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## The Community Benefits Solution: Why We Must Act Now

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Hi Troy,

A century ago, cotton planters and mining companies dominated our region. They relied on captive labor, retaliated against workers who tried to organize, ignored deadly workplace accidents, and displaced Black residents and other communities of color. These 'sins of the past' created a system of staggering injustice.

In 1965, ordinary people marched from Selma, Alabama to the capital in Montgomery, risking their lives to demand voting rights. On March 7, the violence they faced, later known as "Bloody Sunday," exposed the lack of legal protection for Black citizens.

Today, Southern workers continue that fight, this time against unsafe conditions, workplace deaths, low wages, and serious health risks. Against this backdrop, we joined colleagues from the [Recall Injustice at Hyundai-Kia](#) coalition to march with our community in Selma, to honor the past while organizing for the future.

We also joined community members, faith leaders, and workers for a special screening of the Oscar-nominated documentary film *The Alabama Solution*. The film exposes corruption, abuse, and

exploitation inside Alabama's prison system using contraband cellphone footage and testimony from incarcerated leaders. It also connects prison labor practices to broader patterns of economic injustice.

Co-directors Andrew Jarecki and Charlotte Kaufman describe the film as a ["study of complicity"](#) in Alabama and across the country. As Kaufman explains,

**"Our whole country in many ways is complicit with this system of injustice. And one of the reasons we're complicit is because we don't get to see the full contours of it."**

Following the screening, formerly incarcerated workers and family members of people currently incarcerated participated in a panel discussion. The speakers shed light on our [growing coalition work](#) to hold Hyundai-Kia accountable for the low-wage employment within the company's supplier network, including suppliers who have employed incarcerated workers from Alabama's prison system.



Hosted by [Good Neighbors Alabama](#) and [The Ordinary People Society](#) (TOPS), the post-screening panel featured Kenny Thomas, a formerly incarcerated worker who shared firsthand testimony of exploitation through Alabama's work release program. My JMA colleagues successfully advocated for Kenny's release on parole last year. The panel also included Beth Shelburne, journalist and co-producer of the documentary; Rodreshia Russaw, Executive Director of TOPS; Dr. Kenneth Sharpton-Glasgow, National President of the New National Christian Leadership Movement and founder of TOPS; and Julie Sledd, a family advocate who highlighted the resilience of incarcerated organizers.

Dr. Sharpton-Glasgow emphasized that meaningful reform requires resisting the divisions that often shape public conversations about incarceration.

**"The system divides people into categories so we won't stand together,"** he said. **"But the moment we stop labeling people and start seeing them as human beings, the whole system begins to crack."**

Julie Sledd, whose partner Raoul is one of the central voices in the film, said,

**"Raoul has been in prison for thirty-four years, and he still believes people are worth fighting for. The men in this film aren't the only ones standing up—they're just the ones the world can finally hear."**

Now, this work is part of a broader effort. In November, more than 40 groups in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and California [signed the Recall Injustice at Hyundai-Kia letter](#), which we delivered to top

Hyundai-Kia executives by hand.

It builds upon recent [research](https://info.jobstomoveamerica.org/e/968783/units-columbia-labor-lab/2qt6x9/1752300374/h/bCoa1HO6w3t2BviOZzZ6Lr86aimbYwyBqN4Y_SE0pEM) by world-leading economists and sociologists at [https://info.jobstomoveamerica.org/e/968783/units-columbia-labor-lab/2qt6x9/1752300374/h/bCoa1HO6w3t2BviOZzZ6Lr86aimbYwyBqN4Y\\_SE0pEM](https://info.jobstomoveamerica.org/e/968783/units-columbia-labor-lab/2qt6x9/1752300374/h/bCoa1HO6w3t2BviOZzZ6Lr86aimbYwyBqN4Y_SE0pEM) which has documented the use of incarcerated labor in Alabama's auto supply chain and its impact on wages and working conditions for all workers.

As Alabama commemorates Selma's historic fight for voting rights, our community continues the struggle for justice, inside prisons, across workplaces, and throughout the economy. Together, we are building a future where workers and families share in the benefits of this place we all call home.

In Solidarity with Workers,



**Luis Robledo**  
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**Join us in the fight for good jobs and healthy communities.**

Donate Today

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