



# EMANCIPATE

## End of Year Report December 2023



## Contents

<b>A Message from Our Director</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Our Mission</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Our Team</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Board of Directors</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Quotes from Funders</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Congratulations to Our Justice League Fellows</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Strategic Litigation: Fighting police misconduct and prison conditions to catalyze systemic change in the courtroom</b>	<b>11</b>
“After a long 3 years, justice was finally served,” Yolanda Irving, lead plaintiff	<b>12</b>
“The first such court order in state history,” Ashlee Inscoe, plaintiff	<b>13</b>
“Police officers cannot treat people the way they treated me,” Stephanie Bottom, plaintiff	<b>13</b>
<b>Emancipate NC Focus Areas</b>	<b>14</b>
Introducing our Family Defense Focus Area	<b>15</b>
Don’t Plead to Weed: Advancing the abolition of over-policing for weed charges	<b>16</b>
Community Education: Raising public awareness about policies, civic actions, and strategies to abolish the root causes of mass incarceration	<b>17</b>
<b>Cop Watch/Rapid Response: Deploying to scenes of intense police interactions to support impacted people and families - and demand real changes in policing</b>	<b>18</b>
Policing the Raleigh Police	<b>19</b>
Have A HEART: A campaign to re-allocate public safety budgets to invest in community-based, health-centered emergency response alternatives	<b>19</b>
<b>Protest Defense Network: Protecting protestors who challenge injustice</b>	<b>20</b>

<b>Freedom Fighter Bond Fund: Supporting freedom for activists facing arrest and legal jeopardy</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Peace Not Police: Helping communities impacted by over-policing protect themselves from police harassment</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Police Misconduct Database: An avenue to keep Black families safe from police violence and hold police accountable for misconduct</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Poetic Justice: Celebrating beauty and joy within a world that tries - but does not succeed - to silence and cage us</b>	<b>21</b>
Featured Poem 1: Press Five Now, by Ashlee Inscoe	<b>21</b>
Featured Poem 2: A Moral Dilemma, by Phillip Vance Smith	<b>23</b>
<b>Emancipate NC's achievements recognized by community leaders</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Media Spotlight: Media narratives have depended heavily on the expertise of Emancipate NC - often publishing op-eds authored by our staff and featuring quotes by our leadership in news articles</b>	<b>27</b>

## A Message from Our Director

2023 was a beast, y'all. Despite that truth, Emancipate NC continues our fight for liberation and freedom from a racist carceral state and the systems and structures that enable and perpetuate it. 2023 has been a year of growth as much as it has been a year filled with new challenges. The only outcome is liberation. We will get free...together.

The last few years offered more hope to the people than we have seen in a very long time. But, 400-plus-year-old systems of oppression and white supremacy don't die without a fight. After a period of progress and hope, the results of the 2022 election transformed North Carolina and presented formidable challenges to our efforts to help Black communities remember their power.

The state Supreme Court flipped to a conservative and repressive majority. The new majority wasted no time rolling back the progress of previous courts and dragging North Carolina back to Jim Crow, reversing landmark decisions issued by the previously progressive court with surgically precise policies and practices aimed at lynching growing Black civic power. The elections also shifted the partisan majority of the General Assembly, which fast-tracked and approved the passage of HB 40, a bill that punishes and criminalizes acts of protest and public discourse.

But, Emancipate NC was built for times like these. We have pivoted our approach, investing resources into helping amplify the political power of the people. We are changing the rules of engagement, away from those established by the current oligarchy that were NEVER designed to build people power, towards a more guerrilla warfare approach to freedom.



*Dawn Blagrove, Executive Director and Attorney*

Emancipate NC knows the road to liberation has to be paved anew. So, we listen to the people and follow their lead through a jungle of white supremacy towards freedom. With proverbial machetes, we are making our own path and clearing the way to our self-determination.

In Durham, the local Safety and Wellness Task Force passed a proposal that includes transformative changes to pre- and post-arrest diversion, cash bail, and abuse/neglect/dependency court. In Raleigh, the police department has banned the use of no-knock warrants, and city officials have signaled willingness to approve the establishment of an alternative crisis response unit that will deploy mental health professionals, rather than armed police, to non-violent emergencies. We are replicating successes like these in small- and mid-sized rural communities throughout the state.



We have injected new energy into our organizing work by welcoming several new staff members. Team Emancipate now includes Jatoia Potts, Organizer; Jaelyn Miller, Community Lawyering Fellow; and Margaux Lander, Investigator & Strategist.

This year, we were reminded that the systems we are fighting are not designed to allow us to win - but we will never be defeated.

Our strength continues to lie in activating people like you, who feel the oppression of the racist carceral state most acutely, in efforts to abolish it. Our advocacy, education, and organizing are powered by people directly impacted by policing

and incarceration - and strengthened by our solidarity with interconnected movement ecosystems.

Thanks to you, we are emancipating North Carolina - not only from prisons and jails, but also from white supremacy and legacies of slavery, slave patrols, and Jim Crow laws.



Executive Director

## Our Mission

Emancipate NC was founded on the knowledge that mass incarceration and structural racism harm all of us. Prison is state-sponsored violence. We are all complicit in its harms. The mission of Emancipate NC is to shift mainstream narratives on racialized mass incarceration through community education, mobilization, and litigation.

# Our Team



**Dawn Blagrove**  
Executive Director and  
Attorney



**Elizabeth Simpson**  
Strategic Director and  
Attorney



**Kerwin Pittman**  
Director of Policy and  
Program



**Ian Mance**  
Senior Counsel



**Joy C. Belk**  
Paralegal



**Brandon Smith**  
Team Documentarian



**Dedan Waciuri**  
Organizer



**Jatoia Potts**  
Organizer



**Jaelyn Miller**  
Community Lawyering  
Fellow



**Margaux Lander**  
Investigator and  
Strategist

## Board of Directors



**Savannah Baker**  
Board Chair



**Kristie Puckett-Williams**  
Board Secretary and  
Treasurer



**Frances Castillo**  
Board Member



**Tessa Hale**  
Board Member



**Mandie Sellars**  
Board Member



*Emancipate NC are effective, trusted narrative first responders who quickly elevate people with less power in urgent moments to be sure their voices, stories are heard. We're proud to support their ongoing work building grassroots platforms - and challenging dominant narratives."*



North Carolina  
**Local News Lab**  
Fund

**Lizzy Hazeltine**, Director  
North Carolina Local News Lab Fund

*"Emancipate NC is pivotal to the radical transformational change we seek to make in this world. Reimagining and implementing the vision of a just world is hard work. Emancipate NC and its leadership are standing tall and strong in this work and must continue to do so."*



**COMMUNITY**  
Power from the  
ground up **CHANGE**

**Jennifer Wells**  
Community Change

*"Emancipate NC plays a crucial role in the criminal justice ecosystem in North Carolina as an organization focused on fostering change in the system. Their litigation, narrative change, public education, and policy reform strategies have all been in service to creating a fairer system, particularly for those who are disproportionately ensnared in the system. Emancipate NC is both bold and effective."*



**THE JUST TRUST**

**James Gore**  
The Just Trust



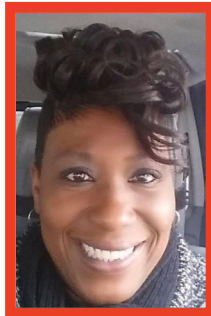


## Congratulations to Our Justice League Fellows

The Justice League is an organizing fellowship for justice-impacted individuals and youth to learn advocacy and organizing skills and to deploy those skills to fight structural racism and mass incarceration. Our 18 Justice League Fellows hail from at least 13 counties throughout NC.



**Amarre French**



**Krystal Ruiz**



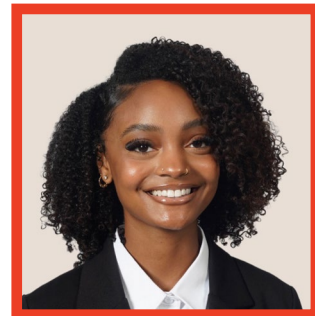
**Anthony Newsome**



**Erin Blagrove**



**Courtney Crudup**



**Nique Chance**



**Crystal Davis**



**Percy Rogers**



**Jared Smith**

# Congratulations to Our Justice League Fellows



**Jenny McKenney**



**Jaymond Bryant-Herron**



**Lee Harris, Sr.**



**Kyla Holton**



**Latisha Facyson**



**Treeva Freeman**



**Mia Dickens**



**April Short**



**April Scales**

# Strategic Litigation

Fighting police misconduct and prison conditions to catalyze systemic change in the courtroom

## “After a long 3 years, justice was finally served,” Yolanda Irving, named lead plaintiff

In 2020, two Black mothers and their children were relaxing at their homes when more than a dozen Raleigh Police Department Vice and Selective Enforcement Unit officers burst onto the premises and held both families at gunpoint as they executed a terrifying no-knock warrant and home raid based on an erroneous search warrant.

This raid was one of many ordered by Omar Abdullah, a corrupt detective who executed dozens of narcotics arrests on the basis of evidence fabricated by a confidential informant. All victims targeted by Omar Abdullah’s arrests were Black. The now-notorious Raleigh Police informant scandal was covered by a [comprehensive investigative report published by Rolling Stone](#) last spring.



Emancipate NC attorneys Elizabeth Simpson and Ian Mance joined with attorneys from Tin Fulton, Walker and Owen to provide aggressive representation to the plaintiffs.

As the case moved through civil court, the lawyers representing Raleigh prevented body camera footage of the raid from being publicly released, tried to get Emancipate NC removed from the case, and shielded Police Chief Estella Patterson from a deposition to answer questions about the department’s policy on no-knock warrants. Ms. Irving, Ms. Walton, and their children were asked racially-charged questions, such as, “Are you in touch with your birth father at all?” “When was the last time you had a job, if ever?” And “Do you have a particular rap artist you like?”



Through it all, Emancipate held strong. In early 2023, we were informed that Raleigh Police Department banned “no-knock” warrants as a direct result of demands and

pressure created by our litigation, which could influence municipalities throughout NC to follow suit. As the litigation continued to progress, former Detective Abdullah was criminally indicted for felony Obstruction of Justice, and substantial changes were made to the staffing and operation of the Drugs and Vice Unit to which Abdullah and the other defendant officers belonged. And finally, in June 2023, we successfully negotiated a financial settlement in our federal lawsuit with the City of Raleigh, which awarded the plaintiffs \$350,000. In addition, the Raleigh Police Department enforced more stringent protections against the use of confidential informants in drug operations.



## [“The first such court order in state history,” Ashlee Inscoe, plaintiff](#)

Ashlee Inscoe is a transgender woman who was born intersex and has been wrongly incarcerated in a men’s facility. Since 2021, Ms. Inscoe, who has been experiencing harassment and threats to her safety in the men’s prison where she is incarcerated, has been fighting to be transferred to a women’s prison.



Ms. Inscoe’s lawyer, Emancipate NC Strategic Director and Attorney Elizabeth Simpson, had already [helped her win gender-affirming surgery in 2022](#). Elizabeth, who is also Adjunct Clinical Professor of Law and Interim Director of the Civil Legal Assistance Clinic, brought in UNC Law Civil Clinic students Robin Bleiweis and Eli Longnecker to bolster Ms. Inscoe’s legal team.

In November, in the first such court order in the history of NC, the judge presiding over this case [ordered that Ms. Inscoe be transferred to a women’s correctional facility](#). The judge cited a state law that mandates an individual be housed in a facility that matches the sex on their state records. Since Ms. Inscoe had updated her sex to female on her birth certificate, following her reproductive surgery in 2022, the state’s records of her sex supported her case.

This crucial win holds promise to redefine the standards that govern confinement of transgender individuals incarcerated in NC prisons.

## [“Police officers cannot treat people the way they treated me,” Stephanie Bottom, plaintiff](#)

Stephanie Bottom, a 71-year-old librarian, was driving to a funeral when she was pulled out of her car by her hair and assaulted by police officers, who stopped her for driving 80 MPH in a 70 MPH zone and not obeying blue lights. During the traffic stop, officers provided Ms. Bottom less than 10 seconds to comply with orders to exit her vehicle before deploying excessive force.

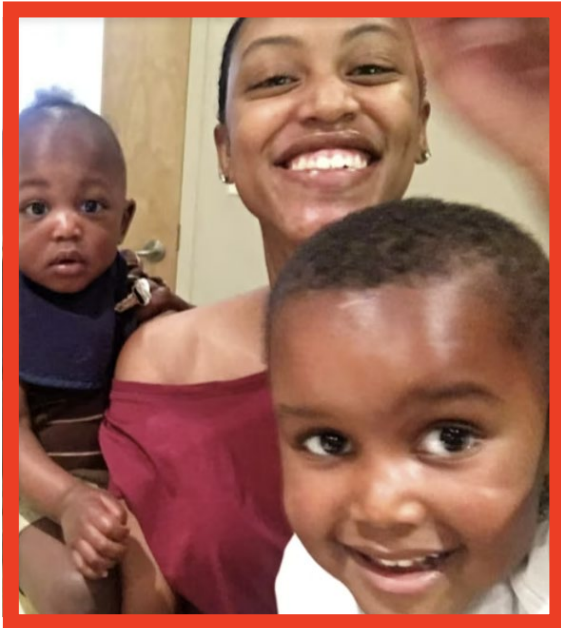
Thanks to the representation provided by Emancipate NC Attorney Ian Mance, [Ms. Bottom received a \\$125,000 settlement](#) from the City of Salisbury and the Rowan County Sheriff’s Office. The judge who decided the case, U.S. District Judge William L. Osteen, Jr., an appointee of President George W. Bush, issued a 58-page opinion in Ms. Bottom’s favor that conveys the responsibility that police officers in NC have during traffic stops to give people time to respond to orders to get out of their vehicles before laying hands on them.



# Emancipate NC Focus Areas

## Introducing our Family Defense Focus Area

This year, Emancipate NC introduced our Family Defense focus area to promote visions of family social services that protect, rather than harm, families and communities. Our Family Defense focus area is led by Toia Potts, an alumnae of our Justice League Fellowship. Toia is a mother who was wrongly accused of child abuse and incarcerated on unattainable bond. Even after all charges against Toia were dropped, Toia's parental rights were terminated, and the rotating door of social workers responsible for placing her children refused to file adoption petitions submitted by her sons' blood relatives in Georgia. In our broken system, stories like Toia's are too common.



Strategic Director and Attorney Elizabeth Simpson has been representing Toia in her fight to return her children to their kin and, in March 2023, [filed a writ of mandamus](#) requesting an end to DSS's interference with and due consideration of kinship adoption petitions. Team Emancipate also [elevated Toia's story to local media outlets](#) and launched a petition to support reunifying Toia's kids with their biological family, which has garnered more than 4,000 responses to date.

Toia has also been leading our work in the community, building the power of impacted parents, community members, social workers, law students, and lawyers struggling in and against these systems. [We hosted community trainings](#) on how to defend yourself and your family in abuse/neglect/dependency courtrooms. We launched a support group for impacted parents. We hosted a roundtable discussion,

["Keeping Families Together,"](#) on the importance of family preservation and local opportunities for child welfare reform. This roundtable created momentum for a [national conference by the same name](#), co-sponsored by three area law schools.

In July 2023, [Durham's Safety and Wellness Task Force passed a proposal presented by Toia Potts](#) for transforming foster care and the abuse/neglect/dependency (A/N/D) courtroom to ensure Durham's A/N/D courtroom and child welfare system respect family integrity and end family separation.

[This proposal](#) will be part of the full package that the Task Force presents to residents of Durham as part of a holistic vision of increasing authentic safety and wellness for our community.





## Don't Plead to Weed: Advancing the abolition of over-policing for weed charges

After NC decriminalized smokable hemp in 2022, ENC launched our Don't Plead to Weed (DPW) campaign to abolish over-policing for marijuana possession on the basis that it is indistinguishable from smokable hemp. We have continued to successfully implement DPW in Pitt County, a jurisdiction with one of the highest numbers of misdemeanor marijuana prosecutions in NC. We hosted know-your-rights trainings throughout NC, including [a community training on 4/20](#).

Strategic Director and Attorney Elizabeth Simpson [filed an amicus brief about the racist/xenophobic history of marijuana enforcement in a pending criminal appeal, \*State v. Dobson\*](#), arguing that NC courts

need to adopt an “odor-plus” standard for probable cause related to the alleged smell of cannabis, because cops use pretext of the smell of weed to racially profile drivers and because the smell of illegal weed is indistinguishable from the smell of legal hemp products. As we close out 2023, we are preparing to scale up our DPW campaign to more small- and mid-sized rural counties in Eastern NC.



## Community Education: Raising public awareness about policies, civic actions, and strategies to abolish the root causes of mass incarceration



Team Emancipate has been on the front lines of NC's attack on the right to dissent through the passage of HB 40, a bill that unjustly criminalizes the constitutional right to protest.

Recognizing that its impact will be disproportionately concentrated among Black activists protesting structural racism, Team Emancipate jumped into action, collaborating with Ready The Ground Training Team (RGTT) to [train a group of protest marshals](#) on the rights they and protestors have under HB 40.



These trainings and resources support our base in effectively mounting civic resistance to unjust policies in order to advance criminal legal reform.

ENC has been addressing legislative attacks at the state Supreme Court and General Assembly levels by creating and publishing a [Local Policy Menu](#) on our website, which is available to activists around the state to advocate at their county and city levels for policies that reduce community reliance on armed police response. This Local Policy Menu features policies implemented in select NC cities that have decreased policing practices that fuel racially disparate rates of contact with armed police, arrests, incidents of police violence and other misconduct, and incarceration - and resources activists can reference to support efforts to draft, propose, and advocate for the adoption of such policies.

**Transforming Safety**  
A menu of local policy changes in North Carolina

Systemic racism and bias affect police judgment. This has harmful and deadly consequences for Black and brown community members.

This policy menu is a tool to help local government workers, community organizers, and advocates begin to transform city and county policing models. Each real-life example demonstrates how a local policy change can minimize the footprint of armed police.

**Ending Regulatory Stops**

A Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office policy prevents police from stopping drivers for regulatory violations, like expired tags. Data shows that these types of stops are often prompted by racial profiling and can lead to unnecessary use of force.

[Learn more](#)

**Ending Regulatory Stops | Policy Model from Mecklenburg County, North Carolina**

Communities across the nation have too often suffered the consequences of systemic racism in our criminal justice system. Black and brown people unjustly harmed or killed when encountering biased law enforcement officers is just one. There are many processes police are involved in that do not require the response of an armed officer. Ending regulatory stops is just one item on Emancipate NC's policy menu for local policing reform intended to divert civil processes away from the police. View the full menu of local policy models [here](#).

**Changes to MCSO Traffic Stops**

Regulatory stops include stops related to expired tags, malfunctioning tail lights, window tints, etc. The new [policy](#) that keeps police from stopping drivers initially for these reasons is a [response](#) to the fact that Black and brown drivers are disproportionately pulled over for non-moving regulatory offenses.

The policy was developed by [Forward Justice](#) and the [North Carolina Second Chance Alliance](#), who cited that Black drivers make up about 22% of the population, yet are subject to 30% of [traffic stops](#).

**“**By eliminating traffic stops for these low-level infractions that do not contribute to public safety, we can begin to minimize unnecessary and potentially harmful interactions between law enforcement and communities and address the racial disparities clearly inherent in these stops.”

Whitley Carpenter, Senior Criminal Justice Counsel  
Forward Justice

**95% greater chance**  
Black drivers were 95% more likely to be subject to [traffic stops](#) than white drivers in Mecklenburg County.

**5 out of 10**  
Half of the [most charged offenses](#) in Mecklenburg County are regulatory.

**September 2022**  
Mecklenburg County's Sheriff's Office (MCSO) announced in September 2022 that drivers would no longer be stopped for non-moving violations.

**10% drop in disparities**  
Black-to-white stop disparities dropped ten percent in Greensboro the year a similar stop ban was implemented.

**Tips on how to Adopt Policy**

- Look at the North Carolina Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Policy instructions on how to craft a [sample policy](#).
- Check out data from the [UNC School of Government Criminal Justice Innovation Lab](#) to get information on regulatory stops in your county. On the left-hand side of the dashboard, click on "Citation v. Arrest" and select "Traffic" in the bottom right-hand corner under the map. You click on the "Race" tab above the map to see racial disparities in enforcement.
- Check out data from [NCCopWatch.org](#), which collects data from the NC State Bureau of Investigations on traffic stops in each NC county.
- Reach out to [Forward Justice](#), a legal organization working to advance racial, economic, and social justice in the South. They drafted the new policy in Mecklenburg County.

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This strategy eschews efforts for reform at the state level (where legislative bodies are controlled by people who have demonstrated opposition to advancing criminal legal reform) in favor of investing resources into advancing reform at the city and county levels, which have proven to be more amenable to exploring alternatives to police.

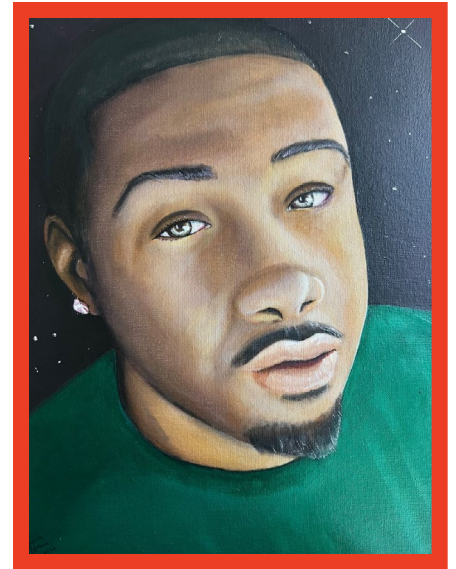
# Cop Watch/Rapid Response

Deploying to scenes of intense police interactions to support impacted people and families - and demand real changes in policing

## Policing the Raleigh Police

In response to the January 2023 murder of Darryl Williams, a man who was tased to death by Raleigh Police Department officers during an unlawful search of his vehicle under the city's racist "proactive" policing policies, Emancipate NC worked in coalition with our community to raise six demands of the City of Raleigh and Raleigh Police Department for reforms that can immediately make our communities safer. Among these demands is the removal of tasers, a practice sanctioned by Raleigh Police Department's de-escalation policy as a non-lethal tool just weeks before tasers killed Mr. Williams.

[We were joined in this fight by Ben Crump](#), civil rights lawyer nationally renowned for his representation of the families of George Floyd, Tyre Nichols, and others.



To open another avenue to hold Raleigh Police Department accountable, Emancipate NC staff [submitted a letter to the U.S. Department of Justice's \(USDOJ's\) Civil Rights Division](#) to formally request that they open an investigation. This request, which documented the evidence of racial profiling, excessive force, victim-blaming propaganda, unlawful home entries, and other violations by Raleigh Police, also created more robust documentation of RPD's misconduct. In May, Emancipate NC followed up on our letter by [meeting with attorneys from the USDOJ](#) to urge them to open this investigation.

## Have A HEART: A campaign to re-allocate public safety budgets to invest in community-based, health-centered emergency response alternatives



In 2022, after our aggressive advocacy raising awareness of the Raleigh Police Department's over-policing of and violence toward Black citizens, the Raleigh Police Department publicly committed to developing its first-ever de-escalation policy. However, their proposed policy fell short of best practices.

In response, Team Emancipate has been working with community leaders on advocating local leaders to implement an alternative to police intervention in emergency calls modeled off of the City of Durham's Holistic Empathetic Assistant Response Team (HEART). Since its launch, HEART's



unarmed response teams have responded to more than 3,800 mental health/quality-of-life calls, diverting 82% from armed police. This model connects people experiencing mental health crises, intoxication, drug overdoses, and homelessness with critical social services and health resources while reducing unnecessary arrests and jail bookings, as well as collateral damage from incarceration.

[In July, the Emancipate NC team launched the Raleigh HEART Coalition](#), a community-driven initiative to expand Durham’s HEART model to Raleigh. One of our first priorities was developing a [comprehensive report with proposed reforms](#), which we presented to Wake County, Raleigh City

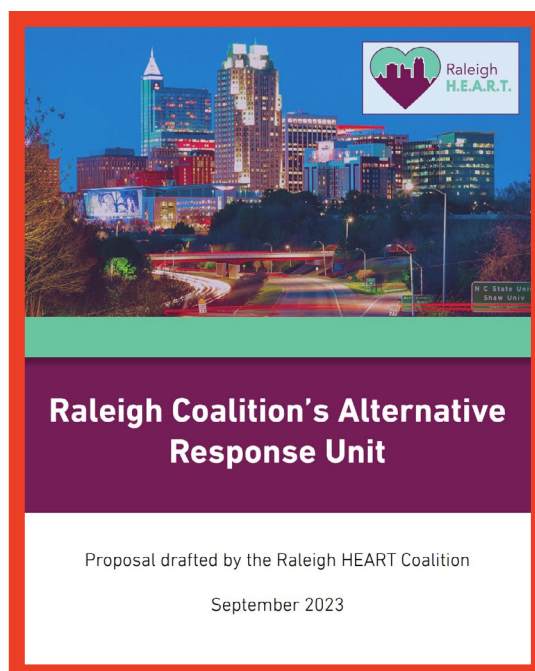
Council, and the Raleigh City Manager in September. Community Lawyering Fellow Jaelyn Miller [spoke at Raleigh City Council](#) to advocate for the adoption of these reforms in Raleigh. [Our letter-writing campaign](#) to demand that Raleigh’s City Council and Mayor allocate funding to implement non-law-enforcement crisis response in Raleigh modeled off Durham HEART has accumulated more than 450 signatures.

As we continue to make progress in Raleigh, recent incidents of police violence during responses to emergency calls have highlighted the need to expand HEART to more municipalities.

In February, James Lanier, a person with mental illness, was murdered by police in Duplin County who responded to the scene. Over the summer, Kayden Strayhorn, a 10-year-old boy in Craven County, NC with nonverbal Autism who was experiencing an emotional outburst, was handcuffed by police, separated from his mother, and subjected to a blood draw without parental consent.

Emancipate is supporting the families impacted by police violence by contextualizing these incidents within demands to implement alternative response models in Craven County, Duplin County, and other rural municipalities throughout Eastern NC.

We are also in conversation with city councilors in Fayetteville, who have reached out for advice and support on local policies that can promote holistic safety in their communities.





## Protest Defense Network: Protecting protestors who challenge injustice

As the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests have shown, throughout the country and in NC, public dissent has been instrumental in advancing movements for racial justice and criminal legal reform. In NC, the right to protest is under imminent threat. Through our Protest Defense Network, we mobilize and train more than 40 attorneys to provide pro bono representation and group defense to protestors speaking out and demanding justice.

## Freedom Fighter Bond Fund: Supporting freedom for activists facing arrest and legal jeopardy

We continue to deploy our Freedom Fighter Bond Fund to free activists and protesters who face arrest or legal charges for opposing injustice.



## Peace Not Police: Helping communities impacted by over-policing protect themselves from police harassment



Under the leadership of Dedan Waciuri, our Organizer, Emancipate implements know-your-rights community trainings for people living in Greenville, NC.

Through these trainings, we educate community members to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their community from confrontations with police that too often lead to unnecessary arrests, charges, and incarceration.

## Police Misconduct Database: An avenue to keep Black families safe from police violence and hold police accountable for misconduct

Team Emancipate has continued to manage our Police Misconduct Database, which provides a mechanism for individuals to report a police encounter, upload videos/photos, and share this information publicly. ENC uses stories submitted to our Police Misconduct Database to advocate law enforcement agencies and elected officials to address patterns of misconduct among officers and within agencies and to file complaints with state commissions overseeing law enforcement certifications.



# Poetic Justice: Celebrating beauty and joy within a world that tries - but does not succeed - to silence and cage us



Our annual Poetic Justice fundraising event featured poetry from our incarcerated friends, Ashlee Inscoe, Chris Ridley, and Phillip Vance Smith II. The event also featured talented artists, including Hausson Byrd, K.y.d Kazi, Chasyn Sparks, Sunguh, and Nick Courmon, who read poems authored by incarcerated people as well as their own work.

## Featured Poem 1: Press Five Now, by Ashlee Inscoe



*Press five now, three words connecting two worlds, bridging the gap between despair and delight.*

*Press five now, a hesitation in my heart has caused a ripple to move through my body. So close, yet so far apart.*

*Press five now, how can I be happy in a place like this?*

*Abandoned, I am not a person anyone will miss.*

*Press five now, the thoughts in my mind: what will I say? Please, please, for this, I will pay.*

*Press five now, with my eyes closed to take me from my senses, while I depart one it seems the other enhances.*

*Press five now, I try not to fear as I focus on you, but I hear a pause, a pause internally that lasts*

EMANCIPATE NCPRESENTS

4:00 PM  
09 SEPT, 2023  
PERFORMANCES BY:

HOSTED BY HAUSSON BYRD

NICK COURMON  
KYD KAZI  
CHASYN SPARX & SUNGUH

A DIALOGUE AROUND THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX FEATURING POEMS AND STORIES OF THOSE STILL IN AND AFFECTED BY THE SYSTEM

PURCHASE TICKETS AT <https://emancipatenc.org/poetic-justice/>

1805 Chapel Hill Road, Durham NC 27707

TICKETS  
REGULAR TICKET \$25  
DONOR TICKET \$50  
NO PRICE TICKET \$0

*an eternity as I reach through the worlds that split me by uncertainty within fragments of a second between one world and another, lies time that has expanded, exploding with means as that.*

*Pause. Then, between the worlds, see through the space then back again. I hear*

*A digitized voice whispering. As it's echoing in my ear, a voice that no one around me can hear: "Connecting," over a galvanized brawl.*

*Through a parallel unreleased, happening faster than my eyes can blink, that voice brings hopes: Thank you for using Global Tele-Link.*

## Featured Poem 2: A Moral Dilemma, by Phillip Vance Smith

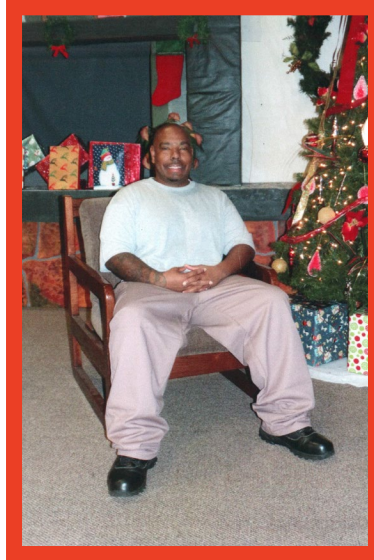
*A moral dilemma, white public pretender, white state prosecutor, white jury led in.*

*Who is for a person?*

*Pretty blonde soft blue eyes, or a balding man grimacing to scrutinize this dark smudge on his stark white shirt.*

*What difference does it make? One must read the unanimous verdict.*

*Charcoal Black Judge occupies the bench, hair white as pillow stuffing, slouching over papers, glasses teeter on his nose.*



*On the table before him rests a dog-eared copy of No End In Sight, an article published by the sentencing project.*

*He ain't no scholar, but he memorized the numbers. He wonders if Charcoal Black Judge knows how the US incarcerates and enslaves 1.4 million, 60%*

*are poor, insignificant, Black, just like him. Surely he must know that he's Black too .How could he not know? And if he does, does he give a damn?*

*Pecan Defendant imagines: Charcoal Black Judge*

*White prosecutor spews legal ease, sounding foreign as Taiwanese to the ignorant.*

*Charcoal Black Judge sighs, "I'll allow it."*

*White public prosecutor says, drumroll please, nothing.*

*Pecan Defendant is 19, on trial for conspiracy to commit murder, facing life without parole, no haircut for 13 months, malnourished, pipe cleaner limbs swallowed by an oversized pumpkin jumpsuit with someone else's skidmarks browning the back.*



*at 19, walking ghetto streets, far removed from the current Zeitgeist of Trump-rattling hip-hop beats.*

*On one corner he stops to hear a quartet snapping in time, singing do-op sweetly.*

*Police beat one of the singers.*

*Charcoal Black Judge stands helpless, mortified, traumatized, as his friend is hauled off to jail.*

*Anger drove him to the law. He took the bench to write systemic wrongs he did not create.*





*But after an eternity of seeing Black faces, time after time committing crimes, his activism becomes cynicism.*

*He once played ball in the same parks.*

*His discernment became resentment.*

*He shopped with the same grocer, and no matter how poor, never thought of robbing him.*

*His mercy became fury.*

*His success did not make him discredit their weakness, but it forced a desire to help them see, understand, and shun their errors.*

*How else do you do that?*

*Them to punish. Spare the rot, spoil the child.*

*And Charcoal Judge stopped looking for a better way.*

*Pecan Defendant locks eyes with Charcoal Black judge. Hope lies not in the exchange. So he closes his eyes in reverie.*

*He sees a brass balance. White powder in one pan. Black powder in another.*

*The pan weighs evenly.*

*Pecan Defendant finally understands the equality of white and Black had never been in question.*

*The hand of the poorer wields the power to force the scale of justice, tilting one way or another.*

*When Pretty Blonde stands with the verdict, her soft blue eyes sharpen into daggers of ice as she reads, "We the jury, find the defendant guilty."*

*Why doesn't it matter that Pecan Defendant's cousin robbed the store and shot the clerk while he slept in the car?*

*Pecan Defendant never knew what happened until they took him to jail.*

*North Carolina incarcerates and enslaves 4,170 lifers.*

*Pecan Defendant no longer wonders if Charcoal Judge knows the numbers.*

*Pecan Defendant is just one grain of sand weighing down imbalance scales of justice.*

*As Pecan Defendant stands for sentencing, he prepares to become lifer number 4,171.*

## **A moral dilemma.**





## Emancipate NC's achievements recognized by community leaders

This year, Emancipate NC has received several awards recognizing our tireless education, advocacy, and organizing work in the community.



[Community Partner of the Year Pro Bono Publico Award](#), presented by UNC Law School: Recognizes the pro bono contributions of a partnering organization that has created opportunities for UNC School of Law students to meet unmet legal needs.

[Consider It Done Award, presented by Color of Change](#): Celebrates educators and activists who are defending our history curriculum in the wake of right-wing attempts to censor our nation's history.



[Direct Action Award and Creative Political Education Award](#), presented by Blueprint NC: The Direct Action Award recognizes Emancipate NC's efforts to advance progressive goals through collective direct action (peaceful protests, strikes, etc.). Emancipate NC was recognized with the Creative Political Education Award for efforts to teach community members how grassroots power is developed and wielded in our political system, using visual art and other creative mediums. During the award ceremony, abolitionist visionary Angela Davis delivered the keynote address.



## Media Spotlight: Media narratives have depended heavily on the expertise of Emancipate NC - often publishing op-eds authored by our staff and featuring quotes by our leadership in news articles

*“Americans have been acculturated to think of the so-called “child welfare” system as a force for good, but the reality is that the foster care system embeds the exact same institutional harms that we see play out in the criminal legal system: racial disproportionality; a punitive, rather than restorative mindset; failure to grapple with how trauma and poverty impact people’s lives; bureaucratic backlogs; and an inadequately staffed public defense system.”*

[“It’s Time for Durham County and Courthouse Leaders to Engage on Reforms to Foster Care System,”](#) an op-ed authored by **Strategic Director Elizabeth Simpson** published by **Indyweek**.



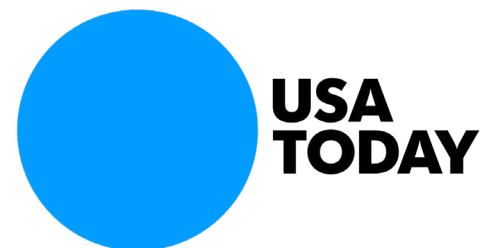
*“These are kids, for God’s sake. These are kids trying to ride their bikes home.”*

The logo for Gaston Gazette, featuring a stylized lowercase 'g' icon followed by the words "aston gazette" in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font, all contained within a dark grey rectangular box.

Quote from **Director of Policy & Program, Kerwin Pittman**, featured in the **Gaston Gazette**, regarding trumped up attempted murder charges against a teen boy who scuffled with a police officer who was hurting his twin brother.

*“What put him in a grave was tasers. He was electrocuted in a parking lot while he was minding his own business,” said Blagrove, executive director of Emancipate NC. “And we need District Attorney Lorrin Freeman to do her job.”*

Quote from **Executive Director Dawn Blagrove** featured in the **USA Today** article titled, [“Attorneys call for officers to be fired, charged after Darryl Tyree Williams’ autopsy release.”](#)



*“We don’t want any more Jim Crow. We don’t want any more stop and frisk. We don’t want any more for the Black people of Raleigh to constantly have to show their freedom papers to be able to live.”*

Quote from **Executive Director Dawn Blagrove** featured in the **ABC 11** article titled, [“Civil Rights attorney Ben Crump demands charges for officers after Darryl Williams’ autopsy released.”](#)



*“I was literally placed on this planet to do this. I’ll continue to share my story. My kids will grow up and see later that their mom was still out there, still doing stuff, still fighting for them.”*



Quote from interview with **Family Defense Organizer Toia Potts** featured in **Indyweek** article titled, [“In Durham, Children in Foster Care Struggle to Reunite With Birth Families.”](#)



**THANK YOU**