

2023

ANNUAL REPORT



A note from our Executive Director



It's hard to believe that it's only been a little over two years since I came on staff as the first employee and Executive Director of the Missouri Workers Center. Since then we've grown to include organizers in three cities, internal research and communications, and capacity to juggle multiple ambitious campaigns effectively.

Low-wage workers are organizing to win substantial community benefits if their tax dollars are used to subsidize the construction of a new downtown stadium in Kansas City. They're taking on Amazon, the second largest private sector employer in America and a trillion-dollar corporation, to demand an end to the injury crisis at their company. And a decade after fast food workers across Missouri walked off their jobs to win \$15 per hour, low-wage workers and their allies are gathering tens of thousands of signatures to finally raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour and guarantee earned sick leave.

As 2023 comes to a close and we prepare for the many challenges that 2024 may present, we reflect on how far we have come, and how far we still have to go. Working class organizations, and civil society more broadly, have been in decline for nearly seventy years. These institutions were the engines that built America's middle class, tore down Jim Crow segregation, and ensured equal protection under the law no matter who you are or where you come from. Rebuilding that power today will require new multi-racial working class institutions dedicated to bridging racial and geographic divides.

Whether you've joined low-wage workers at rallies, or support the organization as a recurring donor or grantor, thank you for standing with the Missouri Workers Center members and staff as we put our shoulders to the wheel of history and advance a vision of America where equality, justice, and democracy are truly guaranteed to all.

In Solidarity,

Jeremy Al-Haj
Executive Director



RAMMING

Up The Fight For A Union At Amazon STL8

Workers at Amazon's STL8 warehouse in St. Peters, Missouri, spent the last year expanding the STL8 Organizing Committee (OC), bringing national attention to their warehouse safety campaign, and building the power to fight for higher pay and a union at work.

RAMMING

Up The Fight For A Union At Amazon STL8

APRIL

STL8 workers march on the boss to demand clean water¹ after observing that water from faucets and toilets inside the warehouse was discolored and had a strong odor that made workers ill.

MAY

STL8 workers publicly launch their safety campaign after delivering a 450+ signature safety petition to management.

STL8 workers and other local union members create and perform² the Workers' Opera: Blue Light Special, a theater production featuring songs and stories about the importance of organizing to improve the dangerous conditions at the St. Peters warehouse.

STL8 worker Yvonda Clopton introduces a resolution³ at Amazon's Annual General Meeting calling for an independent safety audit of warehouse working conditions.

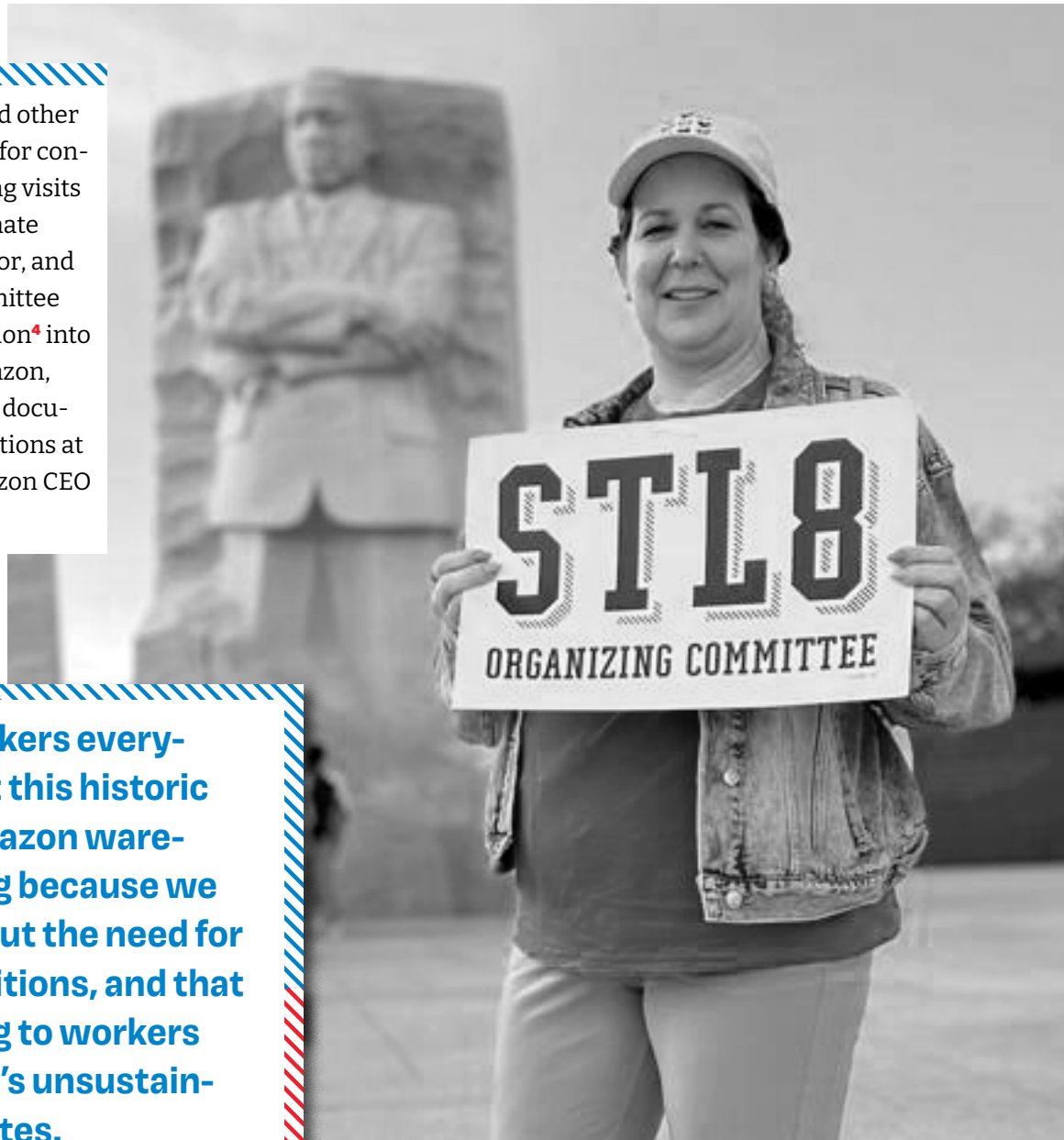


RAMPING

Up The Fight For A Union At Amazon STL8

JUNE

In response to STL8 and other Amazon workers' calls for congressional action during visits to DC in March, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee launches an investigation⁴ into the safety crisis at Amazon, specifically requesting documents regarding conditions at STL8 in a letter to Amazon CEO Andy Jassy.



I want Amazon workers everywhere to know that this historic investigation of Amazon warehouses is happening because we have spoken up about the need for safer working conditions, and that starts with listening to workers and ending Amazon's unsustainable productivity rates.

Jennifer Crane STL8 Organizing Committee member

RAMPING

Up The Fight For A Union At Amazon STL8

JULY

14 STL8 OC members file a complaint⁵ with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) about company practices that result in serious job-related injuries, including AmCare's mistreatment of workers.

AUGUST

WIRED publishes an investigation⁶ into how Amazon's in-house first aid clinics exacerbate worker injuries. The story features STL8 OC member Jennifer Crane.

STL8 workers hold a virtual press briefing, which includes a former OSHA official panelist, to discuss their July complaint.

SEPTEMBER

STL8 workers are featured in a report published by the National Employment Law Project highlighting the need for Amazon to raise worker wages.



RAMPING

Up The Fight For A Union At Amazon STL8

OCTOBER

STL8 workers, joined by National Nurses United, set up an injury clinic⁷ outside the warehouse to protest corporate-driven injury crises spanning both industries and to demand safer work.

STL8 workers attend a national meeting of Amazon workers in Atlanta, GA.

The Center for Urban Economic Development at the University of Illinois Chicago releases a groundbreaking report showing that 41 percent of Amazon warehouse workers have been injured⁸ on the job, among other data demonstrating a widespread health toll connected to the monitoring and intensity of work at the company. The survey represents 1,484 Amazon workers across 451 facilities, including STL8, and is the largest and most representative nationwide study of Amazon workers to date.



Telling The Story Of Working At Amazon

STL8 worker and Organizing Committee member Wendy Taylor discusses her journey to becoming a media spokesperson.

Why does telling your story matter in the fight for higher pay, safer work, and a union at Amazon STL8?

Amazon always talks about delivering smiles to their customers. My story can bring to life for a lot of people what we suffer through inside the warehouse to make Amazon so successful and profitable. If the public could know the truth about how Amazon breaks our minds and bodies down and demands more of us than is humanly possible, it'd open their eyes and the company would have no choice but to be held accountable.

How does it make you feel as you reflect on your journey from earlier this year, before you'd done any media or public speaking, to now, after having done a lot of it?

It has given me hope that I didn't have before. I felt alone and like no one really cared, even if I had the support of family and coworkers. Amazon is a giant and I'm just one person. I've seen how telling my story can travel across this country, and even around the world, to connect with other people going through what I'm going through.





How has the preparation you've done this year helped you tell your story?

It's helped a lot. I enjoy speaking with people, but I've never spoken publicly. The prep sessions gave me the confidence to share my story and affirm that what I'm sharing is true, right, and can make a change. Sometimes when it comes to speaking out publicly, we might not remember certain things or there are things we might want to say but don't know how. Being prepped helps you recondition your mind and not only tell your story but every time you tell it, you put people right there with you. I've enjoyed it and recommend that anybody do the prep to figure out how to deliver your story in a way to get results.

What is something you have learned in prep that has stuck with you?

You can be repetitive about certain things so they stay with people. The more people hear something, the more they can relate, understand, and empathize with you.

What has been your favorite media or public speaking opportunity this year?

If I had to pick, it would be the OSHA press briefing. Our safety is so important to us but it's not to Amazon. Telling people how our Organizing Committee is working with regulators to demand better made me feel like my voice will be heard in a way that moves the needle for myself and my coworkers.



Amazon is a giant and I'm just one person. I've seen how telling my story can travel across this country, and even around the world, to connect with other people going through what I'm going through.

Wendy Taylor Missouri Workers Center leader



DEMANDS

A Strong Community Benefits Agreement With The Royals





In January, we launched the Good Jobs and Affordable Housing for All coalition, a group representing poor and working Kansas Citians, unions, faith organizations, and civil rights and social service organizations committed to guaranteeing a deal for workers that advances economic and racial justice if the Kansas City Royals advance their proposed multi-billion stadium project — the largest private-public development in the history of the city.

Hundreds of our worker-leaders rallied⁹ alongside faith and labor leaders, elected officials, and other coalition members at Kansas City City Hall this summer to demand a secure seat at the table to negotiate a strong Community Benefits Agreement with living wages and a path to unionization for the roughly 2,800 long-term service and hospitality jobs that would be created by the stadium project.

Low-wage workers refuse to be an afterthought¹⁰ when it comes to this once-in-a-generation opportunity to raise the floor for all working people in Kansas City. We shared this sentiment in meetings with several local elected officials this fall, to build power to prevent public dollars from funding a new stadium and entertainment district unless the Royals meet the demands of Kansas City's poor and working people.




DEMANDS



The Royals say they're listening, but it feels like they don't hear us. You know who else says they're listening to me? McDonald's, Burger King, Arby's. Some even call us family. But they're not sitting down and negotiating a better job with me. I'm tired of not having a voice in my own job, and I'm tired of not having a voice when it comes to decisions impacting my own community.

Terrence Wise Stand Up KC leader

Holding A Corporate Fast Food Giant Accountable



Missouri Workers Center leader Kaamilya Hobbs takes us behind the scenes of organizing a shop floor action at Arby's.



Not having paid maternity leave means making an impossible choice between going back to work now and spending needed time with my newborn baby.

Kaamiliya “Milly” Hobbs started working at the North Oak Arby’s in Kansas City, Missouri, a few years ago. She became pregnant with her first son and had to take unpaid time off during his critical first weeks because Arby’s denies workers paid maternity leave. On top of that, \$12 an hour is not nearly enough to make ends meet.

This fall, Milly had her second baby. The same week she was due, her family was evicted and had to scramble to find housing. Milly, her partner Allen, and their two kids struggle daily to pay for food, medical bills, clothing, and other basic necessities.

Kaamiliya Hobbs Missouri Workers Center leader

Meanwhile, Flynn Restaurant Group, Arby’s parent company, has expanded to over 2,600 restaurants while making billions in profit each year. Yet, the workers whose hard work created those profits have seen nothing in return.

So Milly started organizing her coworkers this year to demand better from the company that has put its bottom line above the people who created those profits.

"I want Arby's and Flynn Restaurant Group to be held responsible for how they treat workers like me," Milly said about taking action with her coworkers. "\$12 an hour is not cutting it, and not having paid maternity leave means making an impossible choice between going back to work now and spending needed time with my newborn baby."

// I want Arby's and Flynn Restaurant Group to be held responsible for how they treat workers like me. \$12 an hour is not cutting it.

Milly started speaking with her coworkers to identify widely and deeply felt issues at work. Workers then raised the issues with their Missouri Workers Center organizer and met as an organizing committee to write a petition listing their demands: Raises; paid time off, including vacation, sick time, and breaks on the job; a free meal per shift; extra outdoor lighting to improve safety; and respect and equal treatment from management. The workers who drafted the petition organized their coworkers to sign on in support.

With a critical mass of signatures, Milly and the rest of the organizing committee planned a "March on the Boss" to directly confront management with their petition. Faith and labor allies, and a local elected official, joined in solidarity. On the day of the petition delivery, Milly read the demands loud and clear to their General Manager.

Kaamilya Hobbs Missouri Workers Center leader

Instead of meeting with workers to discuss their commonsense demands, Flynn Restaurant Group hired an anti-union consultant to intimidate and threaten workers, and they have gone so far as to refuse discussing individual pay increases with workers who signed the petition.

The corporate fast food giant has given Milly no choice: She and her co-workers will continue organizing and taking action until they win the pay, benefits, and working conditions they deserve.

WILLIAMS

Back Local Freedom To Protect Workers





In 2015, St. Louis residents won a minimum wage increase from \$7.65 per hour to \$10.00 on January 1, 2017. All the while, the state's minimum wage only went up to \$7.70. In 2017, state lawmakers approved a law to ban cities from hiking the minimum wage higher than the state's. Similarly, Kansas City workers' minimum wage victory was ripped out of their hands by the state preemption law. The sweeping policy cheated 116,720 workers from Kansas City and St. Louis combined out of long overdue wage increases, amounting to over \$580 million in lost annual earnings.

Hundreds of Missouri Workers Center members from Kansas City and St. Louis joined the St. Louis Board of Aldermen outside of City Hall in Sep-

tember¹¹ as part of a long-term fight to win back power from corporations and preserve our local democracies, by introducing new "trigger" ordinances. These ordinances would automatically take effect when Missouri state lawmakers prioritize people over corporate interests and overturn preemption. The first two trigger ordinances that were introduced would ensure fair scheduling and rest breaks for workers in the city of St. Louis.

We will continue to exercise worker power in the halls of government, from St. Louis to the state Capitol, until we win back control from greedy corporations and restore the local freedom to act in the best interest of Missourians.

FIFTEEN

State Policy To Defend Workers' Rights



EMPOWER MISSOURI



Advocating For A Clean Slate For All Workers

Today, almost two million Missourians face barriers to jobs, education, housing, and other basic necessities because they have an arrest or conviction on their record. Worse yet, corporations exploit workers who have difficulty finding other jobs because of their record. While tens of thousands of Missourians qualify for expungement of their records, the process is costly and difficult, and only about one percent of those who are eligible successfully obtain an expungement.

Dozens of low-wage workers from Kansas City and St. Louis gathered at the Capitol this past legislative session to share with their state representatives how having a criminal record has impacted them or a loved one, and to urge lawmakers to pass a “Clean Slate” bill to automatically expunge the records of those with eligible offenses.

Improving The Lives Of Working Families Statewide

Ten years after low-wage workers in Kansas City and St. Louis walked off their jobs and went on strike to win \$15 per hour and a union, workers can finally make \$15 a reality. Missourians For Healthy Families And Fair Wages, a grassroots campaign to win earned sick leave and increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, would help over 137,000 parents and 338,000 kids who live with a parent making the minimum wage.

Workers and their allies are gathering signatures in every corner of the state to get the measure on the 2024 ballot. Missouri Workers Center alone has collected over 20,000 signatures. Grassroots organizing institutions across the state have mobilized 680 petition circulators, gathered nearly 133,000 signatures, and is 83 percent to our goal with months before the deadline. This campaign, driven by poor and working people, for poor and working people, exemplifies the power and coordination of Missouri’s organizing ecosystem.



IN THE PRESS

- 1 **St. Peters warehouse Amazon workers demand clean drinking water, breathable bathrooms**
KSDK.com
- 2 **Taking on Amazon: Workers use play in unionization effort**
stlamerican.com
- 3 **Amazon workers seeking safety audit today**
fox2now.com
- 4 **US Senate Committee has launched an investigation into working conditions at Amazon warehouses**
omny.fm
- 5 **St. Peters Amazon employees file OSHA complaint saying work conditions caused injuries**
stlpr.org
- 6 **How Amazon's In-House First Aid Clinics Push Injured Employees to Keep Working**
wired.com
- 7 **Workers across St. Louis sectors want to feel safer while at their jobs**
stlpr.org
- 8 **"It Kind of Feels Like Prison": Injured, Burned Out and Under Surveillance at Amazon**
inthesetimes.com
- 9 **Kansas City Royals accused of 'stalling' deal that would secure worker benefits for new stadium**
kcur.org
- 10 **KC worker and tenant groups pushing Royals to promise jobs, housing in new stadium deal**
kansascity.com
- 11 **Workers rally at St. Louis City Hall for higher pay, better protections**
firstalert4.com

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