

Brooke Scott
Spring 2023

Black Organizer Project

For my Black organizer project, I learned more about Representative DeShanna Neal (they/them) in the 13th district. I attempted to reach out to DeShanna in order to interview them, but I have been unsuccessful so far. I was first introduced to DeShanna back in 2022 during a rally about gun violence. They spoke about their experience raising a queer child and the fears of violence being directed at them because of their identity. I was immediately drawn to their energy, passion, and courage to be their true, authentic self. A small part of me was healed just seeing them exist and speak up about issues close to my heart and my community. Since then, I have been inspired to learn more about the efforts to make Delaware a more equitable place for LGBTQ+ people, specifically those who are Black and brown.

DeShanna Neal became representative in 2022. They were born in Wilmington Delaware, a city kid, and the first in their family to receive a graduate degree. They are a mother of 4 and a community organizer. Their daughter Trinity was the first child in Delaware to receive gender confirmation treatment after controversy and difficulty accessing it. DeShanna is a passionate advocate in Delaware for LGBTQ+ justice, racial justice, mental and medical healthcare.

I am drawn to DeShanna's story and career because even though my advocacy mostly takes place in the church and spiritual sector, I am also a Black LGBTQ+ person. I identify with them in a personal and political way. As someone who is new to Delaware, I have found it difficult to find many safe spaces for Black LGBTQ+ people to express all these parts of ourselves at the same time. I also have observed that Delaware still has a long way to go in terms of LGBTQ+ justice, especially as it relates to discrimination policies, access to proper healthcare, language/terminology, and understanding gender identity. I have also felt that much

of the LGBTQ+ work in the state is very much led by white LGBTQ+ people. There are very few spaces that are truly “by and for” Black LGBTQ+ people to have a loud voice and thrive. To me, DeShanna represents the priorities of a newer generation, one that cares less about respectability and more about true, intergenerational equity. They seem to be someone who truly cares about *ALL* Black people, not just those who are straight and cisgender (not trans). That represents hope for me and I am sure makes a lot of people uncomfortable. Yet, if Black folks are truly going to get free in Delaware and in the country at large, we’ve got to lift from the bottom and that often means prioritizing the needs of women, femmes, and LGBTQ+ identified people. I am hoping to meet DeShanna soon, support their work, and contribute to the new wave of deepening Delaware’s understanding of true equity and justice for all people.