

THE QUILT

POLICY
ART
HEALING



FALL 2019

Colleen

“

**Quilting started
with scraps.**

**The little we had
we used, starting
with what already
existed. And from
there, it evolved.**

Douglas Ewart

CONTENTS

FALL 2019

Editor's Letter	02
The Minnesota State Capitol Moves on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women	05
Losing a Job Unexpectedly is Devastating	08
Let Our Ancestors Lead: A Racial Justice Tool Kit Centering Healing and Culture	10
Data Disaggregation: Creating Visibility Through Numbers	12
Numbers that Matter: Minnesota Prepares for the 2020 Census.	15
Between the Keepers and the Kept	17
Activating the Power of Young Voices for the Working Family Credit	20
Another Year Passes Without Driver's licenses for All	25
Southeast Asian American Solidarity Tool Kit	27
Racial Equity Impact Assessment	28
From Voice to Impact: Tactical Use of Art and Design for Today's Fight	30
Reparations and the Capitol: Reflections on Solidarity	34
2019 Legislative Assessment	36
Keeping Care at the Minnesota State Capitol	41
With Gratitude	44



Beloved Community,

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *The Quilt: Policy, Art, and Healing*. In this magazine we explore the ways in which we incorporate art and healing in our policy discussions. Our intent has been to engage our community in a deeper policy discussion, while also creating and sharing a policy tool that is culturally- and community-rooted. *The Quilt* is published by *Voices for Racial Justice* and *The UpTake*.

Voices for Racial Justice is a movement organization led by people of color that envisions a world without racism honoring the culture, knowledge, power, and healing of black, brown, immigrant and indigenous communities. We are committed to building collective cultural strategies for racial justice through organizing, training, community policy and research. Our work is guided by a soil tending approach which we borrow from friend, artist, organizer, and elder Ricardo Levins Morales that recognizes the importance of caring for the soil of our organizing and movement work in order for our seeds to grow and flourish. We see soil tending as an invitation to take responsibility for the culture we live in and create practices, strategies, and spaces in alignment with our vision for the future.

The UpTake is a woman of color-led community-centered nonprofit news organization, founded in 2007. In our earliest years, we were a citizen journalism organization known for our livestream coverage of the Minnesota Legislature; electoral campaigns and recounts; and community mobilization efforts. Today, we are a community journalism organization that centers a deep and continuous analysis of social issues. We believe in collaboration and a multitude of tools, including livestream, to report on the issues pertinent to historically marginalized communities. We see our future as two-fold: the formation of a cooperative newsroom, and the creation of a community journalism school. *The UpTake* applies a systems change approach in our reporting, as we strive to equip community members

with the tools to maneuver and report on the world and social movements using a methodology that attempts to re-imagine and re-distribute power as an organization, with journalists, and as system actors, in an act of journalistic imagination.

The Quilt came about after many months of discussion and mutual imagining. As people of color of different diasporas, we had rich conversations about each of our communities' relationships to policy. Through this we found ourselves sharing stories about local governance models in our various communities, and the lineages of organizing and storytelling embedded in our different cultures. Out of this process emerged this question: what does it mean to center art and healing as we talk about policy? We combined *Voices'* background in creating policy tools, agendas, and report cards, with *The UpTake's* tools & editorial knowledge, and a Journalism of Color methodology, developed by staff at *The UpTake* with guidance and mentorship from *Voices'* staff.

We believe that it is not wrong for policy to incorporate healing, love, hope, beauty, and art. We believe that it is not wrong for policy to look and feel like us. We believe that it is not wrong for the Capitol to look like and feel like us. And we hope that *The Quilt* feels similar.

Our hope is for this magazine to be a bridge that connects policy, art, and healing, to a larger conversation about community transformation. At the same time, we have imagined a future for *The Quilt*. *The UpTake* plans on creating a year of reporting based on *The Quilt*, and we have imagined new ways of moving our partnerships forward, with, through, and led by our communities.

With gratitude,

the Editorial Team

Gabriella Anaïs Deal-Márquez,
Brett Grant, Fayise Abraham, and
Cirien Saadeh

THE QUILT

By Julia Freeman

The Quilt is a Tapestry
of History
of Culture
of Traditions
of Ceremony
of Beliefs
of Hopes
of Dreams
of Trauma
of Pain
of Fight
of Healing
of Love
of Beauty
of Art
of Resilience
With every rip & tear by white
supremacy we cover it with a
healing patch that is sewn with
fingers bloodied by the needle
pricks of racism. Our ancestors
lead us in capturing the struggles
& victories of the past, present &
future, wrapping us in a garment
of brave truth.

POEM





*Mysti Babeneau testifies.
Representative Mary Kunesch-
Podein (41B) at her right.*

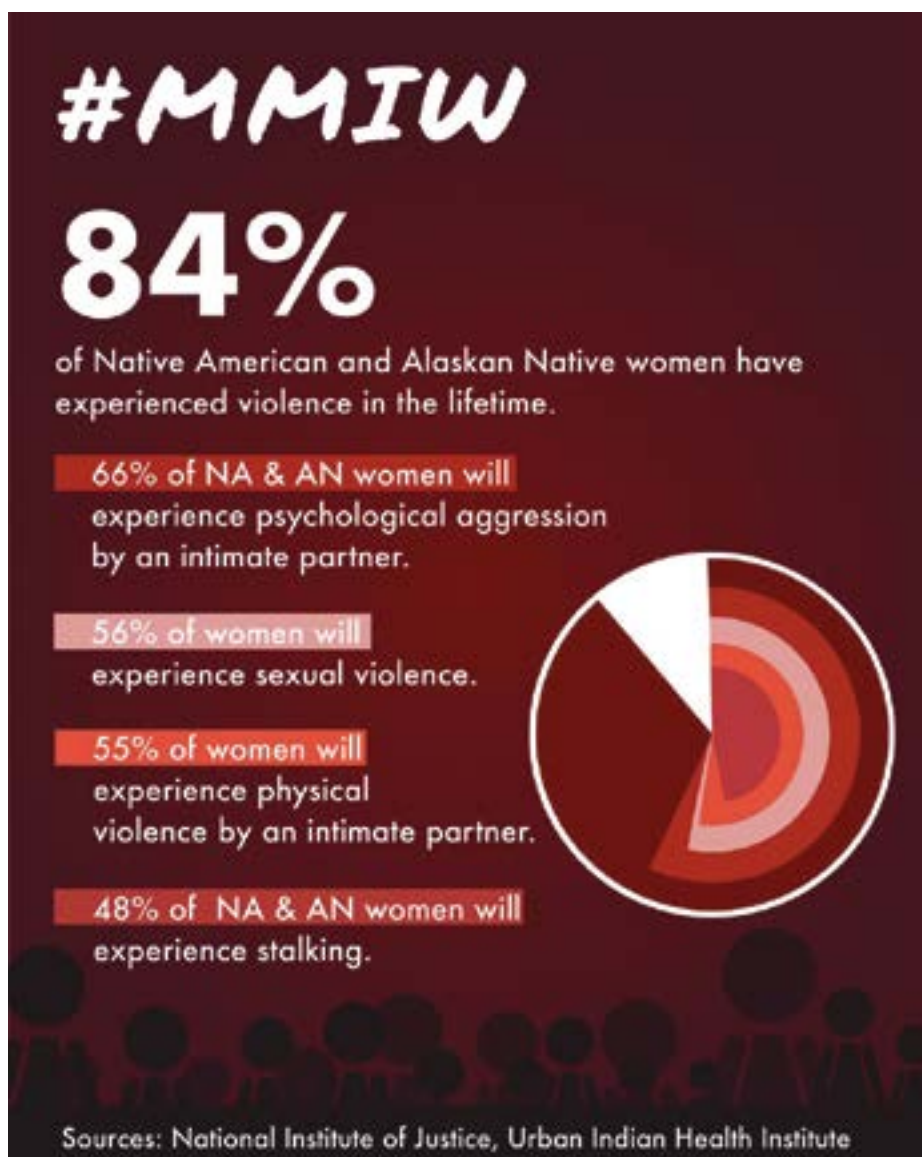
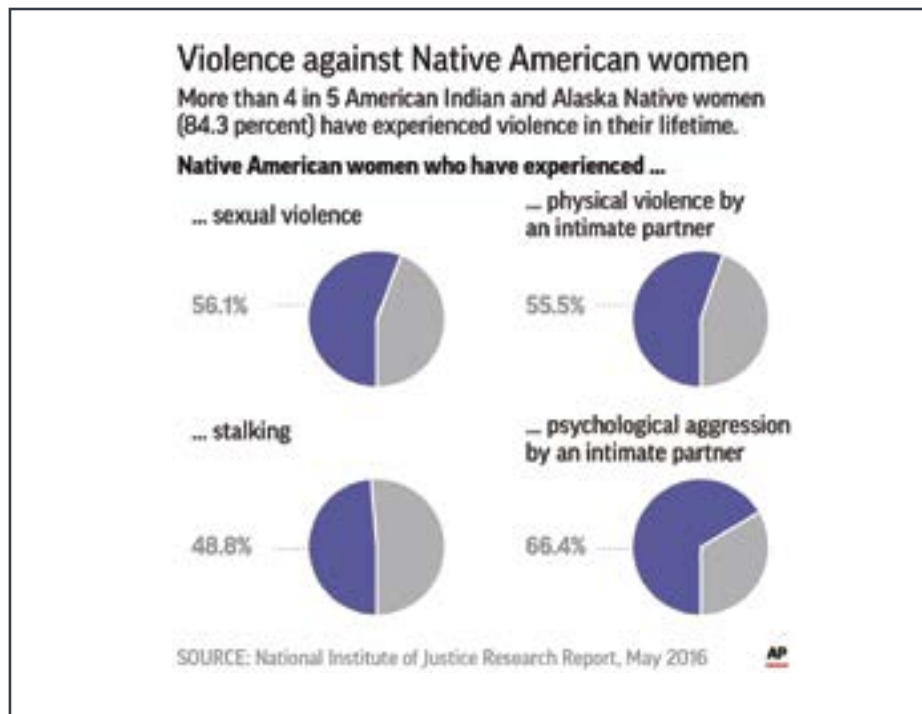
THE MINNESOTA STATE CAPITOL MOVES ON
**MISSING AND
MURDERED
INDIGENOUS
WOMEN**

In July of 2005, JoJo Boswell went missing. Her sister, Dolly, immediately reported her missing, but was told to wait another 48 hours. Imagine law enforcement telling her they had more important things to do. Jojo was never seen again.

Heartbreakingly, members from any of Minnesota's eleven tribal nations and beyond can name the women and girls from generations past who have gone missing or have been murdered. If not their immediate family, then a member of their community. From the stories told, the acknowledgment of a life lived and a life lost, few of these incidents have been pursued or investigated and their circumstances remain unknown.

This is an all too common story across Indian Country. One third of Native women will experience violence and the trauma of rape at some point in their life. Murder is the third leading cause of death for Native women ages 10 to 24. Instead, for these girls and women, the biggest challenge should be which dance to compete in at the next powwow or the plan for their future, not being on guard in order to survive to see their 30s.

Unfortunately, according to the FBI and the U.S. Department of Justice, within Indian Country, nearly half of all Native women - 46% - have experienced rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner. Furthermore, on some reservations, Native women are murdered at a rate of more than 10 times the national average, more often by a non-Natives. In short, sexual violence against women in the USA and Indian Country is endemic.



For example, Mystii was just 9 years old when she was sexually assaulted for the first time by her foster mother's boyfriend. Violence didn't end there for Mysti; in her lifetime, she witnessed her grandmother's murder, then watched in horror as the murderer went after her mother and then after her. When Mysi was 20, she was kidnapped, taken over 60 miles from her home, held against her will, and raped, yet she managed to escape and fights for women and indigenous rights today.

Jojo and Mysti's stories illustrate the reality that plagues indigenous women living in Indian Country and urban communities. In response, Minnesota joined a handful of other states in passing Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) legislation during the 2019 legislative session.

Following the commission application process through the Secretary of State's office, members, which include representatives from all of Minnesota's 11 tribes, law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, defense attorneys, tribal government officials, nongovernmental agencies, and indigenous women - victims or family members, will be assigned. By the end of a two-year period, the task force will have examined and reported to the legislature and the public on the systemic causes behind violence against indigenous women. The report will define appropriate methods for tracking and collecting data, suggest government policies and institutions that impact violence against indigenous women, and finally, propose appropriate measures to address the violence to assist victims and their families. The initial meeting of the MMIW task force is expected to occur in September.



[above] Dolly Boswell (Center) and mother, Geraldine Jackson share struggle of missing family member, JoJo Boswell. Testifiers Mary Lyons and Mysti Babineau seated behind bill author, Representative Mary Kunesh-Podein (41B)

[below] Representative Mary Kunesh-Podein (41B) gives thumbs up after bipartisan support for passage of House File 70 (HF70), the creation of a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Womens Task Force.





Bosteya Jama



LOSING A JOB UNEXPECTEDLY IS DEVASTATING



Rep. Mohamud Noor (60B)

ACCORDING TO THE STATE DATA, LOW-WAGE EARNERS DO NOT MAKE USE OF THE STATE'S UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE PROGRAM.

By: Jessica Webster

The fear of losing housing, food, transportation, and basic necessities can be overwhelming. The Minnesota Unemployment Insurance program is supposed to protect workers from these harms. Through this program, a full-time minimum wage worker who accesses unemployment insurance (UI) receives about \$800-\$1,000/month for six months while searching for work.

But UI does not protect all workers equally. State program data illustrate that the program heavily and disproportionately serves white males in the construction trades.

According to that same data, thousands of Minnesotans who lose work in hotel, restaurant, retail, temp work, and low-wage health care are unable to access unemployment each year and instead turn to Minnesota's less generous welfare programs. These Minnesotans lose jobs due to illness and emergencies where no sick or personal time is allowed. Unpredictable and inflexible scheduling are rampant. Racial discrimination, sexual harassment, and abusive employer practices pervade these industries.

State Representative Mohamud Noor (60B) sees the disparity firsthand. Noor has become a de facto (not formally or legally recognized) navigator of unemployment insurance for many constituents and community members. He sometimes fields daily concerned calls.

"It's a complicated legal process and people do not know their rights," said Noor. "You need to know the terms and the buzzwords, the computer system, the documentation requirements. The language barriers are formidable and many of the interpreters don't understand the legal process."

Noor recently assisted a constituent who worked 17 years in janitorial services for a local hospital. She had an exemplary employment record and was let go unexpectedly. Noor, a computer scientist and legislator, strived to help her access unemployment but was unsure whether she would succeed.

"Losing a job is disruptive to everything - your home, your family, your children's education," he said. "Unlike other systems, there is no support in UI and no navigators for people who are unfamiliar with the process."

Bosteya Jama, site director of the Cedar Riverside Neighborhood Revitalization Program, said there is significant misinformation circulating about unemployment. She sees employees who are injured at work in medical assembly or warehouses, but they are too intimidated to apply. She sees unfair job losses in personal care attendant work, Walmart, and child care, but workers do not access unemployment insurance.

"I work with many elders who have lost work, but they are scared of the system and they do not know who to call. I tell them they are eligible but they have heard stories. They don't know any of the rules surrounding the program," said Jama.

Advocates - including Voices for Racial Justice, Legal Aid, Take Action Minnesota, CTUL, and Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless - are advocating for improved access to unemployment and due process for all Minnesota workers.

"The inability to access the Minnesota Unemployment Insurance program is a severe racial inequity issue. The program as it exists now would benefit from a Racial Equity Impact Assessment - a tool to help policymakers and local communities understand who is most impacted by Unemployment Insurance, what disparity is being addressed by Unemployment Insurance, how Unemployment Insurance can achieve racial equity goals, the potential negative impacts of Unemployment Insurance, and what can be done to ensure that adequate funding, implementation strategies, and accountability mechanisms are in place for Unemployment Insurance," said Brett Grant, Policy and Research Director at Voices for Racial Justice.

To learn more about unemployment insurance, visit: <https://www.uimn.org/>

Let Our
Ancestors
Lead

A Racial Justice Toolkit
Centering Healing & Culture



**VOICES FOR
RACIAL JUSTICE**

ORGANIZING | ADVOCACY | POLICY

The background features a light gray color with scattered white four-pointed stars in the upper portion. The bottom corners are decorated with detailed line art of various plants, including long, narrow leaves and stalks with seed heads, resembling corn or similar crops.

Let Our Ancestors Lead

is a movement strategy toolkit with interactive workshops developed by Voices for Racial Justice's (VRJ) team based on years of training and facilitating with communities of color and Indigenous people. It centers an ecosystem model for racial justice and systems change informed by both healing and culture.

Our toolkit includes tools to learn:

1. The art of facilitation & leading community visioning
2. Community research & policy
3. Narrative & storytelling
4. Cultural evaluation
5. Healing & cultural strategy
6. Grassroots organizing

Our vision is to strengthen a local root system connecting leaders who are building restorative movements for racial justice across the state.

DATA DISAGGREGATION: CREATING VISIBILITY THROUGH NUMBERS

By: Cirien Saadeh and KaYing Yang

Imagine you have been asked to fill out a questionnaire for your child's classroom. Name, birthday, allergies, emergency information, ethnicity. What do you check?

Is your background included? On a macro-level, members of historically undercounted communities, including Asian American and Indigenous communities, have been organizing to advocate to amend Minnesota's laws to better collect more specific data that

will lift up the needs of populations not historically counted.

For far too long, Minnesota's Indigenous and students of color were lumped into one racial category of American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, black/ African American, Hispanic/Latino, Native

Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, or white. These categories are required by the U.S. federal government. Advocates argue that Minnesota will not be able to improve graduation rates and reduce disparities in education without more specific data on student performance.

"Without disaggregated data that displays outcomes for Ethiopian,

Somali, Oromo and other immigrant communities, Black/African American people are presented in a monolithic state that fails to call attention to the cultural needs, socio-economic needs and otherwise of people from countries throughout the continent of Africa," said Ernest Comer III, Associate Director for the African American Leadership Forum (AALF), who spoke at a hearing in the Senate Education Committee on March 26.

Advocates, like Comer, firmly believe in disaggregating student data, which is a practice of breaking down data in order to better understand smaller groups under a racial community in order to create a more detailed image of what underserved and under-represented and under-counted communities, like those in Minnesota, look like.

They believe that to close the educational achievement gap, policy-makers and educators need to better recognize the needs of students. Today, aggregate data lumps all students together, while disaggregated data will uncover key patterns, trends and other important information on student performance for diverse communities within the Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Indigenous communities.

"From our local communities to our schools to the state Capitol, leaders



Community members representing diverse communities showed up in large numbers to support the implementation of the All Kids Count Act (data disaggregation bill) on March 26, 2019 during a Senate Education Committee hearing to oppose Senator Chamberlain's bill (Senate File 709) to repeal the collection of ethnic data which was eventually defeated.



Josh Crosson and Ariana Kierner, staff of EdAllies, and Hoang Murphy of Foster Advocates, are members of the data disaggregation coalition who have been advocating for policies that drive education equity.

are working to understand how data collection and interpretation can inform policies, trends in resources and academic achievement by student groups, and best strategies for improving education opportunities,” said KaYing Yang, Director of Programs and Partnerships for the Coalition of Asian American Leaders (CAAL).

In 2016, CAAL and EdAllies led a coalition of 30 cross-racial groups to work with the Minnesota State Legislature to pass the All Kids Count Act which requires the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to support school districts to collect additional ethnic data under each of these categories. In 2017, to make it more implementable, the law was amended to collect ethnic data for only the most populous ethnic groups within each of the racial categories. In 2018, five school districts have been collecting ethnic data in the roll-out phase. In

school year 2019-2020, MDE informed stakeholders that more than 100 school districts will be implementing the All Kids Count Act law. Parents now have the option to provide their child’s ethnicity, such as Hmong, Somali, Columbian, Liberian, etc. on school enrollment forms.

“Better data will help educators and policymakers understand our diverse communities and effectively direct resources to the needs of all students. For example, policymakers will know which groups are falling behind and more specific data will help us understand the performance of 1st/2nd/3rd generation immigrant students and black immigrant voices,” said Julia Freeman, organizer with Voices for Racial Justice.

This is echoed by Nevada Littlewolf, a Leech Lake tribal member and Graduate student at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs.

“I’ve done work up in northeast Minnesota, working with the court systems there doing youth advocacy. We could see that the Native American kids and the African American kids in our region were being disproportionately incarcerated, or incarcerated for longer periods of time,” said Littlewolf. “But I think the systems themselves were in denial, and so we had a research group come in and actually conduct the research, and yes, lo and behold, Native American and African American kids were being convicted and incarcerated and held at much higher rates than the rest of the population.”

According to Littlewolf, and others, disaggregating data might allow for a nuanced response to inequities by educators, policymakers, and others.

“We are happy to finally see this law be enforced. Within the Asian Minnesotan community alone there are more than 40 different cultural communities speaking a variety of languages, with different historical experiences and migration patterns. Without disaggregating ethnic data, many communities will remain invisible and excluded from equity discussions. Incomplete data leads to misunderstandings about who Asian Americans are, what unique needs exist, and what community assets may be uplifted to solve community challenges” said Yang.

To learn more about data disaggregation in Minnesota, you can visit education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/count/ or caalmn.org/datadisaggregation/

VILLAGE MAKERS

by Kevin L. Reese

Our neighborhood
is built on a slanted hill
and all traffic flow down.
Spirits
spike the air like crushed fiber glass
we all have strong forearms
from wringing out mops by hand.
Our grandmothers weave our clothes from bulls skin
we are matter, so bull skin is weaved from us.
It can always rain, so we are always weaving.
Our wrist ache at the mention of ships
and now, we are drums
weaved together with cedar wood and skin.
We transmit memory when we dance
remember...
we've built Capitol buildings before.
The streets echo when we March
because our feet are sledgehammers.
We bury our children teeth In the pasture
so their voices can grow.
Not change, but grow
we are not what we see
we are what we are

POEM

**NUMBERS
THAT
MATTER:
MINNESOTA
PREPARES
FOR THE 2020
CENSUS.**



By: Cirien Saadeh

In 2010, North Minneapolis lost nearly \$10 million and a city council seat because around 7,000 Northsiders were not counted in the census that year. That's because each person counted in the census leads to approximately \$1500 each year in funding from the Federal Government to the State of Minnesota for a variety of initiatives, according to data from the Minnesota State Demographer's office. From 2010-2020, that added up to a \$105,000,000 loss.

This is despite the fact that Minnesota had the second highest turnout across the nation in 2010, with the highest statewide turnout in Rochester, MN, at 83%.

Mónica Hurtado, an organizer with Voices for Racial Justice (VRJ), is concerned about inaccurate counting. "Those are not real numbers. These people were living in North Minneapolis, but they were not counted," she said.

With the 2020 Census launching in less than a year, community organizations across Minnesota are organizing to make sure all voices are heard and counted in this next census. They want to make sure that historically undercounted communities understand the census, why they should be filling it out, and how to do so.

"Even though we understand the fear and concerns of our historically undercounted communities around the census, we also believe the census

could be a tool for our liberation. Being counted is being visible and being visible will support a more equitable distribution of resources, political representation, and the opportunity to develop policies to address structural racism," Hurtado said.

"Food access, access to health, access to clinics, poverty, education, all those things are driven by numbers, and the census is the way of getting an accurate count. And so, if everyone's not counted, if a community is undercounted, then your community may not get the support or development that it needs," said Anika Robbins, an organizer with Black Votes Matter (BVM).

This is echoed by Isabela Alesna, a community organizer with the Asian American Organizing Project (AAOP), based in North Minneapolis.

"A full count in the census determines how many resources come to a community and how [that community] is also represented," said Alesna.

Alesna and Robbins are part of a 14-member multicultural, multiethnic, and multiracial co-creation table, alongside organizations like Voices for Racial Justice (VRJ), that have been organizing since late 2017 and early 2018. Their goal is to make sure that the census accurately counts every individual in Minnesota.

"Because Minnesota has been doing a great job around the Census each time, Minnesota has less funding than the rest

of the nation," said Hurtado. "Minnesota does pretty well in terms of turnout, but not when you go to Black and Brown neighborhoods."

That decreased turnout in communities of color and low-income communities is due to fear and a lack of understanding about the census and what it is used for. Undocumented communities, for example, may fear being detained and deported if they complete the survey. Other communities, including Asian and African immigrants, also have concerns that if they fill out the census, they might be setting themselves up for trouble.

"A lot of people fled from government persecution, and they don't have a lot of trust in government institutions, and therefore, don't have a lot of trust in the census," said Alesna.

The census count will begin in April 2020. Organizers with the co-creation table are hopeful that the \$1.6 million appropriated by the State Legislature this session will continue supporting census engagement and training activities, especially within historically undercounted communities. For the first time ever, individuals will have the opportunity to complete the census online. You can also ask for a census ballot. For households not filling out the census form online, a census-taker will knock on your door.

A version of this article originally appeared in the May 30th edition of *North News*.

BETWEEN THE KEEPERS AND THE KEPT

By Theartrice Williams

The rebellion at Attica Prison in 1971 undoubtedly gave Minnesota the impetus to examine its corrections system. The issues raised in the Attica disturbance were not new. People who were incarcerated felt they were not being heard. They lacked a reliable system for getting their grievances before the appropriate officials and the public. When their grievances were presented, no one would take responsibility to see that their complaints were properly addressed. They were not kept fully informed about what was happening.

The need for an external grievance mechanism to the corrections system was recognized by the state of Minnesota in 1972. In February 1972, with the encouragement of Commissioner of Corrections, David Fogel, the Governor of the State of Minnesota created the Office of Ombudsperson for Corrections by Executive Order. In April of that same year, T. Williams was named by the Governor to be Minnesota's first Ombudsperson for Corrections and took office in July 1972.

The initial funding for the office was a federal matching grant from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA). In May 1973, the Minnesota State Legislature enacted legislation creating the Office of Ombudsperson for Corrections, independent of the Department of Corrections and as a part of the executive branch of the government. The Ombudsperson is appointed by and serves at the direction of the governor.

An ombudsperson is a public official charged with the responsibility of investigating citizens' complaints concerning the services rendered by the agencies of government. In a sense, the ombudsperson is an agent of the people, a consumer protector.

The ombudsperson concept is new to the United States. The first civil ombudsperson in this country was established in Hawaii in 1967. Since then, Iowa, Nebraska, and Alaska have established statewide ombudsperson programs. However, none of those states have a criminal justice or corrections ombudsperson. Iowa does have a deputy in its Citizens Aide Office who investigates complaints about the corrections system.

Minnesota was the first and, until recently, the only state to establish an independent office of corrections ombudsperson.

The Ombudsperson has the authority to investigate in response to complaints, or on his or her own initiative, any act of the Department of Corrections. S/he may prescribe the manner in which complaints may be made, reviewed, and acted upon. S/he may determine the scope and manner in which investigations are to be made. The ombudsperson has the authority to request and be given any information within the possession of the Department of Corrections that s/he considers pertinent to his or her inquiry.

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

Since the ombudsperson has to depend upon others to implement their recommendations, their credibility is of major concern. The ombudsperson would be totally ineffective if they could not gain the trust of people who are incarcerated and the staff. If they move too far in either direction, serious problems could result.

"I came to the ombudsman's [sic] job without significant experience in corrections," said T. Williams. "To the staff, this meant that I would be easily taken in by the people who were incarcerated. To the people who were incarcerated, I was an unknown quantity, probably just another hoax being played on them by the so-called

reformists of the system. To both, I was someone to be watched and tested. I would have to prove myself by doing. This was no small task because what might be required to please one group could upset the other. The only way to gain credibility is to become credible. No program or individual has automatic credibility. It has to be earned and that comes from doing. Early in the program I had an opportunity to test and develop that credibility."

The program began in July 1972. In October 1972, the ombudsperson was summoned to a prison to participate in a negotiation for the release of a hostage being held by three people who were incarcerated in the segregation unit of the prison. The ombudsperson's presence was requested by people who were incarcerated, the warden, and the Commissioner of Corrections. The [ombudsperson's] role was not to make any promises, but to serve as an impartial third party to the negotiations. In addition, the ombudsperson would monitor the implementation of any agreement. The three people who were incarcerated had had prior contact with the ombudsperson.

After several hours of negotiating, the person who was held hostage was released unharmed, and the Department of Corrections was not forced to make any unrealistic commitments.

That particular incident identified the ombudsperson as a resource in times of trouble for both people who were incarcerated and staff.

The ombudsperson may receive a complaint in any form. The majority of the complaints come in writing or in person during the frequent visits to the eight different institutions operated by the Department of Corrections. When a complaint is received, it is assigned for investigation. Once the investigation is completed, a recommendation may be made concerning the resolution

of the complaint. Frequently, the complaints are resolved without it being necessary to make a recommendation. When a formal recommendation is required, it is prepared by the staff member conducting the investigation. The recommendation, however, is communicated to the appropriate corrections official by the ombudsperson.

"During the first three years the program was in operation we processed over 3,000 complaints," said Williams. "Less than 100 of these were dismissed on the grounds that there was no basis for complaint. The fears of staff that the [ombudsperson] would be inundated with nuisance complaints were unfounded."

In 2019, the Public Safety Omnibus Bill included funding to bring back the Office of the Ombudsperson for Corrections in Minnesota. This office is a neutral, third party to investigate complaints from prisons, jails or juvenile detention facilities. Minnesota has been without a Corrections Ombudsperson since the program was eliminated in 2003.

"Now the work has just begun," said Kevin Reese, Director of Criminal Justice Reform at Voices for Racial Justice, in an article written for the Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder. "The passing of this bill is just the first step. We must continue to organize and let our presence be felt. We must make sure that this office is implemented with the depth and width that it needs in order to be effective. We cannot let this office just be a token position without any real power. So we will celebrate this victory, but we will do so with our eyes on the prize. This is not the end of the road, but a bridge to a better tomorrow."

A version of this article originally appeared in Trial magazine. Language related to "ombudsman" has been updated to reflect gender equity, at the request of the author.

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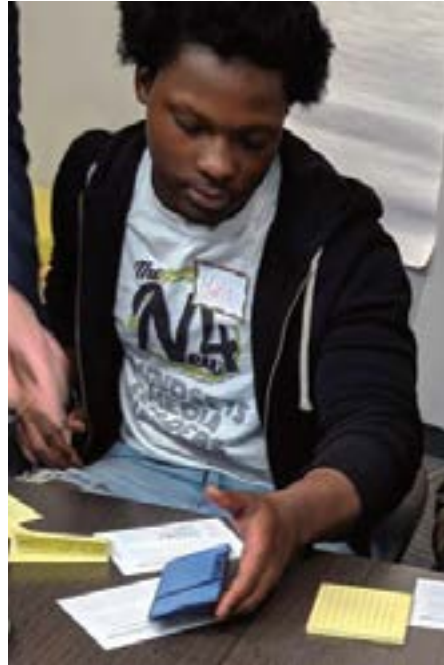
**This is not
the end of
the road,
but a bridge
to a better
tomorrow.**

**ACTIVATING
THE
POWER
OF
YOUNG
VOICES
FOR THE
WORKING
FAMILY
CREDIT**

On the evening of April 16, Prepare + Prosper, along with our partners, Minnesota Budget Project, Children's Defense Fund of Minnesota, Ujamaa Place, Voices for Racial Justice, and Youthprise, hosted a community conversation with young workers about economic prosperity and the role of tax credits—specifically, Minnesota's Working Family Credit (WFC) and the push to expand it during this legislative session so that more young people receive more back at tax time.

The gathering was designed to build momentum around the WFC and to activate the voices of young people. The night started off with a performance by Individuals With Dreams (IWD), a group of entrepreneurs who connect individuals to their dreams by mentoring, teaching entrepreneurship, and striving to uplift the community through creative expression and outreach. Their goal is to create a brighter future for youth by establishing economic growth in Twin Cities' neighborhoods and by changing the mindsets of the next generation. The IWD performers set the tone for the night, speaking about eliminating negative stereotypes that surround young people, specifically young men of color, and empowering youth voices and diverse talents to fulfill their purpose, passion, and peace in life.

"The revolution will be televised. Our ancestors have been systematically removed from our society, to the fathers in our households to the Martin Luther Kings of the world. Still, even with all the great leaders that we know about, there is still a negative stigma on the black male. We have been viewed as thugs, criminals, monsters, and even animals. This is what happens when others tell your story. We are way more than that,



we are visionaries, entrepreneurs, creators and role models. Together we are being leaders changing the narrative of young black males. This is our story to tell and for once the revolution will be televised."

Historically, young taxpayers of all backgrounds have been shut out of access to (or omitted from eligibility for) refundable tax credits, which play an important role in economic stability and success.

In 2017, Minnesota became the first state in the country to pass legislation, which takes effect this year, to extend the Working Family Credit (our state's Earned Income Tax Credit) to younger workers without dependent children, helping them get a foothold in the workforce while also being able to meet basic needs.

However, a full-time, year-round worker earning minimum wage makes too much to qualify for the WFC currently. Advocates are working to strengthen

the WFC, including a push for a larger tax credit (increasing the dollar amount received) and an increased income threshold (raising the income limit so more young people will be able to qualify).

At the community conversation, more than a dozen young people gathered to learn about the WFC and the plans to expand it, and how they could take action and raise their voices to increase our likelihood of success in expanding it. We discussed the most significant barriers young people face in achieving economic success and discussed what a boost to their income through the WFC would mean.

The evening took a powerful turn when Stevenson Morgan, employment and evening coordinator for Ujamaa Place challenged everyone in the room to flip the script on barriers and instead focus on actions.

From Stevenson's challenge came the following proposals:

"Set part of it [increased money from the WFC] aside for savings and share the rest with others."

"Use money to build up my side hustle and support my entrepreneur skills."

"Invest in my mechanic business and hopefully it can be a catalyst to help others in my community."

Marcus Pope, vice president for Youthprise, "piggy backed" off of this idea and had the room think beyond an individual boost to tax refunds.

Weaving together the power of community and collective action, we took time to write our stories, and imagine the ways an expanded Working Family Credit can assist young workers to overcome economic barriers and reach their financial goals.



In the last few remaining weeks of session, policymakers were making important decisions about taxes and tax credits like the WFC. Refundable tax credits play an important role in racial equity and promoting, protecting, and strengthening financial security for all.

Nan Madden, Director of Minnesota Budget Project, provided the following summary of policy changes in the 2019 legislative session: “Policy changes enacted in 2019 expand the Working Family Credit by about \$30 million a year, boosting the incomes of about 275,000 Minnesota workers and families. These workers and families will receive larger tax credits, and more Minnesotans will be able to qualify for the credit. The expansion particularly focuses on those workers and families that were less well-served by the credit as it was previously structured: workers without dependent children and families with three or more children.”

Prepare + Prosper plans to continue sharing stories and educating policymakers about the economic challenges young people face and how the WFC expansion can benefit them.

If you are interested in writing a letter to your legislator about the importance of Minnesota’s WFC, please contact Tracy Fischman at tracy@prepareandprosper.org

A version of this story originally appeared on the Prepare + Prosper website.



“

Helping me feel
financially secure in an
emergency situation.

by: Fayise Abraham

Can you shape your body out of an eraser
and with ease erase?

Can you shape your body out of a
scarecrow and with ease scare?

Can you shape your body out of a border
and with ease divide?

How is it our bodies can so easily become
the very tools of a settler state?

POEM



In the remaining days of session, community members organized a week-long vigil on the State Capitol lawn near the House Office Building. Photo by Cirien Saadeh

“

I know the ways in which people are not living their fullest lives because they don't have access to their drivers licenses.

Nekessa Opoti

ANOTHER YEAR PASSES WITHOUT DRIVER'S LICENSES FOR ALL

By: Cirien Saadeh

Since 2007, year in and year out, organizers, leaders, and community members have gathered at the Minnesota State Capitol fighting for driver's licenses for all.

"I don't always talk about my undocumented-ness, but I'm one of those people who will be impacted directly. A lot of people in my community, in the work that I do as a journalist or as a community member, I know the ways in which people are not living their fullest lives because they don't have access to their drivers licenses," said Nekessa Opotii, co-founder of the Black Immigrant Collective.

2019 was a banner year for the movement, and the Freedom to Drive Coalition behind it. The Minnesota House passed legislation early on in the

session. But despite an escalating array of actions, the Senate did not introduce the corresponding legislation, nor did any legislation make it to the table in the appropriate Transportation Finance and Policy committee; and legislation permitting driver's licenses for ALL Minnesotans did not make it into any conference committee legislation either.

"Immigrants are a positive, positive, positive influence on this economy. If we make things easier for them to be able to get around, there will be a positive impact on the economy. I think that's the bigger thing," said Israel Aranda, an organizer with Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (CTUL). "We're going to continue pushing for it to get another hearing for it, if we have to start the whole process over again we'll do that, whatever it takes."

All Minnesotans, including undocumented immigrants, had access to driver's licenses in Minnesota until 2003, when Governor Tim Pawlenty made an administrative rule change barring the Department of Public Safety from issuing a driver's license to individuals who cannot prove their immigration status

Freedom to Drive MN, a broad statewide coalition of nonprofit organizations, unions, immigrants' rights advocates, community-based groups and collectives, faith-based organizations, workers' rights advocates, and businesses advocating for Driver's Licenses for All Minnesotans, has led much of the organizing around driver's licenses for all this year. You can learn more at: freedom2drivemn.com/

Community members from several different organizations gathered on the steps of the Minnesota State Capitol near the end of session to rally for driver's licenses for all. Photo by Cirien Saadeh



Southeast Asian American Solidarity Toolkit

A Guide to Resisting Deportations and Detentions from the #ReleaseMN8 Campaign



JAMES H. BINGER
CENTER FOR
NEW AMERICANS

**national
IMMIGRATION
project**
of the National Lawyers Guild

#RELEASE MN8

 SEARAC

RACIAL EQUITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

By Voices for Racial Justice

COMMUNITIES AT THE CENTER

The Racial Equity Impact Assessment demands community engagement to understand how proposed policies will affect communities. Effective policymaking should always engage communities from the beginning of the decision making process. Communities know better than anyone what issues they face and can apply their experience to developing solutions.

How can policymakers engage community members meaningfully in the decision making process?

INVEST IN COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION TO DECISION MAKING TABLES.

CO-CREATE WITH THOSE REPRESENTATIVES A PROCESS FOR ENGAGING WITH THEIR COMMUNITIES.

INCORPORATE THE ANALYSIS THAT COMMUNITY LEADERS PROVIDE – IT IS GROUNDED IN REAL EXPERIENCES.

The Racial Equity Impact Assessment helps leaders and communities make better policy decisions by asking key questions before adopting and implementing a new policy. This analysis on the front end reveals the possibility of unintended consequences that would worsen disparities, as well as highlights the positive equity changes that can result. Apply this assessment to any policy, even if it appears race neutral, as a way to ensure that racial disparities are not exacerbated and that racial equity remains a core institutional goal.

WHO IS MOST IMPACTED?

Engage those specific communities in the analysis.

WHAT DISPARITY IS BEING ADDRESSED?

Identify any current disparity and name the racial equity purpose of the policy, if any.

HOW WOULD THE PROPOSED POLICY CHANGE THE SITUATION?

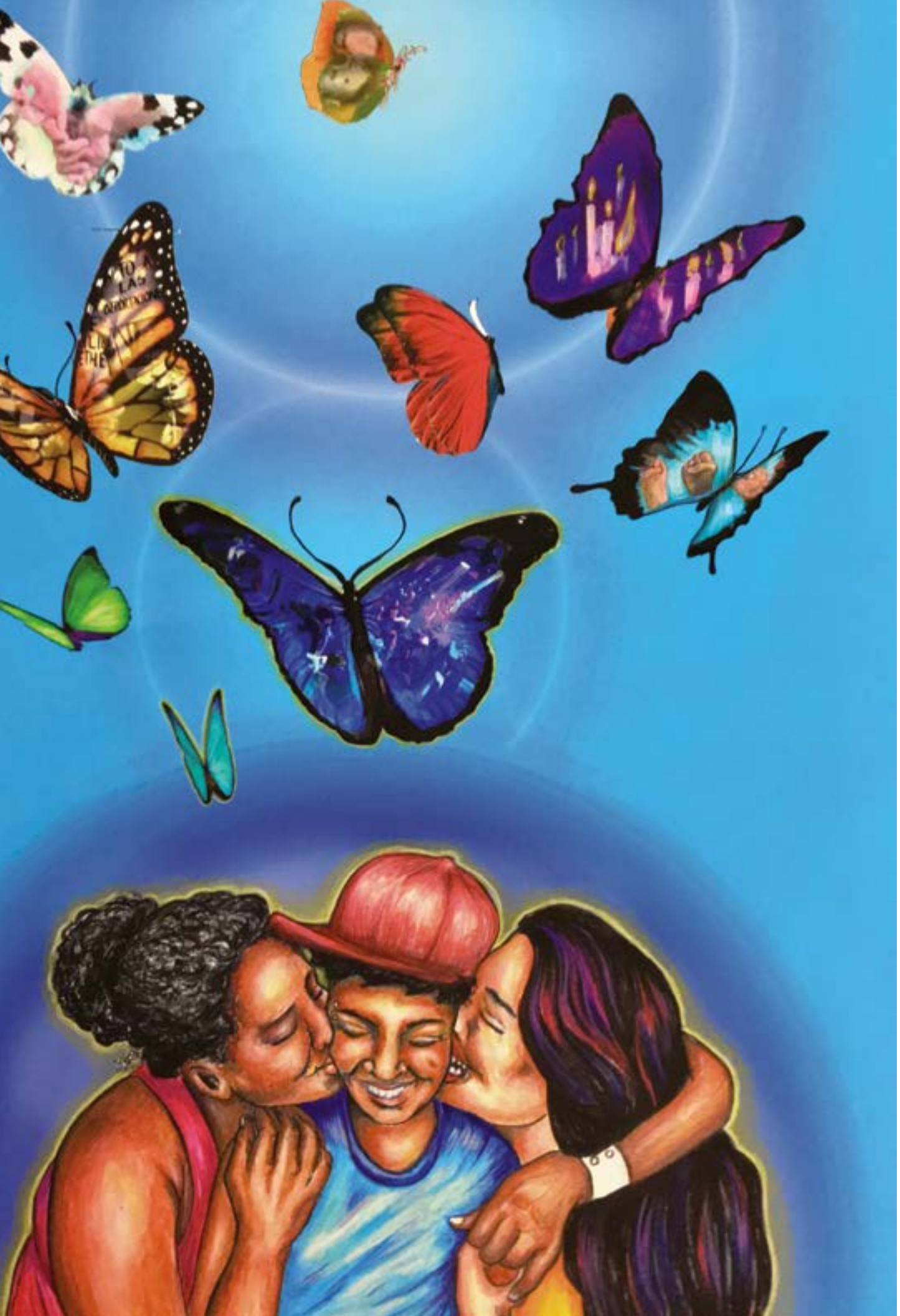
Explain what the proposal seeks to accomplish and assess whether the policy can achieve any identified equity goals.

ARE THERE POTENTIAL NEGATIVE IMPACTS?

If so, adjust the policy to achieve a more equitable outcome.

CAN THE POLICY BE SUSTAINABLY SUCCESSFUL?

Ensure that adequate funding, implementation strategies, and accountability mechanisms are in place.





FROM VOICE TO IMPACT: TACTICAL USE OF ART AND DESIGN FOR TODAY'S FIGHT

By Leon Wang/LOVE HOPE RISE

There is no doubt that we are at war. As we fight against oppression and scarcity, we need to be relentless in striving for efficacy and discipline. We cannot afford to dwell on comfortable defaults and self-imposed limitations. Whether it's an ad hoc street protest, or a multi-faceted state level campaign, we need to utilize all available resources toward creating transformative change.

PROCESS OVER CONTENT

Many artists and designers base their work on critiquing the status quo and seeking transformative outcomes. They are constantly engaging in a process of deriving extraordinary results with ordinary resources. I believe that such a process is the most powerful aspect

of artists and designers. Unfortunately they are often reduced to the role of fulfilling predetermined content. The ability to distill and elevate ideas beyond the cacophony of content is invaluable. This type of process is exactly what the movement needs. Given the current era of aesthetic-driven culture, it is critical to fully embrace such skills and outlook at the organizing table.

A CASE STUDY ON VOICE + PROCESS + IMPACT

During the course of my work, the typical approach I use is based on the following:

A) *What is my voice?* I believe that everything starts with our individual voice – our grounding, our aspirations, our ethics, and our journey. If we don't

know what we stand for, we cannot help others, and we will certainly be lost in the heat of the struggle. Knowing our voice also means understanding how our common humanity connects us, as well as learning about our own blind-spots and limitations.

B) *What is the impact I wish to make?*

This involves envisioning specific outcomes on multiple levels, including the objectives, context, and the various audience spheres (e.g., the impacted family and community, advocates, allies, onlookers, news media and its viewers, etc. It is about ensuring our message is received in the way it was intended. We are essentially taking control of our narrative by “branding” our every action. I am also constantly mindful about the overall energy and personal example I



(Clockwise) LOVE HOPE RISE (mobile installation) January 14, 2016 march to the Governor's Mansion in Saint Paul. (Photo: Zack Swanson, Art: Leon Wang/LoveHopeRise)

PROTECT THE DREAM In collaboration with Asamblea De Derechos Civiles, this series of posters and t-shirts were produced in the aftermath of the DACA repeal. The posters were used in several actions across the state, including this rally on September 17, 2017 at Congressman Tom Emmer's office in Otsego. (Photo: Caroline Yang, Art: Leon Wang/LoveHopeRise)

SOLIDARITY WITH STANDING ROCK Solidarity rally on October 29, 2016 in front of the Minneapolis City Hall. (Photo: Thaiphy Phan-Quang, Art: Leon Wang/LoveHopeRise)

LONG LIVE KING PHILANDO (Art: Leon Wang/LoveHopeRise)

LOVE HOPE RISE (Art: Leon Wang/LoveHopeRise)



wish to contribute to our world -- choosing the higher path and maintaining authenticity.

C) *How do I connect A to B (impact to voice)?* I use a holistic and rigorous process of problem solving and purposeful creativity. The steps include framing the problem, understanding the parameters, acquiring knowledge/skills, and creating/testing ideas. We are constantly vigilant for available opportunities for intervention, and seeking maximum impact via minimal means. The process always demands diligence and perseverance, plus a bit of serendipity. The unique challenges posed by each project also engender personal growth and self-agency. In the end, as with any piece of art/design, it is about finding ways to advance ideas and "make it sing".

WHAT IS YOUR PROCESS?

In today's fight, every move counts. I encourage all of us to continue cultivating our own process for achieving tactical impact with precision and replicability -- along with a spirit of discovery and growth. I hope that we can fully appreciate and utilize the value of such a process, and push beyond doing what we already know. We need to keep challenging ourselves and strive towards creating a truly transformative movement.



STOP THE PRISON PIPELINE The September 9, 2016 rally marked the 45th anniversary of the Attica prison uprising. (Art: Leon Wang/LoveHopeRise)

SEE US, HEAR US, FEEL US Five days of actions at the state capitol during the week of May 14, 2018. (Art: Leon Wang/LoveHopeRise)

THE TRUTH ABOUT MEMORY

By: Gabriella Anaïs Deal-Márquez

I know the border
of the language lies
somewhere in between
the words I'm forgetting,
and the feelings turned
into statements, mismatched
and lopsided, that replace them.

I tell mi tía *tengo calambres*
Mom corrects me,
It's cólicos. Cramps aren't
the same in Spanish when
it's about blood.

Language sounds different
when you're talking of homeland,
sounds somewhat like nostalgia,
or we survived something big,
our families, the entire ecosystems
of roots that share blood, and maybe
shared food for a time. And so
there's music late at night under
the stars against the breeze to make
our land feel closer than it is when
the language we heard lullabies in
begins to slip out from under us.

POEM

“

**Quilting came
out of necessity.
Patchwork
became more
sophisticated as
time went on.
First you have a
garment and it's
patched.**

Douglas Ewart

REPARATIONS AND THE CAPITOL: REFLECTIONS ON SOLIDARITY

By: Brett Grant and Ana Mendoza Packham

I am a descendent of persons who were enslaved. I was born to parents who grew up in Texas and endured legacies of beatings, lynchings, police brutality, violence against women and men, rape and segregation. As a black man, I am a living, breathing example of the beauty that arises out of unearned suffering. The world that I dream of that keeps me working at the Capitol is a world of gardens overflowing with fruits and vegetables. Streets lined with rose petals and flowers. Scents of cinnamon and nutmeg oozing out of coffee shops cooperatively owned by Black, Brown, Immigrant and Indigenous communities. The world I envision is a world without racism that honors culture, knowledge, power, healing and wisdom.

I believe I am a landless person. I was born out of colonization. As a first-generation Mestiza with a white mother and a brown father, I am a living, breathing example of conflict that arises in the space

in-between. My ancestors taught me that we need to think more; that we need to not be afraid to dream of a world without historical trauma dictating our every move; that we need to be hungry for more; that we don't need to be satisfied with the crumbs we have been given. We should demand justice. Reparations for past harm is both necessary and just, but what came out of the discussion on reparations this past legislative session was ugliness, jealousy and hurt, as well as scarcity, divisiveness and erasure.

In this article, we use reparations as a point of departure in order to have a deeper reflection on some of the work we need to do in our communities to be able to work in solidarity at the Capitol and beyond. Our goal is to share a reflection about the legislative session that is not just a list of what happened with particular bills, but a deeper analysis of some of the organizing that happened.

"If I want to know about your culture, I can just google it."

This is what a young black man said to two Native American women at our last community gathering on reparations. This was a couple of weeks before the end of the legislative session. The goal of this meeting was to explore how African-American and Native communities could work together as a unified body to pursue reparations. Clearly, we still have work to do.

So many questions arise when the discussion of reparations begins. Who gets the money? Who gets to benefit from programs? How are these seemingly limited resources allocated? These are questions that tear our communities apart. Because resources aren't scarce—there is enough to go around. More than enough. There is enough food for everyone to eat and there are enough houses for everyone to live. It is not that these resources do not exist, it is that they are being kept from us by the tactics of rich Capitalists.

From the Black folks whose ancestors were enslaved, to the Native folks whose land we inhabit, to the Latinx folks who know our modern day industrial state was built off of their exploited labor—we all deserve reparations. But should we be looking to payments from the state, or should we be looking for more? Even if money is allocated, even if programs are rolled out, even if every person owed reparations in this country gets a check from the government—we will still live in a militarized police state. We will still have borders that hold space for modern day concentration camps. Women of color will still make significantly less than white men in the workplace. Trans women of color will still be murdered at an astounding rate. These issues won't go away just because one community or another gets a check from the US government.

What we really need to do is build alternative forms of governance that are informed by our ancestors. “Our ancestors from Native American and African-American communities have long had ways of gathering and discussing what’s needed in our communities, peace keeping within sacred forms of governance that take lifetimes to learn and share,” said Fayise Abraham, co-Executive Director of Voices for Racial Justice. “Our current legislative process operates differently from the kind of governance that is natural to our communities. We realize the current political system is not equipped with the spaciousness necessary for our communities to gather in ways that do not perpetuate conditions of scarcity and divisiveness. We need to use the instructions our ancestors left us to dream and build beyond what is given to us by systems.”

The reparations bill, House File 2928, is a bill that was co-authored by former state Representatives, Susan Allen (62B), and Karen Clark (62A). The bill proposes to establish a Commission to study Reparation proposals for American-Indian nations and African-American communities in Minnesota. State Representative, Mary Kunesh-Podein

(41B), agreed to author the bill this past session. A coalition of organizers, artists and community members tried to get a bill before the House and the Senate this past session, but were unable to get the bill heard.

“Obviously, the legislature is gone, and nothing’s going to happen with the bill until next year at the earliest,” said local community organizer, Betsy Raasch-Gilman, who attended a couple of community gatherings on reparations. “However, we had talked about some getting-to-know-one-another opportunities this summer (Juneteenth,



If I want to know about your culture, I can just google it.

pow-wows). Is anything in the works now? It may not be appropriate for us white-bodied folks to participate (at least, in an organized way,) and if it is appropriate, we’d like to know when and how to show up. For us, these community meetings have been thought-provoking, challenging, and deep...Bill or no bill, this is exciting work!”

It is also difficult work. Our bill wasn’t heard this past session. That was in addition to tensions among Native American groups and African-American groups which may have contributed to that outcome.

“[However] it would be wrong to blame the outcome on those dynamics alone without also bringing in dynamics of power and systems of oppression,” said Gabriella Anaís Deal-Márquez, co-Executive Director of Voices for Racial Justice.

These dynamics are not limited to reparations. To understand them is to shine a light on the deeper work that our communities need to do in order to

work in solidarity with one another. We need to be aware that white supremacy lives inside all of us, and we need to acknowledge that there is work that all of us need to do to rid ourselves of it.

Maybe the Capitol isn’t the place to have these discussions. Honestly, the Capitol does more to exploit tensions among communities than to heal them. There is deep work that needs to be done to build solidarity before we even get to the Capitol.

“What’s the work that’s missing that needs to happen to cultivate trust and deep understanding across our communities enough for us to be united when we are at the policy table?,” asked Abraham. “What’s the deeper seven generations work that needs to happen outside of systems that are designed for toxins to flourish? What types of relationships, gatherings and spaces are we responsible for creating in order to confront divisiveness, scarcity and erasure? These are the deeper healing questions that need to be asked.”

Fortunately, other events aimed at getting to those deeper questions are being planned. Local organizer and artist, Eric Avery, who helped organize the People’s Hearing on Reparations at the Minnesota Capitol earlier this year is doing just that.

“I’m writing to invite you into a short process exploring what it means to advance reparations utilizing equitable/intersectional/ancestral frameworks focused on culture, creativity, and connection rather than policy-making and other colonial-normed methods,” said Eric. “Unlike the endless time/energy suck that can be trying to move policy we get to decide the pace, scale, and scope of this work.”

The Capitol is a theater - a place where we go to play out roles. It is not the place that will bring us our liberation. We will have to do that ourselves. The Capitol is a place that can help us learn how to do this, not in easy ways, but in challenging, complex, and meaningful ways.

2019 LEGISLATIVE ASSESSMENT

In order to build collective cultural strategies for racial justice through policy, art, and healing, we commit to work in partnership with local communities to build tools that center our voices, honor our cultures, and support our visions. We believe that through this work, our tools will be transformative in process and in outcome. One of these tools is our assessment of legislation that advances racial justice in Minnesota. Each of the bills listed below was selected based on its potential to impact racial justice in our state. Bills are identified by a House File (HF) number and a Senate File (SF) number. In selecting bills, we collaborated with local community leaders and partners, who are working on multiple issues across the state. Our methods are simple. We use two categories to evaluate legislation: Passed and Missed Opportunity. Passed means a bill that became state law. Missed Opportunity means a bill that either did not become state law, or had parts of it that did become state law, and other parts of it that did not.

PASSED

Expanding Working Family Credit

In the 2019 special session, the Minnesota Legislature expanded the Working Family Credit (HF 5/SF 11) by about \$30 million a year, increasing the incomes of about 275,000 Minnesota workers and families. The expansion primarily benefits workers without dependent children and families with three or more children; they will receive larger tax credits and more Minnesotans will be able to qualify for the credit.

Source: Minnesota Budget Project

Right of First Refusal

A longstanding problem in “Right of First Refusal” (HF 2542/SF 1644) legislation has been resolved. Now, residents of Manufactured Home Communities (MHC) are given 45 days to buy the park if it is being sold for redevelopment. There were two types of problems: 1) loopholes that allowed park owners to avoid having to sell to residents; and 2) a confusing and complicated process that made it difficult to use. Those problems have been fixed.

Source: Neighborhood Leadership and Organizing with the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs

Corrections Ombudsperson

The Public Safety Omnibus Bill included funding to bring back the Office of the Ombudsperson for Corrections in Minnesota (HF 1399/SF 1090). This office is a neutral, third party to investigate complaints from prisons, jails, or juvenile detention facilities. Minnesota has been without a Corrections Ombudsperson since the program was eliminated in 2003.

Source: National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), MN

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Teachers Of Color and American Indian Teachers in Minnesota (TOCAIT)

The 2019 Increase Teachers of Color Act (HF 824/SF 1012) was a comprehensive bill including policy for 15 new and expanded programs. It also requested \$80 million over the next two years needed to increase the percent of teachers of color and American Indian teachers (TOCAIT) above the current 4% of all teachers in the state. The Minnesota Legislature passed several parts of the bill, including a total of \$1.5 million for student teacher candidate grants and \$1.5 million for TOCAIT mentorship and retention grant programs over the next two years. Yet, only a small increase in funding of \$299,000 for TOCAIT was made compared to the past two years and several important policy changes were not passed.

Source: TOCAIT Coalition

PASSED

All Kids Count Act

In 2016, the MN State Legislature passed the All Kids Count Act (HF 2258/ SF 1847) to disaggregate student data to reveal disparities along lines of race and ethnicity, English language ability, foster care status, military family status, gender, low-income status, and disability. This is critical to uncovering hidden gaps, identifying bright spots, and developing targeted supports to help all students thrive. During the 2019 legislative session, Senator Roger Chamberlain (38) introduced legislation and Rep. Tony Jurgens (54B) submitted an amendment (A126) to repeal the collection of ethnic data, though both efforts were defeated.

Source: Coalition of Asian American Leaders

PASSED

Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)

The Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) (SF 12/ HF 14) is the State's welfare-to-work program with a cash grant of \$532/month for a family of three. The MFIP grant has not increased since 1986, yet remains a lifeline to 30,000 Minnesota families. In the wake of a decade of advocacy, the Legislature finally passed a \$100/month increase to MFIP this legislative session as part of the Omnibus Tax and Health and Human Services (HHS) agreements.

Source: Legal Services Advocacy Project (LSAP), MN

Urban Agriculture

The Minnesota State Legislature has agreed to continue funding the Urban Agriculture Grant Program (SF 2397/HF 2344). Urban agricultural efforts will receive \$300,000/year for the next four years.

Source: Northside Fresh Coalition & Appetite for Change

Solitary Confinement

The 2019 Legislature passed new laws restricting the use of solitary confinement (HF 493/SF 1911). The new laws limit the use of solitary confinement to the most serious or persistent rule violations such as a serious threat to life, property, people or self. The new law requires the DOC (Department of Corrections) to deliver a yearly report to the legislature on the use of solitary confinement in Minnesota prisons.

Source: National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), MN

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Renters' Credit / Equal Access to Homeowner Tax Benefits

The Renters' Credit is a tax credit that refunds a portion of the property taxes that renters have paid through their rents. Tax refunds received through the Renters' Credit help people who struggle to pay the bills, many of whom belong to communities of color and American Indian communities. There was no increase to the Renters' Credit, nor does the tax bill allow homeowners with Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITIN) to gain the tax benefits that come from homestead status. The original Renters' Credit expansion bill was HF 2349/ SF 2585. The ITIN proposal was in the governor's budget.

Source: Minnesota Budget Project

PASSED

Omnibus State Government and Finance Bill: Census

The Minnesota Legislature gave 1.6 million for the 2020 Census (HF 1935/SF 2227). This will help Minnesotans prepare for the Census count. State funds will be used to, among other things, increase participation in historically undercounted communities and increase shared services, such as translation and promotional materials in all communities.

Source: Co-Creators Table/Minnesota Census Mobilization Partnership

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Solutions, not Suspensions

Except for a provision that prohibits schools from punishing students for using sunscreen, Minnesota goes another year with no progress on school suspensions and expulsions. The House proposed language to require schools to use non-exclusionary discipline for non-violent behaviors, which would force schools to only use suspensions and expulsions as a last resort (HF 1954/SF 2116). The House also sought to end suspensions and expulsions for three- and four-year-olds (HF 1785/SF 1874). Despite a track record of bi-partisan interest in school discipline reform over the past several years, the proposals failed.

Source: EdAllies

Driver's Licenses for All

Despite the strong efforts made by Black and Brown immigrants across the state of Minnesota, and the House passing legislation that would have granted driver's licenses for immigrants regardless of status, the Senate failed to even discuss similar legislation (HF 1500).

Source: Freedom to Drive Coalition, MN

Voting Rights Restoration

This bill (HF 40/SF 856) would have restored voting rights to people who are formerly incarcerated. Voter Rights Restoration had multiple hearings and the bill advanced in the House. The Voter Rights Restoration Coalition held a rally at the Capitol, but unfortunately that wasn't enough to push it over the finish line. It didn't pass.

Source: American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), MN

Medical interpretation legislation

This bill (HF 1400/SF 875) would have provided a statewide baseline for interpreting training and testing with minimum requirements to reduce health disparities and guarantee Limited English Proficiency (LEP) patients' safety. The bill was introduced and heard in the Senate but did not have a hearing in the House. The bill is still viable for the 2020 legislative session.

Source: Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs (MCLA) and Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans.

Post-conviction relief

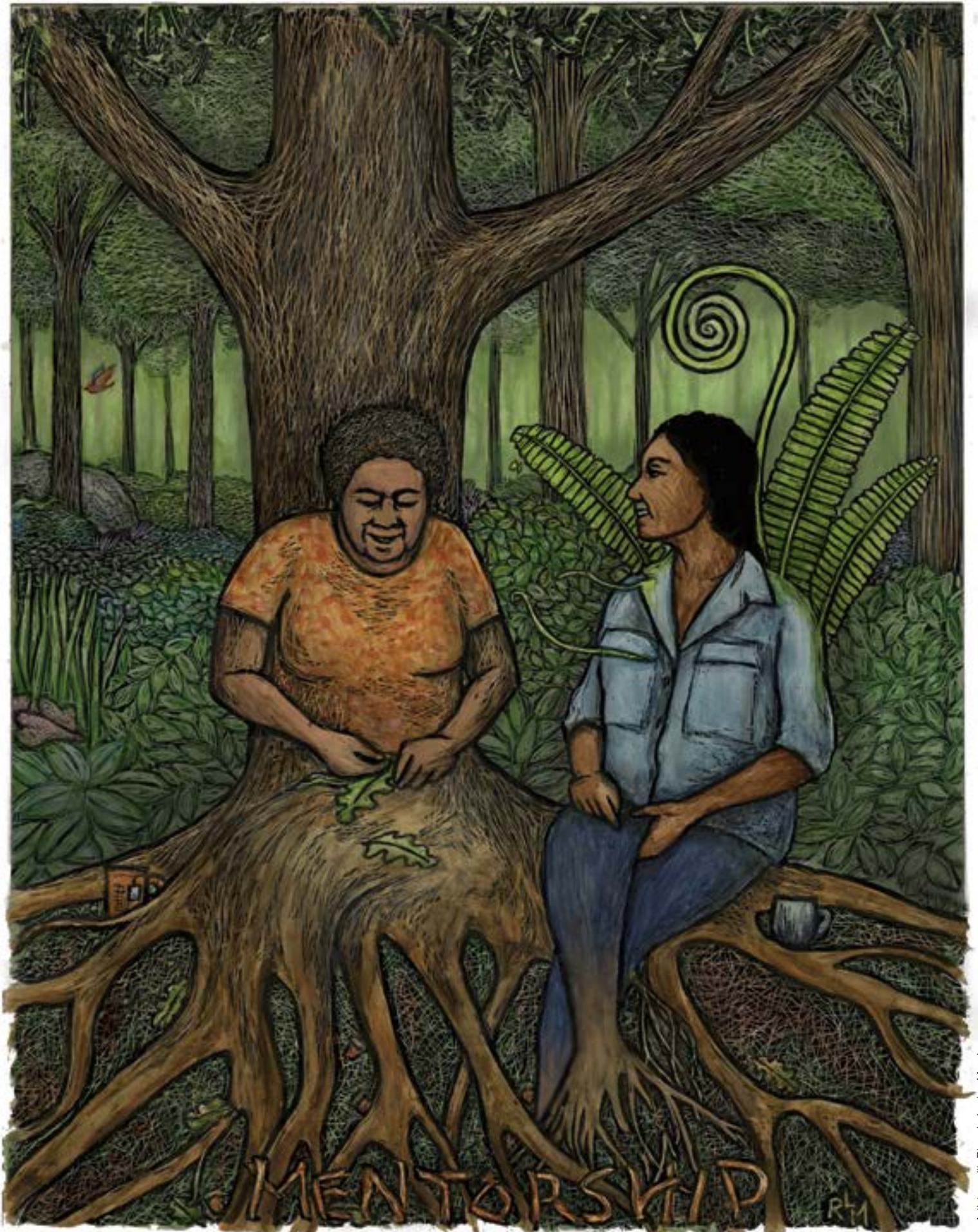
This bill (HF 739/SF 2495) would have allowed more people to have wrongful convictions overturned by a judge. Post-conviction relief is currently inaccessible to many immigrants and refugees, who are being detained and deported on the basis of years-old criminal convictions. Post-conviction relief was introduced in both the Minnesota House and Senate. It passed the House but did not make it through a Senate committee.

Source: Release MN8

Unemployment Insurance (UI)

This bill (HF 1174/ SF 2404) would have (1) restored fairness to workers in accessing UI, and (2) created a UI Equity working group to make recommendations for eliminating barriers that prevent low-wage workers from accessing UI following loss of a job. The Legislature did not hear the bills and they did not pass.

Source: Legal Services Advocacy Project (LSAP), MN



Artist credit: Ricardo Levins Morales

KEEPING CARE AT THE MINNESOTA STATE CAPITOL

By: Cirien Saadeh

THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS CAN BE EXHAUSTING FOR ORGANIZERS AND ADVOCATES WHO GO UP AGAINST ENTRENCHED WHITENESS AND BUREAUCRACY.

One of the untold stories from the annual legislative session is the impact that the legislative process takes on organizers and people who are oppressed. The grueling schedule can make it difficult for people to show up and advocate for their vision, and those whose job it is to advocate are required to live that schedule for months at a time, even as they seek to connect the Capitol to their communities. The toll can be physical, social, emotional, and intellectual.

In a recent community meeting hosted by Voices for Racial Justice (VRJ), meant to reflect on the 2019 legislative session, organizers discussed what they had

learned about legislative organizing and the work that must be done to sustain their organizing.

“No matter whether these bills pass or not, we still exist. And we need to remember to ask, what is our alternative world that we’re building, how are we defending ourselves, how are we protecting ourselves? I think that gets lost when you’re running and racing around to meet these deadlines or to pass a bill,” said Nekessa Opoti, a first-time organizer at the Minnesota State Capitol and the co-founder of the Black Immigrant Collective.

According to Opoti and other organizers, it is difficult to imagine coming back to organize at the Capitol next year because of the impact that the legislative processes have on organizers and community members, as well as the unchangingness of policies and processes.

“This year it just seemed to be so much more hopeful and promising. Reflecting on what we learned, is the lesson not to have hope? Is the lesson not to get excited for the promise of what can be? No,” said Julia Freeman, senior organizer with Voices for Racial Justice. “Hope is what gets us through the struggle. The promise of more is what gets us through the struggle. The promise of better is

what gets us through the struggle.”

Despite the inherent challenges of working in the Capitol, there are things we can do to care for our communities and ourselves throughout the legislative process. Having a meal together and celebrating our together-ness allows for shared strength and builds resilience. Additionally, staying active can help create a sense of resilience and physical sustainability in the process. Lastly, recognize that we are acting in concert with our community, learning from our elders, and teaching our children. We are not alone in this struggle.

“The system is designed to keep us away, to keep us from engaging. It traumatizes,” said Mónica Hurtado, VRJ organizer. “The challenge is how do we survive and thrive. My survival toolkit was to always be able to go to my partners, debriefing the experience, it was one of the things I found very useful.”

Hurtado recommends that organizers use the legislative off-season to build capacity and power, as it may be more difficult to do so during the legislative session.



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Germinators support our projects, ideas, and initiatives across issues including prison justice, immigration, education equity & organizing in greater MN.



Germinator \$180, \$15/month:

Soil Tenders are just as important as our light givers. They are the roots supporting our team as we integrate healing and culture throughout our work.



Soil Tender \$60, \$5/month:

WITH GRATITUDE

We are grateful to all who lent their voice and hand to the creation of *The Quilt: Policy, Art, and Healing*. It's impossible to share all who helped to make this possible, but to name a few we thank:

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**I think life
itself is a quilt:
it's a confluence
of conduct and
development that
makes for an
individual and
community.**

Douglas Ewart



Photo credit: Cirien Saadeh