Sister Warriors

ACTION FUND

2024 Post Election Memo



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WE ARE SISTER WARRIORS ACTION FUND

The Sister Warriors Action Fund (SWAF) is led by systems-impacted and formerly or currently incarcerated women and trans people of all genders. We shift power through organizing, advocacy, policy, and electoral work.

SWAF uplifts the leadership of those who have experienced and continue to experience the devastating and intergenerational effects of incarceration, poverty, and gender-based violence in our work to end the criminalization of our communities. This means that we are committed to ending the violence of the criminal legal system, as well as undoing the harms of foster care, welfare, and other institutions that participate in criminalizing and controlling us. We are building a transformative movement that secures justice, opportunity, and self-determination for all.

Finding the power in our lived experiences is key to the Sister Warriors framework. It's also the basis for the Sister Warriors Freedom Charter, a visionary document created by 500+ members that serves as the North Star for our work. In a political moment where the safety, freedom, and dignity of our communities are increasingly at risk, it is a necessity — not a luxury — that we ground our transformative work in the experiences of women, trans people of all genders, and people of color. SWAF is invested in building movement leadership spaces that see the liberation of all of our people as deeply interwoven and inseparable from one another.

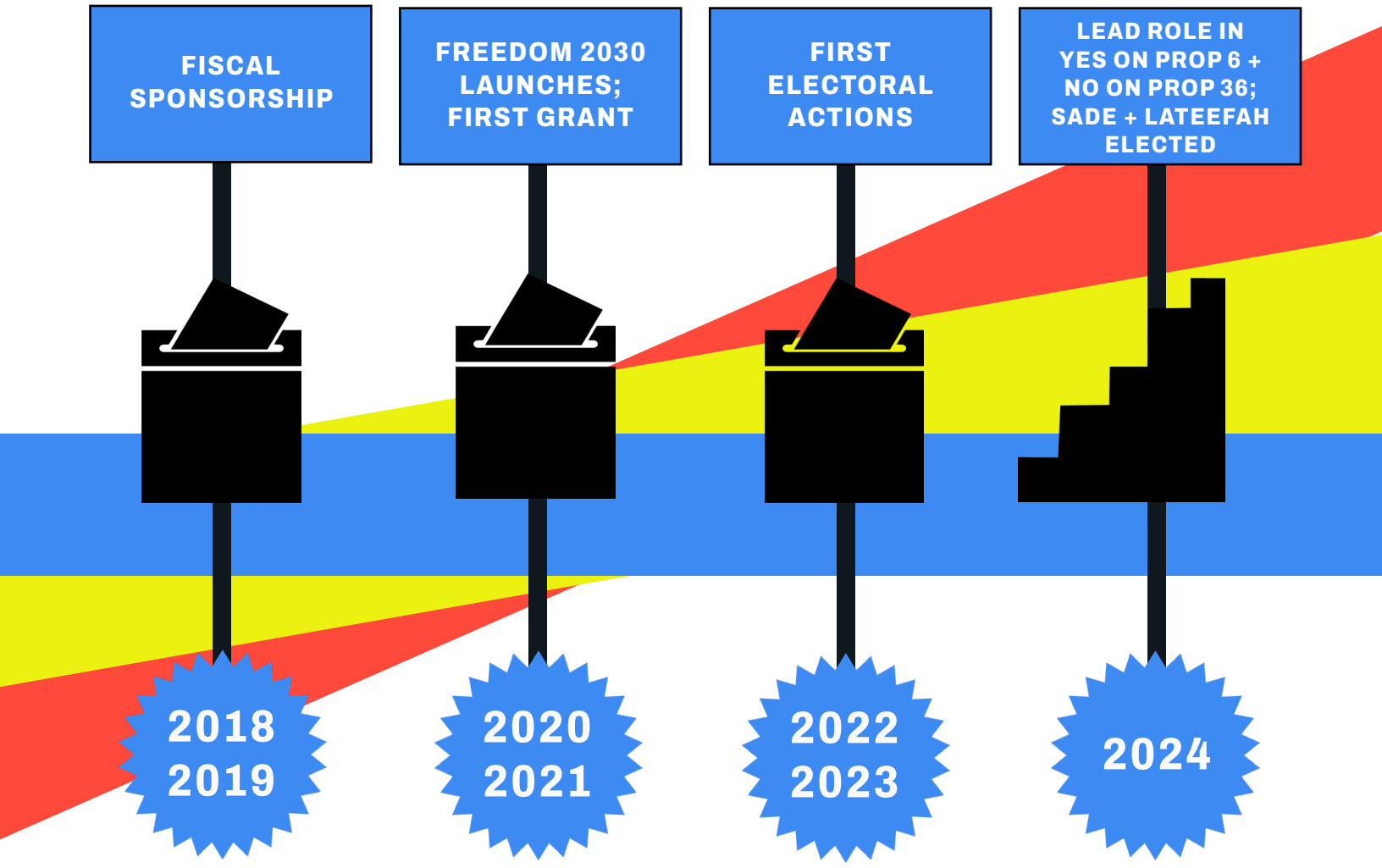
In 2020, Sister Warriors Action Fund launched Freedom 2030, a ten-year campaign to end the incarceration and criminalization of our people while creating new ways of meeting our need for safe, healthy, thriving communities. The campaign combines advocacy, policy, organizing, and electoral strategy to fulfill the vision of our Freedom Charter.

In 2022, SWAF took our first electoral actions, endorsing our first candidate and building our internal infrastructure and an electoral advisory committee within our coalition. As a result of these efforts and those of our coalition members, Antioch City Councilmember Tamisha Torres-Walker won her seat by three votes.

Our 2024 Key Priorities were grounded in the vision laid out in our Freedom Charter, advancing the rights of currently and formerly incarcerated systems-impacted people through our support of systems-impacted candidates and Ballot Propositions that move our policy agenda forward.

SISTER WARRIORS

Action Fund Timeline



2024 Key Priorities

PASSING PROPOSITION 6 AND DEFEATING PROP 36

Sister Warriors Action Fund has led the fight to pass Proposition 6 since 2020. With the passage of ACA 8 in 2024, Sister Warriors Action Fund knew that working hard to pass this important amendment to California's constitution had to be a priority. Proposition 6, which would have ended involuntary servitude (slavery) as punishment for a crime under California's State Constitution, lost at the ballot this cycle. However, this was SWAF's first time engaging in a ballot measure campaign. We played a lead role in the Executive Committee of Yes on Prop 6, End Slavery in California, and worked hard to organize and educate members and voters to pass Proposition 6.

Unfortunately, Proposition 36 proponents were able to play upon Californians' fears and roll back the progress we have made to prioritize treatment and services over incarceration for certain drug and theft-related offenses during the last decade. SWAF was an integral part of the Grassroots Coalition of Californians United Against Prop 36, speaking up at press conferences, canvassing, phone banking, and educating our members at Chapter (member) Events and Town Halls.

Although Prop 6 was defeated and Prop 36 passed, Sister Warriors Action Fund is committed to ending the violence of the criminal legal system.

OUR MISSION REMAINS:

TO BUILD THE POLITICAL POWER OF POOR AND WORKING-CLASS PEOPLE, THOSE MOST IMPACTED BY POVERTY, VIOLENCE, AND INCARCERATION, AND WIELD THAT POWER TO CREATE TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE - WE KNOW THAT DOES NOT STOP ON ELECTION DAY, AND OUR MOVEMENT AND OUR WORK WILL CONTINUE AND INTENSIFY.

ELECTING LATEEFAH SIMON TO CONGRESS AND SADE ELWAHARY TO THE STATE ASSEMBLY

The Sister Warriors Action Fund supports policy solutions and bold visionary leaders who will dismantle oppressive systems and build pathways toward liberation. That is why SWAF endorsed Lateefah Simon and Sade Elwahary.

Both of these candidates embody what Sister Warriors Action Fund stands for – championing the well-being and needs of those who have experienced and continue to experience the devastating and intergenerational effects of incarceration, poverty, and gender-based violence, and Lateefah and Sade have worked tirelessly alongside Sister Warriors Action Fund to end the criminalization of our communities.

We are delighted that both of these Sister Warriors were elected! They will go on to lead the fight to end oppressive systems and protect our communities. We know they will have our backs. We are proud and excited for the impact they will create.



SWAF IN ACTION IN 2024

SWAF understands that all organizing is relational, and we have deep relationships with our members and communities across California.

We know that the California Electorate has changed substantially over the last ten years– especially with the advent of automatic voter registration and all-vote-by-mail. This year, there were 22 million registered voters that made up California's overall electorate. Of that 22 million, based on the most recent estimate as of writing, only a little over 16 million people cast ballots. That is a sharp decline from 2020: a drop off of nearly 1.7 million voters, or a 9.7% decline.

We have work to do. Of those less likely to vote, infrequent or often ignored voters, and those not yet registered to vote are largely 18-34, they identify as people of color or mixed race, and they are often renters and non-college educated. This is where Sister Warriors Action Fund worked to make a difference this year.

Our members, many of whom are formerly incarcerated and systems-impacted, tend to be among the most ignored voters. As a result, many of them vote infrequently or not at all. Because Sister Warriors Action Fund is an organization led by and serving formerly incarcerated and systems-impacted women and trans people of all genders, we have a unique ability to reach people where they are.

Many of our members must be deeply engaged to see the importance of voting because democracy has not typically included them and was not built for them.

This election cycle, Sister Warriors Action Fund was able to use our unique voice and double-down on our experience–lived and earned–to reach voters that other organizations aren't able to. Our plan layered communications, relational organizing, and meaningful events, targeting our membership and those voters who the results of this election will most directly impact.

COMMUNICATIONS

This election cycle, SWAF sent 13 email messages to our 5,000+ mailing list and 6000+ members and connected with them on social media, centering our members and those most impacted by the passage of Proposition 6 and the defeat of Proposition 36. Our posts engaged over 8,000 followers and members and reached 106,000 users. Our social media and email campaigns and our SWAF voting guide and mail program drove members and voters to the SWAF website to pledge to vote.

We drove people to Yes on Prop 6 and No on Prop 36 press conferences and voter contact events;

We introduced Lateefah Simon and Sade Elhawary and amplified their voices and stories.









The SWAF team and our members also attended and spoke at many press conferences and campaign events.

SOME PRESS EVENTS INCLUDE:

- Yes on Prop 6 Kickoff events in LA and Sacramento on September 3
- Yes on Prop 6 Press Conference in LA on September 16
- Yes on Prop 6 Rally in San Diego on September 27
- No on Prop 36 Press Conference in LA on October 3
- No on Prop 36 Campaign Day of Action in LA on October 14
- Yes on Prop 6 Press Conference in Fresno on October 17
- Yes on Prop 6 Press Conference and Rally in San Francisco on October 29
- Women for Yes on Prop 6 Press Conference and Rally in LA on October 30



Our members were engaged at events around the state and raised their voices about the power and promise of representation from our endorsed candidates, and the importance of voting No on Proposition 36 and Yes on Proposition 6.

One way SWAF had such a large impact this cycle was by elevating the voices of those most impacted by our oppressive systems. Our member, Yannick, was selected as an Ambassador for the Yes on Prop 6 Campaign. Yannick participated in and spoke at many press conferences and in an ad for Yes on Prop 6.

"Yannick was really powerful. Yannick came to Sister Warriors Action Fund after helping us with prison sexual assault work. She participated in one of our Town Halls. She embodies everything we hope to do with our membership. Bring the voices and experiences of those formerly and recently incarcerated into the light."

ORGANIZING + VOTER CONTACT

For over 70% of the SWAF team,

this was our first time participating in electoral campaigns. It was the first time many of us phone banked, canvassed, or learned about "GOTV" or Get Out the Vote efforts. It was, for many, the first time we had attended candidate events or intentionally organized friends and family to register people to vote and attend ballot parties, canvasses, phone banks, and Town Halls.

The Sister Warriors Action Fund team faced many systemic barriers to engaging voters around these issues. We were learning while trying to reach and teach others from similar experiences and backgrounds. Those who have been impacted by our oppressive systems are often harder to reach–physically and otherwise. Persuading them even to register to vote, let alone vote or to take an action, is often challenging–for good reason. Nevertheless, our team worked hard, and we persevered. Even when we knew the odds and polls were against us.



WE HAVE ONLY BEGUN TO FIGHT.

SWAF engaged voters in several innovative ways. We circulated a 501 c3 voter guide to members "inside." We hosted youth-focused events and Town Halls, and we participated in important cultural events, such as the Taste of Soul Event in LA, where we could educate voters.

We organized the way it works best for our communities–via relationships and networks.

"For most of our folks, it was their first time being a part of any kind of a voting event. They learned what a proposition was. They learned how to vote and why it is so important. A lot of them started out thinking maybe it wasn't important, but what was on the ballot hit home for them–it was personal. The conversations we had with them helped them put into perspective the entire ballot and what it meant for them."

However, we also layered our relational organizing with targeted voter contact informed by GOTV best practices from the Analyst Institute. We knew that LA County was the most important target for Yes on Prop 6 and No on Prop 36, and we knew that Sade needed support. As a result, we sent 20,000 pieces of social pressure GOTV mail into AD 57 in a successful effort to elect Sade Elwarhary and get out the vote for Yes on Prop 6 and No on Prop 36.

In addition to this mailpiece, we printed 501 c4 voter guides and lit pieces for canvassing, and organized members to attend Town Halls, phone banks, and canvasses.

Some of the organizing and voter contact events that our team participated in were:

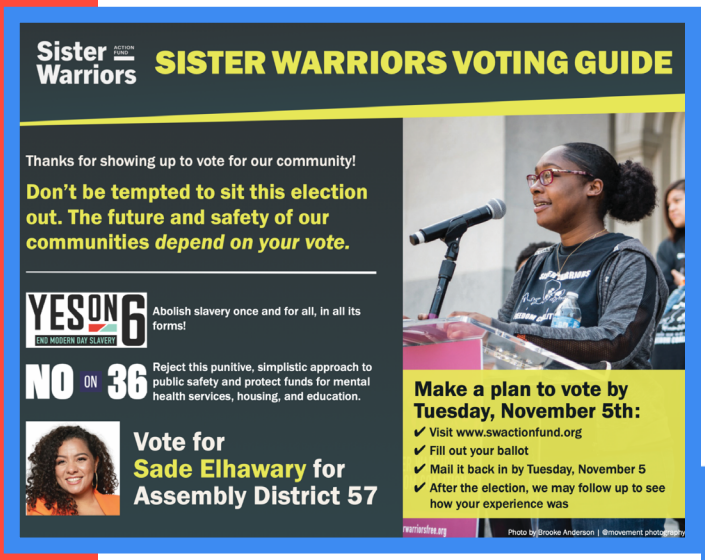
- Canvass for Sade Elhawary in LA on October 12
- No on Prop 36 phonebank hosted by SWAF for members in San Jose on October 16
- No on Prop 36 and Yes on Prop 6 youth Town Hall in Tehachapi on October 19
- No on Prop 36 Ballot Party in LA Co-hosted by SWAF on October 19
- No on Prop 36 and Yes on Prop 6 member event in LA on October 21
- Town Hall with Lateefah Simon in Oakland on October 24
- No on Prop 36 joint canvassing event in Oakland in October 26
- No on Prop 36 and Yes on Prop 6 GOTV events in LA and Oakland on November 2 and 3

"There was a member I had met in the office, Christine. She had just returned home from a lengthy prison sentence. It was her first week out. We offered her an opportunity to canvass, and she was so excited! I was worried it was too much for her, but she embraced the experience. I was tired after the first couple of hours, but Christine said, 'We have to finish these doors!' She was able to meet Sade as well, and that was really meaningful for her. Because she just returned home, we also registered her to vote!"

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IMPACTS + LESSONS

The SWAF team made huge impacts this year.





We learned what it takes to be in leadership on a ballot measure committee and how ballot measure campaigns and coalitions are structured.

We learned about best practices, such as social pressure, and incorporated tools, such as PDI, for the first time.

Most importantly, we educated and informed our members and made our presence known!

We were able to activate folks. Without our efforts, they would not have thought about the importance of voting or have understood the importance of Prop 6 and 36 to their lives. This election got our people talking, which will have a lasting impact on SWAF and our work. We have a Sister Warrior in Congress and a new ally in the State Assembly that will have our back on our issues. And, we realized that we still have a lot of work to do to win hearts and minds here in California.

Moving forward, we are preparing to keep up our offense intensity while being aware that we will likely have to play a lot of defense to keep our people safe.

Looking ahead, we know we will need to continue to build out and engage our base. We know we will need to be doing deep work in the next couple of years to build with the folks we hope to mobilize. Now, we have more tools, skills, and knowledge to be able to do just that.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Sister Warriors Action Fund is proud of the work we did to educate our members, our families, and the community on the dangers of passing Prop 36 and the importance of passing Prop 6, electing Lateefah Simon for Congress in District 12 and Sade Elwahary for Assembly in District 57. Yes, we worked hard to phone bank, canvass, and get the word out.

And, we know that when others go wide, we go deep.



Our roots are grounded in the care for our people–those on the inside and those impacted by the harms of our systems. That's why we know that the most impactful work we did in this election was talking with those people most cannot reach: the youth who came to our events and registered to vote for the first time; those who had received ballots in the mail but had never opened them because they weren't sure what to do with them; and our sisters who just got out and went to their first ever political event.

Here are some of the strategies the SWAF team will be employing in 2025:

- **Powermap the State Assembly to create tiered and targeted legislative and electoral districts.**
- **Build out our membership growth and engagement strategy, focusing on our target legislative and electoral districts.**
- **Revamp and scale up our endorsement process so that we can identify new leaders and champions and build relationships.**
- **Create an elected mentorship and support program so our elected champions get the support they need to succeed.**

- **Plan for increased defensive fights and opposition attacks.**
- **Powermap the organizational and stakeholder relationships we need to intentionally build.**
- **Continue to build our internal systems and maximize relationships with other organizations that engage in electoral work.**
- **Identify key staff training opportunities to build team skills and advance electoral work.**

Sister Warriors Action Fund knows that when we dream big and work hard, as we have with our Freedom Charter, we win.

We are five years into our Freedom Charter, and as it says in the preamble,

"We pledge to strive together until the decriminalization and decarceration of all women, girls, and trans people of all genders and our loved ones and communities is achieved and our families – as we define them – are (re)united."

We have begun to see this happen in the wins we have had already, and we know we have miles to go.

We are ready.

“I feel like I was able to engage in a way I never had before, and I felt passionate about the work we were doing! I know Sade and Lateefah are going to do things to support our communities. It makes me want to dive more into electoral work and maybe even run for a position one day! I hope to do more of this work year-round. What I have always heard is GOTV work isn’t just at election time but really needs to be done year round!”

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swactionfund.org