

NATIONAL OFFICE 2021 YEAR IN REVIEW

OUR MISSION:

Advancement Project is a next generation, multi-racial civil rights organization. Rooted in the great human rights struggles for equality and justice, we exist to fulfill America's promise of a caring, inclusive and just democracy. We use innovative tools and strategies to strengthen social movements and achieve high impact policy change.

OUR VISION:

We envision a future where people of color are free – where they can thrive, be safe and exercise power. Driven by the genius of ordinary people and their movements, racism will no longer exist and justice will be radically transformed.

We create openings for change by building capacity at the grassroots, connecting struggles, advancing local and national campaigns, and shifting narratives on race.

POWER & DEMOCRACY

APPLYING PRESSURE TO MAINTAIN DEMOCRACY



“We are up against the most vicious backlash against voters of color we have experienced in decades. This not only is a disservice to voters, but it sets a dangerous model for other states,” Judith Browne Dianis, Executive Director of Advancement Project National Office.

Our democracy is facing more threats than ever – over 400 new voter suppression bills across 49 states have been introduced—254 of them already passed—which means 50+ million individuals and their rights to vote are at risk. We’ve been on the ground and in the courthouse blocking barriers to the ballot all year. Our Executive Director, Judith Browne Dianis, has been on airwaves all year speaking at events and media outlets to raise the alarm on the attack on democracy. She’s appeared on [Black News Channel](#), [MSNBC](#), [HuffPost](#), [PBS NewsHour](#), and many more.

For decades, our **Power & Democracy Program** has worked to protect the right to vote for communities of color—calling for an affirmative right to vote at the federal level—and this year has been no different. Here are our Power & Democracy program’s 4 priorities in 2021:

- 1. Reconnecting people to the ballot by eliminating criminal convictions as a voting barrier, restoring rights to returning citizens and incarcerated individuals, and continuing to build curricula about voting rights education.** Our Summer 2021 [Rights Restoration](#) Convening brought together nearly 100 activists, grassroots leaders, organizers from 49 different organizations in 15 states. The work centered on utilizing new tools to expand networks and allies, enhance campaigning and increase engagement of returning citizens.
- 2. Block voter suppression in the courts to prevent destructive bills from becoming models across the country.** [We sued Florida](#), again, and Georgia, on behalf of a diverse coalition of faith and civic engagement organizations, after the Senate Bill 90 and [Senate Bill 202](#) were passed—two of the most restrictive voter suppression laws aimed at further diminishing political power for communities of color. We expect to go to trial in the first quarter of 2022.
- 3. Build power and local accountability to make it easier to vote.** Litigation is just one piece of the puzzle, so we’ve been working with Pastors in Georgia to educate voters on attempts to block their right to vote, and to push local officials to make elections fairer and more accessible. Take a look at the [PSA we released to educate voters](#).
- 4. Monitor legislation and advocate at the federal level to protect the right to vote for all.** [We’ve supported the Pastors in our GA litigation](#) in coming to DC for protests (even getting arrested), participating in national actions with Black Voters Matter, and have been participating in national coalitions pushing Congress for federal voting rights legislation.

OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN

LEVELING THE EDUCATIONAL PLAYING FIELD

We are building toward a vision of liberatory education. Through our **Opportunity to Learn Program**, we've pioneered work to end the school to prison pipeline, co-leading the national **#PoliceFreeSchools** campaign along with Alliance for Educational Justice to challenge systemic racism and criminalization in schools across the country. In 2020, we saw a wave of wins and momentum for #PoliceFreeSchools. From Oakland, CA to Rochester, NY—local campaigns successfully fought to remove police and SRO's from their schools and reinvest that money into real school supports like nurses, guidance counselors, and more. To create deeper lasting change, our team will continue to provide critical infrastructure and campaign tools for the #PoliceFreeSchools network to establish an unbending right to quality education for all students.

Our Opportunity to Learn program's 2021 priorities included:

- 1. Protect recent gains through accountability and implementation fights in these districts.** The Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) has invested close to \$300 million in school policing infrastructure, and school districts are working to bring back police to schools that they've been removed from. Many school districts that committed to reinvesting in supports like counselors—to create safer and healthier school environments and reduce tensions—have failed to make those investments. We are working with our campaign partners to prevent these efforts and regression while keeping focused on the big fights for educational equity.
- 2. Ramping up our efforts to secure an affirmative right to quality education.** With the support of Arnold & Porter LLP, we hired a Right to Education Fellow, Noelia Rivera-Calderón, to help spearhead our new push to establish a Right to Education. Early this year, we filed two amicus briefs with the U.S. Supreme Court and U.S. Court of Appeals to protect the freedom of speech and support a secure and quality education for students of color.
- 3. Strengthen the field of young leaders through continuous education and training.** This July, we celebrated the 10th anniversary of ActionCamp, bringing together around 100 young people of color from across the country, virtually. We're sharpening their organizing skills, developing new strategies, and building relationships to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.

JUSTICE PROJECT

ADDRESSING THE MASS INCARCERATION CRISIS AND DECRIMINALIZING POVERTY AND RACE

The **Justice Project** fights to protect communities of color from our oppressive and discriminatory criminal justice system. Our two overarching priorities are to decarcerate and decriminalize our communities—not simply reform—but wholly dismantle systems that criminalize and incarcerate people of color.

**OUR LOVED ONES
ARE NOT SAFE INSIDE**

Through our decriminalization work, we support local campaigns to defund police, attack our predatory system of fines and fees, and holding system actors like prosecutors accountable. At the same time, our decarceration work includes campaigns to close jails, fight horrific conditions in jails, and reinvesting in real safety supports for communities. We've spent the year working in deep relationship with grassroots partners, helping them develop campaign strategies and offering capacity building support to close jails, address odious conditions inside of jails, and abolish cash bail.

Here are our Justice Project's key developments in 2021:

- We developed, "**Mapping Injustice: Navigating the Criminal Legal System 101**", a 3-part video series providing resources for impacted people in the criminal justice system, along with a glossary that family members can utilize in court.
- With our Board member, Jesse Williams, we developed a 3-part video series titled, "**How Cops Get Off**", detailing the cultural, legal, and societal obstacles that keep predatory police from being held accountable in the criminal justice system; stay tuned for this 2022 national campaign launch.
- We supported a coalition in DC as they develop campaigns to end Stop & Frisk policies, worked with partners in St Louis as they develop diversion programs and restorative circles to avoid state incarceration, and in Arizona we're helping a group tracking a consent decree in Maricopa County.
- This fall, we reached settlements related to our East Baton Rouge, LA bail litigation. We were able to ensure that counsel will be present at bail determinations (now scheduled for the same time every day), making it much easier for counsel to appear with their clients. Furthermore, judges are taking into consideration the amount that defendants can pay when setting their bail. This is a major win for East Baton Rouge communities, East Baton Rouge Parish Prison Reform Coalition, and Justice Project, as we continue our litigation to free more people trapped behind bars.
- We also launched an effort in partnership with Civil Rights Corps to train local lawyers who want to be connected to movement and bring police abuse cases at the local level. We've developed a training curriculum and have begun recruiting and training lawyers in our pilot cities of Houston, TX and Washington, DC. Next year we plan to convene the first cohort of lawyers and expand into more cities.
- Along with our community partners Michigan Liberation, we launched the **#FreeBlackWomxn** campaign, a photo and storytelling project that elevates the voices of Black Michigan mothers who have experienced incarceration in support of the **2021 Black Mamas Day Bailout**. Over the past 3 years, more than 50 mothers have been released from cages, allowing them to return home to their families.

**AROUND 80% OF WOMEN
IN JAIL ARE MOTHERS.**

We continue to uplift the unique experiences and challenges of women trapped in the carceral system, and we fight every day to get them home to their families in support of combatting generational cycles of incarceration. Learn more about these women and their stories on our website.