



Polaris Freedom happens now.

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



LETTER *from Our* CEO AND BOARD CHAIRPERSON

Dear Friends,

The year 2023 brought new chapters and challenges to our mission to end sex and labor trafficking and support survivors as they reclaim their freedom.

As you'll read throughout this report, Polaris made huge strides across our three areas of [Direct Response](#), [Research & Intelligence](#), and [Campaigns & Public Engagement](#). We responded to more than 7,300 calls, texts and chats from victims and survivors on the National Human Trafficking Hotline; launched the Polaris Resilience Fund, a guaranteed income program for survivors; and supported passage of several survivor-centered laws and policies, to highlight just a few accomplishments.

As an organization, we are also excited to share that a new wave of leaders has joined our Board of Directors. Incoming chair [Jean Gilbert](#) has been a champion of Polaris's work for more than a decade, and new members [Sarah Angel-Johnson](#), [Maria Gollayan](#), [Jessica Herrera-Flanigan](#), and [Sangeeta Naik](#) will help steer Polaris and advance its mission. Each of these stellar women are exemplary leaders and experts in their areas of work. With this newest class, we are proud to report that our Board composition is now 75% women and 67% people of color, which aligns with the demographics of our staff.

Even as we celebrate these successes, we also want to express our appreciation for your solidarity as we weathered rising inflation and economic uncertainty over the last year. You also helped us manage the threat of proposed legislation jeopardizing the safety, privacy, and agency of victims and survivors.

Through it all, you have listened to survivors, come alongside them, and amplified their voices in arenas of influence. Your partnership has enabled us to lift up survivors as the true experts of this movement.

Thank you for standing with survivors and for standing with us.

With gratitude,



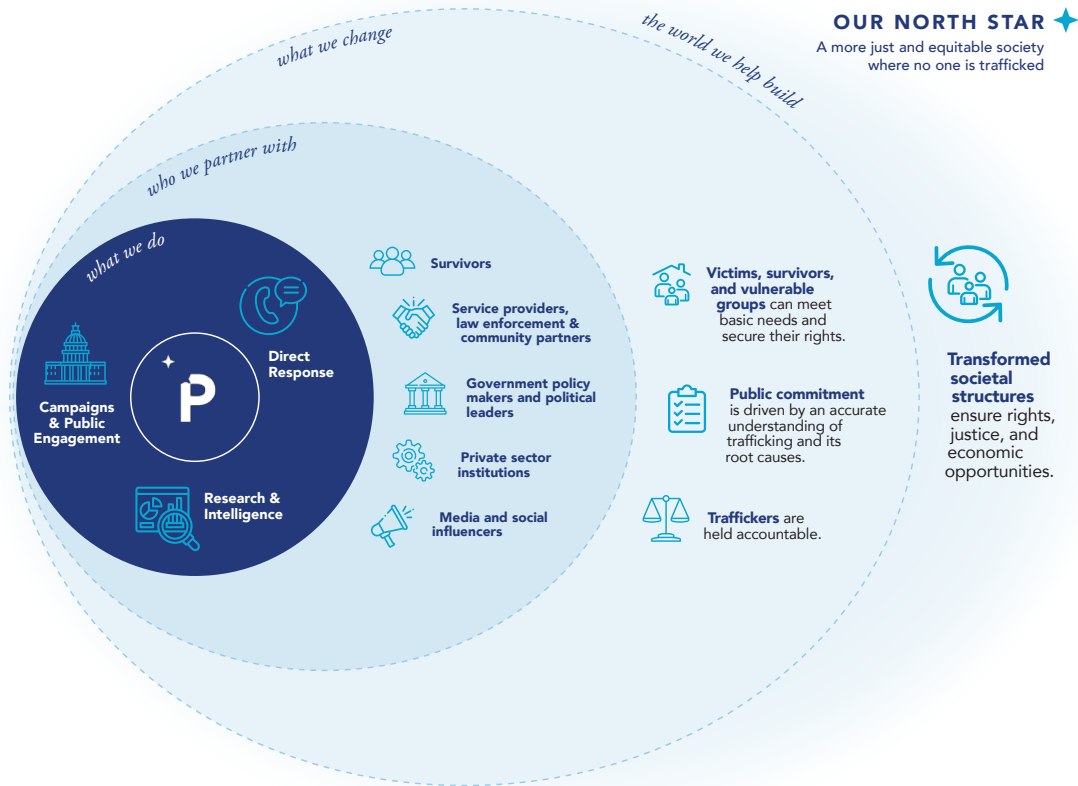
Catherine Chen
CEO



Jean Gilbert
Chairperson, Board of Directors

How We Make an Impact

Last year, Polaris shared our new theory of change that illustrates how we are working toward a more just and equitable society where no one is trafficked.



Here are just a few of the ways we've courageously met survivors' needs and boldly transformed systems over the last two decades:



Direct Response

- Identified 82,000+ situations of trafficking and assisted 75,800+ victims and survivors through the **National Human Trafficking Hotline**
- Launched **The Polaris Resilience Fund**, a direct cash assistance pilot helping survivors build financial stability and break down barriers to economic thriving



Research & Intelligence

- Built the **largest dataset on trafficking in North America** and produced influential reports, briefs, and resources, such as the **National Survivor Study**
- Produced 100+ open-source intelligence packages through the work of the **Financial Intelligence Unit**



Campaigns & Public Engagement

- Led efforts to pass **nine federal and 100+ state laws** in all 50 states, supporting victims, survivors, and vulnerable populations
- Equipped over **1 million corporate partner employees** through tailored training, plus **35,600+ community members** through Human Trafficking 101

Read more about our impact on our website at <https://polarisproject.org/our-impact/>.



DIRECT RESPONSE

National Human Trafficking Hotline

January – December 2023



Responded to
30,162
substantive contacts
including
7,380
contacts from victims
and survivors



Identified
9,619
situations of trafficking
involving
16,999
victims



68% Sex Trafficking

19% Labor Trafficking

13% Sex Trafficking and Labor Trafficking

Polaris records and reviews situations of potential trafficking reported through the Trafficking Hotline, but an increasing volume of information has delayed our ability to release timely, fully validated data. In response, we are transitioning from manual data validation to an AI- and machine-learning-assisted process (see p. 8). Meanwhile, to meet stakeholders' needs, we are sharing partially validated data for 2023 and will update with fully validated data as soon as our new process is in place. For more information and updates, please visit humantraffickinghotline.org/en/statistics.

The National Human Trafficking Hotline is supported by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States (U.S.) Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$5 million with 71% funded by ACF/HHS and \$2.06 million and 29% funded by non-government source(s). The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACF/HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit the ACF website, Administrative and National Policy Requirements: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/administrative-and-national-policy-requirements#chapter-8>.

BEHIND THE SCENES: SYSTEM UPGRADES

Hotline Optimization Project

Thanks to a streamlined interface for staff and a new chat bot for texts and web chats, Polaris can **better triage people contacting the Hotline** about trafficking and high-risk situations, while directing non-trafficking contacts to other resources. After introducing the chat bot, for example, we saw an **increase in the proportion of victims and survivors texting and chatting with us** — an indicator that our new systems are helping to prioritize the right contacts.

Global Modern Slavery Directory (GMSD)

To support the international anti-trafficking field, Polaris enhanced the GMSD's map, filters, and partner listings, making the site easier to use for nonprofits, public agencies, researchers, and companies searching for **service referrals in other countries**. The GMSD is also indispensable for the Trafficking Hotline itself, providing information about resources around the world for about **a thousand international trafficking situations each year**.





Holding Traffickers Accountable

Despite global estimates projecting more labor trafficking than sex trafficking, **the federal government prosecutes concerningly few labor trafficking cases.** The most recent data available from the Human Trafficking Institute's Prosecution of Human Trafficking Cases (2023) shows that U.S. prosecutors report only 5% of their human trafficking cases as labor trafficking and 95% as sex trafficking. This discrepancy is likely due to several factors, including **gaps in identifying trafficking situations and potential victims.**

To address this gap, over the last several years, **Polaris has conducted outreach and training for community members and stakeholders, including thousands of Mexican consular officials at offices across all 50 U.S. states.** Such outreach and training have equipped consular staff to understand trafficking, how to support victims and survivors, and where to report to law enforcement. In 2022, **our support helped the Boston consulate identify and follow up on a trafficking situation involving more than 30 workers in Connecticut.**

In 2023, the investigation conducted by the local police department, FBI, and other federal departments led to an [indictment of two individuals for conspiracy to commit labor trafficking](#), among other crimes. The situation described in court documents is all too familiar, ranging from economic coercion and debt bondage to threats of immigration reports and harm to family members.

Polaris is proud to have played a part in **connecting these workers to help and pursuing accountability for exploitative employers.**



DIRECT RESPONSE

Polaris Resilience Fund

In 2023, we launched [The Polaris Resilience Fund](#), the first guaranteed basic income initiative specifically for survivors of human trafficking across the U.S. This pilot works on multiple fronts, supporting survivors’ financial security and reducing their vulnerability to re-trafficking, while adding to the growing evidence base on the impact of cash assistance programs.

LAST YEAR’S MAJOR MILESTONES INCLUDED:

- Hiring the inaugural **Resilience Fund Director**, a respected movement leader with lived experience and expertise in survivor-led, evidence-based program development, research, and advocacy.
- Contracting a **Resource Navigator** to provide benefits coordination and additional resource counseling as survivors request.
- Convening an **Advisory Council** of six survivor-led organizations to design the program, build trust, and keep the Fund centered on survivors.
- Onboarding and starting monthly payments of \$500 each for the **first cohort of 24 recipients**, nominated by the Advisory Council organizations.

Inaugural Advisory Council (2023-2024)

Chris Ash, *CEO, National Survivor Network*

Aims Babich, *Peer Mentor, You Are More Than, Inc.*

Zoe Christine Bellatorre, *Community Representative, Founder, You Belong, LLC*

Tara Madison, *Chapter Program Coordinator, Elevate Academy, Rebecca Bender Initiative*

Sophie Otiende, *CEO, Global Fund to End Modern Slavery*

Samara Sevush, *Survivor Alliance*

The Resilience Fund helps survivors...



Establish financial stability

by providing consistent funding for monthly expenses like food, rent, utilities, transportation, and children’s education.



Break down barriers

to mental and behavioral health services, legal representation, credit repair, financial inclusion, and a robust social network.



Work toward healing and thriving

on their terms and timeline, taking back what traffickers stole — control over their own lives.

What does “economically thriving” mean?

A survivor of human trafficking who is economically thriving is a person who is securely rooted in their community; with sufficient material resources to be able to be in the present without grief, fear, or restraint from the past; and who has what they need to pursue their goals for the future. Economically thriving is having the freedom of unconstrained choices, and possessing the capacity to dream.



In Their Own Words

"I'm working on my credit repair. I've been meeting with [the Resource Navigator] to figure out all the things I need to do. I know all the information I have to gather up to submit. Then I moved, which was good. And then my baby got Christmas presents, and I didn't have to stress about that, and I didn't have to find money through a magic trick. I haven't had to worry about groceries. I honestly haven't had to worry about too much of anything because I know that money is coming in. I know that I can pay off debt or put money into savings for myself and my son. It's been really relieving. I'm in the middle of a job transition now because my employer was toxic and used my story without my knowledge for a grant. Even with that, I still feel secure because I can count on this money coming."

"What The Resilience Fund provides is for me to be seen and acknowledged as a survivor and as someone working in this field. It's not just the financial piece; it's that Polaris has been listening to survivors and seeing what our challenges are and [acknowledging what] we need. I felt seen by an organization. That is so big. It feels transcendent to have this resource reach into my life as a survivor and uplift my spirit."

"Especially for survivors that work in this field, it's assumed that because we work in the sector, we no longer need support services, despite trauma recovery being a lifelong journey, despite having to dismantle intergenerational and often lifelong cycles of poverty and oppression, and despite continuously having to be up against so many systemic barriers. I've just lost hope in any nonprofit's ability to do anything but the bare minimum. The idea of just trusting us to have money and use it as we need leaves behind the dehumanizing mentality that we can't possibly be self-sufficient and [self-determinative], which is the only true way of experiencing empowerment and freedom. It's amazing that there [are] no strings attached."

The Resilience Fund's Inaugural Cohort

DEMOGRAPHICS

Sex/Gender (write-in)
Woman: 52.6%
Man: 21.1%
Non-Binary/Genderqueer: 15.8%
Trans Woman: 10.5%



- Recipients self-identified as African American/Black, Asian, Bi-/Multiracial, Filipina, Indigenous, Mexican, and White/Caucasian.
- Most have a disability.

26 ————— 57
 They range in age from 26 to 57

ECONOMIC STABILITY



Median annual individual income:

\$17,196



More than 70%
 have no way to cover an emergency expense of any kind.

CORE BARRIERS BY RANK INCLUDE:

- Debt bondage and credit repair
- Mental health
- Robust social supports
- Legal needs and financial inclusion



One out of five
 has no one they can reach out to to ask for help.



RESEARCH & INTELLIGENCE

Data to Impact

In 2023, Polaris continued to advance what is now known as our **Data to Impact Initiative**, a multi-year plan for evolving our data production and analysis in order to help the entire movement respond to and prevent trafficking at scale. Here are a few highlights!

GOAL Build capacity to share timely, accurate, and relevant data

1

Leveraging our technology partnerships, Polaris teamed up with Palantir during their 2023 Hack Week. Together, we **prototyped new tools to improve our process of creating datasets from raw Trafficking Hotline data**. This experience set a foundation for more efficient data production, and we are eager to secure resources to fully implement the tools in the near future.

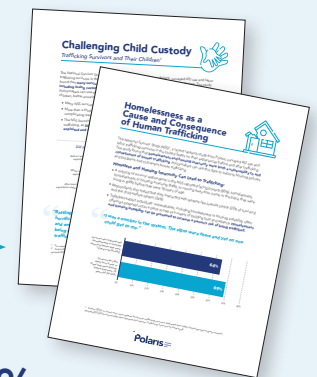
GOAL Provide better insights and evidence for the field

2

In early 2023, Polaris shared results from the [National Survivor Study](#), the largest survey of survivors in the U.S. and the first of its kind done in partnership with survivors. Later, we also published specific issue briefs requested by survivor-advocates and an article in the [Journal of Human Trafficking](#). At year's end, we released "[Human Trafficking During the COVID and Post-COVID Era](#)," analyzing Trafficking Hotline data for pandemic-related trends.

NATIONAL SURVIVOR STUDY

- Engaged **more than a dozen survivor consultants**
- Surveyed **457 survivors** in English, Spanish, and Mandarin Chinese
- Published **issue briefs** on child custody, criminal records, debt, financial abuse and exclusion, homelessness, and workplace conditions



43%
make less than \$25,000 per year

83%
experienced poverty as children

over 60%
experienced financial abuse by their trafficker



42%
have a criminal record



GOAL 3 Establish policies, processes, and tools for data collection, retention, security, and sharing

3

Polaris is a Data Contributor for the [Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative](#), an effort to share trafficking datasets with practitioners and researchers around the world. In 2023, we provided additional Trafficking Hotline and Nonechka data, supporting two breakthroughs: the **development of an AI tool for creating synthetic datasets** to protect the privacy of victims and survivors, along with the 2024 release of the **Global Synthetic Dataset**, which represents 206,000+ victims and survivors across 190 countries and territories over 20 years.

Financial Intelligence Unit

In 2023, the [Financial Intelligence Unit](#) (FIU) kept expanding its partnerships and intelligence sharing to disrupt trafficking businesses and make the crime riskier and less profitable. This financial crimes approach to holding traffickers accountable is more survivor centered, as money laundering, fraud, and tax evasion cases do not always require victims to testify.

The FIU also deepened intelligence work on labor trafficking in collaboration with our Worker Rights team. To help prevent goods produced with forced labor from entering the U.S., Polaris gathered intelligence and conducted research to share with U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Our findings highlighted how companies can circumvent Withhold Release Order restrictions on their products, encouraged CBP to enforce these restrictions, and recommended additional actions to protect workers and hold employers accountable.

2023 MILESTONES



Produced **100th open-source intelligence package** since 2020 and **increased total production by 20%** over 2022



Engaged **seven new financial institution partners** for a current total of 16



Identified **177 businesses and 205 individuals suspected of trafficking involvement** for further investigation by partners



CAMPAIGNS & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Systems Change

In 2023, Polaris’s engagement with policymakers, media, coalition partners, and grassroots advocates helped achieve major wins for victims, survivors, and vulnerable workers across our policy priorities.

Enhancing Worker Rights

With limited immigration status, temporary migrant workers are especially vulnerable to threats of deportation and other force, fraud, and coercion. Polaris has long advocated for reforms to current policy, and in 2023, we celebrated the following milestones:

- The Department of Homeland Security issued new guidelines to expedite deferred action, **enabling non-citizen workers who experience or witness labor rights violations to report abuse and seek assistance without fear of deportation.**
- A regulatory change enabled workers to apply for victim documentation for U or T visas from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, **expanding the set of agencies that can support victims of crime and trafficking.**
- The Departments of Homeland Security and Labor both released proposed regulations for **strengthening protections for temporary migrant workers** in the H-2 visa program, receiving public comments at the end of 2023. The Department of Labor’s final rule has since been published in 2024.

A NOD TO POLARIS:



The draft rule shared for public comment cited several Polaris reports, indicating our leadership and influence in the field.

Supporting Criminal Records Relief

Many survivors have criminal records directly related to their trafficking experience, which can keep them from taking their next steps toward healing and thriving. Polaris has prioritized criminal records relief at the state and federal level, notching the following wins in 2023:

- At the state level, Illinois, Maine, and Florida passed **new laws enhancing criminal records relief for survivors.** Provisions included creating a pathway for survivors to petition for vacatur or expungement, and protecting their privacy through sealing records or exempting petitions from public records laws.
- At the federal level, concerted efforts by Polaris, survivor leaders, and other partners laid the necessary groundwork for both the House of Representatives and the Senate to reintroduce the **Trafficking Survivors Relief Act** in early 2024.

A NOD TO POLARIS:



The legislator who introduced the Illinois bill credited Polaris for raising awareness about the barriers that survivors with criminal records face.



Protecting the Hotline

Law enforcement is an important partner in fighting trafficking. But, except in cases of mandated reporting for situations involving minors, it is vital that we recognize the agency of adult victims and survivors and involve law enforcement when they choose to do so.



The House of Representatives introduced a bill requiring the Trafficking Hotline operator to turn over information shared by the public to state and local law enforcement on demand. **A movement-wide push kept the bill from going to a House vote in 2023.**

- Polaris’s policy team **met and shared information with Congressional staff.**
- Survivor leaders, Polaris staff, and anti-trafficking allies **attended the House Judiciary Committee mark-up to protest the bill** (pictured).
- In just over one month, Polaris’s grassroots network of supporters **made calls and sent 726 letters to their Representatives**, shoring up opposition to the bill. (As of June 2024, more than 5,400 letters have been sent.)
- Several **survivor leaders wrote op-eds** sharing their expertise and experience to inform the public and shift narratives.

Changing the Narrative

Polaris works to ensure that public commitment to ending trafficking is driven by an accurate understanding of the crime. Here are some campaigns and media work that helped set the record straight in 2023:

Listen to Survivors: For National Human Trafficking Prevention Month in January, Polaris launched a campaign representing the diverse experiences of survivors to combat widespread misconceptions and myths that make it hard for people in trafficking situations to recognize their experience as trafficking. Survivor consultants contributed to a variety of resources, including a video, blogs, and a social media toolkit.

Love Isn’t: For Valentine’s Day, we updated our successful campaign on love and trafficking in partnership with survivors. Our resources helped raise awareness about how sex traffickers often groom their victims using romantic, friendship, or familial love to manipulate them into cooperating in their own exploitation. Understanding the realities of how love is used as a weapon is critical to preventing trafficking.

Media Guide: Polaris’s media guide reached new audiences in 2023, notably at a Los Angeles event for entertainment industry leaders, featuring survivor leaders Suamhirs Piraino-Guzman and Rebecca Bender with Polaris CEO Catherine Chen. Their panel discussed how influential stories are in shaping our world and how important it is to partner with survivors in telling stories about trafficking.

CORPORATE SPOTLIGHT

Changing the Narrative: Telling the Truth About Trafficking

In 2023, Polaris's corporate partners joined us in amplifying survivors' voices and combating myths and misconceptions about trafficking for their customers and employees.

DELTA AIR LINES

Top Picks Activation

For National Human Trafficking Prevention Month, Delta partnered with Polaris to offer a selection of [nine free in-flight movies and documentaries](#) that accurately reflect the realities of sex and labor trafficking, available across 146,000 seatback screens. Delta also invited passengers to donate money or miles to Polaris to support victims and survivors.



EXPEDIA GROUP

Employee Training

In 2023, Expedia Group expanded its partnership with Polaris to develop a training about human trafficking in the travel industry for its employees. We worked closely with Expedia Group to tailor information from our Human Trafficking 101 course, Trafficking Hotline data, and other research to educate their teams on the realities of trafficking and how to recognize and respond appropriately to trafficking situations.



Convening Our Corporate Partners

In New York City on November 7 and 8, Polaris hosted **Intersections: A Symposium for Companies Partnering in the Fight Against Human Trafficking**, sponsored by PayPal, the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA) Foundation, and Quantifind. This event brought together dozens of leaders from our corporate partners, who represent a variety of industries and approaches to ending trafficking and supporting survivors.

Over the two days, attendees heard from Polaris leadership, program staff, and corporate peers through panels and discussions sharing best practices, financial crimes approaches to trafficking, and opportunities for collaboration. Everyone came away with actionable ideas for leveraging new learnings and cross-industry relationships, and we all look forward to generating more momentum at future convenings.

Appreciation for Our Allies

Polaris is grateful to all of our corporate partners for their investment in our mission and their shared vision for a world without trafficking. We especially want to thank:

- **Delta Air Lines** for their tremendous philanthropic support for the Trafficking Hotline;
- **Palantir** for their partnership and for providing the software infrastructure driving our primary data to impact for partners, policymakers, and the anti-trafficking movement;
- **PayPal** for their programmatic and philanthropic partnership in fighting financial crime that enables trafficking;
- **Airbnb** for their expansion of language accessibility for the Global Modern Slavery Directory; and
- **Twilio.org** for being the backbone of our Hotline Optimization Project and helping us realize greater efficiencies in our Hotline operations.

SIRIUS
\$500,000+



VEGA

\$250,000 - \$499,999

Your Brand Could Be Here!

CAPELLA

\$100,000 - \$249,999



ANTARES

\$50,000 - \$99,999



REGULUS

\$25,000 - \$49,999



AHARA

\$10,000 - \$24,999

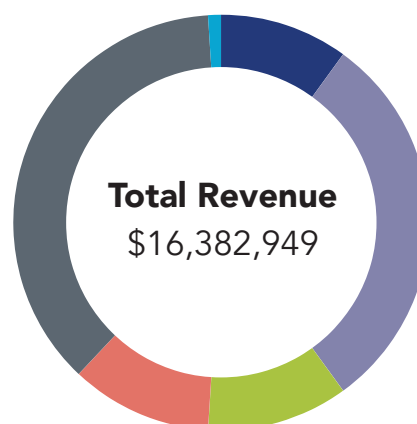


Financial Summary – 2023

Note: Like many nonprofits, Polaris faced a challenging financial environment in 2023, with rising inflation, economic uncertainty, and reduced funding contributing to a deficit. For 2024, Polaris’s executive team worked diligently to reduce expenses for the organization and look for new funding opportunities in a still-challenging environment.

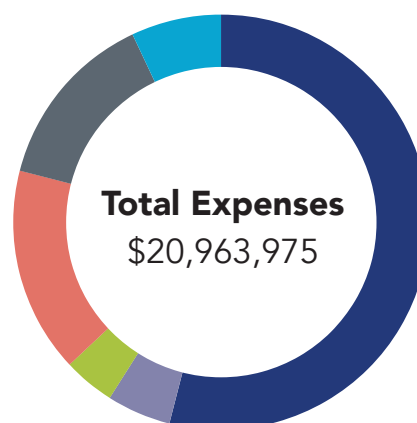
REVENUE

Corporate Donations (10%)	\$1,666,707
Government Grants (30%)	\$4,993,973
Individual Donations (11%)	\$1,807,088
Private Foundations (11%)	\$1,770,500
Donated Goods and Services (37%)	\$6,000,000
Other Income (1%)	\$144,681



EXPENSES

Trafficking Hotline (54%)	\$11,348,598 (\$6M in-kind)
Learning, Innovation and Data Systems (5%)	\$1,091,990
Worker Rights (4%)	\$844,691
Other Programs (16%)	\$3,295,153
Administration (14%)	\$2,917,843
Fundraising (7%)	\$1,465,700



ENDING NET ASSETS \$2,254,803

Note: These financials are pending audit completion and Board approval.

POLARIS LEADERSHIP

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jean Gilbert, *Chairperson*
Liz Kiehner, *Secretary*
Maria Gollayan, *Treasurer*
Sarah Angel-Johnson
Roy L. Austin, Jr.
Susan Coppedge
Boris Gartner
Tanya Gould
Jessica Herrera-Flanigan
Sangeeta Naik
Angel Nguyen Swift
Frederick Reynolds

EXECUTIVE TEAM

Catherine Chen, *Chief Executive Officer*
Jen Jinks, *Chief Program Officer*
Patrick McIntyre, *Chief Development & External Affairs Officer*
Michelle Nicholson, *Chief Operating Officer*
Alfonso Wright, *Chief Financial Officer*



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