

AMPLIFYING *the* POWER OF FAITH

Creating a Region Where Everyone Can Thrive, No Matter Where They Were Born



Photo: Susan Saudek

JULY 2022-JULY 2023

For the past six years, **Congregation Action Network** (CAN) has been fighting for the rights and well being of immigrants and refugees in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC. Founded in 2017 as a project of Faith in Action and Sanctuary DMV, CAN has since organized faith communities across the Washington metro area, and grew into an independent organization in 2022.

As an interfaith organization, we unite people across faith traditions and spiritual beliefs to create a more just and compassionate society where everyone, no matter their immigration status, has the same access to rights and resources. We amplify the power of faith through community organizing to create material and systemic change at the local, state, and federal level. With relationships at the core of everything we do, CAN works closely with advocates, activists, faith leaders, and congregations to fight for a world where all immigrants are met with love, dignity, and liberation.

Through our commitment to justice for immigrants and the support of our network, we have made significant strides toward our goals.

Goals



BUILD the political power of our immigrant and refugee communities in MD, VA, and DC.



ADVANCE local, state, and national policies rooted in the belief that everyone has equal rights, no matter where they were born.



DEVELOP an interfaith effort to ensure all are welcomed with dignity and love.



ADDRESS the trauma that often gets in the way of successful organizing.

Obstacles to Justice

The fight for justice for immigrants and refugees has never been more important as the U.S. enacts inhumane policies at the border, pushing more people into precarity and danger. Immigrants often endure deep trauma in their home countries, during the migration journey, and after they reach the U.S. And, immigrants without permanent legal status face rampant discrimination, including when trying to find jobs, housing, and health care.

Building Leadership

CAN's response to these injustices is rooted in our shared belief in the dignity and worth of all people, and driven by our vision of a world where those who have immigrated shape the policies that affect their lives. To this end, CAN convenes, trains, and mobilizes faith communities in the DC metro region who strive for justice, and we focus on building the leadership of immigrants and refugees.

Over the past year, CAN held monthly regional strategy meetings with our members, formed and trained committees in congregations, and held weekly meetings with migrant residents in DC's temporary shelter program. CAN has also offered training and coaching in trauma informed care, strategic campaigns, and effective communication for advocacy, as well as educational events online and in person.

Fighting for Justice for Bused Migrants

The governors of Texas and Arizona have bused more than 10,000 migrants to DC over the last year. This cruel stunt highlighted the divide between the hundreds of volunteers, many of whom are CAN leaders, who have helped provide food, clothing, transportation, housing and so much more, and our local governments who were painfully slow to respond.

Throughout the year, CAN staff and volunteers have worked with partners to lead an intensive advocacy campaign demanding that local governments provide services for the newly arrived migrants' immediate and long-term needs. This included convening a weekly advocacy space with a dozen local partners and faith communities for several months to share information and plan joint actions.

SINCE JULY 2022, CAN HAS:

Trained

250 people

on healing trauma through community and faith-based organizing.

Had our advocacy and organizing work highlighted in the news

15 times.

Convened and mobilized

more than 30

recently-arrived migrants in our struggle for dignified treatment.



Photo: Susan Saudek

Migrants Bused to DC

2022

APRIL

Buses begin arriving from Texas

SEPTEMBER

DC announces the Office of Migrant Services

OCTOBER

70+ people testify before DC Council

Though the DC government announced the opening of an Office of Migrant Services in September 2022, five months after buses started arriving, the city also announced new regulations that discriminate against immigrants and bar them from many critical city services. In response, CAN helped mobilize 70 community members to testify against the discriminatory policies at a DC Council hearing in October. Six recently arrived migrants who testified with the help of CAN went on to become leaders in our organizing efforts.

CAN worked with these leaders to testify at another hearing in February 2023 about the deplorable living conditions and resettlement challenges they face. Our team accompanied their powerful testimony with a press conference in front of city hall and mobilized dozens of volunteers to join us in directly lobbying every member of the Council.

In response to the demands put forth by CAN and other local partners, the Council passed an amendment that narrowed the exclusions to services and set health and safety standards for housing. In Montgomery County, CAN also regularly convened advocates, met with county officials, and offered testimony at a hearing that resulted in \$1.7 million in new appropriations for immigrants.

National Actions

Though CAN's primary focus this year was on local policies, CAN staff and volunteers also mobilized to defend the program Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). In September, CAN's executive director was arrested for civil disobedience in front of the U.S. Senate along with 12 other activists. In December, CAN and our partners held a seven-hour vigil in front of Congress with over 100 of CAN's volunteers demanding citizenship for DACA recipients, Temporary Protected Status holders, and all undocumented people in the U.S.



CAN staff and volunteers also joined partners throughout the year to demand that the Biden Administration stop blocking asylum seekers and others from entering the US and seeking safety here. We signed on to letters, met with Congressional staff, and spoke in front of the White House for humane policies at our borders and beyond.

Organizing the Central American Diaspora

In addition, we have brought together residents of our region who have roots in Central America to strategize around changing the conditions in their home countries that are forcing so many people to flee. Through our membership in Faith in Action (the largest faith-based grassroots organizing network in the U.S.), we are able to connect those organizing with us with others in Central America and across the U.S. who share these goals.

This committee has been meeting regularly and planning our participation in a visit to El Salvador to learn from and strategize with partner organizations from across Central America. We have also hosted multiple panels about the root causes of migration and human rights situation in the region, including one in July with a former Guatemalan Human Rights Ombudsman.

Timeline and Response

2023

NOVEMBER

CAN testifies to Montgomery County Council

FEBRUARY

CAN press conference and lobby day

APRIL

DC Council passes amendment

Looking Toward the Future

CAN has accomplished all of this with a very small staff because of our dedicated network of volunteers and our close collaboration with faith communities and partners - but, the need is great, and we are determined to grow. If we can secure increased funding, we hope to expand our staff next year in order to train more leaders, offer more comprehensive education and treatment to address trauma, and build fierce and effective campaigns for just policies. In the face of injustice and discrimination, our faith calls us to build a welcoming community where all can thrive.



TOP, left to right: CAN lobby day at the DC Council. CAN and Faith in Action demand citizenship for all
BOTTOM: CAN joins partners to demand humane border policies

