



# ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT 2021

ONE VILLAGE. ONE VISION. ONE VOICE.

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# COMMUNITY

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## Mississippi Black Leadership Institute

Building on the successes of the past 9 years, the Mississippi Black Leadership Institute’s focus in FY 2021 was to promote an agenda of leadership development to achieve equity and justice for vulnerable and marginalized Mississippians – resulting in reaching even more communities with hope and sustainable change. However, we were hit hard by the impact of COVID-19, leaving us with no option but to go virtual. Yet, the work of MBLI continued through novel and unconventional approaches.

MBLI seized this unprecedented moment to set itself up for success. We could have continued business as usual and missed an opportunity or seek to impact more communities through innovative ways and continue leading with intentionality and purpose to evolve. We chose the latter.

Twenty-two cohort members completed the program in April, while 30 new applicants took their place in resolving to take responsibility for being community change agents in August. This was not a superpower that they possessed, but, an instinctive response to answer a call.

In order to ensure sustainability, MBLI has worked intensely exploring rationales for and against government policy, the economic consequences of public policy and providing a strong ethical foundation for decision-making, and the initiation, formulation and implementation of public policy.

Community action plans continue to be underway. Our current cohort project goals and objectives allows them to look big picture at community-based issues and provide solutions that can be accomplished in the coming months that will be sustainable for years to come.

The Mississippi Black Leadership Institute will continue to provide our leaders with a unique skillset they will need to drive them and the communities of which they live, work, play, and worship forward.

# COMMUNITY CONTINUED

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## Electric Cooperative Leadership Institute

As 2021 comes to an end, Energy Democracy has structured a new wave of leaders to organize and educate their communities on how to have a sustainable electric cooperative that provides an effective democratic process. Over the course of three months, our focus has been the revamping of energy democracy by developing a three-phase process that allows member-owners to become not only educated but equipped with the knowledge on how to run an effective campaign. These phases were introduced in the last class of Electric Cooperative Leadership Institute comprised of the past and new class of ECLI in November 2021. Five electric cooperatives gathered at Tougaloo to compose a 3 month to a year campaign as well as developing Scorecards that generates a grading system on how actively electric cooperatives are communicating information and working with member owners. In the upcoming months, we will be preparing for the class of 2022 virtually. Applications will be available soon!



## Hollis Watkins Muhammad Leadership Institute

In 2021, The Hollis Watkins Muhammad Leadership Institute has been able to provide tools and training to 10 individuals throughout the year. Each individual has been able to connect the development obtained during the program to their fields of study, and the ability organize within their communities. Many participants have been able to expand their knowledge base by exploring new found interest areas. This year the program has been able to provide this great training experience to students throughout the state as well as providing skills and training to students as far as Tennessee.

The Hollis Watkins Muhammad Leadership Institute continues to identify the next generation of activist by providing individuals with the necessary tools to succeed. This internship program gives colleges students, and recent graduates the opportunity to explore the components of how non-profits operate, knowledge base to mount campaigns, and how to create and maintain operation of programs for social development.

# EDUCATION

In the past year, partnership has been a keyword in our education focused works and projects. At One Voice, we believe working with our partners toward a common goal is the most effective way to serve our community. In 2021, we were afforded the opportunity to be named as a fiscal agent for the community schools project spearheaded by Our JPS. This project will look at community schools' models nationally and, in the past, to foster a community-based approach to education in Jackson.

As we continued to feel the effects of a global pandemic, we also teamed up with Our JPS and the Institute for Democratic Education in America (IDEA) to plan a series of dialogue circles for Jackson Public Schools' parents. These parent dialogue circles allowed parents to express their thoughts and provide a space for them to talk about parenting through the pandemic. We will be able to use the insights from these conversations as we began to launch our parent leadership institute in the near future.

Throughout 2021, we continued to work with the Mississippi Corporal Punishment Coalition to protect the rights of children against excessive and unnecessary punishment. We signed on and fully supported the Protecting Our Students in Schools Act of 2021 introduced by Representative A. Donald McEachin, Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, and Sen. Chris Murphy and cosponsored by many Representatives and Senators including Rep. Bennie G. Thompson (MS-02).

Just as we championed children's rights, we also advocated for teachers. We

participated in the teacher pay hearing in September by submitting written statements. Here is an excerpt from the letter sent in by Sherry Wright, One Voice Program Director.

...Now more than ever, it is imperative that we show educators across the state that we "see" them and we value their effort and commitment to the education system. Through the pandemic, they have consistently stepped up and rose to the daily challenges faced, from creating lesson packets and conducting virtual class sessions to going out of their way to drop off meals or provide emotional support to students coping with their new reality. Not to mention this school year many of our educators are risking their health and the well-being of their families as they show up for in-person class sessions and address the impact of learning loss. Our teachers deserve better and we have the opportunity to make it happen. I hope you will strongly consider this and make the right decision to increase teacher pay.

We also developed an advocacy campaign to assist our community partners in submitting their comments to the committee.

# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

## Voting

In 2021, voters in cities and towns across Mississippi were facing what's considered the most important election for Mississippi voters. One Voice wanted to assure that voters had the information they needed to participate in the elections and have their voices heard. Voters would be choosing their Mayor and Alderman the decision-makers on education reform, police department budget, local infrastructure, and other local concerns for their community for the next four years.

One Voice operates an election protection hotline where voters can call to get answers to voting questions or concerns. The 1-888-601-VOTE hotline is live several days before each Election Day. When voters went to the polls to exercise their right to vote in the 2021 elections, One Voice was able to help with any obstacles they faced. Twenty trained volunteers answered the incoming calls from polling issues, voter ID, precinct changes, and other issues. One Voice ensured that the ballot was cast and would be counted.

To increase voter turnout at the polls, One Voice collaborated with Mississippi Civic Engagement Roundtable and Mississippi Black Women Roundtable to conduct a non-partisan Get-out-the-Vote (GOTV) door-to-door non-contact canvassing and phone banking. The Voter Action Network (VAN) is a voter database used to identify voters and targeted areas. Each canvasser was supplied with packets that included masks, hand sanitizer, water, snacks, a dog whistle, and door hangers informing them of the elections and going to the polls on

election day. Canvassers hit the streets in twos in Hattiesburg, MS, Clinton, MS, DeSoto County, Pike County McComb, MS, and Stone County. Sixty volunteers participated in the canvassing and phone banking. The door hangers were placed on over 4200 homes and made over 1800 phone calls.

## Redistricting

While One Voice had its fair share of challenges in 2021, the staff still managed to press forward, working remotely to accomplish One Voice's mission and goals. The COVID-19 pandemic continued to cause an impact, and with the rising numbers, One Voice was determined to continue its programs of work with moving Mississippi forward. To accomplish the task, One Voice ensured that the civic engagement roundtable was successful, voters' rights were being protected, an increase in civic participation at the polls, addressing policy issues, and fighting for fair representation and maps during the redistricting cycle. Because of

# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT<sub>CONTINUED</sub>

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these projects we undertook in 2021, One Voice can positively look toward our future. With Mississippi's history of unfair districts and voter suppression, One Voice relied on community involvement as the key to tackle the issues.

With the release of the 2020 Census data, redistricting was a very hot topic kicking off the 2021 year. Redistricting is a once-a-decade process where boundaries of electoral districts are redrawn to align with the change in population from data collected by the 2020 Census. For many, this was the first time they participated in the redistricting process. These district lines drawn are the lines that will be in place for the next ten years. If there is ever a time for a change, now is the time.

One Voice knows that with opportunity comes challenges, and with the pandemic affecting our in-person meetings and how we communicate, we have enough technology available to let communities know what was happening in the state. We relied on meetings being live-streamed with the use of social media to get the word out.

To increase community awareness and involvement, the One Voice redistricting plan included outreach, research, education and training, and participation in public hearings. One Voice conducted several redistricting overview training and presentations across the state to ensure that people understood the importance of redistricting and how to get involved. The training looked at districts and shared with communities what was best for their community showing the shift in population, if the elected representatives will change, how to draw a map that meets the criteria, with a focus on keeping communities as a whole, the VRA, and how to participate in the public hearings.

When communities are aware, and have a better understanding, together they become a voice in the decision-making process for their community.

## Redistricting by the Numbers

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- 11- Community Trainings with 350 community members touching 36 counties
- 2 - Mississippi Black Caucus Sessions
- 3-MBC-LEO Session
- 4-Mapping Trainings
- 24 - Public Comments
- 3 - Written Comments

# CRIMINAL JUSTICE

In 2021, we worked to get more people engaged and informed about the various impacts of our justice system.

Earlier in the year we co-authored and released the “Our Voice, Our Vote” report with our partners at Mississippi Votes and the Advancement Project. In this report we detailed the impact of felony disenfranchisement in Mississippi and provided policy suggestions that you help better our justice system and allow more disenfranchised individuals their rights to vote.

Alongside the work with the report, we have also been identifying and working alongside disenfranchised individuals to help them in the process of gaining back their right to vote. We’ve identified over 50 individuals and have been working alongside them in this process.

We’ve also educated our communities on the importance of serving on a jury with

a session called “The Juror Project”. In this session, we talked about how jurors are selected, and why they’re an importance aspect and have tremendous impact on our Justice system.

Last year, S.B. 2795 was also passed to help expand parole eligibility. The bill becoming a law was an amazing step forward for helping decrease our prison population and advancing even more criminal justice reforms in the state.

In 2022, our team is looking forward to continuing the work that can help reform our Criminal Justice system and benefit our communities locally.



# POLICY

Our 2021 Fiscal Policy campaign centered on promoting a more equitable Mississippi tax and budget system. Due to the looming threat of income tax elimination during the 2021 Legislative Session, we focused most of our efforts on educating lawmakers and community members about the harmful effects of the legislation. Working in concert with our national partners, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and Institute of Taxation and Economic Policy, we developed a number of outreach materials to spread awareness about the tax cut and we disseminated information to coalitions, religious organizations, other advocacy groups, and the masses through earned media coverage.

After the legislative session, we organized a lawmaker briefing. During the briefing, state lawmakers and national partners learned more about the tax cut. Then, in the summer, One Voice's Policy Analyst participated in the Mississippi Legislature's Tax Study Hearing. In preparation for the hearing, One Voice prepared an outreach toolkit for its network of partners and participated in several community-oriented discussions about the importance of equitable tax systems for working families in the state. Media coverage from the hearings focused on the true impact of income tax elimination on lower-and middle-income Mississippians.

In addition to our work on the state income tax, our tax and budget work in 2021 centered on analyses of the state budget, and the policy team commenced work on the organization's Earned Income Tax Credit campaign.

Aside from our tax and budget work, our policy campaign continued efforts to monitor and provide guidance on federal pandemic relief aid. We developed

blog posts on the Treasury Department's guidance on incoming federal aid, we explained the impact of Governor Tate Reeves' decision to end federal unemployment benefits, and we produced a report on the American Rescue Plan Act's Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds.

We also supported work in other policy areas. For our advocacy around Medicaid expansion, we hosted a discussion on Medicaid Expansion and participated in informal and formal coalition meetings that support the expansion of Medicaid in Mississippi.

In addition, we supported One Voice's education, criminal justice, voting, and leadership programs. And we also supported our community allies, partner organizations, and state lawmakers in advocating for a better Mississippi.

# HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

200

Convened over a dozen of redistricting overview workshops with over 200 participants that included community members, elected officials, and grassroots



50

We've identified over 50 individuals who've been disenfranchised and are in the process of guiding them to regain their right to vote.

4200

GOTV Efforts: Canvassing happened in 3 cities (Clinton, Hattiesburg, and McComb) and 3 counties (DeSoto, Pike, and Stone). Over 4200 Homes were canvassed with over 1800 phone calls being made.



18

We were mentioned in 18 Policy-related online/printed articles



22

MBLI Graduates in April 2021 -> 30 New Members in August 2021



10

interns learned new experiences in policy and community organizing

## SOCIAL MEDIA

### TWITTER

Impressions  
118,609

Followers Gained  
272

### FACEBOOK

Impressions  
443,774

Followers Gained  
227

### INSTAGRAM

Impressions  
25%

Followers Gained  
155

## Outreach / Earned Media

We were mentioned in 38 online/printed articles

- 19 Fiscal Policy based
- 9 Criminal Justice based
- 4 Voting based
- 3 Energy Democracy based and 3 general articles about our work

We hosted or were a part of 22 Meetings/Speaking Engagements

- 9 based around our Policy work]
- 13 based around our Voting work

One  
Voice