

VOCAL-KY Newsletter



Upcoming Events

Tuesday, April 25 @ 5 - 8PM: Fentanyl, Family, and Community; A Solutions-Based Conversation in Louisville's West End: Join us and coalition partners for a community conversation about harm reduction. Free Narcan and drug testing strips will be provided. This event is open to the public. **Where:** Louisville Central Community Center, 1300 W Muhammad Ali Blvd, Louisville, KY 40203.

Bi-Monthly Membership Meeting @ 4pm - 6pm: Our general membership meetings are where we develop the knowledge, skills, and relationships required to fight for and win the resources and policies ourselves and our loved ones desperately need. **Where:** Heyburn Building, 332 W Broadway **When:** April 20, 2023 -

Opioid Abatement Commission Business Meetings: We mobilize leaders to go to Frankfort to hear updates from the commission regarding the application process and disbursements of settlement money, as well as continue to be sure funding is going to harm reduction, housing and care. **Where:** Capital Complex East, Frankfort, KY **When:** Tuesday, April 19, 2023 @ 1:30PM

Month In Review

The Kentucky Legislative session, which started January 3 and ended March 30, was considered a “short session,” but it will have lasting effects on the livelihoods of Kentuckians. VOCAL-KY was happy to help support a growing list of community partners while they championed bills aimed at saving and improving lives.

Unfortunately, the 2023 session seemed like an all-out attack on women, the poor, the working class, our young people, and our LGBTQ+ community. There were both good and bad bills that ultimately ran out of time and were never heard by lawmakers. Our Kentucky General Assembly is a force, but we have the power to organize meaningful change. Harm reduction services and care saw a few victories, from the distribution of take-home test kits and the decriminalization of testing and prevention measures for those living with HIV. Fentanyl testing strips are also now legal to distribute in Kentucky starting on June 28.

No proposed constitutional amendments were passed, especially after Kentucky voters rejected Amendment 2, ballot initiative that would have eliminated Abortion rights in the Commonwealth. However, another issue of healthcare rights was passed with Senate Bill 150, a bill that would terrorize our transgender youth in doctor offices, schools and even their homes. Lawmakers overrode Governor Beshear's rightful veto on that legislation. Kentucky is sadly now home to one of the strictest anti-trans laws in the nation.

From anti-hair discrimination to banning drag shows, and trying to allow concealed carry on college campuses, it was a rollercoaster of a session. Bills related to medical marijuana, bourbon barrel tax and sports betting passed through both chambers and were signed by the governor. VOCAL-KY is focused on updating our roadmap to guide lawmakers on how to end the failed war on drugs in Kentucky. Next session, we'll be ready to stand in solidarity with allies and members while working with lawmakers to create better policies that save lives.



Member Spotlight: Get to Know Kristie Barnes

I was asked to be part of VOCAL-KY when I was in the streets lobbying in Frankfort to get voting rights restored. This was a subject I'm passionate about, as I had to do that myself. I also know the pain of loving someone going through active addiction. Last year a dear friend lost his battle with HIV due to lack of insurance. I've personally had battles with section 8 and was forced to live on the street in a tent.

I am interested in every aspect VOCAL-KY stands for. Fighting for the life-saving measures of Narcan and safe-use sites is also extremely important to me after a previous partner died two years ago from an overdose. I have two beautiful daughters lost to the streets in active addiction, so when someone asks me what VOCAL-KY is to me, there's only one answer. It's everything I stand for.

It's been a privilege to go before our senators and our governor with our group of leaders and members of VOCAL-KY, and to ask them to make a change and hear the people and feel our pain. It's been a privilege to put words into action, and fight for laws that will bring positive change for the people, housing, healthcare, therapy, and diversion not incarceration.

Member Spotlight: Get to Know Dustin Collins

"I joined VOCAL-KY for the passion I have for the people who live here in our great city of Louisville. People who live here are experiencing a terrible epidemic of police maltreatment, injustice, sentences that don't fit the crimes, and people who are homeless being incarcerated simply because they're afraid to go to shelters (with good reason). People in our city are battling addiction or mental health issues. These people have my heart and soul because not that long ago I too fought these things for several months. I barely made it through.

I know what they are facing firsthand, so it only made sense to join up with VOCAL-KY and help them bring real change where it's needed – in the trenches of homelessness, addiction, and poverty. I'm proud to be a part of a better future in Louisville, KY. Thanks to the great people who care at VOCAL-KY."



What we're Reading

Louisville Courier Journal: [How law could help stop gentrification](#)

WPSD: [Fentanyl testing strips are decriminalized in the state of Kentucky](#)

Louisville Courier Journal: [City's solution to its homeless problem: Relocation](#)

Filter: [Methadone Clinics Angry at Bad PR, But Not Afraid of SAMHSA](#)

Louisville Courier Journal: [Civil rights attorney Ben Crump responds to Louisville DOJ report. Here's what he said](#)

NPR: [One camp at a time, a Seattle group is transforming its approach to homelessness](#)

Who We Are

VOCAL-KY is dedicated to ending AIDS, the drug war, mass incarceration and homelessness by building the political power of low-income people directly impacted by the issues. We use community organizing and direct action to win policy change that will concretely improve lives and transform politics.

Led by former Mayoral candidate Shameka Parrish-Wright, VOCAL-KY is the first official state chapter of Voices of Community Activists and Leaders (VOCAL-NY). Since its founding in 1999, VOCAL-NY has passed dozens of bills, improving and saving the lives of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers across the state and transforming New York City and New York State in the process. Through community organizing and building power amongst the most marginalized communities in New York, we made our core issues - ending AIDS, the drug war, mass incarceration and homelessness - core progressive issues in the state.