



North Carolina  
Justice Center



2010  
ANNUAL REPORT



THIS is  
your  
MANDATE

NEIGHBORHOOD  
SCHOOLS  
ARE NOT FOR  
EVERYONE

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Justice Center Senior Outreach Coordinator Ajamu Dillahunt speaks during a rally to promote public employee bargaining.



► **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.

The Center was founded in 1996 through the merger of two former Legal Services organizations. Today, our staff is nearly 50 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:**



PHOTO BY JEFF SHAW

**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 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.

**3 Community Outreach** - Our educators build relationships with groups and individuals at the community level and pursue a two-way process of education and empowerment.

**4 Litigation** - Our attorneys take on high-impact cases designed to protect and expand the rights of low-income groups and individuals, including immigrants.

**5 Communications** - Our writers and media experts generate commentaries and publications designed to shape public opinion.

► **To make opportunity and prosperity for all**

a reality, we work toward:

- **Public investments** in services and programs that expand and enhance opportunities for economic security
- **Housing** that is safe and affordable
- **Consumer protections** that shield hard-earned assets from abusive practices
- **Jobs** that are safe, pay a living wage, and provide health coverage and other benefits
- **A fair and stable revenue system** that adequately funds public investments while fairly distributing tax responsibility
- **Fair treatment** for everyone in North Carolina – regardless of race, ethnicity, or country of origin
- **Public education** that opens a world of opportunity to every child
- **Health care** that is accessible and affordable

WITH  
none of us is  
WITH 2017  
no one has  
LIBERTY  
SB1070  
is FREE



**The Justice Center’s mission is to fight for North Carolina’s working families.** During 2010, the state saw no shortage of important battles. The foreclosure crisis deepened, job losses and record unemployment continued, and the number of families without health insurance grew. Many people in North Carolina faced tremendous hardships.

Thankfully, the Justice Center has grown both in capacity and scope in order to help low- and moderate-income North Carolinians through these difficult times. In all of its strategy areas – litigation, policy advocacy, research, outreach and communications – the organization has expanded its experience, expertise and effectiveness.

2011 promises to be a challenging economic and political environment for those working to build opportunities for the people of North Carolina. We’ve all seen the news reports about the under-funding of vital public investments in education, health care and job creation.

More than ever, we need our leaders to help North Carolina’s struggling families. The Justice Center has the unique experience and expertise needed to guide policymakers in the right direction. This is a watershed moment for North Carolina; it is critical that those who care about justice and fairness for our state and its people stand together to call for sound and compassionate policy choices. We ask you to partner with us to meet the challenges of the year ahead.

Sincerely,



*Christopher T. Graebe*

Co-Chair,  
Board of Directors



*Raquel Lynch*

Co-Chair,  
Board of Directors

NORTH CAROLINA JUSTICE CENTER BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

*Co-chairs:* Christopher T. Graebe, Raquel Lynch

- |                               |                           |                     |
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## Dear Friend of the Justice Center,

Though 2010 was a year of economic crisis and political transition, it was also a year in which Justice Center staff won many crucial victories for North Carolina's working families.

Here are just a few examples that offer a snapshot of our work in 2010.

- North Carolina consumers exploited by payday lenders will receive more than \$30 million as a result of litigation brought by the Justice Center and its co-counsel.
- We secured the passage of major legislation to protect homeowners from "foreclosure rescue" scams that preyed on economically distressed families, and we continued our litigation efforts that saved hundreds of homes from foreclosure.
- We provided comprehensive analysis of the state's continuing budget crisis, developed a plan for addressing that crisis while preserving the state's essential infrastructure and services, and continued to build Together NC, a coalition of more than 120 organizations committed to sound state budget policies.
- As unemployment in our state remained at record levels, we advanced solid policy recommendations for job creation.
- We recovered wages for hundreds of workers who were victims of wage theft by their employers.
- Our immigration staff won several landmark victories securing asylum for individuals who were victims of violence and oppression, and they secured legal status for more than 200 individuals.
- We supported a powerful community movement in Wake County fighting to stop the dismantlement of the school district's diversity policy.
- We provided an effective consumer voice in the state's decision-making process regarding implementation of health reform in North Carolina, and we helped educate people across the state about the impact of reform.
- With new staff members focused on investigative reporting and use of emerging media, the Justice Center and Policy Watch provided a strong and effective progressive voice in the public debate on critical issues.

In 2011, we face new legislative realities and considerable challenges. But the Justice Center is ready. We have the capacity and skilled staff to protect vital services, expand protections for workers and homeowners, and empower families and communities so they can create their own successful futures.

In the past dozen years, the Justice Center has made tremendous strides in the effort to advance social progress in North Carolina. Shared prosperity is our definition of success. Achieving this vision has never been more important to our common future.

With warm regards,



Melinda Lawrence, Executive Director





Justice Center attorney Carlene McNulty led litigation efforts to stop payday lenders and recover money for consumers.

## Consumer and Housing Issues

**Throughout 2010**, the Justice Center's consumer protection and housing advocates championed the rights of North Carolina consumers through their tireless efforts and landmark

legal achievements. In September, these advocates achieved a huge victory against payday lenders, further protecting North Carolina consumers from debt traps and the industry's unethical and illegal practices. (See Spotlight.)

Thanks to an increase of capacity in our litigation staff, the Justice

Center expanded our efforts to defend homeowners against foreclosure actions. We also filed litigation challenging predatory practices of mortgage lenders and servicers. To communicate the statewide scope of the foreclosure crisis, we released quarterly research reports analyzing rates of



PHOTO BY COREY LOWENSTEIN - REPRINTED BY PERMISSION OF THE NEWS & OBSERVER OF RALEIGH, NC

foreclosure in every county in North Carolina. As foreclosures continued to rise—in 2010 North Carolina saw more than 67,000 foreclosure filings—the Justice Center continued to litigate cases challenging

foreclosures and predatory lending and loan-servicing practices. As in all our litigation, the goal was to handle cases that impact large numbers of individuals, either through class actions or through cases that establish

important legal precedents. Our attorneys also continued to coordinate foreclosure defense efforts by legal services programs across the state and to serve as a resource for members of the private bar. Through our work we saved thousands of homes from foreclosure and established important precedent that will protect other homeowners in the future.

The Justice Center was a driving force behind the Homeowner & Homebuyer Protection Act. This new law cracks down on foreclosure rescue scams, in which the scammer promises to help a struggling homeowner save his property from foreclosure but instead defrauds the homeowner of any remaining value in the home. The law also created reasonable regulation and standards for “option to purchase” or “rent to own” contracts and contracts for deeds—all of which can be used to exploit families struggling to obtain home loans.

To ensure continued public focus on the foreclosure crisis, we provided updates and analysis of foreclosure data to media across the state and served as a resource for reporters. In addition, we produced investigative articles featuring North Carolina families that explained the foreclosure crisis and the difficulties homeowners face in getting help, and we created interactive online maps that provided foreclosure data for every

county in the state. Long before the foreclosure crisis began in earnest in 2008, the Justice Center was leading efforts to increase the amount of affordable housing available to low-income families. As a part of this effort, we worked to increase and protect funding for the NC Housing Trust Fund, which finances the construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing. In the last two legislative sessions, the Justice Center has fought for and maintained a recurring appropriation of \$10 million for the Housing Trust Fund, despite the state’s budget shortfalls.

In 2010 we worked with the NC Commissioner of Banks to expand the Commissioner’s Foreclosure Prevention Program, which requires loan servicers to give advance notice to homeowners of a pending foreclosure and enables the Commissioner of Banks to assist homeowners in avoiding foreclosure. The expansion means the program now covers all home loans—instead of only subprime loans—and that the program fees are used to help fund foreclosure mitigation efforts by housing counselors.

In March of 2010 the U.S. Treasury announced that North Carolina would be included in its Hardest Hit Fund program for the prevention of home foreclosure. The NC Housing Finance Agency, which was to administer the federal

## SPOTLIGHT: *Kucan v. Advance America*

The Justice Center's Carlene McNulty worked with a team of litigators from private firms and other non-profits to bring a series of cases challenging the exploitative lending practices of payday lenders. These lenders targeted

North Carolina consumers in what McNulty calls the largest settlement against payday lenders in the United States. The Justice Center also worked with the same team of attorneys to secure settlements against Check N' Go

like those incorporated in the payday-loan contracts, were unconscionable and therefore unenforceable. Such agreements had prohibited payday loan borrowers from participating in class action lawsuits and limited them to an

expensive arbitration process—essentially denying the borrowers any meaningful way of recovering damages. In July 2009, applying the Supreme Court's decision, the New Hanover County Superior Court ruled that similar consumer contracts used by Advance America, Check Into Cash, and Check n' Go were unenforceable, allowing the class action lawsuits challenging the legality of the payday loans to move forward.

The successes in *Kucan* and the other payday loan cases were significant victories for the consumers wronged by these companies. "It puts a dent in the pocketbook of payday lenders,"

McNulty said. "It's a huge amount of money paid back to our clients, and it keeps people out of the debt-trap of payday lending and paying exorbitant interest rates." Without lawyers like McNulty and her colleagues, victimization of consumers would continue to escalate and low-income families would continue to lose hard-earned dollars to exploitative schemes.



consumers in low-income communities, charging astronomical – and illegal – interest and fees. In *Kucan v. Advance America*, the first payday lending case filed, annual percentage rates for the loans often exceeded 450%, although North Carolina law caps interest for such loans at 36%.

Six years after attorneys first filed the lawsuit, Advance America agreed to pay \$18.75 million to more than 140,000

and Check Into Cash for \$14 million and \$12 million respectively.

McNulty called *Kucan* a "particularly arduous" case. The legal team first began work on the lawsuit in late 2003. The case was twice reviewed by the Court of Appeals and suffered repeated delays as lawyers awaited decisions in related cases. In 2008, the North Carolina Supreme Court ruled that "mandatory arbitration agreements,"

funds, asked the Justice Center to help in the planning and design of the program. This funding allowed for the expansion

of the state's existing Home Protection Program, which the Justice Center helped to create and which provides bridge loans

enabling laid-off workers to stay current in their home mortgages while looking for new employment. Program funds also are used to

support foreclosure mitigation efforts by housing counselors. ■

Dani Moore speaks at an immigrants' rights forum in Durham.



## Protecting Immigrants' Rights

**The Justice Center's Immigrants' Legal Assistance Project (ILAP)** provides free legal representation to low-income immigrants in all areas of immigration law.

Through the expert representation by ILAP attorneys in Immigration Court, the Asylum Office, the Citizenship and Immigration Service and the Board of Immigration Appeals, more than 200 individuals gained legal status in 2010. (See Spotlight.) Additionally, ILAP staff provided information and referrals to more than a thousand other individuals.

Among the individuals who gained legal status as a

result of ILAP's representation were women from Honduras and Guatemala who fled their home countries due to domestic violence and sought asylum in the United States. Our staff successfully argued before the Immigration Court that these women's lives would be in danger from their abusers if they were forced to return to their home countries, and that the governments of those countries would not protect them from abuse. Asylum based on domestic violence is rarely granted, so ILAP's victories established important precedent in this developing area of immigration law that can help

to protect other victims of abuse.

Because discrimination and open hostility force many immigrants to live in the margins of society, they are vulnerable to fraud and abuse. Attorneys from ILAP and the Eastern Carolina Immigrants' Rights Project (ECIRP) strive to protect the rights of these vulnerable people by providing legal representation.

The problem of wage theft—the failure of employers to pay employees wages owed—is on the rise. Immigrant workers are particular targets of this unlawful conduct, in large part because employers

believe these workers are unable or unwilling to enforce their legal rights. In the past year, hundreds of employees have recovered the wages owed them thanks to cases brought by ILAP and ECIRP attorneys. Victories in 2010 included judgments or settlements on behalf of seafood workers in Pasquotank and Pamlico counties, moving company workers in Wake County, farmworkers in Wayne and Johnston counties, and manufacturing workers in Johnston County.

We also seek to improve or enforce wage and safety standards affecting immigrant workers. In

2010, the Justice Center, along with partners from across the country, won a ruling in federal court that required the U.S. Department of Labor to promulgate new rules setting prevailing wage rates for temporary unskilled guestworker jobs. These proposed rules would result in an average increase of more than four dollars per hour in the wages paid to guestworkers and their U.S. counterparts. The Justice Center, with Legal Aid of North Carolina, also filed a friend of the court brief in an important case in the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals regarding the rights of farmworkers with H-2A visas to receive free housing without the cost of that housing counted toward their wages.



Justice Center paralegal Seonaid Rijo participates in a rally for immigrants' rights.



At Thanksgiving 2010, Justice Center advocates worked with the Farmworker Advocacy Network to launch the Harvest of Dignity Campaign, calling for safe living and working conditions for farmworkers and poultry workers and better enforcement of existing labor laws.

In addition to our work to ensure workplace fairness and safety for immigrant workers, we handle cases that challenge unlawful conduct in housing and consumer matters and that protect immigrants' rights to health care and other services. With threat of litigation, we successfully convinced the state Department of Health and Human Services to provide

The Justice Center's ILAP attorneys represent farmworkers who suffered injuries after they were forced to return to the fields too soon after pesticides were sprayed.

## SPOTLIGHT: One Woman's Asylum Story

Medicaid coverage for legally present immigrant pregnant women and children, which will potentially benefit hundreds of women and children in the state. The department had previously refused to provide the Medicaid coverage despite a new state law mandating them to do so.

The Justice Center also provides coordination for a network that includes immigrants' rights activists, resettlement agencies, faith-based groups and immigrant community members. We connect the network with national advocacy groups, educate network members about policy issues affecting the lives of immigrants and convene community forums. In 2010, the network coordinator's efforts included forums that featured leaders from Arizona to discuss the controversial anti-immigrant efforts in that state; work with the Adelante Coalition to secure a community college policy that would allow the admission of undocumented students; and advocacy for passage of the DREAM Act in Congress. In conjunction with a statewide workgroup, we began the HURRICANE project to systematically document abuses in immigration enforcement and to organize immigrant communities.

Justice Center staff have also worked extensively with Uniting NC, a group dedicated to making North Carolina a place that respects and values immigrants. In its work to civilize the public debate, Uniting NC developed public service announcements for local radio stations, posted billboards across the state, and hosted community dialogues.

**Each year**, the Justice Center's Immigrants Legal Assistance Project provides direct legal assistance to low-income individuals seeking to escape persecution and abuse in their home countries by obtaining asylum in the United States. The asylum process is complex; to succeed an applicant must compile a compelling factual record demonstrating that they meet the stringent legal requirements for asylum. It is all but impossible to successfully navigate the asylum process without legal representation.

In 2010, Winstona Cole, one of ILAP's immigration attorneys, represented an Afghan woman seeking for asylum. In Afghanistan, the woman had been an outspoken member of her community, an unusual and potentially dangerous position in a country where women are regarded, according to the client, as "less than animals." As they prepared for the client's asylum case, Cole discovered extreme restrictions that her client faced as a woman living in Afghanistan—for example, a ban on wearing shoes that might make noise as she walked because "the sound of a women's step is forbidden."

Unlike other women in her family, who had married young and stopped school at an early age, Cole's client completed her education and convinced her father and brothers to allow her to get a job. Soon she was working, and she was being seen and heard in her community, refusing to be limited by Afghan law. As a result, she often faced persecution and attacks for not adhering to the social norm of marrying and staying home with her family. When the client left Afghanistan and came to the United States, her family members received abusive calls contending that it was immoral for an unmarried woman to live

abroad and blaming the client's family for condoning this "immorality." The callers threatened to kill her upon her return to Afghanistan to restore honor to the community. In order to protect himself and his daughter, her father arranged a marriage for the client, but she refused. "As an educated woman, I refuse to be a victim of forced marriage," she said. "I want to work and study, have my own freedoms and rights to dress the way I like and do whatever I wish as a woman who is entitled to fundamental human rights."

"She was in danger of being killed in Afghanistan if she returned," Cole said. "She could not go back to the place she once called home. That was the turning point in her decision to apply for asylum."

Cole and her client traveled to Virginia for an interview with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service. Although a decision in asylum cases is usually made within a few weeks, Cole and her client found themselves waiting month after month without any word.

Finally, Cole's client was granted asylum in early 2011, after an agonizing period during which the woman was not permitted to work and lived with constant worry that she would be returned to her homeland. In the end Cole's persistence and skillful work and her client's courage paid off.

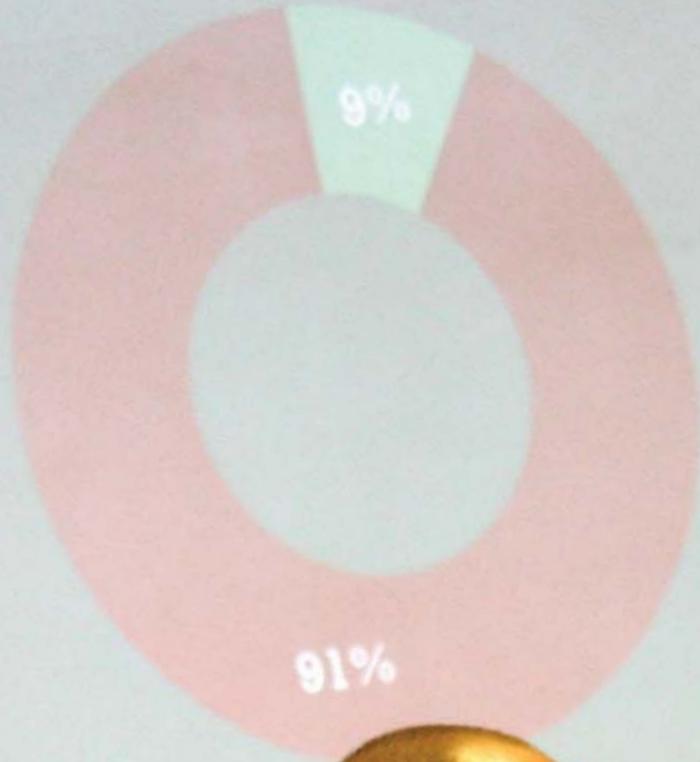
The client is now settled in the United States, happy in the knowledge that she can live free as a woman.

"I can't express in words the joy when she came in to say thank you for what we had done for her," Cole said. "To live free in a country where she won't be persecuted, living as a woman... she says that that's human rights, to be able to do those things." ■



■ Winstona Cole, Justice Center Immigration Attorney

# What will happen without a balanced approach?



**THIS PAGE:** Budget and Tax Center policy analyst Edwin McLenaghan speaks to members of Together NC about the state budget.

**RIGHT, TOP:** BTC Project Director Alexandra Forter Sirota explains the North Carolina unemployment numbers.

# Fairer and More Responsible State Budget

For more than a decade, state policymakers from the General Assembly to the Governor's Office to local elected officials have relied on analysis from the Justice Center's Budget & Tax Center (BTC) to make decisions about a wide range of issues that impact low- and middle-income North Carolinians. Recognition of the BTC's expertise has grown and during the budget crises of recent years, both policymakers and the public have increasingly looked to the BTC for solid analysis and effective policy solutions.

In 2010, as part of the BTC's ongoing work to promote a fairer and more

reports putting the budget gap in context, debunking myths about taxation, and offering a plan for reinvesting in North Carolina's communities.

The BTC staff also worked with Together NC (TNC), a coalition of more than 120 member organizations coled by the Justice Center, to protect services and programs for low-income communities and families from cuts in the face of a second year of major revenue shortfall. During the 2010 budget process the coalition advocated to protect education, human services and public investments. TNC released public statements and sent letters to lawmakers after

Together NC, to educate its members on budget and tax reform issues and to

Spring 2010 marked the second tax season in which some 880,000 low-income

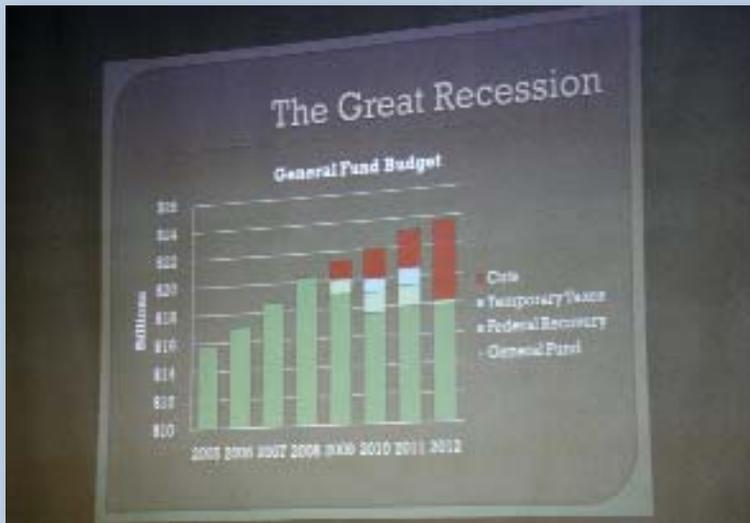


develop a strategic plan for 2011 when the state would again face a huge revenue shortfall as well as a significantly altered political environment. That strategic work has proven of immense value as 2011 begins with proposals from state leaders to slash still further support for critical state programs and infrastructure.

The BTC plays a key role in North Carolina's non-profit community, providing data and expertise to the many organizations with a stake in state budget decisions. As in years past, the BTC

working North Carolinians received the state Earned Income Tax Credit. Despite the state's ongoing fiscal crisis, the state did not weaken or end the EITC, instead heeding the Justice Center's calls to protect this credit for families that already pay more than their fair share in state and local taxes.

The BTC also plays a critical advisory role to lawmakers on a wide range of legislative and budget proposals. Through the Justice Center's Legislative Bulletin, which is distributed to state leaders every week, BTC analysts have provided lawmakers with reliable, robust information that helps them create a brighter future for working families. ■



responsible state budget, our researchers tracked North Carolina's budget shortfall. Using rigorous factual analysis, the Budget & Tax Center produced

each budget proposal—from the governor and each legislative chamber—was released. In 2010, Justice Center staff worked to expand the membership of

partnered with the United Way of North Carolina and local United Way chapters to present seven community forums around the state.



## Access to Health Care

**The Justice Center's** Health Access Coalition (HAC) dramatically increased its writing, research, multimedia journalism and community outreach during 2010.

Among the most important achievements for HAC last year was the passage of the landmark federal health reform legislation, which HAC had aggressively advocated for at

both the state and federal levels for several years. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act will give millions of Americans access to quality health insurance.

But getting this legislation enacted was only a first step. In 2010 HAC traveled the state educating people from Greenville and Wilmington to Boone and Asheville about the Affordable Care Act and the benefits it will provide. Along the way, HAC collected personal stories from individuals and

families benefiting immediately from reform. This bank of stories will help in the fight to support and strengthen federal health reform.

HAC has also been active in the planning process for implementation of health reform in North Carolina. HAC staff participated in workgroups convened by the North Carolina Institute of Medicine and provided the primary voice for consumers as they created an implementation plan. These

workgroups, which included a broad range of stakeholders met throughout 2010 and produced detailed recommendations on how to expand Medicaid, establish a health benefit exchange, and build new models of care. HAC staff also met with key state policymakers, including the Commissioner of Insurance and his staff and top officials from the Department of Health and Human Services, to discuss the plan for implementation, including the development of a state Health

**THIS PHOTO:** Adam Searing, director of the Justice Center's Health Access Coalition, addresses the crowd at a health care reform rally.

**BELOW:** HAC Assistant Director Nicole Dozier explains the health care reform bill to residents of Raleigh.



Benefit Exchange and procedures for ensuring that the dramatic expansion of Medicaid under the federal reforms goes smoothly.

Also in 2010, the Justice Center successfully advocated for funding to enroll nearly 3000 additional children in NC Health Choice, the state's insurance program for children of low-income families.

The Justice Center developed fact sheets for policymakers and advocates showing the unmet enrollment need and the economic benefits that would result from expanding child health coverage. As part of this advocacy effort, we used video to bring stories of parents and children helped by Health Choice and Medicaid to a wider audience.

Finally, in 2010, HAC continued its work to address the skyrocketing medical debt being incurred by low-income North Carolinians. We

released a comprehensive report detailing which hospitals post their charity-care policies on their websites and what those policies require of patients to obtain reduced-cost care. Since the release, more hospitals are making their policies available to patients. HAC also hosted public forums with statewide and local partners to inform the community about charity-care policies and put forward recommendations to make hospitals more responsive to the community regarding charity-care issues. ■

# Quality Public Education

**The Justice Center's Education and Law Project (EdLaw)** historically has played a key role in shaping the state's education policy through its research, reports and advocacy. A decade ago, EdLaw was the first to draw the attention of the public and policymakers to the dramatic gap in achievement between minority students and their white classmates. The Justice Center continues

to be the primary advocate pushing for adequate funding for services to close the state's persistent and wide achievement gap.

A major focus of our legislative work in 2010 was protecting key programs serving low-income and minority students from dramatic budget cuts. Those programs fared well, avoiding or seeing only minimal cuts in funding.

In 2010, an EdLaw report provided an accessible explanation of North



Carolina's complex public school funding system and focused public attention on the state's dimly low ranking in state funding for education—North Carolina ranks 45th in the nation in per-pupil spending.

Another EdLaw report disclosed the barriers facing students whose primary language was not English and set out policy recommendations for ensuring that those students receive the quality education the state must provide all its students.

The Justice Center has worked over the past several years to improve the provisions of the state's laws regarding

the development of Personal Education Plans (PEPs), as our advocates believe the most effective way to reduce student failure is to ensure that individual assessment and targeted individual remediation are provided. In 2010, we worked with lawmakers to secure legislative changes that clarified the responsibility of local school systems to identify students not making adequate process and to provide additional reporting and oversight of the PEP process. We also trained parents on students' rights to Personal Education Plans and the PEP process.

EdLaw has also been involved in the fight against re-segregation in North Carolina's public schools. Our staff supported the work of Great Schools in Wake



**TOP:** Education and Law Project staff: Matt Ellinwood, Tyler Whittenberg and Director Chris Hill.

**ABOVE LEFT AND LEFT:** Participants at an Education Leadership Institute held in Wilmington.



Marchers at an education rally in Raleigh.

and the NAACP to highlight the threatened dismantling of the diversity policy in the Wake County Public School System. Justice Center attorneys served on the team that filed litigation to ensure that Wake County School Board meetings are open to the public. As part of that team of litigators, we also filed a Title VI complaint with the U.S. Department of Education alleging racial bias in Wake County's student assignments and in its disciplinary policies.

In 2010, in a case co-counseled by the Justice Center, the state Supreme Court upheld claims that the Durham Public Schools' gang policy was unconstitutionally vague. Following the Supreme Court's decision, the district agreed to revisions to the policy.

Because improving education and protecting students' rights often require school-by-school efforts, EdLaw staff does extensive outreach work, training parents and community leaders to be education advocates. Last year, we held multi-day Education Leadership Institutes in Halifax and New Hanover counties. These trainings not only provided extensive information about students' rights and advocacy strategies but also supported community members in their efforts to address critical local education issues. ■

PHOTO BY JEFF SHAW

## Workforce Issues

**In collaboration with** Historic Thousands on Jones Street, a broad-based coalition of about 100 groups led by the North Carolina NAACP, the

Justice Center hosted a Jobs Summit with Governor Beverly Perdue. At the summit, the governor heard from individuals hit hard by the recession and about proposals for a job creation agenda. Through ongoing analysis of the jobs market and promotion of effective

policy proposals, the Justice Center focused policymakers' attention on the state's ongoing job needs, educated the public on the pros and cons of various job proposals, and advanced those proposals most likely to improve the job outlook for low-income

North Carolinians.. Following a BTC recommendation, in the fall of 2010, the governor announced that despite the loss of federal funds for a subsidized jobs program that created more than 1,000 jobs in North Carolina, she would invest in the program's continuation.



In addition to a focus on how to create jobs in the current economic context, the Justice Center weighed

**BELOW:** Justice Center Director of Advocacy Bill Rowe and policy advocate Louisa Warren attend a meeting of the new Joint Select Committee on Work & Family Balance.



in on the importance of the quality of jobs that are created. In particular, the Justice Center joined with the AFL-CIO to call for the governor to require businesses that receive incentives and tax exemptions to pay living wages.

Recognizing the importance of post-secondary education to economic well-being, the Justice Center began work in spring 2010 on an initiative to develop and implement policy proposals that would increase the number of individuals successfully completing post-secondary education programs. As part of this effort, the Justice Center produced a report on unmet financial need for students and the barriers that lack of financial aid present to completion. The Justice Center successfully advocated for legislation that mandated participation in the federal student loan program by all community college campuses in North Carolina. As a result, community college students, many of whom were financing their education on credit cards or dropping out for lack of funds, will have access to affordable federal loans.



PHOTO BY JEFF SHAW

**Justice Center Executive Director Melinda Lawrence welcomes attendees at a forum on barriers to success in post secondary education.**

We expanded our work to secure paid sick days for all employees in the state to focus more broadly on a range of workplace policies that

established, and in a committee hearing we educated legislators about the struggles facing employees as they seek to care for children and parents. We also called on lawmakers to explore implementing a family leave insurance program.

Finally, in 2010, the Justice Center continued its coalition work with the NC Second Chance Alliance to remove the significant barriers to employment, housing and services that individuals with criminal records face. We advocated with the Governor's Street Safe Taskforce and a legislative study commission for policies to address these barriers. ■



facilitate work-life balance for employees. We succeeded in getting a Joint Select Committee on Work and Family Balance

# Communications

Effective communications work is essential to achieving short-term policy goals and creating long-term shifts in public perception of key issues.

2010 saw an across-the-board increase in Justice

is an increasingly strong voice in the public debate. In 2010, our staff published more than 100 original columns and op-eds in newspapers across North Carolina, a 36 percent increase over the year before. This does not include opinion

an increase in pick-up from papers across the state. Policy Watch continued to send out weekly “Week Ahead” tip sheets to every reporter in the state, helping get progressive issues on the discussion agenda every Monday morning.

media specialist. With these new staff we produced in-depth reports on important public issues, such as the state lottery, home foreclosures and immigration raids at workplaces. We posted video clips from Policy Watch’s radio show online, broadening the audience for these weekly interviews. Emerging media outreach also improved. Both the Justice Center and Policy Watch broke new ground in social



**LEFT: Crucial Conversation lunch featuring Dean Baker of the Washington, DC-based Center for Economic and Policy Research.**

**BELOW: Rob Schofield, Director of Research and Policy Development for NC Policy Watch, introduces speakers to attendees.**

Center communications work and media coverage. By the end of 2010, the Justice Center had exceeded its two-year goal to double total media appearances by staff. Media coverage of the Justice Center’s work had moved from approximately 730 appearances in 2008 to more than 1,600 in 2010.

The breadth of coverage of our work also increased. Most of the growth in coverage came outside the Triangle area. During 2010, the Justice Center appeared in 100 new publications throughout the state; in all more than 250 media outlets covered Justice Center work last year.

In addition, the Justice Center



pieces placed through NC Policy Watch’s “Progressive Voices” program, which provides a mechanism for social justice advocates to submit op-eds. This program added about 10 new contributors this year and saw

Policy Watch, a communications project within the Justice Center, significantly expanded its staff in 2010, adding an investigative reporter, an in-house producer for the Policy Watch radio shows and a new

media this year, including developing a YouTube presence for Policy Watch, the Justice Center and Together NC, resulting in more than 60,000 views on videos; increasing total unique visitors to the Progressive

Communications Coordinator Clayton Henkel conducts an interview for N.C. Policy Watch's weekly radio show.



ALL PHOTOS THIS PAGE BY JEFF SHAW

Pulse blog by about 20 percent and increasing the total number of visits by more than 40 percent; and gaining nearly 900 fans on Facebook and nearly 900 followers on Twitter for the main Justice Center account and many more for the Policy Watch account.



By expanding quality and quantity of media exposure, the Justice Center and Policy Watch are changing the

debate in North Carolina about the issues we care about. This work continues in 2011.



ABOVE: Litigation attorney Rochelle Sparko on camera.

LEFT: Jeff Shaw, director of communications, debates on radio station WPTF.

FAR LEFT: Senior Editor Diane Morris maps out distribution plans for publications.

# Quotes about the Justice Center

■ **The stimulus package**, officially known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, has expanded food stamp benefits, expanded Child Tax Credits and Earned Income Tax Credits, extended unemployment benefits and made one-time payments to many elderly people, veterans and people with disabilities. “It’s hard to overstate the importance of the Recovery Act,” said Louisa Warren, senior policy advocate at the N.C. Justice Center. “From saving and creating jobs, to keeping struggling families out of poverty, it’s had a critical impact in North Carolina as well as the national economy.” – *Raleigh News & Observer*

■ **Adam Linker**, health policy analyst with the coalition, estimated the recession has caused the number of people without insurance to increase to about 1.8 million. “People need these free care policies more than ever,” he said. “It really is important it be upfront: people know what their potential obligations are, and that hospitals are clear about it.” – *News 14*

■ **A lawsuit filed** this week by three migrant Mexican women who worked at Captain Charlie’s Seafood, Inc. in North Carolina—and allege they were victims of gender discrimination and wage theft—illustrates why people are marching to change America’s immigration system... “Unfortunately, women seasonal workers are especially vulnerable to exploitation by their employers,” said Clermont Fraser, attorney with the North Carolina Justice Center (NCJC). “Migrant workers face many difficulties for a variety of reasons, like language barriers and racism, but women have the additional hurdle of sexism.” – *In These Times*

■ **The N.C. Justice Center** has “been on the forefront of the healthcare reform debate, [and] they were actually one of the first groups to send out information on the legislation,” said Bryan Belcher, manager of North Carolina Healthy Carolinians. – *High Country Press*

■ **The House Education Committee** on Thursday approved legislation that adopts federal guidelines on reforming poorly performing schools by giving local districts four options on how to revamp them, one of which allows a restart with a structure similar to a charter school... Chris Fitzsimon, executive director of NC Policy Watch, said “If you flip the school into a charter, the kids don’t magically get smarter and the teachers don’t magically get better,” he said. – *WRAL*

■ **Opponents of the poker industry** say no amount of revenue would justify getting into the business. “Do we want to live in a state where a child’s education and our health-service programs are based on whether we can convince people to walk into a video poker parlor?” said Chris Fitzsimon, director of N.C. Public Policy Watch... Fitzsimon, like other opponents of sweepstakes or poker, says the industry preys on the poor and those who are addicted to gambling. – *Charlotte Observer*

■ **President Obama called 2009** a tough year for working families but said that it could have been worse... In North Carolina, that view was echoed by Alexandra Forter Sirota, a policy analyst with the Budget and Tax Center of the N.C. Justice Center. “Without the federal Recovery Act, the pain for working families would have been dramatically worse,” Forter Sirota said. “Now is precisely the time to reinvest in American communities, to ease that suffering, and get the economy going again.” – *Winston Salem-Journal*

■ **The North Carolina Justice Center**, an advocacy group for the poor, argues the poverty rate will keep rising unless Congress extends unemployment benefits and job training for the poor in the federal stimulus package... “The economic hardship that families are facing are most often mitigated by a public system that serves working families,” said Alexandra Forter-Sirota, a policy analyst at the N.C. Budget & Tax Center, an arm of the Justice Center. “There’s a real opportunity for state policy makers to think revenue reform.” – *Bloomberg Business Week*

■ **Education advocates** are giving parents and teachers the tools to fight for a better education for their students. The North Carolina Justice Center’s Education and Law Project is hosting a training program in New Hanover County. The group is focusing on the message that every child deserves a high quality education. For Chris Hill, with the NC Justice Center, this project is all about empowering parents and arming them with education. – *News 14*

■ **Community advocacy groups** including Community Success Initiative, the Raleigh Second Chance Alliance, Congregations for Justice and the N.C. Justice Center have held meetings around the state attempting to jump-start a campaign to remove the criminal justice question – “Have you ever been convicted of a felony?” – from job applications in North Carolina. The campaign – “ban the box” – is a national effort for ex-offenders. – *Fayetteville Observer*

■ **...The DREAM Act** is neither a giveaway nor amnesty, said Jack Holtzman, a staff attorney at the N.C. Justice Center who specializes in immigration and education. “Its requirements are fairly onerous. There are screenings and restrictions and it does not make the U.S. a home for criminals. “They’re putting themselves on the line for a problem society has to address,” Holtzman added. “There is no higher commitment than what they’re doing.” – *Independent Weekly*

■ **Many think** the coverage of birth control, if passed, could start a shift toward more reliable and expensive forms of birth control, such as intrauterine devices, which are not used by as many women in the United States because of their higher cost... “Most North Carolinians would agree that if you pay for health insurance, it ought to cover what you need,” said Adam Searing, director of the N.C. Health Access Coalition. – *Daily Tar-Heel*

■ **North Carolina is on pace** for 70,476 total foreclosure filings, easily eclipsing the previous record of 63,286 set last year, according to an analysis of foreclosures by the N.C. Justice Center, a nonprofit advocacy group... “These projections show that, now more than ever, we have to protect homeowners by preserving the Housing Trust Fund and supporting effective, common-sense anti-foreclosure programs,” Bill Rowe, director of advocacy with the Justice Center, said. – *Asheville Citizen-Times*

■ **Payday lender Advance America** has agreed to pay \$18.7 million to 140,000 consumers across North Carolina to settle a lawsuit brought against the company by a coalition of consumer groups, including the North Carolina Justice Center of Raleigh. “We are pleased that Advance America has agreed to compensate North Carolina consumers who have been adversely affected by those practices,” says the Justice Center’s Carlene McNulty. – *Triangle Business Journal*

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# Justice Center Staff



**BOTTOM ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Jeff Shaw, Edwin McLenaghan SECOND ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Adam Searing, Rochelle Sparko, Cristin Ruggles, Seonaid Rijo McKenzie, Maria Guerrero THIRD ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Jessica Rocha, Melinda Lawrence, Carlene McNulty, Kate Woomer-Deters, Sarah Ovaska, Julia Hawes FOURTH ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Clayton Henkel, Carol Brooke, Elise Elliott, Nicole Dozier, Ricky Leung, Jan Nichols, Matt Ellinwood FIFTH ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Al Ripley, Phyllis Nunn, Clermont Fraser, Jack Holtzman, Harry Payne, Dan Rearick, Adam Linker, Chris Fitzsimon, Rob Schofield, Ajamu Dillahunt**

## STAFF MEMBERS ABSENT DAY OF GROUP PHOTO:



Brenna Burch



Lisa Chun



Winstona Cole



Mary Coleman



Chris Hill



Tana Lui-Beers



Lucy Martinez



Dani Moore



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