

# THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN

## A NATIONAL CALL FOR MORAL REVIVAL

Fifty years ago, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and many other leaders launched a Poor Peoples Campaign to tackle the pervasive problems of systemic racism, poverty, and militarism. By many measures, these interrelated problems are worse today than they were back in 1968. And if you add in climate change and ecological devastation, the urgency is even greater.

### NATIONWIDE:

- Voting rights protections in many states are weaker than they were 50 years ago.
- We imprison, detain and/or deport more people than any country in the world
- 140 million people are poor or low-income
- Despite strong economic growth, wealth inequality has expanded, the cost of living has increased, and social programs have been cut dramatically
- 53 cents of every federal discretionary dollar goes to military spending and only 15 cents is spent on anti-poverty programs
- 13.8 million U.S. households cannot afford water, while the poor are bearing the brunt of climate change effects

### IN RHODE ISLAND:

#### Somebody's been hurting my people and it's gone on far too long:

- 41 percent of people in Rhode Island are poor or [low-income](#)—a total of 428 thousand residents. This includes 49 percent of children (106 thousand), 42 percent of women (228 thousand), 65 percent of people of color (176 thousand), and 33 percent of White people (252 thousand).
- From 1979 to 2012, the [income](#) for the top 1% grew by 139 percent, while the income for the bottom 99% increased by 25 percent.

#### Systemic racism and its relationship to poverty:

- Rhode Island requires a [photo ID](#) to vote, with some exceptions.
- Of the 3,103 people [imprisoned](#), about 58 percent are people of color. Black residents are [incarcerated](#) at over eight times the rate of White residents.

#### Militarism and the war economy:

- From 2008-2014, law enforcement has received at least [8.5 million dollars](#) in military grade equipment.
- 2 billion dollars were spent on [defense](#) in 2015, with 1.2 billion in defense contracts.
- Almost 16,300 veterans have incomes [below 35,000 dollars](#) in Rhode Island—23 percent of Rhode Island's veteran population.

#### Ecology and health:

- 50,500 people are [uninsured](#).
- 16.6 percent of census tracts are at-risk for being [unable to afford water](#).
- 839 tons of [NOx](#) are annually emitted in Rhode Island, a leading cause of respiratory problems.

#### Everybody's got a right to live:

- About 1,180 people are [homeless](#). Working at the state minimum wage in 2017, it took [81 hours of work per week](#) to afford a 2-bedroom apartment.
- 187 thousand workers make [under 15 dollars an hour](#)—36 percent of Rhode Island's workforce.
- 155 thousand people participate in the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#).

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## IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE THIS WAY

### *A MORAL AGENDA BASED ON FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS*

Contrary to common myths, our country — the richest in the world — has abundant resources to protect the environment and ensure dignified lives for all people. The problem is a matter of priorities, as more and more of our wealth flows into the pockets of a small but powerful few — and into our bloated Pentagon budget.

- The richest 1% of Rhode Islanders are expected to receive [26% of the benefits](#) of the new federal tax law. Their average tax cut in 2027 is expected to be \$5,840, while the poorest 20% are expected to have to pay \$130 more.
- Rhode Island's contribution to the country's endless wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond totals \$17 billion since 2001, and could instead have created 14,000 new jobs in clean energy, or placed every Rhode Island child in Head Start early childhood education programs, or covered the cost of Medicaid for 190,000 adults for the past 17 years.
- Rhode Island has spent at least [\\$93 million](#) in public subsidies for corporations over the past five years without doing as much as they could to ensure funds are used to create good green jobs for low-income communities.

The Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival has developed a detailed [Moral Agenda Based on Fundamental Rights](#) that would revive the efforts of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and many others for a "revolution of values" in America. This agenda includes demands on the federal and state governments to:

- Ensure the wealthy and corporations pay their fair share of urgent social needs, including decent and affordable housing, quality education and health care, safe and affordable water, and job creation.
- Protect voting rights and prohibit racist gerrymandering, hiring, policing, and sentencing policies that exacerbate inequalities for black and brown people.
- End military aggression, ban the proliferation of guns, and demilitarize our communities on the border and the interior.
- Ensure the right to clean water, air, and a healthy environment and increased public investment in jobs programs to transition to a green economy.

For a detailed copy of the campaign's agenda, see:  
<https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/index.php/demands/>

