

NORTH CAROLINA

JUSTICE CENTER

2014

Annual Report



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## THE PATH TO PROSPERITY.

### **Nothing worth having is won easily.**

For the past few years, we've seen vital public investments eroded by shortsighted policies. To build a North Carolina with opportunity and prosperity for all, we take the long view: the battle of ideas to improve the lives of low- and moderate-income people in this state is neverending. We know 2015 will be another year of tough battles. But our commitment to fairness, justice, and opportunity for every North Carolinian is as strong as ever at the Justice Center. With your help, we will walk that long path to prosperity together.

## THANK YOU FOR HELPING US HELP NORTH CAROLINA.

### **Dear Friends of the Justice Center,**

The commitment to fairness, justice, and opportunity for every North Carolinian is as strong as ever at the Justice Center. We are proud to be on the board of an organization that has played a critical role in the never-ending fight to improve the lives of low- and moderate-income people in this state.

Looking ahead, we know 2015 will be another year of tough battles. Justice Center staff will be at the state legislature, working to improve the unemployment insurance system, expand consumer protections, and ensure that every North Carolina child gets a quality education. They will be in court, fighting landlords who take advantage of tenants, lenders who try to rip off homeowners, and employers who refuse to pay their workers fairly. They will be in the community and in the news, educating North Carolinians about how they can support the rights of immigrants, better wages and conditions for workers, and greater access to health care.

The coming year will also be a time of transition for the Justice Center. Melinda Lawrence, executive director for the past eight years, has begun her well-deserved retirement after decades of fighting for social justice. No words can adequately express our gratitude for Melinda's years of dedicated service. As we look for the Justice Center's next leader, we know the amazing work on the Justice Center staff will not waver or even pause, because their dedication to a progressive vision of North Carolina is steadfast.

We hope your dedication is steadfast as well. As you read this annual report, remember that the hard-won victories belong to you, too, because they would not be possible without your financial support.

### **Thanks to each of you for your support and partnership in the work of the Justice Center.**

With warm regards,



**Cathy Tamsberg**  
*Board Co-chair*



**Lisa Grafstein**  
*Board Co-chair*



**Dede Carney**  
Greenville

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**Karen Gottovi**  
Ahoskie

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**Keith Rivers**  
Elizabeth City

US NAVY (RET.)



**John I. Wilson**  
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NATIONAL  
EDUCATION  
ASSOCIATION (RET.)

The Justice Center thanks the board members who retired from the Board of Directors in the past year - Dhamian A. Blue, Christopher T. Graebe, Gene Nichol, Abdul Rasheed, and Bishop G. Porter Taylor - for their service, commitment, and invaluable contributions.



*BTC staff travel the state to educate community groups about state budget and tax policy. They also collect stories from everyday North Carolinians about how these policies affect their lives and families.*

**C**reating a better future for North Carolina and its residents takes vision. And developing a vision of a fair and thriving economy takes research.

In 2014 the Justice Center's Budget & Tax Center (BTC) launched its "Economy for All" campaign to promote policies that would **decrease poverty and increase opportunity** for North Carolinians. We did extensive research on North Carolina's economy, labor market, and state budget. We revealed how



*Present and former staff celebrated the Budget and Tax Center's twentieth anniversary in 2014. From left: Edwin McLenaghan, Cedric Johnson, Allan Freyer, Alexandra Sirota, Tazra Mitchell, Meg Wiehe, Louisa Warren, Amber Moodie-Dyer, Elaine Mejia, and Steve Jackson.*

changes to the state revenue system have hurt working families from two directions—by making those who can least afford it pay more in taxes and by forcing cuts in programs those families depend on. We **produced dozens of publications and blog**

**posts and gave presentations to community groups throughout the state** in order to educate North Carolinians about the dangerous path the state is on. Plus, we pushed our research on social media using the hashtags #StoptheCuts and #BetterChoicesNC.

Our research covers every aspect of the economy as it affects low- and moderate-income North Carolinians. The BTC looked at the increase in low-wage jobs and the decrease in state funding for workforce development programs. We crunched the numbers to determine what constitutes a living wage in North Carolina. We analyzed data to understand and explain the interplay of race, location and poverty in North Carolina.

And each time the BTC published our research, **we included policy recommendations that could improve the financial outlook for North Carolina families**—reinstating the Earned Income Tax Credit, providing work supports like child care subsidies, and investing in infrastructure. We also exposed problems with the state's primary system for creating new jobs—tax incentives for new or growing businesses. Our analysis revealed that the majority of North Carolina's incentive dollars go to three of the wealthiest counties, rather than to the many rural counties that are struggling.

**The BTC worked to educate local school boards and superintendents about the community eligibility program**, which would allow all students in high-poverty schools or districts to receive free meals. Turns out, most superintendents didn't even know about the program! Thanks to our efforts—which included factsheets to superintendents, follow-up phone calls, and technical assistance with the



*The Budget & Tax Center recorded videos of people who were affected by the loss of the state Earned Income Tax Credit. Almost a million working families had less money in their pockets for life's necessities because state leaders let the EITC expire. We promoted the videos on social media and various websites, including national blogs, and they received hundreds of views. In addition to the videos, we released county-by-county data to show how much money communities lost with the EITC's elimination, and we collected 700 postcards in support of its reinstatement.*

financing aspects—more than 30 school districts adopted community eligibility this school year.

**Many other progressive organizations in North Carolina rely on our data and analysis** to inform them about what's happening in the state's economy and to help them develop their own legislative agendas. In fact, we responded to more than 140 technical assistance requests in 2014. Our state budget report served as a vital resource for others trying to understand how recent tax cuts have undermined North Carolina's ability to rebound from the recession. And our ongoing analysis of the tax cuts passed in 2013 informed media coverage and partners about the costs of the cuts to our state and how these cuts are undermining the state's economy. ■

**T**his year NC Policy Watch, a project of the Justice Center, celebrated its 10th anniversary as one of North Carolina's most influential and prolific sources of news and progressive commentary on state policy and politics. In December, former Governor Jim Hunt, Senate Minority Leader Dan Blue and Capitol Broadcasting President and CEO (and project co-founder) Jim Goodmon co-sponsored an enormously successful celebration of its work. At the event, Gov. Hunt hailed Policy Watch as an "invaluable" voice



*NC Policy Watch hosted eight Crucial Conversation luncheons in 2014. Topics included the economy, with Dean Baker of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, (above), the Duke Energy coal ash disaster, marriage equality, and reproductive rights.*

for justice and reform and urged the more than 200 attendees to recognize "how fortunate we are to have Policy Watch... good people who believe in North Carolina."

In addition to the milestone anniversary, the project celebrated three overarching accomplishments during 2014:

**More content than ever –**

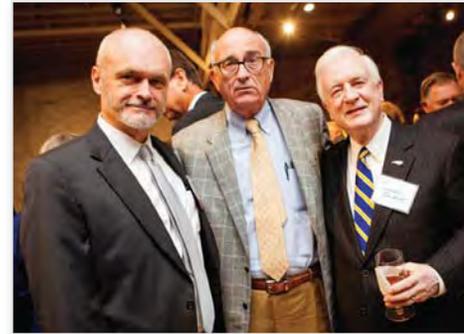
Despite having just seven staff, Policy Watch continued to generate a prodigious volume of content in a variety of formats—online, e-mail, video, radio and podcast. During 2014, the project produced nearly 1,000 stories and commentaries for its main website ([www.ncpolicywatch.com](http://www.ncpolicywatch.com)) and more than 1,600 posts for The Progressive Pulse blog ([pulse.ncpolicywatch.org](http://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org)). Commentary and analysis by Policy Watch staff appeared on an almost daily basis in a wide variety of media throughout the state.

**Better content than ever –** Policy Watch

reporters continued to break stories and cover beats that would otherwise remain unearthed and ignored in today's diminished mainstream media landscape.

We documented questionable aspects of the state's newly privatized economic development partnership; explored the record of a troubled, Wall Street-controlled virtual charter school; and reported on the controversies surrounding the conservative takeover of the University of North Carolina Board of Governors.

Policy Watch reporters also dissected the state education budget and controversial teacher pay plans, documented the rollout of North Carolina's new school voucher program, and exposed the abuses and lack of oversight in the state's troubled experiment with charter schools. Plus, we generated scores of stories highlighting the decisions of the state's appellate courts, analyzing judicial elections



*Former Governor Jim Hunt, Capital Broadcasting CEO Jim Goodmon, and Director Chris Fitzsimon were among those who came up out to celebrate NC Policy Watch's 10th anniversary and its impressive and influential work.*



and documenting Congressional obstruction of federal court nominees.

**A bigger audience than ever –** Policy Watch drew nearly two million people to its websites, expanded its social media followings on Facebook and Twitter to well over 10,000 each, and placed more articles in more newspapers throughout North Carolina than ever before.

Throughout it all, the project's overarching objective remained straightforward and ambitious: to inform and elevate public policy debates and, ultimately, ensure that progressive policy solutions win the "battle of ideas." As it starts its second decade of operation, Policy Watch has become a national model for state-level projects that seek to inform and improve public policy debates through the generation of original news and commentary. ■

**A**round the country, the struggles of workers making wages so low that they are stuck in poverty made headlines and sparked protests. Here in North Carolina, the Justice Center's Workers' Rights Project helped local governments figure out what they could do to improve wages for their residents. The state legislature passed a law blocking local living-wage ordinances, but we worked with advocates in Durham, Asheville and Greensboro to develop alternatives, such as a volunteer certification program for businesses that pledge to pay living wages. We also held a webinar for community leaders, and we sent a letter to all 535 county and city managers in North Carolina, letting them know their legal options for promoting living wages and good working conditions.

In a tough legislative environment, we made several tangible gains on behalf of low-income workers. At the state level, we successfully **fought off proposed changes to the state's unemployment insurance system that would have shortened the amount of time jobless workers receive benefits**. As part of this effort, we worked with state officials and provided comments to the Division of Employment Services on its rules for the revised program. We also participated in organizing a group of workers struggling with long-term unemployment and engaged them in the legislative process. At the federal level, we **persuaded US Senator Kay Hagan to hold the first-ever committee hearing on paid family medical leave** and found sympathetic business leaders to testify before the committee.

A job and a decent place to live are out of reach for many people who have criminal records. Punitive local and state laws can make it impossible for



*Members of the NC RaiseUp movement marched at the 8th annual Historic Thousands on Jones Street event in February. This movement is pushing for higher wages for some of the state's lowest-paying jobs, particularly in the fast-food industry. We provided communications and organizing support for NC RaiseUp as it started its campaign. And when workers at multiple fast-food restaurants around the Triangle decided to strike, we delivered the strike notices so we could inform the employers about the workers' rights and make it clear that retaliation against strikers is illegal.*

them to create a stable life after incarceration. We provided coordination and legal expertise for the Second Chance Alliance, made up of ex-offenders and community leaders working for policies that help those who were incarcerated re-enter and reintegrate into society. In 2014, we discussed the need for more re-entry services and better policies with the Department of Public Safety and the NC Conference of District Attorneys. We **helped state leaders see that helping ex-offenders rebuild their lives saves money and benefits families and communities**, and we are optimistic that our continued work will result in improved policies and services in 2015.

**A class-action settlement for \$1.25 million benefiting hundreds of workers at a sweet potato farm in Wilson County**—that was the result of just one of the cases we litigated in 2014 on behalf of workers whose employers did not pay them the wages they were due under the law. We also **secured favorable settlements on behalf of landscaping workers in Guilford County and farm workers in Edgecombe County**. These workers couldn't afford an attorney, but our staff stood up for their rights when no one else would. We have several more cases underway that will affect hundreds of workers and remind employers that even people who make low wages and have few resources are protected under the law. ■

For years, we pushed and pleaded. We tweeted, shared, and emailed the stories of immigrant families—working hard, contributing to their communities, and living in fear. We demanded action.

The advocates of the Justice Center’s Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project (IRRP), along with their allies throughout the state and nation, called for justice and mercy, and President Obama heard them. He responded by taking executive action to provide our immigrant neighbors with the opportunity to live, work, and go to school without the constant fear of deportation. **These “administrative relief” programs potentially will affect some 120,000 immigrants in North Carolina.** IRRP’s community educators and attorneys are excited about what this will mean for their work in the coming year.

As the leading resource on immigration law and other legal matters affecting immigrants in North Carolina, our attorneys and paralegals helped hundreds of people in 2014. At any given time, we have dozens of immigration cases open, and last year more than 100 of our clients received immigrant benefits (asylum, visas, temporary protected status, etc.) thanks to our help. We also assisted and supervised immigration



*The Raleigh News & Observer ran a front-page article about the clients of Justice Center attorney Kate Woome-Deters. Kate has aggressively pursued debt collection against the owner of a construction company on behalf of seven workers. For nearly four years, she fought for her clients. Today the company owner is finally paying them what they are owed, thanks to Kate’s tenacity and dedication.*

attorneys and advocates with other organizations in order to make sure as many people as possible had access to sound advice and quality representation.

We represented unaccompanied children from Central America in court and influenced the state policy debate about their care. **We generated more than 200 calls to Governor McCrory urging him to support policies and programs to protect these children,** rather than treating them as some kind of threat. We also had formal meetings with state legislators on a range of policy issues affecting immigrants.

Through our trainings, webinars, and workshops, **we educated about a thousand community organizers, advocates, attorneys, and paralegals about important legal and policy issues** facing immigrants. These included access to education, public benefits and Affordable Care Act health plans, eligibility for driver’s licenses, and the myriad scams often targeted at immigrants—especially *notario* fraud.

*Notario* fraud is when someone targets the Spanish-speaking community and offers to provide legal services for which they are not licensed. This can have disastrous consequences for immigrants—



*Dani Moore participates in the Moral March in February, 2014.*

often the *notarios* take their clients’ money but fail to file essential immigration paperwork properly or on time, putting the clients at risk for detention and deportation. **We investigated some of the most egregious notarios in North Carolina and filed a lawsuit against one of them in late 2014.** We also gave numerous presentations and media interviews in 2014 in order to warn the Latino community members about the dangers of *notario* fraud.

We pursued and won victories in several lawsuits in which immigrants were victims of consumer fraud. And we went after employers who cheated their immigrant workers out of the pay they were rightfully due. ■

Photo by Manju Rajendran

In many North Carolina counties, low-income and minority communities must still fight for access to one of life's most basic needs—safe and affordable housing.

In 2014, the Justice Center's Consumer Protection & Housing Project settled a case with the Village of Pinehurst, which initially refused to allow an affordable senior housing project to be built. Our complaint alleged that Pinehurst's actions were based on the race and economic status of the would-be occupants. **Thanks to our advocacy, the town gave the project the go-ahead and agreed to pay damages, costs and attorneys' fees.**

We also joined the UNC Center for Civil Rights to provide legal representation to an unincorporated, predominately African-American community in Brunswick County. The county refused to provide water and sewer services and was planning to expand a landfill next to the community—decisions that the community alleged were discriminatory. After several years of litigation, the county and community members **agreed to a favorable settlement that addressed the concerns raised in the lawsuit.**

We continue to help homeowners facing foreclosure. In 2014, six of our cases reached conclusions that allowed our clients to keep their homes, and we have several settlements pending. In our defense arguments, we make sure to use strategies that have the potential to create precedent that will protect other homeowners. For example, in one case we challenged the right of a mortgage servicer to pursue foreclosure when it has lost the homeowners' mortgage note.



*For-profit schools often target military personnel, hoping to take advantage of the education benefits they receive from the federal government. But often, the degrees and credentials these schools offer are worthless, and they saddle students with unmanageable debt. The Justice Center's Consumer Protection and Housing Project launched a new effort in 2014 to educate military personnel about the dangers of dealing with for-profit schools.*

North Carolina has some of the best consumer protection laws in the nation, but they are constantly under attack by interests that hope to make money through shady business practices. In 2014, **we succeeded in stopping efforts to legalize payday lending, increase fees on manufactured housing loans, and weaken protections for military personnel from abuses by consumer finance**

**companies.** We're defending victims of one of the nation's largest debt buying companies, which is filing cases against North Carolinians even though their abusive collection practices are illegal in our state. We are seeking to turn the case into a class-action lawsuit in 2015. ■

**W**e aggressively and successfully fought against efforts to privatize North Carolina’s public education system in 2014. Along with the NC Association of Educators, the Justice Center’s Education & Law Project filed a lawsuit to stop the implementation of a program to give public tax dollars to private schools. The voucher program offered students no protections and even allowed private schools to discriminate. We secured a ruling in Superior Court that said the program is unconstitutional on multiple counts. The case is set to go before the NC Supreme Court in 2015.

We worked to **prevent the creation of virtual charter schools in North Carolina and to raise awareness of the serious academic and financial failings** of these schools in other states. K12, Inc., the nation’s largest



*Education and Law attorney Christine Bischoff (right) confers with co-counsel Burton Craige in Wake County Superior Court in the case fighting the creation of a voucher program for private schools.*

virtual charter school provider, filed a lawsuit in an effort to force the State Board of Education to allow the company to open a school in North Carolina in 2014. The Justice Center filed amicus briefs with the trial and appellate courts on the problems associated with virtual charter schools in general and K12’s schools in particular, helping to secure rulings against K12 in both courts.

Unfortunately, the NC General Assembly ordered the State Board of Education to approve two virtual charter schools as part of a pilot program—there were only two applicants, and K12 was one of them. Now the company is making plans to open a virtual school in North Carolina for the coming school year. We will continue to educate the public about K12’s problems, oppose attempts to expand the pilot program, and ensure the State Board of Education holds the company financially and academically accountable.

We received numerous calls from immigrant families whose children were being denied the right to an education because of school registration delays lasting up to six months. In response, **we worked with state and national partners to file a Title VI complaint with the US Department of Justice challenging the enrollment and registration process as discriminatory toward immigrant students.** We have worked with the NC Department



*Education and Law policy analyst Matt Ellinwood appeared on NC Policy Watch’s radio show to discuss public education in North Carolina. In addition to explaining important issues in education policy to the media, Matt meets with community groups around the state to inform them about students’ rights and the latest legislative developments.*

of Public Instruction to create guidance, trainings, and oversight for local school districts in order to streamline the registration process so immigrant children no longer miss vital school days while attempting to register.

Some of North Carolina’s most vulnerable students are those living in private psychiatric treatment facilities (PRTFs). We litigated a case on behalf of a student who did not receive special-education services while at a PRTF, prompting state lawmakers to take action. We were **successful in getting legislation passed that provides funding for and oversight of the education of children in PRTFs.** In 2015, we will work with other advocacy groups to monitor the PRTFs to ensure they are fulfilling children’s educational rights. ■

**H**aving access to quality health care can affect every aspect of a family's life—how well a child does in school, if a parent can find and keep a job, whether or not economic security is ever within reach.

For more than two years now, the Justice Center's Health Access Coalition (HAC) has **worked to implement the Affordable Care Act and fought to secure the expansion of Medicaid.** In 2014, we educated some 2,500 people about the new options available under health care reform and built a statewide network of consumer advocates.

We also explained to tens of thousands of people—through meetings, events, and social and traditional media—why **Medicaid expansion is critical for the well-being of North Carolinians and the state's entire healthcare system.** We helped community partners take action by writing letters to the editor

and speaking at press conferences, and we worked with cities and counties across the state to draft and pass resolutions supporting Medicaid expansion. We explained to state legislators how refusing to expand Medicaid strains rural health care and hurts the economy. As we begin 2015, we see that our persistence has paid off, and some state leaders have finally come to understand the wisdom and importance of Medicaid expansion.

Of course, we didn't make this progress alone. We worked with strategic coalitions of statewide allies and local groups that have come together to carry the message that expanding health

insurance coverage is vital to North Carolina's future.

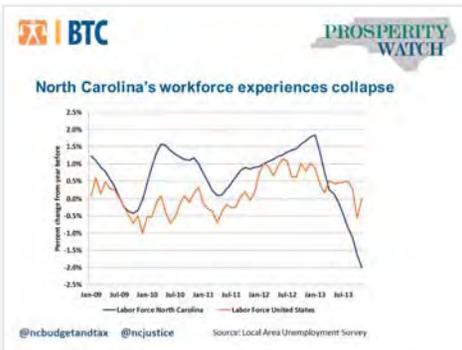
*Health Access Coalition staff worked closely with Belhaven Mayor Adam O'Neal, seen here at the Medicaid Lobby Day at the General Assembly. This Republican and self-proclaimed conservative gained national attention when he walked 237 miles to Washington DC to speak out against the closure of the hospital in his small town. Some 20,000 people in Beaufort and Hyde counties would lose access to emergency care if the hospital closed. We encouraged O'Neal to speak out in support of Medicaid expansion, which is essential to the survival of rural hospitals.*



*Health Access Coalition co-director Nicole Dozier, center, speaks at a 2014 Moral Monday event. This was one of the dozens of events around the state where we educated North Carolinians about the Affordable Care Act and the need for Medicaid expansion.*



The Health Access Coalition also worked to make health care more accessible and affordable for North Carolina consumers. We participated in a national consortium, organized by Consumers Union, on health care costs, and one of the HAC co-directors serves as a consumer representative to the National Association of Insurance Commissioners. We're **working at the national level to create new model laws ensuring network adequacy**—so that when you buy a health plan, you know what doctors and hospitals are included and that it will meet your needs. We continue to fight on many fronts to ensure that consumers are protected during this time of constant change in the world of health care. ■



### The Truth behind Labor Statistics:

Each month, the Budget & Tax Center educates the media and the public about what the latest labor statistics really mean. In January, for example, we revealed that the recent **drop in the unemployment rate was actually the result of people leaving the workforce**, rather than an increase in good-paying jobs.

JANUARY

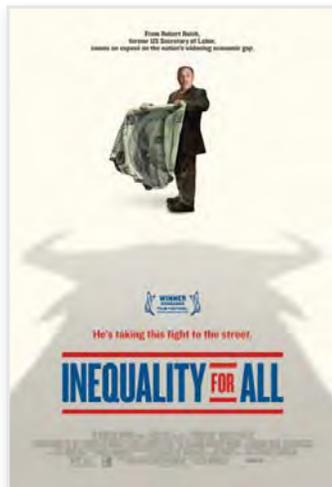
### Marching for Justice:

Justice Center staff joined thousands of our partners and allies from across the state in the annual Historic Thousands on Jones Street march



in support of public education, workers' rights, Medicaid expansion, affordable housing, immigrant rights, economic justice, and more.

FEBRUARY



### Talking about Poverty:

Throughout 2014, the Budget & Tax Center worked with state and local organizations to host screenings of the acclaimed documentary "Inequality for All" and community discussions in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty. From Raleigh to Asheville, the film and discussions highlighted the BTC's research that finds **hard work isn't enough for North Carolinians trying to climb out of poverty.**

MARCH

### Medicaid Expansion:

The Health Access Coalition released a report examining **the damaging effects of state leaders' decision to block Medicaid expansion.** HAC organized coalitions, developed a Medicaid toolkit, and conducted meetings in low-wealth counties to inform residents about their health care options.



### Protecting Immigrants from Scams:

The Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project educated immigrant advocates and attorneys about the many scams commonly targeted at immigrants in North Carolina. These scams often involve housing, lending, or immigration law services—and **some immigrants are even shortchanged of their wages by their employers.** In addition to informing the community about these injustices, we provide legal representation to immigrants who have been victims of these unconscionable scams.



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Coordinator,  
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### Stop the Cuts:

The Budget & Tax Center and advocates from around the state joined together on Tax Day 2014 to **bring awareness to the General Assembly's tax plan, which undermined the state's ability to invest in working families, children, businesses, and the economy.** The BTC also launched a #StoptheCuts campaign, which included infographics, talking points for partners, letter-to-the-editor templates, editorial board memos and opinion pieces from various organizations.

### Community Eligibility:

Throughout the spring, the Budget & Tax Center worked to educate local school boards and superintendents about **the community eligibility program, which allows all students in high-poverty schools or districts to receive free meals.** This effort included blog posts, a Tweetchat with national partners, letters and fact sheets to superintendents, follow-up phone calls, and technical assistance on the financing aspects. The result is that more than 30 school districts will join this program this school year.

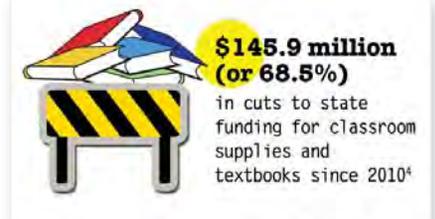


### Documenting the Movement:

NC Policy Watch is behind the scenes at every major hearing, media event and protest in Raleigh, documenting the political spirit and voices of North Carolinians through audio postcards, radio interviews, photography, and in-depth reporting.

### Investing in Public Education:

The Education & Law Project spoke out against **deep cuts to spending on public education** and the elimination of the Teaching Fellows program. NC Policy Watch spread the word about the cuts and other education issues with reporting on the wave of teachers leaving the profession, the perils of school vouchers, and the debate over Common Core education standards.



### Protecting Immigrant Students:

The Education & Law Project worked to **ensure that public schools enroll all students, regardless of a child's or parent's immigration status.** In consultation with our education attorneys, the state superintendent for public schools wrote a letter to all districts reminding them that they cannot deny or delay any student's enrollment. This letter came as a direct result of a Title VI complaint, filed by the Justice Center and national partners, which alleged that the enrollment and registration process in some school districts discriminated against immigrant students.

### Caregivers' Rights:

The Workers' Rights Project released *Caregivers at Risk*, a report documenting **the difficult working conditions of paid and unpaid caregivers.** The report outlined needed policy changes, such as giving employees the chance to earn paid leave. We organized a caregiver event in Greensboro with a group of home health workers to get the word out about our findings.



APRIL

MAY

JUNE



**CHRIS HILL**  
Director, Education & Law



**JACK HOLTZMAN**  
Senior Attorney, Consumer & Housing



**CEDRIC JOHNSON**  
Policy Analyst, Budget & Tax Center



**MELINDA LAWRENCE**  
Executive Director



**RICKY LEUNG**  
New Media Director, NC Policy Watch



**ADAM LINKER**  
Co-Director, Health Access Coalition



**LUCY MARTINEZ**  
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**SHARON MCCLOSKEY**  
Courts & Law Reporter, NC Policy Watch



**PATRICK MCHUGH**  
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**CARLENE MCNULTY**  
Director of Litigation



**TAZRA MITCHELL**  
Policy Analyst, Budget & Tax Center



**AMBER MOODIE-DYER**  
Policy Advocate, Budget & Tax Center



**DANI MOORE**  
Director, Immigrant & Refugee Rights

## Courts in Crisis Reporting:

A ruling by the 4th US Circuit Court of Appeals struck down North Carolina's ban on same-sex marriage. In its Courts in Crisis series, **NC Policy Watch**



covered the ruling, as well as a multitude of other

legal matters throughout 2014, including voting rights, the infusion of large pots of "dark" money into judicial elections, and the state budget's impact on the justice system.

JULY

## Paid Leave:

The Workers' Rights Project worked with Senator Kay Hagan throughout 2014 on the issues of **paid family medical leave and paid sick days**. We found two business owners who favor paid leave to testify at a US Senate committee hearing on the issue, and we rallied support through polling, earned media, and editorial board outreach.

AUGUST

## Transit for Everyone:

The Budget & Tax Center planned and co-sponsored an event on public transit equity. **The BTC lifted up the importance of incorporating equity components**—such as affordable housing—into local transit plans to ensure that these investments serve as a platform for growth and economic prosperity for all.



## Child Refugees:

The Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project spoke out on **North Carolina's treatment of unaccompanied child migrants from Central America**. In a media statement, we said, "This is about our values as Americans, and as North Carolinians. If we can't welcome children in crisis, children who are fleeing drug-fueled violence, then we will fail a critical moral test." Our efforts prompted more than 200 people to call Governor McCrory's office and demand proper care and respect for these children.

## Earned Income Tax Credit:



The Budget & Tax Center launched a video series highlighting families affected by **the loss of the state Earned Income Tax Credit, a modest but vital tax credit** that state lawmakers allowed to expire. The women featured in the videos are all working North Carolinians who are struggling and who relied on the state EITC to help make ends meet.

## Voucher Lawsuit:

In a case led by the Education & Law Project and the NC Association of Educators, Superior Court Judge Robert Hobgood ruled that **North Carolina's school voucher program is unconstitutional**. His ruling was unequivocal, and he cited numerous ways the program violates the rights of taxpayers and students.



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SEPTEMBER

## Predatory For-Profit Schools:



The Consumer Protection & Housing Project launched a major effort to educate high-school counselors and military personnel about the dangers of for-profit colleges. **These schools often leave students with lots of debt and worthless credentials**. We held numerous community education meetings, launched a website, and researched possible litigation and administrative action against these schools.

## State of Working NC:

The NC Justice Center's annual *State of Working North Carolina* report sheds light on how workers are faring. This year's report showed that the **state's recovery from the Great Recession has been slow and uneven, with a few communities thriving while many others struggle**.



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## Getting the Word Out on the ACA:

The Health Access Coalition held an educational forum in Scotland Neck on the Affordable Care Act with State Senator Angela Bryant. Throughout 2014, we presented at or held more than 100 meetings and events, reaching thousands across the state.



## Legal Assistance for Immigrants:

President Obama announced “administrative relief” programs that may help millions of immigrant families throughout the country. The Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project immediately began working with partners to determine how the programs could best be implemented here in North Carolina. As the same time, we continued to work with our many immigration clients and helped more than 100 of them get legal status that protected them from deportation. We also assisted four North Carolina families in obtaining custody of children who immigrated to the United States alone.

## Policy Watch’s 10th Anniversary:

NC Policy Watch celebrated a decade of top-notch policy reporting. Former Governor Jim Hunt, Senate Minority Leader Dan Blue, and Capitol Broadcasting CEO Jim Goodmon co-sponsored the party. NC Policy Watch had another banner year in 2014—combined, the project’s main website and blog received nearly two million page views from 849,000 unique visitors. Also, the number of newspapers carrying NC Policy Watch content on a regular basis rose to 39.



## Millennial Summit:

The Budget & Tax Center partnered with Generation Progress, a project of the Center for American Progress, to plan and co-host a Millennial State Economic Summit. We provided data on the barriers young adults in North Carolina face as they strive for economic security and how state policies can break down those barriers.

## Living Wage:

The Workers’ Rights Project sent letters to 535 county and city managers in North Carolina detailing how they could promote living wages and good working conditions in their communities. The letters included information from the Budget & Tax Center’s annual Living Income Standard report, which looks at how much income a family needs to afford life’s basics in each of the state’s 100 counties.



## Melinda Lawrence’s Retirement:

After eight years as executive director of the Justice Center—and decades fighting to improve the lives of disadvantaged people in North Carolina—Melinda Lawrence decided it was time to retire. Under her leadership, the Justice Center became a stronger, larger, and more effective organization. We will miss you, Melinda!

OCTOBER

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Outreach Coordinator



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General Counsel  
& Director of Advocacy



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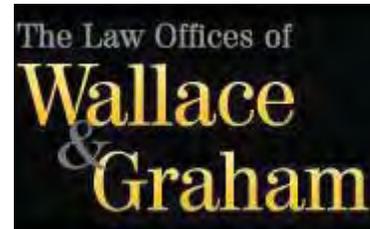
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