

# THE KEYSTONE

A BIENNIAL NEWSLETTER  
PUT PEOPLE FIRST! PENNSYLVANIA



FALL 2020 - WINTER 2021





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## WHO WE ARE

Put People First! PA gives voice to everyday people who are struggling to meet our basic needs. We define our basic needs as things we need to live healthy and fulfilling lives — things like education, housing, health care, jobs with living wages, food, and a healthy environment.

We're a membership organization made up mostly of people who know from our life experience that poor and working people need to unite and have a voice. No one else is going to do it for us.

We're building, county by county, all across Pennsylvania. We're urban and rural. We're multiracial. We're politically independent. Until we unite, we don't have the power to change things.

Join us! We need you! [www.putpeoplefirstpa.org](http://www.putpeoplefirstpa.org)

# Put People First! PA & 2020 Elections

For good reasons, the 2020 elections are on a lot of our minds. So in light of this moment, here are some helpful frameworks for thinking about the elections and clarifying our understanding of what Politics *really* means.

*The following is an excerpt about the importance of political independence from the PPF-PA New Member Handbook that grounds our organizing. This is understanding that is especially important to reflect on during this election season.*



PPF-PA is independent from both the Democratic and Republican parties. That means that we don't craft our agenda around the agenda of these parties, but around what people really need. We have a commitment to holding all power-holders accountable. We fundamentally don't believe that politicians or people in power are going to be able to solve our problems. It is only through a mass movement with a core of clear, competent, committed and connected leaders that changes have happened throughout history. Change comes from below, not from above. We don't put our faith in the parties, but we are political. However, we will not get drawn into conflict between "republicans vs. democrats" because the primary conflict is not between parties but between our human rights and the power holders standing in the way of achieving them.

## From Elections to Politics

*Excerpts from an article written by Nijmie Zakkiyyah Dzurinko, with edits and contributions from Iaan Reynolds and Borja Gutiérrez*

Millions of people around the country and the world have been waking up to the realities that 1) the economic and political system is currently organized around the needs and interests of a ruling class of billionaires, 2) the needs and interests of the billionaires are not the same as the needs and interests of everyday people, and, 3) it doesn't have to be this way. As we wake up to these truths, millions of us are beginning to seek clarity about how to change things. [...]

[...]t's playing out in front of us every day on the news when talking heads repeat their talking points about a "strong economy" while at the same time 700 people die every day in the U.S. from poverty. When schools have to be kept open despite the spread of the COVID-19 because students have no other place to eat. When medical fundraisers are keeping GoFundMe in business.

When there are six empty homes for every unhoused person, but no one working full time at a minimum wage job can afford a two-bedroom apartment in any county in the country. 140 million people – or 43% of the U.S. population cannot afford a \$400 emergency bill. The number of people imprisoned by the state has grown eightfold in the last 40 years, and 66% of those in cages are people of color.

[...]he majority of us believe that healthcare is a human right. We believe that education is a human right. That housing is a human right. That we need to keep fossil fuels in the ground, stop fracking and shift to renewable, clean energy. Raise wages. Cancel debt. Shut down prisons and detention centers. Move from a war economy to one based on meeting human needs that provides for all. Recognize the caregiving work done by millions of mothers and caregivers. *Continued on next page*

## From Elections to Politics Cont'd

Not only do we believe these things but we know they are necessary – and possible.

This is evidenced by the tens of thousands of people in 40 states and D.C. that have come together around a moral agenda to fight the evils of systemic racism, poverty, militarism, ecological devastation and the distorted moral narrative of white supremacist Christian nationalism through the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.

It's evidenced by the millions of us activating around this election.

Yet, there is an ongoing, concerted campaign of voter suppression targeting young people, poor people, Black, Indigenous and other people of color. There is a distorted media narrative telling us who is and is not "electable" and that the "experts" talking about the "strength" of the economy every day know better than we do. A narrative that tries to convince us that there really aren't millions of us, and that the things we need – things in the best interest of the whole of society and not just the super-rich – are somehow "divisive" and unrealistic, while immediately injecting \$1.5 trillion into the financial system to salvage capitalism.

Participating in elections is important! But elections alone won't solve our problems. It's time to move into Politics. Though they are related, Elections are only a part of Politics.

It's in the interest of the ruling class to limit our understanding of Politics to Elections. They pour billions every election cycle into the illusion of conflict. TV ratings soar, as pundits and the two mainstream parties carve up our communities before our eyes, dividing us by geography, race, age – all the identities we're told make us fundamentally different. This is Politics, they tell us, presenting us with a false choice between bad and worse. The choice between two arms of the same ruling class is disguised as an exercise of our autonomy – an expression of our "free will."

[...]But we'll never get what we need if we limit ourselves to what a few billionaires want us to think is possible. To structure our society around meeting our human rights, we need organization, unity, and the power to make our own future. That is Politics.

Politics is the process of uniting around our needs and learning to fight for them. It's the process of identifying, developing and uniting everyday leaders. It is building permanently organized communities. We need organization of the poor and dispossessed working class in every county, in every state in this country, building a politically independent program across race, age, ability, religion, region, nationality, language, sexuality and gender 365 days a year. It is difficult work, but not as difficult as the future we are facing if we don't organize now.

The biggest mistake we could make, as we face up to the reality of what is in store, is falling into disillusionment, cynicism and despair. We are not naive or unrealistic. We have the vision, we have the numbers. We are 140 million strong. We need organization.

We need to advance from Elections to Politics.



# A Public Healthcare Advocate for Pennsylvania

Every year across the state, millions of us in Pennsylvania struggle to get the care we need and to pay for treatments and medicine. We need a Public Healthcare Advocate to stand on the side of everyday people.

Everyone in Pennsylvania needs healthcare, but giant health care companies are lining their pockets by pricing us out of care. Hospitals and drug companies overbill us for essential treatment and medicine, and insurance companies have made a routine business practice out of refusing to cover our treatments and pay our insurance claims.



Every year, these companies force over 750,000 PA residents to delay or forgo medical care and send more than 1.8 million Pennsylvanians a surprise medical bill. More than 1.5 million of us are now in medical debt. That's why in Put People First! PA, we're pushing for a Public Healthcare Advocate, a well-proven model that would make a world of difference to everyday people.

## What is the Office of the Public Healthcare Advocate?

A Public Healthcare Advocate is a public official (backed by a staffed office) who advocates for patients, residents, and workers in the healthcare system; helps people appeal harmful decisions by healthcare companies and state agencies; and helps lawmakers better understand and improve our healthcare system. Fundamentally a Public Healthcare Advocate furthers the goals of universality, accountability, transparency, participation and equity in our healthcare system. **Let's define the terms: Public, Healthcare, and Advocate.**

### What does *public* mean?

- Public does not mean that the office is limited to the oversight of only public insurance/entities. The Public Healthcare Advocate will have oversight over public and private providers of all kinds.
- It does mean that it is a government-affiliated office that serves all residents of the state and serves the public interest as opposed to the interests of profiteers. We mean all residents, no exceptions, including people on all forms of private and public health insurance (insurance through employers, ACA plans, Medicaid, Medicare, workers' comp, the VA, etc.), and people who are uninsured, unhoused, incarcerated, disabled or undocumented.

### What does *healthcare* mean?

- The healthcare of people on all kinds of plans and programs - and no plans/programs - it includes the uninsured and those that are shut out of the healthcare system; it responds to public health crises related to state violence, environmental devastation, pandemics, etc.

### What does *advocate* mean?

- Fighting for all residents to get the healthcare that they need and deserve and is their human right.
- Investigate, analyze
- Advise and assist, provide referrals
- Educate and engage communities
- Co-mediate and co-prosecute
- Collect data, inform policy and law-making

*Continued on next page*



## What would the Office of the Public Healthcare Advocate do?

### Educate Pennsylvanians on their rights

- Educate people on their rights, making sure to reach those who are most often denied healthcare (e.g. poor and working-class people, people of color, immigrants, rural and small-city communities, people with disabilities, people who are homeless, and people who have been incarcerated).

### Advocate for Pennsylvanians

- At public forums, testify and advocate on behalf of patients, especially on problems like cost barriers, denial of healthcare to prisoners, healthcare impacts of environmental devastation, lack of access to dental care, overbilling, insurance-rate increases, and hospital closures that affect people's lives but that they are unable to solve on their own.
- Investigate, mediate and/or prosecute wrongdoing by healthcare entities, such as denial of coverage or excessive billing.

### Fight for our healthcare rights

- Collect data and information on what is and isn't working for people in Pennsylvania's healthcare system.
- Create healthcare policy recommendations for the state legislature and relevant departments, and help draft policy, rules and legislation.
- Ensure through investigatory and prosecutorial action state agency and department accountability.
- Intervene in the closures of hospitals and healthcare facilities.
- Repair harm by the healthcare system by helping formulate legally binding remediation plans.

To learn more, visit <https://www.putpeoplefirstpa.org/our-campaign/signthepetitionpha/>. Talk to your Healthcare Rights Committee about setting up or joining a legislative visit with your with your elected officials to support the creation of this position.

## Member Reflection: Briann Moyer

My name is Briann Moyer. I'm a lifelong Western Pennsylvanian -- born and raised in Washington, PA and a current resident of Pittsburgh.

Since I graduated from college, I have consistently held paid positions as an organizer in addition to my volunteer movement work. I recognize that our organizations and movements are only as strong as our analysis of the interlocking nature of the systemic racial, economic and environmental injustices we face. Put People First! PA is an organization that is committed to doing the deep organizing, political education, and development that produces leaders who recognize this fact.



My first opportunity to do work with Put People First! PA was in November 2019. I was invited to attend an Organizing Exchange hosted by NC Raise Up in Raleigh, North Carolina — and the experience was unforgettable. At the exchange, we were joined by folks from California, South Carolina, Vermont, and of course, North Carolina. We began the weekend by grounding ourselves in the history of the Reconstruction period, through W.E.B. Dubois's Black Reconstruction. For the first time, I learned this radical history, specifically looking at the ways the emancipated enslaved peoples and poor white folks worked together and built political projects that served the poor and working class.

We also discussed the interracial solidarity that was necessary in the organizing against white supremacist violence in North Carolina, learning from activists who were present at the Greensboro Massacre in 1979 where five people were killed organizing for workers rights and against KKK violence. All of this was done to historicize the present moment where we were, examining the material conditions of the poor and dispossessed in Fayetteville — both a military town and fast food capital in the nation -- and to understand nearby Raleigh, a site where the interlocking evils of systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, and militarism are evident. We concluded our time in Fayetteville by door-knocking, working to build a base in the city so NC Raise Up could broaden their campaign to raise the minimum wage.

What brought me to Put People First! PA and what will keep me in this organization is our commitment to deep political education, leadership development, political independence, and organizing across difference. Too often in this work, you see so many resources flowing into the cities to build up their organizing capacity, a strategy very much in line with the Democratic Party goals. The more aligned an organization is with the Democratic Party, the more likely it is that their orientation towards membership will be about mobilization (turnout) than organizing (basebuilding and leadership development).

PPF-PA recognizes that in order to truly build power to challenge the ruling class, we'll have to reach the masses of unorganized folks both within and outside of our cities in order to build power through building a nonviolent army of clear, competent, committed, and connected leaders.

Now our Healthcare Rights Committees is working to organize Medicaid Marches, another step in our long battle to fight for Healthcare is a Human Right, a demand made urgent by COVID-19. As our interlocking crises continue to deepen, and we head towards a major national election, I am overwhelmed with gratitude to be in the company of the most brilliant organizers that I know. Forward together! Not one step back!

# PPF's Summer Course on Building Politically Independent Mass Organizations of the Poor

by Jae Hubay and Phil Wider

For seven weeks this summer, the Political Education and Leadership Development (PELD) team coordinated a course called "Building Politically Independent Mass Organizations of the Poor: Contemporary Experiences of Forging the Organization and Leadership of the Poor and Dispossessed as a Unified Social Force." Leaders of organizations from our network across the country both presented and participated in the course, from the National Union of the Homeless, NC Raise Up, Union de Vecinos/LA Tenants Union, Cosecha & the Vermont Workers Center as part of the Nonviolent Medicaid Army, MILPA, Migrant Justice, Vecinos Unidos, and we even got to hear from Rev. Doc. Liz Theocharis, one of the co-chairs of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival!

Our goals for the course included developing the Clarity, Competency, Commitment & Connection of our leaders, grounding people in the approach of the poor organizing the poor, and creating exchange and connection between different organizations in our network. Each week, we had a presentation followed by break-out discussion in base groups to apply the lessons of the presentations to our work. The course included an evaluation session at the end, PELD debriefed internally & with the coordinators of the PPF-PA base groups, and we want to share out these key points.

The 70 of us who participated in the course learned that the poor organizing the poor is a long-term project, a marathon not a sprint. We have and will continue to learn from historical experiences, and we have built unity around strategic principles across our organizations even though we fight on different fronts of struggle, because we are all fighting as the poor and dispossessed. One common way to basebuild in our model is through Projects of Survival. One challenge of the course was the tendency of participants to see lessons from partner organizations too specifically, and not understanding how to apply those lessons to a different context in our front of struggle. We can and must take lessons from organizing for the right to housing, living wages, and for immigrant rights into our fight for healthcare as a human right!

Through the course, we saw that building leadership across difference is challenging, and that we can develop a stronger practice of this through organizing around our common needs as human rights. With most of the organizations that joined us in this study playing leading roles across the country in building the Nonviolent Medicaid Army (NVMA), it is very clear that the NVMA is an example of the success of this approach to uniting our class through uniting the leaders of our class. We appreciated getting further connected to and learning from other strategically aligned organizations, and want to figure out how to continue strengthening those connections. We had interpretation between Spanish & English for the entire course - developing our practice of leading across difference with language.

Through the process, we learned about the kind of relationships and follow-up that is required for successful coordination. Each week PPF-PA leaders (and leaders from other organizations) got to facilitate the discussion groups that followed the week's presentation. In these base groups the leaders got to create a space and facilitate a discussion with newer members to apply the lessons from other organizing experiences to their work as a collective. Coming out of the course a number of newer PPF-PA leaders are now more ready to join a statewide team! In the future, we want to get into deeper study on the questions of political independence, and the forms of organization our class of the poor and dispossessed needs to build our power.



# Pennsylvania Poor Peoples Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival Spotlight: MILPA (Movement of Immigrant Leaders in Pennsylvania) by Gabriela Castañeda

On Friday August 28th, State Representative Danilo Burgos introduced HB2835, legislation that if passed would allow undocumented immigrants in the state of Pennsylvania, to obtain a drivers license by presenting an ITIN number or Tax ID number. The legislation will protect the data of all applicants by not sharing it with ICE and will also provide applicants with non-marked drivers licenses.

On Tuesday September 22nd, the House Democratic Policy Committee [HDPC], hosted an informative audience where they heard several testimonies from families in the state. The testimonies focused on basic human rights, the economic impact and safety, security, and privacy that this bill will achieve.



As of now HB2835 has 26 sponsors, including Republican Tim Hennesey who is the Majority Chairman of the House Transportation Committee. MILPA along with the Driving PA Forward coalition, composed of more than 15 organizations, has put together a 6-month strategy to make sure that we garner more support for drivers licenses from legislators on both parties. More than 170,000 drivers will directly benefit if this bill becomes a reality.

HB2835 will not only make our roads safer, but it will also prevent family separation and will boost the economy in the state.

## What you can do:

Donate to MILPA: [www.milpafamilia.org](http://www.milpafamilia.org)

Join our phone banking to call legislators to ask them to support HB2835

Join a MILPA Committee!

For more information please feel free to contact Gabriela Castañeda at  
717-585-0564

# Pennsylvania Poor Peoples Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival

## Spotlight: MILPA (Movement of Immigrant Leaders in Pennsylvania)

by Gabriela Castañeda

El viernes 28 de agosto, el Representante Estatal Danilo Burgos presentó HB2835, legislación que de ser aprobada permitiría a los inmigrantes indocumentados en el estado de Pensilvania obtener una licencia de conducir presentando un número ITIN o número de identificación fiscal. La legislación protegerá los datos de todos los solicitantes al no compartirlos con ICE y también proporcionará a los solicitantes licencias de conducir no marcadas.

El martes 22 de septiembre, el Comité de Política Demócrata de la Cámara [HDPC], organizó una audiencia informativa donde escucharon varios testimonios de familias en el estado. Los testimonios se centraron en los derechos humanos básicos, el impacto económico y la seguridad, protección y privacidad que logrará este proyecto de ley.

Hasta ahora, HB2835 tiene 26 patrocinadores, incluyendo al republicano Tim Hennesey, que es el presidente mayoritario del Comité de Transporte de la Cámara. MILPA, junto con la coalición Driving Pa Forward, compuesta por más de 15 organizaciones, ha elaborado una estrategia de 6 meses para asegurarse de obtener más apoyo para las licencias de conducir de los legisladores en ambos partidos. Más de 170.000 conductores se beneficiarán directamente si este proyecto de ley se hace realidad.

La HB2835 no solo hará que nuestras carreteras sean más seguras, sino que también evitará la separación familiar e impulsará la economía del estado.



### Lo que puedes hacer:

Done a MILPA: [www.milpafamilia.org](http://www.milpafamilia.org)

Únase a nuestro esfuerzo para llamar a los legisladores y pedirles que apoyen a HB2835  
Únase a un Comité MILPA

Para obtener más información, no dude en comunicarse con  
Gabriela Castañeda al 717-585-0564

# Member Reflection: We Deserve a Society that Serves Us!

by Gabrielle Angelino, Montgomery County



What do you do when you have an addict mother, an absent father, and four young siblings living in a home that the state is evicting you from at noon the following day, and your mom leaves all five children late that night, never to be seen again? I certainly did not know what to do and, unfortunately, neither did the state. I was eighteen years old, suddenly with four young children to house and feed on a waitress's wages.

As the sheriff arrived to escort us out, we carried what belongings our arms could hold, and asked the uniformed officer, "What do we do now?" He had no solution. The police would help, he told us.

At the police station, I was having a panic attack as I recounted the events of the night before. I said through gasping gulps of breath that my mother had grown violent towards me after I returned home from work without the boxes she had requested to pack our things. I shook while telling the policeman about how she punched and kicked me, dragged me down the stairs by my hair, how she finally left, screaming that each one of us children was a mistake. The officer said, "You need to chill out," and that parents and children often have disagreements, but it was not a police matter. We ended up going to a homeless shelter.

The following days and weeks I spent going to the Department of Children and Families, who told me they could help me apply for food stamps, but could do little more. I was shuffled to caseworkers from one department to another, and none knew how to help. I lost my job in the midst of this crisis because I was missing shifts. At the courthouse, they asked me my age and sent me to another department, which also failed to help. It wasn't until our out-of-state relatives realized what was happening and stepped up that we finally got some help. In the end, my siblings were split up among different family members in different states.

This was only the first time I experienced falling through the cracks of an uncaring society. As a person with bipolar disorder, getting my medications in a timely fashion is a constant struggle. Too often the few clinics available to me, with or without insurance, are overbooked and understaffed. The doctors often split their hours between several clinics while practicing at larger, more lucrative hospitals. With a mandatory three sessions with a therapist, it typically takes me four months before I can even talk to a psychiatrist about my medications.

When I was pregnant with my daughter, though I was living in a single-income household without employer insurance, I was denied Medicaid. The average cost for a pregnancy with a cesarean operation is \$50,000, more than my yearly salary!

I have experienced firsthand the insidious consequences of a society not set up for poor or working-class people, and have felt the power the ruling class wields over me, as it holds my life in the balance. Through Put People First! PA I am able to join a non-violent army determined to place that power and control back into my hands.

# National Union of the Homeless on the Winter Offensive & Mass Evictions

by Kristin Colangelo, Philadelphia

This year, the National Union of the Homeless (NUH) is carrying out a Winter Offensive (WO) during the Christmas Season. This coordinated political operation draws on the lessons of successful WOs in the past, as part of the NUH's organizing drive, from Thanksgiving through Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's birthday on January 15th. This specific period of the year proves strategic when the mental terrain of society gives much attention to concerns of the poor and homeless but, in opposition of the NUH mission, takes the form of charity and mutual aid, not organizing our class to build political power. The WO serves as a tactical platform to convey our message of **economic and social justice for all with universal human rights** to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The original WOs took place at a time when the NUH was able to exert significant ideological and political influence on our class and build its organization as a force to be reckoned with. This year we'll revitalize the central theme and tactics: **Right to Housing, Not Death in the Street!** and a synchronized series of local actions of the different unions in coalitions with other fighting organizations.

## The Important WO Dates include:

- December 10th - Anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Right (UDHR)
- December 21st - Annual National Homeless Memorial Day
- December 25th - Birth of Jesus Christ
- Jan 1st New Year's Day
- January 15th - Birthday of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

## The Main slogans of the WO:

- Only one paycheck/healthcare crisis away from poverty and homelessness!
- No Room at the Inn!
- How Can You Worship a Homeless Man on Sunday and Ignore One on Monday?!
- Homeless not Helpless!
- No Housing, No Peace!
- You Only Get What You're Organized to Take!
- Put Christ Back into Christmas; the feeder of the hungry, the healer of the sick, the homeless revolutionary fighting for the liberation of the least of us.
- Jesus did not ask for a co-pay!

# National Union of the Homeless on the Winter Offensive & Mass Evictions Cont'd

The **Major Political Objective** lies in our raising the demand for **Power Not Pity, Change Not Charity**, raising the awareness that throughout the Christmas season major NPIC organizations become ideological and religious symbols of charity as the solution to poverty and homelessness. In opposition, we contrast the charity message with the message of the **Martin Luther King's Nonviolent Army of the Poor**; the message of ending poverty all together and for once and for all.

This year's WO, as part of the current organizing drive, will help give strength to the political work and influence of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for a Moral Revival to reach other sections of the class of the poor and dispossessed and those elements of advanced social conscience. We will strive for the educational aspect of the Offensive to be much more systematic and central to the overall political organizing drive to build a political union by carrying out our plans for ongoing Officer training, membership consolidation, and recruitment expansion turning the whole experience of the winter series of operations into schools of struggle.

To strengthen this year's WO efforts, we've joined the Nonviolent Medicaid Army (NVMA), a collective of poor organizing the poor mass organization leaders representing different fronts of struggle, to highlight the current healthcare and existing economic crisis as a galvanizing issue exposing the weaknesses of the current system to care for your class, the poor and dispossessed. Our participation will support our goal to build our unions, develop our leaders and prepare for our WO actions. Participation in the NVMA Organizing Drive and week of action (Sept 28th) offers the NUH an invaluable opportunity to mobilize, organize, and identify/develop our leaders, as well as build momentum leading into the WO by putting us in deeper relationships with other fighting organizations and building the strength of our locals to carry out the WO activities.



# Uprisings in Lancaster: When the Poor & Dispossessed Unite

by Tammy Rojas and Matthew Rosing

Lancaster, PA - like many other communities across the United States and the globe - had protests throughout the summer after the death of George Floyd. Many of those who took to the streets at that time did so out of the frustration of their own struggles and hardships, living in a deeply unjust society and experiencing police brutality and racism.

On August 5, 2020 the Lancaster Healthcare Rights Committee held an action to show the interconnection of all forms of state violence, not just police brutality, titled "End State Violence; Fight for Human Rights". Through this action, people started coming out of their silo way of thinking and seeing a broader picture of state violence -- one where 700 people in the US die everyday of the state violence that creates poverty, even before the pandemic.

The August 5th action abruptly ended when the police agitated, sparking a protester to do a spontaneous act of nonviolent civil disobedience and led to three arrests. The media and the people in power tried to change the narrative back into a narrow focus, but in the long run they were unsuccessful. Instead, as we saw at an action in response a few days later, the establishment's actions brought the poor and dispossessed closer together.

Following that series of actions, community members joined us at the August 27th Lancaster City Council public hearing on the UPMC rezoning petition for the old St. Joseph hospital as well as the September 8th City Council meeting. It was at this City Council meeting where the "most diverse and progressive City Council in Lancaster's history" voted unanimously in favor of the UPMC rezoning petition of St. Joseph's hospital -- taking away healthcare for the poor in favor of luxury condos for the wealthy.

For a long time the poor and dispossessed in Lancaster, PA have been crying out against the injustices of racism, police brutality, poverty, homelessness, gentrification, criminalization of the poor and the loss of a hospital.

The summer of Black Lives Matter protests that took place all across Lancaster County, our August 5th Action, and the various Lancaster City Council actions led to the vast majority of the Lancaster community being awakened and paying closer attention. When Ricardo Muñoz was shot and killed by Lancaster City Police during a mental health crisis on September 13th, in the SOWE neighborhood, a neighborhood experiencing intense gentrification, the Lancaster Community was sent into a whirlwind. All of this with no action being taken by elected officials to address these concerns made an uprising among the poor inevitable.

The people protested the actions of police the same night and into the next night. The police responded with unnecessary militant force, they used tear gas canisters and what appeared to be rubber bullets. Protesters were injured and several peaceful protesters found themselves spontaneously arrested after the protests facing severe felony charges and given \$1 million dollar bail.

The Mayor and other members of City government were quick to jump on the defensive and blame county and state government for the lack of mental health resources and the lack of urgency with tackling poverty. They did this without taking responsibility for their hand in the situation. In the two weeks prior to Ricardo's death they rezoned away St. Joseph's hospital and other healthcare infrastructure making way for the development of luxury housing, furthering gentrification.

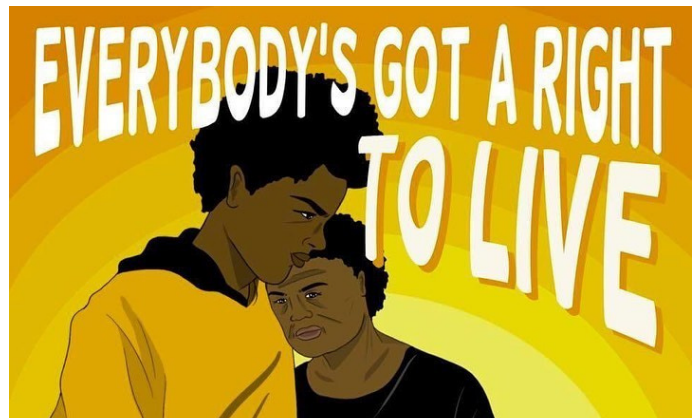
At the City Council meeting following the murder of Ricardo Muñoz folks from different groups banded together to speak out against the hypocrisy of our elected officials and to hold them accountable for the part they played in our loss of healthcare services in our community.

*Continued on next page*

## When the Poor & Dispossessed Unite Cont'd

A few weeks later on October 3rd, the Lancaster & York HRCs hosted the South Central Medicaid March and we were joined by various local organizations, who we had deepened our relationships with over the past few months. Marching around St. Joe's, we lifted up Ricardo Muñoz, we spoke truth to power, highlighted the interconnection of the issues and made demands of healthcare profiteers and elected officials.

Stemming from the protests that happened after the police killed Ricardo most of the protesters' bails have been lowered, many have been released and some of them had charges dropped or lowered but our fight isn't over yet. A deep political awakening happened in Lancaster, PA. The poor & dispossessed are uniting, getting into step and we are speaking out to ALL the power holders to say enough is enough, someone is hurting our people and we won't be silent anymore!



*Art by Kim Dinh*

## Protests Explode all over Montgomery County

by Fran Gilmore, Montgomery County

Diverse crowds of mostly young folks have protested all summer in multiple Montgomery County (MontCo) towns. They are not only outraged over the police murder, but angry at the bleak futures they face. In June, MontCo Healthcare Rights Committee members went to a huge, diverse march of mostly youth from Bridgeport to Norristown, two deindustrialized river towns struggling with poverty and unemployment, and an NAACP demo in Norristown, which included 100 or more poor and working class people, Black, white and Latinx.

Later in the month, we co-sponsored a demonstration in Horsham, about 12 miles north of Philadelphia, of mostly white youth, and a sprinkling of Black and Asian youth, then another in neighboring Hatboro. The presence and strong support for Black Lives Matter of white youth marks a strong shift over the past decade of the prospects young people now face, including those from the suburbs. There are few good-paying jobs, and if youth go to college, they face debilitating debt. Consider that these youth grew up with 9/11, endless war, de-funding of the social safety net, Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, and now two recessions not to mention a pandemic. They are well aware the "American Dream" does not exist, and are deeply suspicious of capitalism. It's not surprising that Black, white and Brown youth are uniting for justice and equality. Several young people we met through these actions have since become members of our Healthcare Rights Committee. We are growing and actions across MontCo were a successful way to base build this summer.

# Johnstown Healthcare Rights Committee (HRC) challenges State Violence: Police - Pandemic - Economic Crisis - Healthcare

by Larry Blalock

This spring, Johnstown (the poorest town in PA with a 38.7% poverty rate) HRC members attended a number of virtual City Council meetings to speak out, calling on Council to support funding for residents most affected by the COVID-19 and economic crisis. We presented the following community needs: eviction and utility relief, housing for unhoused community members, readily accessible COVID-19 testing and the reallocation of funds from added police hiring to the hiring of mental health crisis professionals.

In the midst of the pandemic and economic crisis assaults on our already struggling community, the police murder of George Floyd delivered yet another, more highly visible form of state violence. In response, many hundreds in the Johnstown area signed on to, and showed up for an early June Facebook organized "Justice for George Floyd" rally. Rallies against police violence were spontaneously organized in many small towns throughout West-Central Pa.

While officials and community "leaders" attempted to cancel or co-opt this largest rally, outraged residents were having none of it, and showed up en masse.

Our Johnstown HRC organized a lead-up rally in addition to supporting and participating in the largest rally. We reached out to develop relationships with several potential HRC members. They later joined and became very active; they helped organize and played key roles in ongoing actions, including a March to End Police Violence, a Teach-In and other actions, as well as attending PPF-PA statewide calls and Political Education sessions.

*On September 29th during the Johnstown Medicaid March, Healthcare Rights Committee members delivered a letter to city council demanding that the city cancel their plans to hire more cops and instead invest in mental health resources. Here is an excerpt from the letter:*

Dear Mayor Janakovic and City Council:

The Johnstown Healthcare Rights Committee of Put People First! PA is alarmed at City Council's plans to hire more police officers and increase the JPD budget by \$500,000 over the next three years, half of which will come from city coffers.

[...]

Why would the city try to hire more police officers when the JPD complains about not being able to find good recruits? Why would the city commit more resources to a department with a track record of systemic racism and excessive force, including the killing of Elip Cheatham in 2012 and the beating of a mentally ill elderly man this summer?

[...]

The people of Johnstown do not want more police officers. We had historic protests against police violence and systemic racism this summer after which City Council approved a mural that says "End Racism Now" on the street. If you want to back up those words with actions, do the right thing: Cancel the plans for more cops, give back the DOJ grant, and put that \$250,000 into mental health resources for our community.

Sincerely,

Johnstown Healthcare Rights Committee Put People First! PA

## The Nonviolent Medicaid Army and the 2020 Medicaid Marches



This fall PPF-PA held “MEDICAID MARCHES” in seven locations across the state during the first week of October, calling on Governor Wolf to apply for a federal waiver to expand Medicaid to all PA residents to ensure universal coverage, and calling on the Governor and legislature to support the creation of a Public Healthcare Advocate that will fight for the healthcare rights of everyday Pennsylvanians.

The demonstrations, which attracted hundreds of participants across the state and over 5,000 views on social media, were led by Put People First! PA and joined by local groups and partner organizations in the PA Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival (PPC:NCMR), of which Put People First! PA is a coordinating member.

This annual week of action is a huge part of our yearly campaign plan and a focus of our base building throughout the year. These marches also uplift our member’s voices and develop leaders.

In the context of the pandemic, global economic crisis and ongoing state violence, Medicaid Marches are also being held for the first time in Kansas, North Carolina, Alabama, New York, Maine, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, and other states as part of the nationwide launch of the Nonviolent Medicaid Army, a growing national movement of poor and dispossessed people uniting around the demands for Medicaid for All and an end to all forms of state violence.

*We don't need more cops! We need our city and state elected leaders to put our tax dollars into healthcare, housing, Covid-19 testing, and other resources for poor and dispossessed people to get through this crisis! - Johnstown Healthcare Rights Committee*

*UPMC: Tell us what you did with your billion dollar bailout. Cancel medical debt and pay what you owe us – taxes, living wages, hazard pay, now! - Pittsburgh Healthcare Rights Committee*

*Governor Wolf, seize Hahnemann and re-open it as a public hospital! Re-invest the \$300 million earmarked for the renovation of the police headquarters. - Philadelphia Healthcare Rights Committee*

# The Nonviolent Medicaid Army and the 2020 Medicaid Marches Cont'd

## Community Care Reminders for the 2020 PPF-PA Medicaid Marches

### ■ Learn as we lead, walk as we talk, teach as we fight

- There is deep joy in building the strength and unity of our class.
- In taking action together, we are breaking our isolation and breaking our chains.
- We're stretching ourselves and learning in the process. That can feel scary or overwhelming. We're not doing it alone. Be patient with ourselves and one another. We learn from each other, from our mistakes. We grow stronger with every action.
- We can't wait on others to step up to these responsibilities. In the struggle, we learn to be leaders.
- We're here together as the poor and dispossessed to fight for our new world where all of our needs are met.

### ■ Collectivity

- We're not doing this on our own or for just ourselves. We carry with us those we love, the 140 million.
- We are deeply connected when we take action together.
- We know that the unity of our class across lines of division is not an easy task. We've been taught to act as individuals. We've been taught that we're too different. We remain committed to this struggle. We know the truth is we have much more in common than what makes us different. We need each other for our survival.
- All of the 140 million is unique and in need of leaders; we may sound and look different and lead differently; it's our theory of change and love of our class that guides and grounds us.

### ■ Remember what is grounding for you

- Take a deep breath
- What is it that brought you here? Remember why you are in this struggle.
- If you feel overwhelmed, who can you turn to for support?
- Even in the chaotic moments, look around at the beauty that collective action has created.



“The police are not trained or qualified to replace public health and mental health services. - Maddy Burrows, Johnstown Healthcare Rights Committee”

“Governor Wolf needs to act immediately to address the COVID-19 crisis by applying for a Federal Waiver to expand Medicaid to all residents of PA, and improve oversight of our fractured, profit-seeking healthcare system by passing legislation to establish an Office of the Public Healthcare Advocate. - Dr. Sharrelle Barber, at the Philadelphia Medicaid March”

“Police killings, profiteering hospitals and insurance companies are all forms of state-sponsored violence that benefit the rich at the expense of the poor. - Briann Moye, Pittsburgh Healthcare Rights Committee”

# Pennsylvania Poor Peoples Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival

## Spotlight: CADBI (The Coalition to Abolish Death By Incarceration)

Pennsylvania has some of the harshest sentencing laws in the country, notably the mandatory sentence for first and second degree murder of life-without parole. Currently, 5,000 Pennsylvanians are serving this sentence, which many call Death by Incarceration. The presumption of life-without-parole is that some human beings are incapable of redemption and never deserve a second chance. CADBI believes this sentence is a violation of their human rights and an affront to the humanity of us all.

CADBI fights for a maximum sentencing law that prohibits indefinite sentences, and parole eligibility after 15 years or less. CADBI is a coalition of four organizations and has branches across the state. For more information, visit their website, [decarceratepa.info/CADBI](http://decarceratepa.info/CADBI).

### **Martha Williams, Philadelphia CADBI Chapter:**

I was drawn to CADBI after my 23-year-old son was sentenced to life without parole for second degree murder. I found there a space where families with loved ones serving life sentences could support each other emotionally and with legal education. CADBI includes returning citizens who are an invaluable resource for understanding life on the inside and the policies and procedures of the justice system.

My allies have assured me that the trial was unfair and my son should get a retrial. I now know the appeals process will take many years, that I could not get through without CADBI's support. I thank God it is there.

Recently, I've become more active, going to the annual lobby day in Harrisburg, and reaching out to state representatives. Most exciting, I participated in the Poor People's Campaign Jubilee Caravan action as a speaker at City Hall, in alliance with PPF-PA and other sister organizations. So CADBI has helped me to develop as a leader as I fight my son's case.



### **From the Lancaster CADBI Chapter:**

The Lancaster chapter of CADBI invites you to join the campaign to end life without parole and other forms of long sentencing in Pennsylvania. We believe everyone deserves a second chance. We are dedicated to building a supportive community in Lancaster where family and friends of people who are incarcerated can meet and share with others who understand. We are also committed to spreading the word to our legislators and community to advocate for systemic change. We meet regularly and are a diverse group by age, race, class, and gender. Everyone has skills they can use and contributions they can make! We know we are stronger together. To join the fight contact us at: [CADBILancaster@gmail.com](mailto:CADBILancaster@gmail.com)

## Fall 2020 COVID-19 Member Reflection Series

While many industries have re-opened, we know that does not mean there are not serious risks we face everyday leaving our homes. We see infection and death rates continue to rise as our government puts profits over people. We also know as the poor and dispossessed that 700 people have been dying of poverty every day in the US, even before the pandemic. For a list of PPF-PAs COVID-19 demands visit [putpeoplefirstpa.org](https://putpeoplefirstpa.org).

In this COVID-19 reflection series, we're sharing excerpts from member reflections on the struggles we're facing during this global pandemic. Read full reflections on [PPF-PA's blog here](#).



### **Jen Frank, Lancaster HRC**

Covid-19 has affected all aspects of life and community. [...] It has exposed social fragmentation and differentiated the value placed on certain lives and not others.

As a parent, it has been disheartening (to say the least) to watch school boards and administration play street hockey with the lives of our children and teachers. It is like a real-life episode of the Hunger Games playing out in real time. Power holders are using children to test out the risks of a return to "normal," without the security of proper safety protocols.

As we all scramble to protect our families, our livelihoods, our health, and our children, we also need to review what the on-going pandemic has exposed in our society. We must re-evaluate if this is who we really want to be, as a country. My hope is that such a revelation might pave the way toward more inclusive, collectivist, and holistic approaches to healthcare and community. [Read more here](#).

### **Priyank Jindal, Philadelphia HRC**

When I was a kid, the community college near me was offering free LPN classes, so my mom enrolled and got her degree, eventually going on to get her RN. I remember her graduation vividly. I saw women with their families proudly beside them and I, too, was so proud of my mom. Growing up, it meant a lot to see my mom practice her independence and go to work everyday. Later, both my sister and I followed in her footsteps to become nurses.

At the beginning of the pandemic I saw myself, my coworkers and my peers putting our lives at risk to do our jobs. [...] The world has the resources to make sure that everyone has medicine, food, and housing, but the economic system we live in doesn't care. [...] I have seen the brutality of a system that left imprisoned folks to contract COVID-19 and die with no health precautions, evict people in the middle of a pandemic, and workers forced to leave their jobs with no union protection due to lack of PPE. As much as I was enraged I also felt helpless about the power we had as a group of dispossessed people to change these conditions.

I have been involved with activist work since I was young - working for immigrants' rights or working with youth. Once I became a nurse I found it harder to plug into organizing work, so it's been several years since I'd been involved in a mass-based organization. Then, a friend sent me Put People First! PA's (PPF-PA) Statement and Demands on the COVID-19 Pandemic. The demands were very clear, comprehensive, and resonated with my own feelings of anger and helplessness. I started looking into the organization more and really liked PPF-PA's orientation towards organizing the unorganized. I also felt that, as a nurse, it was my responsibility to use my position to organize my peers and coworkers around the conditions we were facing. [Read more here](#).

## COVID-19 Member Reflection Series cont'd

### **Larry Newbury, MontCo HRC**

When the pandemic started, I was working two part-time jobs, one of which I no longer have due to the pandemic. The job I lost was a grant-based job I had with a local non-profit through the Philadelphia Office of Adult Education (OAE).

One of the drastic alterations [to the budget] that Mayor Kenney made was the complete elimination of the Philadelphia OAE. The complete defunding of this service to the residents of Philadelphia was a devastating blow to the thousands of poor and immigrant communities hoping to make a better life for themselves. If the Mayor was making cuts to the budget across the board, this action might have come with more understanding. But, [Kenney proposed an increase] in the police budget to the tune of fourteen million dollars. [...]

My job loss was a real blow and caused me personal distress. [...] This experience has been incredibly eye-opening and transformative for me. If there is one positive outcome from my job loss, it is that it has reinvigorated my desire to continue to pursue work in social justice. [Read more here.](#)



### **Rose Yanko, NEPA HRC**

I come from a small town in Northeast PA (NEPA). My father was born to an immigrant family in a nearby town. The town was a wonderful little web of many different languages and cultures. Like mostly everywhere in NEPA, they were coal miners in the past and many worked at the coal company right down the road which is still open today.

At [my grandparent's] bar, elders frequently told could get such as cigar factories and coal mining, where if you were killed at work, they dumped your body on your porch. I heard the struggles of immigrants who could not speak English until their new neighbors befriended and helped them. My ancestors wouldn't have survived here without the people who accepted them – though surely not everyone did.

As I read the most recent articles along with the comment sections in the local news regarding Hazleton and the COVID-19 pandemic, I wonder how many of my peers have forgotten the struggles of our own ancestors as they turn around and point fingers at the Latinx community now. [Read more here.](#)

### **Harrison Farina, MontCo HRC**

The COVID-19 pandemic has ignited a flame of graduate student-organizing at Villanova University, where I study and teach. Villanova conveniently classifies us as students, even though we do enormous amounts of labor for the university in the form of: teaching, reading, publishing, presenting, and promoting the school's image. [...]

I believe they call us students because they want to silence our discontent with unsafe working conditions. We are not offered healthcare, and many of us are under- or uninsured. For years, we have been pleading with the school to provide healthcare to graduate student employees. Amid COVID-19, it became clear that Villanova's Catholic values are just a veneer to cover what they really care about: making money. [...]

Using my knowledge of Projects of Survival, I helped implement a "Summer Survival Fund," which was a quick payout system to get support for medical, housing, food, or any other emergency expenses. The fund both addressed our material needs and was a way to build organizational power and collectivity; it was a testament to the success of the organization of the poor. [Read more here.](#)

## COVID-19 Member Reflection Series cont'd

### Farrah Samuels, Philly HRC

If anyone had told me that teaching online as a first year teacher during a pandemic would be harder than surviving a rare form of stage IV cancer, I would've laughed them right outta' town! As a teacher, I never thought of myself as an "essential worker" until the start of this school year. Now, teachers are expected to work no matter what, without hazard pay nor accolades, and we get blamed for everything!

If teachers don't teach, there's no future, and we just can't afford to stop making that investment. That in itself is a crisis and a public health emergency- a generation of youth with no voice nor the know-how to wield the power of their words. Thankfully, I haven't had to work in dangerous conditions, yet, though [... t]his was only because of Philadelphia School District meetings with community leaders, teachers, and families that lasted into the wee hours of the night with almost 100% advocating for virtual learning. Many teachers are struggling, however; we are busting our asses to teach your children well, and our spirits are crushed everyday!

In the small ways I'm able, I continue to advocate for the health care we all need and deserve, while I am spending seventeen hours daily lesson planning and trying to maintain my sanity. [...] My "estranged" husband (who's currently staying with me due to the pandemic), however, has been in and out of the hospital and recently diagnosed with pneumonia. He has had repeated COVID-19 tests, trying to figure out what ailed him. I visited him several nights at Jefferson Hospital in dire fear every time I walked into the hospital doors, masked and armed with prayers. Hospitals are breeding grounds, but what do you do when you love someone and you don't want to leave them to face the horrors of an illness alone? [Read more here.](#)



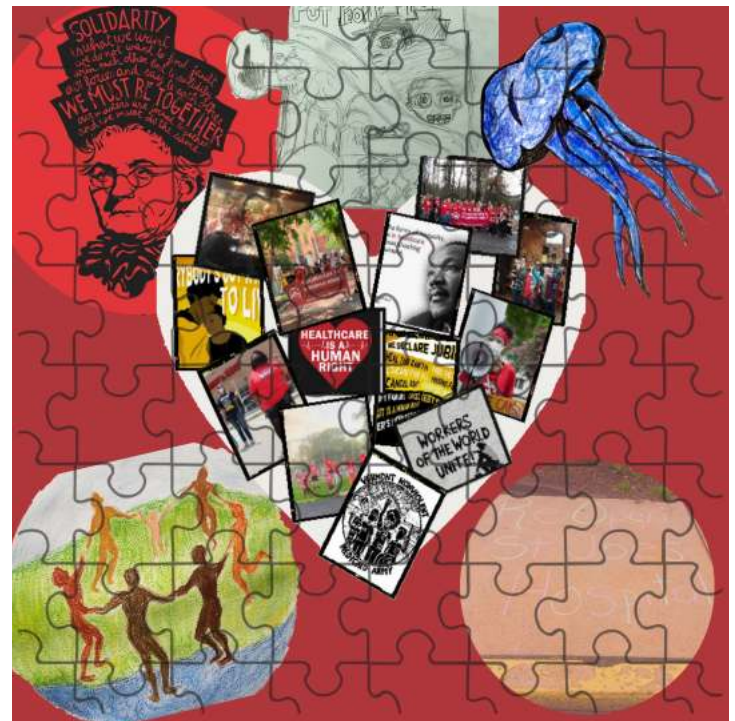
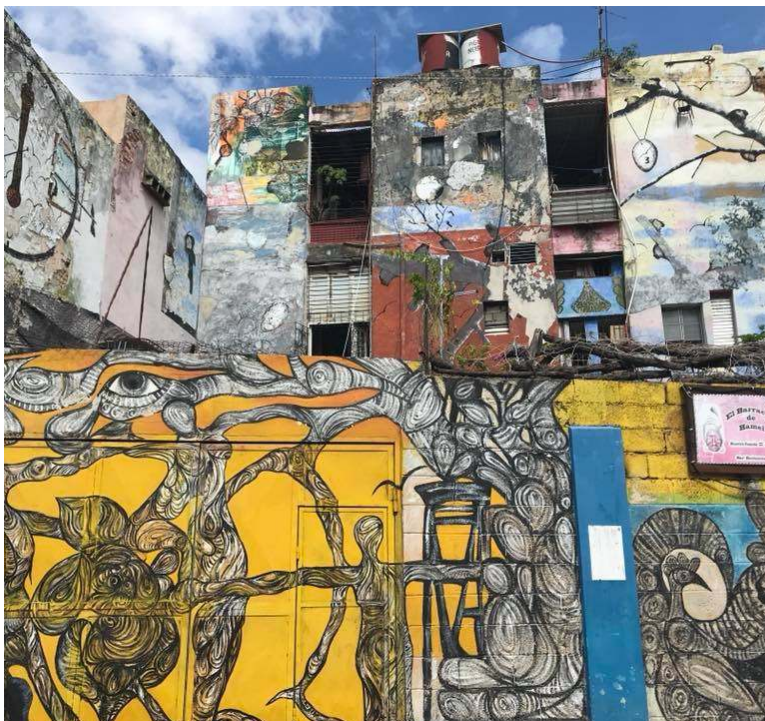
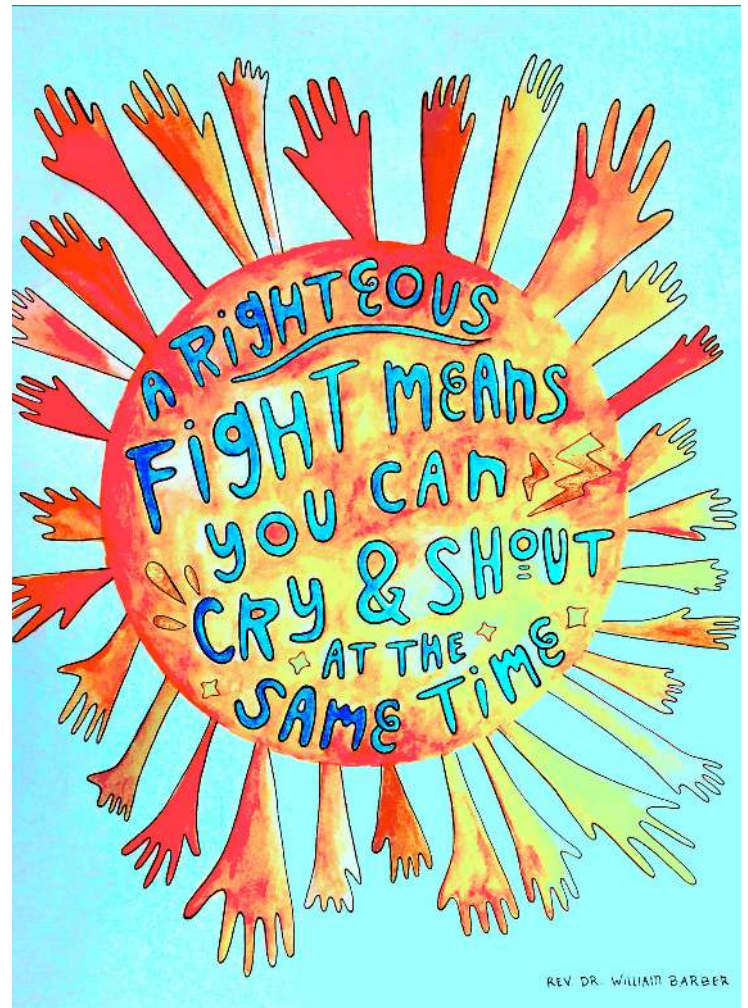
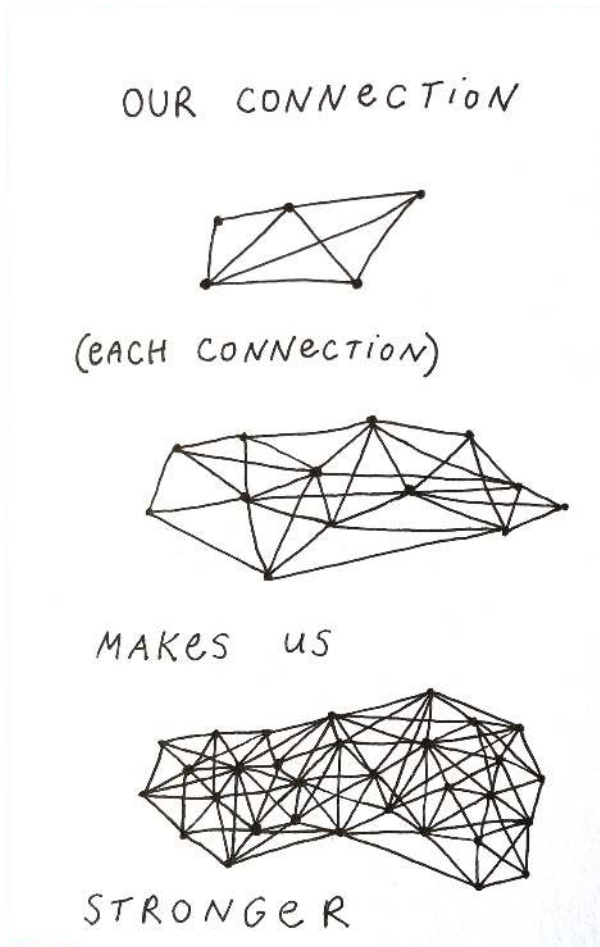
### Monique VanRenterghem, Altoona HRC

*Speech from August Altoona HRC Action*

I have had the privilege of being a front line healthcare worker during this COVID-19 pandemic. [...] On an average day before covid 19 hit the US, I would admit one person to the ICU in a diabetic crisis because they could not afford their insulin or someone who had to be admitted to the hospital for their uncontrolled asthma because they tried to stretch out their one inhaler since they could only afford one every few months. Now, I see my patients who have already stretched their incomes and health thin due to conditions of poverty losing their healthcare coverage at such a crucial time. They suffer not only from the typical illnesses that occurred prior to this pandemic, but also from a higher rate of contracting COVID-19 and a higher death rate from this disease than their richer counterparts.

I have also seen and heard of fellow healthcare workers across the country affected and even killed by this horrible disease. These people have, whether enthusiastically or not, put themselves at risk to provide care in a scary time where the science is still evolving and treatments change every day. In addition they have seen compensation cut, and been provided with scant or inappropriately used PPE, or even in some cases terminated for speaking out against the injustices of our current system.

I worked in a neighboring state earlier in the pandemic, where I was permitted just one N-95 to wear for an entire week, which often included seven 12-hour shifts and more than a hundred patients. [...] I believe the PPE shortage and lack of government response and assistance in this crisis has led to much unnecessary death and suffering for healthcare workers and patients alike. And to have our political figures downplay our suffering and profiteers make all-time high profits during this devastating crisis is dehumanizing and insulting. Similarly, to have our representatives go on vacation while we are waiting to see whether this will be the day we are forced to face hunger or homelessness for reasons outside of our control, is completely unacceptable. [Read more here.](#)



Description (clockwise starting from upper left: Cartoon by Beckett Koretz (Phily HRC), Doodle by Amalia Kalisz Tonsor (Pittsburgh HRC), Photo taken in Cuba by Fran Gilmore (MontCo HRC), Media and Communications Team Collective Collage

## PPF-PA on Social Media & Digital Organizing

Have you checked your screen time use on your phone recently? You may be kind of shocked by what you see. A lot of us are spending more time on our phones and that's partly because using technology right now is a way for us to connect when we can't be together in-person.

The last eight months have reinforced the importance of digital organizing. What do we mean by "digital organizing" you may ask? Well, it's using online platforms and tools to connect with our base and a big part of that is using social media strategically. So, the Media and Communications Team thought we would share with you some guidelines for using social media in this moment.

### Social Media Guidelines PPF-PA 2020

#### Why Use Social Media

Using social media promotes PPF-PA community engagement, especially during a time when we can't be in-person. It boosts the reach of our message and can be a base building tool. It's a platform to share documentation of actions. Through it we can support the work of our partners and promote solidarity between communities. It connects us across distances. It is timely, flexible, and responsive. Plus, it's cost effective.

#### Do's & Don'ts

- Avoid confrontation.
- Avoid cursing and or any other inappropriate words/actions.
- People will see you as a representative of PPF-PA, so carefully consider what you're posting.
- Connect with our base and invite folks to like our Facebook groups and pages.

#### Where to find PPF-PA



@PutPeopleFirstPA



@PPF\_PA (Main Organizational Account)  
@ppfpascpa (South Central Region Account)



PPF\_PA



Learn more about the Jubilee policy platform of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival here: <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/about/jubilee-platform/>

## Stay in touch!

Website: [www.putpeoplefirstpa.org](http://www.putpeoplefirstpa.org)

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Facebook: Put People First - PA

Twitter: @PPF\_PA

Instagram: @putpeoplefirst\_pa