

# THE CIVICS OF JUSTICE

"[V]oting is just one of those many choices that we have access to in this time. It feels like an act that honors the legacy of my ancestors who fought and died, just to show up to the ballot box... **I'm showing up to vote for Black Lives.**"

– CJ Suitt, Chapel Hill, NC Poet Laureate

"Right now the nation is going through a transformation. The transformation consists of police accountability everywhere. **We must continue to advocate for people – no matter who, what, when, where, how.** This is why we need to make sure the power of the vote [is there] for the people."

–Kathy Greggs, Fayetteville PACT, Fayetteville, NC

Communities of color are fed up with being targeted, profiled, and disrespected by federal, state and local justice systems. In 2020, frustration specifically with police brutality and the tragic loss of Black lives has led to major uprisings across the United States and the world.

## **Frustration with racial bias and inequity is driving pushback and policy changes across North Carolina.**

Using the tools of democracy, people are fighting back. Case studies — from Asheville to Fayetteville — featured in Democracy NC's Civics of Justice Toolkit ([demnc.co/justice](https://demnc.co/justice)) illustrate how organizing, voting, showing up at public meetings, and contacting elected officials can build power.

**In North Carolina, Black drivers are 95% more likely than whites to be stopped, and 115% more likely to be searched.**

**Black men make up 32% of all people killed by NC police since 2015, but only 10% of the population.**

**In 2016, 91,176 NC voters were disenfranchised due to a felony conviction — almost half of whom were Black.**

*Data from UNC-Chapel Hill, the Washington Post, and the Sentencing Project.*

## **CASE STUDY: CHARLOTTE, NC**

As part of recent efforts to protest the police, local group Charlotte Uprising has launched workshops intended to educate people on the issue of police reform. Called "People's University," these sessions have been focused on handling protests (including preparations for arrest and release from jail), as well as alternatives to calling the police. Beyond this operational focus, the group has also used these workshops to highlight the history of police violence and direct action response in Charlotte. Formed as a collective of a myriad of social justice groups, Charlotte Uprising has focused their efforts on advocating for social and economic equity, along with police accountability. As part of this work, the group joined with Seeking Justice CLT to organize a march through Dilworth and Myers Park, two of the wealthiest neighborhoods in Charlotte. As the march also wound past SouthPark, the luxury shopping center in the area, the protest was intended to confront the privileged and isolated communities in Charlotte with those issues facing marginalized groups. Beyond demonstrations, the group is primarily concerned with supporting individuals who have recently left jail, providing them with food and transportation. **Charlotte Uprising illustrates the emphasis on coordinated efforts in Charlotte among advocacy groups seeking to reform or abolish law enforcement.**

Since June, a Jail Support station organized by volunteers and Charlotte Uprising began providing material aid for people incarcerated at the Mecklenburg County Detention Center. Jail MSCO deputies have harassed and forcibly arrested Jail Support volunteers, who nonetheless continue to operate on a 24 hour basis. In late August, Sheriff McFadden condemned the Jail Support volunteers in a County Commissioner briefing, and suggested that MCSO might take action to dismantle the station.

# THE POWER OF DEMOCRACY

Engaging at all levels of our democracy can help break the tangle of oppressive practices and policies. Working at the local level is especially powerful because those representatives are most directly accountable to you.

**Start from the bottom and move up your ballot in 2020, for example:**

- ☑ **NC Mayors** normally pick the city or town's police chief to manage law enforcement.
- ☑ **NC City/Town Councils and County Commissions** fund local law enforcement.
- ☑ **NC's Governor** ensures public safety and oversees agencies that implement justice and public safety programs, including state police, corrections, and juvenile justice.
- ☑ **NC's Attorney General** is the state's leading law enforcement officer, the A.G. heads the NC Dept. of Justice, which protects consumers from fraud, provides legal representation to State agencies, and is a resource for local district attorneys.
- ☑ **NC Legislators** are responsible for defining what is a crime, procedures for responding to crimes, sentences, and funding agencies that deal crimes.
- ☑ **US Congresspeople** can reform the justice system, create federal laws, and confirm US Supreme Court Justices.
- ☑ **US Presidents** appoint US Supreme Court Justices and the Attorney General who leads the Dept. of Justice, and enforce federal laws and administer justice.

**SPOTLIGHT:** NC Judges are on the ballot in 2020. **Judges are powerful.** They decide cases that save lives and uphold and overrule laws that affect every aspect of your life. They make decisions in disputes on everything from the cost of electricity, to your right to vote, to who gets the death penalty. You will find judicial candidates near the middle of your ballot – another reason to vote the whole ballot, top to bottom.

➔ **NC Supreme Court** is the state's highest court. Three of the seven seats are on the ballot.

➔ **NC Court of Appeals** judges hear appeals of criminal and civil cases from the District and Superior Courts, North Carolina's trial courts. Five of the 15 seats are up for election.

➔ **Lower Court Judges** determine sentencing for crimes and who ultimately goes to prison.

**We must do more than tell people to vote** – particularly when many of the people at greatest risk of illness and violence in this year's elections have also been subjected to policies explicitly designed to make it harder to cast a ballot that counts. Instead, help people understand how barriers to democratic participation result in harm to people we know and to society as a whole. **Provide options that will bring the responses we need and build the more just society we want, such as:**

## Voting as a start.

Turnout tells elected officials that your community is active and aware. Elected officials pay closer attention to neighborhoods and constituencies that vote. Since local elections can be decided by smaller margins, know and share that one vote really will make a difference. You have power. Use it!

## Contact elected officials.

Elected officials are in office to serve you and your fellow citizens. Let them know your thoughts about the policies that most affect you and your community. Make sure to keep the pressure on, especially after the election.

Talk to your friends, family, and neighbors about these important issues. Help them make their voices heard too.

## Show up at public meetings.

Meetings where elected and appointed officials make decisions that affect you are public so that you and your community can monitor the policies and laws that are being passed. Show up, speak up, and keep an eye on what's going on in your government.

**DEMOCRACY NC**

**Ask yourself: If people in power don't hear your voice, whose voices will they hear instead?**