

Last Prisoner Project's 'Journey to Justice' Gala Celebrates Freedom, Family and the Fight to End Cannabis Incarceration

Featuring Carmelo Anthony, Omari Hardwick, Calvin "Megatron" Johnson, and other icons, the NYC event united artists and advocates to advance cannabis justice.

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, October 27, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Last Prisoner Project](#) (LPP) marked a major moment in the movement to end the War on Cannabis with its second annual Journey to Justice Gala, held on Wednesday, October 15 at Sony Hall in New York City. The evening brought together artists, advocates, and supporters to honor the resilience of those impacted by cannabis incarceration and to highlight the continued urgency of reform.



Ballroom at the Journey to Justice Gala

“

The Journey to Justice Gala brought together people who believe in using our platforms to free those still behind bars and to build a future rooted in fairness and freedom.”

JoJo Simmons

The event featured appearances by Hall of Famer & Co-Founder of Grand National Carmelo Anthony, Pro Football Hall of Famer Calvin Johnson Jr., Omari Hardwick, Fab 5 Freddy, Keith Shocklee and Studdah Man of Public Enemy, and comedian Guy Torry, who served as the evening's MC. Guests were treated to a musical performance by Joy Oladokun with special guest Barteas Strange and a DJ set by Shocklee, creating a dynamic backdrop for the night's program.

LPP honored several constituents who have returned home and are now leading efforts for change in their communities. Among those recognized were Mario Ramos, who served 5 years for a cannabis offense before opening his own dispensary, Conbud, in New York City, and Deshaun Durham, who received clemency from

Kansas Governor Laura Kelly at the end of last year. Both were celebrated for their advocacy and leadership post-release.

The event also celebrated the work of LPP's Cannabis Justice Initiative (CJI), which has saved constituents more than 350 years of unjust sentences, including eight life sentences.

Additional honorees include Leonel Villaseñor and Jose Sepulveda, two federal clemency recipients who returned home earlier this year. Leonel served 22 years of a 30-year sentence, and Jose served 30 years of a life sentence before Last Prisoner Project's intervention.

At the event, Last Prisoner Project also announced that Stephanie Shepard has been named its new Acting Executive Director, marking a new chapter for the organization's leadership. Shepard, who previously served as the group's Board Chairwoman and Director of Advocacy, has been a driving force behind its mission to free those still incarcerated for cannabis offenses and support their successful reentry.

"This night reminded me why we fight," said Stephanie Shepard, LPP's new Acting Executive Director. "After serving a ten-year prison sentence for a cannabis offense, I've seen firsthand the pain families endure and the opportunities lost. To stand in a room filled with people who believe in freedom and redemption was incredibly powerful. It reminded us how far we've come, and how much work remains to bring every last prisoner home."

The gala underscored the scale and impact of LPP's work. Since its founding, the organization has helped constituents secure freedom from more than 300 years of combined incarceration.



Mary Bailey, Managing Director of Last Prisoner Project, presents an award to Leonel Villaseñor, who served 22 years of a 30-year sentence before Last Prisoner Project's intervention



Deshaun Durham, who received clemency from Kansas Governor Laura Kelly at the end of last year, with Calvin Johnson Jr. & Donte West

"Standing with Last Prisoner Project tonight was both a celebration of those who have come home and a reminder that thousands of people remain incarcerated for a plant that is now legal across much of the United States," said Calvin Johnson Jr. "I'm proud to support Last Prisoner Project's fight to reunite those families and ensure no one is left behind."

"So many people are still serving time for cannabis while others are building businesses from it," said JoJo Simmons. "That reality should never sit right with us. The Journey to Justice Gala brought together people who believe in using our platforms to free those still behind bars and to build a future rooted in fairness and freedom. I look forward to continuing to work with Last Prisoner Project to help bring more people home and keep this movement growing."

All proceeds from the gala will directly support LPP's legal, policy, and reentry services, ensuring the continuation of these critical programs.

LPP expressed gratitude to the sponsors who made the evening possible, including Goodwin, DeLisioso, Gotham, Grand National, General Hydroponics, Vladick, Raskin and Clark, Edie Parker, Blazy Susan, Free My Weedman, Happy Eddie, Primitiv, GTI, iAnthus, ConBud, and Ethos Cannabis.

For more information about the event or to support the Last Prisoner Project's mission, visit Last Prisoner Project's website.

ABOUT LAST PRISONER PROJECT

Last Prisoner Project is dedicated to freeing those incarcerated due to the War on Drugs, reuniting families, and helping them rebuild their lives. As laws change, there remains a fundamental injustice for individuals whose convictions are no longer crimes. LPP works to address these harms through legal intervention, constituent support, direct advocacy, and policy change.

Will Mesinger
West End Strategy Team
+1 518-338-7119

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