## 2007 ANNUAL REPORT





North Carolina Justice Center Opportunity and Prosperity for All *"If you don't like the way the world is,* you <u>change</u> it.

You have an obligation to change it. You just do it one step at a time."

– Marian Wright Edelman

MISSION 1

The Justice Center is the state's leading *research and advocacy* organization dedicated to transforming North Carolina's prosperity into opportunity for all.

Our mission is to **eliminate poverty** in North Carolina by ensuring that every household in the state has access to the resources, services and fair treatment it needs in order to enjoy economic security.

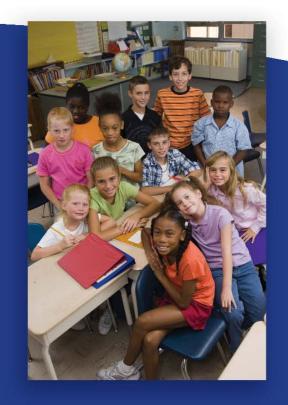
# To make **opportunity and prosperity for all** a reality, we work toward:



 Jobs that are safe, pay a living wage, and provide health coverage and other benefits



• **Housing** that is safe and affordable



 Public education that opens a world of opportunity to every child



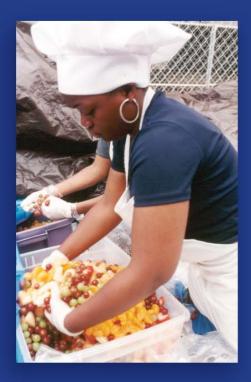
• **Health care** that is accessible and affordable



**Consumer protections** that shield hard-earned assets from abusive practices



A fair and stable revenue system that adequately funds public investments while fairly distributing tax responsibility



- Public investments in services and programs that expand and enhance opportunities for economic security
- **Fair treatment for everyone** in North Carolina regardless of race, ethnicity, or country of origin



The North Carolina Justice Center was founded in 1996 through the merger of two former Legal Services organizations. Today, our staff is more than 40 people strong and includes community educators, communications specialists, researchers, attorneys, policy advocates, and other dedicated professionals.

Our unique approach to advocacy has helped the Justice Center to be extraordinarily successful in changing policies in North Carolina to improve the lives of working families. We use five interconnected strategies in our work:

- 1. **Public Policy Advocacy** Our advocates work with policymakers to secure laws and policies that improve the lives of low- and moderate-income families and to oppose policies that would take the state backward.
- **2.** Litigation Our attorneys take on high-impact cases designed to protect and expand the rights of low-income groups and individuals, including immigrants.
- **3. Research** Our experts analyze policies and challenges that impact low-income North Carolinians, identify strategies for improvement, and publish their findings in an array of well-respected reports and issue briefs.
- **4. Community Outreach** Our educators build relationships with groups and individuals at the community level and pursue a two-way process of education and empowerment.
- 5. **Communications** Our writers and media experts generate commentaries and publications designed to shape public opinion.







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2008 INCOMING BOARD MEMBER: Mr. Orage Quarles III

\*The staff and board would like to extend our thanks to Tong Yang. Tong is a dedicated community leader, who for over four years, has served on the Justice Center's Board of Directors. His guidance and insight will be missed. We wish him well in his next endeavor. What a transforming year it has been for the Justice Center. During 2007, we selected a new executive director and added a dozen new staff and two new projects. The organization's media presence is booming, and people all over the state are learning about the powerful work the Justice Center has been doing for more than a decade.

Both of us have worked with the Justice Center for many years, and it has been an honor to partner with this dedicated staff that has done so much for the people of North Carolina. Hundreds of thousands of families in North Carolina have the Justice Center to thank for the programs, services and protections that make their lives better and improve their economic security.

The Justice Center has championed the well-being of these families through the economic ups and downs of the past eleven years. Now, as the nation prepares to ride out this latest slump, the Justice Center will fight to protect the significant gains made in 2007 and to expand North Carolina's investments in and commitment to its people.

The Justice Center needs support from like-minded people around the state to achieve this mission. There are wealthy interests in North Carolina working to cut programs and restrict the rights of working families, regardless of the human toll. It is up to all of us who believe in "opportunity and prosperity for all" to stand with the Justice Center and support its work.

If you are already a contributor to the Justice Center, we extend our heartfelt thanks for your continued support. If you are not, we hope the extensive accomplishments in this report will prompt you to put your financial support behind this unequaled force for positive change in North Carolina.

Sincerely,

Reuben Blackwell Co-Chairman, Board of Directors

John J. Butler Co-Chairman, Board of Directors

#### LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR 7



Dear Friend of the Justice Center,

The Justice Center experienced substantial growth and secured significant achievements in 2007, and the coming year promises to be equally exciting as we expand our work in a number of areas.

We are adding staff to the NC Health Access Coalition to produce in-depth reports and analyses of critical health care issues. We will also deepen our work in communities to address local health issues and to build political momentum toward increasing access to quality, affordable health care.

Our continuing efforts to ensure economic security for all working North Carolinians will build on our recent successes in raising the minimum wage and the creation of a state earned income tax credit. We are using the relationships and collaborations created during those efforts to launch a campaign for paid sick leave. Currently, more than 40% of North Carolina's workers don't have the opportunity to earn paid time off that they can use to recover from illnesses, visit doctors or take care of family members who are ill. We and our coalition partners are working for a new state law to change this.

In recent years, we have worked to protect North Carolina homeowners by fighting against predatory lending practices, ensuring fair loan servicing, and making the home foreclosure process fairer. A new grant from the Institute for Foreclosure Legal Assistance will allow us to increase our efforts to assist the estimated 50,000 families in North Carolina who stand to lose their homes to foreclosure this year.

The Justice Center is extending our work to several new policy areas in 2008. Staff members are developing recommendations to ensure that upcoming reforms in state transportation and energy policies take into account the needs of North Carolina's poor and working families. We are also working with local community groups to develop policies to ensure that individuals leaving the state's prison system can find housing and employment and to reduce recidivism.

Because of the support and collaboration of hundreds of individuals and organizations, the Justice Center continues to play a key role in securing policies that improve the lives of low-income and disadvantaged people across the state. We look forward to new successes in expanding opportunity and prosperity for all of North Carolina's residents in the year ahead.

With warm regards,

Mulinda Laurerce

#### About Melinda Lawrence

Melinda Lawrence joined the Justice Center as Executive Director in February 2007. She spent nearly three decades fighting for civil rights, workers' rights, and consumer protections as a partner in the law firm Patterson Harkavy, and Lawrence, LLP. Lawrence litigated numerous high-profile cases in North Carolina, including Willie M v. Hunt, which established new rights and services for mentally handicapped children, and Small v. Martin, which resulted in a major reform of North Carolina's prisons. She also represented countless individuals challenging discriminatory treatment in their workplaces, schools and communities.

Lawrence has a Bachelor's and a Master of Education degree from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and a law degree from Yale University.

# This year was a momentously successful one

for the North Carolina Justice Center. Our research, advocacy, and community outreach helped us secure key victories in the state legislature and the courts. Here are some of the year's highlights:

#### Supports and Protections for Workers

Our decade-long effort to secure a state earned income tax credit (EITC) for low- and moderate-income workers paid off this year. Research from the Justice Center's Budget & Tax Center laid out the benefits of a state EITC, helping to secure widespread support from community leaders, countless state policy organizations, and finally, legislators. More than 800,000 North Carolina working families will receive a tax reduction or refund when they file their 2008 taxes thanks to this effort.

In a year of heightened anti-immigrant sentiment, the Justice Center and a coalition of immigrant advocates did an amazing thing: we secured better standards for the housing provided to migrant farmworkers, many of whom are immigrants. The new standards will help to ensure that farmworkers have safe housing and clean mattresses on which to sleep.

Our efforts to protect workers extend into the courts. The Justice Center, along with private co-counsel, filed a class-action lawsuit against the State of North Carolina challenging the improper classification of state employees as "temporary" regardless of how long they worked for the state, thereby unfairly denying them benefits. In 2007, the NC Court of Appeals reversed a lower court's dismissal. Our work in this matter will continue into 2008.

#### A More Responsible State Budget

North Carolina spends hundreds of millions of dollars on "incentives" to get businesses to come to the state, to expand their facilities, or even just to stay put. The Budget & Tax Center, in partnership with the Corporation for Enterprise Development, published a report that exposed tremendous problems with the state's incentives programs and prompted legislators to begin revamping the process.

While the Justice Center often acts as a watchdog, we are also committed to highlighting and building support for the important role the government can play in improving lives. That's why we are taking part in the Bridging the Gaps Project, a multi-state effort to examine how work-support programs - like child-care subsidies, housing assistance and public health-care programs - impact the lives of low-income working families. The research shows these programs are tremendously beneficial to families, and we plan to use the data to increase support for them.

How the state raises money is almost as important as how it spends it. The Justice Center is the only organization in North Carolina that does

extensive analysis on how state tax policies impact low- and moderate-income families. This year, we held meetings in four cities with community and business leaders to inform them about how the current state revenue system works and how legislators can make it fairer for working families.

#### Access to Health Care

The Justice Center's North Carolina Health Access Coalition is at the forefront of the effort to expand access to health care to all people in the state. This year, we made progress toward that goal with the creation of two new programs: NC Kids' Care, which will make affordable health coverage available to some 38,000 currently uninsured children, and the high-risk insurance pool, which will offer affordable insurance to thousands of North Carolinians with chronic medical conditions. We also worked with our partners in the mental-health community to get a law passed that requires equal health insurance coverage for major mental illnesses.

In addition, we have launched a new community initiative to ensure that parents are taking advantage of public health-care programs available to their children. This is the beginning of a new focus on disseminating information in low-income communities and bringing these communities into the statewide conversation about health-care access and affordability.

# SPOTLIGHT:

#### **COALITION EFFORT**

THIS YEAR, the Justice Center took the lead in creating a new coalition dedicated to making North Carolina's revenue system



fairer while ensuring that important programs are adequately funded. North Carolinians for Fair and Stable Taxes (NCFAST) includes organizations that represent more than twomillion Tar Heel taxpayers. In August, this powerful coalition used its extensive resources and connections to bring

more than 40 organizations together to hold a news conference calling for a responsible state budget and a state earned income tax credit. The event, which featured Justice Center staff and cited Budget & Tax Center research, received extensive media attention and helped to cement legislative support for a state EITC and key program funding.

# SPOTLIGHT:

#### COMMUNITY EDUCATION

NC COMMUNITY ADVOCATES FOR REVITALIZING EDUCATION is a

growing organization of parents, educators and community leaders determined to improve their

neighborhood schools and the state's education system. The group grew out of the Education Leadership Institute, which are trainings the Justice Center's Education and Law Project holds regularly to empower those concerned about education and train them to become effective advocates at the state and local levels. ELI graduates

wanted a way to continue working

advocacy skills, and NC CARE was born.

together as they used their new



## Quality Education for All

North Carolina's state constitution guarantees a "sound basic education" for every child. To move the state closer to fulfilling this important promise, the Justice Center aggressively advocates for more money for the education of low-income students and for schools in the state's poorest counties. This year, we helped secure considerable increases for the Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Fund and the Low-Wealth School

Supplemental Fund, which will improve education opportunities for children throughout North Carolina.

We also work to protect students' educational rights. Through legislative advocacy with our friends and allies, we secured a law that allows students who are suspended to take home textbooks, get assignments, and make up missed exams. Two other new laws help protect the rights of special-needs students who face disciplinary action.

In the courts, the Justice Center assisted in a case challenging the unconstitutionally vague rules that Durham Public Schools has regarding gang-related symbols, clothing and jewelry. School administrators are not provided any guidance on how to enforce the rules, and students and parents do not get adequate notice so they can make sure they aren't breaking the rules. A decision in this case is pending.

#### **Consumer Protections**

Every legislative session, Justice Center advocates work to defeat numerous bills that would constrict consumers' rights. We also draft, negotiate and lobby for legislation that will protect consumers from abuses. This year, we worked to counter the foreclosure crisis by securing new laws that make the foreclosure process fairer and expand homeowners' rights to sue for illegal lending practices. The legislation also helps protect homeowners from abusive loan-servicing practices, such as misapplied payments, illegal fees, and mishandled escrow accounts.

The Justice Center coordinates a statewide Foreclosure Defense Project. With our program partners, we initiated impact litigation to curtail predatory lending, conducted community education statewide, and

provided direct legal assistance to low- and moderate-income consumers in hundreds of predatory mortgage lending and foreclosure defense cases. In addition, the Justice Center is part of a group of advocates and state officials who have come together to develop strategies to address the increasing number of foreclosures in North Carolina.

### Safe and Affordable Housing

The Justice Center has been working to expand access to safe and affordable housing for more than a decade. This year, we helped to more than double

the recurring annual appropriation for the NC Housing Trust Fund, which finances the construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing. We also secured continued funding for the Home Protection Pilot Program, which helps laid-off workers avoid foreclosure.

In the courts, the Justice Center and private co-counsel challenged the Raleigh Housing Authority's improper procedures for terminating residents' subsidized housing vouchers. Settlement of the case resulted in new procedures that better protect residents' rights. We also represented the tenants' association at a Wake County mobile home park where many tenants faced improper utility bills and collection

# SPOTLIGHT:

#### PAYDAY LENDING LITIGATION

THE JUSTICE CENTER played a key role in getting payday lending banned in North Carolina, but that was not the end of our efforts. We have filed

> class-action lawsuits to get money back for the thousands of North Carolinians who paid illegally high fees for payday loans. The case hinges on the validity of the mandatory arbitration clauses in the payday lending contracts. These clauses – which most

Americans have signed as part of a loan, credit card, bank or even summer-camp agreement – prohibit consumers from suing to protect their rights, but we believe this is legally unconscionable and therefore unenforceable. The Justice Center is part of an effort through the National Association of Consumer Advocates to end the use of mandatory arbitration clauses, which rob consumers of the ability to stand up for their rights.



procedures. With ACORN and the association, we persuaded the corporation that owned the park to remove improper fees and change its collections procedures for utilities in all ten of the mobile home parks it owned in North Carolina.

In order to increase awareness of tenants' rights, the Justice Center teamed up with Legal Aid of North Carolina to conduct trainings on the state's Landlord/Tenant and Fair Housing Law.

### Expanded Rights for Immigrants

Many groups and politicians took aim at North Carolina's immigrant community, but the most troubling attacks came from law enforcement agencies that raided factories and pulled immigrants from their homes. As the coordinating organization for North Carolina's Network of Immigrant Advocates, the Justice Center brought together activists from around the state and helped to educate immigrant communities about their rights. Justice Center staff also visited 165 migrant farmworker camps in 2007 and spoke to more than 1500 workers about their legal rights.

The Justice Center's Immigrants Legal Assistance Project continues its amazing work providing legal help to hundreds of low-income immigrants in North Carolina, including some trying to escape violent domestic situations and others seeking asylum from persecution in their home countries.

# New Initiatives

#### NC Policy Watch

In September, NC Policy Watch joined the Justice Center as an independent project. Policy Watch is a public policy organization dedicated to changing the way the public and elected officials debate the important issues facing North Carolina and, ultimately, to improve the quality of life in the state by convincing state leaders to make the kinds of investments in people and institutions that allow North Carolina to address its most pressing problems. The AJ Fletcher Foundation, Policy Watch's principal funder and a strong supporter of the Justice

Center, brought us together because we share the goal of promoting economic, social and political justice for everyone in North Carolina.

NC Policy Watch generates a steady flow of timely, accurate and hard-hitting commentaries and analyses that challenge North Carolina leaders to chart a new and better course. This aggressive communications effort includes daily radio commentaries on radio stations across the state; daily emails to an extensive list that includes policymakers and the media; and weekly in-depth analyses. The staff members of NC Policy Watch speak frequently at forums and events throughout the state and regularly provide insights and expert analysis for various media outlets. In addition, they sponsor a regular luncheon series, "Crucial Conversations," which brings prominent state and national leaders together with the community to talk about issues facing the state.

#### Eastern Carolina Immigrants' Rights Project

The Justice Center and Legal Services of North Carolina have launched a new joint initiative, the Eastern Carolina Immigrants' Rights Project. This project serves the critical legal needs of eastern North Carolina's large and growing immigrant population.

The project focuses on impact cases that will positively affect a large number of people by creating changes in policy, practice or law. Some of the types of cases it considers for acceptance include:

- Employment issues involving, for example, unpaid wages and health and safety violations at the workplace
- Consumer issues including consumer fraud; in loans for cars, homes, and mobile homes
- Housing issues including improving conditions in unhabitable rental housing, and avoiding abuses in rental agreements
- Access to Public Benefits and Services to prevent discrimination against immigrant families in attempts to access public benefits and services such as police protection, marriage licences and access to the courts.

### Giving Opportunities: Changing Lives

#### At the North Carolina Justice Center, we are changing lives every day.

Your investment helps to inform, organize, and advocate for a North Carolina that protects and provides everyone economic security and the ability to enjoy the opportunities and prosperity of our great state.

Foundation grants and attorney fees have provided financial support of our organization since its inception. In the summer of 2006, the Justice Center expanded its efforts to ensure the long-term financial security of the organization through the creation and hiring of its first full-time development position. With the support of the Board of Directors, Executive Director Melinda Lawrence and Director of Development Jill Diaz, the Justice Center has made diversifying its financial support a priority. Along with our continued foundation grants and attorney fees, we are now working with individuals, businesses, and professional organizations who are interested in supporting our work and ensuring our long-term financial stability.

Within every project of the Justice Center there are specific funding opportunities; however, as with any nonprofit organization, unrestricted gifts give the Justice Center the ability to respond to new opportunities and the agility to meet the challenges of the ever changing climate of North Carolina public policy.

We are committed to the responsible management of your gifts, and this is exemplified by our low non-programmatic costs. According to Charity Navigator, the independent nonprofit organization helping donors make informed giving decisions, the most responsible nonprofit practice is to spend less than 25% of an organization's annual budget on administrative fees and fundraising. In 2006, the Justice Center's administrative fees and fundraising costs represented approximately 15% of our organization's total support and revenue. We are committed to continuing to manage your gifts with the utmost respect and consideration for your generous support.

The Justice Center would like to recognize our supporters who are changing the lives of North Carolina's low- and moderate-income families every day. Thank you.

#### North Carolina Justice Center 2007 Foundation Partners

- A.J. Fletcher Foundation
- Adrian Dominican Ministry Trust
- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Working Poor Families Project, managed by Brandon Roberts + Associates on behalf of the funding foundations
- Center on Budget & Policy

- Priorities
- Center for Economic & Policy Research
- Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
- The Educational Foundation of America
- El Pueblo
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#### 9th Annual Defenders of Justice Awards

On October 25, the North Carolina Justice Center's 2007 Defenders of Justice Awards ceremony and reception was an evening to remember. Award recipients and guests enjoyed hors d'oeuvres from Savory Fare, a jazz trio from the John Brown Entertainment Group and the warm ambience of the American Tobacco Campus's Bay-7. The event honored seven individuals and organizations that have improved the lives of low-income and disadvantaged North Carolinians:

- State Senator Katie Dorsett of Greensboro for her efforts to better the lives of women, minorities, and low-income communities in North Carolina
- State Representative Rick Glazier of Fayetteville for his determination in expanding educational opportunities for all students
- **State Representative Dan Blue of Raleigh** for his steadfast dedication to improving conditions for workers and protecting disadvantaged communities
- **The Farmworker Advocacy Network** for its tireless efforts to improve living and working conditions of North Carolina's migrant farmworkers
- The law firm of Edelstein & Payne for more than two decades of work protecting civil rights, expanding workers' rights and fighting discrimination
- North Carolina Fair Share for its work organizing and advocating for low-income North Carolinians

The North Carolina NAACP for its efforts across racial lines to achieve progressive change

First presented in 1999, the Defenders of Justice Awards honor those who have made significant contributions to North Carolina's fight against poverty in four areas that reflect the scope of the Justice Center's work: legislative advocacy, research and public policy development, litigation and grassroots empowerment.

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Opportunity and Prosperity for All

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