



NORTH CAROLINA

**JUSTICE
CENTER**

**2023-2024
Impact Report**



Building Toward Equity

Drive Policy | Litigate for Justice | Create Change



DEAR FRIENDS,

When I stepped into leadership at the North Carolina Justice Center in 2023, I knew great opportunities and great obstacles lay ahead. Our state and national politics starkly divided and the impacts of the pandemic deeply felt, it seemed like every day held new challenges.

As challenging as things have been, I know there were times in our history that were even more challenging, and people had fewer resources to confront them.

I am reminded of the words of the late John Lewis, *"Ours is not the struggle of one day, one week, or one year. Ours is not the struggle of one judicial appointment or presidential term. Ours is the struggle of a lifetime, or maybe even many lifetimes, and each one of us in every generation must do our part."*

Taking this advice to heart, I remain committed to keeping the long view in our mission to eliminate poverty in North Carolina. In the year ahead, especially as our neighbors in Western North Carolina rebuild following the devastation of Hurricane Helene, we face these struggles with resolve.

As we think about our work, we evaluate how our advocacy, investments, and partnerships are getting the families of North Carolina the support and financial stability they need and deserve.

The pages ahead tell the story of how we've done just that. This year we:

- Won class action lawsuits, canceling debt for thousands of North Carolinians (pg. 6)
- Ensured research-based, community-supported policies remained at the forefront of budget conversations, remaining focused on the Leandro Comprehensive Remedial Plan (pg. 8)
- Educated small business owners on the many benefits of fair chance hiring and second chance initiatives (pg. 10)
- Supported strategic outreach to newly eligible Medicaid recipients, enrolling over half a million people into the program (pg. 12)
- Helped families move through the complicated and backlogged immigration system and filed actions for individuals experiencing delays (pg. 14)
- Organized community members and advocates demanding stronger worker protections and more robust enforcement of labor laws (pg. 16)

As you read, you will see how the NC Justice Center is uniquely poised to make a lasting impact—and we are immensely grateful for your partnership. These efforts and outcomes would not be possible without the amazing support of our donors. I hope you take pride in the progress we've made and feel inspired to imagine with us the long view of lasting justice.

Reggie Shuford,
NC Justice Center Executive Director

BY THE NUMBERS

JULY 1, 2023 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2024



40+

attorneys, researchers,
analysts, advocates,
community organizers,
& support staff



38

impact cases handled



and nearly
1,000

clients directly served



7

class-action lawsuits
led or co-counseled

Won over

\$6

MILLION

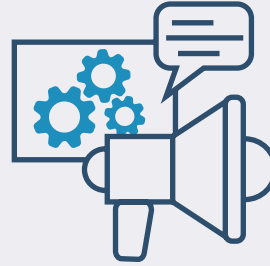
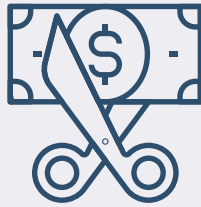
in settlements

and cleared over

\$35

MILLION

in consumer debt



27

publications
produced

500

mentions in the
press



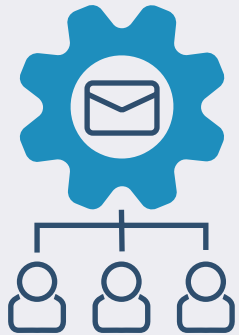
Participated in
advocacy for over

50

bills in the North
Carolina General
Assembly

60,000+

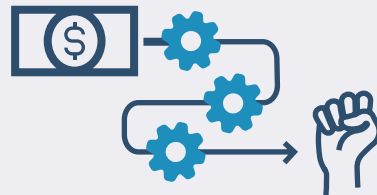
email subscribers connected
to resources



Participated in nearly

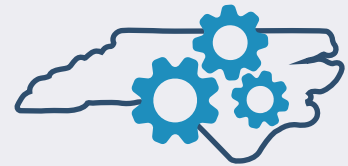
200

community engagement
events and presentations



\$6.2

MILLION+
operating budget



28

years building a thriving
North Carolina

HIGHLIGHTS JULY 2023 - JUNE 2024

AUGUST 2023

Duke Energy and N.C. Utilities Commission agreed to pilot customer assistance program (CAP) reducing energy bills for individuals with low incomes

OCTOBER 2023

Co-authored report revealing the extent to which North Carolina courts are burdening people with increasing debt from criminal court fines and fees

DECEMBER 2023

Co-hosted month-long vigil for freedom and racial justice

FEBRUARY 2024

Secured over \$1 million in settlements for mobile home residents involved in a rent-to-own scheme



OCTOBER 2023

Hosted first Deferred Action for Labor Enforcement clinic

JANUARY 2024

Rebecca Cerese, Policy Advocate, awarded Families USA's 2024 Health Justice Advocate of the Year for Health Coverage

DECEMBER 2023

Medicaid expansion went live

MARCH 2024

Released first "Carolina Changemakers" episode, a podcast by the North Carolina Justice Center

JUNE 2024

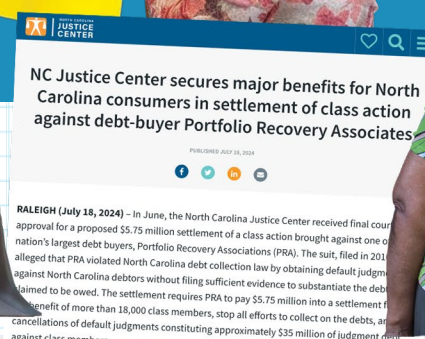
NC Justice Center invited to Governor's Mansion to celebrate 500,000 North Carolinians enrolling in Medicaid

JUNE 2024

Sarah Montgomery, Education & Law Senior Policy Advocate, received Education Award by the Hoke County NAACP

MAY 2024

Published two education briefs in response to shortcomings in the state budget revealing significant budget pressures on N.C. public schools



JUNE 2024

Court approved \$5.75 million settlement, canceling approximately \$35 million of debts for over 18,000 North Carolinians

JUNE 2024

Hosted Unlocking Opportunities: A Second Chance Business Mixer with AJ's Cheesecakes, which led to 5 businesses committing to become second chance employers

APRIL 2024

Co-hosted vigil for Workers' Memorial Day, remembering those who have suffered and died on the job

CONSUMER, HOUSING & ENERGY

WE IMPROVED HOUSING CONDITIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH LOW INCOMES, ENSURING AFFORDABLE UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION, AND PROTECTED NORTH CAROLINIANS FROM HARMFUL AND ABUSIVE BUSINESS PRACTICES.

This year, we continued challenging unfair debt collection practices, rent-to-own scams, and violations of landlord/tenant laws. We advocated for safe, affordable housing and programs that protect and aid tenants, homeowners, and consumers.

We worked directly with several individuals to prevent foreclosure. We focused on victims of predatory lending aimed at people of color and on cases that will expand consumer protections for all North Carolinians.

We worked at the state level to oppose harmful bills and challenge predatory practices, discrimination, and legislation that would weaken consumer protections.

In 2024, lawmakers introduced several bills that could harm tenants by limiting their rights to appeal evictions and making it easier to remove “squatters.” We fought to stop the worst provisions and protect tenants, and we’ll keep opposing attempts to weaken tenant protection laws.

Our efforts this year resulted in over \$70 million in canceled debts and investments in North Carolina’s low-income households.

This included a significant victory in a class-action lawsuit against one of the largest debt buyers in the nation, Portfolio Recovery Associations (PRA), who paid \$5.75 million into a settlement fund and agreed to stop collecting debts for 18,000+ class members, canceling over \$35 million in debts.

The case was made possible by our state’s strong anti-debt buyer legislation—which we advocated for and passed in 2009. Our team has worked to ensure lawmakers uphold these laws, monitoring ways debt buyers engage in collection activity and obtain default judgments.

For the past eight years, our attorneys have defended this case, demanding all efforts to collect the debts be stopped and ensuring lawmakers uphold North Carolina’s consumer protection laws. We will continue litigation to protect consumers and tenants and coordinate with tenant organizers statewide.



NC Justice Center staff stand with class representatives and private attorneys who served as co-counsel after the motion for final approval of the settlement in *Pounds v. Portfolio Recovery Associates, LLC* class-action. From left to right: Carlene McNulty, Jerry Hartzell, Rhonda Hall, Jason Pikler, Iris Pounds, Travis Collum, and Adrian Lapas.

We celebrated another historic victory when the North Carolina Utilities Commission approved North Carolina's first bill payment assistance program. This program provides an automatic bill reduction of \$42 per month to Duke customers who have been enrolled in federal programs for low-income energy

assistance. We are working to continue to improve the program and ensure the benefits and burdens of energy production and consumption are distributed fairly, especially for low-income, marginalized communities, and communities of color.

“ **We not only achieved a favorable outcome but also regained a sense of hope and justice. This victory means so much to me and will significantly improve my life and the lives of countless others affected by PRA's predatory actions.**”

Iris Pounds, a plaintiff in the class action against debt-buyer Portfolio Recovery Associates



EDUCATION & LAW

WE WORKED TO IMPROVE AND REFORM PUBLIC EDUCATION FROM PRE-K TO 12TH SO THAT ALL STUDENTS—ESPECIALLY STUDENTS WHO FACE ADDITIONAL BARRIERS—CAN ACCESS HIGH-QUALITY, EQUITABLE EDUCATION IN A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT.

This year, we continued to advocate for the most pressing issue facing North Carolina’s schools: the urgent need for adequate and equitable funding. Facing a record teacher shortage, learning losses, and widening academic achievement gaps exacerbated by racial and socioeconomic segregation, the 2023 state budget decreased public school funding by two percent.

Meanwhile, the budget tripled funding for a universal voucher program—subsidizing private school enrollments while further exacerbating budget pressures for local public schools.

Policymakers and advocates alike looked to us for critical analysis of this diversion of resources.

Our team responded quickly, publishing reports and policy briefs that critically analyzed these shortcomings. Our research uncovered significant accountability gaps.

We ensured research-based, community-supported policies remained at the forefront of budget conversations, remaining focused on the Leandro Comprehensive Remedial Plan.

While the North Carolina Supreme Court continues to delay the plan’s implementation, we were successful in generating continued coverage and awareness of all that’s at stake in the case. We continued to organize and engage advocates through Communities for the Education of Every Child NC, a coalition of organizations, parents, teachers, and students working to uphold children’s constitutional rights to a fully funded education.

Advocacy days hosted in February and June put further pressure on lawmakers to fully fund the Leandro Plan, end discriminatory school discipline practices, delay the childcare funding cliff, and suspend the use of public funds for private school vouchers.

Despite a tumultuous climate, our efforts have seen results. Lawmakers passed emergency funding for childcare centers, addressing the end of millions of dollars in COVID-era aid and an attempt to increase the number of private school vouchers was not passed.

We connected local advocates to state-level policies impacting their schools, successfully growing the membership of the Every Child NC coalition and building power to prioritize investments in our local public schools.





When we started organizing around Leandro over four years ago, we were worried it might not catch on. Trying to reinvigorate and breathe new life into a decades-long court battle, returning to national standards—would that really move people to act? Is that enough for our restless and creative imaginations?

Well, it turns out \$4.5 billion owed our children and digging us out from dead last place for funding effort feels pretty transformational.

It turns out Leandro is one of, if not the most important and consequential court cases in our state's civil rights legacy—and we have worked hard to make sure we frame it as such, while elevating our movement mentors that represent the heart and soul of what this case is really about.

Brown v. Board turned 70 this year. Leandro turns 30. The fight for justice and education rights existed long before us.



WE ARE EACH CONTRIBUTING TO THE STRUGGLE TO FORCE FORWARD PROGRESS, DISRUPT ENTRENCHED INEQUITIES, REJECT BUSINESS AS USUAL, AND TO KEEP THAT RIGHTEOUS FIRE BURNING."

Top image: Students participate in round table discussion with lawmakers at June Day of Action at the North Carolina General Assembly. | Bottom image: Sarah Montgomery speaks in Raleigh at February Day of Action with the Every Child NC coalition.

SARAH MONTGOMERY, Education & Law Senior Policy Advocate, speaking at Communities for the Education of Every Child NC Day of Action for Education Rights, Feb. 23, 2024

FAIR CHANCE CRIMINAL JUSTICE

WE PARTNERED WITH IMPACTED PEOPLE, CONGREGATIONS, CONCERNED COMMUNITY MEMBERS, ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS, AND DECISION-MAKERS TO MAKE THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM MORE FAIR—FROM ARREST TO REENTRY.

This year, we made significant strides in our mission to dismantle legal and social barriers for individuals with criminal records—while also facing incredible obstacles and harmful policies.

Senate Bill 565 was initially written to fix our state's process for automated expunctions—a critical process for providing equitable access to record clearing. However, the bill was gutted and rewritten in late May, preventing the automatic clearing of not-guilty and dismissed charges. We coordinated with partners across the state, helped plan and execute a lobby day attended by over 500 people, and hosted weekly virtual action hours demanding lawmakers restore the bill.

Our efforts were successful. In June, the Senate and House voted unanimously to pass the restored version of SB 565, improving and restarting automated expunction. Governor Cooper signed the bill, making it law and providing expunction relief to thousands of people.

This moment reinforces the critical importance of growing our Second Chance movement. We continued to publish factsheets, articles, policy briefs, and reports, informing key stakeholders about unfair policies and practices that exclude people with criminal records from essential opportunities and resources. We also sought to create meaningful engagement through nontraditional partnerships and creative advocacy.

We initiated the Fair Chance Fellowship, a 10-week program that supports directly impacted advocates in building policy advocacy skills. The program empowers these activists with facts, policy solutions, and strategies to use their experiences for reform.

We also partnered with members of the business community and beyond to build broad-based coalitions committed to fair chance hiring. We continued to conduct outreach and share resources, equipping businesses with tools to modify their employment policies.



Advocates attended Second Chance Lobby on April 30, 2024. Hosted in partnership with NC Second Chance Alliance, the day addressed laws and policies to expand criminal record relief, end the harmful use of mugshots, and end debt-based driver's license suspensions.

In June, we partnered with AJ's Cheesecakes, a locally owned small business in Durham, to host the Second Chance Business Mixer. The event brought together a diverse array of local business leaders, juvenile-involved individuals, and reentry service providers.

Attendees discussed the many benefits of providing people with records the opportunity to obtain and maintain meaningful employment.

As we see slow progress toward local policy and practice changes, we also remain committed to building long-term strategies to advance criminal legal reform in our state.



No one that works here has any background in baking—that's something they learn—but I have not had one employee that wouldn't qualify as an effective person.

When we interview people, we don't ask about their employment background.

When someone sits down in front of me, that's another human being. I've often said, 'I'm going to start holding you accountable from this moment. Anything behind you is behind you!'

They show up every day and jump right in. That's the loyalty, the amazingness that you get when you take chances.

If you treat your employees, whether they have a background or not, with respect, they're going to follow the example you set for them."

ALI EDWARDS, Owner of AJ's Cheesecakes,
speaking at Second Chance Business Mixer in
June 2024



**EVERYONE DESERVES
A FAIR CHANCE**

#NCforSecondChance

HEALTH ADVOCACY

WE AIMED TO ENSURE ALL NORTH CAROLINIANS—ESPECIALLY PEOPLE WITH LOW INCOMES WHO ARE UNINSURED/UNDERINSURED, PEOPLE OF COLOR, AND THOSE LIVING IN RURAL, UNDER-RESOURCED COMMUNITIES—HAVE MEANINGFUL ACCESS TO QUALITY, AFFORDABLE, EQUITABLE, COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CARE, AND BETTER HEALTH OUTCOMES AND QUALITY OF LIFE.

Our experts in health advocacy continued to celebrate the legislative victory of expanding Medicaid, focusing on strategic outreach and enrollment of the 600,000 newly eligible recipients.

For over a decade, we've partnered with people living in the coverage gap, unable to afford private insurance or qualify for public health coverage. We've centered their stories in our advocacy efforts, connecting policies with lived experiences and building support for systems change.

One of those individuals was Penelope Wingard, a breast cancer survivor who has accumulated thousands of dollars in medical debt. In our efforts to advocate for Medicaid expansion, Penelope's story was featured by several media outlets. When Medicaid expansion went live on Dec. 1, 2023, Penelope was honored as the first person to receive a Medicaid health insurance card from Governor Roy Cooper.

As our focus shifted to education and outreach to maximize Medicaid enrollment, we created resources, including an engaging coloring book with key messages on the importance of Medicaid, how to enroll, training resources for partners, wallet cards, and an illustrated mini magazine. Focusing on populations considered "hard to reach" or "hardly reached," we created these tools with clear and accurate messages about the new coverage. For the first time ever in NC Justice Center history, our Medicaid expansion outreach resources were co-branded with a state government agency, NC Department of Health and Human Services, and printed and mailed to millions of people across the state.

By July, just six months into North Carolina's expansion, over half a million North Carolinians had already enrolled in the program. We continued to center the stories of the many advocates who have shared their experiences of being in the coverage gap, uplifting that these individuals are now able to access



NC Justice Center Staff Rebecca Cerese, Cristina Galvan, and Jen Sharp mail resources to partners about North Carolina's Medicaid expansion program.

comprehensive medical services and fill prescriptions affordably.

Our work to strengthen and protect healthcare access and affordability continued as we began planning a new campaign addressing medical debt in North Carolina. Our state has the fourth-highest percentage of people with medical debt in collections. This debt often prevents people from seeking care. We worked to collect stories that would raise awareness

of this issue and persuade leaders to support policy solutions. We also made some important progress on building support from key decision-makers on this issue.

Although our approach and strategies have changed this year, we remain committed in our fight for healthcare access and health equity as we continue to work to mitigate the harms of medical debt in our state.



“**Today is a day of celebration, and my tears are tears of joy. Medicaid expansion will legitimately save thousands of lives.**”

Back in 2013, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Through the breast cancer and cervical cancer Medicaid program I was able to get treated—but on the last day of my radiation treatment, I lost my coverage. My oncologist wouldn’t even see me anymore because I didn’t have any health insurance. I ended up having an aneurysm surgery twice, losing my vision, and, of course, I lived in fear of the breast cancer coming back. I had to deal with all of this navigation through our healthcare system—without any type of healthcare insurance.

I am one of the lucky people who was auto-enrolled in Medicaid today. I will now be able to go to a doctor to address my back pain that I’ve been having for over a month without worrying about getting further in debt. I’ll be able to get my diagnostic mammogram without spending hundreds of dollars out of pocket that I don’t have.”

Penelope Wingard, breast cancer survivor and healthcare advocate at Dec. 1, 2023, Medicaid expansion press conference

IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE RIGHTS

WE PROTECTED AND DEFENDED THE RIGHTS OF IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES STATEWIDE, PROVIDING LEGAL ASSISTANCE AND ADVOCATING FOR PUBLIC POLICIES THAT IMPROVE THE WELL-BEING OF IMMIGRANT FAMILIES AND PROVIDE THEM WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC SECURITY.

This year, we continued to face a state legislature determined to target and harm immigrants, especially in the areas of criminalization and deportation. While the current makeup of the North Carolina General Assembly is not favorable toward advancing pro-immigrant bills, we employed engagement strategies that are making a difference—both in individual lives and in broader policy debates in Raleigh.

We directly supported immigrants and their families, protecting victims of crime and other abuses and providing legal representation to those seeking legal status.

As part of our goal to help immigrants navigate the complicated immigration system, we have taken on numerous cases this year for clients from all over the world. We're defending two women who fled Guinea to prevent female genital mutilation from being practiced on their daughters, have secured cancelation of removal for a family from Mexico with a severely disabled child, and have reunited families stranded after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. We have also filed mandamus actions against the federal government on behalf of asylum applicants stuck in the backlog of asylum cases, securing approval of asylum applications for clients whose applications have been pending for over six years. We've stood as unwavering advocates in pursuit of safety, security, and dignity for our immigrant clients.

We prioritized high-impact cases with the potential to improve conditions for many immigrants, including settling a class-action lawsuit for mobile home tenants affected by a rent-to-own scheme, securing over \$1 million, new leases, and revised policies.

In addition to direct representation, we sought to protect and defend rights through community education. Through clinics and outreach, we increased awareness of a new form of deportation relief for migrant workers involved in labor disputes against their employers. Our staff members were frequently called upon to provide training to non-profit organizations and government agencies about immigrants' access to benefits.

We monitored compliance with new settlements around court language access and fought for policies ensuring everyone has access to driver's licenses and photo IDs.

Our fully bilingual (Spanish-English) team collaborated with immigrant-led and Latinx groups throughout the state, providing monitoring and policy analysis of state and federal legislative proposals. We created multilingual materials to explain pending legislation and conducted participatory workshops on important policy issues in both English and Spanish.

From the individual to the systemic, our efforts upheld the right of immigrants and refugees to build safe, secure, and thriving futures.





In May, I joined five born-and-raised North Carolinians at the General Assembly to speak against House Bill 10, a bill causing fear in our Latino community. We were nervous, but we encouraged each other with the unspoken words, 'Por nuestra gente—for our people.'

As a leader in my community, I encounter this climate of fear daily. I've helped community members call police because of language barriers and because they don't trust law enforcement due to their immigration status.

As a litigation paralegal and community educator with the NC Justice Center, I help migrants whose rights are violated on our farms and in workplaces across the state. This includes handling human trafficking cases.



WITH EACH CLIENT, THE FIRST THING I MUST DO IS REASSURE THEM THAT FILING A COMPLAINT OR AIDING IN AN INVESTIGATION WILL NOT LEAD TO DEPORTATION."

ANDRESSIA RAMIREZ, Paralegal, Workers' Rights and Immigrant & Refugee Rights

Top image: NC Justice Center staff and summer interns at the North Carolina General Assembly lobbying against House Bill 10. Bottom image: Andressia Ramirez, speaks at the hearing of the NC Senate Judiciary Committee on House Bill 10.

WORKERS' RIGHTS

WE EMPOWERED, ADVOCATED FOR, AND DEFENDED THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS SO THAT ALL JOBS IN NORTH CAROLINA ARE GOOD JOBS, NORTH CAROLINIANS CAN TAKE TIME OFF FROM WORK WHEN THEY NEED IT, AND HAVE DIGNITY WHEN OUT OF WORK.


This year, we continued our efforts to protect North Carolinians from unsafe working conditions and ensure they know their rights in the workplace.

We created new educational materials and conducted outreach to equip low-wage essential workers with information and resources to enforce their rights, improve their workplaces, and influence policymakers. We began a new outreach program, hosting workshops for migrant seafood processing workers and ensuring they knew their rights under the H-2B temporary work visa program.

Because agricultural settings are often isolated and have limited oversight, these workers are especially vulnerable to exploitation. We litigated for agricultural workers, fighting against exploitative practices that perpetuate cycles of poverty—such as wage theft and labor trafficking.

Our efforts helped 36 people get protection through Deferred Action for Labor Enforcement. Through this federal program, these individuals receive protected status and employment authorization, allowing them to participate in labor investigations without fear of retaliation. We hosted two clinics to help groups of people to apply.

We filed complaints for individuals and groups, winning compensation and protections for employees whose rights had been violated.



Clermont Ripley, Co-Director of the Workers' Rights Project (center) supports client at Deferred Action for Labor Enforcement clinic in Mount Olive, N.C. on October 1, 2023.



Advocates stand at a November 2023 vigil highlighting heat stress as a critical issue.

In addition, we advocated on behalf of 16 poultry workers who were fired and initially denied their pensions. We negotiated with their employer to recover their retirements.

In addition to winning monetary damages, our litigation efforts have expanded court interpretations of employees' rights and deterred unlawful employment practices, including cases of sexual harassment.

Despite a landscape that makes policy wins at the state level very challenging, we continued building momentum for a pro-worker agenda through research, advocacy, and media campaigns.

We continued to shed light on systemic biases that undervalue women. Continuing our momentum of two published reports on the challenges facing working people, especially women, in North Carolina, we worked to uplift critical issues like the gender wage gap, occupational



segregation, and the caregiving crisis. We highlighted the stories of individual women advocating for more fair and equitable workplaces. These personal stories and the statistical evidence converged at a State of Working Women Forum hosted in Charlotte in December.

At various press conferences and media events, we advocated for stronger and more robust enforcement of labor laws, including protections against retaliation for reporting abuses and comprehensive support systems that empower workers to assert their rights without fear of reprisal.

As the threats of extreme heat and COVID-19 continued to plague our state, we demanded lawmakers improve worker safety by adopting regulations to protect workers from heat stress and airborne infectious diseases.

We spread awareness of these critical issues through targeted social media campaigns, raising awareness about essential workplace rights and advocating for increased protections.



Ana Pardo, Co-Director of the Workers' Rights Project (far left) stands with Bella-Giavanni Austin, President of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women – Queen City Metropolitan Chapter, Wendy Chun-Hoon, Director of the USDOL Women's Bureau, and Marlaina Guillaume, Southeast Region USDOL Women's Bureau Regional Administrator at the State of Working Women Forum in Charlotte, December 2023.



THESE ARE NOT PROBLEMS WITHOUT SOLUTIONS,

but our state's employers and elected leaders have yet to meaningfully address them. While we continue to pursue policy change in coalition with our partners across the state, our team has also developed tools to support workplace organizing, training working people on their right to take collective action to solve workplace problems and demand better benefits and wages.

We know from looking at other states that when workers are organized, the whole workforce—not to mention the state's economy—benefits. We've been thrilled to see all the new worker-led organizing emerging among workers in the service sector, healthcare, nonprofits, shipping, and in academia. We are hopeful that it's just the beginning."

ANA PARDO, Co-Director of the Workers' Rights Project

Advocates stand at Workers' Memorial Day April 28, 2024, honoring North Carolina workers who lost their lives on the job.



COMMUNICATION HIGHLIGHTS



Page from mini magazine with information about Medicaid expansion, illustrated by Kayla Je'wel Lucas. The booklets were distributed in partnership with NC Department of Health and Human Services.



EPISODE 2

FR. JAVIER ALMENDÁREZ-BAUTISTA

CAROLINA CHANGEMAKERS

A podcast by the North Carolina Justice Center

We created Carolina Changemakers, a podcast featuring interviews with North Carolinians working to make our state a more just and equitable place. Our guests are community leaders, advocates, and organizers working on housing, healthcare, criminal justice reform, education, workers' rights, immigration, and more.

Healing Without Debt

The Medical Debt De-Weaponization Act

Senate Bill 221, the Medical Debt De-Weaponization Act, passed the N.C. Senate in a rare unanimous 48-0 vote in May 2023. If the bill becomes law, it could help provide access of need to everyday health. Conditions making affordable, quality health care.

1 in 5 North Carolinians have medical debt in collections as of 2022.

N.C. has the 4th HIGHEST percentage of people with medical debt in collections among all states.

AT LEAST 30% of all residents have medical debt in collections.

Learn more about how to apply and access the application [here](#).

Terry Belk
She died diving about medical debt. She was actually forced to go back to the hospital because of the bill.

Overcoming his wife's 25 years who died of breast cancer. Chronic debt despite his wife's health insurance, Terry Belk lost control every in his house to settle standing debt with Anthem.

It is very important to talk to a licensed immigration attorney if you think you are eligible.

NOTARIES ARE NOT ATTORNEYS IN THE UNITED STATES, AND YOU SHOULD NOT GET LEGAL ADVICE FROM THEM!

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: PAROLE-IN-PLACE

NORTH CAROLINA JUSTICE CENTER

The new "Keeping Families Together" program that allows some undocumented to apply for legal permanent residence (a green card) without leaving the U.S. is **now open for applications**.

YOU MAY QUALIFY FOR THIS PROGRAM IF YOU:

- Entered the United States without inspection
- Have lived in the U.S. for 10 or more years as of June 17, 2024
- Have been married to a U.S. citizen as of June 17, 2024
- Have not been convicted of disqualifying crimes

Learn more about how to apply and access the application [here](#).

It is very important to talk to a licensed immigration attorney if you think you are eligible.

NOTARIES ARE NOT ATTORNEYS IN THE UNITED STATES, AND YOU SHOULD NOT GET LEGAL ADVICE FROM THEM!

ACCESS TO BENEFITS IS ESSENTIAL for families in North Carolina to thrive

For over 25 years, a policy passed in 1996 has arbitrarily denied lawfully present immigrant families access to critical health and social services.

Over 100,000 people in North Carolina are excluded from these vital benefits.

The LIFT the BAR Act would repeal the unfair restrictions on lawfully present immigrants eligibility for public benefits, aligning the federal safety net's eligibility standards with the Affordable Care Act.

Support the LIFT the BAR Act

NORTH CAROLINA JUSTICE CENTER

We continued to push our publication style to highly visual and easily skimmable formats.

ON JUNE 17TH, 1943, BLACK WOMEN FROM LOCAL 22 IGNITED A FLAME OF CHANGE BY LEADING A COURAGEOUS LABOR STRIKE. THEIR UNWAVERING DETERMINATION SPARKED 7 YEARS OF RELENTLESS ACTIVISM FOR LABOR AND CIVIL RIGHTS IN WINSTON-SALEM, NC.

NORTH CAROLINA JUSTICE CENTER

PIEDMONT LEAF TOBACCO CO. INC

We leveraged social media to elevate historical events, such as the anniversary of the courageous labor strike of United Tobacco Workers Local 22.



GENEROUS DONORS

FROM JANUARY 1, 2023 - AUGUST 30, 2024

WE THANK OUR INCREDIBLE GROUP OF DONORS WHO CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THIS WORK AND THOSE WHO JOINED US FOR THE FIRST TIME. WE WOULD LIKE TO RECOGNIZE THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS, FUNDING PARTNERS, FOUNDATIONS, ASSOCIATIONS, AND BUSINESSES.

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Anonymous* (2) | Honorable Cynthia Ball & David Aspnes | Linda & Mitchel Bollag* | Shelley Brown |
| James Aaron | Donald Ball | Jack Bookman | Jessica & Steven Brueggeman |
| Irwin Abrams | Elizabeth Barnes | Magdalene & William Bordley* | Kim Brugh |
| Nancy Ackermann Cole & Don Cole | Erin Barnes | Deborah Bosley & Martin Settle | Elizabeth Bruno* |
| AFL-CIO of NC | James Barrett, Jr | Linda Bossert | Julia Buckner |
| Annie & Honorable John Ager* | Jim Barrett | Stella Boswell & Craig Heinly* | Larry Bumgardner |
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to empower families and dismantle obstacles to economic mobility, NC Justice Center is not only uplifting communities but also fostering a more just and equitable North Carolina.”

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