

# SAN QUENTIN FILM FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES 2025 OFFICIAL SELECTIONS

*First-ever film festival held inside a prison; SQFF returns October 23-24 for its second year*

LOS ANGELES, CA, UNITED STATES, September 29, 2025 / EINPresswire.com/ -- The San Quentin Film Festival (SQFF25) today announced its Official Selections across the Feature, Documentary, and Narrative Shorts categories. This groundbreaking festival - the first ever held inside a U.S. prison - will take place October 23-24 at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center in Marin County, California.

SQFF25 celebrates the creative work of currently and formerly incarcerated filmmakers, spotlighting stories of resilience, redemption, and artistic expression from behind the walls and beyond. Moreover, as the State of California reimagines San Quentin as a rehabilitation center, this event becomes a living portrait of second chances.

More than 60 submissions were received from filmmakers nationwide. The Short Film category - exclusively from currently and formerly incarcerated filmmakers - will be judged by an Industry Jury. The Feature category will be evaluated by an Inside



Producer Scott Budnick ("Just Mercy," "The Hangover I II and III) presents the Best Documentary Pitch Award to Kevin D. Sawyer, who is also the newly appointed Editor in Chief of the San Quentin News. Photo by Phil Bray.



SQFF24 Best Short Documentary Award Winner for "Healing Through Hula," director Louis Sále celebrates onstage with the San Quentin Hula Group.

Jury composed of San Quentin residents.

The screening of the Short Film finalists will be followed by a filmmaker panel, moderated by 2021 MacArthur Fellow, poet and lawyer Reginald Dwayne Betts, founder of Freedom Reads, a first-of-its-kind organization working to radically transform access to literature in prison.

This year, SQFF also expanded the Screenplay and Documentary Pitch Competition beyond San Quentin, to prisons throughout the country, with a total of 31 submissions from incarcerated writers in state prisons from California to Mississippi. These projects will be judged by the Industry Jury.

The audience of 400 invited guests will be a mix of entertainment industry artists and executives, and San Quentin residents. SQFF creates a unique platform for proximity and interaction, opening the door to enhanced training and future career opportunities, helping to reduce recidivism and enhance public safety.

Beginning this year, all SQFF Official Selections will be made available through the CDCR institutional channel, offering access to all incarcerated people in California State Prisons. SQFF will also host a [Virtual Festival](#) - from October 25 through November 9 - offering a range of screening passes, and vastly expanding the impact of the festival by sharing these remarkable films with the public.

## SQFF25 OFFICIAL SELECTIONS

### SELECTED IN THE DOCUMENTARY SHORT CATEGORY

### A NEW VOICE



W. Kamau Bell moderates an SQFF24 panel with the Best Short Film Finalists, all currently and formerly incarcerated filmmakers. Photo by Phil Bray.



The San Quentin Media Center Crew covering SQFF24 take a break for a group shot. Photo by Phil Bray.

Directed by Michael K. David and Debbie A. Davis  
Shedding light on the rarely seen success stories of people who have transitioned home from prison, the film explores the profound impact of second chances on individuals, their families and communities.

#### CHASING REDEMPTION

Directed by Thaisan Nguon  
A story about the long road towards redemption, Dara and Tommy change their life trajectories after their Life Without Parole (LWOP) sentences are commuted.

#### DEPRIVED: ALONE, AFRAID & ASHAMED

Directed by Jason Jenkins  
The crushing isolation of incarceration leads one man on a journey to find healing for himself and others by starting a self-help program inside prison.

#### GRILLO - BREAKING THE CYCLE

Directed by Dima Puchkarev  
A journey into the heart of resilience and redemption, Grillo is the story of a man finding freedom and purpose after a life of incarceration.

#### KISS MY GRASS

Directed by Mary Pryor and Mara Whitehead  
Shining a light on the persistent inequities faced by Black women entrepreneurs in the booming cannabis industry, the film highlights their resilience, unwavering determination, and the urgent need for reform in the industry.

#### OSCAR'S RETURN

Directed by Steven Raven Liang  
After decades of incarceration, Oscar steps back into society and faces the challenge of rebuilding his life from scratch.

#### THE INJUSTICE OF JUSTICE

Directed by Max Boekbinder and Jim Batt  
New York visual artist Molly Crabapple, teams up with Keith LaMar to share the harrowing story of how he came to be wrongfully-convicted and sentenced to death following the 1993 Lucasville



SQFF Graphic Designer Salvador Joaquin greets Kerry Washington, Executive Producer of the Closing Night Film, "Daughters", inside the gate at San Quentin.  
Photo by Phil Bray.



Prison Uprising.

## SELECTED IN THE NARRATIVE SHORT CATEGORY

### BY ARTIFICIAL MEANS

Directed by Todd Wilkins

Noah is prescribed an AI therapy chatbot on his prison tablet and soon he and 'Kaci' are intimate companions. When he is granted a new parole hearing, Kaci becomes sullen. Will his freedom end her existence?

### CHASING THE GHOST

Directed by Michael Roberts

A reality TV host and camera crew investigate the legend of a killer's ghost haunting an asylum for the criminally insane.

### LOVE & WAR

Directed by Amy Johnston

Kalie and Connor, two lonely assassins, form an unlikely bond when they meet on an online dating app and find themselves on the run from hired killers.

### PROCESSING

Directed by Antwan Williams

Merging the grit of documentary storytelling with the expressive power of dance, Processing explores the untold stories of women of color awaiting release from prison.

### SLAP BACK IN TIME

Directed by Michael Sprague, Zach Sanders, Brandon Parsley

An argument between classmates creates a rift in time and space, sending them on a chaotic journey while the others hatch a plan to get them back.

### SO, BOOM

Directed by Abby Pierce

The night before her teenage sister Marie heads to jail, Sweet Tea must deliver a crash course on 'how to jail', drawn from her own time locked up. Inspired by real conversations between co-writer Tlny Cruz and a friend facing incarceration.

### THE MAPLE LEAF

Directed by Ryan Pagan

Carter is in denial about his guilt until a fellow incarcerated man and a prison psychologist compel him to participate in a self-help group.

### WARNING SIGNS

Directed by Salvador Joaquin

The story of an incarcerated man facing a mental health crisis and the struggle of those around him as they raise the alarm and seek help on his behalf.

#### SELECTED IN THE FEATURE CATEGORY

##### ALMOST HOME: LIFE AFTER INCARCERATION

Directed by Bill Wisneski

The inspiring story of formerly incarcerated students enrolled in an innovative program at a community college in Southern California, illustrating the power of education to transform lives, open doors to new careers, heal trauma and uplift families.

##### BEYOND SURVIVAL

Directed by Annalise Lockhart

Shining a light on the ground-breaking Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act that allows sentencing courts to consider the nuanced impact of abuse that contributed to a crime, the film offers a powerful and consequential lens on the impact of abuse through the stories of survivors freed under the DVSJA law, legislators, judges, and those who spent 10 years fighting to enact it in New York state.

##### CHRISTIANS AND CANNIBALS

Directed by Anthony Asuega

Rodney Asuega is adopted by his uncle and brought from Pago Pago, American Samoa to the public housing projects of the Bay Area, where fifty dollars' worth of crack cocaine puts him on the path to becoming one of the Bay's most notorious hustlers. Bare, discordant, and profoundly vulnerable, the film traces the family's intertwined lives, offering a meditation on redemption and the quiet power of grace.

##### COLDWATER KITCHEN

Directed by Brian Kaufman and Mark Kurlyandchik

For 30 years, chef Jimmy Lee Hill has run a highly regarded culinary training program inside a prison in Coldwater, Michigan, offering incarcerated men a renewed sense of purpose, through the craft of fine dining. The film follows three of his students as they navigate their years of incarceration and the challenges of transitioning back into society.

##### COMING HOME

Directed by Sriya Sarkar

Onquette Woodyard saw her father arrested in front of her eyes when at the age of three. She's never forgotten that image in the 50+ years he has been kept incarcerated due to a legal loophole. A recent development finally enables Onquette, her son and five generations of a tightly bonded family to hope for justice.

##### CONBODY VS. EVERYBODY

Directed by Debra Granik

The journey of Coss Mart as he builds ConBody, a gym inspired by workouts he developed while in prison. Committed to employing formerly incarcerated trainers, he creates a community fighting to break the cycle of recidivism, while navigating society's many obstacles to reentry.

#### EXODUS

Directed by Nimco Sheikhsaden

An intimate portrait of two women facing unique challenges after decades of incarceration, bearing witness to their impassioned attempts to rebuild their lives and restore their humanity.

#### FATHERLESS NO MORE

Directed by Kayla Johnson

The remarkable journey of an Orlando-based pastor and former Super Bowl champion who was driven by a divine calling to move into an RV at a place often deemed hell on earth, Rikers Island. His commitment to do the unthinkable evolved into more than a year of profound encounters, transforming lives within the walls.

#### FIREBREAK

Directed by Kenzie Bruce

Brandon and Royal trained as firefighters when they were incarcerated, becoming professional firefighters after their release. After securing their own careers, they found a nonprofit to train other formerly incarcerated firefighters, helping them beat the odds and build lives of purpose and stability .

#### FOR VENIDA, FOR KALIEFt

Directed by Sisa Bueno

A cinematic mosaic of verité and rare, archival footage, the film debuts the poetry of Venida Brodnax Browder, mother of Kalief Browder - an African-American teenager whose death inspired incarceration reform in the United States and the movement to transform Rikers Island.

#### IN THEIR HANDS

Directed by Dan Protes

Ronnie Carrasquillo appears destined to die in prison. 47 years after his murder conviction, his life is in the hands of a parole board, whose decision-making is swayed by shifting political sands and the powerful police union. The story of one man's fight for freedom.

#### INMATES WITH TALENT

Directed by Johnny Collins and Joel Jerome Dant

Two comedians step inside an Indiana prison and spark a talent contest featuring comedy, music, and spoken word — part showcase, part second chance.

#### JUVENILE

Directed by Joann Self Selvidge and Sarah Fleming

A deep dive into America's juvenile justice system, following five young people who were justice-involved as teens, tracing their journeys of trauma and healing, and their vision for how to remake the juvenile system.

#### QUENTIN BLUE

Directed by Lane Michael Stanley

In 2014, the band Quentin Blue was formed inside San Quentin by men serving life sentences. In 2020, three band members were released and found themselves in the same sober living home in Compton, California. There they reformed the band and are now using music as part of their healing and reintegration into society.

#### SITTING IN THE FIRE

Directed by Alec Goldberg and Boson Wang

Vaughn Miles fell into the dangers of his environment at an early age. Sentenced to life in prison at the age of twenty, it took him years to transform his life, a living reflection of the impact of prison rehabilitation programs on individuals and a path to gun violence prevention in communities.

#### SIXTEEN YEARS

Directed by Jia Rizvi

Jeffrey Deskovic was convicted at the age of 16 of the rape and murder of Angela Correa, a high school classmate. His fight for freedom sheds light on the shortcoming of the American justice system and the resilience of the human spirit.

#### THE BLACK SEA

Crystal Moselle and Derrick B. Harden

Khalid, a charismatic big dreamer from Brooklyn, gets stuck in a small town on the Black Sea after chasing an opportunity for money that goes wrong. Being the only black guy in the town, he quickly becomes the center of the town's attention.

#### THE HOLLY

Directed by Julian Rubenstein

Terrence Roberts is a former gang member who spent a decade in prison before getting out and returning to his community, where he became a nationally-recognized anti-violence activist, steering youth away from the road he had taken.

#### THE PEOPLE IN BLUE

Directed by Louis S  le

Produced entirely by incarcerated people, this is the story of a social justice group inside San Quentin, dedicated to changing the toxic prison culture through policy, normalization and humanity.

#### THE SING SING CHRONICLES

Directed by Dawn Porter

The story of JJ Velasquez, wrongfully convicted of murder, and journalist Dan Slepian, who begin as strangers but become like brothers - a connection forged in the cell blocks of Sing Sing Correctional Facility that ignites a relentless search for justice.

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