fighting plans to open new jails, organizing against policing and pushing to redirect re-

sources toward community well-being.

"Much of our work is done through long-term campaigns that often take years to win, so we don't have too much rapid change in our work because we keep our eyes on the long term," said Mohamed Shehk, Critical Resistance media and communications director over email. "This year, we won two significant victories: We pushed the city of San Francisco to commit to closing a longstanding jail, and we abolished the gang policing unit of the Portland Police Bureau, a unit that almost exclusively profiled Black youth in Portland, Ore."

He said when the organization receives donations, it goes toward the day-to-day essential functions like paying their small staff, printing informational fliers and organizing community events with food, translation and American Sign Language interpreters.

Critical Resistance was a

part of a class about abolition work taken by Rooth recently to learn about what defunding the police means.

Rooth said, "It's not just about getting rid of the police and prison system. It's about actually addressing the root problems instead of just punishing people for reacting to them."

She isn't new to anti-racist work.

"I'm a white woman and I was raised in a very white area ... in the Pacific Northwest and I started to get involved with anti-racist work when I left to do a yearlong volunteer program right after I finished high school," Rooth said.

The program consisted of studying systemic racism while living and working in low-income communities, which were predominantly Black.

"I care about this topic in a more personal way because I have a couple of men in my family who have been in and out of the po-

licing and prison system," Rooth said. "I've seen firsthand how destructive it is to human wellness."

She said one of her family members, who was suicidal and obtained a gun, ended up in jail rather than having easy access to mental health resources.

"Along with [economic impacts like difficulties in job searching after being released] there's a real destruction to people's identity and how they view themselves as being worthy in a society," Rooth said. "That's really painful to see in people that I love."

Rooth will continue to curate virtual concerts supporting social justice organizations throughout the rest of the year.

The next virtual concert will be held on Oct. 10. An application for performers who want to participate in future shows is available online.

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