



Gardening the Community (GTC) Takes
On DC with Rural Coalition (RC)

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Our GTC students had the incredible opportunity to visit Washington, DC for the Rural Coalition conference and to visit important figures in Congress. Here is a timeline:

January 17th:

- Students visited the House of Representatives and the Senate buildings where they met Representatives Richard Neal and Jim McGovern and Senator Markey's Staff and talked about the needs of their communities.
- GTC got to touch the walls of the building walls that the enslaved Africans once built.
- Students also visited the Washington, DC Botanical Garden and had dinner at the El Sol Restaurante & Tequileria.

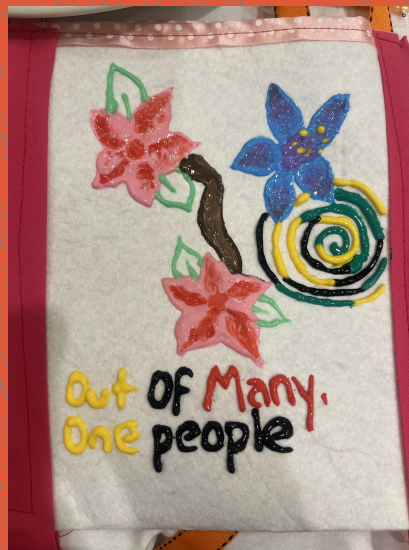
January 18th:

- GTC enjoyed activities hosted by Rural Coalition and their youth program. Here they learned about pollinators, urban farming, and learned Native American indigenous dances along with creating some indigenous bags.



January 19th:

On the last day, students heard from the other members of the Coalition about their communities and what farmers who look just like them are doing in their communities. Some of the GTC students spoke about their experience with urban farming and GTC and how it has created an impact on their lives and their overall experience with the activities of the week. Here is a brief video of their presentation.



Preparation and Reflection on the Trip:

The Springfield Food Policy Council sponsored the Gardening the Community youth and staff's trip to the rural coalition. Prior to the trip to DC, the youth received a brief civic's education. This work has been a part of the broader digital storytelling work of GTC. They learned about legislative advocacy and how a bill becomes a law and the advocacy work that facilitates the passing of a law. Many of the youth shared that this was their first time learning about the legislative process.



In reflecting on the trip several of the attendees discussed how the rural coalition visit changed their understanding of the food system. One youth said "I learned how much work needs to get done in Washington to feed people, it's more than we grow here." Other youth shared how meeting members of the rural coalition expanded their understanding of who participated in growing food and advocating food justice. Their visit also taught them the complexities and difficulties of the legislative process and felt that their peers needed to learn about these processes. The youth have expressed a desire to return to the rural coalition and look forward to supporting the work.