



ANNUAL REPORT

2015-
2020





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SOCM'S MISSION

SOCM is a member-run organization that encourages civic involvement and collective action so that the people of Tennessee have a greater voice in determining their future. The mission of SOCM is to empower Tennesseans to protect, defend, and improve the quality of life in their communities across the state. SOCM is working for social, economic, and environmental justice for all. We are committed to the journey of becoming an anti-racist organization. Recognizing our interdependence, SOCM is committed to overcoming social and institutional racism and embracing our diverse cultures.

Photo credits: SOCM, Alliance for Appalachia, Todd Waterman, Brady Watson.

PUBLIC EDUCATION DEFENSE

From 2015 through 2020, SOCM members worked tirelessly to defend public education across Tennessee – resisting privatization, pushing back against excessive standardized testing, and confronting inequities in discipline policies. Beginning in 2014, the Social Justice Committee decided to work on public education as a statewide issue as local chapters were increasingly identifying concerns about threats to their local public education institutions.

In Knoxville, SOCM's alliance with SPEAK (Students, Parents, Educators Across Knox County) brought together teachers, staff, parents, and students into a well-organized coalition with working groups focused on specific issues such as reducing excessive testing, protecting teacher and staff rights, and strengthening parent outreach. SPEAK has mobilized advocates to influence the Knox County School Board, successfully challenging unjustified teacher terminations and pushing back against arbitrary standardized tests that steal valuable classroom learning time. Their efforts led to the election of school board members that were more aligned with the needs of teachers and students and the resignation of the School Superintendent.

In Middle Tennessee, SOCM co-founded CAPE (Coalition Advocating for Public Education) to take on similar challenges in Metro Nashville Public Schools. In November 2016, SOCM co-sponsored a public forum on the racial impact of school discipline policies – spotlighting the stark reality that, while Black children make up just 24% of public school students in the Southeast, they account for 48% of suspensions and 49% of expulsions.



These efforts helped spur the Nashville School Board to establish a committee to review disciplinary policies. CAPE's presence at Nashville School Board meetings has been hard to miss, often filling the speakers' list with passionate teachers, parents, and community advocates.

In Maury County, SOCM members continued their fight against racial discrimination towards teachers and students. When chapter leader Patricia Hawkins, a Maury County teacher for decades, was terminated without cause or explanation the chapter supported the Maury County Education Association (MCEA) and Tennessee Education Association in filing a wrongful discharge suit on her behalf. Meanwhile, Patricia was elected to the Maury County Commission. In late 2016, SOCM fought the district's mismanagement of employee payroll check distribution and continued to pressure the district to negotiate a memorandum of agreement over teachers' wages and working conditions.

On a statewide level, SOCM helped launch the Tennessee Public Education Coalition (TPEC) to connect and coordinate pro-public education organizations working at the General Assembly. The coalition's September 2016 meeting drew an even larger and more diverse set of organizations, including SPEAK, SOCM's Maury County Chapter, KCEA, CAPE, UnifiEd (Hamilton County), Tennessee Education Association, TREE, Momma Bears, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Williamson Strong, and Alcoa Warrior Parents. Participants engaged in small group discussions on school funding, charter schools and vouchers, standardized testing, and discrimination in education. They also helped to launch Pastors for Tennessee Children in 2018 based on a similar model in Texas that focuses on providing wrap-around care for local schools, teachers, parents and children.

Through these local and statewide partnerships, SOCM has helped build a network of educators, parents, students, and advocates who are united in the fight to keep Tennessee's public schools strong, equitable, and community-centered.



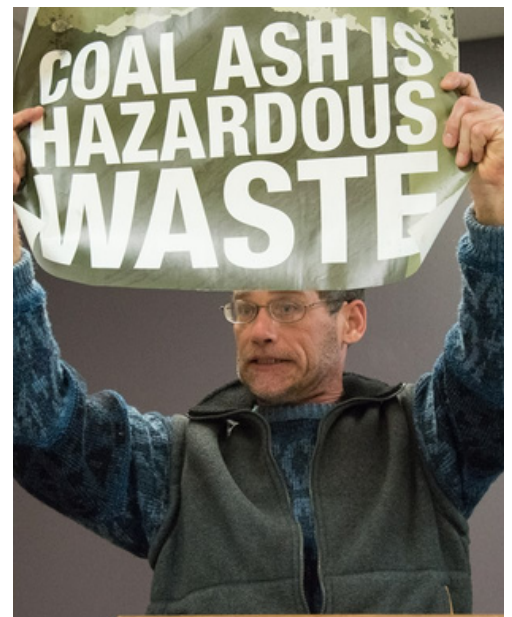
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

From 2015 to 2020, SOCM members fought relentlessly to hold polluters accountable and protect Tennessee communities from the toxic legacy of coal. In Roane County, Claxton, and Gallatin, members organized community meetings, challenged inadequate state and TVA cleanup plans, and demanded the complete removal of coal ash from unlined pits and flood-prone storage sites. The Kingston Coal Ash disaster of 2008 remained a powerful rallying point, especially as more workers who cleaned up the spill faced illness and death due to lack of protection.

In Claxton, the fight to close and safely remediate the Bull Run Fossil Plant united residents, scientists, workers, and environmental allies. SOCM's Bull Run Community Meetings drew together coal ash survivors, local officials, TVA employees, and public health advocates to push for a full removal plan and oppose TVA's proposals to store coal ash in place. TVA eventually withdrew their proposal in a win for the community. In Gallatin, members raised concerns over TVA's handling of toxic waste pits and the risks posed to drinking water. Through public hearings, media advocacy, and coordination with allies like Appalachian Voices and Sierra Club, SOCM elevated coal ash safety to a statewide issue, linking it to broader campaigns for environmental justice and community health.

SOCM also won defensive victories for Tennessee's waterways and landscapes. In 2016, testimony from SOCM members helped protect 76,000 acres in the Upper Cumberland Wildlife Refuge Area by securing a Lands Unsuitable for Mining designation. This victory preserved forests, streams, and habitat from destructive surface mining and demonstrated the power of coordinated local action backed by technical expertise and legal advocacy.

SOCM members continued to serve as advocates for the people of Appalachia by fighting for investments in workforce development, infrastructure, and economic diversification for communities most affected by the decline of the coal economy, in addition to the protection of critical amenities and services that make the region habitable.



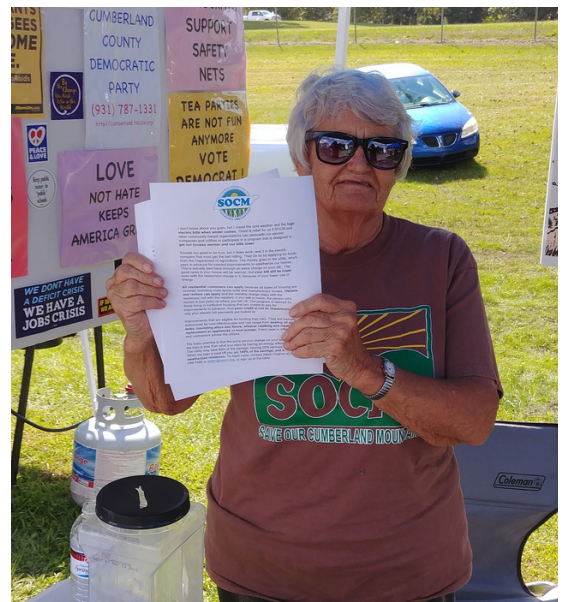
ECONOMIC & ENERGY JUSTICE

Access to affordable, clean energy remained a core priority for SOCM members over this period. The Cumberland County Chapter led a long-running campaign to convince Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) to adopt Pay-As-You-Save (PAYS) on-bill financing for home energy efficiency improvements. This model allows residents – regardless of income or credit history – to access weatherization and energy-saving upgrades, paying for them over time through their utility bill with no upfront costs. SOCM members met with VEC leadership, partnered with Appalachian Voices, and presented at community events to build public support.

While the PAYS campaign continued, SOCM joined statewide and regional partners in the Tennessee Valley Energy Democracy Tour. Members in Knoxville, Davidson, and Cumberland counties hosted public forums to examine TVA's history, decision-making structure, and energy policies. These events brought together residents, energy experts, and grassroots leaders to envision a democratic, renewable-powered TVA. Data from SOCM's Energy Equity Initiative highlighted the crushing energy burdens faced by low-income households, providing a foundation for calls to reform TVA rates and expand investment in efficiency programs.

In 2020, SOCM joined 30 other organizations calling on TVA to address three compounding crises facing the region: (1) the immediate economic distress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and in particular the urgent threat of utility shut-offs, (2) the climate, environmental and economic threats posed by TVA's refusal to embrace the vital clean energy transition; and (3) the disproportionate energy burdens and lack of access to clean energy ownership faced by communities identified as low-wealth, Black communities, and other communities of color.

These efforts connected local concerns to the broader fight for justice – positioning SOCM as a key voice for equitable energy policy, rural-urban collaboration, and public accountability in the Tennessee Valley.





STOP THE STINK

The “Stop the Stink” campaign in Rutherford County became one of SOCM’s most visible local fights during this period. With Middle Point Landfill taking in over 3,000 tons of trash per day from 16 counties – and with its capacity projected to be reached within a decade – members organized residents to demand sustainable waste management solutions. Odor complaints, traffic hazards, and fears over water contamination near the Stones River drove public outrage. SOCM opposed any landfill expansion (which was unanimously approved by County Commission) and instead pushed for a comprehensive zero waste plan centered on recycling, composting, and waste-to-energy innovation.

The campaign combined community forums, public hearings, petitions, neighborhood canvassing, media outreach, and direct advocacy with local government. In 2019, the chapter expanded its efforts to advocate for a multi-county solid waste authority, ensuring that regional planning would prioritize environmental and public health. Members connected this work to statewide zero waste campaigns, participating in events like Murfreesboro’s Earth Day celebration to educate the public.

By reframing waste management as both an environmental and social justice issue, SOCM elevated the conversation beyond nuisance complaints to a long-term vision for sustainable, equitable solutions.



MT PLEASANT

In Mt. Pleasant, SOCM members worked across multiple fronts to defend community well-being and ensure that residents' voices were heard in decisions that affect their lives.

The town's government saddled Mt. Pleasant with millions in debt after a local contractor botched a lagoon project aimed at improving the drinking water. SOCM members have been pushing back against the city's attempts to make local residents pay for their mistakes. Members conducted a cost study that showed Mt. Pleasant's water rates were some of the highest in the state, and a water quality study that concluded that the tap water was often undrinkable.

Members and other community leaders successfully pushed the City Commission to file suit against the contractors in charge of the failed water lagoon, in order to recover the money and relieve the burden on the people of Mt. Pleasant. The city leadership finally agreed to lower water rates by \$20 but later reversed it as the city could not afford to make payments on loans it had taken out for water and infrastructure. In addition to exposing the cause of the town's water problems, this campaign highlighted other instances of mismanagement and a lack of accountability by city officials, which resulted in changes in leadership.

Through listening sessions, voter education drives, and participation in legislative lobbying days, Mt. Pleasant leaders deepened the community's engagement in civic life. By linking education, environmental, and democratic participation efforts, SOCM's Mt. Pleasant members demonstrated the power of a multi-issue, grassroots approach to building a stronger, more resilient community.



APPALACHIAN TRANSITION

From 2015 to 2020, SOCM's Appalachian Transition work focused on moving coalfield communities toward healthier, more sustainable economies while addressing the environmental damage left behind by mining. Building on the federal Abandoned Mine Land (AML) program and the proposed RECLAIM Act, SOCM organized public forums, county resolutions, and lobbying trips to Washington, D.C., to secure funding for mine cleanup and community-led redevelopment.

In Campbell, Claiborne, and other East Tennessee counties, members mapped abandoned mine sites, identified potential reuse projects, and connected with state and federal agencies to ensure funds would go to locally supported initiatives. SOCM members also engaged in citizen inspections and bond release challenges, like at the Clearfork Surface Mine, to hold coal companies accountable for full reclamation. Additionally, with the assistance of Appalachian Transition Fellow Morgan Pennington, members created a community asset map that recorded the unique assets of the community. By talking to hundreds of residents in community meetings, at neighborhood events, and through door knocking, they were able to identify collective community goals for the region and bring more people into the work.

Through partnerships with the Alliance for Appalachia, Appalachian Voices, and other allies, SOCM linked environmental restoration to economic transition, advocating for renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and infrastructure investments as pathways to a post-coal future.



TENNESSEE IS NOT FOR SALE

Launched in 2015 after Governor Haslam's Office of Customer-Focused Government quietly issued a request for corporate bids to take over the management of public facilities, the Tennessee Is Not for Sale campaign quickly became one of the largest and most visible grassroots efforts in the state's recent history. The proposal threatened thousands of stable public jobs – including maintenance, groundskeeping, custodial, and housing services – across Tennessee, two-thirds of them on public college campuses. The plan was hatched behind closed doors, giving multinational corporations a seat at the table while excluding legislators, community members, and the very workers whose livelihoods were at risk.

SOCM joined forces with United Campus Workers, Jobs with Justice, the Sierra Club, the League of Women Voters, and other labor and community allies to stop the outsourcing. The coalition mobilized campus rallies, statewide protests, and a highly visible "Day of Action" at the state capitol. Hundreds of people from Knoxville, Memphis, Chattanooga, and rural counties silently marched to the Tennessee Tower – home to the outsourcing plan's architects – to confront state officials face-to-face. Legislative allies from both parties, including Representatives John Ray Clemmons and Lee Harris, and Senators Janice Bowling and Richard Briggs, joined the fight, culminating in a letter from 75 legislators urging the governor to halt the plan.

In Knoxville, SOCM members also took the fight local, rallying at the University of Tennessee campus and building solidarity with students and faculty senates passing anti-outsourcing resolutions. Across the state, the campaign educated the public on the dangers of privatizing public assets, spotlighting the governor's ties to JLL – the corporation awarded the outsourcing contract – and the damage done by similar past schemes.

By combining public pressure, legislative advocacy, and media scrutiny, the “Tennessee Is Not for Sale” campaign slowed and reshaped the outsourcing effort, winning key opt-out decisions on college campuses and with TVA, and reinforcing a powerful message: Tennessee's public jobs, lands, and services belong to the people – not to private profit.



LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

SOCM continues to invest deeply in training members to become effective leaders, organizers, and advocates. These sessions combined skill building with opportunities to strengthen relationships across chapters, ensuring that members could return to their communities with tools to take action.

In 2015, SOCM held a statewide Leadership Training Day in Lebanon, covering facilitation skills, lobbying, grassroots fundraising, media engagement, and issue identification. Members and staff also participated in regional media trainings in Knoxville and Murfreesboro, learning to use both traditional press and emerging social media platforms to advance local campaigns.

The following years saw targeted workshops like Grassroots Policy Training at the Highlander Center, which combined campaign strategy with deep dives into environmental policy, mining regulations, and water quality protections. The coalition Community Media Organizing Project (CMOP) continued to train members at their annual communications training, and other local groups like Virginia Organizing, Chattanooga Organizing for Action (CALEB), and the Alliance for Appalachia also contributed to members' ongoing education. And, as always, the Annual Meeting was full of fun, fellowship, and skill building, and the Anti-Racism Transformation Team provided opportunities for members to learn about building a more multi-racial organization and anti-racist movement work.

Even in 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic made in-person gatherings unsafe, SOCM adapted by moving trainings online. Chapters hosted webinars on topics like tenant rights, civic engagement, and zero waste planning, and developed resources for members new to video conferencing. These remote trainings not only kept campaigns moving forward during a public health crisis, they also expanded accessibility for members in rural areas or with limited travel capacity.

Across all these efforts, SOCM's approach to training reflected its values: building skills from the ground up, centering member knowledge, and fostering a statewide network of leaders ready to fight for social, economic, and environmental justice.



Cumberland County Chapter

- Led a multi-year push for Volunteer Energy Cooperative to adopt a Pay-As-You-Save (PAYS) on-bill financing program for energy efficiency upgrades, including community education and direct engagement with utility leadership.
- Maintained oversight of the Turner Surface Mine cleanup, speaking at public hearings and securing measurable reductions in pollutants.
- Hosted public educational events on abandoned mine lands and pollinator conservation, including hands-on school programs.
- Advocated for the creation of the Gaynor Solar Array both locally and with TVA.

Maury County Chapter

- Won a major victory in Mt. Pleasant by forcing city leaders to lower water rates after a botched water treatment project left residents with unfair debt.
- Led a petition campaign calling for resignation of local officials over corruption and mismanagement
- Advocated for anti-bullying policies and addressed racial inequities in the county school system.



Knoxville Chapter

- Partnered with SPEAK to fight excessive standardized testing, protect teacher rights, and mobilize parents in school board advocacy.
- Advocated for affordable housing, legal representation and basic rights for tenants, repercussions for predatory landlords, and expanded assistance for renters during the pandemic.
- Advocated for community investment needs in Knoxville that resulted in a \$60 billion community investment plan, the largest of its kind, from BB&T, SunTrust, and the National Community Reinvestment Coalition.

Rutherford County Chapter

- Spearheaded the long-running “Stop the Stink” campaign against Middle Point Landfill expansion, promoting a Zero Waste regional plan.
- Conducted air quality monitoring and research with local universities to identify harmful compounds near the landfill.
- After more than two years of organizing, secured stronger protections for the Flat Rock Cedar Glade’s sensitive cave and sinkhole system, which feeds into Murfreesboro’s drinking water supply. Persistent advocacy forced the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) to require quarterly testing for pollutants along with enforceable deadlines and civil fines for noncompliance.

Roaring River Chapter

- Participated in defending public lands, including contributing to advocacy that secured a Lands Unsuitable for Mining designation for 76,000 acres in the Upper Cumberland Wildlife Refuge Area.

Jackson Chapter

- Secured traffic safety improvements and park beautification in East Jackson.



From 2015 to 2020, SOCM members and allies maintained a strong presence in the Tennessee General Assembly, and in front of government agencies, pushing for laws that advance social, economic, and environmental justice – and working just as hard to stop harmful bills. They also were ever present in Washington as part of the Alliance for Appalachia lobbying team.

Promoting Environmental Justice

Through the Energy, Ecology, and Environmental Justice (E3) Committee, SOCM lobbied for the federal RECLAIM Act, which would direct funds to clean up abandoned mine lands and support community-driven redevelopment. SOCM secured county-level resolutions of support in Campbell and Roane Counties and helped win co-sponsorship from Tennessee members of Congress. This was paired with advocacy for stronger bonding requirements (and even an application denial) for mining operations to ensure companies bear the cost of environmental damage.

SOCM members continued to successfully press local, state, and federal agencies to hold opportunities for community voices to be heard on topics such as abandoned mine lands, the federal POWER+ Plan, and the RECLAIM Act. Members also used these hearings to present technical comments and personal testimony, often coordinating with partners like Appalachian Voices, the Alliance for Appalachia, and Sierra Club to expand turnout and media coverage.

Protecting Air & Water Quality

SOCM supported and won passage of several environmental protections, including a bill to ensure lead testing in school water sources and a bill allowing watchdog groups to monitor where low-level radioactive waste is disposed of. Members also fought to preserve stormwater protections against industry-backed attempts to weaken them, and challenged bills to outright ban vehicle emissions testing unless municipalities opted back in.



Fighting Harmful Environmental Rollbacks

From 2015 to 2020, SOCM's fight against harmful environmental rollbacks meant actively resisting efforts at the state and federal level to weaken water, air, and land protections that safeguard Tennessee communities. Members mobilized to stop the state from taking over federal coal mining regulation under a "Primacy" program that would have reduced oversight and left taxpayers with potential cleanup costs.

SOCM opposed attempts to loosen stormwater runoff rules that would have increased pollution in rivers and streams, and worked with the Southern Environmental Law Center and others to challenge TVA's inadequate coal ash management plans, pushing for stronger protections for waterways and communities near Kingston and Bull Run.

Through public hearings, lobbying, technical comments, and coalition actions, SOCM confronted proposals that prioritized industry profits over environmental health, insisting that agencies uphold their legal responsibilities under the Clean Water Act, Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act, and other key protections. This persistent advocacy not only slowed or blocked some rollbacks but also kept community voices at the center of environmental decision-making.

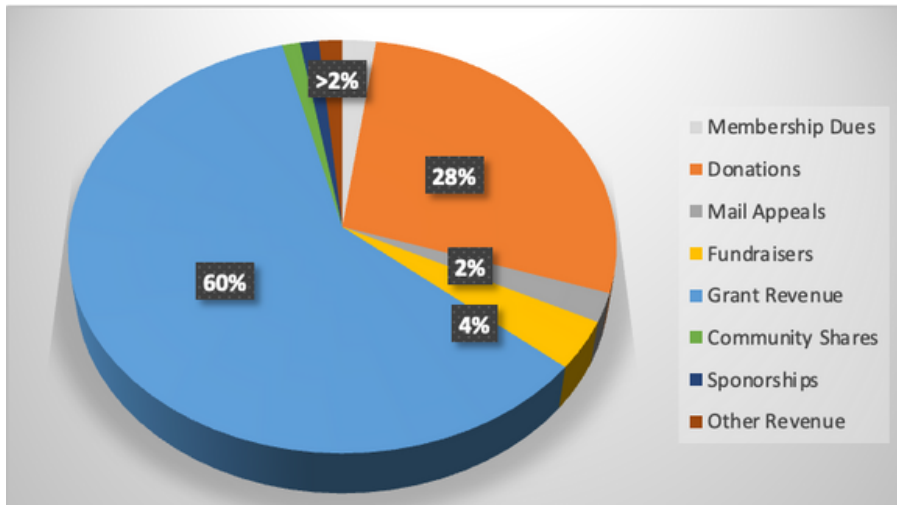
Civic Engagement & Voter Access

SOCM consistently tied legislative advocacy to voter engagement, holding public forums and training members on how to track bills, contact legislators, and speak at hearings. Ahead of the 2018 midterms, several chapters helped register and educate voters, and partnered with other local groups to increase voter turnout.

Through a mix of grassroots pressure, coalition building, and direct lobbying, SOCM kept member priorities in front of lawmakers year after year, even in the face of a challenging political climate.

FINANCIALS

2015-2020 INCOME \$2,124,882



2015-2020 EXPENSES \$2,200,542



MEMBER LEADERS AND STAFF

SOCM Board Members

President: Patrick Morales, Julie Burns, Erica Davis

Vice President: Nora Limon, Erica Davis, Tiara-Lady Wilson

Secretary: Erika Swain, Nova Land, Daniel Snider, Taylor Prince, Tiara-Lady Wilson, Leith Patton

Treasurer: Casey Self, Patricia Hawkins, Franz Raetzer

Chapter Representatives: Jean Cheely, Alex Fields, Karen Olayinka, Doug DePina, Ellen Martin, Jake Burkhalter, Kaki Comer, Denise Acquista, Ruthie Whisnet, Joycelene Johns, Calief Snelling, Drocella Mugorewera, Shalitha Graves, Stephanie Rapp, Kara Reeves, Anna Skates, Gail Ford, Kelvin Streeter, Tiara-Lady Wilson, Meredith Kermicle

At-Large Representatives: David Beaty, Lauren Bush, Leith Patton, Taylor Prince, April Jarocki, DJ Coker, Brad Wright

SOCM Resource Project Board Members

Franz Raetzer, Jon Jonakin, Howard White, David Beaty, Brian Paddock, Casey Self, Wanda Campbell, Drocella Mugorewera, Amy Kelly, Doug Hudgens

SOCM Staff Members

Executive Director: Ann League

Director of Operations, Finance & Development: Linda Cowan

Community Organizers: Mike Cannon, Adam Hughes, Rosa Ponce, Caroline Ford

Communications Director: Heather Davis

Development Organizer: Zach Blume

Interns & Fellows: Micah-Sage Bolden, Shannon O'Brien, Erica Davis, Morgan Pennington, Maggie Lee, Abby Golden, Isabella Killius

IN MEMORIAM

During these years, SOCM mourned the loss of leaders including Carol Judy, Thelma Currie, Franz Raetzer, Billy Christopher, Bill Naumann, Sadie Hill, Dwight Green, Dr. Liane Russell, Kate Bradley, Vickie Terry, Sandy Scrade, David Beaty, Jim Young, and others whose lives embodied grassroots activism. We honor their legacy in every campaign we carry forward.



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