

Shimon Cohen:

Welcome to Doin' The Work: Frontline Stories of Social Change, where we bring you stories of real people working to address real issues. I am your host, Shimon Cohen.

In this episode, I talk with Amanda Wallace, who is the Founder and Executive Director of Operation Stop CPS, based in Durham, North Carolina. We talk about how the family policing system surveils and regulates families, especially Black families, under the guise of child protection. Amanda shares how she worked in child protective services for 10 years, with the original good intentions of helping, but realized the harm that was being done to children and families. As she began to advocate for change within that system, specifically providing parents with information about their rights and how the system works, she faced retaliation and lost her job. Amanda discusses the work of Operation Stop CPS, how they intervene to assist families being affected by the system, families who have had their children taken from them — family separation — and families facing this state-sanctioned kidnapping. Amanda explains how this system is rooted in anti-Black racism, both historically and present-day. She shares the hope of building a movement to end family policing while providing the needed education, advocacy, and support for families right now. I hope this conversation inspires you to action.

Before we get into the interview, I want to let you all know about our episode's sponsor, the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work. First off, I want to thank them for sponsoring the podcast. UH has a phenomenal social work program that offers face-to-face master's and doctorate degrees as well as an online and hybrid MSW. They offer one of the country's only political social work programs and an abolitionist focused learning opportunity. Located in the heart of Houston, the program is guided by their bold vision to achieve racial, social, economic, and political justice, local to global. In the classroom and through research, they are committed to challenging systems and reimagining ways to achieve justice and liberation. Go to www.uh.edu/socialwork to learn more. And now, the interview.

Thank you so much for coming on Doin' The Work, Amanda. We've done some past episodes about the family policing system, otherwise known as child welfare, how it gets hidden and covered up and called child welfare. And when I saw the work you were doing on, I learned about your work on Instagram, I really wanted to make sure to get you on here. So, I'm really excited that we connected and that you're on here. And so just to start off, please tell us about Operation Stop CPS. What do you all do and how'd you get started as an organization?

Amanda Wallace:

Yeah, well first I want to thank you for holding space to allow me to talk about the work. But again, the name, the title, Operation Stop CPS, that's what we do. Our mission is to abolish the child protection system, which is what a lot of people reference it as. But what we understand it to be the family regulation system, the family policing system. And so our mission is to expose the reality of the system and then to call people to action to actually be the solution. And so we do that by educating families on their rights, educating families on what they should do during the process to be able to ensure that their voice is heard. Also educating communities on what they need to do to be the solution to the problem. And that looks like protesting, court watching, sending emails, making phone calls. And so again, our main mission is to abolish the family regulation system and we do that in a lot of ways because it looks different for a lot of families.

Shimon Cohen:

I think one of the things that really struck me about looking at your organization's website is all the different ways you intervene. So, maybe we can talk about that now and then we'll get into some other stuff a little later because there's really just so many ways. Could you go a little more in depth about and describe all the different ways that Operation Stop CPS intervenes in order to protect families and children and keep them together?

Amanda Wallace:

Yeah, we do that by understanding that we have to humanize the family. So, the system is able to paint this narrative that families are in need of assistance from the state and that they're there to protect families. But what we do is we are able to show this family in their truest sense and the love, a mother's pain of not being with their child for years, being able to see that. We do that by allowing parents to just speak their own narrative, to tell their story. We're storytellers. We tell the story of the family and then we use social media and the news to be able to magnify that voice so that this family is not fighting alone. And also then taking that in the court of public opinion because that's something that's not always utilized by families is the court of public opinion.

And so then bringing it to the actual courtroom and offering court support, being able to sit there with the family. It's so important when a mother that has been fighting for years with nobody sitting there in support then has two, three, four, five people sitting out there showing the judge, showing the department that there's community. And that is the most powerful I believe thing when we think about Operation Stop CPS is the activation of community. When we say, "Well, how do you reimagine or how do you abolish the system?" You abolish the system by igniting a community around people and letting a community know their responsibility to ensure that children are safe. It's a mindset shift. Operation Stop CPS is a mindset shift and a mindset shift that started from a social worker that used to work in the system.

I worked as a CPS investigator for over 10 years in the state of North Carolina. I went to college, I got my bachelor's of social work and went immediately into child welfare as an investigator. And so for those 10 years I thought I was a superhero. I thought that I was doing the work. I thought that I was protecting families and giving services to families. But in reality, that's not what was happening. That's not what was happening. I was simply doing a job. I was doing a job from a system that was set up and designed to make me think that I was doing the work. And so Operation Stop CPS really challenges that belief of people that are in the system. If you're inside of the system, how can you say that you are doing the work when we put families in front of you that are hurting, that you're not actually helping, that you're traumatizing. And it's really putting up the mirrors because for me, I had to take off the blinders in order to truly see what needed to happen and to walk in my purpose.

And that looked like when I was in the system, I took a child into custody that I knew was safe. So as a social worker, I filed the petition, I wrote the petition, I walked the petition to the judge. The judge didn't read it. He just signed it and gave me custody, the state custody of this child. And in that moment I was faced with a moral dilemma. I was faced with a moral dilemma because guess what, I had did my job. Literally I did my job, I did what I was told to do. But what that did was ruin a family's life. And so those are the realities that we have to talk about.

Those are the realities we have to create safe spaces for people to be able to confront those realities and then say, well, what are we willing to do differently? There is no need for the family regulation system. There's no need for the family policing system. If we can just be really clear about that and really simple about that when we are in the community, then we would be able to move forward a lot quicker in this fight.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah, that's an incredible story. And I actually want to hear a little bit more about this turning point for you because... So, you've got 10 years that you were in CPS and then you have this turning point. And one thing that I was thinking about when you were talking about that is the training that you had and a lot of us have as social workers where we're taught this is actually the right way to do things to protect children. So, we're already taught to look at parents who are struggling as in some ways problematic and dangerous. So how did that shift for you? Was it building up over time and then it really, that was the turning point? Or how did you undo all of that training and all of those years of being in the system? Because I think it does something... At least for me, I think there's an undoing that needs to happen mentally too.

Amanda Wallace:

It does. And I think I'm still undoing what I've learned from the system every day. It has helped from the political education that I've gotten since being out of the system. Shout out to the African National Women's Organization, which I'm a part of, when it comes to political education. But when it comes to the turning point, yes, it was building, it was up. Throughout my career, I felt like I was able to use my voice to challenge certain things. But policies, I saw them getting even more oppressive. The things that weren't written in policy that gave some latitude about we can talk about it and use some critical thinking skills, those things, we couldn't do it anymore. It was just this is what you have to do, you have to do it this way, and there's no exceptions. So what that then does to a person that is used... We can have a conversation.

I don't operate in black and white. I'm not a robot or an AI that this system is trying to create. And so when I'm out speaking to a family and I'm talking to them and there is poverty that is present or just challenges or a mother that has to choose between going to work or supervising her child. Those things, when you're faced with those things and you have to have real conversations, but a system that doesn't accept those realities, even though those are the realities that it created for those people. And so again, as a human though, a person going through my own personal, I believe awakening at the same time coming to, well, what am I doing? What am I truly, what has this education? I'm a social worker, what does that even mean? Asking myself those questions. What am I doing here?

And then seeing the fact that I'm not truly helping. I'm not helping. Someone said that social work is just a profession to help people feel good about their social condition that's been imposed on them. And when I heard that, I was like, that's it. I was going out to people's homes and helping them for a moment. They're talking to me, but then at the same time, I'm just using that information for the case. I'm not truly giving them any help and those types of things. So again, I think it was just stacked on, stacked on, stacked on things that were happening that just caused me to have this moral just again, dilemma. And my voice became just a threat to this system. I think I became closer to the root of the problem. I started to go onto state design teams in North Carolina. They were redesigning child welfare. And I'm like, okay, this might be a avenue to try to get my voice heard.

But once I got even closer I think to the root or to the power source, I just saw how chaotic and how nothing they actually want to do actually changes it. And just how far removed people were from the actual people. No one cared about impacted parents on these meetings. Nobody cared about what was happening to families. It was just writing up little pretty forms and making people feel like, think something was changing. And I was just done with that. Frankly, I was done with that shit. I was over it. I was like, no, enough is enough. And when I went out on leave at Wake County, which is where I was formally employed, when I went out on leave, I had no idea what Operation Stop CPS was. It wasn't a name, it wasn't an idea or anything. I was just done. And I knew something had to happen.

And I got a big whiteboard and put it up on my wall and just started just, things just started coming out of my head. What could be a solution and what needs to happen? And Operation Stop CPS was birthed from this need for change. And not just change, but revolutionary change. Change that would put me as a social worker out of business. How do I stop myself? How do I stop myself from coming into somebody's home? That's the information that families need to have. And so in launching Operation Stop CPS, the Respond in Power Guide was also launched, which is a how-to guide for families who get that knock on the door from a CPS investigator. And also before you get that knock, you should have this information. And again, it was like a, okay, this is the information that people need to know. Stop opening your door. Stop letting CPS come inside. Again, just giving people this information so that they started to draw the line. These people are the enemy. That's the first thing. Again, it's the mindset. Our goal is to shift mindsets and if we keep seeing the state as the people with the resources, we'll never be able to close our door to them. We have to see the state as the enemy, as our captors, as our colonizers. We have to see them for who they are.

Shimon Cohen:

It's so interesting because really in a lot of ways only someone who had that experience you had could create, not saying other people that never worked in CPS obviously, but you know all the ins and outs, you know all the tricks that get used. So, you creating a guide for parents and having this really transformative experience to then create this organization, it's got to be... It's you're giving out the inside info.

Amanda Wallace:

Right. And that's why I got fired. The day after Operation Stop CPS was launched in 2021 and the Respond in Power Guide was launched, we got locked out of computers. And they said, "Bye-bye." And one of the things was they said, "You cannot give out information to the public. This is detrimental to the county for you to give people their rights." And it's like, excuse me. I thought that's what we were supposed to do. That was my argument. Nothing that's in the guide is not public. It's no proprietary information. It is simply taking the information that people should know and putting it in a guide, a handy guide right here because words are powerful. We have two pages full of definitions just for people to understand the lingo of the system because just knowing that will help you understand and have thoughtful conversations with people. What to ask when the social worker picks up the phone, those types of things. They don't know how to deal with people asking them questions on the other end. And so they know that that's dangerous for the county for families to be empowered with knowledge. It is, but it's what needs to happen. You know what I mean? What needs to happen? Families have to have power and we have to take it back. We can't ask for it.

Shimon Cohen:

So, you actually started this while you were still employed by the county and then you're thinking, oh, I can keep doing this? Or you were trying to figure out maybe what you were going to do right with work and stuff, but you were like, I know I need to do this to help these families and then they fired you.

Amanda Wallace:

So, I was on leave due to the mental anguish of this system. And so I think when I was no longer doing that work, my mind became so powerful. My mind became so powerful and so clear. And during that time, not being physically attached to the system or doing that work, that's when this idea of Operation Stop CPS was launched and the Respond in Power Guide. And then yes, as soon as it was launched to

the public and my county found out about it, I was fired because they said that it was incompatible with public service.

Shimon Cohen:

That says a lot. That says a lot right there because, this is a bigger conversation, but why are families the enemy and why aren't people able to know what their rights are? And we know why because then the exploitation can continue.

Amanda Wallace:

Exactly. And it's just that simple. It's as simple as you just said it. We know why. We know why this is dangerous. We know why they don't want people to have this knowledge because if you just simply shift your mindset and responded differently, you responded in power to the system, they would lose their power. It's simply a mindset. They created this system and then they gave themselves power. They created laws to protect themselves and then they gave themselves the money to fund their operation. It's just that simple. And so when enough people stop believing in the lie, we can actually get to some truth. And then just we need to repeal those laws. We need to reroute those funds. We know what needs to happen. We just have to build enough power to be able to demand those things.

Shimon Cohen:

I think one of the biggest things with this whole family policing system, which just the fact that it gets called child welfare, child protection services, these misconceptions. So it starts with the public perception and then really for the people working in the systems, it starts with the educational. A lot of these social work programs, which many of us over the years have done a lot of work around white supremacy in social work and the harm that's done and changes that need to happen within social work. So going off of that, what are some of the misconceptions that people have about this system?

Just for example, whenever abolishing child welfare comes up, the first thing people always are going to say is, "But what about abuse? We've got to save these kids." And people who know about it, who've worked in the system or have studied it or know that the majority of the cases aren't these severe physical abuse cases. The majority are neglect cases, which has a very wide definition, almost doesn't have a definition in some states, which often gets tied back to poverty. So, maybe we can just talk about that in terms of what did you see in your 10 years and the misconceptions that people have about this system?

Amanda Wallace:

When people say that in regards to what about the children that are being abused? If we abolish this system, what happens to them? And I always tell them, "So in my 10 year career, I can count on one hand how many bad cases of abuse that I saw that were like, oh, something's happening here. Let's figure something out." And so to think that I was paid, I came to work every day for 10 years and I only saw or responded to five cases, that, one, should just challenge your thought of this system, this whole system being needed. And then the misconception that this system has resources to solve the problems that they're getting called for. And so if a family got called because of improper supervision, a parent's at work, we didn't have the daycare or childcare to provide to this family to solve the problem. So it was like, well, what are you calling for? Or if a family didn't have food, we didn't have food resources to give to the family. It was just looked at as a problem.

So again, I think the biggest misconception is that this system protects families or that they're doing some type of good. And then I think also when we see these cases that are really bad that come out on

the news media, one, I think that we need to always caution the state's propaganda of this is what you see. This is what helps people feel good about this system. And then also when the system fails and then it's exposed, people tend to look at it as if, aw, they just messed up this time or this is maybe a one-off situation. In reality, the system, it just got exposed. But this is actually the reality. This is what's happening every single day. Children being murdered, raped, being prostituted by their case workers, families not being reunited, and children remaining in foster care. That's every day. You know what I mean? Look at their own statistics. Look at their own numbers.

I've been in the system through several state reviews, federal state reviews, and we've always failed. Child welfare fails every year. The feds come and they review and guess what? They going on a corrective action plan and nothing changes. I sat on a federal review team before I left. I didn't even know if the children were alive based on the documentation and they still gave us food and we had a good time at the meeting as we reviewed the cases. But that's what the review looks like. And so again, I think the biggest misconception is that this system is actually doing something other than kidnapping Black and Brown children and dismantling families. That's the mission of the system. And if we believe that it's doing anything other than that, then we have been bamboozled. We're believing the lie.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah, it's absolutely just hard to wrap my head around when I have learned more about it and I think about the money that goes to a foster family, for example. But if that money went to the family to actually support them to address whatever issues that led to the original call where they get caught up in the system, it just doesn't make any sense when you think about it just from even a financial perspective, let alone the trauma that it does to these kids to be removed from their parents.

Amanda Wallace:

But again, I think it made a lot of sense to the founders of the United States and also the founders of the system. They want to cause harm because you break the child, you break the family, you break the revolution. And then also financially, it helps white supremacy, it helps you give it to... You want to be able to take this child away and you pay someone else to pretty much to carry out genocide and remove all the culture from this child. They're paying to continue this process of imprisonment and enslavement. And so it should not make sense to us. It shouldn't make sense to us. And when you start to challenge what you see, hopefully we challenge what we see enough to challenge the system. Why is this... This shouldn't be happening. This should not be happening. And we cannot give it any justification. We can't give it any justification. We can't give it any room to wiggle out of the reality that it is. It is harming families and it needs to be abolished.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah, absolutely. I had Jalil Muntaqim on here a while back and there was a UN tribunal about the United States about genocidal conditions and charging the US with genocide. And that was actually one of the points that was made during that is the harm that's been done to Black people by the US government because of just what you said, stealing these children, putting them... Because that was another thing is the National Association of Black Social Workers way back was if you are going to have any removals, the children need to stay first with family members, extended family, but then definitely with other Black families. And that of course doesn't happen.

Amanda Wallace:

And because the system is designed to make sure that it doesn't happen. So, we know that the system impacts Black families more and generationally. And so they might say that this is what needs to happen. But if the policy says that if you have CPS history, you can't be a caretaker, then that could eliminate you as a possible placement. Or because, we know that Black bodies are surveilled by even police more and you have a criminal record, that then eliminates you from being placement for a child. Again, the system is set up to eliminate people just because of the policies that it creates to over police families. So again, this is just how it was set up.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah, totally. And you're right, it's all connected and it can't be separated. So the idea of racial capitalism that first puts, especially Black people to be in... There's a reason there's this huge racial wealth gap and there's a reason there's disproportionate levels of poverty, and then the surveillance on top of that and all these situations that are going to make the system be more likely to be involved and then to have a removal for Black children and Black families. It's the same system that's causing poverty is not going to be the same system that can eliminate that either.

Amanda Wallace:

And to that point in regards to causing poverty, the same system and social structure that kidnapped, enslaved, beat, tortured, killed, and sold Black bodies is now the system responsible for protecting Black children. It's just like how? You know what I mean? How? In a modern day example of in what they call sex offenders, a sex offender getting out of jail and then running the program to protect children. And so this is the same thing. You have these enslavers, these captors that have now given themselves the power to erase what they have done to people and then create a system to make people think that they are helping people. No. When are we going to say, we don't want your help, we don't need your help because we know what your help has gotten. From the time they came over to Africa to get us, help has never... They've never helped Africans at all, Black people at all.

Shimon Cohen:

So, I have this whole idea about some stuff with social work and I want to get your thoughts on this because it connects to everything we're talking about. So, social work programs for the majority, we could probably agree that they're very white centered, very white middle class, upper middle class in terms of values, theories, and curriculum and the way they teach. But then more and more and over the years and more and more Black students who then go into these programs and to pass the classes and everything, they have to learn this way. They have to learn for the most part, I and many others would call it white social work because there are different types of social work. But to pass the classes, to pass licensing exams, you have to learn this certain way. And plenty of white social workers are doing this too.

So I'm not trying to make it sound like this is a Black social worker issue and not... Because white social workers are doing it, but I think the dynamic that's different is when a Black social worker who is even connected to their community but then works for child welfare, it's like they've kind of got an in with the community that maybe the white social worker would be viewed with more trepidation and hesitation from the community. But the Black social workers come in, but with this having been indoctrinated in these programs of these white ways of doing things. And I just wanted to get your thoughts on that because it's something I think about quite often actually.

Amanda Wallace:

Yeah. Definitely, I was the social worker that they would send in when they had a family that was not so receptive because I could sit down and smile and we can have a conversation. And again, it's how the system was designed. If you see someone that looks like you, you are not going to be as defensive. You might listen to that person more. And because of also the racial divide, if you see this white social work worker coming in, you're more likely to see the system for what it truly is. But if you have this person that looks like somebody in your community, then you think that they might be there to help you. And so again, it's just how it's designed. And so like you said, having to go through this education or this indoctrination into the system, down to having to label people and their diagnosis and who they are.

Oh, they got some signs of ADHD or they have some signs of bipolar disorder. Everybody has all these signs that the system has taught us to look at people not for just humans that are having an experience, but what is it? Where can we fit them into the DSM? Where can we fit them into here and to here? And so again, yeah, I think that the system is smart. It is extremely smart and it is operating exactly how it's designed and you want to ensure that your target doesn't see what you're truly doing. And so that it is, they're set up to be able to be the friendly social workers that look like... Just community policing. They say that the cops need to look like the community and it's like so that you can trust the cops. No, we don't want to trust the cops, nor do we want to trust the social workers. We want to trust the community. And that means you can't have any attachment to the system at all and we got to teach ourselves that.

Shimon Cohen:

And I hope any social work educators who are listening, white social work educators or white social workers on here that I'm not trying to... I think white social workers and white faculty need to address this issue and change the curriculum, change the practices, stop doing this and stop creating these programs that are putting out new social workers that are going and doing harm in communities.

Amanda Wallace:

The first thing is I thought I could save the world. That's red flag. Red flag is if you come out of school and you believe you can save the world or save anyone. Save yourself. That's what I want. That is what people need to be able to understand. If you save yourself, then you will just show up in the world and just be who you need to be for whoever you come in contact with. And so if you go into a home and you are trying to fix or assess or diagnose someone, then you've probably missed the reason why you have come in contact with this person. So we just need to, instead of learning a profession of social work, we just need to learn how to be better humans, having better human experiences, living self-determined lives, and not being problems in other people's lives. You know what I mean?

And I think that it's hard because truly challenging these professions and these in the indoctrination of people, really the system crumbles. The social work program might not be so popular or these programs might not be so popular or the funding might decrease, but it should be going somewhere else anyway. Those funds should be going somewhere else anyway. You should be doing something else anyway. But the problem is the system employs corporate loyalty. It's a career path. It's a way to feed your family. I had to give up my ability to securely feed my family when I challenged the system. And they have attacked me at every turn since I've started. But again, that corporate loyalty, those vacations, the healthcare plan, all of those things creates this sense of I'm just going to do what I need to do and I'm just going to get my job done.

But what I'll say is that this system has created this mindset of money. This system has created the attachment of money and power. And when as people take that back, then we will see we don't need

what this system is offering. That's really the only way I think that we going to be able to abolish this system is we have to challenge this mindset of power. What is true power in our society? Because they've defined it for us, but we can redefine it. And that looks like in our schools, in our students, let's really think here about what we are going to do moving forward.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah, no, you hit on so many good points. A lot of the people working in these positions, they're living in the same larger structures, the larger system. And because of these jobs can be... Not like the caseloads are easy or anything like that, it's like people are overworked and underpaid, but it's better than a lot of other jobs out there. And then you've got the health insurance is a real problem. So it's almost these bribes to keep you doing that work. I know I felt like that in higher ed. It was very hard to leave, even though it was a horrible situation. It was very hard because of the same things you're talking about, salary, health insurance, all those things. Especially when you have a family, it really gets you locked in. I want to talk a little bit about the outcomes of the work you do with Stop Operation CPS. What are some of your success stories?

Amanda Wallace:

So since we launched in 2021, we had 19 children come home to their families. And so one of our first families that we worked with was Zephaniah Brown. Ms. Sellers was a mom in Kentucky who went to give birth. And at two days old, Zephaniah was ripped out of her hands at a hospital because they said that Ms. Sellers was impolite after giving birth and... Yeah, impolite after giving birth. So that really, again, that was the first family we worked with. And that really challenged my beliefs. But for 590 days and so many trips to Kentucky, court cases, petitions, attorney after attorney. 590 days, Zephaniah is now home with his mother safely. But again, we had to fight for that. We had to fight hard to be able to show people what was happening. I went to jail in Kentucky in regards to this case.

Also we had the Brooks twins in Ohio. Those the babies were medically kidnapped and even though a judge found that they had not been abused nor neglected, CPS said, "No, we're not giving the babies back." And they stayed in custody for months. We had to again, go to Ohio, went to city council meetings, county commissioner meetings, put protests down Main Street. Those babies are home. They actually came home, they came home, the Black Mother's March that we had last year, the Friday we were leaving, we got the call that they were on the way home. And so for us, reunification is what we fight for. We want freedom for our children. That is what success looks like for Operation Stop CPS is to see children physically coming back to their communities and to their families. Also closing doors to CPS. So we work with several families who, because of advocacy, CPS has either not seen their children and closed the case without seeing the children or never come inside the house and close the case. So that is again, we want to draw the line and push CPS back from our communities.

Shimon Cohen:

In those two cases. You mentioned the reunifications, was there a specific... 540 days, I think you said.

Amanda Wallace:

590 days.

Shimon Cohen:

590 days. That is an incredibly long time for a child to not be with their mom or with their family. Is there something that finally did it in the end to make them... As much as you, I know there might be

some things you can't get into, but is every case different? Or is there something that usually shifts at a certain point and that's what does, some legal action or something?

Amanda Wallace:

Yes, every case is different, but I will say persistence is what pushes for change. And it's like you have to... Who are the players in the case? Putting pressure on those people and getting the community to continue to hold this system accountable. We're watching. We're not going to go away. You know what I mean? So, it's just persistence. It's persistence and continuing to push and demand for that child to come home.

Shimon Cohen:

And how do you get supported? Do you raise funds through donations? How do you do this? Because you're talking about going to Kentucky, going to Ohio. You're going wherever you need to go. How does all that work?

Amanda Wallace:

Yes, definitely. We call on the community to invest in our work. You can go to our website and click invest in the top right hand corner, www.operationstopcps.com because, again, this is community work. And instead of waiting for the state to invest in their own demise, which I am not waiting for, it's calling on the community to say this is a solution that we need to make sure. It's CPS insurance. It's insurance to say that we are going to fight, we are going to fight for families to come home. And also the sale of the Respond in Power Guide. So proceeds from that also go into to the work to make sure that we're able to continue to support families as well.

Shimon Cohen:

It's really amazing the work you're doing. I know you and I earlier had talked about going through some of the demands. I think just maybe for the sake of time, we can refer people to the website. Or do you want to try to get into some of the demands? What do you think?

Amanda Wallace:

Yeah, I think we kind of touched on them in regards to as for repealing CAPTA. And then just the ban, we just have to call it what it is, and the ban of, the sale of Black children through the family regulation system. That's our major demands.

Shimon Cohen:

So for people following the podcast, we're going to put links to the Operation Stop CPS website in the show notes on the website, on our website dothework.com. And you can link there, click the link there and go read up more on the demands and the work Operation Stop CPS are doing. You talked a little bit about how folks can donate. Do you also have volunteer opportunities or other ways folks can get involved?

Amanda Wallace:

Yes. If you also go to our website, you can click on join the movement and then just fill out the join the movement form and just let us know what your talents are, what you want to do, what you're just your natural skills are so that we go to that list when we're in need of something. We'll go and see what we

have there to be able to call on volunteers. Also when it comes to our newsletter and being able to alert people when there's a court watching opportunity or a call to action, so just ensuring that you're signed up to receive on our email list as well.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah, because you're covering the whole country. You're going all over the US, so you need people everywhere who can show up to things.

Amanda Wallace:

Right. So originally when we launched in 2021, we were all over. We were definitely all over, but now we are primarily focused on North Carolina and specifically Durham, North Carolina because we see that we could be more effective by really targeting this local area so that we can then replicate in other places.

Shimon Cohen:

That makes sense. That makes sense because the need is everywhere. The need is just everywhere. It's been amazing talking with you. I think the work you're doing is absolutely phenomenal. It's so needed and people can go to your Instagram because I know there's real video footage of families talking about what's happened to them. It's really intense. It's really intense. It's one thing for us to talk on a podcast about it because it just part of me feels like it doesn't even do justice to the emotional and psychological and spiritual impact of what is happening to these children and families. And I just want to acknowledge that what you're doing is just incredible really. As a parent, it's absolutely heartbreaking and infuriating to see this happen to children and families and think about what that would ever be like. That type of, having the state involved in your life where no matter what you do, you just can't escape from their grasp and them breaking up your family.

Amanda Wallace:

And that's what we want. We want people that might not be impacted, that might have never even thought that this could happen to feel that what could that feel like? And then also being able to help people that have not been impacted understand how big of a threat though this system is because it's for profit and it is profiting very well. And then what happens when all of the targeted children are in custody? Who are they going to come for next? And so we have to understand that. And then what are we going to do about it?

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. So before we wrap up, is there anything you want to make sure we cover? Anything else that we should cover?

Amanda Wallace:

Only the only other thing is that I just want to let people know that on April 25th, 2023, the state of North Carolina intensified their retaliation efforts against myself and our organizing efforts here in North Carolina and sent armed agents to my home and surrounded my home for hours and terrorized my family. And unbeknownst to me, apparently I had been indicted for something they say I did two years ago. But it was in retaliation for using my voice at a county commissioner's meeting the month prior. So all of a sudden now this has happened. And so of course we're in the middle of a legal battle right now, so it's not a lot that I can say, but what I want people to understand and to put this out because this is just history repeating itself. And so we can't allow this system to attack in silence. We can't allow them

to just attack in silence. And so if we don't protect those on the front lines, then where are we going? So what are we able to do?

And so again, the reason why they attacked is because the stories of these families are very powerful. The truth is extremely powerful to the state and especially when we're able to say the message extremely clearly. The state is kidnapping Black children. It is the state-sponsored kidnapping of Black children, period. It is for profit. And we're not going to be toned down. We're not going to say anything different because that would just be genocide. And if we are going to continue to be the problem, then again, how are we truly doing the work? And so again, I don't want them to continue to attack me. I want to put that out. But we're going to continue to build support to make sure that we have some protection.

And so again, that join the movement link, if you are an attorney, anything that you could do to be able to protect this movement, we are calling on people to mobilize. Lawyers, doctors, teachers, we need your mind outside of this system and inside of this movement. And so we are calling on you to mobilize because the fact that they feel the need to attack should let us know that we are on the right track. And so we should not retreat. We need to keep moving forward.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. I hope by the time people hear this episode, hopefully the situation is resolved and you're okay. And I'll try to update. We'll be in touch and by then, by the time we post, maybe there's some sort of update that you've got through Instagram or through your website or something like that. But yeah, you're exactly right. This is what happens historically, especially when anyone organizes, but especially when Black people have organized. And we see this happening not just with what's happening to you, but what's happening in terms of even African American studies and DEI work. It's like happening everywhere, these white racist backlash attacks. I want to thank you again, Amanda, for coming on the podcast and just thank you so much for doin' the work.

Amanda Wallace:

Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Shimon Cohen:

Thank you for listening to Doin' The Work: Frontline Stories of Social Change. I hope you enjoyed the podcast. Please follow on Twitter and leave positive reviews on iTunes. If you're interested in being a guest or know someone who's doing great work, please get in touch. Thank you for doing real work to make this world a better place.