

Our Voice, Our Power

ANNUAL REPORT | FY23

JULY 2022 - JUNE 2023



Mission Statement

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Chicago builds power through collective advocacy and organizing to achieve racial equity. We do this by:

01 **LEADERSHIP**

Developing grassroots leaders through base-building programs such as KINETIC (for high school and college-aged youth), I Speak Power (for adult English learners), and A Just Chi (at-large community members)

02 **ADVOCACY**

Advancing policy change through issue-based campaigns and coalition leadership including the Pan-Asian Voter Empowerment Coalition, Just Democracy Illinois, and the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

03 **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

Getting out the vote by reaching out to Asian Americans, increasing participation, and growing our community's power

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Fatima Begum, a member of I Speak Power, shares her story at a language justice teach-in in West Ridge. Photo by Ankur Singh

A Letter From Our Leadership



GRACE PAI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



KHAI YANG
BOARD PRESIDENT

Our Voice, Our Power. When we reflect on Advancing Justice | Chicago's work over the past year, this theme shows up in so many different ways.

Hundreds of Asian Americans across the Chicago area came together to make their voices heard and take action with us this year. From the **mayoral forum in January** that was attended by seven of the nine candidates to the packed state capitol rotunda at **Asian American Action Day in May, we demanded the attention of our elected officials** – and those hoping to represent us – and **fought for bold, systemic change**. After so much time distancing and holding virtual events during the pandemic, it felt amazing to gather in community again.

This year, we saw many years of hard work and coalition organizing come to fruition. The end of cash bail was finally implemented after the Illinois Supreme Court upheld its constitutionality. Chicago eliminated the racist and ineffective gang database after years of advocacy by the Erase the Gang Database Coalition. We mobilized hundreds of people to advocate for legislation that would increase language access across state agencies and monitored 106 voting locations for language and disability access during the municipal elections. **We are successfully reimagining what's possible, expanding the bounds of what we can win, and creating the world we want to see.**

And yet, there is so much more work to do. Our city is seeing the ramifications of decades of disinvestment in affordable housing and healthcare as Chicago struggles to welcome thousands of migrants into our community. Our fight for citizenship for all is stuck in partisan gridlock. **We must tackle each new challenge with hope, resolve, and a vision of what all communities need to thrive,** not just survive.

We hope our annual report will remind you of what we've accomplished and our ongoing work to advance racial equity. **Please join us** and turn your commitment into action by making a contribution, attending our next event, or sharing this report with a friend or colleague.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grace Pai'.

Grace Pai
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Khai Yang'.

Khai Yang
Board President

What We Do

Base-Building and Leadership Development

- 01 **A Just Chi:** Organizing Pan-Asian Community Members
- 02 **I Speak Power:** Empowering English Learner Adults
- 03 **KINETIC:** Developing Youth Leaders

Policy Advocacy

Immigrant Justice: Advancing Justice | Chicago advocates for policies that advance immigrant and refugee rights at the local, state, and federal levels. As the convener of the **Pan-Asian Voter Empowerment Coalition** and a co-chair of the **Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR)**, Advancing Justice | Chicago co-creates state-level platforms each year that include policy proposals focused on healthcare access, economic security, deportation prevention, funding for immigrant services, and more. This year, **A Just Chi** members have also been active in mutual aid efforts to support the nearly 15,000 recently arrived migrants.

Language Access: In 2019, Advancing Justice | Chicago co-founded the **Illinois Language Justice Coalition**, a multiracial and multiethnic coalition space dedicated to improving language access for all immigrant communities. This past year, Advancing Justice | Chicago has been leading a state-level campaign to pass the **Language Equity and Access Act**, which would require state agencies to provide interpretation and translation in more than 15 languages and create a division of language equity and access within the governor's office.

Photo 1 (left): Rep. Theresa Mah speaks at Asian American Action Day rally in the state capitol to nearly 300 participants. Photo by Ray Rivera

Photo 2 (right): Advancing Justice | Chicago community organizer Anooshka Gupta shares information on the PAVE agenda to Asian American Action Day participants. Photo by Ray Rivera



Education Equity: Two years since the **TEACH Act** was passed, requiring Illinois public schools to teach Asian American history, Advancing Justice | Chicago continues to facilitate **Professional Development workshops** for K-12 educators on how to integrate Asian American history into their lessons. Advancing Justice | Chicago is also working on ensuring equitable Asian American representation in the district maps for the newly elected Chicago Board of Education, which will have its first election in November 2024.

Voting Rights & Democracy: During each election, Advancing Justice | Chicago runs the city's only **language access-focused poll watching program** to monitor compliance with language and disability access requirements. The poll watching observations and results then inform advocacy efforts and recommendations for improvement to local election authorities in Chicago and Cook County. As a member of **Just Democracy Illinois**, Advancing Justice | Chicago advocates at the state level to protect voting rights policies like automatic voter registration and to increase voting accessibility across the state.

Public Safety for All: Advancing Justice | Chicago participates in multiracial coalitions and campaigns to advance public safety solutions that invest in communities rather than over-relying on law enforcement. This year, **A Just Chi** members have been actively involved in the **Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice, Erase the Gang Database Coalition, and Stop Shotspotter** campaign.

*Photo 1 (left): Members of A Just Chi gather at Ping Tom Memorial Park after canvassing Chicago's Chinatown neighborhood and gathering petitions to Erase the Gang Database.
Photo by Ankur Singh*

*Photo 2 (right): A Just Chi member Huy Nguyen and Advancing Justice | Chicago director of development Sangini Brahmbhatt take a selfie while monitoring polls on election day for language access.
Photo by Sangini Brahmbhatt*



FY23 Impact: By The Numbers

1,313

Teachers trained on Asian American curriculum

875

Individuals trained in Bystander Intervention

150

Community members participated in our issue-based campaigns

63

TEAACH professional development workshops

37

Bystander Intervention Trainings

106

Voting locations monitored for language and disability access during the Chicago municipal elections

55

A JUST CHI GENERAL MEMBERS

37

I SPEAK POWER PARTICIPANTS

26

APPEARANCES IN NEWS MEDIA

330

LEADERS ATTENDED ASIAN AMERICAN ACTION DAY AT THE STATE CAPITOL IN SPRINGFIELD, IL

18

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Our Voice: Civic Engagement and Voter Access

It was a sight to behold at the Chicago History Museum on February 6, 2023. Over **300 Asian American community members** packed the auditorium that evening to hear from seven individuals vying to become the next mayor of Chicago.

The audience hailed from various neighborhoods across the city – from Uptown to Chinatown and Albany Park to West Ridge. Hosted by **Advancing Justice | Chicago** and the **Pan-Asian Voter Empowerment (PAVE) Coalition**, this candidate forum was the only opportunity for Asian American voters to hear from mayoral candidates in their preferred language. Thanks to simultaneous interpreters, **community members were able to hear the candidates' responses in seven different languages:** Cantonese, Hindi/Urdu (which are spoken similarly), Khmer, Korean, Mandarin, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

This election was an important opportunity for Chicagoans to elect leaders committed to prioritizing the needs of Chicago's immigrant and working families. **Advancing Justice | Chicago made sure that Asian American voters had the information they needed to make informed choices at the ballot box** and monitored voting locations across the city on Election Day to ensure compliance with language and disability access requirements.

The mayoral forum in February was a sign of the shifting times. After decades of organizing, the **Asian American community in Chicago was now a critical electorate** that candidates were eager to reach, not ignore.

This was the first mayoral election since the Atlanta spa shootings and the spike in anti-Asian violence throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Seven out of nine candidates for mayor attended: State Representative Kam Buckner,



Advancing Justice | Chicago made sure that Asian American voters had the information they needed to make informed choices at the ballot box.

*Advancing Justice | Chicago executive director Grace Pai along with board member Mark Anthony Florido introduce themselves at the mayoral forum.
Photo by Ray Rivera*



Congressman Jesús ‘Chuy’ García, Ja’Mal Green, Cook County Commissioner Brandon Johnson, Alderman Roderick Sawyer, Paul Vallas, and Dr. Willie Wilson. Alderwoman Sophia King had confirmed but canceled due to illness and Mayor Lori Lightfoot was invited but not able to attend.

Community members posed questions to candidates regarding anti-Asian racism, public safety, language access, poverty and isolation amongst Asian American seniors, affordable housing, immigrant support services, and more. **I Speak Power** participant **Waniya Zahid, a high school student in Chicago Public Schools**, shared a powerful testimony about the need for equitable school funding.

“My dream is to pursue a career in cybersecurity. A few months ago, I asked my counselor if I could sign up for the IT class. She said, ‘I’m sorry, there’s not enough space.’ For a second there, I felt like my dream had ended before even starting,” Zahid shared.

“After doing my own research, I was able to find free classes about cybersecurity online. Sadly, we can’t always rely on our schools and there are thousands of students like me affected by the lack of resources who have to open doors for ourselves.”

Beyond educating Asian American voters about candidates’ positions on issues they care about, **Advancing Justice | Chicago engaged in year-round advocacy to improve and expand voting accessibility for immigrant and Asian American voters.** Many individuals face language barriers in their day-to-day lives, including at the ballot box. Despite federal and local laws that require language access in elections, there is still much room for improvement.

On Election Day in both February and March, **Advancing Justice | Chicago sent poll monitors** to nearly all of the precincts that were required to provide translated election materials in Chicago. The compliance issues observed by poll monitors then **informed recommendations outlined in a post-election report** that was shared with local election authorities.

After decades of organizing, the Asian American community in Chicago was now a critical electorate that candidates were eager to reach, not ignore.

Photo 1 (top): Seven out of nine mayoral candidates attended the forum and shared how their platforms would improve the lives of Asian American community members.

Photo by Ray Rivera

Photo 2 (bottom): I Speak Power participant Waniya Zahid asks mayoral candidates about what they’ll do to ensure equitable funding for Chicago Public Schools if they are elected.

Photo by Ray Rivera

Recommendations from Advancing Justice | Chicago's [latest poll watching report](#) included:

- Improve training so that poll workers are better equipped to **assist Limited English Proficient (LEP) voters** and voters with disabilities;
- Create new polling place signs to **increase visibility on the type of assistance** and resources available for LEP voters and voters with disabilities;
- **Hire staff** with dedicated responsibilities to conduct outreach to Korean and Filipino communities; and
- **Strengthen relationships with community organizations**, and establish channels for community feedback.

Advancing Justice | Chicago's civic engagement work pairs individual and community education with systemic advocacy work. Both are critically important to advance our goal of empowering Asian American communities to make their voices heard in elections and beyond.

*Hundreds of Asian Americans attended the mayoral forum which was translated into multiple languages to ensure all attendees received the information needed to make an informed vote.
Photo by Ray Rivera*



Our Community: Building Impactful Movements

On a Monday morning in September 2023, dozens of people gathered outside the Cook County Criminal Court House to celebrate the first day of the end of cash bail.



The group, made up of a broad coalition of progressive organizations, included leaders from **Advancing Justice | Chicago's grassroots volunteer base, A Just Chi**, as well as elected officials from the state, county, and city levels.

This moment represented the culmination of a six-year campaign **led by the Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice, of which Advancing Justice | Chicago is a member.** The historic Pretrial Fairness Act, passed in 2021, eliminated the racist, wealth-based system of cash bail and

instead requires judges to intentionally assess whether an individual poses a threat to the public.

In addition to ending the blatant unfairness of allowing individuals to pay their way out of jail before trial, the **Network's long term goal is to reduce the number of people detained in Cook County Jail and limit the use of electronic monitoring** as part of the larger fight against mass incarceration.

Advancing Justice | Chicago members and staff attend a press conference celebrating the first day of the implementation of the Pretrial Fairness Act, a six-year long campaign led by the Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice. Photos by Ray Rivera



Over the last three and a half years, Advancing Justice | Chicago mobilized progressive Asian Americans in support of this important reform. Volunteer leaders with **A Just Chi** and **I Speak Power** organized political education workshops and teach-ins, canvassed their neighbors, lobbied legislators in Springfield and Chicago, tabled at events, participated in direct actions, signed petitions, and more. Six grassroots members took on leadership roles and those leaders mobilized the entire A Just Chi membership to take action in support of the campaign.

"Advancing Justice | Chicago is an organizing powerhouse," said Matt McLoughlin, an organizer with the Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice. "Since joining the Network, they have helped **expand our community outreach and legislative advocacy efforts...** [and] have played a **major role** in defending the Pretrial Fairness Act."

Although the passage of the Pretrial Fairness Act sparked intense backlash, cross-racial coalition building and grassroots organizing successfully prevented any rollback of the bill. Now, Advancing Justice | Chicago and other members of the coalition are attending court hearings to monitor implementation across the state. Though the advocacy phase of the campaign is over, implementation will be just as important.

*Members of A Just Chi have a picnic and teach-in at a park along with coalition partners Organized Communities Against Deportations and Brighton Park Neighborhood Council to learn about and build the campaign to Erase the Gang Database.
Photos by Ray Rivera*

The partnership between Advancing Justice | Chicago and the Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice is a prime example of Advancing Justice | Chicago's commitment to multiracial coalition building.

When communities come together, bigger victories are possible. Other current coalition work includes the Erase the Database coalition, which recently won the erasure of the Chicago Police Department's gang database, the Stop Shotspotter coalition, and the Illinois Language Justice Coalition.



Our Power: Asian American Action Day



Photo by Ray Rivera

Miwa Shimokogawa, a member of A Just Chi, walked up to the podium, with a dozen members of the Pan Asian Voter Empowerment Coalition (PAVE) standing behind her.

During Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, 300 Asian Americans gathered in the Illinois State Capitol rotunda for Asian American Action Day, or AAA Day. In front of the crowd was a large banner that read “Raising Our Voices, Building Our Power.” Miwa Shimokogawa, a member of A Just Chi, walked up to the podium, with a dozen members of the Pan Asian Voter Empowerment Coalition (PAVE) standing behind her.

“Language justice impacts all of us, whether we realize it or not. We feel it both as individuals and as a community. The **Language Equity and Access Act** has the opportunity to impact the lives of nearly 1 million people in Illinois and is a critical step in Illinois being an inclusive state,” Shimokogawa said. “I’m fighting for this bill for my 9-year-old self and classmate, for my brother, and for my community.”

Our voices were heard loud and clear. That day in Springfield, Asian American power rippled through the halls of the capitol and across the state.

AAA Day is Advancing Justice | Chicago's biggest event of the year. As the lead convener of the **Pan-Asian Voter Empowerment (PAVE) Coalition**, Advancing Justice | Chicago staff lead the planning and execution of an annual state lobby day that uplifts the needs and priorities of Asian American communities.

This year's **top legislative priority was the Language Equity and Access Act, which would require state agencies to provide translation and interpretation in more than 15 languages** so that residents who prefer a language other than English can access important government services. Furthermore, it would strengthen support and accountability for state agencies by creating a Division of Language Equity and Access within the Governor's office.

*Photo 1 (left): Asian American Action Day participants walk towards the Illinois state capitol to lobby elected officials.
Photo by Ray Rivera*

*Photo 2 (right): Members of Advancing Justice | Chicago pose with State Senator Mattie Hunter after successfully talking with her to vote for the Language Equity and Access Act.
Photo by Ankur Singh*

The PAVE Coalition's annual legislative agenda also included bills that would ensure access to Halal and Kosher meals in all state-run institutions, prevent unfair medical debt by requiring hospitals to screen patients for financial support programs before sending them to collections, and require healthcare workers to participate in cultural competency trainings. On AAA Day alone, **PAVE Coalition members lobbied over 70 state legislators** in support of the PAVE Agenda.



Our Culture: Celebrating AAPI Heritage Month

For Advancing Justice | Chicago and many Asian Americans, food is a big part of our culture. During AAPI Heritage Month in May, Advancing Justice | Chicago partnered with **21 local businesses and vendors** for **#doughsomething**, a now-annual fundraising campaign spearheaded by Parachute chef Beverly Kim.

Participating businesses contributed a portion of proceeds from special food items, theater performances, events, drinks, and more to support Advancing Justice | Chicago's programs and organizing work.

"I reflect how proud I am to introduce others about my rich heritage through Korean cuisine at Parachute, which was my mother's love language in our immigrant family," said Chef Beverly Kim.

"As a chef/restaurateur, it's beautiful to bring diverse people together at the table – it is the best way to be open to learn about others and break down barriers."



Beverly Kim is an award-winning chef who co-owns the Michelin-starred restaurant Parachute in Chicago.

As part of the Heritage Month festivities, **A Just Chi** organized a fundraising event at **Bites Asian Kitchen** that brought together more than 60 people to break bread, connect, and build relationships. It was a beautiful reminder of the passionate community that's coalesced around the work Advancing Justice | Chicago does to create a better future.



A Just Chi Giving Project celebrated Heritage Month with a festive event featuring a raffle, henna, drinks, food, music, and more. Photos by Ray Rivera

Program Testimonials

"I joined **I Speak Power** two years ago thinking it will help me to converse better in English. As I look at myself now, **I see a transformation happened to me. I have become confident to raise my voice** and concerns and **feel connected** with the community."

~Asiya Asif, I Speak Power core leader



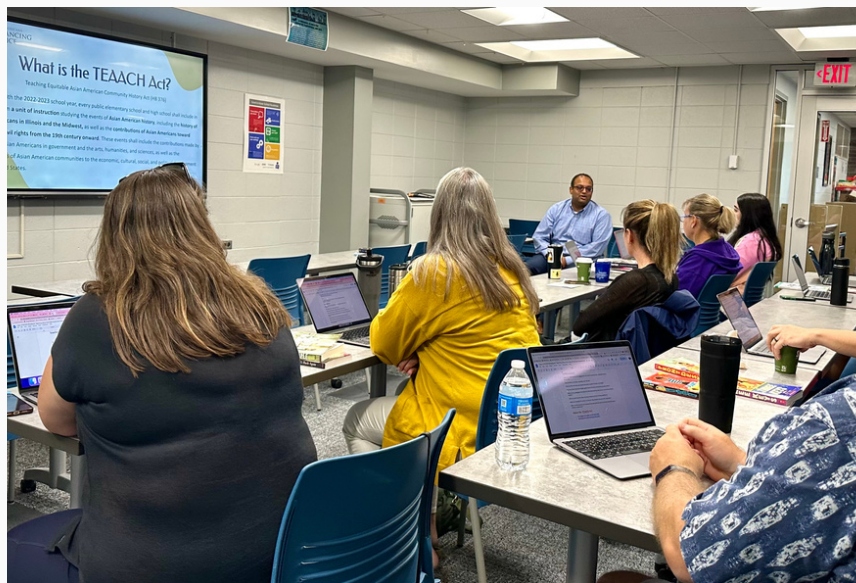
"As an AAPI educator, it feels rare to see so many people dedicated towards learning about AAPI issues and history. **This training helped me feel seen**—and I hope it makes my students feel the same way. The resources shared will **undoubtedly be used in my classroom**. I left feeling excited about exploring the ways I can fit more AAPI curricula into my classroom!"

~Wayne Z., HS teacher and TEAACH Professional Development participant



"[Advancing Justice | Chicago] held a **bystander intervention training** at [my child's high school]. Students, parents and teachers all participated. We had been having a very challenging time tackling issues of racist incidents and systemic racism, and this event was a **helpful concrete step** we could take as a school community to **empower students and adults** to acknowledge and provide tools to address the reality of anti-Asian sentiment in our school and wider community."

~Cassie C., Chicago Public Schools Parent



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Thank you!

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. If you have any questions or are interested in learning more about our work, please reach out to us.


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