

2024

# ANNUAL REPORT



## CENTRAL OHIO WORKER CENTER

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# CENTRAL OHIO WORKERS' CENTER ANNUAL REPORT



We are proud to present the Central Ohio Workers' Center Annual Report, which detailed our accomplishments, initiatives, and the impact we have had over the past year. This report highlights our uncompromising commitment to protecting and empowering immigrant and low-wage workers in Franklin County as we celebrated an important milestone: our 10th anniversary in December.

Throughout the past year, we have diligently executed our mission and have pursued our action plan, which focuses on:

- Protecting workers from wage theft.
- Improving access to legal clinics for low-wage workers, immigrants, and refugees.
- Deliver educational workshops to learn about their rights.
- Defend the rights of immigrants.
- Strengthening our community outreach efforts.
- Connect workers with pre-apprenticeship, better paying job training, and workforce development opportunities.

## MISSION PROGRESS

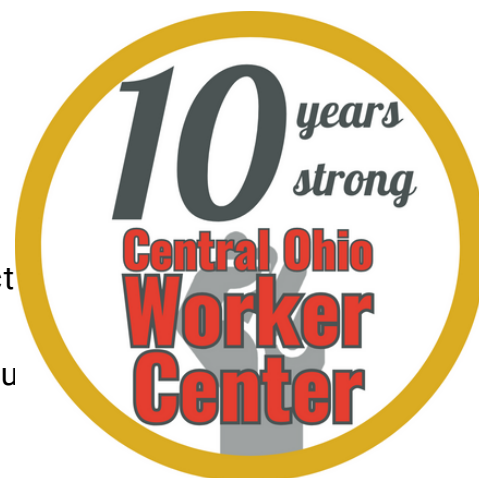
*AND KEY INITIATIVES*

Thanks to the continued support of our community and our partners, we have accomplished substantial progress in building capacity and momentum for future initiatives.



## *Celebrating a* **DECADE OF COMMITMENT**

As we commemorate our 10 years of dedicated service to low-wage and immigrant workers, we reflect on the significant progress we have made in the fight against wage theft, discrimination and exploitation. Our committed team has remained focused on fostering fair and equitable work places for all Central Ohio workers.



One of our most notable accomplishments has been our commitment to protecting workers from wage theft. People in our community every day face unfair working practices that stand in the way of their right to fair wages and compensation. COWC has become a vital resource for those seeking assistance, providing them with essential guidance and support to help them claim and recover their hard-earned wages. In 2024, we supported 160 people with workplace concerns.

Our network of alliances has expanded significantly, now encompassing at least 33 community organizations, educational institutions, unions and faith-based groups united in the pursuit of workers' rights and social justice. Through collaborative storytelling initiatives, we have shared the powerful stories of workers who have overcome challenges and won victories in their struggle.



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# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- Community Refugee & Immigration Services (CRIS)
  - Advocates for Basic Legal Equality (ABLE)
  - The Legal Aid Society of Columbus (LASC)
  - Our Lady of Guadalupe Center
  - Policy Matters Ohio
  - Columbus Public Health
  - Ohio Health
  - Lower Lights Christian Health Center
  - Dominican Learning Center
  - Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)
  - U.S. Department of Labor (Wage and Hour Division)
  - City of Columbus - City Hall (Wage Theft Prevention and Enforcement Ordinance)
  - The Self Help Center (Franklin County Municipal Court)
  - The MARCH Program (Franklin County Municipal Court)
  - NP immigration
  - Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers Local 55
  - Central Ohio Labor Council
  - Painters & Allied Trades DC6
  - OHIO AFL-CIO
  - Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT)
  - Mamás y Mujeres Latinas en Ohio
  - City of Columbus Public Health
  - Justice for Migrant Women
  - Mid Ohio Central Labor Council
  - Justice for Migrant Women
  - Alianzo 614
  - Workers United
  - Rural Action
  - Latino Heritage Month organizing
  - Kenyon University
  - Vineyard
  - Legal Aid
  - CRIS
  - Catholic Charities
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# LEGISLATION

In our ongoing commitment to data-driven research and advocacy, our team has diligently tracked significant legislative developments affecting workers across the United States. In 2023 alone, we have monitored and participated, through written and oral testimony, as well as sharing action items for national issues with our members. We were deeply engaged in advocacy for the Paystub Protection Act. That bill passed in 2025, but we worked towards it throughout the 2024 year. We also advocated around the e-verification mandate, supported Issue 1 on the ballot, shared information on voting rights and access and Issue 47. On a national scale we shared information and actions to our members on the Heat Protection and LETS protect workers legislation, as well as signing on in support of these as an organization. Our work on these legislative issues ensured that we remain at the forefront of the fight for equity and justice.



## *Access to* Legal Resources and Community Education



In our efforts to expand access to legal resources, we have been instrumental in helping the low-wage workers and immigrant workers learn their rights. Through outreach initiatives, we have trained hundreds of workers to seek legal assistance and gain confidence to advocate for themselves. We hosted and participated in over 60 events in 2024, specifically providing Know Your Rights trainings for at least 560 people. Additionally, at least 450 Know Your Rights handbooks were distributed.



Our “Know Your Rights” program has played a key role in educating workers about their rights in the workplace. Through workshops and training sessions, we have raised awareness and fostered a culture of empowerment and solidarity in the community.

We continue to provide a newsletter containing updates that will effect workers as well, with 4 volumes published in 2024.





## COLLABORATION

The success of our initiatives is testament to the collaboration between our team, board members and allied community organizations. The continued support of our fearless and committed Board members, Franklin County, the Columbus Women Fund, the Ohio State Bar Foundation support has been critical to our ability to deliver effective services and expand our reach.

Key team members who have contributed to our success include.

- Ali Smith, COWC Chair (volunteer)
- Isbel Alvarado, Case Manager and Organizer
- Molly Shea, Volunteer & Communications Coordinator
- Claudia Cortez, Director of Programs

Additionally, we recognized three volunteers who have really taken on important roles this past year: Linda Martínez Oliva, Gina Hernandez and Isaiah Franco. A new Advisory Committee was formed, with 15 members from local and national leaders in Worker Rights advocacy, legal experts, and working people on the frontlines. Our board has continued to be a valuable resource to help keep us informed on policy, engage at events, spread the word, and advise the team. The COWC relies on a diverse network to support our mission and we are grateful for all the ways people participate.

## Advocacy efforts and legislative support

Numerous outreach activities aimed at serving and empowering the Franklin County and surrounding area community have been conducted this year. Some of the highlights include:

- Participation in the Avenue for All event, where we engaged with over 100 people and distributed Know Your Rights handbook and other educational materials.
- Hosting “Know Your Rights” training sessions in Spanish for various community organizations to reach Hispanic residents and improve their understanding of their rights in the workplace.
- Collaborating with community events such as Comfest and Somali Fest, where we connect with diverse community members and share valuable resources.



In addition, we have actively participated in coalitions that advocate for worker justice, including EMPLEO, enhancing our ability to inform and assist workers in Franklin County.

## FINANCIAL SUMMARY AND FUNDRAISING SUCCESS

During this reporting period, we successfully raised \$5,978 through grassroots donations, membership dues, and fundraising events. In particular, we raised \$1,275 at a community concert, hosted and performed by our longtime community advocate and singer, Bill Cohen, over \$1,500 at the Celebration of Life event for Rubén Castilla Herrera, and over \$600 with a Cozy Winter Treats recipe fundraiser.

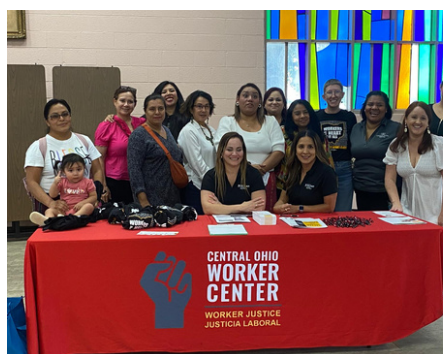
Our May Day event was generously sponsored by Ohio Federation of Teachers, Policy Matters Ohio, Ohio Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, National Employment Law Project, Central Ohio Labor Council, and IUPAT DC-6. Additionally, we are grateful for the \$19,550 grant awarded by the Ohio State Bar Foundation and Columbus Women Fund \$20,000 for future seminars and events. We are now in year 3 of receiving a foundational grant from Franklin County that makes much of our work possible. We are so grateful for all the financial contributions that help us move our mission forward!



## Looking Forward

As we reflect on our accomplishments, we recognize that our commitment to serving the community must be stronger than ever. The challenges workers face, especially amid rising anti-immigrant sentiment, require our collective efforts to ensure that all people's rights are respected. We will continue to fight for fair wages, safe working conditions, and the right to organize. Together we can create a powerful movement that will amplify the voices of those who cannot speak out.

We express our gratitude to our members, donors and community partners for their continued support. We look forward to another year of advocacy, empowerment and progress toward a more just and equitable society in Franklin County. Thank you for standing with us in this fundamental work. In Solidarity we remain.



*Thank you for your continued support and commitment.*

