# DIGNIDAD & COMUNIDAD PODER





# MAKE THE ROAD CONNECTICUT 2022 ANNUAL REPORT



2022 proved to be another year of uncertainty, change, and growth. As I reflect on this year and our return to in-person events and sharing office space I can't help but think back to times before the pandemic when we had a storefront office on State Street in Bridgeport. It was a small space where we had folding tables for desks and where we would need to rearrange the one large room several times a day to accommodate the various events happening. I remember trying to run a meeting, have food available, and provide childcare all in close proximity to each other. I remember one girl, Tracy, who used to talk about joining our Youth Committee but she was 7 and not quite old enough to get involved. It so happens that just a few weeks ago I saw Tracy, now a teenager, engaged in one of our youth power meetings being held in the youth room of our newly purchased office, an entire mansion on Washington Avenue, with enough space to hold multiple meetings, provide childcare, take a zoom call, all at the same time without interference.

Purchasing a building that we will call our permanent home is an expression of our value of being rooted in the community as an organization. For several years we have built relationships, developed leaders, and engaged with partners in a way that anchored us in Bridgeport. Now, we have the physical space along with those relationships that will allow our roots to continue to deepen and fan out across the community. There is a certain power in having a space to call our own, especially in a building that was never designed to hold us. The building we purchased was built in 1915 as a mansion designed to house a single family. Mansions are spaces that serve to separate their occupants from the rest of society, representing individual wealth and hoarding of resources. However, at the same time this symbol of inequality was being built, workers across the city were striking, over 14,000 to be exact, which resulted in them winning an 8hour work day for many Bridgeport workers. It is within this deep tradition of shifting power that we decided to purchase this building.

We are dubbing this new space the "People's Mansion". Instead of hoarding wealth, it will be used to enrich the community with resources and be a space to gather together to envision new ways of building a society that works for all people; where everyone has what they need. It will be a foundation upon which we stage other power shifts as well. We have 4 statewide campaigns this year which will involve dozens of members going to the State Capitol, another building designed to keep people like our members out. Rather than staying out, we will take over and demand changes that our community needs including putting an end to exorbitant rent increases and no cause evictions, expanding Husky Health Insurance to everyone, and passing a bilingual parent and student bill of rights. We will not stop organizing and power building until these systems work for us!

We will be having a grand opening and many other activities in our new space and we invite you to be a part of building a home and a community cultural hub together.

In Solidarity,

Barbara Lopez



### **OUR MISSION**

Make the Road Connecticut (MRCT) is an intergenerational member-led community-based organization working to build power in immigrant, Latine, and working-class communities in Connecticut to achieve dignity and justice. We do this through community organizing, legal and survival services, transformative education, and policy innovation.

### **OUR VISION**

MRCT envisions communities where Black, Brown, immigrant, indigenous, and workingclass people are treated with dignity and respect and have equitable access to housing, healthcare, education, and other systems and resources. We see children playing, neighbors sharing food, dancing, laughing, being healthy, and building strong connections to not just live but to thrive. We trust the power of organizing and fighting back against inequities, sexism, institutional racism, and all the other isms that exist in our society to deliver the changes and build the new systems our community needs.



### **Membership Assembly**

For the first time since 2019, members from Bridgeport and Hartford gathered together for our statewide membership assembly in-person. Over 60 members joined us to celebrate our victories in 2022 and discuss plans and set expectations for our work in 2023. Members from the Bridgeport City Council and State Legislature also joined us to answer member questions and commit to working together with us.



### **Husky Campaign Victory**

We once again increased access to Husky Health insurance by raising the age of children that qualify from age 9 to age 12. Now all children 12 and under regardless of immigration status will be eligible for insurance. There were many points throughout the campaign where we showed our power but none more than at the Public Hearing where over 20 Make the Road members joined 140 other and allies directly impacted community members in testifying about the need for expanded access.

### **Fighting For Tenant Rights**

Dozens of tenant leaders showed up at a City Council meeting in mid-October to address the ways the city of Hartford has failed to support tenants living in buildings owned by slumlords. This action resulted in a meeting with the city in December where the City Council and Mayor's office agreed to regularly meet with tenant leaders and address issues raised by tenants.

#### **Summer Youth Academy**

For 6 weeks during the summer, 8 young people joined our Youth Coordinator twice a week for activities and learnings focused on organizing and leadership development. Youth learned organizing skills and information about the school to prison pipeline, getting cops out of schools, environmental justice, and access to college. The program wrapped up with presentations and a graduation ceremony attended by friends and family.



### **May Day Rally**

Over 125 community members form MRCT and several of our allies rallied at the State Capitol for International Workers Day or May Day on May 1st. Speakers spoke about the need for expanded access to health insurance for everyone regardless of immigration status as well as the need for immigration reform at the federal level.



### Annual Hope & Resilience Gala

There were many firsts since the start of COVID and one of them was our return to in-person fundraisers. We held our annual Gala in June at the Hartford Public Library and were ioined by family, friends, supporters from across the state. Together we ate good food, had some mocktails, and danced the night away, or at least until 8pm, all while raising over \$28,000.

# **Campaign Launches**

We launched several campaigns in 2022 including our local healthcare campaigns and our local and statewide education campaigns. Members shared their stories and talked about the need for education justice and health equity and many local news outlets reported on our work. You can read more about our campaigns in the pages that follow.

### **Summer Outreach Days**

Our organizing team worked to intentionally find ways to engage new community members in 2022. One way was hosting Summer Outreach Days. On Saturdays throughout the summer, MRCT members and staff hit the streets to talk with community members about issues that they cared about. We got contact information for hundreds of Bridgeport and Hartford residents that led to new members being involved in our work!

#### Make the Road States Throwdown in PA

30 members and staff from CT joined hundreds of other Make the Road members from 5 states to knock on doors in Allentown PA to get out the vote and ensure the voices of Latine and immigrant Pennsylvanians were heard. In total, we helped knock on over 9,000 doors and our members learned valuable canvassing skills that can be used for our civic engagement work back in CT.



#### **Leaders Council**

We welcomed our new cohort of Leaders Council members in October of 2022 after over 20 of our members participated in an intensive leadership school where they gained leadership and organizing skills. Out of those 20 participants, 13 were elected to be part of the leaders council for a two year term. These leaders represent each of our committees and will help set the vision and inform large-scale decisions for MRCT. You can learn more about our leaders committee on page 12.

# LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT BY THE NUMBERS

One of the core pillars of Make the Road is the leadership development for our members. Over the course of the year we provide various training opportunities for our members to learn and grow. This year over 300 members participated in trainings, meetings, and actions including:

- 70 Members Trained in Phone Banking, Story of Self, Campaign Development, 1:1s, and Public Speaking
- **30** Members trained in New Immigration Policies Impacting the CT Immigrant Community
- 58 Members trained in Housing Know Your Rights
- **30** Members trained in Healthcare Know Your Rights
- 29 Members trained in Local, State and Federal Government Structures
- **29** Members trained in Popular Education
- 25 Members trained in CT Health Insurance "Husky"
- **20** Members Trained in Special Education Policies
- 20 members trained in Medical Debt and its Impact
- 20 Members trained in Healthcare Advocacy
- 15 members trained on How to Share your Story with Legislators
- 10 Members trained in Letter Writing to your Representatives
- **10** Members trained in How the CT Legislature Works
- 8 Youth Members trained in Political Education, Environmental Justice, How the School Budget works and Community Organizing skills



"We suffer a lot in health, it is important that we have medical coverage and better services. It's important that we lead the solutions and be present because it affects us and we have lived experiences to know how to solve the problem - that's why I'm excited about the campaign, because we can create changes that improve the community.

> -Victor Sanchez **HFD Fightback Committee Leader**



### **What We Believe**

We believe that every resident of Connecticut, regardless of race, immigration status, class, or insurance status has a right to quality healthcare. We believe that this healthcare should be culturally informed, multilingual, and should put people over profit.

# **Our Organizing Work**

For the past several years, we have been fighting alongside our coalition partners to open Husky Health Insurance to everyone regardless of immigration status. Doing so is estimated to drop the uninsured rate for undocumented immigrants in the state by 18% and cover an additional 21,400 people. In 2022, we continued to get closer to that goal by expanding access to Husky Health Insurance to all children regardless of status up to age 12 (previously it was up to age 8). While we continue to be disappointed that the state legislature is taking such an incremental approach, we will keep fighting in 2023 to ensure everyone has access to affordable health insurance.

On the local level, our **Bridgeport Campaign achieved a huge win** when we got our demands for improved access to healthcare included in the Health Improvement Alliance (HIA) 3 year health improvement plan (CHIP). This includes training for hospital and clinic staff, transparency and accurate information on what types of payment support patients qualify for, access to high quality interpretation and translation for all medical appointments, and much more. In Hartford, we launched our local campaign on a rainy day in October with similar demands to improve healthcare in Hartford. In 2023, our Hartford leaders will be meeting with hospitals, clinics, and various city officials, including the Hartford City Council and Department of Health, to get them to commit to improving services.



"We need to continue the fight to implement more laws that protect our community. We are from here because we live here, work and contribute to the socio-economic development of the city and the state."

> -Nely Mendoza **BPT Fightback Committee** Leader

# **Our Programming Work**

Throughout 2022 we continued working to promote vaccine equity and access in all of our communities, particularly those that are uninsured and don't have access to routine healthcare. Together with our partners at Sacred Heart University, we conducted community led research on barriers to vaccination in the Latine and undocumented community, through a series of focus groups conducted in both Hartford and Bridgeport. The results of the focus groups were then analyzed and presented to 60 healthcare professionals working in the communities we serve. They were then tasked with creating action plans for incorporating our recommendations into their clinics, hospitals, and the health departments. As a result of this work, we also began partnering with the Health Improvement Alliance in Bridgeport, and MRCT is now an important part of this coalition.

In addition to working on the systemic barriers to vaccination by training healthcare providers through our community-led research process, we also worked to reduce the misunderstandings and lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate information available on COVID and vaccination. We held a series of workshops on Facebook live that provided over 500 individuals with information on how to access the vaccine, myths around vaccination, knowing your rights as an undocumented individual when seeking healthcare, and more. We also created short videos and flyers providing free and low cost healthcare resources for our members in Bridgeport and Hartford.

Although the crisis point of the COVID pandemic seems to have come to an end, the healthcare needs of our communities and the inequities in access to healthcare continue. For that reason, in 2022 we hired 2 community health workers, better known as "promotoras" in Spanish. The promotoras are currently finishing up their first project, collecting 220 surveys on community members' experiences with Medicaid in CT. This is part of a nationwide effort to reduce barriers to healthcare coverage, and the results of this survey will be used to advocate for Husky coverage for all here in CT.





"Make The Road has had a positive impact on the community because they support all of us to build power, and fight together. [Together we] have gotten more Spanish speaking City inspectors in Hartford, and funds for free legal aid in Hartford in areas that didn't have it. [We will continue] to raise our voices and fight for dignified housing"

> -Victoria Ramos Tenant Leader



# What We Believe

We believe that everyone deserves a safe, quality, affordable place to live in the location that they so choose. Ultimately, we believe housing is a human right and should be accessible to all.

# **Our Organizing Work**

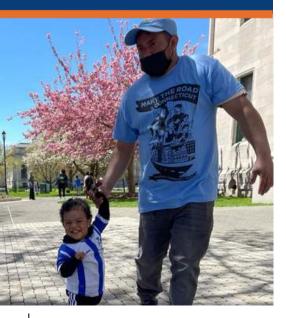
In 2020 and 2021 we facilitated the distribution of over \$600.000 in rental assistance to undocumented families left out of the federal government stimulus and other statewide rental assistance programs. Being a part of this process highlighted for us the major issues that existed in the housing system across CT and the systemic changes that would be needed to bring about change. This led us to start organizing tenants in buildings owned by corporate slumlords across Hartford and Bridgeport. Many tenants were living in deplorable conditions with appliances not working, rats, roaches, mold, water damage, and management refusing to do anything to address these issues.

In October we, alongside our allies at the CT Tenants Union, showed up to a City Council meeting with dozens of tenant leaders demanding the city take action to address slumlord conditions. This was after many tenants saw rent increases of 20, 30, even 40% with no improvement in conditions. In December we had a meeting with the Mayor's Office and City Council where the city agreed to hire more inspectors, more quickly process Fair Rent Commission Complaints to stop unfair rent increases, increase transparency around fines and actions being taken against landlords, and to meet with tenant leaders on a regular basis. In 2023, we will be ensuring that the city follows through on its commitments while also fighting at the State Level to pass a bill that will cap rent increases at 3% annually and close loopholes that allow for no-fault evictions.



"MRCT fights the injustice, problems, and difficulties that our community has. So, MRCT has a significant impact on empowering families in our State. In the education area. they show how parents become the best advocates for their children. Children are the future of the world. When parents advocate for them, we are creating a better world. MRCT empowers more people in the State to raise their voices and fight for their rights."

> -Aracely Hidalgo Madres en Acción Parent Leader



# **What We Believe**

We believe that every student deserves a quality education and that all parents and family members regardless of race, class, immigration status, or language spoken should be able to fully participate in that education. We believe educational resources should be equitably distributed and the stories and experiences of those historically left out or targeted should be centered.

# **Our Organizing Work**

Over the course of 2022, our leaders pushed for several state and local initiatives. In Hartford, our parent leaders launched a campaign to increase language access for parents in Hartford Public Schools. They met with the Superintendent, the Chief of Engagement & Partnerships, and other district leaders to ensure that language access is being prioritized. By the end of the Fall, our parent leaders got the school district to commit to translate all documents into Spanish, run focus groups with parents across the district to get feedback on how to improve language services, expand resources for language line and in person interpretation, and more! In Bridgeport, our parent leaders continued to work with the district to improve resources at the Newcomer Welcome Center that we won a few years ago and began planning a campaign around non-citizen voting in school board elections.

At the state level, our leaders launched a campaign to pass a Bilingual Parent and Student Bill of Rights. We have been hard at work building a coalition, the ELL Parent and Student Success Coalition, to push for this Bill of Rights to pass as a new state law. The Bill of Rights has 17 points including: the right for parents to have a qualified, trained interpreter at important interactions with the school district, the imperative of the school district to provide high quality bilingual and ELL education for all students and to update parents about student progress, and receive equal access to all programs and services provided by the school district. Our leaders will be at the Capitol in 2023 sharing their stories with legislators as to why this legislation is important to pass.



"I joined Make The Road because I wanted to learn more about what is going on around me, how I could help, and why it is important to know this information. An impact I've seen our Make The Road committee have in our city Bridgeport is how many youth are realizing that it is important to advocate for our needs and to know what is going on around us."

> -Gisell Juarez **Youth Power Committee Member**



### What We Believe

We believe that young people should have power and agency over the institutions that impact their lives. We believe young people know what is best for their schools and their communities and should be given the tools and resources to ensure these institutions are giving them what they need to learn and grow.

# **Our Organizing Work**

We were very excited in July to welcome our first Senior Organizer who is focused specifically on youth organizing and added significant capacity to the work being done by our Youth Coordinator. Together, the two focused on building up the Youth Power Committee. reaching out to new youth to engage them in our work, and beginning to build a campaign focused on improvements to Bridgeport Public Schools including investing in mental health, school infrastructure, and college and career readiness, and multilingual services, implementing intentional approaches to restorative justice practices, and equitable approaches and resources for students with disabilities.

In 2022 we also hosted a Summer Youth Academy as a space to allow young people to develop their organizing and leadership skills and learn about issues impacting their community. The program ran for 6 weeks in-person at the Burroughs Community Center. The program included: political education sessions related to the school to prison pipeline, environmental justice, and the school budget; information related to college and career readiness; and skill-building sessions focused on organizing and leadership skills including campaign development, how to share a story of self, and how to have a 1:1/ recruit other young people to get engaged in the work MRCT is doing. The young people received certificates for completion of the program and many expressed interest in being a part our Youth Power Committee.



Make the Road CT uses various strategies to build the leadership of members and involve members in important organizational decisions. One of the spaces that does both of these things is our Leaders Council. We launched a new Leaders Council structure in late 2022 that will allow our members to more deeply engage in organizational strategy and have ownership over various aspects of our work. Our new Leaders Council is made up of 13 members, 2 from each of our committees and an additional member from our Youth Power Committee. Below are our Leaders Council Members!























[top row] Victor Sanchez, Tracey Garcia, Esther Alcantara, Xiomara Fugon, Arantza Gonzalez

[2nd Row] Yuri Diaz, Minerva Antigua, Ruth Valera, Giselle Chavez, Harley Moncada

[3rd Row] Nuliva Montilla, Imelda Barajas, Francisca Gabriel Garcia









In order to join the Leaders Council, members had to be actively engaged in their committee and attend our annual Leadership School, where members learned about civic engagement, how to navigate the political process, and engaging in intersectional movements. We had 20 members total participate in the Leadership School to hone their skills. From those 20 members, 13 were chosen to be a part of the Leaders Council. The Leaders Council will meet monthly for the next 2 years and will especially be focused on member engagement and involvement, hosting quarterly membership assemblies and special events such as the membership assembly and developing our civic engagement program to engage the community in new ways.

This new Leaders Council was a revamp of the previous Leaders Committee we have run for several years. Those previous committees were only one year long and did not include a Leadership School component before joining. We felt that having a Council for 2 years allows members to have stronger ownership over decisions and that the Leadership School gave them the information they needed to successfully engage in the Council. **We also view this Leaders Council as a space for our members to practice group decision making and other skills that are important to have in a world where more power and control is shifted to the community.** We will all have to learn how to better navigate conflict and be in community together and our Leaders Council is a space that is doing just that. We encourage you to say hi to our Leaders Council members when you see them out and about at actions and events!



# **MEET OUR** STAFF TEAM

2022 was another year of continuing to grow and develop our staff team. We hired six new staff members, expanding our organizing team, staff working on the infrastructure and daily functions of the organization (affectionately known as our DIVA team), as well as hiring the first members of our new Programs team. On organizing side, we hired new organizers in Hartford and Bridgeport focused on healthcare, youth organizing and economic justice. On the DIVA team side we hired an Operations Manager and a Communications Associate who are vital as we run more campaigns and move into new physical office spaces, Lastly, we hired two part-time promotoras who are working to connect community members to resources in the healthcare system. We are excited to move into 2023 building deeper relationships between our staff and members and working together in our new Bridgeport and Hartford homes.

Staff Members from left to to right:

[top row] Barbara López - Executive Director, Wendy Cárdenas - Organizing Director, Mary Elizabeth (M.E.) Smith - Development & Programs Director

[2nd Row] Sonia Hernandez - Bridgeport Fightback Organizer, Teresa Quintana - Housing Equity Organizer, Megan Scharrer - Hartford Community Organizer

[3rd Row] Yaniliz Rosario - Bridgeport Senior Organizer, Helen Quiñonez - Bridgeport Community Organizer, Brigith Rivera - Hartford Community Organizer

[4th Row] Mwiche Siwingwa - Youth Coordinator, Jonathan Gonzalez Cruz - Hartford Senior Organizer, Marlis Prieto - Communications & Digital Associate

[5th Row], Keyla Medina - Operations & Special Project Manager, Stefan Keller - Development Associate, Leida Ramos - Office Maintainer

[Bottom Row] - Fanny Andujar - Promotora, Aileen Suarez - Promotora



































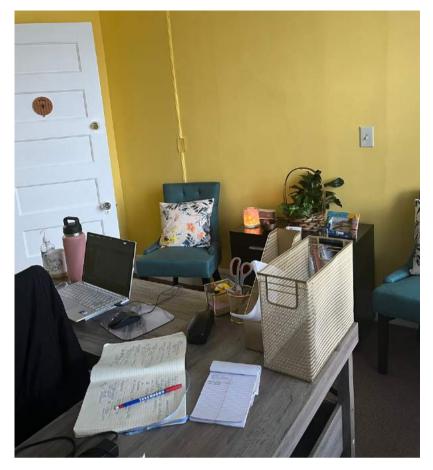




Some of you may remember the small storefront office that we had on State Street in Bridgeport for several years. Our staff remember fondly the relationships built and meetings held in that space while not as fondly remembering the occasional flooding and close quarters that we worked in. When we closed our office in mid-2020 we began to envision what our next home in Bridgeport would look like. We knew we wanted a space that could truly feel like home for the community that we work with and serve as a central cultural hub for the expanded organizing and programming efforts we would engage in for the coming years.



We are beyond excited to announce that we have found that space and moved in December 2022. Dubbed the "People's Mansion," (pictured above) the large space has room for meetings, childcare, offices, and plenty of space to expand and grow. We have been calling it the People's Mansion as the building was a former mansion, designed for a single family, certainly not for an organization led by working class and poor black and brown immigrant people. We were never envisioned as being able to set foot in such a space. However, at Make the Road, we organize to shift the balance of power and occupying this space is a visual representation of one of those shifts. We will use this space to build deeper roots in our community and provide a space to build power and connect people to resources to meet their basic **needs.** We look forward to continuing to make this space our home in the coming years. Be on the lookout as there will be many ways to be engaged in this project of home-building in the near future including a grand opening at some point in 2023.



"For 2023 The most exciting thing is that we are going to continue working and campaigning for all Immigrant families and continue fighting [and] growing Make The Road CT."

> -Leida Ramos Madres Guerreras



"[In 2023] I'm hoping that we do get more students and people to come in with us and help us advocate whether it's about a school need or a change in the school board, etc."

-Gisell Juarez Youth Power Committee Member



"[In 2023 I hope] we continue to grow and have more people join the team and we do everything for the best in the community. I'm excited to have more events where the community comes together and shares and is just happy and healthy.

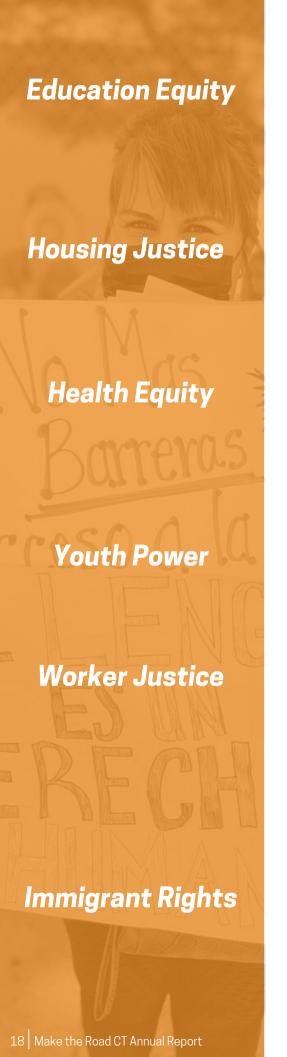
-Victor Sanchez
HFD Fightback Committee Member

And we are not just expanding in Bridgeport. **We will also be moving into a new, larger space in Hartford as well to accommodate our growing team.** We will be moving into a building on Wethersfield Avenue owned by one of our close allies, the labor union CT SEIU 32BJ. There will be plenty of space for offices and a large meeting space we will have access to for events and assemblies. This will also put us in the South End of Hartford close to neighborhoods where many of our members live. Pictured below are our Hartford members in our current home at 360 Farmington Avenue in Hartford.

Our expansion and growth is not only in reference to space but also to our programmatic work. In 2020 we underwent a strategic planning process including members, staff and partners. One of the results of our collective visioning process was some clarity around how our members would like to see us expand our work. In the area of services and programs, our members overwhelmingly expressed the need for two things: legal services, specifically in the areas of immigration, housing and workers rights; and healthcare navigators to guide our members in understanding the complexities of the healthcare system. While 2020 was a year of many changes, and our path has diverged at several points, we have been working consistently to make these two ideas a viable reality. In 2022 we hired our first community health workers, or promotoras, and in 2023 our community health worker program will continue to build and grow. This program will accompany our health equity organizing work and will help our members navigate the healthcare system, understand and enroll in Husky (particularly for newly eligible members) and access financial assistance and medical debt reduction programs. The promotoras will also provide popular education training on the health issues that are most pressing for the MRCT community.

In 2023 we also hope to launch the initial stages of our legal & survival services department. While this department is still in the planning stages, it will build off and expand upon the work we have done in the past by connecting members to trusted attorneys, providing Know Your Rights and accompaniment programs through immigration proceedings, and holding legal clinics. We are excited to keep you posted about this upcoming growth and expansion!





## **OUR 2023 ORGANIZING PRIORITIES**

- State Level Advocating for an ELL/bilingual parent bill of rights to be adopted for all of Connecticut that will ensure that school districts are providing the proper support and resources to bilingual students and families.
- **Local Level** Developing a campaign to support non-citizen voting for the Board of Education in Bridgeport and better resources and training for interpretation and translation services in Hartford.
- **State Level** Passing a 3% rent cap to ensure landlords cannot raise rent an extreme amount and expand eviction protections to ensure landlords cannot evict tenants for no reason.
- Local Level Building tenant unions and taking direct actions against corporate landlords that continuously put profit over people and force their tenants to live in deplorable conditions.
- **State Level** Expanding access to Husky health insurance to everyone regardless of immigration status (currently just children under 12, those that are pregnant, and one year postpartum)
- Local level Monitoring and addressing issues with hospitals and clinics and ensuring everyone has access to quality translation, interpretation, gets treated with dignity and respect, and has the information they need to make informed medical decisions.
- Local Level Improvements to Bridgeport Public Schools including investing in mental health, school infrastructure, college and career readiness, and multilingual services, implementing intentional approaches to restorative justice practices, and equitable approaches and resources for students with disabilities.
- State Level Passing the Predictable Scheduling Bill which will give workers more power over their schedules at big corporations and franchises across the state
- Local Level Develop a workers committee in Hartford and Bridgeport that will address issues impacting workers including worker rights, trainings such as OSHA to help workers build their skills, and launch of a worker-led campaign. To do this the newly hired Senior Economic Justice Organizer will build connections with unions and worker centers and build a base of workers ready to organize and fight for their rights.
- We have been disappointed by the lack of movement by the Biden administration and Congress towards a pathway to citizenship and other immigration protections. We know the next 2 years will continue to be difficult to push new policies forward but we will keep fighting to ensure that all people have the freedom to move where they want or need, the freedom to stay where they feel connected and rooted, and to get the resources and support they need no matter where what immigration status they hold.

