

# Community Hope Justice

*Rising together for a better  
North Carolina*

This year has changed our organization, state, and nation in ways we never thought possible. The COVID-19 pandemic has required us to act quickly while remaining true to our core values—everything the past 25 years of work in unemployment, housing, health care, workers' and immigrant rights, and other issues has prepared us for, in courthouses, the legislature, and communities across the state. We will continue to fight, working to help North Carolinians from all walks of life.

## What we do, who we help:

**Communities from Murphy to Manteo:** Throughout the pandemic, we made it clear how important it is to invest in our communities and lifted up inclusive policies that will be crucial in the COVID-19 response. We supported outreach on Economic Impact Payments, and developed relationships with local communities to connect them more deeply to budgetary decisions and how we allocate public resources. These are often considered “wonky” issues, and yet they affect all North Carolinians, especially communities of color and those with low incomes. We helped partners and legislators make value-based arguments for serious structural changes to the state tax code in order to deliver long overdue anti-racist, equitable outcomes. Most vitally, we connected the dots between all of these issues and communities listed

below, and made the case for a robust, people-first COVID-19 response through research, advocacy, and engagement.

**Unemployed North Carolinians and their families:** We have been speaking out against North Carolina's inadequate Unemployment Insurance system since changes made in 2013 left too few jobless workers receiving too little, for too short a time. The pandemic has required us to reinvigorate our efforts, through lobbying and legislative advocacy, to improve our state system and extend the federal supplement. We requested an Executive Order from Gov. Cooper





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that would clarify what is good cause for refusing work during the pandemic, and in early May, the NC Division of Employment Security issued new guidance regarding returning to work and eligibility for UI benefits.

**North Carolinians with health challenges:** Never have the health disparities in our state been more apparent than this year. We channeled complex

feelings surrounding the public health and economic crisis and reckoning with our nation's long history of racism into exciting work, creating the Southerners 4MedEx coalition with seven other Southern states

that continue to reject Medicaid expansion. Leading up to a national vigil with Rev. William Barber and Stacey Abrams, we organized storytelling spotlights, launched a petition, and collected data.

**People who are incarcerated:** Few North Carolinians were more at risk during the COVID-19 pandemic than those who are incarcerated, as the crisis amplified how much we need to support this community, both during and after incarceration. In 2020, we helped achieve the passage of several pieces of fair chance legislation, including the Second Chance Act and a provision allowing people with suspensions of driver's licenses for failure to pay traffic court costs to gain limited driving privileges. We coordinated a bipartisan coalition of District Attorneys publicly committed to

pursuing mass expunction and advocated for the early release of 21 people (and counting) from state prisons to prevent exposure to COVID-19.

**Our immigrant communities:** We coordinated community education events and materials—in both English and Spanish—to address the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the immigrant community. Knowing there is often an abundance of fear and misinformation on the issues, we produced landlord-tenant rights videos and developed informational materials on the pandemic and the public charge rule in six languages. We spoke out publicly about the DACA Supreme Court decision, providing legal updates and information sessions.

**Workers:** Migrant farmworkers, H-2B, and processing workers have been on the frontlines of the pandemic; because of our advocacy, these workers are better protected. We elevated worker voices to bring attention to the conditions at processing plants and held biweekly meetings with state officials to hold them accountable to improving testing, PPE, and support services. We helped inform thousands of workers and advocates about the right to paid leave, accessing unemployment, and health and safety at work, through bilingual materials, virtual trainings, and responding to legal requests.



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**Our students and teachers:** This spring we launched Communities for the Education of Every Child NC, a multi-partner Leandro coalition focused on ensuring a sound, basic education for all of North Carolina's children, as promised by our state constitution, with an emphasis on equity. This has never been more important, and it has been crucial to connect the long-term effects of the historic Leandro ruling to its relevance during the pandemic's public education crisis. We additionally worked with partners to secure bonus pay for early childhood educators.

## **North Carolina homeowners and tenants:**

This has been a terrifying year for North Carolinians who are at risk of losing their homes and not being able to pay utility bills. We represented homeowners and tenants, and advocated for lawmakers to expand eviction and utility shutoff protections. We urged lawmakers to extend and strengthen the moratorium on utility disconnections and late payment fees to protect families who are suffering economic hardship due to the pandemic.



## **This is all thanks to engaged North Carolinians—like you**

Despite the numerous challenges posed by the pandemic, we saw an incredible outpouring of support and engagement from our supporters in 2020. Those who read every NC Policy Watch breaking story and commentary, attended our Crucial Conversation policy events, and learned about the issues by following our newsletters and our work online. Those who wrote, called, and tweeted at their lawmakers to enact real change when we asked them to – sometimes several times a day. Those who attended our Know Your Rights trainings and virtual community events. Those who offered their time, interest, and financial support.

*None of this would be possible without you.*

**“Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year; it is the struggle of a lifetime.”**

*– Representative John Lewis*



# North Carolina Justice Center: 2020 *by the numbers*

**25,000** emails sent to lawmakers through our action alerts



**63** poverty law litigation cases that impact hundreds of thousands of clients and indirectly impact every resident of NC



**80** publications produced



**36** online events and trainings viewed by more than 20,000 people have allowed us to advocate for North Carolinians since the pandemic began



**1,761,637** NC Policy Watch readers engaged and understanding the issues and policies affecting our state

