

# 2025 ANNUAL REPORT



**Northeast Ohio  
Worker Center**

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Northeast Ohio Worker Center (NEOWC) is the region's labor rights organization and over the past year, we have seen escalating attacks on workers at every level. The federal government has canceled collective bargaining agreements for thousands of employees, while the Department of Labor and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission face dwindling resources and reduced enforcement capacity—culminating in near-total furloughs during the government shutdown. Meanwhile, Latine, immigrant, and Spanish-speaking workers face intensified workplace raids, employer retaliation tied to immigration status, and detention following routine check-ins.



**GRACE HEFFERNAN**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Employers have taken advantage of this climate, exploiting vulnerable workers with near impunity. The workers coming to NEOWC are experiencing unprecedented workplace threats and a narrowing pathway to justice. And yet, despite all of this, we haven't looked away. Not even for a moment. In fact, it has been just the opposite. We've stood together, learning along the way, creating stronger networks of mutual aid, deepening our care of one another and building relationships that are resilient and strong enough for the fight ahead.

Our strength at NEOWC comes from the tenacity of our community, the bravery of working people, and the power of collective action. Our hearts are full.

Solidarity forever!

## NEOWC Staff

**RICARDO MORALES**  
**VIVERO**  
BILINGUAL ORGANIZER

**ANDY SCHUMANN**  
ORGANIZER

**GRACE HEFFERNAN**  
EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR

**JIMENA HORTA**  
**BALLESTEROS**  
BILINGUAL ORGANIZER



# ABOUT NEOWC

The mission of NEOWC is to build worker power in Northeast Ohio through education, organizing, and advocacy. We do this work while understanding that the urgency and fight for a more just economy is not shared equally by all and so we must center our work on the lived experiences of communities of color and of intersecting identities around class, gender, sexual orientation, and other marginalized communities.



Students participate in a collective bargaining simulation.

# 2025 IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

We stood with more workers than ever this year. We fought alongside workers as they won back wages, filed charges with labor agencies, initiated legal actions against their employers, and organized with their co-workers and communities. We took what we learned from those individual workplace issues and used them to deliver Know Your Rights trainings to hundreds of workers, sustain the region's first bilingual wage theft clinic with Young Latino Network, lead the Pay Equity Alliance with Collaborate Cleveland, and expand the region's first high school collective bargaining program to Ohio.

**\$54,141**

dollars recovered by workers in 2025!

**109**

workers involved in organizing activities!

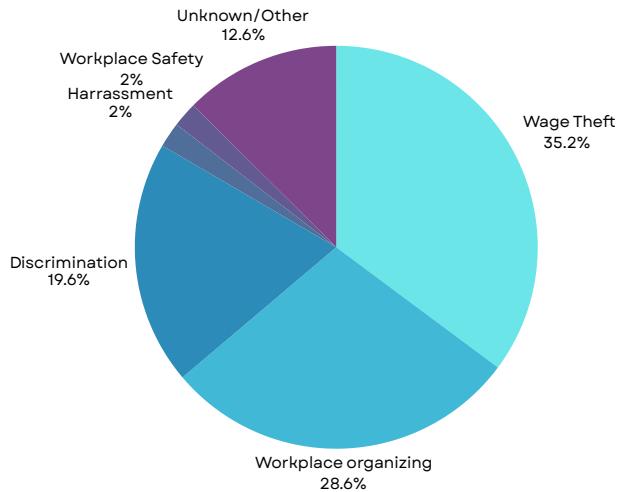
**407**

workers trained on their workplace rights!

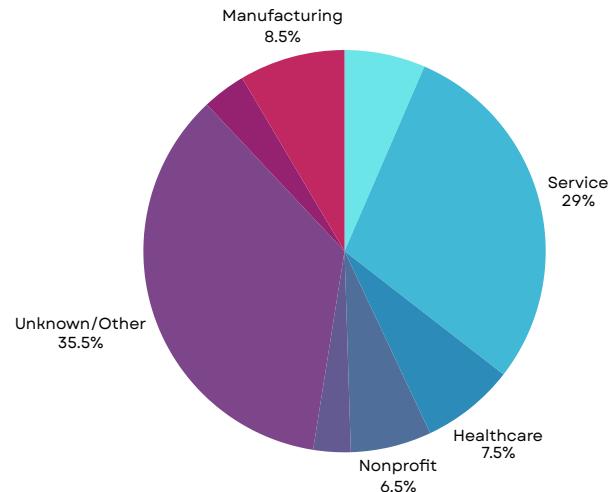
**199**

workers access workplace navigation services!

Worker Priority Workplace Issue



Worker Industries



# BILINGUAL WAGE THEFT & IMMIGRATION CLINIC

The Northeast Ohio Worker Center was honored to be recognized as Young Latino Network's Partner of the Year for our partnership building the region's bilingual wage theft and immigration clinic. We did this after identifying the increasing ways in which employers use immigration status to exploit workers.



NEOWC was honored as the YLN Partner of the Year in July 2025.



## YOUNG LATINO NETWORK

11 bilingual wage theft and immigration clinics held throughout 2025

14% of all workers served by NEOWC accessed services in Spanish

# JOSE'S STORY

We share José's story not to uphold the myth of a "perfect immigrant", but to show how even those who do everything asked of them can be crushed by a system designed to punish rather than protect. His experience reveals how deeply unjust our immigration system remains, even when an entire community stands behind a family with care, solidarity, and unwavering support.

Jose arrived in the US in 2019 determined to build a future for his family. When wage theft and retaliation threatened his family's stability, he spoke up, refusing to accept exploitation. Jose became an advocate for his rights and secured his first **work authorization permit** through our clinic. With partners, we also helped Jose to secure a **dependable car**.



Despite having never missed an immigration check-in and working with authorization, Jose was detained at his most recent check-in. Unable to access vital medication and adequate legal support, he was deported. NEOWC and community partners continue to support Jose's family through **grocery delivery and mutual aid**.

# WORKER EDUCATION & NAVIGATION

NEOWC's Workplace Know Your Rights training and Worker Navigation services work together to ensure every worker has both the knowledge and the support to confront exploitation, unsafe conditions, and discrimination. Through partnerships with workforce development and career-readiness programs, workers gain a clear understanding of their rights—fair pay, safety, and freedom from discrimination—alongside practical tools to recognize and address violations. When issues arise, NEOWC provides direct assistance, helping workers navigate complaints, assert their rights, and build power. Together, these services strengthen individual workers while advancing a more just, worker-centered economy.



407

workers trained on their workplace rights!

199

access workplace navigation services

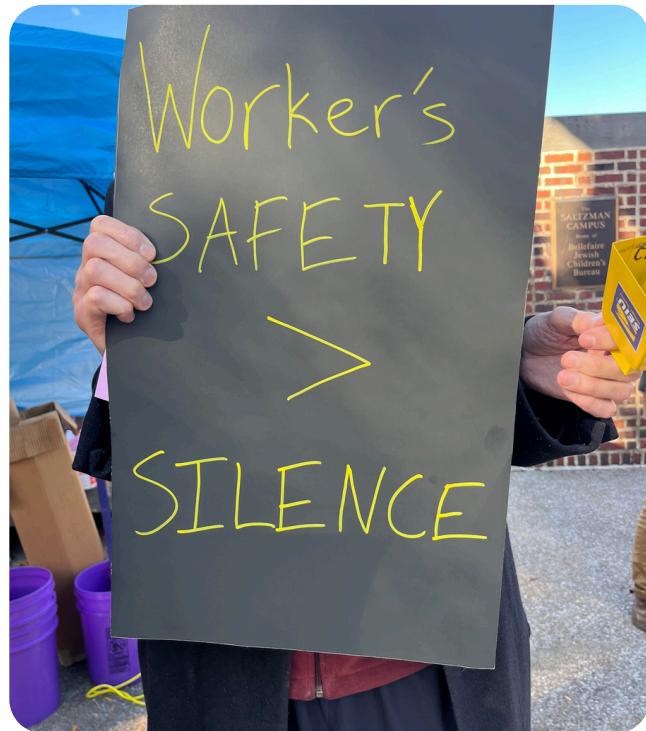
\$54,141

dollars recovered by workers

# WORKER STORIES

## \$5,500 wages won

A Spanish-speaking construction worker, brought from Central America to work in the US by his boss, faced years of unpaid wages due to his limited English and lack of supports. With support from the bilingual wage theft clinic, he sued his employer in small claims court and was awarded \$5,500, securing long-overdue compensation for his labor.



## \$800 wages won & mutual aid

A Spanish-speaking day laborer, often picked up for jobs from big box store parking lots without knowing his employer, was regularly experiencing wage theft. NEOWC taught him to document his employer information, enabling him to recover \$800 through the Department of Commerce. We also connected his family to grocery delivery, helping to supplement their income.



# WORKER ORGANIZING

## Rising Star Workers Union

Workers from Rising Star Coffee sought help from NEOWC after management ignored serious safety concerns and retaliated when they spoke up. With support from the Worker Center, they organized their workplace, built collective power, and ultimately won their union election—securing a stronger voice and safer conditions on the job.



## CMNH Workers United

Workers at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History wanted a stronger voice on the job. They turned to NEOWC for support forming an organizing committee, connecting with a union, and engaging coworkers. The workers successfully won their union this year.

# COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

This year, Northeast Ohio Worker Center expanded Ohio's first Collective Bargaining Program where we educated and equipped young people with essential knowledge about workers' rights, unions, and the collective bargaining process.

**107**

students participated in the collective bargaining program

**85%**

of students who completed a pre/post assessment achieved learning gains

## THANK YOU TO OUR 2025 SPONSORS AND PARTNERS

### Champions

THE WILLIAM SWANSTON CHARITABLE FUND  
A Supporting Organization of the Community Foundation of the Mahoning Valley



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION  
OF THE MAHONING VALLEY

### Supporters



IUPAT DC-6  
DISTRICT COUNCIL 6

### Allies

F  
G  
P  
Fusco  
Gallagher &  
Porcaro LLP



### Friends



IRONWORKERS  
LOCAL 17  
Northeast Ohio Est. 1901

### Partners



OPEIU  
Local 1794

UNITED STEELWORKERS  
**USW**





Watch  
Me!



# COLLECTIVE BARGAINING



# LABOR SOLIDARITY

Throughout the year, we stood with organized labor—mobilizing supporters and resources for rallies, fundraising for strike and relief funds, promoting campaigns on social media, and providing a stage for workers to share their stories at solidarity sessions. Solidarity forever!



# PAY TRANSPARENCY

**The Problem:** Women and workers of colors are paid less than their white male counterparts.

**The Coalition:** Collaborate Cleveland, NEOWC and over 40 partners championed Pay Transparency policies to close the gender and racial wage gap.

**The Solution:** In 2025, the City of Cleveland passed legislation: 1) requires employers to include pay ranges on job postings; and 2) prohibits employers from asking about salary history during the hiring process.



## The Solution: Cleveland's Pay Fairness Law



The Pay Equity Alliance was formed by collabCLE and the NEO Worker Center. A policy was drafted and city council engagement began.

Advocacy  
2024

APRIL 2025

Mayor Bibb signed the bill into law. This aligns with his pro-worker agenda and his decision to revive the Fair Employment Wage Board.

The law goes into effect at the end of October. This includes complaint and investigation processes.

Law goes into effect

2024

Cleveland City Council passes law

City Council unanimously supported the passage of Cleveland's first pay transparency law.

May 2025

Mayor Justin Bibb signs bill into law

JUNE 2025

Pay Equity Implementation Committee Established

OCTOBER 27, 2025

A committee is established to support implementation and ensure constituents will be able to file complaints that will be investigated by the Fair Employment Wage Board.

# CLEVELAND POWER ALLIANCE

The Northeast Ohio Worker Center has partnered with Cleveland Votes and a coalition of grassroots and nonprofit partners to form the Cleveland Power Alliance (CPA). The CPA recognizes that in order to drive civic participation when it matters, we need to be engaging residents in year-round, meaningful issue based campaigns in the following areas:

- Civil Liberties and Human Rights
- Equitable Democracy
- Healthy + Safe Communities
- Just Economy



# SOLIDARITY SESSIONS

From *Tariff Turmoil* to the *Dismantling of the NLRB*, labor has faced unprecedented attacks this year. Our Labor & Education Committee hosted nine events to spotlight these struggles.



Tariff Turmoil



Labor Mixer



Dreamin +  
Schemin



Spooky Labor  
Stories



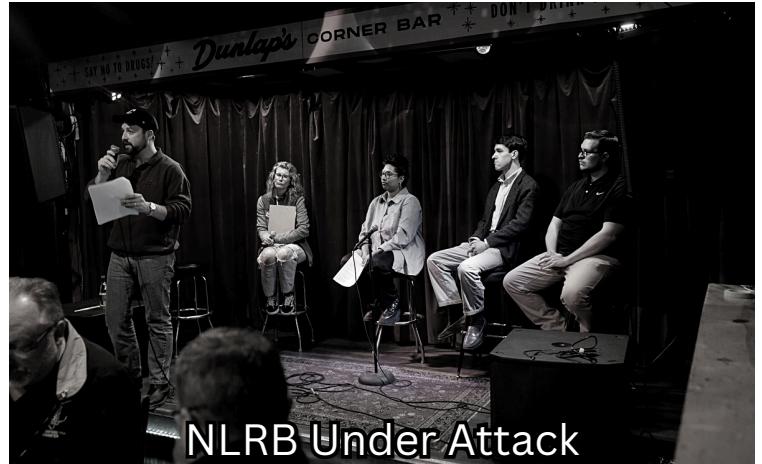
Immigrant Workers Under Attack



Nonprofit  
Organizing



Federally F\*cked



NLRB Under Attack

# OUR BOARD

**“Everybody wants a revolution. Nobody wants to do the dishes.”**

**- Dorothy Day**

The Northeast Ohio Worker Center Board of Directors is filled with committed community leaders who are just as likely to be behind the scenes “doing the dishes” as they are to be out in front leading the movement. We are eternally grateful for their wisdom, dedication, and militant vision for the just economy we all deserve.

**AISIA JONES**  
CHAIR

**JERRY PENA**  
VICE CHAIR

**COLLEEN DAMERELL**  
SECRETARY

**KATE HEFFERNAN**  
TREASURER

**ALEENA STARKS**

**MARC ALVARADO**

**CORINNE HUNTLEY**

**PAM MASON**

**CAMILA FOX GONZALEZ**

**MCKENNA GLORIOSO**

**DANIEL ORTIZ**



# OUR COMMITTEES

If you've ever felt like the Worker Center has a bigger presence than the size of its staff would suggest, that's because we have the greatest committees. Our committees are a way for us to invite folks into their power, give workers an organizing home they may not otherwise have, and grow our movement for a more just economy through collective action and community care.

IMMIGRANT  
DEFENSE

MEMBERSHIP &  
DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNITY  
OUTREACH &  
ENGAGEMENT

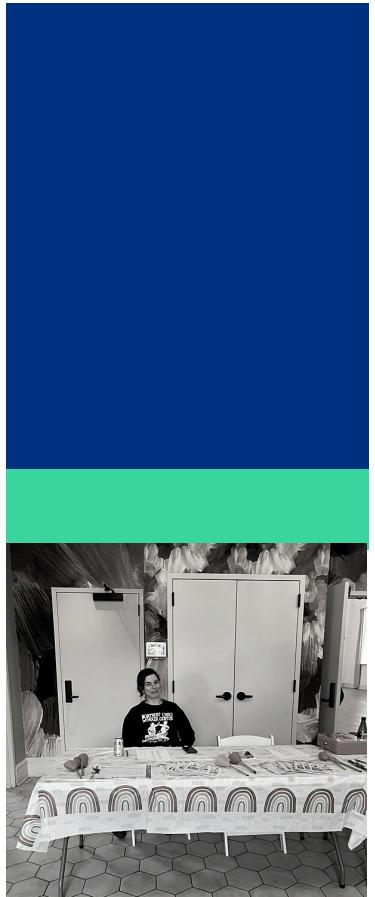
LABOR  
EDUCATION

UNIONS 101



# ANNUAL EVENT

The theme for the 2025 NEOWC annual event was Bread & Roses. Together with our INCREDIBLE committee, volunteers, sponsors, and supporters we raised over \$25,000 to build our movement!



## Champion



## Allies



Nora Kelley,  
Connor Boylan, &  
Ronin



MCCARTHY LEBIT  
CRYSTAL LIFFMAN  
EXPECT MORE. GET MORE.



Scott & Winters  
Law Firm, LLC  
OHIO WAGE LAWYERS



Rebecca Kusner &  
Cory Hudson



Mark J. Basista  
&  
Andrea M.  
Stathopoulos



## Friends



Edie Rasell



Claire Gautner



John Ryan

HUBAY DOUGHERTY



PEOPLE'S WORLD

CONTINUING THE GREAT WORKS  
FOUNDED 1919

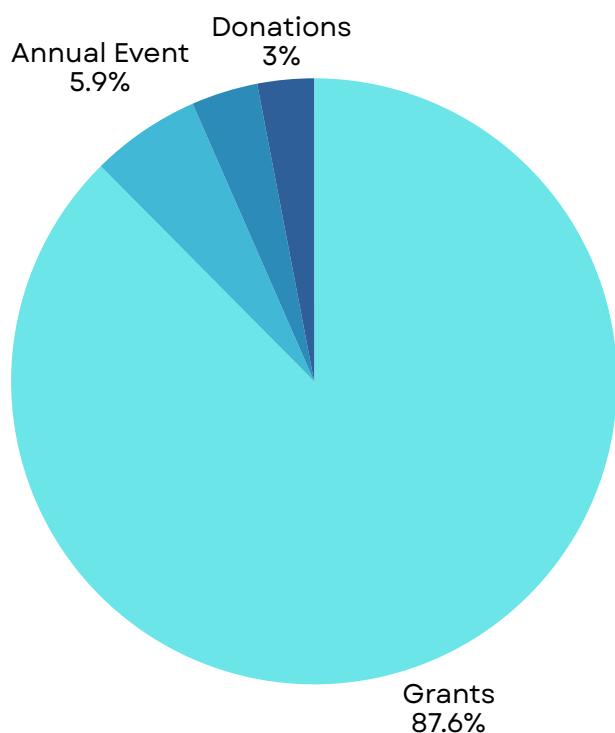
The Legal Aid Society  
of Cleveland



# FINANCIAL STATEMENT\*

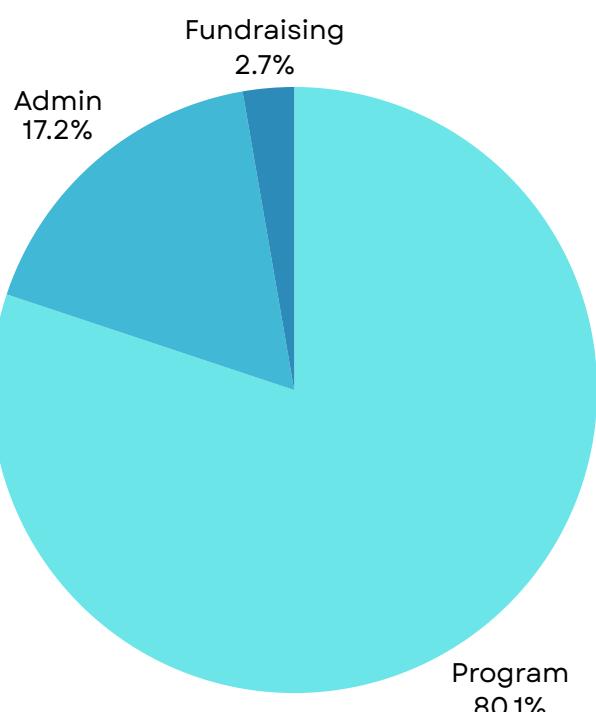
2025 INCOME  
\$323,760

- Grants
- Annual Event
- Bargaining Sponsorship
- Donations



2025 EXPENSES  
\$233,705

- Program
- Admin
- Fundraising



Cuyahoga County  
Workforce Funders Group



WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR ALL OF OUR GENEROUS FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS WHO DONATED TO OUR WORK THIS YEAR. A SPECIAL THANKS TO THE FOUNDATION PARTNERS LISTED ABOVE.

# STAY CONNECTED



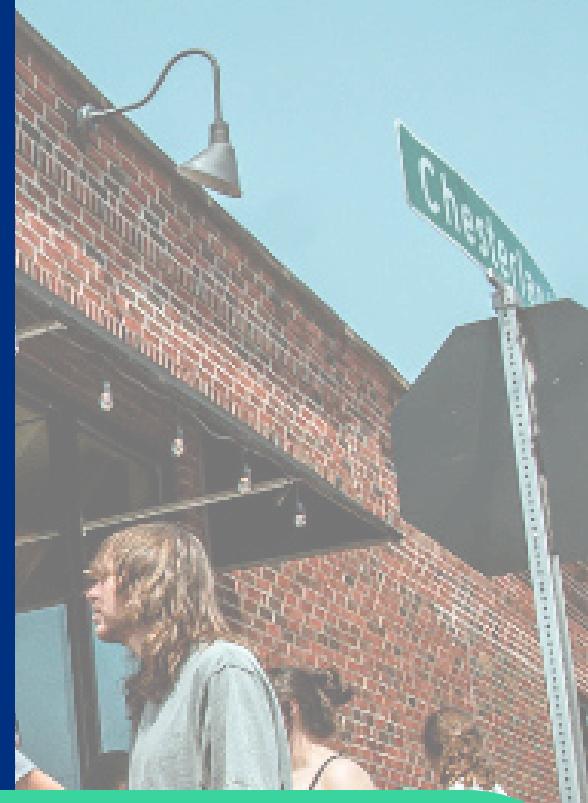
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44102



## DONATE!

