

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) illustrate how organizing, voting, showing up at public meetings, and contacting elected officials can build power.

CASE STUDY: DURHAM, NC

In the last decade, Black organizers have led the way in transforming the criminal-legal system in Durham. **Black and brown Durhamites, suffering disproportionately from traffic stops, incarceration rates, police murders and detention center deaths, came together to organize, build solidarity, and fight for reform** through powerful coalitions like Fostering Alternatives to Drug Enforcement (FADE). In 2017, the Durham Human Relations Commission published a scathing report condemning the Durham County Detention Facility, where at least 14 people died from 2008-2018. The Commission made 10 recommendations, including an end to cash bail and collaborations with ICE. Durham residents pushed the conversation on other fronts, too.

In 2014, in a campaign led by All of Us or None and the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, the city of Durham passed a Ban the Box policy opening up employment opportunities to formerly incarcerated people; in August 2017, protesters toppled the Confederate monument outside the Durham County Courthouse; and the local chapter of Southerners on New Ground (SONG) began their ongoing Black Mama's Bail Out Campaign, continuing to free people today alongside the North Carolina Community Bail Fund of Durham. Grassroots organizing seeped into electoral politics as well, leading to the election of District Attorney Satana Deberry and Sheriff Clarence Birkhead in 2018 on platforms of decarceration

and an end to Durham County's collaboration with ICE. The emergence of a younger, Black-led Durham Beyond Policing coalition in 2016, consisting of organizations like Black Youth Project 100, SONG, SpiritHouse, and the Durham City Workers Union, championed alternative ways to build community-led safety and wellness. The DBP coalition uplifted the work of Black organizing and transformative justice projects, like SpiritHouse's Harm Free Zone, and put together a proposal for a community-led safety and wellness task force. In 2019, DBP scored a significant victory in preventing the hiring of 72 new police officers and winning raises for the city's workers. In the wake of George Floyd's murder this summer, Durham's vast organizing network has escalated its demands to full police abolition, a moratorium on law enforcement budget increases, the removal of School Resource Officers, and further investments in community-led safety and wellness by the city council and county commissioners.

Hundreds of Durham residents took to the streets again at the end of August 2020 protesting police brutality after Jacob Blake's murder in Kenosha and an incident at Durham's Rochelle Manor apartment complex, where Durham police officers pulled their guns on two Black children playing. At a Friday protest, organizer Sarah Hinton called for accountability, stating, "Our children should be able to go outside and play and not have to fear for their lives."

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?