

MARCH 2023

2022: THE YEAR OF VICTORY!

People's Action Overdose Crisis Cohort

**PEOPLE'S
ACTION!**

**NO MORE
DRUG
WAR!**

WHO WE ARE

The Overdose Crisis Cohort brings together **Hoosier Action** (Indiana), **Maine People's Alliance**, **New Jersey Organizing Project**, **Progressive Maryland**, **Rights and Democracy NH & VT**, **River Valley Organizing/UnHarming Ohio**, **Showing Up for Racial Justice - Ohio/Nelsonville Voices**, **VOCAL-KY**, and **VOCAL-NY**.

We ground our work in an understanding that the War On Drugs was created to divide us with fear, based on the color of our skin and how much money we make. This false narrative continues to divide us, and makes it harder to overcome the shared challenges of the overdose crisis for urban, rural and working-class communities.

Together, we unite across race, place and experience. We fight to shift responses to the overdose crisis from those that stigmatize and criminalize people who use drugs to ones that center compassion and open up space for public health and harm reduction solutions at the local, state, and federal levels.

We know we are stronger together. We believe in strong, healthy communities, where everyone - no matter what you look like, who you are or where you're from - has what they need to stay alive and thrive. This is the vision we are fighting for.





2022: THE YEAR OF VICTORY!

On December 29, 2022, President Biden signed the Mainstreaming Addiction Treatment Act (MAT Act) into law through the Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023. This is a tremendous victory for the People's Action Overdose Crisis Cohort and the thousands of our member leaders across the country who hosted meetings, made phone calls and organized their neighbors to save lives. The MAT Act was our first federal-level victory on our path to end the drug war and its collateral consequences. By building and harnessing people power through grassroots organizing, we moved key elected officials, built bipartisan support, amplified the voices of people directly affected, and pushed the MAT Act over the finish line to victory.

The MAT Act brings us one step closer to ending the overdose crisis that is ravaging our communities. Through this victory, we showed that organizing, combined with effective advocacy, works; it will inspire people impacted by overdose and the war on drugs as we now turn to state and local level policy campaigns and build deeper power to win on our issues at the federal level in the future.

At the end of 2020, we titled our first cohort annual report "the year of imagining a world with no overdose deaths." We spent 2020 deepening relationships, creating a vision for a world we want to fight for and aligning our values and goals. We also began to take action and act to realize that vision.

We built this victory over the past two years through leadership development, building across lines of difference, digging into discomfort, deep relationship building, and aligning with uncommon partners through coalition. In 2021 and throughout 2022, we built power, developed leaders, and moved decision makers to deliver concrete wins for our people that mean real change in real people's lives. And we won!

WHAT WE DID TO MAKE THIS VICTORY HAPPEN

Brought More People Into the Fight

Our first large event of the year was the Harm Reduction Works: Compassion in Action Livestream. We save lives when we focus on harm reduction, increase access to compassionate treatments, and enact policies grounded in evidence-based and proven solutions in public health. This livestream educated more people on the fundamentals of harm reduction and shared important legislation and other public health initiatives currently underway.

We cohosted the livestream with Center for Popular Democracy Action, and twenty-one additional organizations signed on as supporting organizations for

the event. Six member leaders from our cohort shared their personal experiences and expertise as it relates to harm reduction and our policy priorities. Additionally we were joined by U.S. Reps. Paul Tonko, D-N.Y., and Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y., and Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-M.A., who all reiterated their commitment to fight for our communities in Congress.

With 36,000 real-time viewers and 130 individuals taking action that night, this livestream was a great success in building momentum towards solutions. Bottom line: #HarmReductionWorks! In the overdose crisis, saving lives is all that matters.



X-WAIVER

WHAT IS THE MAT ACT?

The Mainstreaming Addiction Treatment Act (MAT Act) removes bureaucratic barriers (called the x-waiver) that have blocked healthcare providers from being able to prescribe buprenorphine, a life-saving treatment for people facing opioid addiction and seeking treatment. Before the MAT Act passed, only 130,000 healthcare providers across the country could prescribe the life-saving medication, buprenorphine. Upon passage, that number immediately jumped to 1.8 million healthcare practitioners meaning significantly more access across the country.

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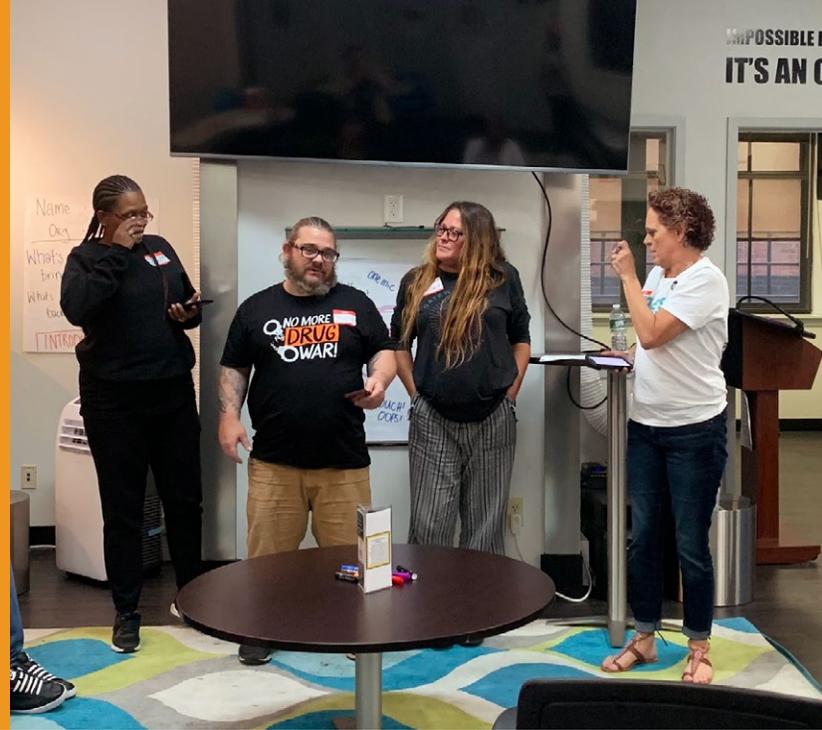
**Having the MAT Act means
that people who seek and
want treatment can now be
able to get it without
having so many things
stand in the way.**

SHANTAE OWENS

New York City, NY

MEMBER ORGANIZATION HIGHLIGHT

Along with allies across Ohio, **River Valley Organizing & Nelsonville Voices** brought home a huge victory through the passage of S.B. 288. This bill not only made fentanyl test strips legal across the state, it amends Ohio's Good Samaritan law so that people who are helping someone who has overdosed have protections from prosecution for paraphernalia including people on parole and probation. This was a six year fight that took strong organizing and base building to bring the victory home.



Developed Leaders

In late April, nearly 30 staff and member leaders of the Overdose Crisis Cohort came together for our first in-person event since 2019 for a Strategy Summit. This Strategy Summit was a gathering of core staff and member leaders across all campaign areas and movement politics at People's Action. The Overdose Crisis cohort dug into building deep relationships across our organizations, training member leaders on core concepts of power building, and visioning for a better future. The time together served to deepen cross-cohort connections as we built across race, place, and experience with drugs and overdose. It also served as a launching point to kick off regular membership meetings hosted by the cohort.

At the end of September, twenty staff and member-leaders from the Ohio River Valley region joined together for a Regional Red State Convening.

Changed the Narrative

People's Action released a new [narrative video](#) in recognition of International Overdose Awareness Day. At the same time, organizations from our cohort across the country hosted various public events, teach-ins, concerts, and memorials in recognition of the day. We also helped organize a national sign-on letter with 166 organizations asking Sens. Schumer (D-N.Y.), McConnell (R-K.Y.), Murray (D-W.A), and Burr (R-N.C) to attach the MAT Act to the September continuing resolution.

We brought together staff and member leaders from Hoosier Action Resource Center, VOCAL-KY, River Valley Organizing, and Nelsonville Voices. The convening was all about investing in organizations that are working to build the bigger “we,” meeting people where they’re at, and investing in deep base building. We created a space for learning and sharing best practices across the cohort on the issues of harm reduction and drug policy. We provided training to organizers and member leaders on strategic campaigning while also pulling from knowledge of those in the room around best practices for organizing in small towns, red states, and directly impacted individuals. The planning team created a space where folks facing the same challenges and opportunities could learn from each other and deepen our work in these integral places to win battles on our way to end overdose and the drug war.

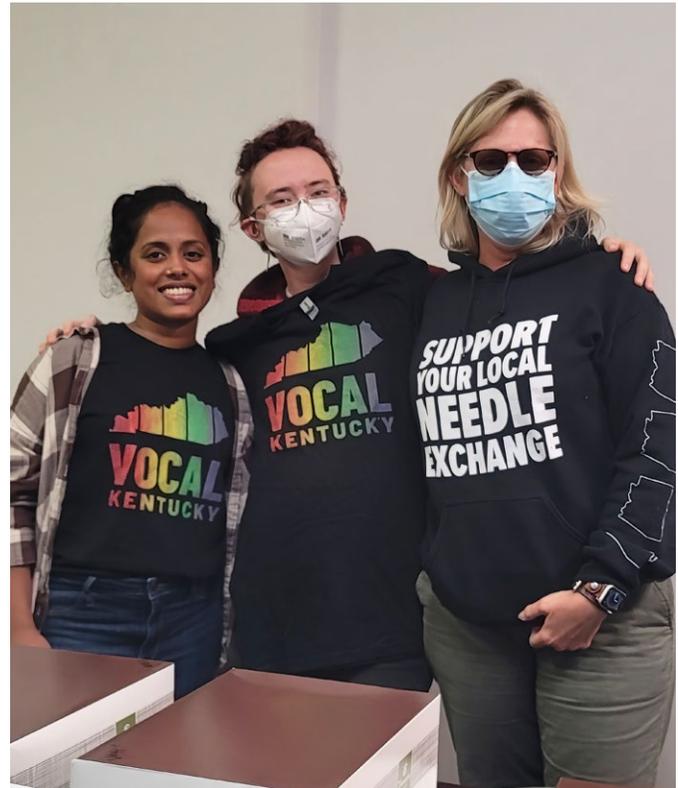
We released new polling results showing strong bipartisan support for harm reduction. Our release process included a press call featuring member leaders from Rights & Democracy NH, VOCAL-NY, and River Valley Organizing as well as People's Action Institute and Data for Progress. The polling findings show significant support for harm reduction tools including naloxone, MAT, overdose prevention centers, and decriminalization. [Full polling findings here.](#)

Toplines from the polling:

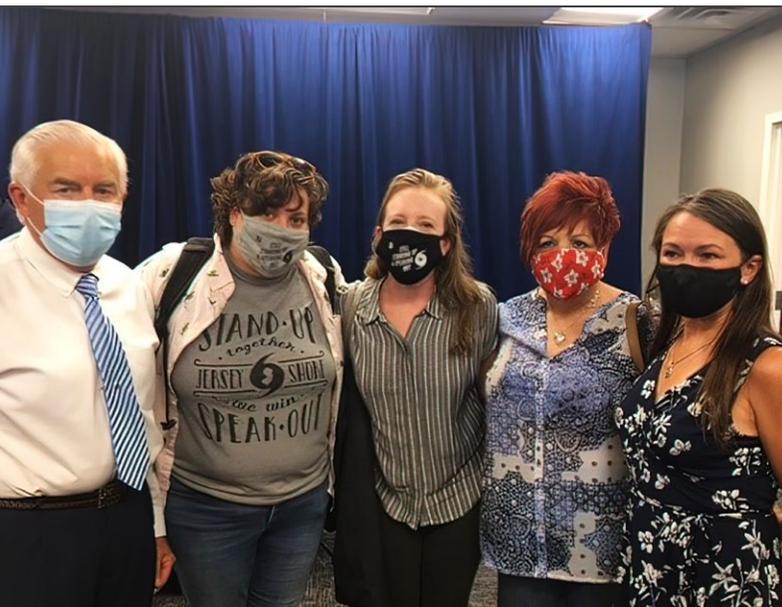
- Nearly half of all voters have personal experience with addiction or overdose.
- By a 64-point margin, voters support expanding the use of medication-assisted treatments for substance use and addiction treatment. Support includes independents by a 62-point margin and Republicans by a 52-point margin.
- There is bipartisan support for ALL of the harm reduction tools included in the poll: naloxone, MAT, overdose prevention centers, and decriminalization of small amounts of drugs.

Throughout the year, a number of op-eds authored by our members, staff, and leaders were published. We told our own story in the media, lifting up the voices of people who are affected by overdoses in their own lives and the voices of people fighting to end this scourge in their communities.

- [VOCAL-NY Op-ed in the Hill](#) (February 17, 2022)
- River Valley Organizing [Good Sam OpEd](#) (April 25, 2022)
- Hometown Action [Op-ed on MAT Act](#) came out on International Overdose Awareness Day (August 31, 2022)
- Ellen Glover's [Op-ed got published in papers nationwide](#) (November 23, 2022)



Jasmine from VOCAL-NY, Tracey from Hoosier Action, and Tinselyn from We Make the Future joined our campaign director, Ellen Glover, for the Grantmakers in Health Conference in Miami, FL. Together they presented on the powerful narrative research and implementation work the cohort has been engaged in since 2019. The presentation highlighted the work of our cohort to use intentional narrative work to build across race and place.



MEMBER ORGANIZATION HIGHLIGHT

New Jersey Organizing Project has been bringing together New Jerseyans to engage around the \$641 million of opioid settlement funds coming into the state. NJOP was asked to participate in a roundtable with Governor Murphy and Attorney General Platkin regarding the best use for the funds in early 2022. Since then, they have been educating community members about the potential investment that can come through the funds and working to ensure that voices of people with lived experience are involved in the decision making process.

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As someone with family members who have struggled with addiction, I know first hand how much the MAT Act can change lives. Organizing made this change possible.

AMANDA DECKER

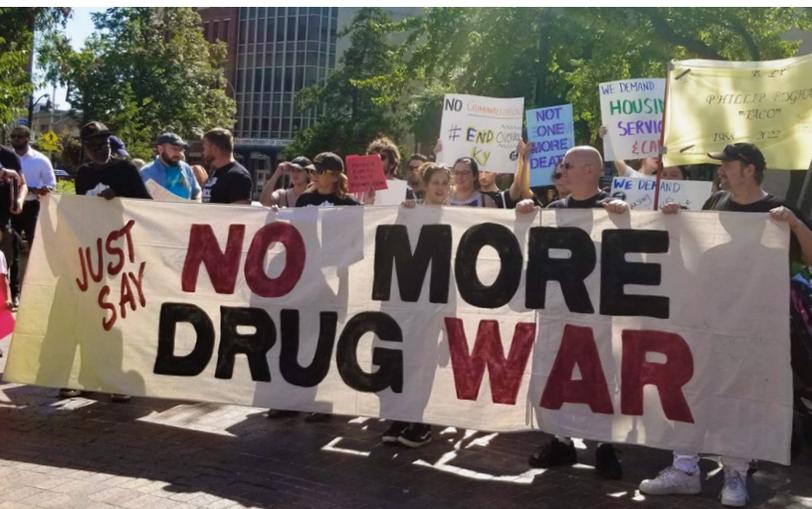
Nelsonville, OH

Moved Elected Officials

In May, the MAT Act came up for a vote in the House Energy & Commerce Committee. After over a year of organizing and pressure, cohort member New Jersey Organizing Project was able to get a commitment from Committee Chairperson Frank Pallone (NJ-6) to move this bill as part of a bipartisan bill package, the Restoring Hope for Mental Health and Wellbeing Act. This was the first time that the MAT Act made it out of committee. By leading with our values, digging into the work, and building power, we moved one step closer to expanding access to live-saving medication for those with opioid use disorder.

Leading up to the vote, our cohort worked diligently to bring more members of Congress to join as co-sponsors for the bill, bringing the total up to almost 250 in the House at the time of the committee vote. Immediately before the vote, we helped lead a coalition letter with 100 signers to the Energy & Commerce Committee, moved over 700 emails to members of Congress in support of the MAT Act, and texted over 20,000 voters in three key congressional districts in Indiana and Ohio. And guess what? All three of those members of congress voted YES to the amendment.

In June, the full U.S. House voted on and passed the MAT Act through HR7666. People's Action sent a vote recommendation letter to all members of Congress ahead of this vote, and cohort organizations forwarded the letter directly to offices that they had been working to move. The final vote was 402-20. MAT Act passage in the House was an important step forward and set us up strongly to push it forward in the Senate. During the debate on the House floor, the treatment gap for folks needing access to MAT who are Black, brown, and from rural communities was lifted up, citing that passing the MAT Act begins to close this gap.



MEMBER ORGANIZATION HIGHLIGHT

VOCAL-KY officially launched in Louisville, K.Y. over the summer. In the span of their first few months in operation, they pulled off a number of large-scale actions organized and led by member leaders from the unhoused community in Louisville.

The final quarter of the year focused on doing everything we could to bring home the Mainstreaming Addiction Treatment Act victory.

To push us over the finish line, we:

- Helped organize 193 organizational sign-ons to this letter to Congressional Leadership demanding action on the MAT Act before the end of the year.
- Met with Senator Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Speaker Pelosi's (D-C.A.) offices to ensure they continued to prioritize the bill in year end negotiations. Additionally, met with other members in leadership including the office of Congresswoman DeLauro, D-C.T.
- Won the commitment of Sen. Brown (D-O.H.) to join as a co-sponsor to the Senate bill.
- Jennifer from VOCAL-KY met with Van Ingram (KY Drug Czar) and he agreed to speak to Senator Mitch McConnell's (R-K.Y.) office and stress the importance of including it in the omnibus.
- 75% of the People's Action network more broadly committed to move their organizational power in support of the MAT Act in December 2022.
- Mobilized key progressive organization relationships including Center for Popular Democracy, Drug Policy Alliance, AIDS United, and Community Catalyst to move their organizational power in support of the MAT Act.
- Moved artist Nan Goldin to include MAT Act action pitches in the press tour for the release of a documentary about her struggles with substance use disorder and the liberation that access to buprenorphine gave her.

And then we WON! On December 22, the Senate passed the end of year omnibus appropriations package that included the MAT Act. On December 23, the House followed suit and on December 29, President Biden signed the bill into law. The bill went into effect on January 12, 2023 with notice going live on [SAMHSA's website](#). Check out our [press statement](#) and [victory video](#) here.

Summary

The Overdose Crisis Cohort campaigned intentionally to bring in more people, develop leaders, change the narrative, and move electeds. By grounding in our values, centering directly impacted people, working from the ground up, building across lines of difference, and utilizing a wide array of strategies, we were able to bring this victory home for our communities. Strategic organizing rooted in base building made this victory possible.

**Strategic
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Substance

What is the White House doing about overdose deaths?

President Biden calls for harm reduction, but also requests the largest ever funding increase for Customs and Border Protection and the DEA. Plus, new harm reduction polling from Data for Progress

 **Zachary Siegel**
Apr 22, 2022

POLITICS MARIJUANA MOMENT

Bipartisan Majority Of Americans Support Drug Decriminalization, And Most Favor Overdose Prevention Sites, Poll Finds

 Published on April 22, 2022
By Kyle Jaeger

POLITICS MARIJUANA MOMENT

Push To Decriminalize Drugs In Washington State Survives Early Challenge

 Published on April 26, 2022
By Ben Adlin

truthout

Biden Embraces Some Harm Reduction Policies — But Doubles Down on Drug War

Biden's recent budget request includes \$355 million in additional funding for the Drug Enforcement Administration.

By Mike Ludwig, TRUTHOUT
April 27, 2022

Filter

WA Ballot Measure to Decriminalize Drugs Has Early Poll Lead

BY BEN ADLIN MAY 2, 2022



Bloomberg Government

HEALTH CARE BRIEFING: House to Vote on \$28 Million Formula Bill

May 18, 2022 6:14 AM
By Brandon Lee

Bloomberg Government

HEALTH CARE BRIEFING: Senate Drug Measures Cut Deficit, CBO Says

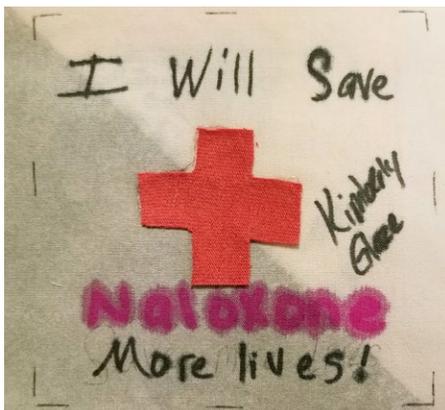
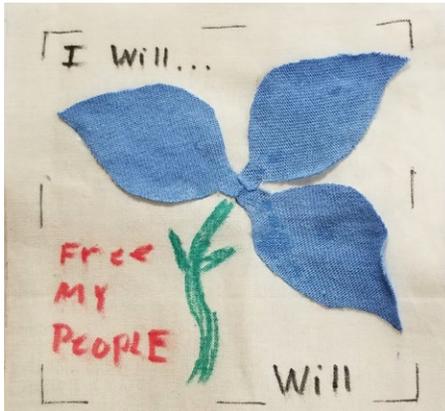
August 4, 2022 6:15 AM
By Brandon Lee and Alex Ruoff

truthout

Congress Has One Last Chance to Turn the Tide of the Overdose Crisis

Doctors urge the Senate to vote on bipartisan legislation that would expand access to lifesaving buprenorphine.

By Mike Ludwig, TRUTHOUT
November 26, 2022



WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

We will continue to claim and own this victory, celebrating the fact that organizing got the goods on this issue. As we do that, we'll also be digging in to make sure that the impact of the MAT Act victory filters down into our communities through spreading awareness to local healthcare practitioners and community members. We want all healthcare providers in our communities to know that the x-waiver has been removed and they can more readily prescribe buprenorphine for MAT.

From there, we'll move forward continuing to develop leaders, build base, and share lessons learned. We plan to dig back into base building and local and state campaigns as part of the ongoing organizing revival at People's Action. As we gear up in 2023, organizations across People's Action are poised to take on powerful fights to expand access to life saving harm reduction tools like overdose prevention centers, to ensure opioid settlement funds support public health interventions, and to dismantle the power of the drug war by winning decriminalization fights at the local level. We won a big victory here—one that sets the stage for the next state and local fights to end the drug war and protect our folks from needless overdose deaths.

MEMBER ORGANIZATION HIGHLIGHT

Maine People's Alliance fought and won a campaign to expand Maine's Good Samaritan law that went into effect in early August. The bill changes Maine law so that any person at the scene of an overdose in which a good faith effort is made to call for assistance is protected from arrest or prosecution.



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My road to get to where I am today, from drug addiction to being houseless, has been a hard-fought one. Today, I am the man you see who fights for the less fortunate and the ones no longer with us. That's why I am so proud to have brought the MAT Act victory home for our people.

PONY MORRIS

Louisville, KY

TIMELINE

**March
2022**

Harm Reduction Works: Compassion in Action [Livestream](#)



**April
2022**

- Released new polling showing strong bipartisan support for harm reduction
- Strategy Summit



**May
2022**

MAT Act vote in the House Energy & Commerce Committee

**June
2022**

- The U.S. House vote on and passage of the MAT Act through HR7666
- Cohort leaders present at the Grantmakers in Health Conference in Miami, FL

**Aug.
2022**

People's Action released a new [narrative video](#) in recognition of International Overdose Awareness Day

**Sept.
2022**

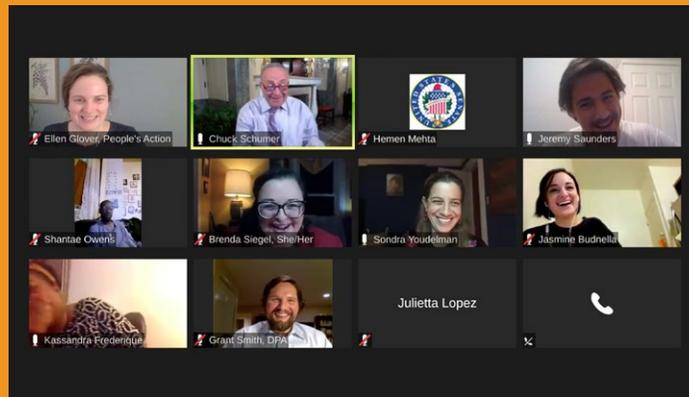
Regional Red State Convening



Oct.-Dec.
2022

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Dec. 22
2022

The Senate passed the end of year omnibus appropriations package that included the MAT Act

Dec. 23
2022

The House followed suit

Dec. 29
2022

President Biden signed the bill into law

Jan. 12
2023

The MAT Act went into effect

**PEOPLE'S |
ACTION |**