



# IMPACT REPORT



2024  
2025

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# A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



When our staff sits down to start mapping out our Annual Impact Report at the end of our fiscal year, we often reflect on themes that our team noticed over the last 12 months-- in the Capitol, in our communities, and across the state. I'm not going to lie to you-- our initial brainstorming was bleak. We reflected on unprecedented attacks on our social safety net, on anger and division growing in our communities, and on the attempted normalization of bigotry against many groups, including working class families and the poor.

But, luckily, we didn't stop there. Once we set aside our anger, frustration, and sadness over many events in the last year, we started to remember the moments of hope. We remembered what it felt like to see increasingly large gatherings of advocates gather in the Capitol, pushing back against the attempts of legislators to undermine the will of the people. We remembered walking into a packed room in a library in Southeast Missouri and seeing a sea of new faces who wanted to talk with us about food security in one of the largest food deserts in the state. We remembered the power of ordinary renters in Columbia preparing to launch their city's first tenant union.

If the past year were to have a movie or song title, I might suggest "The Rise of the Resistance." Yes, we are facing unprecedented attacks on access to food, housing, and healthcare. Yes, we are going up against many legislators who seek to prioritize the wealth of the few over the needs of the many. But, we're also seeing people around the country wake up to these harsh realities and raise their voices to fight back-- for their families, for their neighbors, and for themselves.

On the eve of our 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, I'm hopeful that not only we will see that resistance continue to blossom, but that we can win over more and more elected officials to the cause of fulfilling Missouri's state motto-- making the welfare of the people the supreme law. The theme for our anniversary year is "People-Powered Policy Change," which means that we can't do any of this without you. **Are you in? Our time is now.**

Let's do this, together,

Mallory Rusch  
Executive Director

# 2025 LEGISLATIVE RECAP

THE LEGISLATURE FILED

**2,439**

BILLS IN 2025



WE TRACKED OVER

**330**

BILLS THAT WOULD  
DISPROPORTIONALLY IMPACT  
INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES  
LIVING IN POVERTY.



**51**



BILLS WERE  
PASSED IN 2025

*\*Excluding appropriation bills*

The 2025 Missouri legislative session will be remembered for the tension of its final days, when the Senate invoked the “Previous Question” to cut off debate and force a vote on two controversial bills, both in direct contradiction to the will of Missouri voters:

- **HB 567**, which removed the automatic inflation adjustments for Missouri’s minimum wage and repealed the paid sick leave provisions of Proposition A, which was passed by voters in the November 2024 election.
- **HJR 73**, which will place a proposed constitutional amendment with new abortion restrictions on the ballot. This new proposed amendment will contradict Amendment 3, which was passed in November 2024.

After the passage of these two bills, the Senate adjourned, leaving the House to also adjourn early for the first time since 1952. Despite this disappointing end, the legislature did manage to pass 51 bills (in addition to the 16 budget appropriation bills), nearly double 2024’s 28 passed bills, including some of Empower Missouri’s priority bills.

## WHAT GOT DONE

### CIRCUIT BREAKER TAX CREDIT

The “**Circuit Breaker**” tax credit helps older adults and those with disabilities to stay in their homes as inflation causes property taxes to rise. An improvement to the credit passed as part of **HB 594**, and will increase both the income eligibility and credit amount for eligible older adults and people with disabilities, and will build in automatic future increases for inflation. This bill has been a priority of the Affordable Housing Coalition for several years.

### DIAPER TAX

The Missouri Coalition of Diaper Banks, a 2024-2025 Advocacy Accelerator member, spearheaded a successful campaign to eliminate sales tax on diapers. **HB 594** not only exempts diapers from sales tax, but also menstrual products and adult incontinence supplies. This change will provide needed relief on the cost of necessary hygiene supplies for families already struggling to meet their basic needs.

IN 2024, NEARLY

**50%**



OF U.S. FAMILIES WITH KIDS  
WEARING DIAPERS EXPERIENCED  
DIAPER INSECURITY

### MEDICAID COVERAGE FOR HEARING AIDS

After years of testifying in support of similar bills, Empower Missouri is proud to be part of a coalition of organizations who advocated for hearing aids and cochlear implants to be covered under Medicaid and MO Healthnet plans. In August, when the bill became effective, Missouri became the 38th state in the country to provide this essential health coverage to Americans earning low incomes. The legislation is expected to provide life-changing coverage for 15,000 Missourians who need hearing support.

# A WORK IN PROGRESS

## CLEAN SLATE

Our campaign to **automate the expungement progress** for eligible criminal records did not reach the finish line this year, but did make significant progress. Bills in both the House and Senate had committee hearings, with the House bill passing multiple committees and being perfected on the House floor. Ultimately, the bill failed a key vote in fiscal review, due to a faulty fiscal note. This is the farthest Clean Slate legislation has made it in Missouri, and is a great sign for more progress in 2026.

## INCREASING OUR COMMITMENT TO FEDERAL ADVOCACY

This year, as repeated attacks on social safety net programs came from both the state and federal level, Empower Missouri increased our focus on federal advocacy. We led the charge in Missouri to protect SNAP from extreme cuts in **HR1**, the “Big Beautiful Bill”, and rallied our network of advocates and partners to urge our representatives in Congress to fight these changes. While we couldn’t prevent all of the dire changes made in HR1, the final version of the bill passed by Congress had several of its most draconian proposals removed or scaled back thanks to the work of advocates around the country. Now, we’re turning our attention to the Department of Housing & Urban Development, which has recently announced a massive shift in their funding priorities that will cause Missouri to lose \$28M typically earmarked for permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing programs. We will be strenuously advocating against HUD’s new policies that shrug off decades of evidence-based “Housing First” program results in favor of “treatment-first” programs that have been proven ineffective.

## ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Bipartisan bills to provide **independent oversight of the Department of Corrections**, a high priority of our Community Justice Coalition, were introduced in both chambers, but unfortunately did not pass this year. Lack of independent oversight for the Missouri Department of Corrections has led to an unsafe environment for staff, contractors, and residents of these facilities. This has resulted in Missouri spending **over \$87 million** in the last five years settling lawsuits, primarily to former DOC staff and contractors. At the same time, deaths in Missouri prisons are at an all-time high, with **over 130 deaths per year** in four of the last five years. Missouri wants and deserve accountability from correctional facilities, and we will continue to work on this legislation in the coming year.





# OUR IMPACT IN 2024-2025

**1,341** COALITION MEMBERS  
REPRESENT  
**205** ZIP CODES  
ACROSS MISSOURI



ADVOCATES PARTICIPATED IN TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

OUR NETWORK SENT OVER

**3,000**

ADVOCACY MESSAGES TO LEGISLATORS

# WHAT'S NEW AT EMPOWER

## NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUILDING POWER

### BACK TO SESSION BOOTCAMP

In 2025 we launched a new training program, Back to Session Bootcamp, to give both new and seasoned advocates the opportunity to prepare for the legislative session. Hosted virtually in January, this training covered everything from navigating the Capitol and how Missouri's legislative process works, to the best ways to interact with your lawmaker and influence policymaking. Nearly 100 advocates attended the inaugural program, and we'll be bringing this back in 2026!

I am brand new to advocacy and I thought every day was a wonderful presentation. Having specific topics to cover each day made the information easier to digest without being overwhelming and I appreciated that there was always time for Q&A.

*-Back to Session Bootcamp Participant*

### STATEWIDE TOWN HALLS

In the summer and fall of 2025, our team traveled around the state to connect with local communities about many of our core policy priorities. Policy staff were everywhere from Cape Girardeau to Hannibal to Joplin to discuss youth justice, improving nutrition access for older adults across Missouri, school meals, the Housing Trust Fund, and more. We heard from hundreds of Missourians about what your communities need, and how we can work together to make real, lasting change. While these events will mostly be on hiatus as our team focuses on the 2026 legislative session, watch for their return in the summer and fall.

## SUPPORTING MISSOURIANS AT EVERY STAGE OF LIFE

### FOOD ACCESS FOR A LIFETIME

This year we kicked off our **Food Access for a Lifetime Campaign** to fight hunger for older Missourians by increasing access to SNAP and other nutrition programs. As the status of SNAP nationwide was continually threatened, protecting the program was a major focus of this campaign. This included advocating against expanded work requirements for adults aged 55-64 and new funding split that places a greater burden on state budgets. While these provisions did eventually pass in HR1, we are working diligently with Missouri's Department of Social Services (DSS) to implement those changes in ways that could limit the harm to low-income Missourians.

In addition, the campaign advocated for the implementation of the **Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP)** in Missouri, a program that would greatly reduce the administrative complications in applying for SNAP for individuals over age 60 or with a disability. We've made progress towards this goal and are hopeful to continue working with DSS in the coming year to make ESAP a reality! The campaign is also working on the federal **Hot Foods Act**, which would allow SNAP recipients to use their benefits to purchase certain hot prepared foods from grocery stores. Together, these two changes could greatly increase SNAP participation among older adults, and make the benefits more effective for eligible consumers. You can learn more about the Food Access for a Lifetime campaign at [FoodAccessMissouri.org](https://FoodAccessMissouri.org).



## SPRINGFIELD RIGHT TO COUNSEL

Along with local partners Legal Services of Southern Missouri, Community Partnership of the Ozarks, and Springfield Tenants Unite, we've launched a campaign to bring a **Right to Counsel** (RTC) program to Springfield, Missouri. RTC would ensure that tenants facing eviction have access to legal representation, leveling the playing field in housing court. A similar program in Kansas City saw a 72% decrease in the eviction rate within three months of implementation. Across the country, these programs also save an average of \$3 on interventions like homeless shelters and emergency room visits for every \$1 spent. If the Springfield City Council votes to enact this program next year, Missouri will be tied with Ohio for the state with the most cities with Right to Counsel in the country, since Kansas City and St. Louis have already enacted RTC programs.



## WHAT'S NEXT AT EMPOWER

### CELEBRATING OUR PAST AND ENVISIONING OUR FUTURE

#### OUR 125<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

Next year, 2026, will mark the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Empower Missouri, founded in 1901 as the *Missouri Conference on Charities and Corrections*. From a mainly volunteer-led annual gathering of social workers fighting for social justice, to our current fully-staffed advocacy organization running three statewide coalitions and numerous training programs and events, we'll be celebrating each step in that growth and the milestones that got us here.

We have planned a year long celebration including sharing stories from our archives, spotlighting the people who've brought us to today, and events around the state. **Watch for more information in early 2026 about when we'll be in your community, and how you can get involved!**



### BUILDING POWER FOR THOSE CLOSEST TO THE PROBLEM

#### THE JUSTICE ADVOCATES COHORT

Empower Missouri has always focused on bringing the voices of those with the most knowledge of an issue, the people personally impacted, to those in power. We train and equip nonprofit organizations to share the stories of their clients with legislators, we seed and support tenant unions around the state fighting for housing justice, and we offer various opportunities for individuals personally impacted by poverty to learn about the legislative process and how to make change. With those successes in mind, we're launching a new training program, the **Justice Advocates Cohort (JAC)**, for individuals personally impacted by the criminal legal system. Our first year will be based in the St. Louis region, and will include bi-weekly workshops over several months, where participants will learn about the legislative process and organize advocacy efforts around their chosen policy goals. **JAC is launching in 2026, so watch for these advocates in the Capitol.**

# 2026 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

We know that the changes we seek take time, and our solutions to poverty are not a quick fix. While 2025 was a year to build community power, we're looking forward to 2026 with the hope that it will be a session of progress. Some priorities for the 2026 legislative session include:



## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- Increasing funding for the Missouri Housing Trust Fund, to allow for construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing across Missouri.
- Defending against attempts to remove local jurisdictions right to implement tenant protections and other housing supports.
- Defending against attempts to criminalize individuals who are living outdoors due to the nation's growing homelessness crisis.



## CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM REFORM

- Establishing an independent oversight committee for the Department of Corrections to improve conditions for both incarcerated individuals and correctional officers.
- Continuing our work to pass Clean Slate legislation to automate the expungement process.
- Improving policies impacting justice-involved youth.
- Preventing any increases to "mandatory minimum" prison sentences, especially for individuals who have committed non-violent offenses.
- Improving access to compassionate release programs for older adults and those with significant illnesses or disabilities.



## FOOD SECURITY

- Increasing enrollment of older adults in SNAP by simplifying the application process and making the program more accessible and functional for this age group.
- Expanding access to free school meals.
- Reducing or eliminating the sales tax on groceries.
- Defending against policies that weaken the social safety net, and working with the Department of Social Services to limit the harm of implementation of such policies.
- Ensuring full funding for the Department of Social Services to manage SNAP enrollments and disbursements, understanding that legislators are likely to balk at the increased cost dictated by the changes to the state vs. federal funding structure under HR1.



## OTHER ANTI-POVERTY MEASURES

- Fighting attacks on the initiative petition process, including the limitations passed during the 2025 special session, which will be on the ballot in 2026.
- Increasing access to affordable healthcare, especially for families in rural communities with increasingly fewer options.
- Advocating against the reduction or elimination of Missouri's income tax in favor of raising sales taxes, a regressive policy proposal that disproportionately impacts lower-income households while benefitting the wealthy.

# EMPOWER'S LEADERSHIP

## OUR POWER IS IN OUR PEOPLE

In 2024-2025, we welcomed two new members to our Board of Directors, replacing members that had completed their terms. We also expanded our staff with two new positions, and two welcomed two newcomers in existing roles. The combined leadership of the staff and Board of Directors continues to be the driving force behind Empower Missouri's power in the Capitol, and connections to our statewide network of advocates and nonprofit organizations.

## NEW BOARD MEMBERS

### TONY BAKER

Hailing from Southeast Missouri, Tony has had a life-long focus on social justice, poverty, and inequality, particularly on campaigns and initiatives for free, quality basic education and helping governments, donors, and partners come together to support the right to education.

Following undergraduate studies at the University of Missouri-Columbia, Tony volunteered with Peace Corps in Tanzania, returning there after further graduate studies to work with HakiElimu, an education and democracy rights civil society organization. He then went on to serve as the Associate Director for Global Education at RESULTS, a citizen advocacy organization based in Washington DC. Tony currently works with World Vision International, a Christian relief and development organization operating in nearly 100 countries, supporting their advocacy and engagement with partners such as the Global Partnership for Education, Education Cannot Wait, the World Bank, and UNICEF.



### DEANNA FINCH

Deanna Finch is the executive director of United 4 Children, where she leads the nonprofit's team as they advance their vision to ensure that every child has the foundation to thrive. Before becoming executive director, Deanna worked as the organization's development officer and event director and previously served on the United 4 Children's board of directors. Deanna has over a decade of experience in business development and nonprofit leadership. Deanna is an alumna of FOCUS St. Louis cohorts, Women in Leadership #75 and Leadership St. Louis #48. She is passionate about improving the health and well-being of children and families across Missouri.

De's passion is guided by her personal experience as a low-income mother at a young age and her own struggle in learning how to meet the enhanced needs of her child, who is now 27 years old. She believes that supporting a child's village of caregivers is necessary to provide more opportunities for families and children to succeed in life.



# NEW STAFF MEMBERS

## PEYTON DAVIS

Peyton Davis was born and raised in mid-Missouri. Her career began in public education, where she taught students who came to school hungry, moved through the foster care system, or lacked stable housing. These experiences stayed with her and continue to shape her passion for advocacy.

Driven to make a broader impact beyond the classroom, Peyton moved into the nonprofit sector, where she has worked for the past five years. She brings experience in fundraising, community events, and engagement, and is especially passionate about connecting people to causes they care about in meaningful, lasting ways.

She holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology Education and resides in Columbia, Missouri. She joined Empower in 2025 as the Development Manager.



## TINA MAHTANI

Tina Mahtani joined Empower Missouri in April 2025 as the Operations Director. She brings more than ten years of nonprofit leadership experience, including serving as Interim Executive Director at an equity-focused organization. Throughout her career, Tina has specialized in strengthening internal systems, streamlining operations, and supporting teams so they can focus on advancing their mission.

With extensive experience in financial management, human resources, project oversight, and organizational strategy, Tina has led major operational improvements and guided organizations through periods of growth and transition. She is particularly skilled at identifying challenges, implementing practical solutions, and building strong relationships with staff and stakeholders.

Tina holds an MBA and a Bachelor's degree in Human Resource Management from Webster University.



## JERIKA WHITE

Jerika White joined Empower Missouri as the Criminal Justice Policy Manager in January 2025. She brings years of experience in grassroots and faith-based organizing, legislative advocacy, and national policy work focused on gun violence, mass incarceration, and criminalization. A proud St. Louis resident, Jerika has worked extensively with faith leaders, directly impacted communities, and statewide coalitions.

At Empower, Rika leads the statewide Community Justice Coalition, advances the Clean Slate Missouri campaign, and works to establish a Parole Oversight Board. She is committed to building people power to create bold, transformative policy that strengthens Missouri communities.



# NEW STAFF MEMBERS

## NATALIE WILKINS

Natalie Wilkins is a communications professional who recently relocated from New Mexico to Southeast Missouri. She has a strong background in content creation, social media strategy, and community advocacy. Previously, she has worked in communications in the non-profit space, developing creative design assets and launching impactful digital campaigns to combat social justice issues. She looks forward to bringing her creativity and passion to the team to contribute to Empower Missouri's mission as one of the Communications Managers.



# RETURNING STAFF AND BOARD MEMBERS



Amanda Berry  
Policy Manager



Dr. Amy Blansit  
Board of Directors



Lucas Caldwell-McMillan  
Chief of Policy Staff



Raquel Cooper  
Board Vice-President



Stephanie Cooper  
Board Secretary



Deitra Colquitt  
Board of Directors



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Manager



Sarah Owsley  
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Dr. Tiffany Patton  
Board President



Mallory Rusch  
Executive Director



Vee Sanchez  
Policy Manager



Jennifer Shotwell  
Board of Directors



Gwen Smith-Moore  
Policy Manager



Katheryne Staeger-Wilson  
Board of Directors



Jason Stoff  
Board of Directors



Rachel Tripp  
Board of Directors



Randall Wollenberg  
Board Treasurer



Christine Woody  
Policy Manager



Pierre Yancy  
Board of Directors

\*Not Pictured: Kimberly Henderson, Board of Directors

**28 STAFF & BOARD MEMBERS REPRESENT 23 ZIP CODES**

**32% ARE PEOPLE OF COLOR.**

**82% ARE WOMEN OR GENDER NON-CONFORMING.**

**64% HAVE BEEN PERSONALLY IMPACTED BY POVERTY.**

# YOUR PLACE IN A MOVEMENT

We are grateful for your continued support as we strengthen our base for future policy wins. We deeply believe that poverty in Missouri can be eradicated through the many evidenced-backed solutions we continue to advocate for. With your help, we can continue the fight to build the power to enact policies that can end poverty. There are many ways you or your organization can continue to get involved and help support Empower Missouri and our partners in the coming year:

## JOIN A COALITION

Becoming a member of one of our coalitions means that you'll be a part of a network of hundreds of individuals and organizations finding and fighting for solutions to solve some of the state's biggest challenges – from housing reforms to poverty alleviation to criminal legal system reform.

Our **Affordable Housing, Community Justice, or Food Security Coalitions** meet monthly on Zoom throughout the year. Sign up on our website at [EmpowerMissouri.org/Coalitions](https://EmpowerMissouri.org/Coalitions) to get in touch with our Policy Managers and be notified of our next meeting!

## JOIN US AT AN UPCOMING EVENT

Throughout the year we host several in-person and virtual opportunities to learn more about our work and take action to end poverty in Missouri. This winter, you can join us at our Legislative Preview webinar, or for our Back to Session Bootcamp, to learn how you can advocate for low-income Missourians. In February, we hope you'll join us for our Week of Action and Day of Action to put those skills to work! You can always find the latest information about all upcoming events on our website at [EmpowerMissouri.org/Events](https://EmpowerMissouri.org/Events).

## JOIN EMPOWER365

Your support fuels our mission, and you can make that commitment last all year long! Joining Empower365, our monthly giving program, is the best way to provide consistent, reliable support for our work. It's a simple and convenient way for you to make a significant impact without a large upfront commitment. Plus, you'll join a community of dedicated supporters who are helping to drive real, sustainable change. Join at [EmpowerMissouri.org/Monthly-Donation](https://EmpowerMissouri.org/Monthly-Donation).

## SPREAD THE WORD

Be a catalyst for change by spreading the word about Empower Missouri. Make sure you are following our social media and subscribed to our newsletter to get the latest updates, and share them with your network! By rallying your friends, family, and community, you can raise funds and awareness for Empower Missouri's vital work. Together, let's create a more equitable society. Find all the ways to connect with us and share with your network at [EmpowerMissouri.org/Connect](https://EmpowerMissouri.org/Connect).

### LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR COALITIONS!



### VIEW OUR UPCOMING EVENTS!



### BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR!



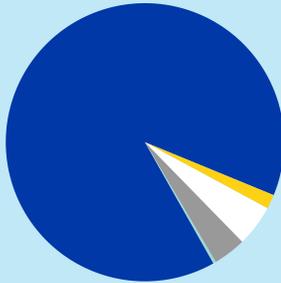
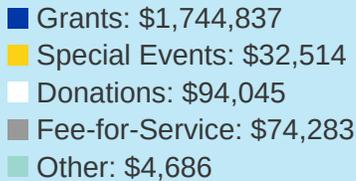
### FOLLOW US AND SPREAD THE WORD!



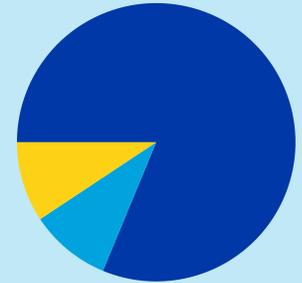
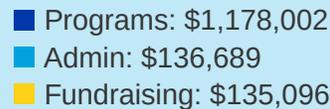
# YOUR SUPPORT IN 2024-2025

## FINANCIALS

### REVENUE



### EXPENSES



## THANK YOU TO OUR 2024-2025 DONORS

Our work would not be possible without the support of an extensive network of partners, coalition members, advocates, and supporters. We are incredibly grateful for this growing group of donors that financially supported our advocacy efforts this past year:

Allyce Bullock  
 Amanda Stockbridge  
 Amie Bossi  
 Amy Thiede  
 Ananya Kumar  
 Anatolij Gelimson  
**Angela Rickard and  
 Jason Stoff**  
 Annemarie Spitz and  
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 Frank Thompson

Gabriela Verdugo  
 Garry Destin  
 Gina McDonald  
 Harriet Lawrence  
 Izzy Litwack  
 Jacinta Cox

***Bolded names indicate membership in Empower365, our monthly giving program.***

### 2024-2025 GRANT FUNDERS

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 Banjo Fund  
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 Deaconess Foundation  
 Healthy Food Financing Initiative  
 Joan & John Vatterott Family Foundation  
 Missouri Budget Project  
 Missouri Family Health Council  
 Missouri Foundation for Health  
 MOVE  
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# 2024-2025 DONORS

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Missouri Coalition for Children  
Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council  
Missouri Foundation for Health  
Missouri Jobs with Justice  
Missouri Primary Care Association  
PNC Bank  
StateLine Strategies

## 2024-2025 ADVOCACY ALLIANCE MEMBERS

Conscious Communication Ministries  
Douglass Community Services, Inc.  
Missouri Budget Project  
Missouri Coalition of Recovery Support Providers  
MO ID Access Coalition  
Mothers of Incarcerated Sons and Daughters  
St. Louis Regional Health Commission  
Women's Voices Raised for Social Justice





[WWW.EMPOWERMISSOURI.ORG](http://WWW.EMPOWERMISSOURI.ORG)

*Thank you for powering  
policy change!*