

Action St. Louis Power Project

Legislative Recap Report



2023

**Action has its
first Lobby Day.**



ABOUT ACTION


WHO WE ARE


Action St. Louis is a grassroots racial justice organization that seeks to build political power for Black communities in the St. Louis region. Action St. Louis builds campaigns that leverage organizing, communications, advocacy and direct action to mitigate harm against our community while fighting for long-term transformation.


OUR VISION


Action St. Louis envisions a region where Black people are empowered to take bold action towards transforming our own communities, making St. Louis a place where every Black life is valued and affirmed. Through organizing, we envision building communities that are free from oppressive institutions and all forms of violence.


OUR CORE VALUES


 **Abolition:** In order to truly transform our communities and create a society where ALL Black people are able to thrive, we must divest and then abolish systems of oppression.

 **Black Feminist Lens:** Our organizing work must address the multifaceted ways Black people are continually oppressed - including race, class, gender, sexuality and more. We subscribe to Black Feminism as a political ideology and it shapes our organizing work as we build power in our region.

 **Base-Building:** The power of this organization is a reflection of building strong campaigns that build strong leaders and a base of active community members.

 **Self Determination:** The right to self-determination is essentially the right of a people to determine its own vision and govern themselves in service of that vision.

 **Leadership Development:** Action St. Louis believes deeply in the Ella Baker approach to organizing. Growing the capacity of our members is key to sustaining the organization and the movement.

 **Inclusivity:** Action is building a political home for all Black people including and especially, women, trans and gender non-conforming Black folks, formerly incarcerated Black folks, Black immigrants and differently-abled Black folks.

2023 Legislative Session By the Numbers



01

2,268 bills filed.

02

43 Bills Passed both House and Senate.

03

Successfully defended Local Control.

04

Defeated regressive Initiative Petition Legislation.

05

Established 5 legislative champion relationships at the capitol.

06

Action held its first-ever legislative advocacy day.

Lowest number of bills passed by a General Assembly in 20 years.

Missouri Legislature at a Glance

- Made up of 2 chambers:
 - House of Representatives - 163 members limited to four two-year terms.
 - Senate - 34 members limited to two four-year terms.
- Responsible for creating laws that govern the state of Missouri.
- 42 State Representatives and Senators represent St. Louis.
- There are a total of 25 Black elected officials and 57 women in the House and Senate.
- There are 111 Republicans to 51 Democrats and 1 vacancy in the house.
- There are 24 Republicans to 10 Democrats in the Senate.

How a Bill Becomes a Law in Missouri



PRE-FILING

Starting December 1, elected officials from both the House and the Senate begin formally proposing new bills they hope to become laws.

SESSION STARTS

Session begins on the first Wednesday in January. Each bill receives a number and is assigned to a committee. The committee's job is to hear the details of the proposed legislation and get testimony from experts and community members that will be impacted by the bill.

COMMITTEES

If the committee votes to advance the bill it is sent to the floor of one of the two legislative chambers to be voted on. The bill then goes through the process again in the other legislative chamber.

FLOOR VOTE

If the bill passes both houses, it is sent to the governor. The governor either signs it and it becomes a law or they veto it. If the governor vetoes a bill, the state legislature has the ability to override a veto with another vote.

FINAL PASSAGE

If the bill would make changes to the state constitution it must be voted on by the people before it can become a law. Those Amendments are placed on the ballot in either August or November. Any bill that is not on the governor's desk when the legislative session ends must be resubmitted the next year.

Action's 2023 Legislative Priorities

In Action St. Louis Power Project's second year building power at the state level, we focused our time in Jefferson City on creating a footprint in the capitol and pushing for a legislative agenda that prioritized the rights of Black communities in St. Louis.

01

Defending democracy through the defeat of bills to end local control of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department and gut the initiative petition process.

02

Establishing relationships with state legislative champions.

03

Supporting our partners in the fight against anti-trans legislation and for Black maternal health legislation.

04

Hosting our first state legislative Lobby Day.

As Black voting power has increased, we have been instrumental in securing wins in the local legislature, voting to expand Medicaid, and legalizing recreational marijuana. In response, the Republican majority state government set its sights on stripping our communities of our power by attempting to cease control of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department and weaken the citizen-led initiative petition process to make it harder for voters to enact progressive legislation that our state government refuses to create.

Unfortunately, the Missouri general assembly achieved a new low; for the first time in two decades, they passed only 43 bills out of both houses. From months-long disagreements over the budget to attempts to steal power from voters and local governments, our Republican run state government couldn't move past their own egos and self-interest to pass legislation. They did, however, manage to pass legislation that furthered attacks on bodily autonomy and negatively impact LGBTQIA+ rights in our state, repeal the residency requirement that applied to St. Louis City Police officers, and approved the FY24 State Budget that includes \$2.8 Billion dollar allocation for the expansion of Highway 70.

Local Control: Under Attack!

Police Control in Missouri?

- State control of the police has been a part of Missouri History since the civil war. Prior to 2012, both the cities of Kansas City and Saint Louis were run by a state controlled Board of Commissioners. As of today, Kansas City is the only city in the state with a state controlled commission.
- In 2012, the City of St. Louis voted in favor of Proposition A, gaining local control of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department.
- Since the passage of Proposition A, city residents have been able to play a direct role concerning public safety in the city; defunding the police department of \$4 million dollars, dissolving over 100 vacant positions, and creating the Office of Violence Prevention.

During the 2023 session, the city of St. Louis saw an attempt by Republicans in Jefferson City to take over public safety. Fueled by racism, a clear lack of input by the residents of St. Louis, and the police union conservative leaders shaped a narrative of rampant crime and ineffective leadership as the basis for the argument to seize control of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department. Multiple bills were introduced by Republican representatives that were not residents of the city with the goal of taking away St. Louisans ability to control our own police department despite the fact that voters in St. Louis and across the state made it clear with the passage of Proposition A in 2012 that the city should have control of our own police

department. Here are the details of some of the bills introduced:

HB 702:

- With an effective date of August 28, 2023, the city of St. Louis would relinquish all control of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department and the State would retake control.
- Establishes a Board of Commissioners who would oversee the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department. The governor, under advisement of the senate, would select four commissioners that would serve on the board with the Mayor of St. Louis.
- Establish that the department hires and retains a minimum of 1,313 patrol officers.

- A pay raise of seven thousand dollars for all police officers by July 1, 2024.
- Prohibit local elected officials from creating any legislation that would seek to challenge or overrule the Board of Commissioners.

HB 301:

Original bill language included:

- The ability of the governor to appoint a special prosecutor for a period of up to 5 years if the rate of homicides exceeds 35 cases per every 100,000 and after the review of "certain" crime statistics, the governor determines there is a threat to public health and safety.
- Subject to the approval of a state plan amendment by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services, if a formerly incarcerated individual does not have health insurance within six months of release, they shall be eligible to receive MO Healthnet benefits.
- Repeals mandatory minimum sentences in certain instances.

In the final days, a senate substitute was offered that also included language that was identical to HB 702. Fortunately, with assistance from our legislative champions in the Senate, both bills died on the Senate floor.

#HANDSOFFSTL

Action St. Louis Power Project combined our grassroots organizing and the lessons from our first year of state legislative work to launch a statewide campaign - #HandsOffSTL. This successful campaign focused on mobilizing citizens of St. Louis and across the state to email, call, and meet their legislators in person to advocate against all attempts to take control of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department away from the city.

As part of the campaign, Action St. Louis Power Project hosted our first lobby day in Jefferson City. The work we did to organize support in St. Louis, Kansas City, and Columbia led to support from all St. Louis area Democrats in the Senate standing up against the bill to take control of SLMPD.

#HANDSOFFSTL campaign had 4 goals:

- Stop the State Legislature from assuming control of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department.
- Stop the State Legislature from planting a state-appointed pro-capital punishment prosecutor in the St. Louis City Circuit Attorney's Office.
- Educate our base on Local Control and how it influences citizens' ability to achieve their wins.
- Sponsor a Legislative Advocacy Day for citizens to speak to and request the support of elected officials in the fight against legislative overreach by our state legislators.

Action St. Louis Power Project's primary focus is to ensure Black voters in the City of St. Louis have a voice at the table in the state capitol. For many in our community, all aspects of state politics are inaccessible to them - whether it's finding the time to travel to Jefferson City, lack of opportunities to speak directly to their elected officials, or bill language purposely written to be confusing and hard to understand, - these barriers keep our community from engaging.

To ensure a victory, we relied heavily upon political education to make sure community members understood why having local control of our police department matters. We partnered with the Defund.Re-Envision.Transform. campaign to host a series of teach-ins to break down the legislation that the conservative legislators were filing at the state level, explain how local control of our police department contributed to recent victories to defund the police, and create accountability in St. Louis.

On Wednesday, March 29, Action St. Louis Power Project hosted our first Legislative Lobby Day. 46 members of the community traveled to Jefferson City to deliver their #HandsOffSTL demands to every state representative and state senator. Members of the community also met one-on-one with St. Louis area State Senators Senator Karla May (D-04), Senator Tracy McCreery(D-24), and Senator Angela Moseley (D-13) who showed their support to the attendees and made a verbal commitment to filibuster any bill to strip local control of SLMPD away from the people of St. Louis City.

After our meetings with elected officials, Action St. Louis Power Project and our partners held a press conference on the south steps of the capitol where our message rang out for all of Jefferson City to hear: HANDS OFF... STL! During this press conference, Senator Karla May, Representative Rasheen Aldridge of the 78th District, Ronnie Amiyon of Freedom Community Center, and abolitionist and community member Ms. Toni Taylor spoke of the dire need for local control and what state control of the SLMPD would mean for residents of St. Louis City.

Another Session, Another Successful Stand for Direct Democracy

What is a Ballot Initiative?

- A Ballot Initiative allows voters to participate in direct democracy by proposing laws or constitutional amendments that can be placed on an election-day ballot to be voted upon.
- The process begins by submitting a petition to the secretary of state's office.
- Once approved by the Secretary of State, you begin signature gathering. In Missouri, the amount of signatures required is 5% of legal voters in 6 out of the 8 congressional districts for all statutory changes. For constitutional changes, the amount of signatures required is 8% of legal voters in 6 out of the 8 congressional districts.
- Once the required signatures are gathered, the signatures are submitted to the SOS for verification and approval. After signatures are approved, the petition is placed on the ballot for the upcoming election cycle.

Republican lawmakers at the capitol staged yet another attack on the initiative petition process during the 2023 legislative session. Similar to last year, legislators submitted 28 bills that sought to limit the ability of Missourians to participate in direct democracy.

One bill, HJR 43, advanced through both houses but ultimately came up short. HJR 43 was a summation of all 28 initiative petition bills that were submitted during the session.

HJR 43:

- Increase the percentage of voters needed to pass a ballot initiative from a simple majority (50% +1) to 57%.
- Increases the percentage of the general assembly needed to amend or repeal a measure to 57%.
- Add language that says legal voters must be United States citizens that are registered in the state and properly registered to vote in the state of Missouri. (Which is already the law in Missouri)
- Ensure accessible voting for disabled voters. (Fiscal Note shows that \$0 was appropriated to ensure this is made possible)

The ballot summary for HJR 43 included language that was intentionally confusing to entice voters to approve xenophobic and restricting legislation. Fortunately, this bill died in the final hours and Missourians survived another legislative session with the current initiative petition process intact.

Anti-Trans Legislation in Missouri

Last session, we saw multiple pieces of legislation filed that directly attacked the identity of Transgendered people. Much of the language sought to limit gender-affirming care and only allow student-athletes to participate in sports according to the gender they were assigned at birth. Advocates managed to fight back against this transphobic legislation in 2022, but this year conservative lawmakers were successful. Two pieces of legislation passed both houses and were signed by the Governor on June 7th.

SB 49:

- Ban any minor to receive gender transition surgery beginning August 28, 2023.
- Ban any minor from receiving hormone or puberty-blocking medication for gender transition starting August 28, 2023. Minors who've begun gender transitioning medication prior to August 28, 2023, can still receive treatment. Ban lasts at least until August 28, 2027.
- Healthcare providers face the penalty of having their license revoked if they go against these measures.
- MO HealthNet will not cover gender-affirming surgeries, hormones, or puberty blockers.
- Health care services in prison shall not include gender transition surgeries.

SB 39:

- Prohibit private schools, public school districts, public charter schools, or postsecondary public or private institutions from allowing any student to compete in an athletic competition unless they participate as the gender assigned to them at birth.
- A "female" student is only allowed to participate in a competition designed for "male" students if there isn't a corresponding competition for "female" students available.
- If a public or private institution from elementary to postsecondary education violates the act, it will cease to receive any state aid or other revenues from the state.
- Creates a means for a parent or guardian or student over the age of eighteen to file an injunction if they are deprived of an opportunity to compete due to an institution violating the act.

This legislation is only the latest blow to bodily autonomy in Missouri state. Conservative legislators rejoiced last year when the supreme court opinion upended Roe v. Wade, thus activating a trigger law in Missouri that banned abortions state-wide. Now, those same members dealt a crucial blow to the transgender community in our state. This legislation also has an unintended consequence for women in sports across the state as well. We have seen many young women across the country break the gender lines in sports competitions. From Mamie Johnson, the first black woman to play in the Negro Baseball Leagues, to Mone Davis dominating the Little League World Series in 2014, women have proven to have success in sports across gendered lines. This legislation has the potential to set that progress back as well.

Black Maternal Health

In 2022, Action St. Louis was invited to join a coalition of black healthcare professionals, doulas, elected officials, and doctors to develop the “Missouri Momnibus”. Following the national footsteps in the Black maternal health fight, this coalition’s main goal is to advocate and develop policies at the state level that will “save the lives of Black pregnant and birthing people”. Although the legislation that we championed this session did not survive the session, as a coalition we were able to foster relationships and gather many allies in Jefferson City and we are confident that we can make more progress for Black birthing people in the upcoming year. The legislation that Momnibus supported was HB 900 and its companion HB 1148. Our legislative champion, Representative Jamie Johnson of Platte County, sponsored both bills and managed to get them out of the House committee.

HB 900 and HB 1148 sought to:

- Require health carriers or health benefit plans that offer or issue health benefit plans on or after January 1, 2024, and that provide coverage for maternity services to also provide coverage for healthcare services provided by a midwife.
- Define the term “Doula” and allow for health insurance reimbursement for Doula Services, once the Department of Health and Human Services review and approves a Doula registration.
- Establish the process by which the Department of Health and Human Services will develop and maintain a statewide Doula registry.

What's Next?



The violent, regressive attacks on our democracy, local control, and bodily autonomy during the 2023 Legislative session are a direct response to the growing movement of communities like ours building power at the local level and at the polls. We can expect to see all of the failed attacks by conservative leaders and more introduced in 2024. Our job is to continue fighting for the policies our community deserves locally and at the ballot box.

It will take all of us working together to continue protecting our local communities. Join us by:

1. Join us for Signature Collection! We are collecting signatures to place a \$15 dollar minimum wage and paid time off for all workers on the ballot in 2024 and we need your help. Sign up to be a volunteer signature gatherer throughout the summer and fall.
2. Join one of our campaigns in the St. Louis region as we fight for Tenant's rights, reenvisioning public safety, and strengthening the voting and governing power of Black communities.
3. Sign up for the Action St. Louis Power Project newsletter to learn more about how proposed legislation will impact our community. [link for online, QRcode for print?]
4. Become a \$5 a month sustaining donor of Action St. Louis Power Project to help us continue our work.