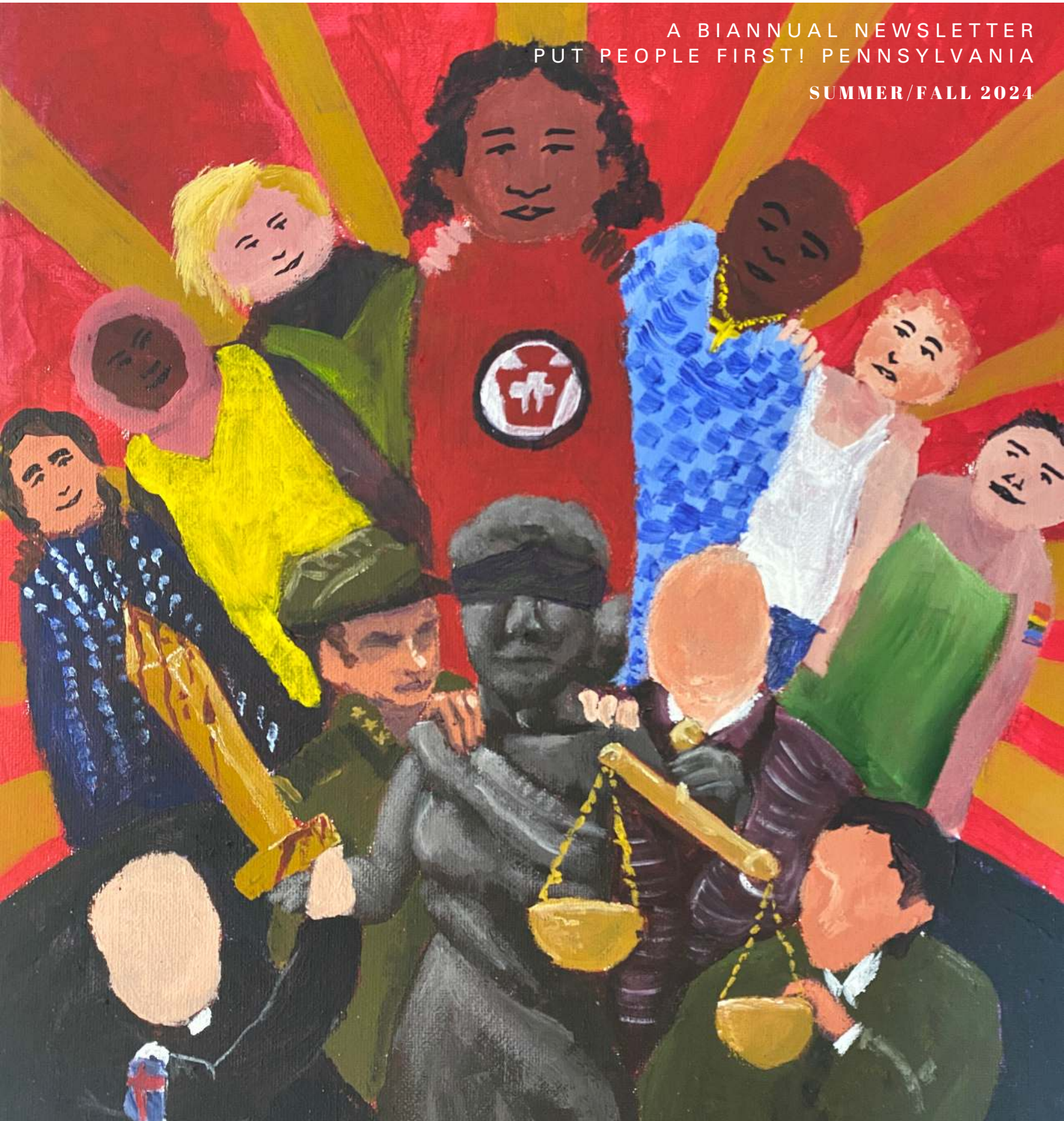




THE KEYSTONE

A BIENNIAL NEWSLETTER
PUT PEOPLE FIRST! PENNSYLVANIA

SUMMER/FALL 2024



Cover art: Depicts how the four evils of society (poverty, militarism, racism, and environmental destruction) use a so-called 'justice' system to harm the poor and dispossessed and divide us. Put People First! PA must bring together the poor across many lines of division to rise above and abolish a system that allows these evils to continue. - Anita Knisely-Durham, Southeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee

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*[Above] Singly None! by David Greene, Southeast PA
Healthcare Rights Committee*

WHO ARE WE?

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. 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.

The background of the page features a collage of images. At the top, a banner with the word 'DENTAL' in large, colorful, block letters is visible. Below this, there is a faint image of a person's face, possibly a woman, with a slight smile. The overall tone is somewhat somber and activist, with a focus on social and political issues.

Keystone Summer 2024 Introduction

In this election year, as we watch the nauseating spectacle of misleaders of the big political parties, we, the poor & dispossessed in the U.S., also witness and experience the global war on the poor. Whether in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gaza (Palestine), Venezuela, everywhere that empire exploits and displaces us, and in the U.S., where 800 people die every day of poverty, we mourn and organize. As the political parties employ their machines to tell us their stories of how bad the other guy is, we desperately tell our stories of the crises in our lives, where we are denied our human rights: purged from the healthcare system, incarcerated, evicted, lied to and lied about in the corporate media. Truly, the misleaders are ruled by the power of the uber-wealthy. They pressure us to identify as 'red or blue' while they refuse to acknowledge poverty or meet the needs of the growing legions of poor people.

It is more important than ever, especially at this time of extreme divide & conquer' politics, partnered with extreme wealth inequality, to affirm our humanity and our love for our class, by meeting and organizing these legions of people through projects of survival, across all lines of difference. We need to exercise our political independence from this exploitative system; politicians will not save us. What we can do is really see each other, although we appear to be divided by race, gender, region or nation, language, sexuality and any other difference. What we have in common is the right to live, to love, to have good health & healthcare, housing, education, transportation, clean air, water & good food, to be mentally & physically well and thrive, and we must fight for these rights.

This issue of the Keystone is dedicated to all of us who are fighting 'divide & conquer', especially in the crucial fight for universal healthcare, working to transform our world by organizing the poor across all lines of division!

***Members of the Put People First! PA
Media & Communications Team***

Did you get a notice saying you no longer qualify for your Medicaid benefits?

Did you know that you have a legal right to appeal this decision?

Put People First! PA will help you fight back.

Since April 1st, 2023, we have seen the single greatest loss of healthcare in Pennsylvania history. The Medicaid cut-offs were the result of bipartisan agreement and signed into law by President Biden. Nearly 900,000 people in Pennsylvania have been cut off Medicaid as part of the nationwide Medicaid purge since April 1, 2023.

Despite what you might hear, the cut-offs are not over. The powers that be are going to continue — cutting people off their healthcare will be the normal routine. We know that denying people healthcare is only normal under a healthcare system that puts profit over people's lives.

We're looking for people who want to fight back for themselves and for others. We reject the "eligibility" narrative that some don't deserve Medicaid because they make a few dollars over the limit. We reject people being cut off due to paperwork errors. If you or someone you know has received a cut off notice, contact us. We demand our right to Medicaid.

Marketplace insurance plans are not healthcare. Less than 10% of those who lost their Medicaid last year enrolled in a Pennsylvania health insurance marketplace, or Pennie plan. These plans have high deductibles, high copays, and high premiums. Being cut-off Medicaid means losing your healthcare, and losing your healthcare means losing your life.

Put People First! PA has successfully filed appeals for people across the state of all backgrounds who were both cut-off Medicaid.

For example, Lynda, in Southwest PA, was cut-off Medicaid because of an error at the welfare office. Deborah, in Southeast PA, was thrown off her Medicaid because she made \$20 over the income limit. For both, we successfully won their benefits back!

"I worked with Put People First! PA to appeal the cut in my SNAP allowance. It took some work to locate all the receipts for my out of pocket expenses for food (I'm on a gluten-free diet, among other things). But it was worth it, since they raised my SNAP allowance from \$55 to \$125 per month! My roommate was grateful too, since that takes some pressure off our food budget. You only get what you're organized to take!"- Lynda, Southwest PA (Photo of Linda below)



Put People First! PA Members in the Media!



Check out
Raphie's
interview with
WHYY from April



Check out Jen's
interview with
WESA from April

During the 1st Anniversary of the Medicaid Cut-offs, Put People First! PA was asked to share stories from people affected by the cuts. Here are excerpts from PPF-PA member Raphaella Huff's story:

"I almost gave up," she said of her renewal application. "I was having problems getting the verification for something that [the state] wanted and I actually was like, OK, I'm just going to give up. I can probably get by without health care again, because I did in the past."

But it didn't come to that. Huff got help from Put People First! PA, a grassroots health care advocacy group. She was able to keep her Medicaid, which she relied on during her pregnancy and the birth of her daughter last month. Others haven't been so lucky, she said.

"It seems like luck is a huge part of it," Huff said. "You can make a mistake and it will cost you your health care. And they [the state] can make a mistake and it will cost you your health care. But it's always we're punished, the ones that are trying to apply."



June 5th: The Southeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee rallied around our member Raphaella (Raphie) for a SNAP Benefit hearing. Raphie recently featured in an Inquirer article on the ongoing Medicaid Cuts - then, despite being a brand new mother, was still cut despite being legally qualified for automatic renewal. Put People First! PA helped Raphie appeal, which forced them to reinstate her Medicaid but kept her SNAP cut. We met in court today to ensure Raphie and her daughter kept SNAP. Our basic needs are our human rights!

Put People First! PA leader, Jen, was interviewed by Kate Giammarise from 90.5 WESA. Click or scan above to read the media coverage.



Medicaid Appeal Victory! Jen's Testimony



"In March 2024 after about eight years of being on Medicaid, I received a notice saying that I made too much money and was going to be cut. I'm a substitute teacher. When I got the notice I was sitting in a classroom full of teenagers and I started crying. I had no idea what I was gonna do.

Medicaid has been the best healthcare I've ever had. With Medicaid, I could focus on my health, not whether or not something was covered, or whether I was gonna get a bill for something that I thought was covered, or finding out that I had a hole in my coverage because of some miscommunication or bureaucratic issue. With Medicaid I could focus on my mental health, my family, my job, my work, all of the things in my life.

So when I received my cut off notice, I was terrified. I was terrified of having to go back to Pennie for healthcare. I have been on marketplace insurance plans multiple times, for several years, with 2 different companies and the whole time it was a nightmare. I had high co-pays and premiums. There were times I thought I was covered and wasn't and got huge bills for treatment that I found out afterward wasn't covered for various reasons.

Fortunately, I'm a member of Put People First! PA. I had been involved for the last year with our Medicaid Cut-offs organizing drive, helping other people to appeal. When I got my notice, I knew that I have the right to appeal and that I have an organization behind me that would stick with me through it all, whether I win my appeal or not. I also knew that I could appeal immediately and keep my Medicaid while I waited for the hearing. Importantly, I knew that I wasn't alone, that I had the right to healthcare.

PPF-PA was with me every step of the way. Within days of my receiving the notice, several of us met. PPF-PA members helped me by listening to how I was feeling. They helped me figure out how to immediately file the appeal so that I kept my Medicaid. They helped me communicate with the welfare office.

When I got my date for my hearing a couple months later in May, PPF-PA members immediately got into motion helping me figure out my case.

We talked about how the welfare office determined that I made too much money for Medicaid, but that because I'm a substitute teacher, I'm not salaried and so I only make money when school is in session, which means that for the two and half months of the year that school is out during the summer, and during the year when there are school holidays and breaks or days off, I don't get paid.

In the end, the caseworker didn't appear, so I won my case and get to keep my Medicaid on!!

This is all unnecessary. It doesn't have to be this way. We can have it so much better if we fight and organize and build this movement so that everyone can have all of our human needs as human rights."

- Jen Cox



Southeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee



[Read full story here](#)



(Photo above: Southeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee Members Jeanette and Jacob at Jen's Appeal Hearing.

Photo on page 7: Deborah's Appeal Hearing also in Southeast PA with Anita, Zevi and Jacob supporting.)



Medicaid Appeals as Projects of Survival

In September 1968, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover described the Black Panthers (BPP) as "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country". For many it was thought that this statement was made due to their militant presence and guns but in actuality it was due to the work they did to organize in their communities through what they came to call Projects of Survival (PROS).

Projects of Survival are a form of base-building that help our base meet our immediate needs while strengthening the organization and coordination of our class. The BPP organized within their own communities, met the needs they witnessed and used such opportunities to connect with and organize their base through ongoing political education activities. It is this organizing of the most impacted segment of society as well as their work to connect across otherwise uncrossable lines through the Rainbow Coalition, organizing the bottom, that made them "the greatest threat....". This led to their ultimate infiltration, leader assassination and incarceration and demise.

In the 1980s-1990s the National Union of the Homeless took up the practice of carrying out Projects of Survival (PROS) through their nationally synchronized housing takeovers in over 25 cities building a membership of close to 35,000 members at its height. Although they were able to win concessions such as multi-million dollar housing programs, they too were infiltrated, undercut and by the late 1990s were in demise.

What makes this type of organizing so dangerous to the power holders we are working to hold accountable?

As PPF-PA works to carry out our Theory of Change and the Poor Organizing the Poor model of organizing, it is our practice of moving beyond charity and mutual aid to carry out these PROS as a form of base-building that helps to meet our base's immediate needs while strengthening the organization and coordination of our class. This is what makes our base-building centered around our practice of carrying out PROS across the state just as powerful, effective and dangerous.

Most recently, we have turned Medicaid appeals into a Project of Survival. For years, we have been signing people up for state benefits like Medicaid and food stamps as a Project of Survival, developing trainings for our members and incorporating this practice as part of our People's Clinics. Medicaid appeals are an extension of this practice of organizing around welfare benefits.



Why Medicaid appeals?

We know that people are still being systematically and brutally cut off Medicaid. This is an opportunity for us to reveal our class-based healthcare system that is denying us healthcare and killing us every day.

Nearly 80 million people in this country are enrolled in Medicaid. By organizing around these cuts through tactics like appeals, we are making the invisible visible. Every day we meet another person who was cut off Medicaid. We know that this is going to keep happening to our people, and when it does, they will not know where to turn.

When someone tells us they have been cut off Medicaid, we tell them about their right to appeal and encourage them to let PPF-PA help them file. The welfare office will process their appeal and eventually give us a hearing date. During the hearing, a member of PPF-PA can go to support someone as they talk with a judge and caseworker to explain why they think they should still have Medicaid. A group of us also go to rally outside the welfare office. Regardless of the judge's decision, we continue to fight for this person's healthcare!

So far, we helped 10 people and counting to file appeals – all of whom had a favorable ruling out of the 55 favorable rulings statewide. That is a big impact! [Click here to read the full article.](#) ▽

- **Harrison and Kristin**

Co-coordinators, Base-building Team



Highlights from Spring-Summer 2024 Base-building across PA!



Put People First! PA members have been out in our regional Healthcare Rights Committees in different areas across the state almost every week since March. Members go out together and knock on doors to meet people at their homes, partner with food pantries or participate in community events. Everywhere we look to connect with people about their healthcare experiences, and talk with one another about what it would take to change this system. At People's Clinics we meet basic needs like helping people sign up for state benefits and provide basic medical services like blood pressure screenings. We ask people to share their healthcare stories to help us break our isolation and to join us to get organized. Here are base-building photos and brief recaps from Healthcare Rights Committees.

April 20 Northeast PA

Door knocking at Newberry Estates in Williamsport. We heard devastating stories of the effects of poverty.

☑️T, whose mother can barely scrap together the money for her copays every month.

☑️C, who worries since she started working part time, she might lose her access to healthcare.

☑️J, who lost her husband 3 years ago and suffers from high copays for her lifesaving meds.

☑️R, who reapplied to Medicaid five times before the state allowed her to have healthcare.

☑️C, who has healthcare for her kids, but struggles to access it for herself.

☑️K, whose brother died far too young. We won't stand by as poverty kills our people anymore!



April 27 Central Appalachia PA

CAPA's first door knocking of the season in Oakhurst Homes in Johnstown today! We met up with Sean, who we previously met door knocking here and came with us to a legislative visit with Senator Langerholc, but we lost touch when his number changed. Today, we got reconnected, and he came out to door knock with us!

May 25 Southeast PA

We had an amazing People's Clinic in Pottstown today! This clinic followed a door knocking we did last month in our newest member's neighborhood nearby. We're a month out from Mission of Mercy - a massive free Dental Clinic taking place in not far from here. We're inviting everyone we've met here to join us in getting essential care that we're otherwise denied.



Projects of Survival

June 8th Southwest PA

The Southwest PA Healthcare Rights Committee held a People's Clinic at the Swissvale Farmer's Market at the STEAM academy on Saturday June 8th. Melanie, Benita, Rica, Barbara & Briann led the clinic and offered blood pressure screenings, Medicaid/SNAP signups, and listened to healthcare stories from those who visited us. We build our base to build our power!

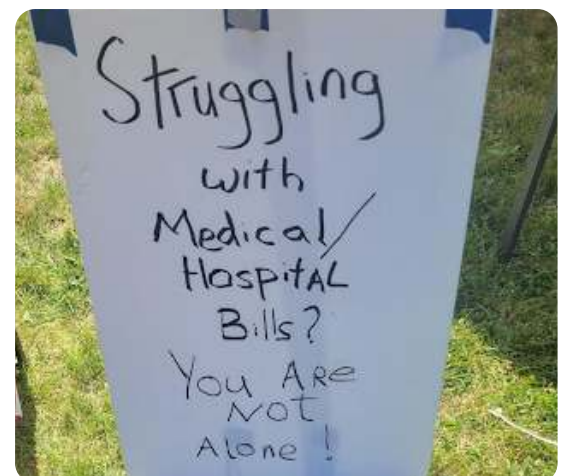


June 8th South Central PA

Put People First! PA South Central Healthcare Rights Committee joined the "Peace in the Streets Block Party" at Culliton Park in Lancaster, PA organized by the Kendall Movement, dedicated to Kendall Cook and all those who lost their lives due to gun violence, Paying it Forward, an organization that offers food boxes and SOWE, a Lancaster City neighborhood group. [Click here to read more!](#)



[Read more about what are Project of Survivals.](#)



Campaign Update

It's Time For a Public Healthcare Advocate



On May 13th, 2024, Put People First! PA (PPF-PA) hosted Pennsylvania's first Public Healthcare Advocate Forum (PHA)! Co-sponsored by Partners for Dignity & Rights and members of the PA Poor People's Campaign, the event brought together healthcare advocates from Nevada and Connecticut, state legislators, representatives from several state offices, and everyday leaders from PPF-PA and other working class organizations. Our members spoke to some of the many healthcare struggles facing Pennsylvanians, while the advocates from other states showed how offices like theirs play crucial roles in ensuring access to healthcare, preventing and alleviating medical debt, and holding healthcare profiteers accountable.

Drawing inspiration from states like Nevada and Connecticut, PPF-PA began to envision a Public Healthcare Advocate in our state in 2018. But, just what is a Public Healthcare Advocate, and how did we get here?

A Public Healthcare Advocate, or PHA, is a public office that protects patients 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. After winning the first public hearing on rising insurance premiums from the Pennsylvania Insurance Department in 2016, followed by statewide town halls in 2017, we realized that the systems supposedly in place to defend residents were really fighting for the interests of insurance companies! We knew that we needed someone to represent us, everyday people, at the state level and began organizing for a Public Healthcare Advocate.

Since then, PPF-PA has held advocacy days in Harrisburg, met with legislators and state officials to discuss our vision, and drafted detailed legislation to bring about a robust Advocate's office, guided by a Community Advisory Board.



May's forum was a vital step forward for the PHA, connecting a bipartisan audience of PA lawmakers with two representatives from long standing offices who outlined just how powerful and successful advocates can be.

Reflecting on his office's work in 2023, Connecticut's Sean King reported a 70% success rate in appeals and over \$4.6 million in recovered costs for residents. Khadyja Carter of Nevada highlighted similar accomplishments for her team. In 2023, Nevada's Office of Consumer Health Assistance opened 1450 advocacy cases and saved residents nearly \$2 million. These offices are not only effective at assisting people; they are also sustainable institutions, recouping far more money than is needed to operate them.

A Public Healthcare Advocate in PA would no doubt achieve similar successes and be a champion of our class and a regulator of those who try to profit off our sickness and misfortune. We will continue to fight for our own advocate because we know that healthcare is a crisis for all of us and we need real representation in Harrisburg. Already, this struggle has strengthened our organization and partnerships and has helped us to unify everyday people across many lines of division, and while the work ahead will challenge us, it will also help us grow further. To that we say, "Forward Together!"



- Benita Campbell, Ande Ciampa, Anita Knisely-Durham, Nijmie Dzurinko
PPF-PA Campaign/Legislative Team



[Read more here.](#)

Member Stories

This is a story about why we need a Public Healthcare Advocate in the state of Pennsylvania. As you may remember, in the last *Keystone*, we heard about Rica's dental saga - her dentist had been paid for something they didn't do. She says: I called them many times and they finally sent the money back to the insurance company. I didn't feel comfortable with them doing the work on my mouth, since I don't like thieves!

So I found a new dentist, he did the measurements and within 4 visits, I had my new dentures. I went in to have the first adjustment on the dentures and that's when I found out my dentist was denied payment for the dentures he had done. And the reason for this was that my former dentist turned around and filed paperwork that said they did my dentures when they did not. So they got paid for not doing any work. It turns out they had filed multiple times and were paid, even though I had told my insurance that I wasn't using them anymore.

And the insurance told me that if I couldn't get them to send the money back, I couldn't get any dental work for 5 years. *Why are we doing the insurance company's job when they are getting paid by the federal government? Why didn't they listen to me when I told them I wasn't using the old dentist anymore? I am on Medicare.*

At our recent Public Healthcare Advocate Forum, Khadyja Carter (Operations Chief, Office for Consumer Health Assistance in Nevada) said they hear too many complaints like this. So what do we have to do to get a Healthcare Advocate office in PA to handle this complaint? I should not have to do the insurance company's job. I should not have to be threatened that I won't have dental services because of their mistake, not once but twice! This seems like fraud!



Rica Phillips
Southwest Healthcare Rights Committee



Rica on right, with fellow PPF-PA Member Esther



Member Stories

My father taught me so much about how to survive under poverty. He would be gone all week, driving day in and day out as a truck driver, but still made time to help our neighbors on the weekends. Sometimes it just so happened that when we were hungry, the exact food that we needed would "fall off" the back of the truck while it was being unloaded. Daddy would say it was an "act of God".

One summer night in 1998, he called home to talk to us kids. He did that every night, which was quite a feat back then before cell phones became commonplace. His only words were, "Put Alice on the phone." He never called my mom Alice. The doctors said it was a heart attack, but a month later my Dad went back to work - "AMA", or Against Medical Advice. The day that my dad left, we were served an eviction notice.

My family was homeless for several months. No matter how hard or how long my dad worked, we couldn't seem to climb out of poverty. The health insurance cost \$120/month because his heart attack was considered a pre-existing condition. The meds cost \$60/month out of pocket. He dropped the health insurance and we stopped going to the doctor.

Eventually my dad worked hard to improve our credit and bought a house, and my brother came back from California. When my mom had a stroke, Geisinger sent my dad a bill for almost a million dollars - he had a good laugh about it and threw it in the trash. When my mom died, my dad used her last social security check to pay for her cremation. After my brother lost his job, I gave my dad whatever I could, but they still kept coming up short. My dad and then my brother took out payday loans in order to make up the shortfall.

In the summer of 2022 my dad got a hernia. Fluid was emptying into his groin; his family doctor referred him to a liver specialist in Harrisburg. The night after the surgery my dad complained of chest pain, but it was dismissed as heartburn. In December of 2022, I rushed him to the ER three times. As soon as they got him to a real room, they wanted to discharge him as soon as possible. Repeating this cycle over and over again was torture.

The fourth time that I rushed him to the hospital was in January of 2023. They ran tests and found out that he was having another heart attack, and one of the tests they did showed that he had calcification on his heart. They said any surgery was too risky with the calcification, that he never should have been approved for the liver surgery. I cried and protested that they said he would die without the surgery. They said yes, it was only a matter of time. They gave my dad a prescription for nitroglycerin and discharged him. He only made it another three weeks before we lost him forever.

Poverty sentenced my dad to death over and over again. It sentenced my dad to death when the threat of homelessness forced him to work himself into multiple heart attacks. It sentenced my dad to death when he chose to drink to cope with the stress, which developed into liver disease. It sentenced my dad to death when he decided to forgo doctor visits because health insurance was too expensive. A lifetime of poverty and insufficient healthcare culminated in his death.

Through the Nonviolent Medicaid Army, I learned about a place where healthcare is guaranteed as a human right. In Cuba, every person has a family doctor who cares for you your whole life, and that family doctor talks directly to your specialists in the same building. My father deserved the kind of healthcare where your liver specialist meets and talks with your cardiologist before surgery. Where your whole healthcare team works together. Not some disjointed, fragmented system that runs off of profit. Whose miscommunications result in two months of pain, suffering and untimely death.

- Rebecca, Co-Coordinator
Northeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee



[Read full story
here.](#)

#MEDICAID MONDAYS

Every Monday, our members share why we need Medicaid on social media.

What's your story?



Brian

(Left) It took two sessions, she pulled all upper teeth, and all lower teeth. (mind you, I had good teeth.) This dentist also had my dentures made before I moved out of state. I am disabled. I am low income. I had no choice. The cost of dental insurance is out of reach which again leaves people no choice....

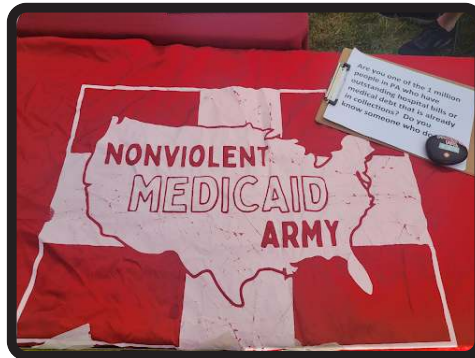


Knova

(Above) I have Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, which there is no cure or treatment for. Most people my age with EDS are in wheelchairs. I am struggling severely with my mobility because of EDS...

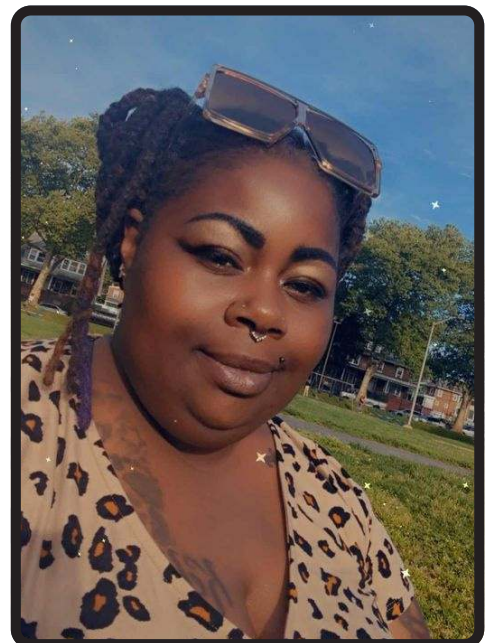
Sefi

(Below) I've had teeth pulled because I couldn't afford a crown or root canal. I now have private insurance; the most expensive plan offered to me by work and it doesn't cover what I need.



Lameesha

(Right) "It's hard to get dental care in my area. The dentist offices either don't take Medicaid, or they are booked out for months. I am supposed to see a periodontist for scaling and I can't afford it. Just the consultation is \$80. I am a single mother. This would have all been covered by Medicaid but they cut it. We need the Adult Dental Benefit put back in Medicaid...."



#MEDICAID MONDAYS

Visit [Facebook.com/PutPeopleFirstPA](https://www.facebook.com/PutPeopleFirstPA) to see more.



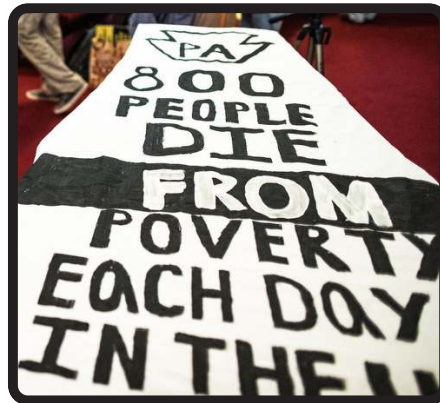
Matt

(Left) "I'm posting today on behalf of a movement to restore the dental component to Medicaid. As someone who RELIES on state covered healthcare, it is ABSOLUTELY vital that this "benefit" (we pay for it, and deserve to utilize it when necessary, don't EVER let anyone tell you different.) make a return. Too many fail to understand the full fallout of poor dental health. It could LITERALLY kill you!...."



Maxine

(Below) "I'm on Medicaid due to compromised immune system and congenital birth defect, and life's struggle for a person of melanin, it's getting harder to eat, pay bills, find affordable housing, that's not mice, rat, roach, flea, fly, and tick ridden abode."



(Above) I received medical benefits and food stamps for \$185 in 2023. August of 2023 they told me I no longer qualified for these benefits. Beginning of November 2023 I received a letter stating I no longer qualified for medical.



Thea

(Right) "I got kicked off of Medicaid in 2023, so I was forced to get a Pennie plan. If I paid the full value of what Pennie costs, my premium would cost me over \$700 a month. I just filed my taxes and I'm not going to get any return and I owe money because of this Pennie plan. The affordable care act isn't very affordable."



Poor People's Campaign

March 2nd: Mass Assemblies to end death by poverty



Here's a reflection from Steph C., a Put People First! PA member in Southwest PA.

Making the trip to Harrisburg after just a few weeks of joining Put People First! PA wasn't anything that I expected doing. But that experience and comraderie was exactly what I needed after a long dark Winter. I was immediately welcomed by a whole group of extremely warm and friendly people. I was really nervous to make the trip alone so their kindness meant more than they probably realized at the time.

We ended up waiting a prolonged time for a bus that kept getting delayed. But that was an amazing opportunity for me to talk to and get to know people in the group. It didn't take long to feel comfortable when I saw who I was surrounded by; people who were differently abled who wouldn't judge or pressure me for my own different needs, people with their children in tow, people who were very young and people who were older with deep knowledge happy to be sharing it freely. People who all had the same goal of caring for others.

I have never been in the city of Harrisburg before so there were a lot of interesting sights to take in. Seeing the big elaborate buildings, the Capitol building with its ginormous copper roof, in contrast to the tents alongside the river made it seem just like any other city in this country though.



[Read the press coverage.](#)

Walking inside of the church and immediately seeing the provided childcare, nourishing food and drink for the guests, the Spanish and sign language translators, and working class people from numerous groups presenting powerfully at the podium with a side of song and dance again solidified that we are the ones on the most glorious side of the river. When we work with each other, when we come together, we are enough, and we are powerful in all of the most important ways.



- Steph C.
Member of Southwest PA HRC



**Photos by Zach Gleiter of Penn Live*

Maternity Care Deserts Are Social Murder



I don't have kids, and I don't plan on having any.

But I do think that one measure of a healthy society is how our families are doing.

Do parents and caregivers have time to spend with children?

Are families able to secure housing, healthcare and food?

Seven PA counties are now considered to be "maternal health deserts". That means that in these counties there is literally no place to give birth, or anywhere to get any assistance with giving birth.

Two of these counties - Elk and Juniata, are in the Central-Appalachia region where I live. All of the counties in PA which are currently considered maternal health deserts are rural (the others are Cameron, Forest, Greene, Sullivan, and Wyoming).

According to Becker's Hospital Review, 200 hospitals in the United States have shut down delivery services in the last decade, and there have already been 19 maternity closures since the start of 2024 (including in Elk County).

Hospitals are citing "financial pressure", "workforce shortages" and lower birth rates as some of the reasons they are no longer providing maternity care. Ultimately, though, the truth is that we live in a society where giving birth is no longer "good business".

Our healthcare system is owned by Wall Street. More profit accumulates from chronic conditions which garner repeated and consistent outpatient care, hospital visits, pharmaceutical interventions, surgeries and other treatments as well as highly specialized procedures (joint replacements, cancer centers).

Birthing is a natural process. Its pace, frequency, and complications cannot easily be translated into reliable and consistent profit-making.

At the end of March 2024, 22 leaders from the Nonviolent Medicaid Army (NVMA) from across the U.S. traveled to Cuba as part of our network's first Nonviolent Medicaid Army Cuba Brigade. The Brigade aimed to learn about the Cuban experience of building a revolutionary movement and society with the human rights to health and healthcare as central demands in order to inform our struggle as the Nonviolent Medicaid Army in the U.S. today. From visiting an arts school to a polyclinic and a maternity hospital to meeting with various community organizations, members exchanged experiences of the organized poor from the U.S. and Cuba, and learned about each other's realities and roles in our shared working class internationalist struggle. As leaders fighting for healthcare across the U.S., members of the brigade also deepened their relationships with one another.



That wouldn't be a concern, though, if we lived in a system that put people first.

March 22nd - 31st, 2024, I had the honor of learning about the Cuban healthcare system firsthand, along with two dozen other leaders from the Nonviolent Medicaid Army from the Midwest, South, Southwest, Appalachia and Northeast. One of our goals was to learn about healthcare as a cornerstone of a fundamental transformation of society from the bottom up.



**Scan to watch
the video!**

While there, we visited Maternity Hospital Gonzalez Coro in Havana. We learned that the fundamental premise of the Cuban health system is that it is free, universal, and accessible. Since the 1959 revolution that defeated a dictatorship and the forces of big capital, Cuba has made healthcare a free, fundamental human right.

Unlike in the U.S., hospitals in Cuba are not shutting down. There is no such thing as an “unprofitable hospital” because healthcare is not for profit in the first place. The purpose of the healthcare system is to provide care, prevent disease and meet people’s needs. So simple, straightforward and rational

While being graciously hosted and getting to view the hospital, we got to meet some new parents with low birth weight twins. It’s well known in the medical community that skin to skin contact with parents is one of the most important factors in supporting premature newborns to grow and thrive. Despite that, healthcare in the U.S. is organized not by what is best for families, but what is best for capital. I saw something in Cuba I would never see in a U.S. hospital - parents spending all day (and night) with their newborns, staying in the hospital for as long as it takes, without worries about cost, insurance, coverage, networks, co-pays, deductibles, or any of the other barriers they would encounter in the U.S. healthcare system.

Another NVMA leader and I shared a moment of grief reflecting on parents we know who had twins who were in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) for months after birth and had limited contact with them during that time.

The attack on maternity care in the U.S. should be acknowledged as a form of state violence. The same state that is attacking our families imposes an economic blockade against Cuba, causing deep harm, suffering and shortages. But despite the pressure they have not forfeited their commitment to healthcare as the essence of their revolution!



- Nijmie Zakkiyyah Dzurinko
Central Appalachia Healthcare Rights Committee

In 2021, the U.S. saw the highest number of maternal deaths in six decades. The “maternity care deserts” we’re seeing are not acts of God and they are not “natural”. They are a form of social murder at the hands of a state that is not set up to act in the interests of the working class majority but instead at the behest of shareholders and billionaires. The Nonviolent Medicaid Army aims to change that by becoming a new and unsettling force, capable of reorganizing society to meet our people’s needs.



Receiving Care Under Medicaid, Coming from a Genderfluid Perspective



If there is one thing that no one likes when it comes to scheduling doctors appointments, it is the concern of insurance standing in the way. Whether it's with an NSI number just so you can see a specialist, or being told you cannot access a specific medication because it's "not covered," a firm denial of benefits when you need them most will always remain the hassle that it is: health insurance puts profits over people. To have the ability to make my own medical decisions should be clear and simple.

When I know I am sick or when I know my loved ones are sick, I take care of my needs and their needs because I am present in the situation. An insurance company is not present. It is only present in-so-far as it will be paid for services that they are claiming to cover but then can choose on a whim to not cover at all. Why is this? Because if the insurance company is not making a profit to give to their shareholders, then the venture is not worth the cause. That leaves us - the everyday folks, the working class - the people who are most affected by these sudden whims to worry and stress over what to do. What is a common experience we all share? Having the insurance company swoop in and tell us what we deserve in our health care, and what THEY are willing to pay out for it. All in the name of a shareholder making extra money without putting in the work.

When I was a teenager, I had a lot of discomfort with my body as well as anxiety and depression. I did not like shaving; I did not always like my breasts; and don't get me started on periods. I was diagnosed with Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) due to my sudden changes in mood and overall dysphoria of my body during the time of my menstrual cycle. As a teenager I had an irrational fear of losing friends if I so much as shared my experiences regarding my diagnosis. But in order to protect myself, I had to hide my true feelings about the perception I had of my body which took a mental and emotional toll back then. It would not be until much later in my life that I would realize I was genderfluid and learn to accept myself.



I consider now what gender-affirming care might have looked like had it been an option when I was a teenager going through all those experiences. Since 2014, gender-affirming care has been covered under Medicaid. Being denied that ability to take care of myself played a pivotal role in my overall health. I felt unworthy of care. In reality, I know I am worthy of care but what does that mean for others who have similar feelings and experiences regarding their health? It hurts us when we are made to feel that we do not deserve access to healthcare when in dire need.

However, having the ability to make healthcare decisions for myself precludes that I have access to healthcare. It is still hard to obtain any kind of health care if you are poor, working class, or a person of color. A major obstacle that keeps us from obtaining healthcare is insurance benefit denials. Medicaid offers many kinds of services to people of various backgrounds and identities. When I was on Medicaid in 2018, it relieved me to know I would be able to obtain affordable medications and seek care when I needed it. However, insurance companies are only interested in for-profit needs.



- Ramona Rose
Southeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee



**[Read full story
here.](#)**

Winter Study

The Bible, The Ballot, The Organized Poor and the Path to Fundamental Change

PPF-PA Political Education & Leadership Development Team

For six weeks during Winter 2024 leaders from the Nonviolent Medicaid Army led and participated in a six week course on *The Bible, The Ballot, The Organized Poor and the Path to Fundamental Change*. With over 60 leaders from 16 states the course gave participants in different formations across the country an opportunity to learn from each other's practical work and build the collectivity of the NVMA. Participants studied how various movements in US history successfully and unsuccessfully wielded Christianity and the electoral arena to build a broad based movement of the poor to transform society. The course included classes on The Movement to End Slavery, The Great Depression, the New Deal, & the Post-War Counteroffensive, Martin Luther King, Jr and the Original Poor People's Campaign and our present day.

From the movement to end slavery to today, our class has walked this treacherous terrain – but through study we know we need a stronger foothold. The ruling class has wielded the bible and ballot to manipulate the poor; many of us have felt this firsthand.

Through this study, we have moved the needle in our collective understanding: to pave a pathway towards fundamental change, we must engage with the ballot and bible regardless of our own personal attachments to these arenas. The task at hand is to combine study and practice and continue refining how we strategically wield the battle for the bible and the ballot in our organizing. The course equipped us as leaders to continue to build the Nonviolent Medicaid Army in, through, and beyond the crises and divisiveness of 2024



The vigilance committees were especially powerful for our Indiana crew, giving a practical example of a fusion approach (abolitionists and fugitives) and network formation. Now as new people join the NVMA here, we describe the role of vigilance committees to demonstrate why sharing our healthcare stories is such an essential 'rite of passage.'

Jason Shenk

Indiana Nonviolent Medicaid Army

People have experienced so much hurt from different faith groups. We reclaimed our stories through study, understanding the corruptive narrative of division of how faith was used to create propaganda of the ruling class, and saw the many times in how faith was used to break up the larger movement. Ultimately, we walked away and reaffirmed faith in each other and in our different movements to end poverty. What is true is we have the capacity to see the trends, and we have the agency to change these times for ALL of our good.

Femi Akinmoladun

Wisconsin Poor People's Campaign

The mixed organization discussion groups did fortify connections among the NVMA in my experience. This space was invaluable to be able to think together each class session - I can have trouble taking in all the information on my own, so hearing how my discussion group members were understanding things helped me understand & question better too.

Stacey Padilla

Put People First! PA

Divide and Conquer and How to Combat It in Lancaster County, PA



From late February to late March of this year in Lancaster County, PA, the ruling class strategy of deflection through divide and conquer tactics was carried out by City, County and State elected officials.

- February 27, 2024, Lancaster City Council Meeting: The County government Homeless Coalition share their "cost saving" proposal for the year to close down the only low barrier shelter in Lancaster City at the end of June 2024
- The City Council vote on a resolution that reaffirmed Lancaster City's standing commitment to be a "Welcoming City" to undocumented immigrants
- March 2024, Lancaster County Commissioners, Josh Parsons and Ray D'Agostino, attack the Drag Queen Story Hour organized by Lancaster Pride and the Lancaster Public Library, followed by a right wing bomb threat and protest by hate group Moms for Liberty is permitted
- March 20th, 2024, Lancaster County Commissioners vote on a resolution declaring the county a "NON Sanctuary County," and urge other counties to follow suit.

The community as a whole was unaware that these tactics of divide and conquer were being used. Several community members and organizations took action against the attacks on their communities by only addressing what their sector of the class was experiencing instead of uniting together as one.

Besides those under attack not being in step, some members of the working class fell for the fear tactics and false narratives, which led to the working class fighting each other. Imagine what we could have accomplished if we had ALL banded together based on our needs and against the ruling class agenda, instead of fighting each other.

The Political Geography of Lancaster County

The political geography of Lancaster County is such that the Democratic Party has in recent decades controlled the Lancaster City Government and the Republican Party has in recent decades controlled the Lancaster County Government.

In much the same way state politics pit Philly and Pittsburgh against the more rural and central parts of the state, the politics of Lancaster County pit the residents of Lancaster City against the residents of the rest of Lancaster County. Underneath this divide and conquer narrative and politics is the reality that across Lancaster County people are being hurt by the denial of their human rights to healthcare, housing, jobs at living wages, etc.

Across Lancaster County & City both political parties have been united in and beholden to economic redevelopment that enables profits for the few and gentrifies the poor. And in the lead up to elections, in particular national elections, both parties engage on issues in ways designed to rally "their base" to turn out on election day. In many ways the use of divide and conquer tactics - either via attack or defense - obscure these underlying economic and party interests.

The Republican Party, under the sway of the distorted moral narrative of White Christian Nationalism, blames and scapegoats various segments of the working class for the ills facing society. They refer to these populations as illegal, sinful and threats to social order.

The Democratic Party, neoliberal at its core, feigns concern for the poor, but mostly offers patronizing sentiments (implicitly blaming the poor for their poverty), and leave the poor in the bleachers while the Democratic Party "fights" on their behalf. This leaves the poor demobilized and divided and blocks real organizing and coming together for the kinds of fundamental change our communities need. The Democratic Party has also taken to co-opting leaders who emerge in different fights into the Democratic Party as part of renewing their party's connections to populations that have historically been part of the Democratic Party base.



From Scattered Silos to a Unified Front

For the most part these attacks on different sections of our class led to a defensive response that was fairly siloed. Organizations of the homeless, undocumented and LGBTQ (along with their allies) fought back simultaneously, but not in a coordinated way. This began to shift at the Lancaster County Commissioners meeting on March 20. There, without any prior planning, advocates for all of these constituencies found each other filling the seats and testifying against the attacks. Seeing their own situation in each other's fights.

Put People First! PA South Central PA Healthcare Rights Committee (SCPA HRC) was present in all of this. Having established ourselves through organizing and previous moments of struggle (in particular the fight against the closing of St Joseph's Hospital, against water shutoffs, for a Public Healthcare Advocate, for the rights of the unhoused, for decarceration and the rights of those held in Lancaster County Prison) we began to make the invisible, visible.

In county and city meeting rooms, in one on one conversations, signal group communications, and on social media - and then in press conferences and major gatherings like the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival's March 2nd convening in Harrisburg - we called attention to how the attack on these three sections of the working class (and others) was meant to divide us, pit us against each other, leaving us less able to resist both the onslaught of divisive attacks (and siloed responses) and the forward march of the redevelopment machine.

We moved to shift the narrative from the prevailing left vs right frame, to a rich vs poor frame. We engaged in the battle for the Bible, suggesting the hypocrisy of worshipping a homeless man on Sunday and then stepping over, vilifying and criminalizing him -- and the refugee and LGBTQ -- on Monday.

As we have in the past, we continue to fight for the unity of the leaders who emerged out of these different fronts of struggle as our essential task in order to kill the system before it kills us. Read the full article here.



[Read full article.](#)



Movement of Immigrant Leaders in Pennsylvania

JUNE 2024
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

President Biden's announced executive action expanding access to parole in place to a potential 500,000 people along with possible pathways to citizenship for certain DACA recipients and immigrant students, shows the political power that exists to protect families, regardless of immigration status. Together these changes represent easier pathways to citizenship and safety for hundreds of thousands of families.

We will ensure MILPA families eligible under this change get the support they need to apply when it takes effect in late Summer. We feel great relief for these families in our network and across our state. We call on this administration to follow through on this action and to ensure those detained by ICE who would benefit from these changes be released immediately to stay with their loved ones.

In Pennsylvania, our state legislature and Governor must pass laws to protect undocumented families and workers here in our state that fall outside of these changes. This includes legislation for driver's licenses for all, universal legal representation for those facing deportation, and creating a Pennsylvania Public Healthcare Advocate to support all families struggling to access healthcare services, regardless of immigration status.

The deepening crisis of poverty in the US and the ongoing genocide in Gaza are interlocking flashpoints at the root of Biden's political decision.

This fact and these struggles must not be ignored. In February, 100,000 Michigan Democrats voted uncommitted to protest Palestinian genocide in a key state for the Presidency. One of countless mass protests against US-backed violence in Palestine. Americans continue to struggle here at home for essential needs like food, housing, and healthcare despite record wealth and endless war funding. These conditions and the growing discontent around them represent a threat to this administration's support from its own base and many working class Americans.

We welcome hard fought relief for our people and MILPA maintains hope for our communities, but we know Pennsylvania must continue to organize for fundamental changes that value human rights and that include us all. Our families deserve more.

[Learn more about MILPA here.](#)



Member Stories

Why Put People First! PA? In 2016 I registered to vote for the first time. I grew up in a Native American household and was told that if I voted I would give up my sovereign nation status. This was a real threat that happened well into the 1980's and my family never voted because of this. Though later I found out the law had been changed, I felt at that time that a certain candidate WAS fighting for the working class and worth risking my status to vote for. Then I saw this candidate be squashed by the establishment.

That candidate was my first dive into organizing. I had poured months of grassroots organizing and phone banking and texting into this and I was exhausted, frustrated and emotionally fried. It was then, a friend I had made working for this candidate invited me to a healthcare forum - where everyday people got to ask Pennsylvania insurance execs about the rise in premiums. I later found out that this was a major win that PPF-PA had achieved.

This forum was being held in my town, Altoona, at the library. I went, not understanding anything about healthcare premiums, insurance companies or healthcare profiteers. I firmly believed that healthcare was a human right, and Danelle, the friend who invited me, told me Put People First! PA held that same ideal.

I went and there was a very loud man speaking over everyone else. He kept saying he did NOT believe healthcare was a human right, that he was tired of lazy leeches thinking they deserved healthcare paid for by HIS taxes. People who can't afford healthcare don't deserve to live.

Before I knew it, my hand shot up in the air. I found myself saying, "I'd like to respond to the gentleman's comments." I said that 1st of all, my ex husband was medically retired from the military, but because he was ONLY 60% disabled, our children

and I were not covered by Tricare, and we had no option but Medicaid. How dare he call a retired veteran and their family lazy. Next I said that now I was a single mom who was working 3 jobs, but still couldn't afford out of pocket medical insurance for myself and my children, so without Medicaid we would not be able to access medical care. Finally, I finished by saying that God forbid something happened to him or his family and they were in an accident and COULDN'T WORK, did they then deserve to die because they couldn't work for and afford healthcare?

I was suddenly surrounded by people in red shirts! My friend Danelle is telling them, "this is my friend Jennina and she's going to be an HRC (Healthcare Rights Committee) coordinator in Altoona". Lol, I didn't know what an HRC was! She ended up being right though.



In my journey with PPF-PA, I have been an HRC coordinator, on various teams and been actively engaged in multiple actions with PPF-PA and the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. I have learned how to advocate for myself and others. I have learned how to effectively organize against "business as usual" politics and attitudes of the ruling class. I have learned to use my voice - both in song and to speak out against injustice here, and everywhere.

In PPF-PA I found my chosen family. A family who has loved and supported me through my darkest times and celebrated with me, and helped me achieve my greatest joys. Put People First! PA is Home for me. The people, the principles, are what I want for this world, and what I teach my children. Together we can and will win.

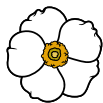
- Jennina Rose Gorman
Central Appalachia PA Healthcare Rights Committee





Nonviolent Medicaid Army

Georgia NVMA Reflection



The Georgia Nonviolent Medicaid Army has worked in an area with a great amount of Empire happening in our backyard. We exist in the middle of one of the best hospital systems in Georgia and the newly formed Department of Defense Cyber Command has brought a swarm of people and money to the region that gives the illusion of prosperity and opportunity.

This has caused us to become multifaceted in our organizing, starting first with a Spiritual Foundation, understanding that people rely heavily on the bond of faith and its role within our communities' lifestyle, leading us to form a bond with a local congregation. With the church's participation, we have been able to work through various People's Clinics sites allowing for regular activity that we are learning to make effective. During the debrief process we are constantly shifting and improving. The key is always using the Struggle as a School philosophy as a road map to success.

We've done 5 Projects of Survival in the past year. It also became apparent at the People's Clinics - or in Door Knocking to inform folks of the People's Clinic - that we also needed to become more knowledgeable about multiple areas of the healthcare fight, so we looked at the Veterans Health Administration amid the backdrop of a community that boasts a large Veteran presence and two VA Hospitals. We're constantly in fear of the privatization of the VA.

Carrying out the arduous task of Landscape assessments has really been informative and has helped aid our Political Education. We are young but energized and empowered to continue the fight, constantly gaining a better understanding of our enemy and their tactics so that we may provide the best counteroffensive possible.

Forward Together!

The Nonviolent Medicaid Army (NVMA) of the poor is a growing militant force of the poor and dispossessed, united across identities, regions, races and issues, modeled after Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 'nonviolent army of the poor' from the first Poor People's Campaign of 1968.

We are on or unfairly excluded from Medicaid and represent the diversity of the entire working class and are impacted by every single front of struggle.

*Members of the Nonviolent Medicaid Army are organizing across 12 states:
PA, MD, IN, WY, NY, MA, GA, VT, WI, NC, IL, TX*

"The clinics are fun and you get to meet great people! Once you meet these people, they're a part of your team. Once you meet a person, they're now a part of who you are!" - Rev. Neil

- Rev. Neil
Georgia Nonviolent Medicaid Army

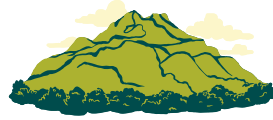


Learn More!

Nonviolent Medicaid Army

Vermont NVMA

Reflection



From February through June 2024, Vermont Workers' Center (VWC) Organizing Committees (OCs) planned, organized towards and hosted events, all part of a consolidated, statewide Spring Tour.

The goals of the tour were:

- Use a tour as a unifying approach to our organizing across the state
- Use the tour to create a North Star to strengthen and expand existing Organizing Committees and as a method of building new Organizing Committees
- Simplify the development of local base-building strategy
- Strengthen leaders' ability to base-build, coordinate events and develop political education around the economic concepts under-girding our campaign.



Scan to watch a
video from
VWC!



Here are a few reflections and lessons learned from different Organizing Committees across the state:

Chittenden:

40 people came out to the Spring Tour event at the Old North End Community Center in Burlington. We had a pop-up health screening clinic in partnership with healthcare workers from UVM Medical Center Support Staff United. We heard from speakers from the support staff union, from speakers who were in recovery, experienced homelessness, faced huge medical bills, and linking the fight for basic needs with ending military support for Israel's war on Gaza. We worked with interpreters and flyer-ed in multiple languages with the aim of ensuring participation from everyone in our community.

Windham:

Organizing is more than just canvassing or just tabling, it's all the ways in which we reach out and bring this struggle into our connections with people. Follow-up with contacts was crucial—continuously meeting up with people. In terms of the organizing cycle, we needed to begin the follow-up from the first tour stop over the following couple of weeks, then continue that follow-up while beginning the cycle again for the upcoming second tour stop, in the hopes that people from the first event will join us in planning and canvassing for the second.

Upper Valley:

The Spring Tour as a method advanced our organization's understanding of organizing cycles and the concept of the North Star. The first iteration wasn't as successful at building OCs because it was more focused on building up the existing OC's ability to plan a North Star event. After using this muscle more, we'll be able to base-build in new towns, with new people, and recreate the organizing cycle and plug new folks into this broader process.

Nonviolent Medicaid Army Indiana NVMA Reflection



I work an average of 66 hours a week, but because I'm not a full-time employee, I'm still considered unworthy of decent healthcare. I haven't been to a doctor since the summer of 2023 and I haven't had the opportunity to even see a dentist in 8 years. Even if I did have health insurance through the temp agency I work for, I would be punished for taking time off in order to attend an appointment, by receiving a point. My partner still has Healthy Indiana Plan (HIP), Indiana's Medicaid Program, and by extension so does my daughter. But if I was to marry the woman I love, both her and my daughter would lose all of their benefits. This is just my situation, but there are many similar scenarios in the lives of all working class people in this nation. And why is this? Because the powers that be care more about dead presidents than they do about the living, breathing working class people that generate their wealth for them. I know we're becoming increasingly isolated, and it's more difficult than ever to organize, but we must group together and stand against them. We must say "enough," and mean it. We must bring an end to the bloodshed both foreign and domestic. And remember, "monkey together strong".

- **Jesse (Crow) Roberts**
Indiana Nonviolent Medicaid Army



Dreams & Schemes

What is building the NVMA this year?

- Arts & Culture Exchange with Wisconsin PPC, June 27th
- Organizational "Blueprint" Planning: Taking what we've done and what we have and fitting it into a structure that will help us sustain ourselves and grow further.
- Expanding our organizations reach through landscape assessment and field & labor organizing.
- A project to study an archive of testimonies and case studies from our base.

Highlights from the Indiana NVMA

- ✦ Gathered 12 people from across the state for a New Member Orientation weekend of arts and culture, study and strategic planning, community and pancakes.
- ✦ Indiana NVMA leader, Jason, got his Medicaid cutoff notice early in the year. We studied our rights – then had 7 out of 7 of our local NVMA show together to go with him to file an appeal. He got a call **THAT AFTERNOON** that he had his coverage back!
- ✦ At the March 2nd Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival (PPC) rally in Indianapolis, the Indiana NVMA put our 4Cs into practice – playing a central role with testimonies, marshaling, media, and theomusicology.
- ✦ For NVMA Saturday Schools, Indiana has done regular watch parties, which have also included game nights, packing solidarity meds for the NVMA Cuba Brigade, and setting up 1:1 conversations across the state.



Member Stories

All together I spent 9 years in prison and I have been hospitalized over 30 times for my mental health problems because I was only able to receive treatment once I was in an emergency situation instead of receiving the care I needed when I needed it.

I was lost in the ineffective mental healthcare and criminal justice system. With healthcare not being a human right like it should be I was just thrown to the lions with my mental state. Through the 20 years of being misdiagnosed over and over again, I was given massive amounts of antipsychotics, and was looked at as an aggressive psychotic animal.

In prison I spent a large amount of time in solitary confinement and spent years locked in a manic psychotic hell. During my time in prison I worked in the infirmary. I watched people die in the worst conditions you could imagine. As I cleaned their cells they would be quietly praying. Quietly suffering indescribable pain. With no help in sight.

Through all this I saw the failures of our healthcare system. It is based on money, not people. In prison I saw hell. I saw unimaginable suffering. Through this I was ignited. I knew I had to do something to give these prisoners some sort of dignity in their death.

Their stories need to be told. Love, love is what will save us. We need to throw away all our mental fortresses and stand together to make healthcare a human right. This system isn't broken, it's working just the way the ruling class planned. It's time to fight back. Join us!

- Matt Rosing

South Central PA Healthcare Rights Committee



From the Media & Communications Team:

The media and many people in power really talk about us unhoused folks like we are a different species or something, a disease on this planet, like we aren't even human and this dehumanizing rhetoric insinuates that we are the ones to blame for the economic woes of everyone and affects our health as well as puts our lives at risk.

The Put People First! PA Media & Communications Team recently studied Media coverage of Grants Pass. We saw in the videos how the poor are always treated as a criminal case or as a pity case - NEVER as powerful leaders who are capable of upending this system. That's why it's crucial we make our own media, build our movement and shift the narrative!

Supreme Court case Grants Pass v Johnson: Will Homelessness Be Criminalized!?

On Friday, January 12, 2024, the United States Supreme Court announced it would take up the case of Grants Pass v. Johnson, which is the most significant case about homelessness in over 40 years.

Grants Pass, Oregon has outlawed “camping” on public property. Camping to them is using these items in public spaces: blankets, cardboard, pillows, or even the activity of lying down! Authorities in Grants Pass are not using this law to just ticket anyone, they are specifically targeting those in violation of this law who are also perceived to be unhoused. This directly violates a 2018 9th Circuit Court ruling: which states you cannot criminalize sleeping on public property if there isn’t adequate shelter.

The Supreme Court heard arguments on the case April 22, 2024, and it's final outcome will be “to determine whether, if under our constitution, a local government can make it a crime to involuntarily live outside and unsheltered, when adequate shelter is not available” with a ruling expected to come by the end of June 2024.

Us poor folk are in the midst of a fight for our lives, more specifically our human right to merely exist!

Grants Pass doesn’t care whether there are available shelter beds (there isn’t) and this is not just happening in Grants Pass, the criminalization of the poor and unhoused is happening across the nation and it's rising. 2023 had record levels of police violence hand-in-hand with rising poverty and rising criminalization and incarceration of the poor.

In 2023, 135 million people (more than 40% of our nation's population), were poor or low-income and just one paycheck or healthcare emergency away from homelessness. Over 50% of all renters in the nation are struggling to pay rent. Homelessness has increased 12% from 2022 to 2023 a record number since 2007 as rents soar and pandemic aid lapses.

Even owning your own home doesn't protect you from homelessness. Currently 30.8% of all homeowners in the United States are struggling to maintain their homes, they are being referred to as “House Poor.” On top of all that 23 million+ people have been cut from Medicaid since April 1, 2023 and 60% of our nation's population are living paycheck to paycheck.

I'm a leader in the Pennsylvania & National Union of the Homeless and earlier this year, as well as several other times throughout my life, I experienced homelessness. Our landlord announced they needed to rent the unit to family and won't be renewing our lease.



Luckily we had a lot of support this time around, thanks to the people we organize with, so it wasn't as bad as the previous times. However it was still very emotionally draining, intense and I was under constant stress. It took us four months to find a place and that was with a lot of people helping us, like the people in Put People First! PA and various community programs. So needless to say this ruling that we will hear soon from the Supreme Court, which will determine whether or not being homeless is a crime, is very personal to me and concerns me greatly.



**[Read Full
article here](#)**

Response to Grants Pass Ruling July 2024

On Friday June 28th, on the eve of the mass national Poor People's Campaign Assembly and Moral rally In Washington D.C, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Grants Pass, a town in Oregon. This means local governments can now fine and arrest you for sleeping in your car, laying on cardboard, or using a blanket, even on "public" property, whether there is a shelter bed available or not.

States like Florida didn't wait for the ruling from the Supreme Court. The state passed legislation criminalizing homelessness that was signed by the Governor in March 2024.

Here in Pennsylvania a few of our state Senators and House Representatives held a press conference following the Supreme Court ruling, and released a statement: "in the near future, we will introduce legislation to clarify that homelessness cannot be criminalized in Pennsylvania. This legislation will seek to guarantee the right to be outside and the right to share in public spaces, while ensuring that local governments secure adequate low-barrier housing to accommodate the houseless population."

These Representatives are elected from several areas of Pennsylvania: Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and Lancaster. The PA Union of the Homeless has established or is developing Homeless Union chapters in these areas, so we must organize to hold these Representatives accountable to our Human Right to housing.

We reject the Supreme Court ruling!

Homelessness occurs from policies enacted by those in power and is a product of this poverty-producing system. Essentially this ruling is punishing unhoused people for the crimes committed against them by the perpetrators of policy violence.

We are homeless, NOT helpless, we can think for ourselves, organize ourselves, WE HAVE POWER. We are not to be "pitied" and it will take our power and our organizing to get the Pennsylvania State legislation passed that these representatives are promising and demand that our communities care for unhoused people.

Join us in our fight for our human rights to healthcare, housing, food, education, clean air & water, etc. Because we only get what we are organized to take!



SUPREME COURT: YOU CAN BE ARRESTED FOR BEING HOMELESS

Today, June 28 2024, the Supreme Court ruled that cities can fine and arrest you for sleeping in your car, laying on cardboard, or using a blanket -- even on "public" property

WE REJECT THIS

In the RICHEST country in Human history, we place full blame for homelessness on this poverty-producing system.
No longer will we accept record profits amidst Medicaid cutoffs, public housing destruction, SNAP reduction, and poverty wages.

NATIONAL UNION OF THE HOMELESS

We are Homeless, NOT helpless. When we organize together, we can take what we need - Healthcare, Housing, our Dignity!

[Join the Fight: NationalUnionOfTheHomeless.org](https://NationalUnionOfTheHomeless.org)



In Memoriam: Dedication to Roxy Hall Williamson

In loving memory of Roxy Hall Williamson, we come together to honor a remarkable woman whose unwavering dedication to the fight for healthcare justice has left an indelible mark on all who knew her. Roxy's passion, tenacity, and boundless compassion have inspired countless individuals and organizations, including the Nonviolent Medicaid Army (NVMA) Texas and many others who had the privilege of standing alongside her in the battle for equitable healthcare.

Roxy's journey as an advocate was not just a career—it was a calling. Her commitment to ensuring that every person had access to quality healthcare was evident in every action she took. Whether she was organizing rallies, speaking at public forums, or providing support to those in need, Roxy's spirit shone brightly, illuminating the path towards a more just and compassionate world. Her tireless work with the NVMA Texas and other advocacy groups demonstrated her profound belief that healthcare is a fundamental human right, and she dedicated her life to making that belief a reality.



To the NVMA Texas and all who knew her, Roxy was more than a leader—she was a mentor, a comrade, and a friend. Her wisdom and guidance helped shape the direction of our efforts, and her encouragement gave us the strength to persevere even in the face of daunting challenges. Roxy's ability to connect with people from all walks of life and her genuine care for their well-being endeared her to everyone she met. She had a unique gift for making everyone feel valued and heard, and her legacy lives on in the countless lives she touched.

Roxy's fight did not end with her passing. Her spirit continues to fuel our resolve and our actions. We carry forward her legacy with a renewed sense of purpose, knowing that her dream of healthcare for all is more attainable because of the foundation she laid. Her memory propels us to advocate with even greater vigor, to stand up against injustice, and to support one another as she supported us.

As we continue this journey, we do so with Roxy's passion and love in our hearts. Her dedication to the cause, her kindness, and her unwavering belief in the power of collective action will forever inspire us. The fight for healthcare justice is far from over, and in every step we take, Roxy Hall Williamson's spirit walks beside us. We honor her memory by continuing her work, determined to make her vision of a world where healthcare is a right for all a reality.

Thank you, Roxy, for your immeasurable contributions and your enduring legacy. We will carry your torch forward, in Texas and beyond, with the love and dedication you so generously shared with us all.

- **Denita Jones**

Texas Nonviolent Medicaid Army



[Scan to watch a
video
dedication to
Roxy here.](#)

In Celebration, in Memoriam

In Memoriam



Ms. Lucille Fletcher

September 18, 1935 - May 9th, 2024

Ms. Fletcher was a member of the former Southwest Philly Healthcare Rights Committee, she is also featured in our 2016 video speaking truth to power at the hearing we won with the PA Insurance Department.



Watch Ms. Fletcher speak out at the hearing.



Starr Kennedy Romano

November 22, 1958 – September 3, 2023

Starr was a member in the Central Appalachia PA Region from 2020-2022. She was a leader in the temporary Healthcare Workers Team that we created during the pandemic. A nurse and union activist for decades, Starr was very motivated to connect with other healthcare workers and to fight healthcare profiteers like UPMC.

In Celebration

Luchia, Southeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee

Welcome to our Newest Healthcare Rights Committee member, Luchia, daughter of Southeast PA HRC member, Raphie. Raphie was given a cut off notice just after giving birth to her daughter. With members of the Southeast PA HRC, Raphie was able to successfully fight for her right to medicaid!



Congratulations to United Workers in Maryland on their recently launched *Right to Health Campaign*!

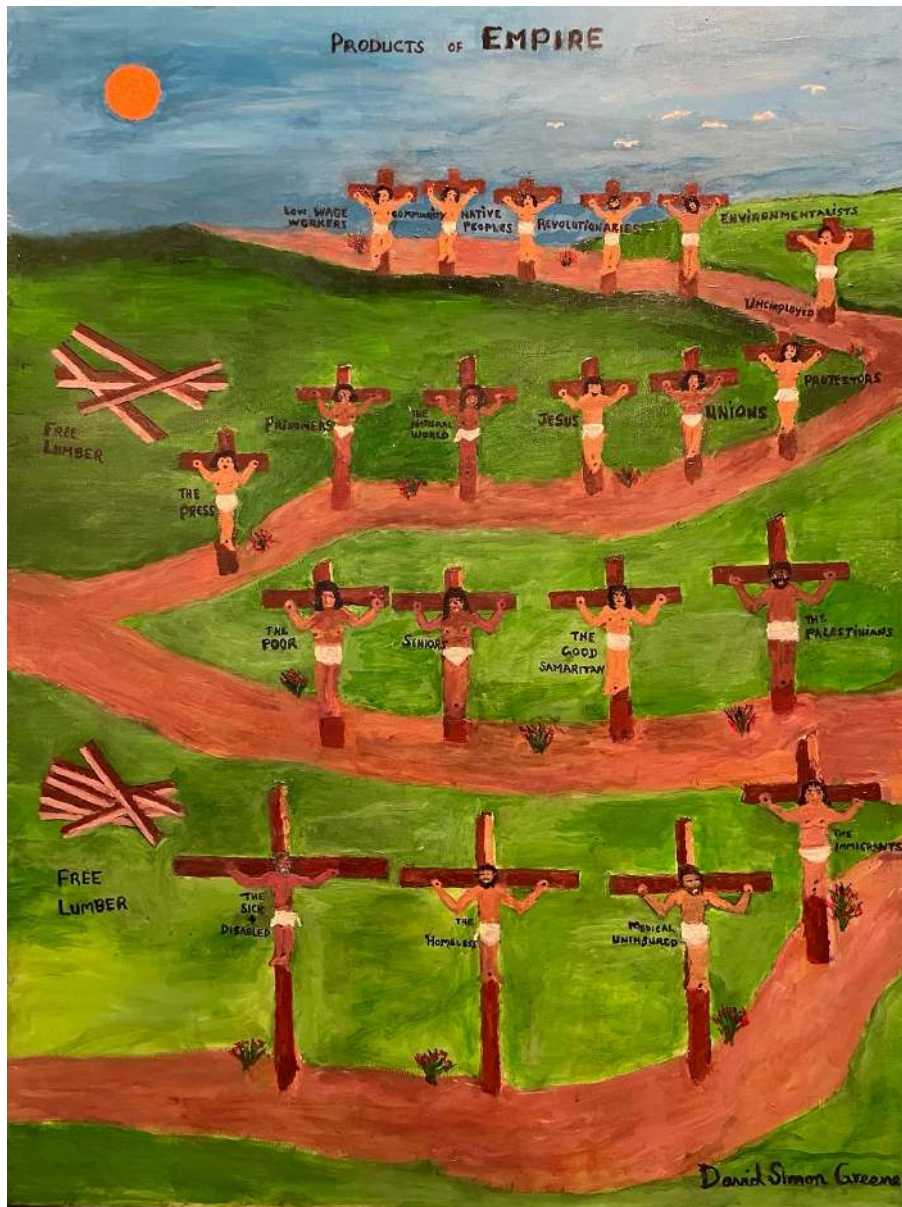
"Last year, we embarked on a year-long campaign reconnaissance and collectively decided on our next campaign. Now we are getting into step and gearing up to officially launch our Right to Health Campaign. Watch [this video by the Media Team](#) that recaps how we got here."

At the Right to Health Memorial Day Launch, "we remembered and honored the fallen soldiers in this war on the poor. Members from across the state of Maryland shared how poverty is affecting the health and wellbeing of themselves and their loved ones. It was an emotional and powerful way to make visible the deadly health impacts of poverty in one of the richest states in the country. We must organize, organize, organize to transform this poverty producing system from the bottom up!

Watch the Right to Health Campaign launch [livestream here](#).



Arts and Culture



Products of Empire

by David Greene, Southeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee

Description: "My most recent painting about the many attacks on our working class. Like the poor and working people before us, millions are suffering the consequences of a capitalist system. Victims on these crosses represent low wage workers, the poor and homeless, the Palestinians the disabled, those without health care and millions more just trying to survive. I tried in this effort to illustrate how we are all being crucified for profit."

[Click here for larger view of David's painting.](#)



Scan to watch
the Arts and
Culture
Saturday
School

I shall start with this:
I did not grow up a Christian.
I grew up in faith and hope,
but not as a Christian.

I did not learn
passages or verse until I pursued it
for myself
Perhaps this was good;
It saved my judgment
It kept me steadfast in my stances
It allowed my eyes to remain open
my ears unclogged
my heart open to receive good news

When I listen to scripture
of texts both within and without
I am reminded of the radical
facets fighting against
the tacit fielding of the creative
To imagine the world for the meek
not suppressed by rulers
of status quo.

To galvanize
To revolutionize
To see through these eyes
both sides that do not care
for my eyes
or my hands that work
that till until they truly
hold no more.
But why do my hands
working matter more than
my hands teaching?
my hands learning?
my hands healing?

In all I take
that our class must surpass
the status quo
Treasure us not as commodities of
industry
but as humans with dignity
crossing divides, and finding our
humanity.
Not in cash
but in checking in with each other
Finding community in each other
"As a movement, as a justice"

Untitled
*Ramona, Southeast PA Healthcare
Rights Committee*

Arts and Culture

Bible and the Ballot

By Linda, Wyoming Nonviolent Medicaid Army

Linda created this as part of a group presentation during the 2024 Nonviolent Medicaid Army Winter study.

Linda writes, "The green band-aid is the money profited in and paid out with tax money to alleviate the problem. The people with the hole in their stomachs are empty inside, wanting more of something? (Candidates for the "church within the church") The astute woman in front in silent prayer, for change to come. man walking away with hole in his guts questions. This, just wanting a job. His boy, lagging behind, feels the praying spirit and warm flame that's close by (diversity is a growing flame).



The 5 with fire in their hearts know something bigger than this, to engage in the fight to demand moral rights. In the middle a young man advocating for the Poor People's Campaign. "Join a movement, peel off society's band-aids. We are building unity and organizing the poor in order to win hearts and minds of the people to a vision of human worth and dignity."



New music by Central Appalachia
Healthcare Rights Committee Member,
Kiki, also known as **Nondi_**.

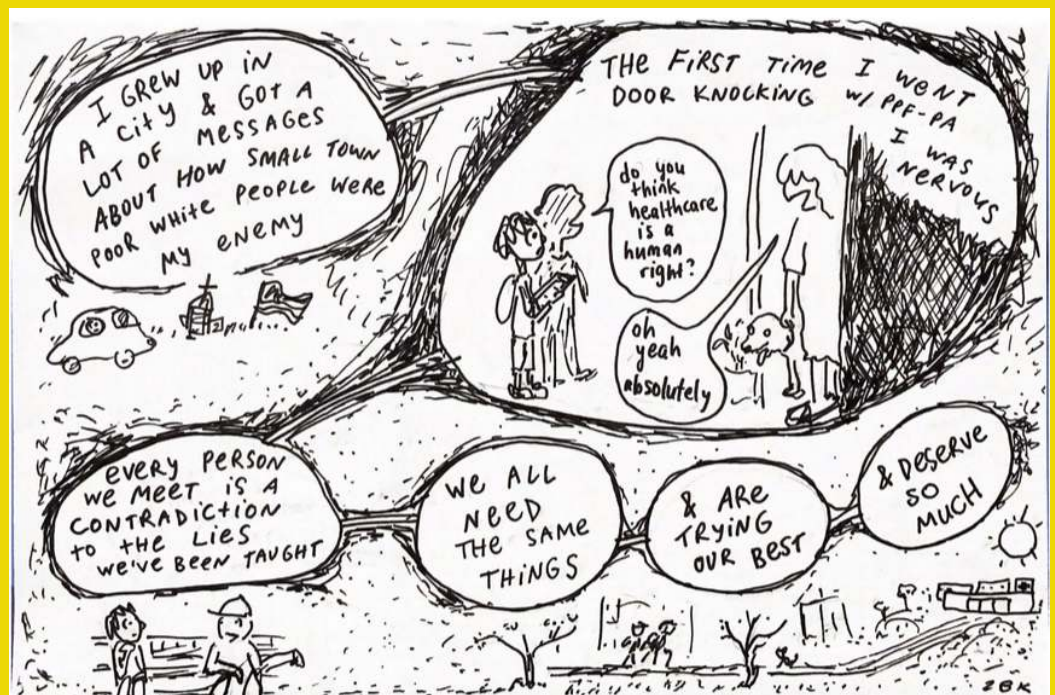
"**victory juke**" it's about being willing to
die for liberation and the bittersweet
feelings of that.



Click here
or scan the
QR to
listen.

Door knocking

A Comic by Zevi,
Southeast PA
Healthcare Rights
Committee



Stay in touch!

Website: www.putpeoplefirstpa.org

Email: info@putpeoplefirstpa.org

Facebook: Put People First - PA

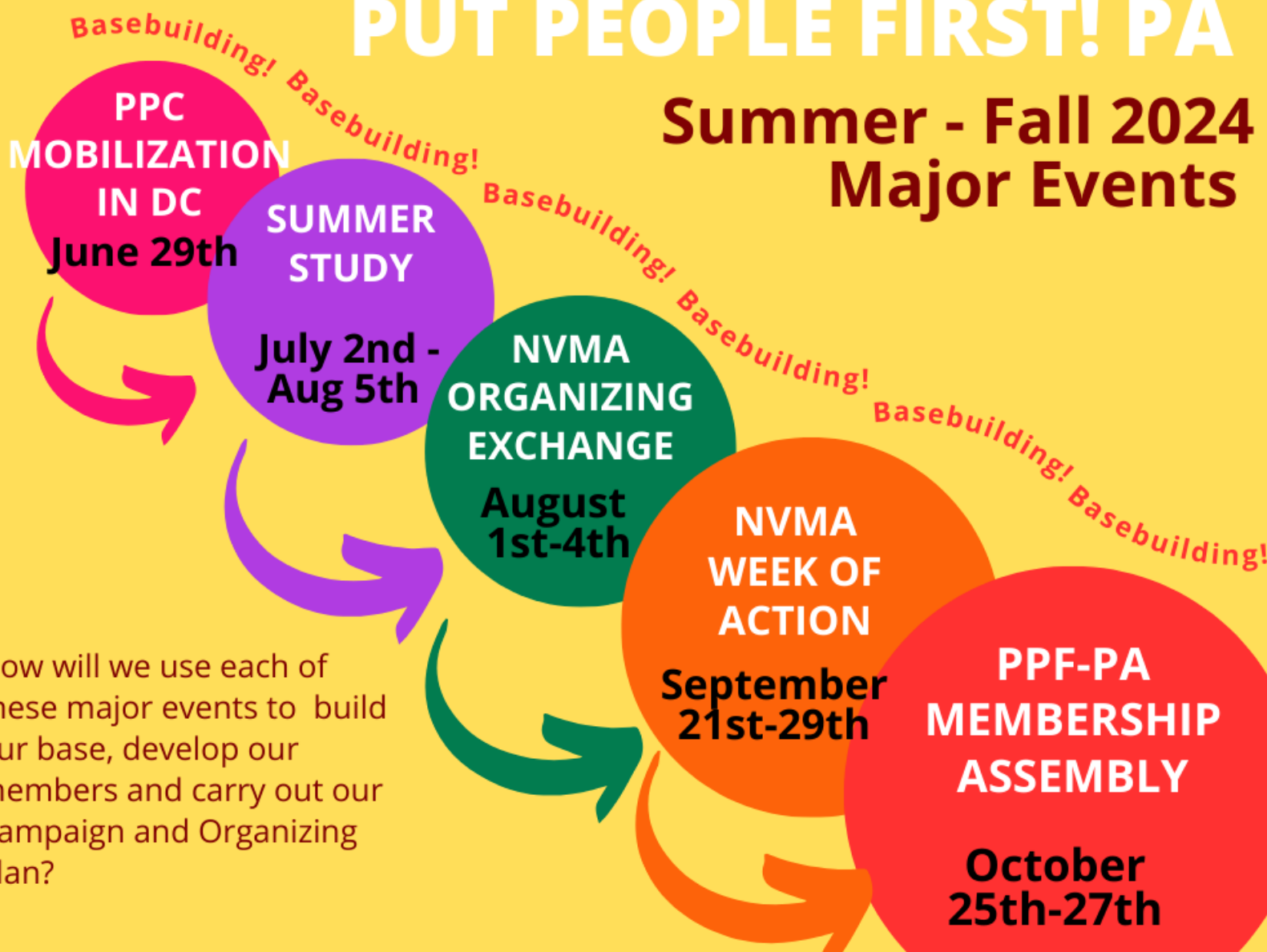
Twitter: @PPF_PA

Instagram: @putpeoplefirst_pa



PUT PEOPLE FIRST! PA

Summer - Fall 2024 Major Events



How will we use each of these major events to build our base, develop our members and carry out our Campaign and Organizing Plan?