

michigan united

JUSTICE AND DIGNITY.

IMPACT REPORT



2020-2022

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

KEN WHITTAKER

JUSTICE AND DIGNITY

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Over the past few years, we have navigated unprecedented challenges and transformative events. Despite these tumultuous times, our spirit of unity and perseverance has remained strong. As the world grappled with the pandemic, altering the fabric of our lives, we at Michigan United have been heartened by an extraordinary display of resilience and solidarity in communities.

In a society often perceived as deeply divided, both politically and socially, our work over the last few years paints a remarkably different picture—one of collective strength and determination. With over a decade of experience in community organizing, I have always believed in the power of people coming together to build a stronger and more just community. This belief has only been reinforced as we've navigated these challenging times together.

Our journey from 2020 to 2023 is a testament to what can be achieved when we unite around our mutual self-interests. We've confronted challenges head-on, from holding corporations accountable for environmental injustices to combating attempts to disenfranchise voters. Our relentless advocacy has led to inclusive healthcare policies for undocumented immigrants during the pandemic and the recognition of racism as a public health crisis throughout the state of Michigan. Victories like these are powerful indicators that we create real, lasting change when we organize and build power together.

Thank you for being an integral part of this journey. Your support, involvement, and belief in our mission fuel our efforts at Michigan United. We will continue to build a bigger "we," realizing a united Michigan that stands strong in the face of adversity and strives for justice and dignity for all.

What follows is a small fraction of the work we've done. **Explore our interactive report and discover the compelling narratives of our MU Storytellers at www.miunited.org.**

With gratitude and determination,

Ken Whittaker

Executive Director





We believe it is
OUR MISSION
to work together to
build the power we
need to win the justice
our communities deserve.



Faith in Justice

The newly established Faith in Justice team at Michigan United, staffed predominantly by clergy, has become a beacon of social justice and civic engagement. Our team has been at the forefront of Michigan United's response to critical social issues, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the fight for reproductive rights, and the movement to recognize racism as a public health crisis.

As a steering committee member of End Gun Violence Michigan, we've spearheaded some of Michigan's most significant gun safety legislation. This journey from bill to legislation showcases Michigan United's dedication to creating safer communities.



During the Good Time ballot initiative, our team led Redemption Sunday, which saw participation from over 50 households of faith. Our event during Second Chance Month was pivotal in promoting redemption and advancing the conversation around the Good Time ballot initiative.

The Faith in Justice team prioritized the Reproductive Freedom for All ballot initiative. Our team was integral in gathering signatures and educating the public on why people of faith support reproductive freedom. Team members took center stage as public spokespersons, highlighting our ongoing commitment to advocating for reproductive rights.

Immigrant Rights

In **2020**, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, our Immigrant Rights team demonstrated agility and responsiveness to the unique needs of the immigrant community. We successfully advocated for the inclusion of undocumented immigrants in emergency Medicare coverage for COVID-19 testing and treatment. Our team organized **12 virtual Justice Assemblies** in multiple languages, two virtual candidate forums for State House and Congressional districts, and a virtual presidential debate commentary in partnership with **La Explosiva**. Additionally, we held two multilingual Virtual Voting Rights Town Halls and disseminated instructional videos in Spanish on absentee voting and voter registration.

In **2021**, we joined forces with the Fair Immigration Reform Movement, influencing national immigration policy. **Our efforts led to President Biden rescinding the Muslim Ban, halting the construction of the border wall, fully reinstating DACA, and undoing numerous anti-immigrant executive orders.** We conducted over **12 legislative meetings** to lobby for crucial immigration bills in



Congress, including the Build Back Better Bill, The DREAM and PROMISE Act, The U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021, and the Citizenship for Essential Workers Bill.

In **2022**, we joined the Home is Here Campaign, advocating for using Budget Reconciliation to pass immigration legislation. We focused on updating the Registry data for **over 7 million immigrants**, pushing for the DREAM and PROMISE Act, the Farmworker Modernization Act, the repeal of Title 42, and opposing the Consequence Delivery Systems at the border. We hosted **nine legislative meetings** with U.S. Senators Peters and Stabenow and Representatives Haley Stevens and Elissa Slotkin, along with three public events to address the concerns of the immigrant community.

By **2023**, we intensified our campaign to pass the DRIVE SAFE Bills in the Michigan Legislature. Our team attended several coffee hours with legislators, held over **20 legislative meetings**, and organized a press conference on Capitol Day to advocate for the Drive Safe Bills. We collected video testimonies to support this cause. Additionally, we co-hosted an immigrant youth conference in Grand Rapids, focusing on voting rights, educational opportunities, and legal services.



Justice for Black and Brown Communities



The thing that got me interested in Michigan United was the fact that we were fighting for policies that were gonna improve the lives of people in our community. The people that normally get overlooked.



Three members of Michigan United, some of whose work precedes the formation of MU, were asked to share their unique story of how they came to join the organization, and why they believe in the work we're doing. MU Organizing Director Adonis Flores shares his early advocacy work as a volunteer rooted in immigrant rights, and the importance of preparing the next generation of leaders to continue the fight for justice in our communities.

IMMIGRANT EMPOWERMENT

2020

Over 100 immigration applications were filed, and 20+ navigators were trained.

2021

85+ applications, 5+ navigators trained, and additional know-your-rights trainings.

2022

A significant jump to 186+ filings, 11+ navigators trained, and expanded educational offerings.

COMMUNITIES SERVED:

Metro Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Kalamazoo



2021: VOICES FOR VACCINES

A federally funded public health initiative
to counter misinformation and promote
vaccine accessibility.

76,852

Doors Knocked

470,768

Calls Made

51,533

Conversations

COMMUNITIES SERVED:

Detroit, Lansing and Flint



2022: ELECTORAL DEEP CANVASS

A continuing initiative that aims to unite a diverse, multigenerational, multiracial working-class population across political ideologies.

210,000

Calls Made

3,205

Doors Knocked

21%

Phone Movement Rate

39%

Door Movement Rate

COMMUNITIES SERVED:
Statewide



Full Access for All People to American Rights

“

We have ... dedicated staff ... working to empower people in the community, so that people might know their rights... might advocate for their rights... might speak to make our society more just. ... for all people.



Three members of Michigan United, some of whose work precedes the formation of MU, were asked to share their unique story of how they came to join the organization, and why they believe in the work we're doing. Pastor Jack Eggleston, a Lutheran pastor for over 43 years, shares his work in the immigrant community, including free English Language courses in partnership with MU and Unity Lutheran Church Southgate.

Healthcare and Public Health

Tackling the Overdose Crisis Head-On

In **2020**, an overdose crisis in the middle of a pandemic challenged us to respond urgently. We organized two critical listening sessions with those affected and offered a platform for voices often unheard. Our team participated in strategy meetings and hosted Capitol Week lobby meetings with legislators Jon Hoadley, Joe Bellino, and Phil Green. Our meetings launched research into community-wide accessibility of Narcan boxes, taking a proactive step toward harm reduction.

Voices For Vaccines – A Pioneering Public Health Campaign

In **2021**, we teamed with **Michigan Voices** and partners in 'Voices For Vaccines,' a federally funded public health initiative to counter misinformation and promote vaccine accessibility. Our effort led us to knock on **76,852 doors**, dial **470,768 calls**, and successfully facilitate **51,533 conversations** in Lansing, Flint and Detroit. We significantly bolstered vaccine confidence within these communities.

The Inception of the Care Over Cost Campaign

We launched the 'Care Over Cost' campaign, with healthcare costs soaring. We wanted to put patient care over company profits. This campaign saw the organization and execution of **12 community healthcare events** statewide, drawing **393 attendees**. Our volunteers' dedication shone through as they canvassed with **10 teams**, passing out **1,500 informational brochures** and conducting **eight text banks**. The impact of our efforts was evident in the **405 healthcare conversations** and the attendance of **32 community members** at the 'Make Meds Affordable' speak-out event. A pivotal achievement was the collection of **1,400 signatures** for the 'Reproductive Freedom for All' initiative. We canvassed **2,800 doors** to secure its passage.

Healthcare Navigators

Our Healthcare Navigators were relentless. They hosted **25 to 30 health events** monthly and conducted over **100 home visits** to support homebound and disabled Michiganders. They managed **117 vaccine clinics**, administering **850 vaccines**. Our nursing staff provided valuable medical insight through **35 webinars and podcasts**. They conducted 500 blood pressure screenings with our **24 community partners**, impacting **over 15,000 community members**.

Advancing the Care Over Cost Mission

As we moved into **2023**, our focus shifted with the launch of the 'Care Over Cost Navigators' set for September. This initiative guided individuals through the maze of insurance claims. We're advocating for the revolutionary Micare Act to cement universal healthcare, urging political leaders to reject private insurance donations, and championing stringent oversight of health insurance metrics. Building a robust leadership base deeply invested in health advocacy is central to our values.



Legal Services: Championing Immigrant Empowerment

Advocacy and Legal Representation

Michigan United's Legal Services has been a beacon of hope for immigrants seeking legal help. Accredited by the Department of Justice, our Legal Clinic has filed over **371 immigration applications** from **2020 to 2022**, ensuring families remain together. We issued over **100 power of attorney letters** to prevent children from entering foster care if their parents face deportation.

Education as a Pathway to Citizenship

Empowering immigrants through education, we have conducted citizenship and English Language classes to strengthen community ties and foster civic participation. With three

cycles of citizenship classes each year and naturalization workshops in major Michigan cities, we have set many on the path to becoming informed, active citizens.

Expanding Outreach

We've increased our capacity to serve by training more than **36 immigrants** as community navigators, equipping them to guide their neighbors through legal issues. Our efforts ensure strong support within the community, with our navigators serving as the first point of contact for many immigrants.

Strategic Expansion & Impactful Education

Our strategic presence across Detroit, Grand



Rapids and Kalamazoo, coupled with virtual platforms, has removed barriers. In **2022**, we provided two English Language classes and citizenship education cycles, reaching people eager to engage with their community.

A Three-Year Snapshot of Empowerment

Over the past three years, our Legal Services outreach and impact grew exponentially:

- **2020:** Over **100 immigration applications** were filed, and **20+ navigators** were trained.
- **2021:** **85+ applications, 5+ navigators** trained, and additional know-your-rights trainings.
- **2022:** A significant jump to **186+ filings, 11+ navigators** trained, and expanded

educational offerings.

Our approach continues to empower immigrants to become active, informed people in their communities. With a future where immigrant communities thrive and flourish, we continue offering much-needed services to protect, educate, and empower.

Throughout **2020-2022**, Michigan United Legal Services provided vital resources for immigrants, emphasizing the importance of legal support, education, and community empowerment. By tying legal services and civic engagement, we create a foundation for a thriving immigrant community that enjoys their rights and citizenship privileges.



Transformative Justice: Amplifying Equity, Advocating Change

Pandemic Response and Racial Equity

During the years marked by the COVID pandemic, our Transformative Justice team was at the forefront of addressing racial inequities. We were vocal and influential in advocating for the needs of those incarcerated. Our advocacy was instrumental in the implementation of a comprehensive COVID-19 response plan across Michigan's jails and prisons, aiming to mitigate the spread among the incarcerated population and staff, who are disproportionately affected by neglect.

Groundbreaking Advocacy in Kalamazoo

In the face of civil unrest and police brutality, our team in Kalamazoo stood firm, mobilizing support and demanding accountability during the protests of 2020. Our efforts exposed the

unequal treatment of George Floyd protestors compared to the leniency shown to the ProudBoys group. Public pressure led to changes within the local police force, including firing a Police Chief and increasing police accountability.

Innovating Justice with Participatory Defense

With the launch of the Participatory Defense program, we embraced new strategies to change the trajectory of youth in Michigan's criminal justice system. Our approach was validated when we successfully advocated for a minor, preventing unfair criminal charges. That case proved our commitment to community-centric defense, aiming to protect the future of our youth.



Propelling the Good Time Initiative Forward

The Good Time Initiative symbolized our battle against mass incarceration. Although the initiative did not make the ballot in 2022, the campaign heightened public and legislative awareness regarding sentencing reforms. We are currently championing three bills in the Michigan legislature that continue this fight for systemic change.

Fostering a Future of Justice

Our Transformative Justice team continues to work for a future where equity prevails within the criminal justice system. Our mission extends beyond governance into the communities we serve. Every action and every voice can merge into a powerful force for change. Our initiatives remain rooted in pursuing a justice system that rehabilitates, restores, and respects the dignity of every individual.

Helping Immigrants Become Tomorrow's Leaders



Immigrants come from different countries. ... speak different languages. ... have different cultures. So I tried to create a liaison between the police and immigrants to ... work together, instead of ... against each other.



Three members of Michigan United, some of whose work precedes the formation of MU, were asked to share their unique story of how they came to join the organization, and why they believe in the work we're doing. Immigrant Rights Organizer Rose Mayan shares her desire to "offer more" for the communities she served is what led her to join MU, highlighting the innovative ways we are working to improve the quality of life and futures of immigrant youth.



Emergence and Mission

The African American Leadership Council (AALC) emerged from the profound impact of the George Floyd tragedy, symbolizing a renewed commitment to racial justice. Comprising passionate staff and leaders of Michigan United, the AALC has since been at the forefront of addressing systemic racial issues, especially amidst the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

African American Leadership Council (AALC)

Pivotal Role During the Pandemic

With Detroit as the epicenter of the pandemic in Michigan, the AALC took a leadership role in orchestrating crucial conversations around COVID-19, particularly addressing the intersecting issues of race and public health. These dialogues, which gained global attention, included sessions with African-American doctors discussing vaccine hesitancy. This initiative led to notable outcomes, such as facilitating significant farm aid to Detroit and feeding thousands during the crisis.

Racism as a Public Health Crisis

A significant focus of the AALC has been the 'Racism as a Public Health Crisis' campaign.

Our persistent advocacy led to **over 25 cities, counties, and institutions** adopting policies that recognize and aim to address this crisis. This campaign's success was marked by Governor Gretchen Whitmer's declaration, making Michigan a leading state in formally acknowledging and acting upon the public health impact of racism.

Local Government Collaboration

In an impactful collaboration with the **City of Westland**, the AALC influenced the declaration of Racism as a 'Public Health Crisis.' This has led to the establishment of an Office for Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion in Westland, ensuring a commitment to these values in city governance and operations.

Advocacy for Black Immigrant Women

The AALC women have brought critical issues to the forefront, including the illegal sterilization of Black immigrant women in detention centers. This advocacy underscores the AALC's commitment to intersectional justice, addressing race, immigration status, and women's rights.

Educational Initiatives and Legislative Support

Through educational programs during Black History Month and Juneteenth, the AALC has engaged communities in discussions on voting literacy and the power of organizing. These programs have been instrumental in integrating the experiences and challenges of the Black immigrant population into the broader narrative of African-American history and rights. The AALC's efforts were also pivotal in enacting Michigan's Crown Act, which addresses discrimination based on hair – a significant step in legislative progress toward racial equality.

Outlook and Ongoing Commitment

As we look forward, the AALC remains dedicated to its mission of dismantling systemic racial barriers and advocating for equitable treatment of African Americans and Black immigrants. We are committed to creating lasting change and a more just society for all through continued dialogue, education, and policy advocacy.



Environmental Justice

2020: A Victory Landmark

In **2020**, our Environmental Justice team achieved a significant victory after an **8-year campaign** against Marathon Petroleum in Detroit's Boynton neighborhood. The company agreed to a **\$5 million** buy-out for residents affected by its refinery's toxic emissions. This victory was spearheaded by **Emma Lockridge**, a retired reporter, who organized her community through protests, divestment campaigns, and crucial negotiations, compelling Marathon to create a buffer zone for healthier living conditions.

Advancing Climate Justice and Policy Influence

The year **2021** was marked by our extensive advocacy for the Build Back Better (BBB) agenda, particularly the climate justice and clean energy provisions. Key events included:

- Build Back Better Video Campaign with Rep. Dingell, Sen. Peters, Rep. Stevens, Rep. Levin, and countless state legislators.
- Rally with high-profile elected officials like Sen. Sanders and Rep. Tlaib, gaining substantial media coverage.
- Strategic lobby meetings with legislative representatives like Rep. Slotkin and Sen. Peters, focusing on climate, healthcare, and citizenship policies.
- People's Action Build Back Better Corporate Accountability Day and Climate Action Rally in Flint and Lansing, amplifying the call for climate accountability.
- Climate Roundtable with White House Cabinet member Brenda Mallory, chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, and influential policy leaders and organizers.
- Detroit and Lansing Rallies advocating climate justice with critical members of Congress.
- Townhall with Rep. Tlaib and Rep. Dingell, featuring a panel in which Executive Director Ken Whittaker and Organizing Director Adonis Flores were participants.

We also launched a statewide campaign to remove legislative barriers to municipal decarbonization, partnering with diverse organizations and academic partners.

Expanding Coalition and Community Engagement

In **2022**, we saw remarkable growth in our coalition, particularly in Flint, with the Stop Ajax Coalition opposing the construction of an Ajax Cement plant in a predominantly Black neighborhood. We also initiated Detroit's first Youth Climate Debate involving **eight high schools**, fostering environmental awareness among youth.



Deep Canvass

Vision and Theory of Change

Since initiating the Hometown Voices Rural Campaign in **2019**, Michigan United's Deep Canvass initiative has evolved, extending our reach across Michigan. Our program aims to unite a diverse, multigenerational, multiracial working-class population across political ideologies. The mission is dual-fold: to cultivate an engaged, progressive, multiracial base in Michigan and to challenge and mitigate the growing racial and political divisions threatening our democracy.

Notable Events and Collaborations

- The Deep Canvass Electoral Town Hall with activist and actor Matthew Lillard significantly amplified our reach and engagement.
- Our strategies and collaborations across various campaigns, including Environmental Justice, Immigrant Rights, and Transformative Justice, have created a robust support system, utilizing deep canvassing as a vital tool for persuasion and community activation.

Metrics and Impact

- Our approach in the Climate Justice conversations yielded a **12% shift** in attitude, opinion, or intended action, and the Immigrant Rights discussions saw a **46% shift**, underscoring the effectiveness of our deep canvassing techniques.





Strategic Approach and Key Achievements

2020 Presidential Election Deep Canvass: Our approach harnessed race and class-conscious messaging, empathetic and nonjudgmental listening, and narrative exchange, significantly influencing voter perspectives. This program scaled **up to 1.5 million calls**, facilitating **over 32,000 conversations**, leading to a **50.6% movement rate** and a **27.4% persuasion rate** in voter opinions.

2021 Deep Canvass Listening Campaign: We delved into rural communities, uncovering critical issues, particularly healthcare and mental health services. This phase included **281 member-led conversations** and multiple community events, sparking grassroots advocacy for significant policy changes.

2022 Climate Justice Deep Canvass: This segment of our program achieved **7,916 dials** and **101 conversations**, markedly shifting community perspectives on critical climate justice issues and federal legislation.

2022 Immigrant Rights Deep Canvass: Centering on the "DRIVE SAFE" bills, this campaign resulted in **over 60,000 dials** and **884 conversations**, significantly enhancing community support and empathy for immigrant rights.

2022 Electoral Deep Canvass: Our campaign included **over 210,000 dials** and **3,205 door knocks**, leading to a **21% phone movement rate** and a **39% door movement rate**, demonstrating the effectiveness of our deep canvassing in shifting voting intentions and raising awareness on critical issues.



We're working for an equitable and sustainable world that reflects OUR VALUES of economic & racial justice.



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