



# Down Home North Carolina

## Annual Report 2022





## FROM OUR CO-DIRECTORS



### Friends,

It's been five years since we knocked on our first door in Alamance County. We remember those first few meetings, when just a few members gathered together to plan our path to power. This year, our Alamance County chapter meetings were so full we had to drag in extra chairs.

Our Alamance County chapter has not only grown, but our members are no longer alone in their fight for a people-powered, multiracial democracy. In 2022, Down Home added six new chapters to our network for a total of eight member-run, county based organizing centers, representing communities from the mountains to the coast.

Our members worked hard this year to launch their chapters, make local endorsements, and activate a massive field campaign. They led the way to some exciting wins for North Carolina's working class.

This year, our members flipped the script. Small towns and rural voters often get scapegoated after elections, but it was the work of country folks that saved North Carolina in the midterms. Our members put in the work to protect our state from the return of a one-party supermajority and everything that comes with it. We protected the governor's veto, the rights of women and of queer youth, defended our public schools, and helped pave the way towards Medicaid expansion.

There's more to come, and more to do, but thanks to our dedicated members and staff, the future's looking brighter for North Carolina. In this report, we hope you will rejoice in our work and find inspiration as we plan for our next year.

*Dreama Caldwell*

*Todd Zimmer*

Dreama Caldwell and Todd Zimmer  
Co-directors, Down Home North Carolina

### Thank you to our many partners:

ACLU of NC  
Blueprint  
Bridging Divides  
Cardinal & Pine

Care 4 Caroliina  
Carolina Federation  
Carter Center  
CREED  
Durham People's Alliance  
Equality NC

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H.E.A.L. Together NC  
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New North Carolina Project  
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Red Wine and Blue  
Red Wine and Blue NC  
Rural Democracy Initiative  
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Sheriff's for Trusting Communities  
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The Management Center  
Visions  
We Make the Future  
Winning Jobs Narrative



# CELEBRATING OUR WINS

## Members created big wins all across the state

Down Home members achieved grassroots wins all across the state in 2023, from school board to the state house! There were many important local wins, but the biggest prize was defeating one-party rule in Raleigh. Our victories defeated the Republican Supermajority, protected the governor's veto, and helped working class North Carolinians preserve reproductive rights, voting rights, and LGBTQ rights in North Carolina.



**Cabarrus County**  
28,556 doors knocked  
7,726 conversations

Above: Cabarrus members ready to mobilize

## Cabarrus shines like a Diamond

In countrypolitan Cabarrus County, our members endorsed and knocked doors for Diamond Staton-Williams for NC House. This Black working mom defeated a far-right candidate and was the NC win that prevented a one-party supermajority. All our grassroots door-knocking and conversations campaign made the difference: she won by only 629 votes.



**Person County**  
8,760 doors knocked  
2,399 conversations

Above: Person County members canvassing

## Winning is better in Person

Our Person County chapter worked hard to elect Ray Jeffers, who flipped the district by defeating a 12-year incumbent Republican. This Black farmer, a true son of Person County, won his district thanks to increased voter turnout that came from knocking doors and organizing. Now he's a real rural leader representing a split urban/rural district.

*"Because we fought really hard, basically a group of 20 or 30 people prevented the supermajority and a near-certain abortion ban for 10.5 million people. That just shows the power and possibility when we organize." -Austin Smith, Deputy Field Director*

## Our Fieldwork Statewide

Total Knocks: 120,993  
Total Conversations: 35,165  
Total Attempts: 148,181  
Total Calls: 151,886

Learn about all our wins across the state on our blog!





# BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR CHANGE

## Why multiracial local organizing matters



**Granville County**  
15,351 doors knocked  
6,741 conversations

Above: The Granville team ready to knock doors

William talks with his hands. To describe what he's saying, he puts down his chicken salad sandwich and stands up.

"What we have done is put down a brick to start the foundation," he says, placing an imaginary brick in front of him. "Every house, every mansion, has to start with that brick."

He's talking about the recent election in Granville County where he and a small team of local organizers mobilized voters to the polls. "I don't remember when I slept those last few weeks," he laughs. "We just kept on moving, kept on talking to people. I've never been more tired!"

It was worth it. Down Home's local chapter – small, brand new, and in a very rural place – just elected Robert Fountain as the first Black sheriff in the county's 276 year history. They didn't stop there. They also elected Mary Wills Bode, cutting into the NC Senate's GOP

majority by defeating an ultraconservative Raleigh millionaire.

This didn't always seem possible. Years ago, William left Granville County certain he wouldn't return. "It felt like a trap. I saw generations stuck here. I thought: *There's nothing for me here except trouble.*" He describes a local caste system where the families with old money have opportunity and "everyone else is just stuck."

He did come back, however – the people he loves are here. He returned with fresh eyes, realizing that while his hometown might not have a lot happening, it could be a blank slate. "I saw there was a lot of opportunity, a lot of good people, and a lot of space. I came back and saw it as a choice, rather than a sentence."

William took this energy into his work with Down Home, door knocking and having hundreds of conversations with his neighbors. He found that people – *thousands of people* – had the same concerns as he did. "Everyone is being treated unfairly. Everyone is hurting. No one is benefiting. We thought, hey, let's not let the same people who have been benefiting from this system be in charge again. Let's put that thought in the light."

*It worked.* Fountain won the county by 1,314 votes – a Black progressive grassroots win in a county that otherwise goes red. Bode won the district by closing Granville's margin to just under 1,000 votes and winning the district by 51.1%.

"We can all breathe a little bit now," says community leader and Down Home member Courtney Crudup. She feels relieved at Fountain and Bode winning, but isn't surprised by it.

Courtney also conjures the image of a house. To her, the house has an unfortunate foundation made from Granville's racist history that will never go away. She is a straight shooter and cavalier: "The history will always be here," she says, adding that they have to build right on top of that ugly legacy.

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What changed in Granville for these wins to happen?

The demographics here are stable and the local population is growing at a rate slower than the state average.

"Nothing changed, just people were tired," says Courtney. "Our county was on the news for scandals. It was embarrassing."

Granville's former sheriff was indicted in 2019 when he was accused of urging someone to kill a deputy he thought was about to expose his use of racist language. He is currently in jail for falsifying documents.

**"So we went to people and said:  
Voting is power. We can choose to  
stay in corruption or we can  
try something else."**

Courtney says Fountain was the perfect candidate. He was an outsider to the sheriff's department and not associated with its bad reputation. "He was just a regular guy," she explains. "He ran a campaign in the community, talking about how he wants the community to hold him accountable." He was outside the existing power structure and that appealed to voters.

Jason Dunkin, another born and raised Granville native, says the local Down Home chapter is energized like never before. "Seeing two of our endorsed candidates get elected let us know that we can actually have a voice. We needed those wins to show our community that we can get it done."

"Now we have to support the candidates we elected so they can get done the things they told us they would. They need us to back them up, but we also need them to be accountable to us."

"The thing about that brick we have put down," William explains, returning to his earlier metaphor, "is that it could be part of a new foundation but only if we work to protect it and build off it. That's not a given and our work isn't done. It could also just be one brick."

"They could just as easily pick it up and throw it away, making us start again. That's why we need to continue to organize."



Down Home Granville member William with Mary Wills Bode, who was newly elected to the NC Senate after being endorsed by our chapter.



# FIGHTING FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

Our children, our teachers, our candidates, our communities



Members in Craven County organize for public schools during a listening event.



Members in Alamance County at a "What do you want? What do you need?" event.

Despite all the culture war noise, public school parents want more, not less, of what multiracial public schools offer. That's why Down Home created a dedicated team this year to organize a statewide coalition of parents and teachers called **H.E.A.L. Together NC**. Our members helped conduct listening sessions across the state, showed up at school board meetings, endorsed local school board candidates, and held a statewide Public School Summit to reflect on our work, the election results, and plan towards 2023.

Down Home members endorsed school board candidates in 6 counties this year, winning in three. Hear from some of our endorsed school board candidates below.



**Seneca Rogers**  
Alamance County

## Why did you run for school board?

"It gave me the opportunity to plant some seeds and see they would take hold and grow. Seeds of hope, seeds of seeing that someone from my background, from my side of town, East Burlington, could run for office. Being seen and represented were some of the seeds."



**Pam Escobar**  
Cabarrus County

## What have you seen at BOE meetings that you want to change?

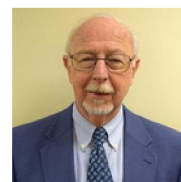
"Chaos! I saw Board of Education members sowing seeds of division. They were callous, unprofessional and oftentimes didn't seem to be concerned with the needs of all of the students and parents in the county."



6 **Polly Jones**  
Ashe County

## What are the main issues facing schools?

"We know teachers still often have to buy things on their own for their classrooms. But the state has not funded and paid teachers what is needed. Teachers are understandably disgusted that they don't get a raise, and feel like the state has devalued teaching."



**Gary Childers**  
Watauga County

## Why are public schools important?

"I think there is nothing more important we can do than to provide our young people the skills they need to become productive and happy citizens in our county, state and country. Public schools make it possible for students to be successful."





We advocated for Medicaid Expansion by sending letters, making calls, and visiting lawmakers. Here, Down Home Fellow Alondra Ramirez from Johnston County (left) went to Raleigh to talk with lawmakers like Ricky Hurtado from Alamance County (right). In the middle is Down Homie Christine Ashley from Alamance County.



In July, our Granville County member and mom Courtney Crudup spoke in Raleigh at a vigil for those who have died from the Medicaid gap.

# EXPANDING HEALTHCARE

## 600,000 North Carolinians still need help

Down Home engaged in thousands of conversations with rural North Carolinians from the mountains to the coast this year. As in previous deep listening canvasses, we heard over and over again that working families lacked health insurance, were unable to afford a doctor's visit or medication, had insurmountable medical debt, and were frustrated that the government has continued to fail to help them.

For nearly 10 years, our elected officials have refused to expand Medicaid in North Carolina, denying coverage to over 600,000 of our neighbors– including many, many Down Home members – living in the healthcare gap. This year, we upped our game in the fight for Medicaid expansion by bringing out members to Raleigh to speak directly with their representatives and advocate for themselves.

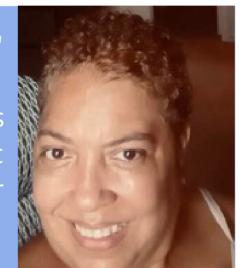
The people we engaged were everyday, small town residents – many of whom had never been involved in advocacy efforts before this moment. These hometown healthcare activists published opinion pieces in their local papers, wrote letters to the editor, spoke at press conferences, and engaged through dozens of advocacy trainings, educational programs, lobby visits, and personal letters to legislators.

We made it further than we ever have: Both sides of the aisle publicly pronounced their support and introduced bills that would expand Medicaid. While these failed to be reconciled, both Democratic and Republican leadership are now on record committing to expansion.

In 2023, we are going to hold them to their word and push Medicaid expansion over the finish line!

"I know how much healthcare access means. "

Read Alamance County member Janine Colon's healthcare story about living with a chronic disability and why we need Medicaid on our blog: [dhnc.info/janine](https://dhnc.info/janine)





# FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE SEA

In 2022, Down Home grew our footprint to a total of 8 counties across the state. They range from very rural counties with stable populations to fast-expanding "countrypolitan" areas near major cities. But they all have one thing in common: rural folks who are ready to organize.

"I moved here because I wanted it to be the home I never had. My dad was a preacher and we moved around every 3 to 5 years. Once I got to Ashe County and found a piece of land, I built a house and did all the good stuff. This is a good place to call home."

-Dillon in Ashe County



**Watauga County**

After 2020, I was looking for ways to get involved politically for the first time in my life. I reached out to Down Home to see if they would ever think of coming to Ashe County. This year they said they would be starting a chapter and would be in it for the long haul, and so that was a big yes from me.

-Lexie in Ashe County



**Ashe County**



**Cabarrus County**



**Alamance County**

There are two systems of justice here. One for the white rich folks and another for people of color and working class and poor folks. And sadly, those rich white folks hold all the offices in our local governments. That's why we need a change in Alamance County.

-Theresa in Alamance County



**WATCH VIDEO**  
What Matters in  
the High Country







**Person County**

"Housing is definitely an issue around here. There's nothing for rent, and everyone wants to sell. But who's going to buy? The people who are going to buy, what are they going to do with it? They're trying to bring people in without taking care of the people already here."

-Brittney in Person County

Am I supposed to go further? I've met so many elected officials I feel like I can fly! This is what I needed for the next part of my life. Down Home is changing my life, and I love it.

-Courtney in Granville County



**Granville County**



**WATCH VIDEO**  
What Matters in  
Person County



**Johnston County**

"I grew up in a poor, working class family. Living in Johnston County, I've seen the disparities. I want to be a part of this so we can make sure things are fair and give opportunities for all people, regardless of race and ethnicity and even economic status. So we can enjoy what we should all be able to enjoy."

-Joyce in Johnston County



**Craven County**



**WATCH VIDEO**  
What Matters in  
Granville County

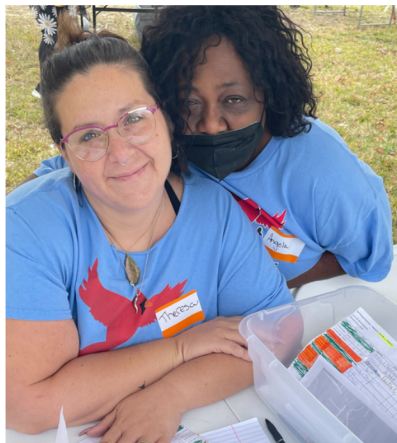




# CONNECTING THROUGH CANVASSING

## Our members' experiences in the field

Written by Esperanza Peral, Down Home's 2022 Fall Intern



Theresa with member Angela Willis at a Super Saturday in Alamance.

### Theresa Draughn

Theresa moved to Alamance county about five years ago. With her children in the public schools, Theresa knew she wanted to help work to better their community.

With that mission in mind, Theresa describes both the good and bad that comes with organizing in your own community.

"It can be disheartening to hear that people have been told their vote doesn't matter but I think that's why it's important that we have these conversations. When you are able to connect with someone and the issues they are concerned about...it builds a base and a community. Those conversations really renew my faith in this work."



### Tiffany Stamm

Tiffany was born and raised in Ashe County. For her, canvassing in the community was out of her comfort zone. Even still, she describes canvassing in the High Country as "really awesome" and "so rewarding." Tiffany says she feels honored to be a part of this work and to meet people in the community that care about the same issues she does.

Left: Tiffany Stamm of Ashe County

Through this work, Tiffany learned that she was eligible to vote this year even with a prior felony. From then on, she felt that she needed to go into the community to share the news with others. "A letter was sent when I first lost the right to vote but no one besides Down Home felt the need to tell me I had that right given back. Hearing that news was amazing. I couldn't believe it. I had to join and share that with other people in the same place as me."



Jason with newly elected Sheriff Robert Fountain in Granville County.

### Jason Dunkin

Born and raised in Granville County, Jason has been familiar with his community for as long as he can remember. Jason had been doing prior activist work in Oxford, but joining the Down Home NC Chapter allowed him to see just how large his network is. Even outside of Oxford, people would recognize Jason and the work he has done. "When people recognize Down Home or myself, it makes me feel like nothing we do is in vain. Our work stays with people. It's freaking awesome." One of the most rewarding aspects of working in his own community, Jason says, is getting to bring his own family into the process. His own father voted for the first time this year at age 61 after seeing the dedication Jason brought to the work. "Down Home NC is tailor-made for me."



# CREATING RURAL CHANGE MAKERS

## Down Home's first Fellowship



Above: Fellowship Manager Femi Shittu, Stevie Brooks, Gemale Black, Isani Howell, Rion Thompson, Rev. Donna Vanhook. Bottom row: Alondra Ramirez, Mark Ortiz. Not pictured: Kiesa Kay.

People living in small towns and out in the country have often felt that we have to leave home to make a positive impact. Rural places in North Carolina have lost jobs, lost land, and lost people to the big cities. We don't want to lose anymore. We want to win.

That's why Down Home created our inaugural fellowship program in 2023. It's a way we can invest in local communities and develop homegrown leaders in rural places.

Our inaugural class of fellows this year consisted of fellows from all across North Carolina, ranging in age from their early 20s to their 70s. They joined us from the Piedmont to the mountains, including the following counties: Alamance, Ashe, Cleveland, Johnston, Rowan, and Yancey.



### Finding home (again)

Stevie Brooks has lived in Shelby, N.C. almost all of her life.

"Growing up it was somewhere to get away from," she explains. She left for two years but has since returned to raise her own family here.

"I started to love how great it was for everyone to know me and care about me. I thought it could be really enriching for my daughter. Everyone could know her, too. That's what it did for me and so it could do it for her too."

Read more about Stevie's Fellowship journey and her group Shelby Women for Progress on our Reclaiming Rural blog: [dhnc.info/stevie](https://dhnc.info/stevie)



### Connecting with heritage

"Farming and growing your own food is the best way to keep yourself alive," says Alondra. "But it's just the beginning."

Through trips to Puerto Rico to gather seeds and farm in different island climates, Alondra saw the relationship between the land, food, and human communities. It's not about transactions; it's about nourishing each other.

"Connecting to the earth is very healing for the person and the soul," she says.

Read more about Alondra's Fellowship journey and how she's promoting change on our blog: [dhnc.info/alondra](https://dhnc.info/alondra)





# MAKING HER STORY

Long-time member's win inspires others



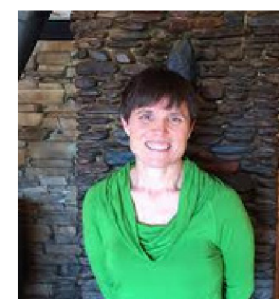
Since winning her election as Alamance County Soil and Water Supervisor, people keep asking advice from long-time member and current fellow Rev. Donna Vanhook. How did she win?

"Be involved in the community so that people know that you care," she tells them. "Be in the community and make sure you are open to learning where your strengths and weaknesses are. You have someone in your corner to help work through those weaknesses."

And talk about growth! Last year, Vanhook ran for mayor of Burlington and received 385 votes. This year, she won over 20,000 votes. Plus, she was the only local Black woman on her ballot.

Vanhook is a Princeton BTLI Theological Fellow and was named Distinguished Alumni Preacher by Shaw University. This year, she became a Down Home fellow in order to learn more about the political process. She created a committee of trusted friends and family to help her reach more voters. The most important thing, she says, is serving others and being visible.

"I showed the community that I'm out here to make a difference and that I care," she says. "Over the last few years, I've shown that I can get the job done. When people know you can get results, that makes a difference."



**Thank you to all our members who ran for office this year!**

In 2022, more Down Home members ran as candidates than ever before, an important reflection of our multiracial working class values and what it means to build power! Pictured above: Sabrina Berry (Cabarrus); Sean Ewing (Alamance); Wendy Ella May (Johnston); Ron Osborn (Alamance); Terry Garrison (Granville); HollyAnn Rogers (Person); Anthony Pierce (Alamance); Keshia Sandidge (Cabarrus); Beth Sorrell (Ashe).

**In 2023, we are excited about working with new members who want to run for office and helping build skills and plan!**



## DEEP CANVASSING

### Down Home's way of crossing divides

"Through Deep Canvassing, I was able to hear people's opinions and thoughts that I didn't necessarily have myself. It was good because it's people I would never have had a chance to talk to otherwise.

It made me think more expansively about not just my little corner of North Carolina. Of course, we're concerned more with what's happening right around us, my daughter's school, and my work in rural Appalachia. But now, talking with people across the state, I saw a lot of commonalities in our lives.

I felt some pieces of hope.. talking to people who didn't even know why voting was even important. But I hope that I gave them a reason for it being important. Hopefully, it's one of those things where it is a ripple effect, like a tiny drop that spreads. Maybe they won't go this time, or they won't get involved, but maybe they'll talk to somebody else about it, and maybe that person will get involved. You never know. It's just a cumulative thing."

-Dana Bango (pictured below), Down Home member, Watauga County

Read more about Dana's experiences on our blog: [dhnc.info/dana](https://dhnc.info/dana)



### DEEP CANVASSING in 2022

**165,721** phone calls

**4,195** conversations

**723** volunteer hours

**359,000** texts

**31%** average persuasion rate

## BUILDING FROM SCRATCH IN RURAL PLACES

### Looking at Ashe and Craven Counties

By Kiesa Kay, Down Home 2022 fellow

This summer, Down Home NC stretched from the mountains to the sea with the launch of new chapters in Ashe County and Craven County. While geographically almost as far apart as two NC counties could be, the two places share some similar struggles, common goals, and deep community wisdom.

Before the chapters launched, field organizers led listening projects to learn what really mattered most.

In the summer season, tourists flock to the pleasures of both counties. In Craven County, families often enjoy touring historic homes, visiting the birthplace of Pepsi, or hiking in Croatan National Forest, mindful of the occasional alligator. Nobody in Ashe County has to dodge any alligators, as it's nestled in the Appalachians up along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Nonetheless, the economic boost provided by tourists who arrive to enjoy the natural beauty can bring both snags and snarls, said Dolly Reaves, field organizer for Ashe County.

**"Down Home's working to create communities where people can grow up there and afford to live there," Reaves said.**

"Even in a tourist hot spot, we need livable wages, sustainable places to live, medical care, mental health resources. We can't allow fear-mongering tactics to keep people from getting to know each other as humans, so we can work together to resolve these problems."

Tara Bailey, field organizer for Craven County, finds similar signs. The people who call her county home also hope for affordable housing, criminal justice equity, and good schools.

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Families seeking shade in coastal Craven County at the summer chapter launch.

Craven County has a demographic that includes 65 percent White, 21 percent Black and 5 percent Hispanic residents, according to Data USA, and racial equity has been a concern. She found that when the listening sessions began in the spring, a groundswell of support flowed forward.

**“People didn’t want it to stop,” Bailey said. “We can educate the community on what resources are available, and I feel if we continue to really be member led, we can go far.”**

The demographics of Craven and Ashe County differ, with Ashe being 92 percent white, 4 percent Hispanic, and less than 1 percent Black residents. Reaves had the same, strong experience of support at her county’s chapter launch in late July. She said she reached out to families who had been living in the county for four or more generations, and most of them already had done deep work to advocate for change.



Families seeking sun in the mountains of Ashe County during a fall election event.

“At our chapter launch, people who didn’t know each other got together to envision what utopia looks like for us, what would make Ashe County a great place to live,” Reaves said. “We talked about the potential and power in our hands.”

Both Reaves and Bailey felt great hope in their counties’ possibilities and the strength of the communities to meet the existing needs.

“We just have to come together, put our hands and hearts together, and get it done,” Bailey said. “We have the potential to be what we need to be, not only a place to visit that’s exciting and shiny, hiding the struggles. We all have the same end goals.”

From serpentine roads that thread up through the mountains, to the streets that wind along coastal waterways, all across North Carolina, a new hope and unity has been strengthened throughout the state.

“Just as the scenery is beautiful, we can make our counties beautiful if we all work together,” Bailey said.



# PLAYING THE LONG GAME



Above: Some of the Johnston County team ready to mobilize voters this past summer

**Not every movement starts in a Pizza Hut, but this one sure is.** From the outside looking in, it is an unlikely crowd. Gathered together tonight are 70-year-old elders, a retired police officer, a trans disabled veteran, a grocery store clerk, and a three month old baby. The room is multiracial and multigenerational. Some folks have driven here in minivans, some have come in old pickup trucks. This is a meeting of Down Home's Johnston County chapter and it's a group that could only be created here.

A big rural county that is rapidly suburbanizing due to its proximity to Raleigh, Johnston County is considered deeply conservative. But the people in this Pizza Hut represent something new and different. And far from feeling alone, they have found each other... *here*.

Johnston is a hard place to win in. Far right extremists ran and in some cases won here. Republican voters far outnumber Democrats. But the people in this room had thousands of conversations with

their neighbors and cut into the margins, helping defeat a far-right Trump-endorsed candidate and block him from representing them in Washington.

Tonight, the team is planning for the next year. Members are giving updates from their local co-governance group, while others pass around a sign up sheet for the public schools working group.

Here and in rural communities all across the state we have had wins this year, but there's still so much work to be done. Our work for 2023 is big, ambitious, and aspirational.

We are playing the long game. We all need to lean in.

## OUR WORK IN 2023

- 1. Deepen our chapters.** Deepen our relationships, train together, and dig in for the long haul.
- 2. Campaign to win.** From local county budgets, to Medicaid expansion, to cogoverning with our recently elected candidates.
- 3. Grow our network to defend public schools** through local work and the H.E.A.L. NC network.
- 4. Prepare for 2024.** We'll be ready to fight for a working class champion in the White House, the Governor's mansion, and down-ticket...while preparing our own members who plan to run for office themselves.
- 5. Rest and reflect.** In 2022, we welcomed six new chapters to our network and did the hard work of protecting the governor's veto. It's important to recharge after a hard fight. We're in it for the long haul.





Address