



PROPÚBLICA

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

A Year Like No Other

With the close of 2020, America is still reeling from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, a national reckoning on racial justice and the violent aftermath of a contentious presidential election.

Throughout the unprecedented year just past, ProPublica set out to cover these stories with clarity and facts, illuminating what was actually happening, who was bearing the brunt and who was responsible. These guiding principles resulted in a wealth of stories that broke news, countered or added context to misleading headlines and promoted real accountability.

Early Moves

Our newsroom began the year largely set to undertake long-term investigations over weeks and months. When the full force of the pandemic hit in mid-March, however, we postponed much of what we'd planned to examine in 2020 and assigned many reporters to new beats.

We realized even earlier that the failure to develop and distribute tests was a key shortcoming in the initial government response to the crisis. Many of our reporters took a closer look there, including Caroline Chen, Marshall Allen, Lexi Churchill and Isaac Arnsdorf, who on Feb. 27 published the first detailed story on [the failure of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to create an effective test for the virus](#).

Our investigative reporters' well-honed habits also gave ProPublica a coronavirus reporting advantage: We love filing requests for public records. Our then-research director, Katie Zavadski, worked closely with our general counsel, Jeremy Kutner, to craft letters seeking records from every state we thought might be a hot spot. As the records requests started coming back, the documents from Nevada were particularly fascinating, yielding what we called a "[a behind-the-scenes peek into the messy early stages of the U.S. response to the coronavirus](#)." The piece revealed how the CDC fumbled its communication with public health officials.

On the cover: Face masks in Waterloo, Iowa, where ProPublica reporters Michael Grabell and Bernice Yeung traveled to report on a coronavirus outbreak at a Tyson Foods meatpacking plant. (Taylor Glascock for ProPublica)



This illustration accompanied ProPublica reporter J. David McSwane’s investigation into how the federal government and states have fueled a chaotic, unregulated market for masks. (AJ Dungo, special to ProPublica)

Mismanaging the Official Response

As the spring unfolded, we found that the federal government tossed aside its many rules on contracting to give out billions of dollars to just about anyone who said they could supply personal protective equipment. Unsurprisingly, an unprecedented array of opportunists emerged. ProPublica stepped in with powerful reporting and a searchable database by news apps developers Moiz Syed and Derek Willis that allowed users to track the government’s spending and scrutinize its contract recipients. Reporter J. David McSwane’s series of stories on the sketchy would-be suppliers of masks and supplies bidding for federal contracts exposed the world of what he called “buccaneers and pirates” trying to make a fast buck from the country’s misfortune.

Our journalism revealed not only jaw-dropping instances of waste and bad judgment. It also showed

that the government’s procurement failures left hospitals without equipment to treat desperately ill patients and front-line workers without supplies to help keep them safe. This included an investigation showing how the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services had paid tens of millions of dollars for Royal Philips, a Dutch appliance and technology company, to develop low-cost ventilators that were never delivered. Reporters Patricia Callahan and Sebastian Rotella then exposed that the White House had struck a new deal to get the ventilators — but for four times the original price.

These stories sparked a congressional investigation and led both to a scathing report that found “evidence of fraud, waste, and abuse” in the deal the White House struck and to a broader probe of Trump trade adviser Peter Navarro, the point man on the

deal. More importantly, the federal government terminated the Philips contract early, saving taxpayers more than \$400 million.

A major October story by James Bandler, Patricia Callahan, Sebastian Rotella and Kirsten Berg — “[Inside the Fall of the CDC](#)” — provided the most detailed look at how, since the beginning of the pandemic, the CDC has been silenced and hobbled through unprecedented political interference from the White House. The story also fully detailed for the first time the chain

of mistakes and disputes that unfolded inside CDC labs, including a lab director sending faulty COVID-19 test kits to state and local public health labs even though his own staff’s quality checks showed they might not work. Less than six hours after ProPublica published this investigation, the CDC shut down the key lab implicated in the faulty tests. Several top scientists said they were unaware of the full extent of issues in the lab until our story ran.

Race and the Virus

Early in the pandemic, while New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo was calling COVID-19 the “Great Equalizer,” ProPublica assembled a team to cover what we suspected would be a disproportionate and devastating impact on Black Americans. We requested data on deaths and realized that astoundingly few agencies broke it out by race, not even the CDC. One health department that did was Milwaukee County. Everyone who had died there, up to the point we called in March, was Black, though African Americans made up only 26% of the population. The resulting story by Akilah Johnson and Talia Buford gave the earliest look at an emerging [pattern of racial disparities in deaths](#).

As agencies, under pressure, released more data and other outlets began to dig in, ProPublica stayed ahead of the coverage by moving past the easy explanations often given for disparate outcomes in African Americans. We emphasized that many deaths were avoidable, and that there were people who needed to be held accountable.

This work included spotlighting stories of [the first 100 people who died in Chicago](#), 70 of whom were Black, exposing the flaws in one-size-fits-all CDC guidance on when and how to seek care. In New Orleans, reporters Annie Waldman and Josh Kaplan



In our reporting on racial disparities in COVID-19 illnesses and deaths, Chicago — where 70 of the city’s first 100 recorded victims to die were Black — offered a snapshot into the racially disproportionate destruction the virus has inflicted nationwide. (Nathan Asplund for ProPublica)

reported on hospitals sending African American patients to hospice facilities or [back home to their families to die](#). A sweeping story by Nina Martin and Akilah Johnson detailed how [the virus is killing young Black men](#) with deadly efficiency. The piece was accompanied by an explanatory video to help put into context [the underlying conditions that left these men so vulnerable](#).

The Election, a Racial Reckoning and More

ProPublica stayed ahead of the curve on other big stories this year, including numerous threats to the election process. Prescient work from Jessica Huseman, Ryan McCarthy and Maryam Jameel included stories

about [Republican secretaries of state who expanded mail-in voting](#) and pushed back against Trump’s voter fraud narrative, and traced the struggles of the U.S.



A story by ProPublica and the New York Times Magazine, with support from the Pulitzer Center, showed how climate refugees are moving across international borders. (Meredith Kohut/New York Times Magazine)

Postal Service, from [service delays and mistakes](#) to poorly protected [postal workers catching COVID-19](#).

In a series of groundbreaking reports with The New York Times Magazine, with support from the Pulitzer Center, senior environmental reporter Abrahm Lustgarten examined the warming of the planet and the consequences of [climate migration](#) as certain areas become unlivable. Using a first-of-its-kind mathematical model to forecast the effects of climate change on

the movements of communities, the stories explored the future of a world shaped by climate-driven migration and shared the experiences of people for whom this reality has already begun.

Other important investigations in 2020 shed light on [troubling police tactics used against Black Lives Matter protesters](#); the [lack of officer accountability in the New York Police Department](#), America's largest police force; inequities in Michigan's juvenile justice system (including the story of an African American teen [incarcerated for failing to complete her online coursework](#)); how the child car seat maker [Evenflo](#) put profits over child safety; the [undermining of environmental laws meant to protect Hawaii's quickly eroding beaches](#); Maine's [predatory legal services for the state's poorest defendants](#); how [Oregon](#) has prioritized the timber industry over the economy and environment; the origins and failure of a [privately funded portion of Trump's border wall](#); and [Trump political appointees who blocked a criminal prosecution of Walmart](#) over its suspicious opioid prescriptions.

As a new year and a new administration begin, ProPublica is pivoting again. Our coverage of a Democratic administration is guided by the principles with which we covered a Republican one — we go where the facts and our reporting lead. The Biden administration will provide new opportunities for us to scrutinize the effectiveness and operations of the federal government. Our expanding teams focused on local and regional reporting in the South, Southwest and Midwest will uncover new accountability concerns.

Thanks to our 43,000 donors' generous support, which reached record levels in 2020, we are well positioned to pursue these stories, always focused on reporting that can spur change, wherever it is needed.

Highlights of the Year at ProPublica

Impact

Our journalism spurred dramatic changes in 2020. Sen. Richard Burr resigned as chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee after our revelations about his stock trading just before the coronavirus market crash. After 33 years behind bars, a man our reporting showed was wrongfully convicted was released from prison in Texas. Chicago’s punitive ticketing practices were outlawed after we shined a light on them. After our story, Congress passed legislation to stop unemployment agencies from demanding money back when they mistakenly overpay. The federal government backed out of what we revealed to be multiple sketchy coronavirus contracts, and landlords across four states reversed illegal eviction filings in the face of our inquiries.

Memorable Stories

Our work brought clarity to the stakes and consequences of COVID-19, including stories on missteps at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that hampered the nation’s ability to track and contain the virus’s spread, as well as unprecedented White House meddling inside the public health agency. We published critical explanatory pieces on asymptomatic carriers, antibody tests and how to understand coronavirus numbers. Stories also shed light on race and police accountability, inequities in Michigan’s juvenile justice system (including the story of an African American teen incarcerated for failing to complete her online coursework), and racial disparities across the health care system. ProPublica’s Electionland also produced revelatory reporting on

U.S. Postal Service slowdowns, voting-by-mail concerns and the proliferation of voting misinformation.

Local Expansion

In 2020, ProPublica announced a dramatically expanded commitment to local investigative journalism with the forthcoming launch of regional reporting hubs in the South and Southwest, in addition to broadening our Illinois efforts to cover a wider swath of the Midwest. Projects from the first year of our joint initiative with the Texas Tribune exposed (and ultimately helped reverse) the practices of a lender that sued Texas borrowers after they lost jobs to the pandemic, and the structural problems and disturbing origins of a privately funded portion of Trump’s border wall. Stories from the ProPublica Local Reporting Network illuminated the erosion of Hawaii’s beaches and the state’s failure to return Native Hawaiians to ancestral lands, Maine’s shoddy and predatory legal services for the state’s poorest defendants, and how Oregon has prioritized the timber industry over the economy and environment. Augmenting the Local Reporting Network, we announced a longer-term Distinguished Fellows program, enabling local reporters to partner with ProPublica for three years as they produce investigative projects from their home newsrooms.

Award-Winning

ProPublica won the Pulitzer Prize — our sixth — for national reporting for “Disaster in the Pacific,” a series about safety problems in the Navy’s 7th Fleet and the problematic response of the Navy high command. The 2020 Pulitzer gold medal for Public Service, the nation’s highest journalistic honor, was awarded to



ProPublica staff virtually celebrating the announcement of our sixth Pulitzer Prize. (Cynthia Gordy Giwa)

the Anchorage Daily News in collaboration with ProPublica for our Local Reporting Network series on major shortfalls in public safety services in rural Alaska. Our story on African American land loss in the South, co-published with the New Yorker, won the George Polk Award in Journalism for magazine reporting, and our investigation on the use of jailhouse informants co-published with the New York Times Magazine won the National Magazine Award for reporting.

Larger, More Diverse Team

As ProPublica continues to grow — more than doubling in size over the past four years — we expanded our senior management team to include five additional editors and reporters. This move has both strengthened and diversified our news leadership with journalists whose depth and breadth of knowledge, life experience and innovative thinking have been crucial to producing some of our best work. At the same time,

our staff overall is growing more diverse, from 37% people of color in 2019 to 40% in 2020.

Partnerships

Our publishing partnerships continued to grow, with 80 in 2020 alone. Partners over the past year included the New York Times, Washington Post, the New Yorker, the Atlantic, Univision, Politico, Telemundo and USA Today.

Growing Platform

ProPublica is continuing to reach new audiences through third-party distribution platforms such as Apple News, Microsoft News, Google News and SmartNews. Traffic grew substantially on such platforms, with these monthly average page views climbing 81% to 10.2 million. Traffic on our own site rose 72% to 9 million page views per month on average.

Impact

The most important test of ProPublica is whether our work is making an impact. We measure our impact not in terms of audience size or honors but in real-world change. In 2020, our journalism spurred such change in a number of important areas.

Alaska Attorney General Resigns After Texts to Junior Employee Exposed

In August, ProPublica and the Anchorage Daily News published an investigation reporting that Alaska Attorney General Kevin Clarkson sent hundreds of text messages to a younger state employee — at least 558 messages in March alone — inviting her to come to his home in at least 18 of them and often using kiss emoji. At the time of our reporting, Clarkson was on a monthlong leave of absence without pay, but the state had never told the public he was gone, or why. Records obtained showed the abrupt absence came after a junior state employee raised concerns about the text messages. Hours after we published our story, which included texts obtained by ProPublica and the Daily News, Clarkson resigned as attorney general.

After Dubious Conviction (and 33 Years), a Release from Prison

In 2018, ProPublica published an investigation, in partnership with the New York Times Magazine, about a beloved Texas high school principal named Joe Bryan who was convicted of his wife's 1985 murder. His conviction rested largely on bloodstain-pattern analysis, a dubious forensic practice. The state denied Bryan parole seven times, including most recently in 2019, even after the bloodstain-pattern analyst who testified against Bryan admitted that his conclusions were wrong. In March 2020, the parole



Joe Bryan, left, embraced by family at the Texas State Penitentiary. (Courtesy of Celestina Rossi)

board reversed course and — 33 years after his conviction, at age 79 — Bryan was released on parole.

Following National Outrage, Teen Released From Juvenile Detention

Last July, with the Detroit Free Press and Bridge Michigan, ProPublica published the story of Grace (her middle name, used to protect her identity), a 15-year-old girl from suburban Detroit who had been sent to a detention center for failing to complete online schoolwork. Judge Mary Ellen Brennan of the Oakland County juvenile court ruled that this had



Chicago hiked the cost of vehicle city sticker violations to boost revenue, but ProPublica found it's driven more low-income, Black motorists into debt. (Rob Weychert/ProPublica)

violated the probation Grace had been given weeks earlier for fighting with her mother and stealing a classmate's cellphone. Within days of the story's publication, #FreeGrace became a trending hashtag. Protesters showed up outside the county courthouse where she was sentenced, and politicians — including Hillary Clinton and then-Sen. Kamala Harris — called for her release. Less than three weeks later, the Michigan Court of Appeals ordered Grace's release, and soon after, Brennan dismissed her case entirely. The Michigan Supreme Court's oversight agency continues to investigate the court procedures in Grace's case and has already proposed a rule that would ban courts from using handcuffs and shackles on juveniles. Grace's school district also issued an apology and instituted a restorative justice program.

Director of Maine's Public Defense Agency Resigns

In October, ProPublica Local Reporting Network partner Maine Monitor investigated how the state handles legal services for the poor. Maine is the only state in the country that does not have a public defender system. Instead, the state's poorest defendants are provided with access to private attorneys contracted by a state office called the Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services. The investigation found that these attorneys lack oversight for professional misconduct and have disproportionately high levels of professional misconduct and criminal convictions, including for repeat drunken driving and possession

of child pornography. Within a week of publication, Gov. Janet Mills said she was "disturbed" by the investigation and called for a bipartisan effort to reform Maine's defense system. Amid mounting criticism of his management of legal services for Maine's poor, John Pelletier stepped down as executive director of the commission.

Chicago's Punitive Ticketing Practice Outlawed

In 2018, a ProPublica Illinois and WBEZ investigation showed that Chicago uses aggressive ticketing practices and punitive collection measures to boost revenue, disproportionately targeting poor, minority residents and trapping them in spiraling debt. Our reporting sparked numerous changes to the system. Most recently, in January, Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed the License to Work Act into law, which ends the practice of suspending driver's licenses over unpaid parking tickets and other non-moving violations.

CDC Shuts Down Lab Involved in Botched Coronavirus Tests

In October, ProPublica published a comprehensive investigation into meddling at the CDC from White House officials determined to prioritize the president's message over public health. The reporting shed light on missteps at the public health agency, including line-by-line edits that Trump advisers made to official health guidance and a lab director sending faulty COVID-19 test kits to state and local public health labs — even though his own staff's quality checks showed they might not work. Less than six hours after ProPublica published this investigation, the CDC shut down the key lab implicated in the faulty tests while it conducted its own investigation and developed corrective action plans.

New Law Mandates Transparency on Health Insurance Conflicts of Interest

In 2019, ProPublica and NPR published an investigation documenting the hidden cash and gifts that health insurers pay to influence the independent insurance brokers who advise employers on which insurance to choose for their staff. This influence ultimately helps determine the health coverage for about 150 million Americans. In December 2020, tucked into the coronavirus relief bill, Congress passed a new federal requirement for brokers to disclose to employers what they receive from the insurance industry.

Director of Newark Hospital's Troubling Transplant Program Departs

In 2019, ProPublica published an investigation of the transplant team at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center that revealed attempts to artificially increase the program's survival rate, an important indicator used by federal regulators. In one egregious case, it kept a patient alive in a vegetative state for a full year without consulting his family members about treatment decisions or explaining their options for care. After an investigation spurred by ProPublica's articles, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services found that the transplant program was putting patients in "immediate jeopardy" and directed the hospital to implement corrective measures. In October, the hospital announced that, after a yearlong administrative leave, the director of Newark Beth Israel's heart transplant center, Dr. Mark Zucker, was departing and Newark Beth Israel is conducting a search for his replacement.

TurboTax Abuses Spotlights in State and Federal Investigations

In 2019, ProPublica showed how TurboTax uses deceptive design and misleading ads to get people to pay to file their taxes, even when they are eligible to file for free. The series prompted investigations by federal and state agencies. In February 2020, the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration released a scathing audit of TurboTax-maker Intuit, H&R Block and other companies, which found that 14 million taxpayers paid for tax prep software in 2019 that they could have gotten for free. The audit also confirmed ProPublica's reporting that so few taxpayers use the Free File program because of tax prep companies' use of confusing design and lax oversight by the IRS. In June, the bipartisan Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations published a report on its own investigation, which criticized the IRS for failing to oversee the free tax filing program and recommended that the IRS increase funds to advertise the free filing option instead of relying on the for-profit tax prep industry. Another investigation by the New York State Department of Financial Services, also launched in response to our reporting, concluded in July that TurboTax, H&R Block and other tax prep companies have long engaged in "unfair and abusive practices."



A patient suffered brain damage during a heart transplant at Newark Beth Israel and never woke up. We reported that, while barely consulting his family, doctors kept him alive for a year to avoid federal scrutiny. (Carlo Giambarresi, special to ProPublica)

Border Patrol Agents Fired or Suspended for Troubling Facebook Activity

In July 2019, ProPublica spotlighted the U.S. Border Patrol agents responsible for detaining and safeguarding immigrants crossing the border with Mexico, including many children. Our series revealed a pattern of indifference and callous behavior, including participation in a secret Facebook group for present and former Border Patrol agents where they shared racist, sexist and misogynistic posts about immigrants and members of Congress. The internal affairs office of Customs and Border Protection, the agency that oversees the Border Patrol, launched an investigation within hours of our report. In July, the agency revealed that its investigation resulted in the firing of four employees and suspension without pay for dozens of others.

Senate Intelligence Chair Steps Down

In March, ProPublica reported that Senate Intelligence Chairman Richard Burr sold off up to \$1.7 million of stock after receiving early classified intelligence briefings on the serious health threats of COVID-19. Simultaneously, Burr was reassuring the public that the government was prepared to deal with the health crisis. In May, FBI agents served a search warrant to Burr, which included the seizure of his cellphone, as part of an investigation of his stock trades. The next day, Burr resigned as chairman.

Congressional Investigation Confirms Aviation Companies Misused Bailout Funds

In July, ProPublica reported that three airline industry companies received \$338 million in public money designed to preserve jobs in the hard-hit industry, but they laid off thousands of workers anyway. The Trump administration allowed the companies to keep the relief money intended for staff that they had already laid off. Immediately after our investigation was published, three House committees announced an investigation into the administration's handling of the aviation Payroll Support Program. In October, the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis released its report, echoing ProPublica's findings. "Treasury's implementation of the Payroll Support Program undermined the program's job preservation purpose," the subcommittee wrote. "Treasury permitted aviation contractors to lay off tens of thousands of workers through the worst months of the pandemic and still receive full payroll support calculated based on pre-pandemic workforce numbers — the same amount they would have received if they had not laid off a single worker."

USDA Cancels Contract With Unlicensed Food Supplier

In May, ProPublica reported that the Trump administration's billion-dollar Farmers to Families Food Box Program, meant to distribute fresh food to struggling food banks and other nonprofits dealing with increased food insecurity during the pandemic, was rife with problems. The program used an unusually fast bidding process that awarded contracts to many organizations that lacked experience or proper licenses. Another result of this process was that the program left hard-hit areas like New York with less food than areas with less need and bypassed the states of Maine and Alaska entirely. In response to our reporting, members of both the House and Senate sent letters to the U.S. Department of Agriculture asking for an explanation of how it evaluated the bids, including if it checked companies' licenses and considered equity across regions. The USDA committed to reviewing food distribution to underserved areas during its next round of contracts and canceled the largest unlicensed contract, a \$40 million deal to an avocado grower profiled in our initial investigation.

Trump Administration Backs Out of Controversial Ventilator Contract

In March, ProPublica published a story showing how a U.S. subsidiary of Royal Philips N.V., a Dutch appliance and technology company, had received millions in federal tax dollars years ago to deliver a low-cost ventilator for pandemics but failed to do so. Yet, as the coronavirus began spreading around the globe and U.S. hospitals were desperate for more, Philips was selling commercial versions of the government-funded ventilator to overseas buyers from its Pennsylvania factory. We reported in April that, despite having not fulfilled the initial contract, the Dutch company struck a much more lucrative deal to sell the U.S. government 43,000 ventilators for \$646.7 million — four times the price. In August, a House subcommittee investigating the government's purchase of the new Philips ventilators said that "gullible" White House negotiators overpaid. Citing evidence of waste, fraud and abuse, the subcommittee asked the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General to launch its own investigation of the deal. By the end of the month, HHS terminated the controversial contract with Philips, and the company announced that it would stop making the ventilators.

Data Released on Emergency Loans for Small Businesses

In May, ProPublica, together with several of the nation's largest news organizations, filed a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit to obtain data about borrowers receiving funds from the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program. Through the program, created under the CARES Act and with little oversight, the government had dispensed more than \$525 billion in loans that can be forgiven if the money is mostly spent to keep employees. In November, federal Judge James Boasberg ruled in the news organizations' favor, noting that the program was at significant risk of fraud and would therefore benefit from additional scrutiny. He ordered the release of the names, addresses and precise loan amounts of all borrowers that received government pandemic loans, and the release of the data followed in early December.



The parents of Jillian Brown, who was paralyzed from the neck down in a car crash while seated in an Evenflo “Big Kid” booster seat, turned their dining room into her bedroom because hers was on the second floor. (Kholood Eid for ProPublica)

Congress Investigates Child Car Seat Maker and Calls for Further Probes

In February, ProPublica published an investigation revealing that the child car seat maker Evenflo put profits over child safety, marketing its “Big Kid” booster seats as “side-impact tested” despite internal video of side-impact tests showing that children could be injured or killed in the seats. Our reporting highlighted the corporate disregard and regulatory failures that allowed the booster seats to be sold even after serious injuries to children resulted. Within a week of our reporting, the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform’s Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy opened an investigation of Evenflo, requesting the company’s records related to the marketing of the Big Kid and other boosters. In November, the subcommittee chastised the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for failing to protect children from injury and death and asked the agency to justify why it hadn’t adopted the tougher safety rules that

members of Congress had pushed. In December, the subcommittee released a report finding widespread evidence that the nation’s largest manufacturers of car seats endangered the lives of millions of American children and misled consumers about the safety of booster seats in crashes. It also formally requested that federal highway safety regulators, as well as the Federal Trade Commission, investigate “unfair and deceptive marketing and unreasonable risks to safety” by the makers of booster seats and urged state attorneys general to look for violations of consumer protection laws by these companies.

Federal Investigation Confirms VA Secretary Misconduct Allegations

ProPublica reported in February that, according to an anonymous complaint, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie personally sought damaging information about a congressional aide who said she was sexually assaulted in a VA hospital. In response to

the story, the inspector general for the VA opened an investigation into the allegation. The inspector general issued a report in December that confirmed the findings of ProPublica’s reporting, and every major veterans group called for Wilkie’s resignation.

House Investigation Opened on Trump Administration’s Coronavirus Response

In February, ProPublica reported that missteps at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — including designing a flawed test for COVID-19, then taking weeks to figure out a fix so state and local labs could use it — may have hampered officials’ ability to contain the disease’s spread in the United States. Citing ProPublica’s reporting, the House Oversight Committee in March announced an investigation into the Trump administration’s response to the coronavirus.

Victim of Prosecutorial Misconduct Walks Free After 18 Years

As part of a 2012-13 series on prosecutorial misconduct in New York, ProPublica profiled the case of Tyrone Johnson. Johnson was convicted of murder in 2002 and spent the next 18 years in jail, even though prosecutors failed to disclose key evidence, including witness statements that would have cleared him of the crime. ProPublica also reported that the original prosecutor had been stripped of his license for other cases of misconduct. In February 2020, seven years after our story, Johnson was released on parole. He credits the ProPublica investigation, which he included in a packet of materials submitted to the parole board, with helping secure his release because it offered the “most thorough example of the truth of what happened.”

Five More Wrongful Convictions Overturned

A 2016 ProPublica investigation published with the New York Times Magazine spotlighted how police departments in Nevada and other states used roadside drug tests to secure guilty pleas, despite widespread evidence that the tests routinely produce false positives. The story led to five overturned drug convictions in Multnomah County, Oregon, and more than 250 in Houston. In July 2020, the Clark County District Attorney’s Office in Las Vegas disclosed that, following ProPublica’s reporting, Las Vegas courts overturned five more drug convictions in 2017. Upon reanalyzing white powder, originally believed to be cocaine, found with the accused, Las Vegas police

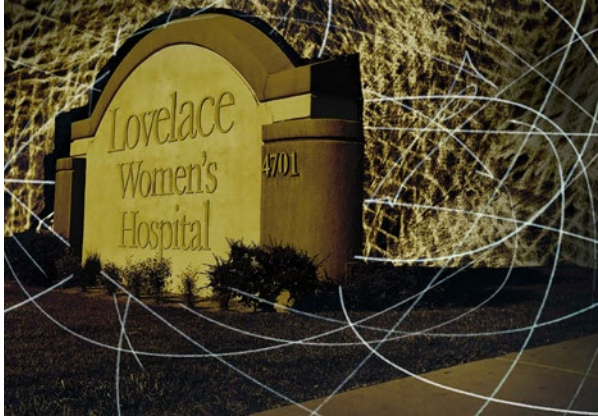
officers found that the powders were not illegal substances at all.

Illinois Begins Sharing Data About COVID-19 Outbreaks in Schools

In October, ProPublica Illinois and the Chicago Tribune published an investigation about COVID-19 outbreaks in Illinois schools. The article revealed that more children were testing positive since school reopened than during the height of the pandemic, but Illinois, unlike many other states, was not sharing information about the spread of the virus within schools with the public. After a request by ProPublica Illinois and the Tribune, state health officials released data showing nearly 9,000 children testing positive since mid-August, roughly 180 new infections on average each day, but they declined to publish the number of cases linked to schools or which schools have been affected. Two weeks after our reporting, the Illinois Department of Public Health announced that it would start sharing the number of cases and outbreaks by school.

Illinois School Board Begins Phase-out of Isolated Timeouts

ProPublica Illinois partnered with the Chicago Tribune for a 2019 investigation into the routine and illegal use of “isolated timeout” rooms within Illinois public schools. We found that children as young as 5 were sent to seclusion rooms, sometimes for hours on end, for minor infractions. In January, educators testified before Illinois lawmakers at legislative hearings on reform bills, urging an end to the practice. Two U.S. senators and 10 members of the House of Representatives (all but one from Illinois) asked the U.S. Department of Education to institute a national ban on the use of student seclusion rooms and physical restraints that restrict breathing. The Illinois State Board of Education conducted the first review of isolated timeouts in schools throughout the state, finding that six of the eight districts they examined violated state law by placing children in seclusion for improper reasons, for too long or without properly notifying parents. In February, the Illinois State Board of Education voted unanimously to permanently prohibit the use of locked seclusion rooms and stop schools from using face-down restraint — but it quietly reversed its decision in April, after a few small schools mounted letter-writing campaigns in opposition. Schools will now be allowed to use face-down



State and federal investigations were launched after we reported that New Mexico's Lovelace Women's Hospital had racially profiled Native American women. (Shoshana Gordon/ProPublica, source image: Shaun Griswold)

restraints for one more school year, aiming to phase out its use by July 2021.

Debt Collection Lawsuits Dropped Amid Coronavirus

ProPublica and the Texas Tribune investigated Oportun Inc., a Silicon Valley-based installment lender that caters to Latino immigrants, and found that it was continuing to sue borrowers even after they lost jobs because of the pandemic. As we were talking to borrowers and before we published the story, Oportun announced that it was dropping the lawsuits it filed against borrowers who fell behind on payments, including during the coronavirus pandemic. It also announced a cap on interest rates for new loans.

Hospital Reforms After State and Federal Investigations

In June, ProPublica Local Reporting Network partner New Mexico In Depth reported on Lovelace Women's Hospital, a prominent facility in Albuquerque where pregnant Native women were singled out for COVID-19 testing and separated from their newborns after delivery. Clinicians and health care ethicists deemed these practices — in which mothers were separated from babies for several days while waiting on test results, preventing them from nursing and bonding — to be racial profiling. The day after our reporting, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced a state investigation of the hospital. In August, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services concluded its in-

vestigation, finding that the practice, which Lovelace halted, had violated patients' rights. Hospital officials also submitted a plan to fix problems identified by federal investigators, including a promise to conduct internal audits to ensure compliance with state and federal regulations and COVID-19 screening guidance.

Salaries and Benefits for ER Providers Protected

In March, ProPublica reported that the medical staffing company Alteon Health would cut salaries, time off and retirement benefits for emergency room doctors and nurses. Citing lost revenue as hospitals postpone elective procedures and non-coronavirus patients avoid emergency rooms, Alteon and other staffing companies announced pay and benefits cuts to ER providers dealing with an onslaught of coronavirus patients and shortages of protective equipment. After our reporting, the company said it will not cut medical professionals' stipends by 20% as planned and will continue offering paid time off. And while Alteon deferred matching 401(k) contributions, it did not eliminate those contributions, as it had announced.

Illegal Eviction Filings Reversed

ProPublica reported that landlords in at least four states (Georgia, Oklahoma, Texas and Florida) had violated the eviction ban passed by Congress in March, moving to throw more than 100 people out of their homes. With no clear enforcement mechanism for the CARES Act, building owners faced no apparent consequence for simply not following the law. After being contacted by ProPublica and informed their actions were illegal, four landlords said they were withdrawing their eviction filings.

Medicaid Benefits for Uninsured Retiree Reinstated

In March, ProPublica reported on one of the millions of Americans facing the coronavirus threat with chronic illnesses and no insurance. Medicaid had abruptly canceled coverage for Judith Persutti in November 2019. The 64-year-old retiree, who gets by on Social Security and food stamps, had appealed the decision unsuccessfully for months using a process that the Trump administration has called a "guardrail" to protect citizens as states try to apply more stringent requirements for Medicaid. Days after our story, Persutti's Medicaid benefits were reinstated.

Wi-Fi Installed in Rural School District

In March, ProPublica Illinois and the Chicago Tribune reported on learning challenges in southwestern Illinois's Trico school district, following coronavirus-related school closures. While students were expected to learn remotely, many families in the district lack computers or internet connections, and Trico did not have a single publicly accessible Wi-Fi hot spot. Without access to technology, teachers distributed nearly 6,000 pages of paper lessons to the district's K-12 students just before they left school. Weeks after the story, a local internet provider moved to install Wi-Fi service to connect families to the district network, and an anonymous donor pledged to donate a dozen hot spots. In addition, a school district in Chicago's suburbs said it would ship about 250 used Chromebooks to Trico when the computers are replaced after this school year.

Gag Gift Shop Finally Closes Amid Coronavirus Fears

Acting on a tip from staff members fearful of contracting COVID-19, ProPublica reported in March that novelty store Spencer's remained open even after a national emergency was declared. While other chains shut down amid the pandemic, Spencer's forced its staff to work — selling gag gifts and sex toys — with little or no protection. ProPublica contacted the company, and within hours of our publishing deadline, it shuttered its more than 650 stores, promising to pay staff at least through the end of the month.

Telework for VA Administrative Staff Instituted

ProPublica and New Mexico In Depth, a ProPublica Local Reporting Network partner, reported in March that the U.S. Veterans Health Administration had banned most administrative staff from working at home, despite calls from public health officials and the White House for more Americans to stay home during the COVID-19 pandemic. VA employees expressed alarm to our reporters that they might be unnecessarily exposed. After the article, the VA reversed course to allow some administrative staff to work from home.

Permit for Controversial \$9 Billion Plastics Plant Put on Hold

In 2019, ProPublica partnered with the Times-Picayune and the Advocate on a series about Louisiana's



After our reporting, New York court officials reviewed recent cases handled by a State Supreme Court judge forced to retire this summer because of early onset Alzheimer's disease. (Thomas Cian for ProPublica)

Cancer Alley, a stretch of the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Baton Rouge with a high concentration of petrochemical facilities. Our analysis concluded that toxic air pollution in these predominantly Black and poor communities is rising, and air quality relative to its peers is getting worse. One story in the series focused on Taiwanese plastic company Formosa's proposal to build a \$9.4 billion petrochemical complex in the area, estimating that the communities around the plant would face double or even triple the toxic levels of cancer-causing chemicals than they currently do. In November, the Army Corps of Engineers announced that it is suspending a permit for the construction of the plant.

Court Officials Review Cases Handled by Judge with Alzheimer's

In October, ProPublica published an investigation into the erratic behavior, mysterious medical leave and abrupt early retirement of a young judge from the New York State Supreme Court. While documenting

Judge ShawnDya Simpson’s rapid mental decline as a result of early onset Alzheimer’s, ProPublica’s investigation highlighted policies and procedures that enable impaired judges to remain on the bench, and the lack of procedures for reviewing rulings made during that time. Within days of our story, New York court officials announced that they plan to review all of the cases handled by Simpson while she was on medical leave.

GAO Report on Trump Cronies Echos Our Reporting

In 2018, ProPublica reported that the “Mar-a-Lago Crowd” — a group of businessmen who met at President Donald Trump’s private club in Palm Beach, Florida, including Marvel Entertainment chairman Ike Perlmutter, doctor Bruce Moskowitz and lawyer Marc Sherman — was exerting significant influence over the Department of Veterans Affairs, advising the president on veterans issues. They made recommendations on VA policies, programs and personnel, even though none of them had military or government experience. Prompted by ProPublica’s reporting, members of Congress requested a review by the Government Accountability Office. The GAO report, released in June 2020, confirmed ProPublica’s findings that Trump empowered his friends to secretly steer the second-largest government agency without any accountability or oversight.

First Research Study on FBI Photo Analysis Method Released and Finds Serious Flaws

In 2019, ProPublica investigated a technique the FBI Laboratory has used for decades to identify criminals, purporting to match their bluejeans with those photographed in surveillance cameras. After our story, which raised questions about this practice, researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, tested the FBI’s method and found several serious flaws. Published in February in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, it is the first known independent research on the technique’s reliability, even though courts have allowed it as trial evidence for years.

Internal Marine Corps Investigation of Fatal Crash Reinforces Our Reporting

In 2019, ProPublica reported on a 2018 Marines Corps crash off the coast of Japan that killed six men. Despite an original Marine Corps investigation into the

crash that largely blamed the squadron, painting the men as reckless aviators who flouted safety protocols and abused prescription drugs, ProPublica revealed deep systemic failings that were well known to superiors up the chain of command. The squadron had been deprived of adequate training and equipment, and its repeated pleas for help from superiors in the months before the crash went unaddressed. A new Marine Corps review of the crash, which concluded in July 2020, acknowledged that its original investigation was inaccurate and incomplete, led by a commander who was more concerned with how his findings would be perceived by his bosses than getting to the truth. Many of the report’s findings reinforce ProPublica’s reporting.

EEOC Probe Confirms ProPublica Findings on Age Discrimination at IBM

In 2018, ProPublica published an investigation into IBM’s practices of forcing older workers out of their jobs through retirement and layoffs, replacing them with younger employees and flouting laws intended to protect against age bias. Months after our stories published, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission consolidated age discrimination complaints against the company from around the country, launching a nationwide investigation of age bias at IBM. The EEOC released the results of the investigation in a letter in 2020 to a group of ex-employees, echoing ProPublica’s findings in their conclusion that IBM engaged in systematic age discrimination between 2013 and 2018, when it shed thousands of older workers in the United States. Employment law experts said the agency’s finding could result in IBM facing millions of dollars in settlement payments or a federal lawsuit.

Legislation Introduced to Improve Alaska Public Safety

The Anchorage Daily News, a member of the ProPublica Local Reporting Network, partnered with us for a project that uncovered a sexual assault crisis in rural Alaska and how it is compounded by a profound lack of public safety services. Almost all of these remote communities are primarily Alaska Native and often have no local law enforcement. In the wake of our investigation, in February a task force of Alaska legislators filed bills that would overhaul key elements of the state’s Village Public Safety Officer Program, which uses state money to train and pay officers



After Ahmad Ghabboun made a minor mistake filling out an unemployment form, the state demanded \$14,990 from him. (Jovelle Tamayo, special to ProPublica)

working in remote villages. Among other recommendations, the proposed legislation would define VPSO's law enforcement power and duties to avoid any ambiguity and remove a cap on overhead costs that VPSO employers can bill the state.

Bill Proposed to Reduce Unnecessary Amputations and Racial Disparities

In May, a ProPublica story detailed how Black Americans with diabetes lose limbs at a rate triple that of others, a sign that quality preventive care isn't reaching the people who need it most. In the weeks that followed publication, several congressional and state legislative offices reached out to the American Diabetes Association to ask for guidance on drafting policy to reduce disparities in diabetic amputations. In August, the Diabetes Association unveiled a new initiative to prevent unnecessary amputations as part of an unprecedented campaign on race and diabetes care. In October, U.S. Rep. Donald M. Payne Jr. introduced

a bill to reduce unnecessary amputations and address racial disparities. Called the Amputation Reduction and Compassion Act of 2020, the bill proposes major reforms that seek to address policy gaps explored in the ProPublica article, in addition to better aligning Medicare payments with American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology guidelines on peripheral artery disease.

Legislation Passed to Stop Unemployment Agencies From Demanding Money Back When They Make Mistakes

An October ProPublica article exposed the debts and anguish faced by workers who have been overpaid thousands of dollars by state unemployment agencies, sometimes as a result of the state's mistakes. Even when the agencies made the original error, they have garnished paychecks or taxed refunds to obtain repayment, while others charged interest on the debt. In December, prompted by ProPublica's reporting,

members of the U.S. House introduced bipartisan legislation that would shield unemployed workers from having to return federal pandemic unemployment assistance benefits when agencies have mistakenly paid them these funds. The coronavirus relief bill that Congress passed — and that President Trump signed into law — soon after granted hardship waivers for pandemic assistance overpayments by state unemployment agencies.

Bill Introduced Banning Use of Tear Gas and Rubber Bullets on Protesters

In June, ProPublica reported on the harmful effects of tear gas, which can cause long-term lung damage and increases the risk of contracting viruses like COVID-19; contaminates food, furniture, skin and surfaces; and seeps into homes. Citing our investigation, Sen. Edward Markey and Sen. Bernie Sanders introduced the No Tear Gas or Projectiles Act, which would prohibit federal, state and local law enforcement officers' use of tear gas and rubber bullets by banning federal officers' use of riot control agents and kinetic impact projectiles and by limiting federal funding to state and local entities that do not ban their use.

Hawaii Officials Pledge New Policies to Protect Disappearing Beaches

The Honolulu Star-Advertiser and ProPublica reported in August that beachfront property owners across the Hawaiian Islands have circumvented environmental laws meant to preserve disappearing shorelines, winning permits to protect multimillion-dollar homes at the expense of the state's beaches. In response to the investigation, the state Department of Land and Natural Resources announced that it is revising its rules governing shoreline structures, and Hawaii lawmakers said they will introduce a bill requiring sellers of residential property to provide a written statement disclosing the risks of sea level rise.

Officials Call for Reforms to NYPD Officer Discipline

A series of ProPublica investigations revealed that New York Police Department commissioners have used their authority to overturn Civilian Complaint Review Board recommendations for punishments for police misconduct, as well as rulings by department hearing officers and even guilty pleas agreed to by police officers. In December, the chair of the CCRB

called for a fundamental shift in how NYPD officers are disciplined for abuse of civilians, saying the police commissioner should no longer be the final arbiter of discipline in cases investigated by the CCRB. In addition, several City Council members are working on legislation that would shift final disciplinary authority away from the commissioner.

FEMA Warns Against Unusable COVID-19 Testing Supplies as Homeland Security Investigates the Contractor

In June, ProPublica reported that the Trump administration paid a fledgling Texas company \$7.3 million for test tubes needed in tracking the spread of the coronavirus nationwide. But, instead of the standard vials, Fillakit LLC supplied plastic tubes made for bottling soda, which state health officials say are unusable and may be contaminated. A later story in the Wall Street Journal raised similar allegations. A week after the stories published, the Federal Emergency Management Agency warned states not to use COVID-19 testing supplies it bought under its contract with Fillakit, and the Department of Homeland Security opened an investigation into the contractor.

GAO Investigates Dubious Contract for Unauthorized Hospital Masks

In May, ProPublica reported that former White House Deputy Chief of Staff Zach Fuentes' 11-day-old company received a \$3 million federal contract to provide KN95 respirator masks to Navajo Nation hospitals during the pandemic. Fuentes secured the deal with the Indian Health Service with limited competitive bidding and no prior federal contracting experience — and his company's Chinese-made masks did not meet Food and Drug Administration safety standards for use in health care settings. In June, IHS attempted to return the possibly ineffective masks. Several members of Congress also demanded investigations into the contract, and the Government Accountability Office announced plans to review the deal.

Lawmakers Demand That NYPD Halt Undercover Sex Trade Stings

In December, ProPublica revealed that undercover operations in New York City that aim to arrest sex workers or their clients have led to numerous allegations of false arrest and sexual misconduct, and that almost everyone arrested was nonwhite. Days after we published the story, a group of New York lawmak-



Some NYPD officers who police the sex trade go undercover to round up as many “bodies” as they can with little evidence. Almost no one they arrest is white. (Daniel Stolle, special to ProPublica)

ers called on the New York Police Department to stop the busts in a letter to leaders of the City Council, as well as the state Assembly and Senate. The letter also asked for an oversight hearing to examine misconduct allegations against the NYPD vice unit, the primary division that polices the sex trade.

Human Rights Lawsuit Challenges Secretive Immigration Policy

In April, ProPublica reported on a secretive policy issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which barred unauthorized immigrants from entering the United States. Our reporting uncovered an internal memo that, citing an obscure federal law authorizing the government to ban the entry of people who could “introduce” an infectious disease (in this case, the novel coronavirus), instructed Border Patrol agents to summarily expel migrants. The guidance ordered this without considering whether migrants might be persecuted in their home countries — a screening that is required of agents under U.S. immigration law. In June, a coalition of advocacy organizations sued the Trump administration to stop a 16-year-old boy from being sent back to Honduras after he crossed into the U.S. to join his father. The lawsuit, which cites ProPublica’s reporting, was the first challenge to the administration’s policy.

New York Mayor Seeks Criminal Investigation on Trump’s Tax Inconsistencies

In 2019, ProPublica and WNYC reported that President Donald Trump’s company made its New York properties appear more profitable to lenders and less profitable to tax officials. In January, New York City conducted an investigation based on our reporting and, according to Mayor Bill de Blasio, the city sent its findings to the Manhattan district attorney “because there is a possibility of a criminal act having been committed.”

State Legislators Demand Investigation Into New Orleans Hospice’s Practices for COVID-19 Patients

In September, ProPublica reported that the Ochsner West Bank hospital in New Orleans was sending patients infected with the coronavirus into hospice facilities or back home to their families to die, in some cases pressuring families into discontinuing treatment as they pushed back or stopping treatment against family instructions. Within weeks of our reporting, the Louisiana Legislative Black Caucus, which includes 37 legislators, met with Gov. John Bel Edwards to discuss ProPublica’s findings and submitted a letter to the governor demanding a state investigation.

New York Nursing Home Residents Sue Over Hazardous Conditions and Attorney General Investigates

In April, ProPublica reported that the Queens Adult Care Center, which houses elderly, sick or mentally ill New Yorkers, was covering up cases of COVID-19 within its facility and not implementing procedures to stop the spread. Patients with the virus continued sharing rooms with elderly and at-risk residents and were allowed to circulate in the neighborhood. Fearing for their own safety, staff didn’t return to work or minimized contact to such a degree that residents went without food and medications. In May, ProPublica learned that the New York attorney general is investigating the center after being contacted by two local lawmakers who read our story, and several residents featured in our reporting are now suing the facility under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Trump Administration's Civil Rights Rollbacks Interrogated

In July, ProPublica and the Capitol Forum reported that the Trump administration has pulled back on civil rights enforcement as a part of its overall relaxation of bank oversight, quietly abandoning six discrimination probes into Bank of America and other lenders. Staff at the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, the regulatory agency that conducts investigations into discrimination, found evidence that people of color were being disproportionately denied loans or were charged more at banks across the country. Their recommendations for fines or penalties were ignored and the cases closed. Within a week of our investigation, 18 Senate Democrats asked the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency to explain how the agency handled investigations into discrimination and “redlining” in the banking industry.

Lawsuit Filed Against Trump Organization for Overcharging Inaugural Committee

Our “Trump, Inc.” collaboration with WNYC reported in 2018 and 2019 that the Trump Organization overcharged the nonprofit presidential inauguration committee for rooms, meals and event space at the company’s Washington hotel and that Ivanka Trump was involved in negotiating the price the hotel charged the inaugural committee. In January, the Washington, D.C., attorney general filed a civil lawsuit charging the inaugural committee and the Trump Organization with using around \$1 million of charitable funds to improperly enrich the Trump family.

Opportunity Zone Abuses Investigated

In 2019, ProPublica reported on several examples of politically connected billionaires benefiting from the opportunity zone tax break, a 2017 anti-poverty measure meant to attract businesses to low-income communities. In response to requests by congressional Democrats who cited ProPublica’s stories, the Treasury Department’s inspector general announced in January that the agency would investigate the Opportunity Zone program and publish the results.

Congressional Investigation Into Sex Offenders on Dating Apps Opened

In 2019, ProPublica reported, in partnership with Columbia Journalism Investigations, on the use of online dating apps by sex offenders to attack other



Under the Trump administration's Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, at least six investigations into Bank of America and other lenders for discriminatory mortgage loan “redlining” were halted or stalled. (Lisa Larson-Walker/ProPublica; Source: simonkr/Getty Images)

users and the billion-dollar industry’s resistance to legislation to improve the safety of its products. In January, the House Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy responded to our reporting with an investigation into the safety of online dating apps, including the use of dating sites among minors, the sale or dissemination of users’ personal information and the presence of registered sex offenders on free dating sites. Lawmakers submitted letters to the top executives at sites like Match Group, Bumble, Grindr and The Meet Group, requesting information on how (and if) they screen for sex offenders or individuals convicted of violent crimes.

Oregon Gov. Calls for Audit of Agency That Lobbied for Timber Industry

ProPublica and Local Reporting Network partner Oregon Public Broadcasting joined with the Oregonian to investigate the timber industry, reporting through the summer on how the state’s preferential treatment for wealthy corporations has had detrimental effects on both the local economy and the environment. Among other findings, the reporting team revealed that the tax-funded agency Oregon Forest Resources Institute worked to discredit academic research and acted as a lobbying and public relations arm for the timber industry. In September, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown called on Secretary of State Bev Clarno to conduct a thorough state audit of the agency.



Mississippi has one of the highest incarceration rates in the United States, and its prison system has long been plagued by accusations of brutality, corruption and abuse. (Evangeline Gallagher, special to ProPublica)

Tougher Consequences Proposed for California's County Jails

In 2019, ProPublica and the Sacramento Bee, a ProPublica Local Reporting Network partner, published a series of investigations that exposed how California's efforts to reduce the population of state prisons have led to overcrowded and dangerous, increasingly deadly, conditions in its county jails. In January, California Gov. Gavin Newsom submitted a 2020 budget that would give more authority to the Board of State and Community Corrections, which oversees jails, empowering it to take more aggressive and transparent steps when its inspectors find conditions that violate state standards. In February, the BSCC proposed tougher scrutiny and consequences for dangerous conditions in California's county jails. The board also formalized an enhanced inspection process for evaluating jails, and California Assembly Member Sydney Kamlager has demanded audits of several sheriffs' offices with regard to how they used state funding

received since 2011 to implement improvements to county jails.

Justice Department Investigates Deadly Mississippi Prisons

In 2019, ProPublica and the Mississippi Center for Investigative Reporting, a ProPublica Local Reporting Network partner, investigated the Mississippi prison system, which has one of the highest incarceration rates in the United States and has been plagued by accusations of brutality, corruption and abuse. In February, after a letter from prison reform organizations that cited our series, the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division opened an investigation into four of Mississippi's prisons to determine whether prisoners were adequately protected from physical harm by other prisoners, if proper suicide prevention measures were taken and if adequate mental health care was provided.

Cleveland Hospital's Private Police Come Under Scrutiny

In September, ProPublica reported that the armed private police in Cleveland's largely white hospital zone, including at the famed Cleveland Clinic, predominantly cite and charge Black people for traffic violations and misdemeanors such as trespassing, jaywalking and possession of marijuana. In response to our investigation, which revealed that nearly 90% of people charged by University Circle police since 2015 were Black, two City Council members, a municipal court judge and the NAACP have called for tougher supervision of private police forces in Cleveland's medical area, and one of the police departments is vowing reform.

Nonprofit Receives Flood of Donations Following Heirs' Property Story

In a 2019 collaboration with the New Yorker, ProPublica investigated heirs' property, a legal means for land to be passed down to family without a will, which has made property owners vulnerable to losing their land and prohibits them from receiving the full benefits of land ownership. This had led to billions of dollars in land loss, primarily by black landowners in the southern United States. The Center for Heirs Property Preservation, which helps protect heirs' property by assisting families on clearing titles and writing wills, has received more than \$200,000 in donations in response to ProPublica's story. In October, property law scholar Thomas Mitchell, featured in the story, won a MacArthur "genius" award and plans to use the grant to create a law center to help protect the real estate and wealth of disadvantaged property owners.

Electionland Tracked Voter Problems, Alerted Voters

Throughout 2020, ProPublica's Electionland used data and technology to track issues that prevent voters from casting their ballots. The hope was to address those problems before the 2020 election. Following

are some of the changes spurred by reporting by ProPublica and partners:

- KQED and ProPublica reported on WeChat misinformation in the Chinese American community. A local nonprofit used our reporting to develop an anti-misinformation campaign, translating materials to disseminate among San Francisco's large Chinese American community before Election Day.

- After voters in a New Jersey town received messages from the local GOP stating that there was no in-person voting, NorthJersey.com and NJ Spotlight set the record straight to explain actual voter options.

- Gov2Go, a public service app in Florida, sent Miami users the wrong date for Election Day, suggesting it was three days later than the actual election. The Miami Herald alerted voters to the error a couple of weeks before the real Election Day.

- An Iowa man with a large, military-style vehicle promoting Trump was asked by the county attorney to move his vehicle to the legal limit of at least 300 feet from a polling place, following reporting from Iowa Public Radio.

- The Orange County district attorney and registrar of voters announced they would investigate an allegedly fraudulent voting center after partner Voice of OC reported it.

- Following confusion about whether COVID-19-positive Omaha voters could use curbside voting, poll workers were contacted to alert voters they could in fact use that voting method, thanks to partner 3 News Now's reporting.

- The Beacon's story on insecure local election websites in Kansas and Missouri, which used Electionland resources, led several counties to update their security measures.

Recognition for Our Work

ProPublica's work was honored in 2020 as follows:

"Lawless," a ProPublica Local Reporting Network project with the Anchorage Daily News that uncovered **sexual assault in rural Alaska and how it is compounded by a lack of public safety services**, won the Pulitzer Prize Gold Medal for Public Service. The series also won the Paul Tobenkin Memorial Award, the Al Nakkula Prize for Police Reporting, the Scripps Howard Impact Award, the Scripps Howard Award for community journalism, the Online Journalism Awards' Al Neuharth Award for Innovation in Investigative Journalism, a News Leaders Association's Frank Blethen Award for Local Accountability Reporting, the John Jay/Harry Frank Guggenheim Award in Criminal Justice Reporting Award for series, the Society of Professional Journalists' Sigma Delta Chi Award for public service journalism, the Society of Professional Journalists' Northwest Excellence in Journalism Award for investigative, the Best of the West award for investigative reporting, and was a finalist for the Goldsmith Prize for investigative



While state troopers can be found in wealthier, and mainly non-Native, suburbs, many remote Alaska Native villages have no law enforcement at all. (Marc Lester/Anchorage Daily News)

reporting and the Michael Kelly Award.

Our series on **deadly accidents in the Navy and Marines caused by inadequate training and faulty equipment** won the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting, a News Leaders Association's Deborah Howell Award for Writing Excellence, the White House

Correspondents' Association's inaugural Katharine Graham Award for Courage and Accountability, the Gerald R. Ford Award for Distinguished Reporting on National Defense, the Military Reporters and Editors Association Award for print/online domestic, and Malofej Silver Medals in the features and motion graphics



In our reporting on African-American land loss in the South, we told the story of two brothers who spent years in jail for refusing to leave waterfront property that had been in their family for a century. (Wayne Lawrence)

categories. The series was also a finalist for the Scripps Howard Award for investigative reporting, the National Magazine Award for public interest, and the Online Journalism Award for digital video storytelling.

Our story on **African American land loss in the South**, co-published with the New Yorker, won the George Polk Award in Journalism for magazine reporting, the John Bartlow Martin Award for Public Interest Magazine Journalism, the National Association of Black Journalists' Salute to Excellence Awards for magazine, was a runner up for the MOLLY National Journalism Prize, and was a finalist for the News Leaders Association's Dori J. Maynard Award for Justice in Journalism.

"The Quiet Rooms," a ProPublica Illinois series with the Chicago Tribune about **the unlawful use of isolated timeouts in Illinois schools**, won the

Fred M. Hechinger Grand Prize for Distinguished Education Reporting, the top prize in the National Awards for Education Reporting, a News Leaders Association's Frank Blethen Award for Local Accountability Reporting, the Anthony Shadid Award for Journalism Ethics, the Online Journalism Awards' University of Florida Award for Investigative Data Journalism, the Society of Professional Journalists' Sigma Delta Chi Award for investigative reporting, the Katherine Schneider Award for Excellence in Reporting on Disability, the Richard H. Driehaus Award for Investigative Reporting, as well as the Driehaus Awards' inaugural Readers' Choice Award, the Illinois Press Association Knight Chair Award for investigative/enterprise reporting, the Illinois Associated Press Media Editors Awards for public service, investigative reporting, editorial sweepstakes and digital storytelling and four

Chicago Headline Club Peter Lisagor Awards: the Watchdog Award, best education reporting, best data journalism and best multimedia collaboration. It received honorable mention in the Dart Award for Excellence in Coverage of Trauma, won second place for the National Headliner Award for public service in newspapers, was a finalist for the MOLLY National Journalism Prize, the Selden Ring Award for Investigative Reporting and an Investigative Reporters and Editors Award for print/online, and was on the shortlist for the Sigma Award for data-driven reporting.

Our reporting on **the pervasive use of jailhouse informants to secure convictions**, co-published with the New York Times Magazine, won the National Magazine Award for reporting, the MOLLY National Journalism Prize, the Taylor Family Award for Fairness in Journalism, the Hillman Prize for magazine journalism and an Investigative Reporters and Editors Award for print/online, and was a finalist for a News Leaders Association's Deborah Howell Award for Writing Excellence.

"Profiting From the Poor," a ProPublica Local Reporting Network project with MLK50: Justice Through Journalism that exposed **predatory debt collection practices by the largest health care system in Memphis, Tennessee**, won the Gerald Loeb Award for Distinguished Business and Financial Journalism for local reporting, the Selden Ring Award for Investigative Reporting, an Investigative Reporters and Editors Award for print/online, the Barlett & Steele Bronze Award for investigative business journalism,

a National Association of Black Journalists' Salute to Excellence Awards for online project and the Association of Health Care Journalists Award for business journalism, and was a finalist for the Scripps Howard Award for community journalism.

"The TurboTax Trap," our series that revealed that TurboTax sold taxpayers a service they could have received for free, won the Gerald Loeb Award for Distinguished Business and Financial Journalism for personal finance and consumer reporting and the Edward R. Murrow National Award for social media, was a finalist for the Selden Right Award for Investigative Reporting and the Scripps Howard Award for business/financial reporting, and received honorable mention in the Society of American Business Editors and Writers' Best in Business Award for government.

"A 911 Emergency," a ProPublica Local Reporting Network project by the Public's Radio on **how inadequate training and oversight harms emergency medical care in Rhode Island,** won the Scripps Howard Award for radio/audio and was a finalist for the Scripps Howard Impact Award, as well as an Investigative Reporters and Editors Award for radio/audio.

"Inside the Border Patrol" won the RFK Journalism Award in the new media category.

"The Bad Bet," an investigation by ProPublica Illinois and WBEZ about video gambling across the state of Illinois, won the Edward R. Murrow National Award for investigative reporting and the Edward R. Murrow Regional Award for investigative reporting, was a finalist for the

Gerald Loeb Award for Distinguished Business and Financial Journalism for local reporting and the Chicago Headline Club Peter Lisagor Award for best graphics, and won third place in the Richard H. Driehaus Awards for Investigative Reporting.

"Polluter's Paradise," a collaboration with the Times-Picayune and the Advocate, won the Society of Environmental Journalists' Nina Mason Pulliam Award for Outstanding Environmental Reporting, a Society of Environmental Journalists' Kevin Carmody Award for Outstanding Investigative Reporting, the National Association of Science Writers' Science in Society Award for series, the Malofiej Awards' Climate Change and Environmental Commitment Best Graphic Award, a Malofiej Silver Medal in the features category and a Society for News Design Bronze Medal for maps, and was selected for the Sigma Awards shortlist for visualization.

Reporter Caroline Chen won the Livingston Award for Young Journalists in the local reporting category for her story on a **Newark hospital that kept a vegetative patient on life support to boost its survival rate.** The story also won the New York Press Club Journalism Awards for Feature Reporting in Science, Medicine, Technology, and received honorable mention in the Society of American Business Editors and Writers' Best in Business Award for health/science.

"Unchecked Power" by Reckon by AL.com, a ProPublica Local Reporting Network partner, won the Society of Professional Journalists' Sigma Delta Chi Award for public service journalism and

third place for the National Headliner Award for health, medical and science writing.

Three **ProPublica newsletters** ("False Witness," "Disaster in the Pacific" and "Not Shutting Up") won the Society of Professional Journalists' Sigma Delta Chi Award for public service in newsletter journalism.

Our reporting on **President Donald Trump's tax inconsistencies** won the Society of American Business Editors and Writers' Best in Business Award for banking/finance.

"The Extortion Economy," our story on how insurance companies are fueling a rise in ransomware attacks, won the Society of American Business Editors and Writers' Best in Business Award for technology.

Our collaboration with BuzzFeed News on the grueling, sometimes deadly conditions endured by **drivers who work in Amazon's delivery network** won the Society of American Business Editors and Writers' Best in Business Award for retail.

"The Extortion Economy," about how companies purport to help victims of ransomware, won the Trace Prize for Investigative Reporting.

"Trump, Inc.," a collaboration between ProPublica and WNYC, won the New York Press Club Journalism Award in the podcast category, and was a finalist for the National Magazine Award for podcasting.

ProPublica Illinois' reporting with the Chicago Sun-Times on the **failures of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services to serve Spanish-speaking families** in the foster care system won the Chi-



We uncovered the history of Anna, Illinois, and other nearly all-white “sundown towns” where, historically, Black people were not welcome after dark. (Whitney Curtis, special to ProPublica)

cago Headline Club Peter Lisagor Awards for best non-deadline reporting and best illustration, and was a finalist for the Richard H. Driehaus Awards for Investigative Reporting.

Our reporting on **sundown towns** won the Chicago Headline Club Peter Lisagor Award for best feature story or series.

Our reporting with the Sacramento Bee on **how California’s efforts to reform the state prison system left its county jails more deadly**, a project of the ProPublica Local Reporting Network, won the California Journalism Award for investigative reporting.

An investigation by NPR Illinois, a Local Reporting Network

partner, into the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign’s handling of **sexual harassment complaints against faculty** won the Illinois Associated Press Broadcasters Association Award for best investigative report.

Our reporting with the Connecticut Mirror, a ProPublica Local Reporting Network partner, on how **state and local officials blocked affordable housing in affluent Connecticut towns**, won the New England Newspaper & Press Association Award for investigative/enterprise reporting.

Our visualization of **the spread of the natural gas industry across West Virginia**, created in partnership with ProPublica Local

Reporting Network partner the Charleston Gazette-Mail, was a finalist for the National Magazine Award for digital innovation.

ProPublica was a finalist for an Online Journalism Award for general excellence in online journalism.

Our reporting with American Banker on **how Trump’s political appointees intervened to reduce sanctions against two large banking organizations** involved in trading risky securities received honorable mention in the Society of American Business Editors and Writers’ Best in Business Award for banking/finance.

Our reporting on white supremacist groups for ProPublica’s

“**Documenting Hate**” series was recognized as a finalist for the News Leaders Association’s Batten Medal for Courage in Journalism.

Our reporting on **invasive TSA searches that transgender people often face at airports** was a finalist for the GLAAD Media Award for outstanding digital journalism article.

Our collaboration with PBS Frontline on **problems with a New York City policy to move mentally ill people into private apartments** was a finalist for the National Institute for Health Care Management Foundation’s Research and Journalism Award in the television and radio journalism category.

“**Financial Aid Loophole,**” a ProPublica Illinois series re-

vealing that well-off families were transferring guardianship of their college-bound teenagers to qualify for financial aid, was a finalist for the Chicago Headline Club Peter Lisagor Award for best non-deadline reporting.

Our reporting with Portland Monthly on **sexual misconduct by U.S. Ambassador Gordon Sondland** was a runner-up for the SPJ Northwest Excellence in Journalism Award in the feature/hard news category.

Our Instagram video, which told the story of **a 16-year-old migrant who died while in Border Patrol custody**, won a Society for News Design Bronze Medal for social media design.

Our reporting on **politically connected billionaires benefiting from the Opportunity Zone**

tax break intended as an anti-poverty measure was selected for the Sigma Awards shortlist for data-driven reporting.

“**Aggression Detectors,**” our investigation on unproven surveillance technology schools are using to monitor students, was selected for the Sigma Awards shortlist for innovation.

Our **news applications and data visualizations** won a Malofiej Silver Medal in the features category for “Trapped in a Deadly Chase” and a Malofiej Bronze Medal for the portfolio of news applications developer Al Shaw.

Our illustration for a story about an anesthesiologist who began keeping count of **health workers lost to COVID-19**, won a Society of Illustrators Silver Medal.

Overview of Distribution

To reach the widest possible audience, we have always made our work available for republication under a Creative Commons license, and we regularly copublish major stories with leading news organizations.

80	Publishing partners in 2020	
9,000,000	Page views on ProPublica platforms per month on average	UP 72%
10,200,000	Off-platform pages viewed on Apple News, Microsoft News, Google News and SmartNews per month on average	UP 81%
4,300,000	Unique visitors to ProPublica.org per month on average	UP 80%
731,000	Pages republished under Creative Commons per month on average	UP 75%
396,000	Email subscribers	UP 48%
906,000	Twitter followers	UP 8%
461,000	Facebook followers	UP 4%

Publishing Partners, 2020

ProPublica has had 228 publishing partners in 13 years. We choose each partner with an eye toward maximizing the impact of the story in question. Here is a list of our partners in 2020. **New partners marked in bold:**

- Advocate [New Orleans/ Baton Rouge]
- AL.com
- Anchorage Daily News
- **Arizona Daily Star**
- Arizona Republic
- Arkansas Nonprofit News Network
- **Asbury Park Press**
- Atlanta Journal-Constitution
- Atlantic
- **Bay City News [CA]**
- Block Club Chicago
- Boston Globe
- **Bridge Magazine**
- BuzzFeed News
- **Capital Gazette [Annapolis, MD]**
- **Capitol Forum**
- CBS News
- Chicago Sun-Times
- Chicago Tribune
- Chronicle of Higher Education
- **The City [NY]**
- CT Mirror
- **Daily Herald [suburban Chicago]**
- **Desert Sun [Palm Springs, CA]**
- **Detroit Free Press**
- **El Pais**
- **Eye on Ohio**
- Fortune
- **The Frontier [Oklahoma]**
- **Georgia Health News**
- Georgia Public Broadcasting
- Guardian
- **Honolulu Star-Advertiser**
- Houston Chronicle
- **Kentucky Center for Investigative Reporting**
- KQED
- **KYUK [Bethel, Alaska]**
- Louisville Courier-Journal
- **Maine Monitor**
- Miami Herald
- Mississippi Center for Investigative Reporting
- MLK50 [Memphis, Tennessee]
- Mother Jones
- **Mountain State Spotlight [WV]**
- NBC News
- **New Mexico in Depth**
- New Republic
- **News & Observer [Raleigh, NC]**
- New York Magazine
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- Planet Money (NPR)
- Politico
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- The Public's Radio [Rhode Island]
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- **Underscore.news**
- USA Today
- Univision
- Vox
- Washington Post
- WBEZ
- **Wisconsin Watch**
- **WKSU [Kent, Ohio]**
- WNYC
- WRAL-TV, Raleigh
- **Youngstown Business Journal**

Financial Information, 2020

In a year that devastated so much of our economy, ProPublica was fortunate to see strong fundraising. Revenues were up 8%, allowing ProPublica to increase its cumulative reserve to roughly \$36.5 million, just larger than our budgeted spending for 2021. This provides an essential cushion against a prolonged downturn or other reverses in future fundraising unrelated to our work.

Revenues

Board of Directors contributions and related grants	\$6,229,000
Major grants and gifts (\$50,000 and above)	\$19,985,000
Online donations	\$4,732,000
Other grants and gifts	\$4,214,000
Earned income and interest	\$536,000
Total	\$35,696,000

Total donors: more than 43,000

All figures are preliminary and unaudited, rounded to nearest \$1000.

Expenses

News salaries, payments and benefits	\$21,754,000
Non-news salaries and benefits	\$3,241,000
Personnel support	\$1,643,000
Outreach	\$967,000
Professional fees	\$186,000
Occupancy/office	\$1,843,000
Capital costs	\$188,000
Taxes	\$4,000
Total	\$29,826,000

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Hiring is underway for a full reporting team in the Southwest.

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