

SHAPING OHIO'S **FUTURE**



**SPEAK UP,  
OHIO, WE'RE  
LISTENING**

**WE LISTENED**

LISTENING  
FOR **CHANGE**



WE WANT  
TO HEAR  
**FROM YOU**



February 2023

ACLU of Ohio

# An Analysis of the ACLU of Ohio's 2022 Listening Process

**We invited you to speak up. We told you we'd listen.  
We asked whose Ohio is it?  
You answered.**

**This is OUR Ohio.**

## **Opening**

Each day, public officials make decisions for Ohioans without being truly informed about our needs. At the ACLU of Ohio, we imagine a different way. We imagine an Ohio where we're connected to each other, speaking up together for the needs and wants of our community.

To make this vision a reality, the ACLU of Ohio embarked on a statewide listening campaign in June of 2022 called **Speak Up Ohio, We're Listening**. We sought to hear from you and your neighbors about your biggest hopes, dreams, and needs for the future of our state. Your voice matters. Together, through the thousands of conversations, we have built a movement of people committed to reclaiming Ohio and creating a community that benefits us all.

Throughout this report, you'll learn more about the thoughts and experiences of your fellow Ohioans. Moving forward, this information will be used to inform the ACLU of Ohio's priorities as we fight alongside you for the futures we deserve.

## **Our Methods and Net Impact**

We understood that this would be no easy task. Our audacious goal was met with the reality of a continued pandemic, a battle-worn supporter base, and a political system that has continued to disenfranchise and disempower more of our neighbors. And yet, we believed in the strength of Ohioans and their desire to Speak Up when someone asked the tough questions.

We learned that when we move together, in belief of the common good and desire for change, great things can happen. Check out our collective impact below:

Community  
Conversations: **63** with **315** people  
over engaged

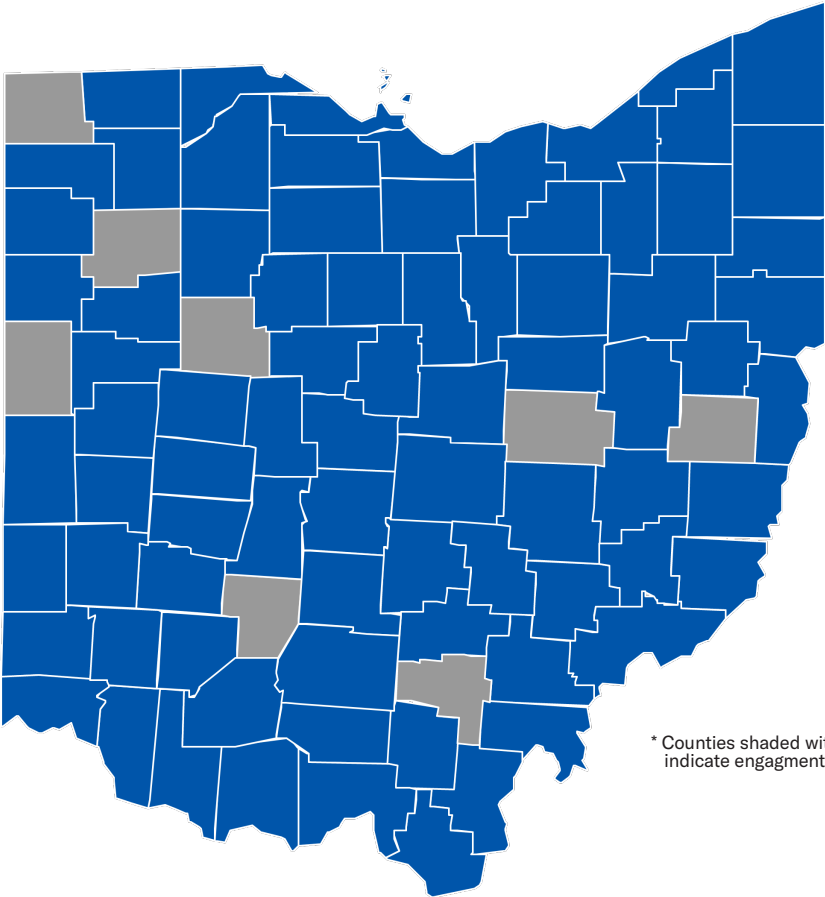
Survey  
Responses: **3,210**

Community  
Events Attended: **18** with **600** people  
over reached

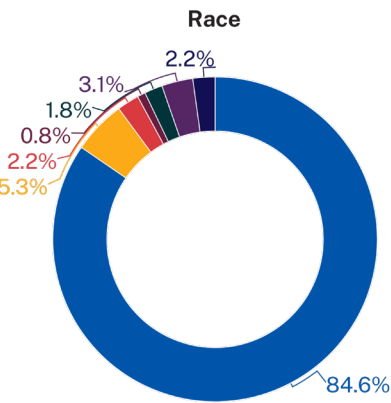
**Total Impact and  
Engagement:**

**4,215**  
participants

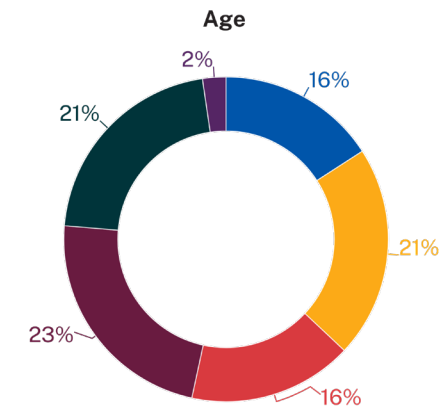
# Participant Information



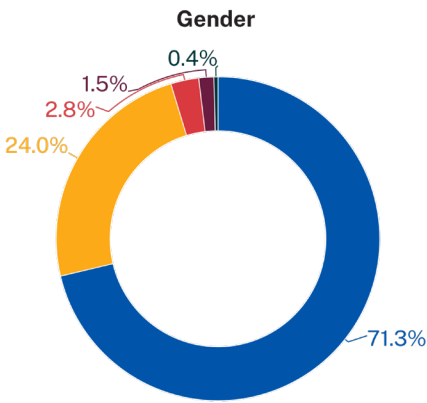
\* Counties shaded with blue indicate engagment



- White/Caucasian
- Black or African American
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Indigenous American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Prefer not to answer
- Other



- 18-30
- 31-43
- 44-56
- 57-69
- above 70
- Prefer not to answer



- Female
- Male
- Non Binary
- Transgender
- Other

## The Issues That Matter Most

Despite the many superficial divisions that political parties and political actors espouse upon us, we are more aligned than you may think. After our summer listening process ended, we did a deep analysis of the conversations and survey responses across our statewide tour and we were amazed that the same three issues continued to rise to the surface. No matter our race, zip code, economic status, gender, sexual orientation, level of education, or income - we the people are inherently aware of the systems that oppress us. It didn't take long to see the key issues most at stake: **voting rights, bodily autonomy, and criminal justice reform.** Included in our analysis are several anonymous quotes from respondents that help summarize the sentiments we heard about these issues across the state.

### Voting Rights

*"Gerrymandering has nullified opportunities for improvement in Ohio's government."*

*"I just think that the senators and representatives in the state of Ohio are working for a few individuals, not everybody."*

*I am extremely concerned that gerrymandering has reduced the power of our democracy."*

**Voting is a right, not a privilege.** Across Ohio, we've heard from folks who are disappointed and disillusioned with our political system because of extreme gerrymandering and voter suppression. Decades of gerrymandering and voter suppression have created a cohort of leaders unaccountable to the wants and needs of their voters, leaving many Ohioans discouraged. We hear you. We feel the frustration. We're fighting back.

The failures of the Ohio Redistricting Commission to do their duty and pass fair maps is unacceptable. Whether it's in the courthouse, at the voting booth, or in our communities, we're continuing to fight for the fair maps our state deserves. Protecting and expanding access to the ballot remains a top priority. In addition to fighting for fair maps, we will continue to expand voter education initiatives and reject all attempts to limit or restrict our voting access. Join us by ensuring that you're registered to vote and encouraging your community members to do the same.

## Bodily Autonomy

*“It should be my choice when it comes to my body.”*

*“We need a ballot initiative to legalize abortion in Ohio.”*

*“It’s dehumanizing.”*

Although the U.S. Supreme Court voted to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and end the federal right to abortion in June of 2022, the attacks on our bodily autonomy have gone on far longer. For decades, Ohioans have been fighting back against harmful legislation, such as abortion bans and transgender healthcare bans. This legislation does not reflect the will of the majority. During our listening campaign we heard consistently from folks who feared the harm and destruction anti-abortion extremists would inflict on our communities after SCOTUS ended the federal constitutional right to abortion, leaving the decision of reproductive healthcare access to the states. Across the country, citizens rejected abortion bans on the ballot during the 2022 election cycle. We know that Ohioans overwhelmingly support abortion access, and so we have come together with a coalition across the state to form **Ohioans for Reproductive Freedom**. Together, we will enshrine abortion access into our state constitution, and never again will abortion access be at the mercy of the changing courts. Our bodily autonomy is not up for debate, and we will continue fighting for it with everything we have.

The control over our bodies is not limited to our reproductive rights – it also includes our right to live freely as we are, loving who we want, and identifying and expressing the gender we identify with.

In December 2022, after a tremendous outpouring of opposition, LGBTQ+ rights advocates and allies were able to halt a bill that would restrict access to gender-affirming care for transgender and gender non-conforming youth. Also, we know that our state desperately needs to pass the Ohio Fairness Act which would extend non-discrimination policies to include sexual orientation and gender identity. We have a long way to go to achieving LGBTQ+ equality in Ohio. We will not stop fighting until this right to bodily autonomy is fully realized.





## Criminal Justice

*“Juvenile justice is handled with zero oversight. These are kids”*

*“In the Dayton area, I see the criminal legal system relying on incarceration, an unfair cash bail system, and racial bias. It does not feel like a fair system where people are treated equally.”*

*“I think the judicial system can work well if you are white and have money.”*

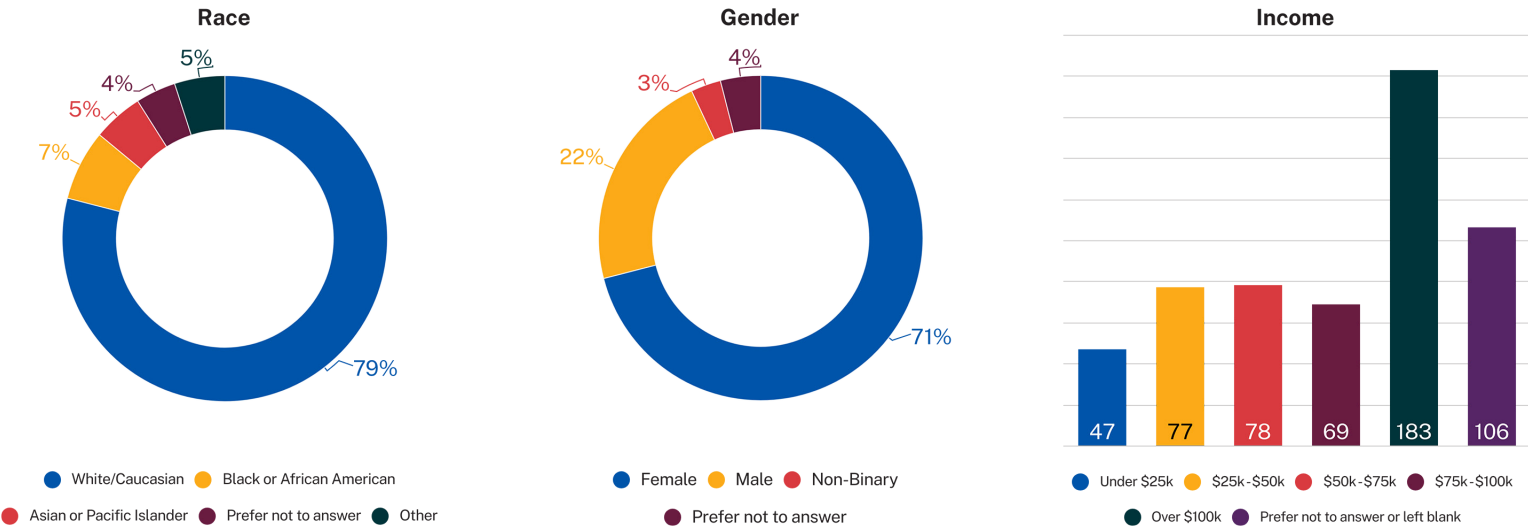
Every day, tens of thousands of Ohioans interact with the criminal legal system. Whether at school, in their neighborhoods, on the roads, in hospitals and healthcare situations, in the courthouse, or in jails and prisons, every interaction matters. The criminal legal system has long been a source of disparity and inequity. The very system that was created to protect and serve the people has become empowered to protect the state’s interest and serve the wealthy. While we understand that there are good actors in the legal system, those good actors are often overshadowed by the corruption and prejudices of the few. Overwhelmingly, respondents to the listening process lifted the need for sweeping reforms to policing, sentencing, pretrial incarceration, and the juvenile legal system.



Over the last several years, the ACLU of Ohio has worked to eliminate the two-tiered system of money bail on a statewide level. Though our efforts were hard fought, we did not win these much-needed changes in the last session of the Ohio General Assembly. While this is hope deferred, it is not hope demolished. We will continue to push for criminal legal system reforms on the local and statewide level, ensuring that everyday Ohioans are central to our movement for a fair and just legal system that truly protects and serves the many, not just the wealthy few.

# Regional Information

## Southwest Ohio (SWO)

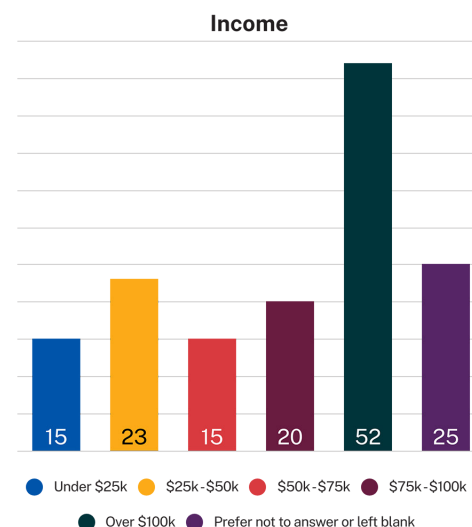
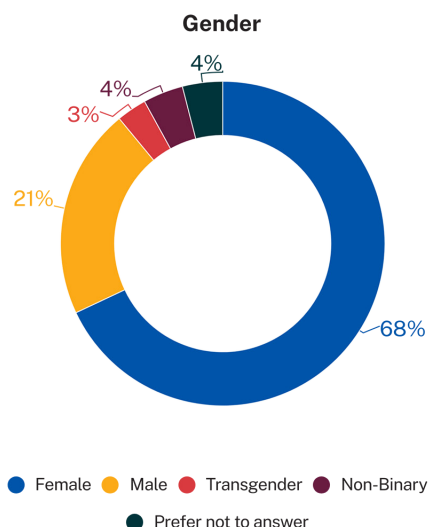
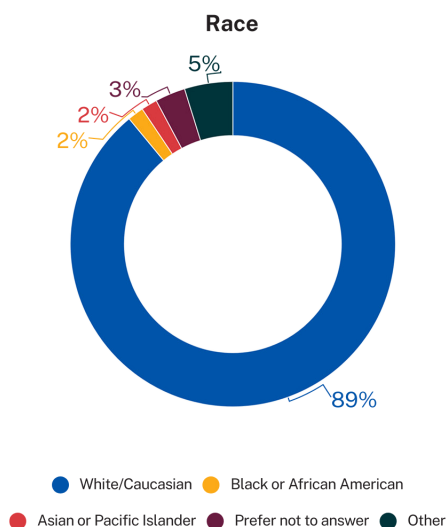


Southwest Ohio boasts a generous concentration of Fortune 500 companies and larger businesses. The region prides itself on business chambers and alliances, and yet, SWO continues to maintain high levels of economic inequity, multiple housing crises, and a myriad of other policy-driven inequities. In Cincinnati, 25% of residents live in poverty. In Montgomery County, close to 16% live in poverty. We know poverty is driven by policy, and we know policy is driven by elected officials who make the rules.

Close to **600 people** responded to our survey, over 25 community conversations were held, and an equal amount of community events were attended in the region. In Cincinnati, our Listening Process respondents overwhelmingly identified **racism and housing** as the key issues facing the city, in Dayton, **racism and economic inequity** were highlighted. Throughout the region, as with the state, most respondents felt that our elections were deeply impacted by **Gerrymandering** and they struggled to trust not only the results but also those running the process. **Alternatives to policing**, Criminal Legal System reforms, as well as finding ways to mitigate racism in the system were all repeated in comments and shown in the survey. We believe that SWO is poised to engage in policies that affirm housing as a human right, pushes to restore election integrity, and a statewide move to protect bodily autonomy within the next two years.

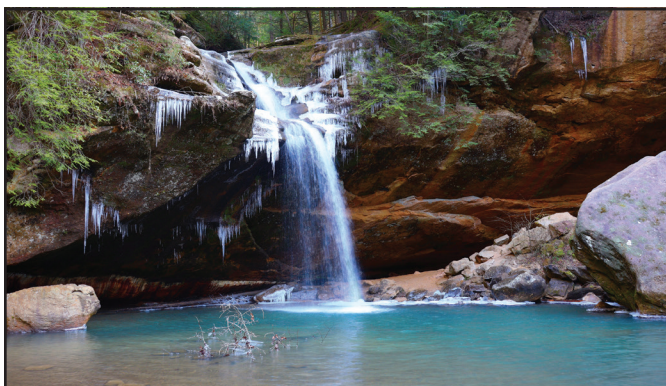


## Southeast Ohio (SEO)



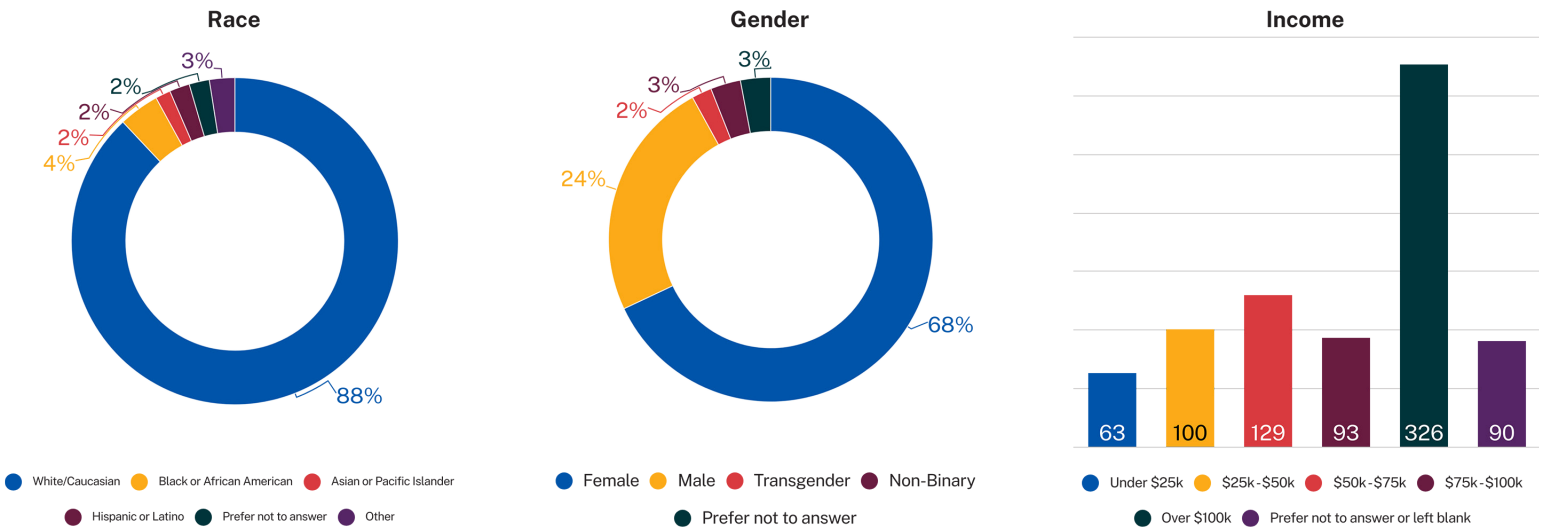
Southeast Ohio is one of our newest areas for grassroots organizing. During the 2020 Election, we learned just how much distrust there was, and still is, in the election process and those who administer it. With the “Big Lie” being most pervasive in outlier counties, we found that lower engagement from organizations that work on voter education and civic participation often led to higher distrust. Often, Southeast Ohio is left out, overlooked, and under-engaged. The people of Southeast Ohio are an integral part of our Ohio, and we’re focused on building engagement and trust one relationship at a time.

Over the course of our Listening Process, we engaged close to **130 people via survey and 60 more through our community events and canvasses**. Many of the respondents identified **housing access** as the top need for their communities. **Criminal convictions** and prior or current **drug use**, among other causes, bar residents from being able to find safe, affordable housing. Another issue that was highlighted is the need for **equitable mental, physical, and addiction services health care**. SEO is ground zero for the addiction crisis, which means the impact of addiction directly affects economic outcomes, access to quality education, housing, and healthcare. We’re committed to working alongside SEO residents to build local and statewide power. It’s time “our Ohio” truly means ALL Ohioans.





Central Ohio (CO)

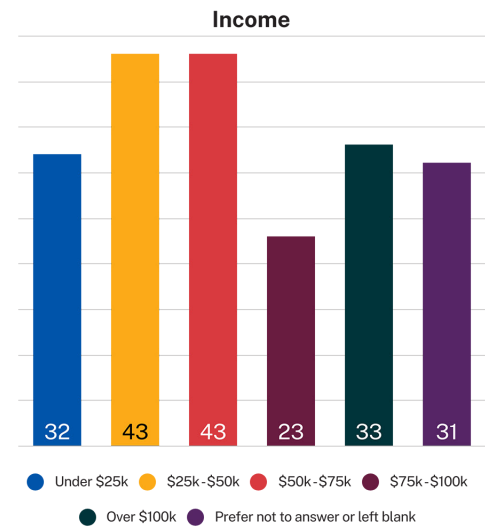
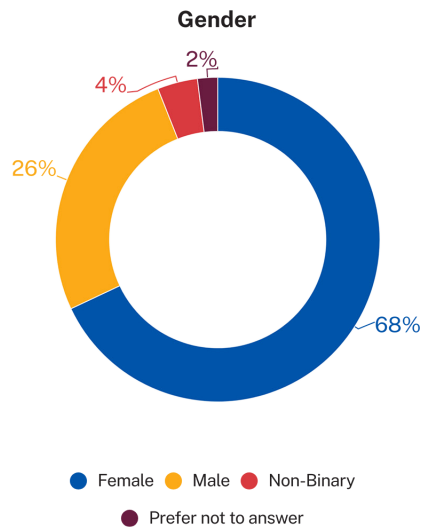
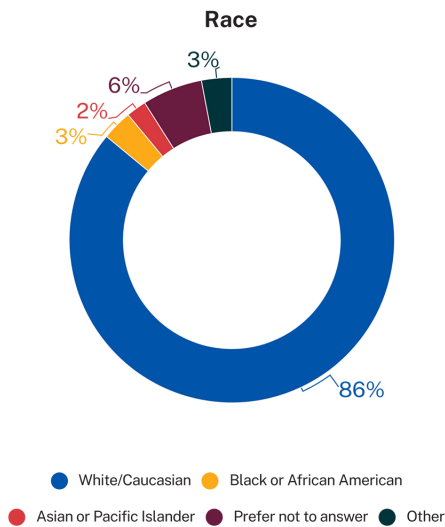


The last 4 years have been a whirlwind in Central Ohio. The home of the state capital building, the place where civil uprisings and police encounters have turned deadly, and the only region in Ohio that has maintained, or increased, its population size. With this growth comes both promise and problems. Over the course of our Listening Process, we engaged **719 residents** through our survey and hundreds more through community events and canvasses. While Central Ohio is aligned with the statewide results in prioritizing pushing for fair elections and bodily autonomy, there were a few issues that stood out.

**Racism** continued to show up through every response. In 2020, the city of Columbus declared racism a public health crisis, yet CO residents have yet to see it taken seriously. If anything, racism continues to permeate every other issue. Central Ohio responded overwhelmingly that there was a need to reform the criminal legal system citing that citizens **did not feel safe in the presence of police** and when interacting with the legal system. One other outlier for Central Ohio was what we’ve termed as **religious persecution**, both for those who do not identify as Christian and at the hands of those who profess Christian values and seek to rule with those values.



## Northwest Ohio (NWO)

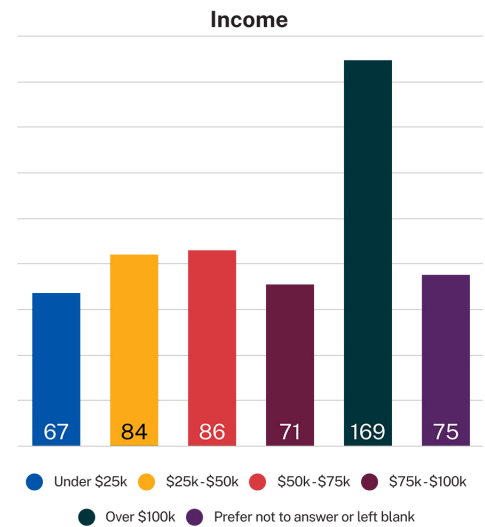
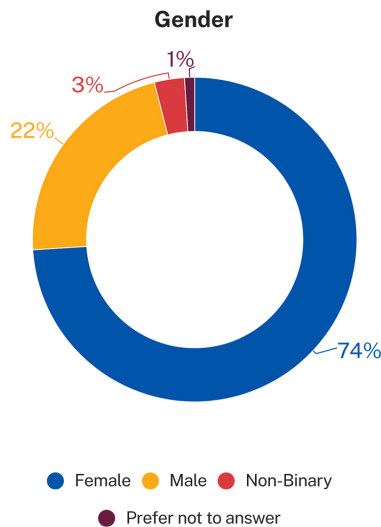
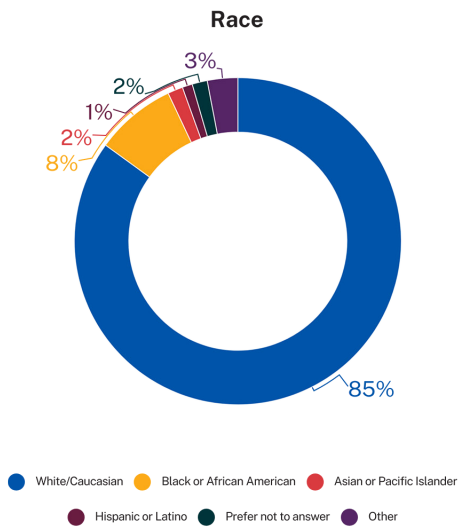


Northwest Ohio is another region that the ACLU has worked to build new relationships in. Through our organizing work, we mobilized community leaders and allies to engage with their elected officials and their neighborhoods to build local power. During the course of the listening process, over **200 people** responded with their hopes and needs for their region. Again, the results aligned with statewide focuses on bodily autonomy, criminal legal system reforms, and the need to fix the gerrymandered voting process in Ohio. However, there were a few key trends that jumped out.

**Racism** continues to underpin all other issues that respondents lifted, whether housing, criminal legal reform, education, or other responses, racism threaded them all. NWO residents also felt strongly that **election integrity** needs to be restored and that voter suppression is changing the outcomes of elections. One way to combat this is through voter education and working to rebuild an election process that truly represents the will of the people. Respondents identified that **housing access** continues to be a key issue in the region. Rundown and vacant properties pose a serious issue that some city governments have committed to fixing but it is clear that residents feel more needs to be done.



## Northeast Ohio (NEO)



Northeast Ohio has long been a place where the ACLU of Ohio has engaged. We've worked to build relationships with local schools, businesses, legislators, and community members. These relationships showed up during our listening process. Over **550 people** responded to the survey and hundreds more engaged through listening conversations and community events. Northeastern Ohioans feel strongly about **bodily autonomy and election integrity**. These two issue areas saw the most engagement and response.

Widening the lens, we see that the majority of respondents also felt deeply that **youth justice** must take center stage. With numerous deaths at the Cuyahoga County Juvenile Detention Center, it is easy to understand why. Other major themes in responses were **housing access** and **racism**. Many respondents felt that there were not enough affordable, safe housing options in the region, and that racism is a determinant in many of the disparate outcomes in the education system, maternal outcomes, and criminal legal system.



## Closing

These five geographic regions of Ohio have historically been spoken of as fundamentally different. Though the population demographics and income ranges are somewhat distinct, the needs of those who participated in our listening process are overwhelmingly similar. **Addressing the effects of systemic racism, working to restore abortion rights and bodily autonomy, fighting for fair maps and voting rights, and working to reform the criminal legal system** were the most clear and consistent trends across all five regions. These steel threads lend themselves to our belief that the bulk of our decision-makers are disconnected from the needs of Ohioans and it is going to take all of us to ensure we put our needs front and center. After all, this is *our Ohio*.

In the end, we're left with one ringing question- who's Ohio is this anyways? We believe in an Ohio where our neighbors, friends, and loved ones can live out their dreams free from oppression. We believe that Ohioans want the same things; we want to know that we are safe in our homes and communities, we want to know that we have the right to our bodies and our lives, we want to know that the people's process of governing is protected and honored at every level. These wants and desires are not lived out and supported by the majority of those who seek power over us.

Our response to this question is simple — This is our Ohio. The will of the people will govern again. Through continuing to build public power and contending for the right to claim our state back from the hands of those who seek to disempower us, we will create the Ohio that thousands of our neighbors told us they want. It is going to take all of us. It is going to take you. Join us.



Elizabeth Chasteen Day  
Organizing Director

