

Change.org Releases Top Ten Petitions that Changed 2021



Local youth activism campaigns for trans rights, student dress codes emerge as the most influential petition movements of the year

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Change.org, PBC →

Dec 20, 2021, 14:21 ET

SAN FRANCISCO, Dec. 20, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- Today, Change.org released its Top U.S. Petition Lists across several categories, including Top 10 Petitions That Changed 2021, Top 10 Victories, Top Changemakers of 2021, and the Top Changemakers Under 25 in 2021.

More than 115 million U.S. users came to Change.org to make a difference in 2021, starting more than 791,896 petitions with more than 463,883,172 signatures in total. The largest trend this year was a massive increase in youth campaigning, with tens of thousands coming to the platform to start and sign petitions. In response, **Change.org doubled its Top Changemakers under 25 list in 2021 to accurately represent the scale of youth campaigning on the platform this year.**

In general, petitions calling for local change were the biggest movement on Change.org in 2021, with more than 57,000 petitions created garnering a total of more than 10.8 million signatures. Animal rights campaigns led the second biggest trend in petition creation and signatures, with 10,300 created with 10.7 million signatures across them. The third-largest group of petitions were criminal justice and clemency campaigns, with more than 9.2 million signatures. These included major campaigns such as Justice for

Julius Jones, Elijah McClain and Greg Mingo. Another such campaign, [#FreedomforRogel](#), was a late-breaking entry for fastest-growing campaign in 2021, gaining more than 3 million signatures in just days.

Many campaigns became victories in 2021—from Ms. Opal Lee's historic Juneteenth campaign that led to her presence as President Biden signed the Juneteenth National Holiday legislation into law, to the historic settlement for Elijah McClain's family to Derek Chauvin's conviction for George Floyd's murder. The latter was in response to a public outcry for justice and the largest and most-signed campaign in Change.org history.

"Coming off of a historic year of activism in 2020, Change.org users built on a growing wave of change by launching local campaigns in their own communities," **said Molly Dorozenski, Managing Director of North America and Australia at Change.org.** "The new young leaders thriving on our platform aren't waiting for an organization to tell them what to do. They are taking our free tools and support and driving the change they want to see themselves."

Tens of thousands of students started campaigns on school dress codes, mascot reform, and anti-trans legislation and trans rights petitions in their communities. **Youth campaigning was the largest trend on Change.org this year, reflecting the explosion in activism among Gen Z across the country.** Gen Z, defined as those born from the mid-1990s to 2010, came to the platform in droves, defying claims of 'slacktivism' by leading rallies, protests, virtual events, boycotts, and much more.

"It's about more than just signing a petition and our generation knows it," **said Saraya Hamidi, Campaigner at Change.org and Top Youth Changemaker of 2020.** "It's about driving action and making real change through organizing. I've been fortunate to work with petition starters who believe in challenging the status quo and making the world a better place—and who won't stop until they do." Saraya led the historic Justice for Elijah McClain petition that achieved historic milestones this year before coming to work at Change.org.

TOP TEN PETITIONS THAT CHANGED 2021

1. **Justice for Julius Jones (6.5 million signatures)**: At age 19, Julius Jones was convicted of a crime he didn't commit and put on Death Row. For 22 years, he and his family have maintained his innocence. Cece Jones-Davis took on Julius's cause, starting the Julius Jones Coalition and a viral petition which gained celebrity support from Kim Kardashian, Kerry Washington and Russell Westbrook, among others. Just three hours before Julius was to be executed, Oklahoma Governor Stitt commuted his sentence.
2. **Justice for Elijah McClain (5.6 million signatures)**: 23-year-old Elijah McClain was tragically killed by Aurora, CO police officers in 2019. Outraged by Elijah's tragic death, activist Saraya Hamidi started a petition, calls to legislators and increased public pressure leading to a historic \$15 million settlement this year in the McClain family's civil rights suit.
3. **Emergency Stimulus Checks (2.9 million signatures)**: In the wake of COVID-19 closures, Stephanie Bonin, a Colorado restaurateur, started a petition calling on Congress to issue recurring \$2,000 monthly stimulus checks for struggling American families. While stimulus checks were issued on an emergency basis, Stephanie and her supporters continue to fight for continuing regular checks for the duration of the pandemic, citing continued economic crisis due to the Omicron variant and inflation.
4. **Juneteenth National Holiday (1.6 million signatures)**: 95-year-old Ms. Opal Lee of Fort Worth, TX has been fighting for Juneteenth as a national holiday for years. She believes Juneteenth, which commemorates the day that enslaved Black Americans in Texas finally heard they were free, could be a unifier for a polarized country. Her Change.org petition galvanized national support and prominent celebrity and political endorsements. Ms. Opal was present for the historic moment when President Biden signed the Juneteenth federal holiday into law—the first new holiday since Martin Luther King, Jr. Day in 1983.
5. **Student Loan Cancellation (1.06 million signatures)**: Alan Collinge founded Student Loan Justice (SLJ), a coalition of activists fighting for student loan cancellation. He and SLJ started a petition calling for President Biden to cancel student loans by federal order. The issue continues to trend as a major nonpartisan flashpoint among those struggling under the weight of student loan debt.
6. **Saving Idaho's Endangered Wolves (515,000+ signatures)**: Idaho's wolves had finally made a long-hoped-for recovery, but Idaho legislators introduced a law that called for killing 90% of the wolf population. Erika Moore, a wolf advocate from Colorado, started a petition asking the U.S Fish & Wildlife Service and Idaho's governor to reevaluate this

decision. Erika's petition was the most-shared petition by signers in 2021, and wildlife advocates continue to fight to protect Idaho's wolves.

7. **Ban UNL - Fiji (500,000+ signatures)**: In August, news broke that the University of Nebraska-Lincoln had received severe reports of sexual assault by the campus fraternity Phi Gamma Delta (FIJI). Thousands rallied to ban the fraternity with on-campus protests and online activism on Change.org. This viral petition became one of Change.org's fastest-growing and most-shared petitions in 2021 and resulted in much-needed attention to the stories of survivors on college campuses.
8. **LeVar Burton for Jeopardy Host (296,000+ signatures)**: After icon Alex Trebek's tragic death, super fan Joshua Sanders started a petition urging Jeopardy to choose LeVar Burton as the next host. Sanders cited his legacy of Black representation on Star Trek and literacy efforts through Reading Rainbow as the perfect fit. The petition went viral, gaining massive fan and celebrity support. Burton eventually guest-hosted the show, and while it wasn't the right fit, the fan outcry led to a new opportunity. Burton announced he'd be hosting the new Trivial Pursuit game show in 2022, making this a victory to Joshua and Burton's legions of fans.
9. **Anti-trans legislation movement (800,000+ signatures)**: In early 2021, states across the country introduced dangerous anti-trans legislation that would have targeted the rights and dignity of transgender youth. People flocked to Change.org to start and sign petitions on the issue. The public outcry put pressure on legislators and let them know they would be held accountable to voters.
10. **End Discriminatory School Dress Codes (604,000+ signatures)**: This year, there was an explosion in youth petition creation to ban discriminatory dress codes in schools across America. Young women especially have started using the platform to stand up and speak out against sexist, racist and outdated dress codes in their schools— and winning. This trend is expected to continue into 2022 as these young activists continue to fight for what they believe is right.

TOP TEN PETITION VICTORIES THAT CHANGED 2021

1. **Justice for George Floyd**: Last summer, more than 19 million people from all over the world joined together to fight for racial justice after the murder of George Floyd. Started by 15-year-old Kellen S., it became the biggest petition and movement in Change.org's history. The petition hit a huge campaign milestone in 2021 when Derek Chauvin was convicted for the murder of George Floyd.
2. **Juneteenth National Holiday**: 95-year-old Ms. Opal Lee of Fort Worth, TX has been fighting for Juneteenth as a national holiday for years. She believes Juneteenth, which commemorates the day that enslaved Black Americans in Texas finally heard they were free, could be a unifier for a polarized country. Her Change.org petition galvanized national support and prominent celebrity and political endorsements. Ms. Opal was present for the historic moment when President Biden signed the Juneteenth federal holiday into law—the first new holiday since Martin Luther King, Jr. Day in 1983.
3. **Free Greg Mingo**: Greg Mingo, a 68-year-old man, was given an egregiously long sentence for a crime he did not commit. His niece, Ava, and sister Evonne started a petition calling for Gov. Cuomo to free Greg, who had supported them for years—even from jail. A coalition of activists, friends and family members of Greg's led by Ava's friend Diana Scholl pushed for his release through phone action, mobile billboards, and advertising. On Gov. Cuomo's last day in office, he pardoned Greg, who has been reunited with his family. Greg is now an activist himself.
4. **Covid Vaccines for Teachers**: COVID-19 vaccines were released early in 2020, yet teachers were not included in the first group of people eligible for vaccines. Folks all across the country started and signed a growing trend of petitions calling on their state's leaders to prioritize educators for the COVID-19 vaccine access. This activism resulted in many victories across the country including in Florida, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and California.
5. **#FreeBritney**: Val started a petition to demand an investigation into the allegations of conservator abuse of pop legend and icon, Britney Spears. The #FreeBritney movement was more than just a celebrity movement and brought needed attention to endemic conservatorship abuse. With more than 85,000 signatures, this petition and the rising public pressure to address Britney's conservatorship played a key part in her eventual freedom this year.
6. **Stop Racial Discrimination in the NFL Concussion Settlement**: Amy Lewis, the wife of a former NFL player, started a petition calling on the NFL to address the use of race as a factor in determining baseline cognitive function in their concussion settlement.

Lewis argued the policy had been purposely used to deny Black and brown players fair and equitable compensation for their work-related chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) injuries. In August, Lewis and a group of former NFL players delivered the petition to the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. In October, the NFL agreed to end race-based brain testing, a major victory.

7. **Honor USCP Officer Eugene Goodman with the Medal of Freedom**: More than 100,000 signers advocated for Capitol Police Officer Eugene Goodman to receive the Medal of Freedom after he diverted a Capitol riot mob away from Senate leaders. This act of bravery potentially saved the lives of those inside the Senate building. In February, the Senate unanimously voted to award Officer Goodman this very special accolade for his act of heroism.
8. **Get Mainstream News Coverage Of National Elderly Asian American Assaults**: Over the past year, the unfortunate inflation of racist rhetoric associated with the origin and spread of the coronavirus resulted in an uptick of deadly hate crimes against Asian Americans. The Asian American Collective fought to change this narrative by creating a campaign to ask mainstream America to tell these stories. More than 120,000 signed the petition and it achieved coverage on the issue in Rolling Stone and Huffington Post, among others.
9. **Name Howard University's College of Fine Arts in Honor of Chadwick Boseman**: After the death of actor Chadwick Boseman, Maya started a petition to name the reestablished Howard University's College of Fine Arts the "Chadwick A. Boseman College of Fine Arts." Boseman was well-known for his cinematic portrayal of iconic Black legends and after more than 58,000 signatures Howard University agreed to name the college in his honor.
10. **End Comcast's Data Cap**: During the pandemic, it became much harder for residents to stay under Comcast's Internet cap policy while working from home and school. The company was rebuked for potential profiteering during a time that had economically devastated so many families. In January, petition starter Luz Lucena asked Comcast to put statewide holds on the expansion. His petition, which received more than 60,000 signatures, influenced the company's commitment to suspend the cap until the summer.

- **Ms. Opal Lee (Juneteenth):** 95-year-old Ms. Opal Lee of Fort Worth, TX, known as the "Grandmother of Juneteenth," doing annual 2.5 mile walks to recognize the 2.5 years it took for the news of the Emancipation Proclamation to reach all enslaved Americans. She and her granddaughter, Dione Sims, started Unity Unlimited to achieve the creation of Juneteenth as a federal holiday. Ms. Opal Lee was present when President Biden signed Juneteenth legislation into law and gave her the historic pen he signed it with.
- **The Free Greg Mingo team:** A coalition of activists, including Greg's family members Ava and Evonne, family friends and supporters including Diana Scholl, Anne Dabrowski, the CUNY Student Law Center, and many more, led a driven and sustained campaign fighting for Greg Mingo's freedom. Greg, an innocent man, was in jail for 40 years – and thanks to their tireless efforts, which included mobile billboards, advertising, lobbying and more, Gov. Cuomo pardoned Greg during his last day in office.
- **Maebel Gebremedhin (Tigray Genocide Awareness):** Maebel Gebremedhin, an NYC activist, started a petition asking the U.S. government to stop the Ethiopian government's genocidal campaign against women, as well as all citizens, of Tigray. Tigray, a region in northern Ethiopia, has been engulfed in war. Women are now coming forward about the obscene sexual violence and separation of families, including Maebel's own family. Maebel first came to the United States as a refugee at the age of five from Tigray. Through her sustained activism, President Joe Biden signed an Executive Order on Imposing Sanctions on Ethiopia in September.
- **Rev. Cece Jones-Davis (Free Julius Jones):** After Cece Jones-Davis heard about Julius Jones's story, she took on his cause, starting the Julius Jones Coalition and a petition calling for his freedom that went viral with 6.5 million signatures. Momentum continued to build through 2021, and celebrities like Kim Kardashian, Kerry Washington and Russell Westbrook voiced their support. Just three hours before Julius was to be executed for a crime he did not commit, Oklahoma Governor Stitt commuted his sentence. The Coalition plans to keep fighting for his freedom.
- **Randy Kritkauskay (WSJ Thanksgiving column):** Every year, The Wall Street Journal publishes a Thanksgiving passage from a pilgrim detailing what colonists perceived when they arrived in the "New World"—full of racism and disdain for Indigenous Americans. Randy Kritkauskay, an enrolled tribal member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, author, professor, and the founder of ECOLOGIA, felt enough was enough and

started a petition calling on the WSJ to end this practice. He ran an essay contest to find a more fitting replacement and got a response from the WSJ—building awareness around an important Indigenous rights issue.

- **Eric Woodyard (Free Horace Peterson):** Eric Woodyard's grandfather, Horace Peterson, has been in prison for 49 years serving a sentence of life without parole – despite being innocent. Eric and his family want him to come home to experience the special family moments he's tragically missed. He started a petition calling on Gov. Whitmer to free Horace, which involved a mobile billboard campaign, advertising and more. Eric's incredible campaign to free Horace will continue into 2022.
- **Stephanie Sherman (Save Taino Artifacts from Christie's):** Stephanie Sherman, a Taino activist, started a petition calling on Christie's, a British auction house, not to sell off historic Taino artifacts. Stephanie hoped her petition would convince them to return the sacred artifacts, which hold invaluable sacred, historical, and cultural importance, to the Taino peoples. While the auction ultimately occurred, Stephanie has pivoted her activism to fighting for the establishment of a Taino Cultural Center.
- **Camille (Anti-Trans Legislation petition, AL):** During a wave of anti-trans legislation, Camille started a petition to fight against the proposed 'Vulnerable Child Compassion and Protection Act.' It quickly gained tens of thousands of signatures, and Camille continues to galvanize supporters in the fight against dangerous legislation in Alabama.
- **Jennifer Price (COVID Psychosis Awareness):** When Jennifer's husband Ben came down with COVID-19, she never expected that it would cause him to develop paranoia, panic, and ultimately lead to Ben taking his own life. She learned that this was post-COVID psychosis, and there simply was not enough awareness of this serious, life-threatening issue. She started a petition asking President Biden to add a neurology expert to the COVID task force, and she continues to fight for change.
- **New York Taxi Workers Association (Medallion Debt):** Taxi drivers in New York City had been buried under crippling debt (an average of \$600,000 per driver) that was thrust onto them by a system of car ownership loans that was approved and promoted by the city. After the total collapse in value of the 'medallions', the New York Taxi Workers Association (NYTWA) led by Bhairavi Desai, started a petition that gained thousands of signatures. Rallies and hunger strikes led to a November decision by Mayor DeBlasio to provide debt relief.
- **Trisha Hamsmith (Reese's Law):** When Trisha's infant daughter, Reese, swallowed a

button battery, she channeled her grief into action. Trisha started a petition calling for federal legislation to require child safety measures for products with button batteries, and it quickly gained 114,000 signatures and support from major consumer and child advocacy groups. Her devoted campaign led to Senate introduction of the bipartisan "Reese's Law" this November.

2021'S TOP CHANGEMAKERS UNDER 25

- **Kim Saira (James Corden / Spill Your Guts)**: Kim Saira, a 24-year-old Asian-American activist, started a viral petition calling on James Corden to change the "Spill Your Guts" segment in which guests are asked to answer difficult questions or eat the "gross," "disgusting" or "horrific" foods presented to them. Many of the dishes come from various Asian cultures and are deeply ingrained in Asian cuisine. Saira's petition went viral through a TikTok video about the segment and got top-tier media coverage calling out Corden. He eventually pledged to avoid using those foods for his segment.
- **Olivia Rosenblum (ESPN Women's Soccer Coverage)**: Olivia, a New York City fourth-grader, started a petition calling on ESPN to increase their women's soccer coverage after learning that only 2% of ESPN's airtime is dedicated to female sports. She has been calling for ESPN to increase their coverage to at least 30%, saying they have a responsibility to disrupt these damaging gender stereotypes.
- **Rose Felice (Ban Fiji UNL)**: Rose, a student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, has led protests with her peers against their campus fraternity Phi Gamma Delta (FIJI), for their continuous history and recent accounts of sexual assault on campus. With more than half a million signatures, Rose's petition became one of the fastest-growing petitions on Change.org this year. It resulted in the ban of the fraternity at UNL through 2026.
- **Raien W. (Anti-Trans Legislation petition - NC)**: 17-year-old Rai started a petition after NC lawmakers introduced legislation that would ban gender-affirming healthcare for youth under the age of 21, and would require schools to report to a child's family if suspect they are trans. Rai, who survived a suicide attempt as a youth, believed that measure would put countless trans kids' lives in danger and knew he had to do something about it. His petition gained 35,000 signatures and galvanized support for a marginalized community, and Rai continues to push for change.
- **Daniel Peterson (Pierre Trans Youth)**: This year, Daniel's South Dakota high school said they would no longer address trans students by their chosen names, placing their dead names and assigned gender at birth on their records and college transcripts. The sudden change was devastating, and the affected students had no counseling support. Daniel started a petition calling on the school to protect fellow trans students, and it gained 14,000 signatures. Daniel continues to fight for trans students in South Dakota to have their chosen names on their records.
- **Siddhanth Pachipala (Texas Minority History)**: Siddhanth, a high school student from Houston, TX, decided to stand up against some of his state's recent education

copyright laws. After his classes sparked an interest in local civics and government, Siddhanth looked up the bills in front of the Texas legislature. He was horrified to see a curriculum bill where items like "the 'I have a dream' speech" and "Native American History" had been simply crossed out. After taking off amid a storm of backlash against Texas bills from 2021, Siddhanth's petition caught the attention of USA Today. They interviewed Siddhanth about the importance of freedom of ideas and discussion for high schoolers, helping the petition grow to nearly 160,000 signatures.

- **Nikki Wombwell (Myers Park)** - Nikki is a Myers Park High School graduate (Charlotte, North Carolina), who started a petition against her school to raise awareness of its inaction against sexual violence. As a student, Wombwell was known as "Jill Roe" in a lawsuit filed against CMS and Myers Park leadership, who ignored her case of sexual violence by fellow students. Nikki started a petition this year that gained 60,000 signatures to stand against rape culture. Now 22, Nikki has grown into a leading voice for survivors in Charlotte, including the formation of Amplify Voices - an organization dedicated to standing against sexual violence.
- **Reem Kirja (Eid Off For Students)**: Reem Kirja, an Iowa 8th grader, petitioned for Iowa City Community School District to allow Muslim students to honor the religious holiday, Eid al-Fitr, without penalty. Through multiple meetings with the district and presenting her petition, the Iowa education board voted a unanimous yes to Reem's campaign, and the new policy will be implemented next school year.
- **Sydni Scott (Tulsa Reparations Resolution)**: Sydni Scott, a Columbia University student-athlete, activist and Rhodes Scholar, started an organization called The Amendment Project calling for the Tulsa City Council to vote 'yes' on the reparations resolution for victims and descendants of the Tulsa Massacre in 1921. In June, the campaign was a success, gaining 10,000 signatures and passage of the historic resolution, a step towards justice for survivors and descendants of those impacted by the Tulsa Massacre on Black Wall Street.

For more information on any of these campaigns, or to speak with any of these petition starters or a representative from Change.org, please contact press@change.org.

ABOUT CHANGE.ORG

Change.org is the world's largest nonprofit-owned tech platform for people-powered, social change. More than 450 million people across more than 196 countries use our technology-

driven petition and campaign tools to speak up on issues they're passionate about. Approximately 70,000 petitions are created and supported on our platform every month, with 1.7 million new people joining our global network of users every week.

Every day, our users collaborate to organize on local, national and global issues; hold corporations to account; and demand action from decision makers at the highest levels of government and business. Our platform is free to use, open to all, and completely independent because it's funded by the people who use it. This independence also makes Change.org a trusted resource for decision makers, who turn to the platform to hear from and respond to the communities they represent. People on Change.org have powered tens of thousands of campaign victories worldwide, and more are winning every week.

As an organization, Change.org is committed to providing the tools, resources and support needed to empower anyone, anywhere to create the change they want to see in the world.

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