



# Common Defense

## Strategic Plan | 2023-2025



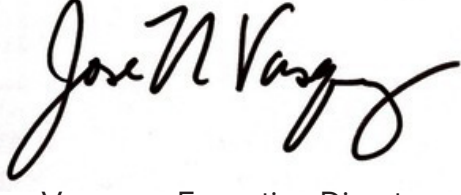
# Letter From the Executive Director

In 2016, a handful of veterans organized a rally outside of Trump Tower to oppose the hateful rhetoric being unleashed on the campaign trail. They had one clear goal—to show the country that veterans did not stand behind this racist and divisive vision of America. Within just six years, the seed that was planted then has grown to the largest grassroots army of progressive veterans in the country.

It became clear to those of us leading Common Defense that after years of reacting to the horrors wrought by the Trump presidency and the pandemic, it was time to take a step back and think critically about how the movement we built can be best positioned to have the most impact, and what strategy it would take to get there. While there will always be an element of rapid response in our work—we will never stop organizing to oppose bills and candidates that seek to oppress us—we now have the people power and resources to go on the offensive in a strategic and sustainable way.

Thanks to the generous investment of our board members, we were able to hire Southard Strategies, a consulting firm consisting of two seasoned organizers, Emily Southard and Brooke Harper. Over the past six months we have devoted time and resources to interviewing and surveying our board, staff, and veterans community; analyzing our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; aligning on our organizational mission, vision, and values; and solidifying our theory of change. Our executive staff and representatives from each board gathered in January 2023, for an in-person retreat to craft our three year strategic plan and train staff on a new way of goal setting to achieve objectives and key results.

The strategic plan outlined in these pages is the roadmap that will help us achieve the goal that our founders set forth that day in 2016: leveraging the power of our nation's veterans to realize the America we all know is possible.



Jose Vasquez, Executive Director



# Executive Summary

Common Defense is the largest grassroots organization of progressive military veterans and the only one that invests in the leadership of its members through training and deployment in strategic campaigns that leverage the credibility of their service. Since our founding in 2016, we have accomplished incredible successes and seen measurable impact, and we recognize that we must now scale this work to organize more veterans and deploy our power in existing and innovative ways.

The world around us has shifted since our formation during the beginning of the Trump regime. US democracy has been threatened, culminating in an insurrection at our capitol; racism, hate, and violence are on the rise; the impacts of climate change are being more acutely felt across our country and world; and hopelessness to address these intersecting challenges pervades our society—each of these obstacles represents the growing threats to our work as well as new opportunities to grow Common Defense’s impact.

Through this strategic planning process, we have reaffirmed, and in some cases, updated our mission, vision, values, and theory of change to best reflect and guide our work. We identified our core strategies for the next three years lasting through the end of 2025. And we established annual objectives and measurable key results for 2023—thus, enabling us to quantify our impact toward our mission.

## In this strategic plan we commit to:

- Grow our training program to build the largest grassroots army of progressive and diverse veterans in modern U.S. history.
- Increase our financial resources and sustainability to fully staff our programs with multi-year funding.
- Cultivate a highly engaged board who fulfill their fiduciary and governance responsibilities.
- Focus our End the Forever War work by focusing on restoring Congress’ War Powers authority.
- Center our Veterans for Climate Justice work on shifting federal spending away from the military industrial complex toward initiatives that mitigate the multiple climate crises we face in historic sacrifice zones in the Appalachia and Gulf South regions.
- Endorse candidates who champion progressive, justice-rooted policy agendas – then mobilizing our base to get them elected and defeating extremist candidates who threaten our democracy.
- Enact a strategic planning cadence that allows our team to consistently measure progress towards our objectives and strategically aligns our day-to-day work with our mission.



# Mission

Common Defense organizes veterans and engages the military community to transform our society by advocating for progressive policies that work for all of us.

# Vision

We envision a world free of structural violence where everyday people are civically engaged in the decisions that impact their lives. We see a grassroots movement of veteran leaders united at the forefront of struggles to foster an inclusive democracy where liberty and justice truly exist for all.



## Equity

Rooted in history we reckon with the past and strive to uphold dignity, fairness, and respect in our relationships with everyone.



## Justice

We believe accountability is core to achieving peace and prioritize being in solidarity with directly impacted communities.



## Progress

Fueled by love and unwavering optimism in the face of oppression and violence we are committed to building a better future.



## Power

Knowing our shared interests we choose to gather our collective strength and counter the cynicism of corruption and patronage.

# About Common Defense

Common Defense has over 300,000 veteran and civilian members representing every state in country. With an annual budget of \$3,000,000, Common Defense is a family of organizations: Common Defense Education Fund (501c3) for training and organizing, Common Defense Civic Engagement (501c4) for issue based and electoral advocacy, and Common Defense Action Fund (PAC) for lobbying and electoral support.



**Veteran  
Corps  
2,000**



**Veteran  
Associates  
33,000**



**Veteran  
Cadre  
200**

## Current Programs



The right to vote is sacred in a democracy. The United States has struggled for generations with oppressive laws that prevent millions of people from having a say in their nation. And even as we have made progress over the years, there are now renewed efforts to suppress the vote and deny the results of free and fair elections. We cannot let those who wish to destroy our democracy win. The Veterans for Democracy program fights back on multiple fronts by mobilizing veterans to advocate for expanding access to the ballot box and ensuring election deniers and MAGA extremists are held accountable.



Common Defense defines the open-ended, unauthorized, and interconnected U.S. military interventions that began after September 11th, 2001 as the “Forever War.” While the largest troop deployments were in Afghanistan and Iraq, counter-terror operations have spread to dozens of countries, including Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Niger, Pakistan, Philippines, Sudan, Tajikistan, and Yemen — and they continue to this day. Common Defense works to restore Congress’ war powers authority in our nation’s foreign policy as a start to put an end to unjust wars.



As veterans, we’ve seen and been impacted by the climate crisis firsthand. The Common Defense Climate Justice program will activate the enormous and largely-untapped constituency of veterans to build public will and put pressure on decision makers to invest in a future of clean energy, clean air, and clean water for all Americans. This multifaceted campaign consists of base-building, storytelling, and advocacy that Common Defense leads at the national level and conducts in close coalition with local- and state-level allied organizations.



The Veterans Organizing Institute exists to support the leadership development of progressive military veterans. Through VOI, we work to develop a network of diverse, former service members, with sophisticated political analyses and practical organizing skills to play an important role in reshaping the long-term American political landscape. By providing convening spaces, advanced training, and opportunities for hands-on issue campaign work, we believe we can cultivate long-term progressive veteran leaders who will play a crucial role within an emerging social justice alignment.

Core Strategies	2023 Objectives	2023 Key Results
<p><b>Base Building:</b></p> <p>Common Defense will organize a durable progressive veterans corps by recruiting, training, and mobilizing them to engage in our strategic campaigns.</p>	<p>Build the largest grassroots army of progressive and diverse veterans in modern U.S. history.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Double our veteran associate members from 33k to 66k</li> <li>• Double our veteran corps members from 1800 to 3600</li> <li>• Double our cadre members from 200 to 400.</li> <li>• Recruit and train 120 new participants</li> <li>• 50% of Corps take action in 2023</li> <li>• 75% of Cadre take action in 2023</li> <li>• DEIA metrics</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sustainable Growth:</b></p> <p>Obtain and leverage the capacity, resources, and infrastructure to execute our 3-year strategic plan.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fully staffed programs with multi-year funding commitments.</li> <li>2. Highly engaged Board members who fulfill their fiduciary and governance responsibilities.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise \$5 million across all vehicles</li> <li>• Two months of reserves</li> <li>• 70% of foundation commitments being multi-year</li> <li>• Seven active and engaged members on each board</li> </ul>
<p><b>End the Forever War:</b></p> <p>CD works to restore Congress' War Powers authority in our nation's foreign policy and finally puts an end to unjust wars.</p>	<p>Congress passes War Powers legislation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congress introduces War Powers legislation endorsed by CD</li> <li>• 20% bi-partisan co-sponsorship in both chambers</li> <li>• Two CD members testify at Congressional hearings</li> </ul>
<p><b>Vets for Climate Justice:</b></p> <p>CD works to shift federal defense spending away from the wasteful Military Industrial Complex (MIC) to climate justice initiatives while also fighting for climate justice—beginning in Appalachia and the Gulf South.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Get lawmakers on HASC and SASC to champion climate initiatives in the NDAA.</li> <li>2. Launch successful pilots in Appalachia and the Gulf South that result in community benefits and impacts.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New commitments from 20% of Dems on HASC and SASC to support climate investments being added to NDAA</li> <li>• Persuade local leaders in 4 frontline communities to apply for competitive federal grants</li> <li>• Recruit 500 veteran corps members and 50 cadre members in Appalachia (PA, WV, KY, TN) and the Gulf South (FL, AL, MS, LA, TX)</li> <li>• Train 35 new CJC members in Appalachia and the Gulf South</li> </ul>
<p><b>Vets for Democracy:</b></p> <p>CD endorses candidates who best capture the grassroots energy of our political movement to champion a progressive policy agenda rooted in justice. We leverage the power of the veteran voice to mobilize voters to the polls and hold extremists who threaten our democracy accountable.</p>	<p>Mobilize our growing base of progressive veterans to protect our democracy and shift the balance of political power toward our values in targeted key states.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 million voter impressions in key states</li> <li>• 1 million voter contacts in key states with a 10% response rate</li> <li>• 2/3rds of endorsed candidates win election with 10% being challengers</li> </ul>