



COMMON GROUND

CONNECTING PEOPLE, PLACES AND ISSUES IN THE TWIN CITIES REGION | SUMMER 2015

MoveMN: Calling for an Investment in Transportation Equity

The Alliance is a founding member of MoveMN, a 200-organization coalition calling on the Minnesota Legislature to pass a comprehensive transportation funding solution. Minnesota has a transportation problem. The cost of maintaining the current system is increasing faster than the available funding, making it difficult for Minnesotans to access jobs, education, health care and other important destinations. The result is congested and aging highways and roads, deficient bridges, incomplete regional transit systems, and lack of access to safe and convenient bicycling and walking options.

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Alliance members and allies rally for equity.

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 The Family Partnership
 Fresh Energy
 Harrison Neighborhood Association
 HOME Line
 Housing Justice Center
 Jewish Community Action
 Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota
 League of Women Voters of Minnesota
 Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers
 Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing
 Minneapolis Bicycle Coalition
 Minneapolis Urban League
 Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy
 Minnesota Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Alliance
 Native American Community Development Institute
 New American Academy
 Northside Residents Redevelopment Council
 Office for Social Justice, Catholic Charities
 Saint Paul Area Coalition for the Homeless
 Sierra Club, North Star Chapter
 Somali Action Alliance
 Summit Academy OIC
 Transit for Livable Communities
 Twin Cities Local Initiatives Support Corporation
 West Side Community Organization
 Women's Environmental Institute

The work of the Alliance is generously supported by the following **FUNDERS**:
 Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of Minnesota
 F.R. Bigelow Foundation
 Ford Foundation
 Headwaters Foundation for Justice
 Jay and Rose Phillips Family Foundation of Minnesota
 McKnight Foundation
 Minneapolis Foundation
 Northwest Area Foundation
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 Saint Paul Foundation
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From the Director's Desk

Creating New Spaces to Build Community Power

One of the less noticed, yet significant ways that public agencies can be more inclusive of community perspectives is to proactively reserve seats on advisory committees for members of the public.

Doing this well means sharing power to produce better project results and advance equity. Doing this poorly undermines public confidence and supports gatekeeping.

The Met Council has initiated a new way of broadening opportunities for community-based organizations that operate along the Southwest LRT project (also known as the Green Line extension) to sit at the table and influence decisions. The new model promises to improve upon the agency's old methods of engagement.

Doing this well means sharing power to produce better project results and advance equity. Doing this poorly undermines public confidence and supports gatekeeping.

In the past, the standard way of populating a light rail project community advisory committee (CAC) had been to allow cities along the line to select representatives for the seats assigned to them, and generally that was how a member of the public would secure an advisory seat. But that meant that city officials might pick favorites, appoint only people they were familiar with, or screen out voices that raised difficult or provocative questions, particularly from an economic and racial justice perspective. The danger was that public agencies could play the role of gatekeeper, intentionally or not, and that could exclude valuable insights and on-the-ground expertise.

The new method is much improved. The Met Council drew from the pool of Corridors of Opportunity community engagement grant recipients to repopulate a portion of the Southwest LRT Community Advisory Committee (SWCAC), assigning five seats for community leaders who have been applying an equity lens to their work in the planning of this future light rail line. The Met Council also utilized its power to appoint additional seats to the SWCAC to include more equity and bicycle/pedestrian perspectives. Both moves are noteworthy because they have never been done before.

Why is this important? The SWCAC provides guidance on commu-



nity issues related to engineering and environmental phases of the LRT project. It also provides input on station area planning, accessibility issues, multi-modal connections to stations, public art, the development at each station (for example, the availability of housing affordable to low-wealth residents) and even construction impacts and mitigation efforts. It can also review how well the project relates to existing and future bus service improvements, job/employment opportunities, corridor housing, and economic development plans.

In short, the SWCAC has the opportunity to shape and define the ridership experience, station plans, and equitable development of the project. It is critical that it represents the diversity of our region. The Met Council's actions in shaping the committee are a welcome change.



Russ Adams



After Southwest LRT, the Metro Blue Line Extension is next

Formerly known as the Bottineau LRT, the METRO Blue Line Extension is moving forward. With an approximate construction date of 2018, this \$1 billion light rail transit line will extend the existing Hiawatha LRT (now known as the Blue Line) to the northwest suburbs. This 13-mile extension will serve the cities of Minneapolis, Golden Valley, Robbinsdale, Crystal and Brooklyn Park. The Blue Line Extension is unique in our region because within the corridor, 52 percent of the residents are people of color and 14 percent rely on transit for all their transportation needs. This new transitway could connect the communities within the corridor to jobs, education opportunities, recreation and other amenities throughout our region.

There will be 11 stations along the Blue Line Extension. North Minneapolis residents have been intensely involved in the station area planning for the first phase of stations that will be built: Van White, Penn Avenue, Plymouth and Golden Valley. They are contributing community voice to the important decision-making on land use, connectivity and economic development within the ½-mile radius around each of these stations. Some of the issues they are elevating include concerns about pedestrian safety on Olson Memorial Highway and the importance of commercial development along the transitway to provide more opportunities for North Minneapolis residents.

As the project moves into Phase II of station area planning, organized low-wealth communities and communities of color in the northwest suburbs are gearing up to ensure their residents have an influential role in planning the remaining seven stations: Robbinsdale, Bass Lake Road, 63rd Avenue, Brooklyn Boulevard, 85th Avenue, 93rd Avenue and Oak Grove Parkway. These communities are beginning to look at how to create a pedestrian-friendly environment in a car-oriented world and how to preserve and increase affordable housing in the future.

Overall, there are more than 20 active organizations within the Blue Line Extension corridor representing low-wealth communities and communities of color. Some of these organizations have come together in a corridor-wide partnership called the Blue Line Coalition, led by Nexus Community Partners, to share information and build power. Other organizations, including the Alliance and the Minnesota Center for Neighborhood Organizing are providing technical and organizing assistance to support these and other community efforts. The Blue Line Coalition is also building relationships across the region to learn best practices from other communities that have organized along transitways like the Green Line/Central Corridor.

These community efforts are a strong beginning of a long journey to ensure racial equity results from the public investments in the Blue Line Extension light rail project and the land use within the corridor. [To learn more about the METRO Blue Line Extension, visit <http://bit.ly/1Cgf9Oa>.](http://bit.ly/1Cgf9Oa)



The need for a comprehensive transportation system transcends geographic and jurisdictional borders, but it will bring tremendous value to those who need it most.

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In addition to transportation access problems, Minnesota also has a racial equity problem, as most people reading this know. A comprehensive transportation system that serves Minnesotans is an essential tool in decreasing Minnesota's racial inequities and income disparities. By funding such a system, Minnesota would make an important investment in our present and future economies, supporting the development of communities where everyone has access to opportunity. There are recent examples of the positive equity impacts of carefully planned transportation investment in Minnesota:

- » Metro Transit's workforce in 2014 was **34 percent people of color**, exceeding the region's population of color, which is currently 25 percent. Growing the bus system will increase job opportunities for people of color.
- » The recently completed Green Line exceeded its equitable hiring goals, achieving a workforce that was more than 19 percent people of color. The project resulted in an estimated **950 construction jobs for people of color**, which translates to around \$32 million in wages earned.
- » Future projects, such as the Southwest line, have hiring goals for at least 32 percent of workforce hours be performed by construction workers of color. This would result in around **1,280 jobs for people of color**, who would earn an estimated \$43 million.

To maintain our competitive advantage, build up our under-utilized local assets, and generate entrepreneurial activity, Minnesota needs to step up and make the kind of game changing investments that will lead to long-term, shared prosperity for all communities. The need for a comprehensive transportation system transcends geographic and jurisdictional borders, but it will bring tremendous value to those who need it most.



Former Harrison Neighborhood Association staff member Michael McDowell testifies at the legislature.

Key Values of the MoveMN Agenda for Comprehensive Transportation Investment

In the 2015 regular session, legislators proposed a plan to invest in transportation, with a focus on roads and bridges. The Alliance and our partner groups say that's not enough —we need a long term, multi-modal solution, not a partial approach. MoveMN has asked the legislature to consider a number of key issues before any legislation is finalized:

- **Provide stable future funding:** MoveMN is asking the legislature to find creative ways to protect transportation investments from the whims of future legislatures.
- **Plan for long-term funding for local governments:** Even after dedicated transportation funding is secured, local governments will face shortfalls for roads and bridges.
- **Invest in transit alongside roads and bridges:** Demand for transit is up and transit investment must be a key component of any transportation investment.
- **Ensure bike routes and pedestrian routes are viewed as part of our state's transportation infrastructure:** In communities all across Minnesota, biking and walking are part of a balanced transportation solution. For our health, we must invest in safe routes for people who bike and walk to their destinations.



HIRE Minnesota Updates

HIRE Minnesota is a coalition of organizations and activists working together to end racial employment disparities in Minnesota. HIRE brings people together with a vision of a new economy that works for all members of our community. Minnesota is home to some of the worst employment disparities in the country. But HIRE Minnesota has set an ambitious goal: to bring our state from worst to first. We believe Minnesota can lead the nation in racial employment equity. Here's an update on what we've been up to:

Vikings Stadium is on track at nearly 50 percent complete!

Due to the successful collaboration of many partners, the stadium construction project has continued to surpass its goal of hiring a workforce that is at least 32 percent people of color. Currently, people of color have contributed 36 percent of the total work hours on this project, and have earned an estimated \$5.39 million, making this the largest construction project to have benefitted workers of color. Thanks to Mortenson and Ryan Companies for working with us and paying close attention to this critical aspect of the stadium construction!



Summit Academy CEO Louis King speaks at a HIRE Minnesota event

Capitol and Senate Office Buildings on track

HIRE has met multiple times with the Department of Administration's leadership. The department's current reports show that the Senate Office Building and Capitol Renovation projects are exceeding the 32 percent hiring goal for people of color.

MnDOT is falling behind

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) and its contractors have stopped making progress after several years of improved performance toward meeting their hiring goals. MnDOT's most recent reports showed that the number of people of color in the contractors' workforce has flatlined. Because of this, HIRE is monitoring and working closely with MnDOT on ways in which the agency can ensure its contractors improve their performance.

Partnering with the Minneapolis Office of Civil Rights

HIRE is continuing to work with the Minneapolis Office of Civil Rights to shape useful best practices to hold contractors accountable to meeting their workforce goals. We recently presented our Workforce Management and Projection Tool, which was used successfully to meet hiring goals on Green Line LRT construction. The department has committed to using this tool to ensure that the upcoming renovation of the Target Center is equally successful. We are excited to keep working with the city to meet workforce goals in Minneapolis.

We always knew that the work to make Minnesota first in hiring equity for people of color would be hard. It is clear that systemic barriers continue to hold us, and many of our partners, back from making sustained progress. But we can also see that when we consistently push for our true vision of an equitable Minnesota, these barriers can be torn down.

Ladders of Opportunity:

An opportunity to apply better community engagement standards to a major regional initiative

In October 2014, Metro Transit received a Federal Transit Administration Ladders of Opportunity grant for bus stop enhancements that improve access to employment and other economic opportunities for communities of color and low-wealth communities throughout the Twin Cities region. This grant, combined with other funding sources and previous bus stop improvement commitments, will create the local Ladders of Opportunity program.

Metro Transit is interested in engaging the community in discussions and activities that will better inform the criteria the agency uses to prioritize bus stops for shelters, heated shelters and transit information. Community engagement could also influence how Metro Transit prioritizes bus stop facility investments beyond the Ladders of Opportunity program,

The Ladders of Opportunity program consists of:

- **150 new shelter locations** with light and, in some cases, heat;
- **enhancement of 75 existing shelters** with light and, in some cases, heat;
- improved **transit information** within these shelters and at other bus stops;
- **community identity enhancements;**
- **pedestrian access improvements;**
- and **funds for community engagement work**, which will be granted following the Community Engagement Team (CET) model created by the Alliance, the Minnesota Center for Neighborhood Organizing and Nexus Community Partners.

The Ladders of Opportunity program has the near-term goal of installing bus stop improvements to serve communities of color and low-wealth communities. The long-term goals of the program are to establish criteria and processes, with community input, around these and other bus service improvements.



which will have long-term implications for advancing transit equity in the region.

This program represents an important shift in governmental practices: intentional budgeting for robust community engagement. Metro Transit is demonstrating a commitment to putting resources on the table when it approaches communities for more input and inclusion.

We expect the discussions that surface will go beyond shelter placement and signage considerations, leading to a deeper analysis around the transit ridership experience, routing, amenities, agency performance, safety and new ideas for service improvements.

In the end, the most authentic community engagement processes are really about mutual problem-solving, with community members positioned as knowledgeable partners in decision-making. This leads to stronger partnerships, better project results and more equitable outcomes.

The Alliance and our partners, the Minnesota Center for Neighborhood Organizing and Nexus Community Partners, will support a process to make Ladders of Opportunity Outreach and Engagement grants. The goal of this grant program is to open the doors for people who are traditionally left out of transitway decision-making processes (low-wealth communities, communities of color, immigrant communities, indigenous communities and persons with disabilities) to ensure that they are engaged and involved

in the planning. This includes not only participation, but also decision-making and leadership roles.

The grants will support effective place-based initiatives that engage and involve underrepresented communities in participation, decision-making, and leadership roles around bus stop enhancements. Grants will be made to organizations interested in improving access to employment and other opportunities for underrepresented people. We hope to begin a larger conversation that allows Metro Transit staff

and community members to discuss strategies for improving the bus ridership experience. This funding does not replace Metro Transit's existing public engagement efforts, but is intended to supplement them with increased community capacity. *Details about the grant process will be posted soon at metrostability.org.*

Community Members Secure Two Seats on the Newly Forming Metropolitan Council Equity Committee

Shifting power within an institution requires the not-so-glamorous work of showing up to push for change day after day. The Community Engagement Steering Committee (CESC), a group of community-based organizations working for better regional standards of community engagement, knows this well after years of advocating for structural shifts in how the Metropolitan Council engages low-wealth communities and communities of color around the Twin Cities region.

The arduous work of showing up and consistency has paid off! After years of working to establish regional standards for community engagement, the Met Council implemented a Public Engagement Plan (formerly the Public Participation Plan), which for the first time outlines a plan for community engagement to be integrated throughout all of the Met Council's work. In addition, the CESC had advocated for several years for the formation of a permanent committee at the Metropolitan Council that addresses regional equity and the engagement of under-represented communities. On December 10, 2014, the Met Council voted to "establish a committee ...to create more equitable outcomes for people who live and work in the Twin Cities region."

At CESC's recent annual retreat, we were visited by the newly appointed Met Council Chair Adam Duinick. CESC members introduced their organizations and talked about how they were advancing transit equity in our region. The CESC also shared with Chair Duinick our recent success in securing the Public Engagement Plan and the formation of the Met Council's Equity Committee. Chair Duinick updated us on the progress on shaping its role and membership and made a commitment to reserving two seats for CESC leadership.

We've come a long way with the leadership of the CESC! Congratulations to all who have dedicated the time and effort to ensure the community is involved in important decisions about our region.



Met Council Chair Adam Duinick and members of the CESC.

Regional Housing Policy Plan Provides Incentives to Preserve and Expand Affordable Housing

Over the past several years, the Metropolitan Council has developed and created its regional 2040 Housing Policy Plan. The Housing Policy Plan describes the strategies the Met Council and cities within the Twin Cities region will advance to provide housing options for people in all stages of life and all economic means. The plan provides leadership and guidance on regional housing needs and challenges, especially those that would be difficult for individual cities and counties to tackle on their own.

Alliance staff and member organizations of Equity in Place (EIP) have been actively involved in shaping and influencing the Housing Policy Plan. The Alliance co-convenes the EIP table with the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs. EIP focuses on the intersections of housing, public transit investments, racial equity and regional planning.

EIP helped to open up seats at the Met Council's Housing Policy Plan Working Group (HPPWG) for a number of community-based organizations. EIP members Nelima Sitati-Munene of African Career, Education and Resource, Tim Thompson of the Housing Justice Center and Owen Duckworth of the Alliance were all participants at the HPPWG.

Through the work of HPPWG and a housing advocates table convened by the Housing Justice Center, we've seen the Met Council's Housing Policy Plan take some positive steps in outlining greater understanding of the affordable housing need in the region. The plan also creates greater accountability for cities to build, rehabilitate and maintain housing in their communities.

One of the major areas of improvement is in the Met Council's requirements for cities to complete their comprehensive plans. Comprehensive plans are documents created by each city in the region to outline land use goals for the coming decade, including goals related to economic development, housing, parks, transportation and more. In past comprehensive planning processes, cities merely had to show they had an implementation plan that included zoning adequate

land to meet their affordable housing goals, which was seen as a "check-the-box" exercise. Now the Met Council's review will be much more rigorous and will reward cities that have real, action-oriented plans to accomplish their affordable housing goals.

The Housing Policy Plan also increases incentives for cities to do better by leveraging Met Council funding. One big change is factoring in affordable housing performance in the Regional Solicitation transportation funding, which is distributed through the Met Council's Transportation Advisory Board (TAB). This is a large, much sought-after source of transportation funding that will now be connected to a city's commitment to its affordable housing plans. The other change is that the Housing Performance Scores laid out in the Housing Policy Plan will give much more weight to actions taken and tools and resources used by cities, with much less credit given for existing housing conditions. This should reward cities for actively taking steps to build and preserve housing.

There's more work to be done beyond the Housing Policy Plan. Many of the positive steps included in the plan are setting up ways for local communities, tenants and housing advocates to hold government agencies in our region accountable to meeting the very significant need for more affordable housing. A number of partners at the EIP table are already working to preserve and expand housing options in their communities. We are hopeful that a better aligned regional housing plan will support our work.



Northside Greenway Steering Committee

Over the last two years, the Alliance, working in partnership with the city of Minneapolis, has facilitated and led an outreach and engagement process around the North Minneapolis Greenway, a proposed park-like bike and walking trail on the Northside. We created the Northside Greenway Council, which is involved in decision-making and visioning for the project. Together, we have aimed to inform residents about the greenway and to explore whether it is a desired amenity for the community. This year, the council continues to partner with community-based organizations, neighborhood organizations and faith-based institutions to ensure that all of the diverse people living in North Minneapolis are engaged. We also want to better understand people's opinions about the greenway, engage residents living south of Plymouth Ave to explore a south greenway connection, and share data and information about what we have learned. *For more information about the project, please visit:*

<http://www.minneapolismn.gov/health/living/northminneapolisgreenway>.



Members of the North Minneapolis Greenway Council



New Staff Member: Nick Kor, HIRE Minnesota Campaign Organizer

Nick Kor joined the Alliance in February 2015 as the new HIRE Minnesota campaign organizer. He comes to the Alliance with a wealth of political and campaign organizing expertise. Nick went to the University of St. Thomas and majored in music. While there, he noticed the lack of resources available to LGBTQ students and started developing safe spaces for students to be supported. After graduating from college, Nick continued to organize campaigns around LGBTQ issues with Minnesota United and Outfront Minnesota. He has also organized for Councilmember Dai Thao in 2013 and Senator Al Franken in 2014.

In his years of organizing around LGBTQ issues, Nick saw that many white people in the movement did not approach the work with a racial justice lens. Understanding the different needs that queer people of color face, including unemployment, homelessness and police brutality, Nick began to speak up in spaces where those needs were being ignored. He also got involved with Shades of Yellow, the only Hmong LGBTQ organization in the world, which provides Hmong and other Asian Pacific Islander LGBTQ people with a place to build community and advocate around the issues most pertinent to them.

As the new HIRE Minnesota Campaign Organizer, Nick will have an opportunity to move racial justice in employment outcomes for people of color. He is most hopeful to build on the great work that HIRE has already accomplished and to make equity the norm in hiring practices across the region. "I believe that movements, communities, and identities are bound to each other. The liberation of queer people is tied to the liberation of people of color. As a queer person of color, I see HIRE's work connected to a larger movement that tackles systems of oppression and empowers everyday people to rise up to demand for the changes we want to see in the community."

Welcome aboard, Nick!

New Alliance Board Member: Ashley Fairbanks



Ashley Fairbanks is a community organizer at the Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI). At NACDI, Ashley feels that she is finally able to operate from a place that combines all of her passions and expertise. She brings to her work three distinct skill sets and perspectives: policy, arts and relationship building.

Ashley developed her interest in policy as a student at the University of Minnesota when a professor, who was an expert in Native law and federal policy, encouraged her to pursue a degree in political science alongside her existing American Indian studies focus. For Ashley, this was a perfect fit because she knew the barriers that American Indians encountered were different than those experienced by other people of color. “As American Indians, we need to know which legislation and what policies are causing us harm so that we can change them,” she said.

Ashley has brought that analysis to much of her political organizing work. As a recent aide for Minneapolis City Councilmember Alondra Cano, she partnered with NACDI to write the resolution to recognize Indigenous People’s Day on what was previously recognized as Columbus Day. “When the city council passed that resolution, I felt acknowledged as an indigenous person,” said Ashley. “Kids will grow up in a city that is no longer celebrating someone who committed genocide against their people.”

Ashley also brings a strong arts perspective to her work. She owns a graphic design firm called Ziibiing Creative, through which she focuses on producing culturally relevant, Native design. “I design work that feels authentic to American Indians and that does not speak to the clichés that others identify with,” said Ashley. “Through this, I was able to partner with NACDI on several projects before I came on board as full-time staff.”

Finally, Ashley brings a deep commitment to relationship building to her work. She believes that the most important thing that an organizer can do is to build relationships with the community. “Face time is important,” she said. “It can be exhausting, but it keeps me in check. I am never too important to spend time with my own community. We must see people as people and relatives instead of clients or constituents. We have to get back to what it means to be human, and as a human, a member of a community.”

Ashley also recognizes the importance of building deep relationships with those outside of her community, in particular people with different racial and ethnic backgrounds than her own. “We have to learn to fight together,” she said. “Having a majority-minority society means nothing if we cannot work together. In my work, I have found that it is important for us American Indians to work with other communities of color because we cannot change legislation by ourselves.”

At NACDI, Ashley feels that many of her experiences and skills are finally coalescing. “I love that I have the opportunity to talk with the community and sit at policymaking tables and also with elected officials,” she said. “I speak comfortably in all of these worlds. But I also love the fact that I am able to use art as a means to promote social change. In the American Indian community, art is very central to who we are. In connecting people who have been disenfranchised by the system, it is sometimes easier to use art than other models.”



Farewell, Avi!

After four years with HIRE Minnesota, **Avi Viswanathan** has moved on to become a Ron McKinley Philanthropy Fellow. Avi’s fellowship is with the Bush Foundation as part of the leadership programs team. Best of luck, Avi—you will be missed at the Alliance!

ASK OUR MEMBERS:

Race, place and poverty are highly correlated in our region.

What is your vision for making all communities places of opportunity?



"My vision is that there would be **equitable investments** all across the region that enable people to thrive where they are **regardless of zip code, race or income**. There should also be multiple opportunities for everyone to thrive across the region. For example, someone could live in Edina if they want to, and there is opportunity to live and thrive, or people could live in Brooklyn Park or North Minneapolis and opportunities are there, too."

-Nelima Sitati-Munene, African Career, & Education Resource, Inc



"Communities must begin to **reject the deficit approach** and adopt the view that their community consists of a set of concrete assets. In this light, we can look at investments and project proposals as **opportunities to build upon those assets**. Then and only then will communities with significant non-European populations begin to significantly prosper."

-Ishmael Israel, formerly of Northside Residents Redevelopment Council



"The first step to making all communities places of opportunities is to **understand what we as a community feel we need to succeed** instead of having those dictated to us. For my community, **transportation and educational opportunities** are the most important factors in ensuring that we are able to thrive and do life well."

-Neeyada Santopietro, Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota



"We can make every community a place of opportunity when we start out by **making every neighborhood a neighborhood where we would want to live**. In addition, communities become places of opportunity when community members are able to engage in all of the conversations that impact where they live. This happens through **community engagement and providing the leadership, tools and support** for everyone to participate in the decision-making process."

-Carol Swenson, District Councils Collaborative of Minneapolis and St. Paul



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JOIN THE MOVEMENT FOR A JUST AND EQUITABLE REGION

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