



20

YEARS
of
DEFENDING
JUSTICE

REPORT & RETROSPECTIVE
1996 - 2016

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Dear Friends of the Justice Center,

This year we celebrate 20 years of work by the North Carolina Justice Center.

Never has the work been so challenging nor more critical: challenging given the national dialogue (or lack thereof), polarized state, and partisan political context; critical given the opportunity for change upon us and for the crucial need to move North Carolina towards a path of progressive social renewal and expanded economic opportunity for all.

One of my favorite quotes, from Rabbi Hillel, reads, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me; But if I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?” Everyone belongs to a family, some large and some small. But all provide key things for their members: clothing, food, shelter, love and companionship. And for a family to fulfill its commitment to every member, each person has responsibilities.

Those who founded, work in, and support the Justice Center know more than most that we all also belong to a much bigger family as part of our communities and state. Just as with our family, if we are to enjoy the benefits of our state, we all must equally contribute to its maintenance and growth: by paying taxes, abiding by its laws, and helping those in need by alleviating human suffering wherever possible. When we fail to do so the results are all too foreseeable (and preventable): increased hunger, homelessness, disease, illiteracy, and poverty. We are, in the end, talking about real people who are dramatically affected by all our contributions of time, service, and resources.

What the Justice Center teaches, by actions and not just words, is a solemn obligation exists, passed down to us by previous generations: to leave this state a better place for us having lived here. By living in North Carolina, we agree to accept it. And, a trust is placed in each of us—by future generations not yet born—to fulfill our maintenance obligation to fight poverty and disease, ignorance and bigotry, and apathy and distrust.

History’s fundamental lesson is we cannot ever separate ourselves from the larger community in which we live. It brings to mind the parable of the

clergyman who was famous for collecting charity. One day he visited the home of a famous miser who was very rich and lonely. The clergyman knocked on the door and when the miser appeared, he asked him for a donation for the poor. The miser, incensed, screamed back at him, “All anyone wants is my money. No one cares about me. I worked hard for this money and I am going to keep it.”

The clergyman calmly said, “Please go to the window and tell me what you see.” The man did so and described the people in the street. Then the clergyman asked the miser to look into the mirror on the wall and tell him what he saw. The man said, “Well, I see only myself.” The clergyman then said, “The lesson is very simple. Look into the silver and you see only yourself. Take away the silver from the glass and you see the rest of the community.”

The Justice Center’s real mission is to help us take away the silver from the glass and allow all North Carolinians to see one other. In doing so, we assure no citizen is left behind, none abandoned in the crossfire of an uncaring home, community or society. We help plant the tree of knowledge in every town, sustain the tree of life throughout our state, and nurture the tree of love for all of us.

For all who have given and will give to the Justice Center and our work, you will be remembered for every child you helped inspire, every family you touched and as keepers of North Carolina’s soul. Thank you for making this state a kinder, wiser, and better place to live for everyone!



Rick Glazier
Executive Director

Dear Friends of the Justice Center,

Twenty years ago, a collaborative decision was made to create a bold new organization capable of employing multiple advocacy strategies—litigation, policy advocacy, policy research, and grassroots organizing—to improve the lives of low-income and working poor North Carolinians.

In 1996, two Legal Services organizations merged—the NC Client and Community Development Center and NC Legal Service Resource Center—to form the NC Justice Center.

These forerunner organizations had won important victories that moved North Carolina forward in its treatment of disadvantaged people. But, as successful as these early efforts were, they lacked the power of a single unified organization working, without political constraints, on multiple fronts for progressive change.

During its early years the Justice Center's future was uncertain. It struggled to find operating funds; in fact, many times we didn't know if we'd be able to keep the doors open from one month to the next. It's a testament to the commitment of our earliest staff members who took up the challenge and devoted themselves to the Justice Center's mission and untested advocacy model.

None of this would have been possible without the selfless support of the Legal Aid community – in many respects they are the reason the Justice Center exists. Due to restrictions placed on Legal Aid advocacy by Congress, the Legal Services community chose to rally together and support the creation of the Justice Center so that the excellent work formerly done by Legal Aid attorneys could carry on.

The Justice Center has evolved dramatically since the early days. In fact, the size and scope of the organization's work are hard to believe for those of us who set the foundation for the next two decades. Yet the model that we envisioned for the Justice Center in 1996 endures: an organization that could effectively employ multiple approaches to address the problems

facing struggling North Carolinians. Today, the Justice Center utilizes those very same approaches, with some new ones as well.

In 2016, the Justice Center faces different challenges than it did 20 years ago. To be sure, our state's political landscape has dramatically changed, making progressive victories harder to achieve. Poverty is increasing in our state, affecting nearly 2 million of our people, and maintains its fiercest grip on communities of color, rural areas, children, and single-parent households. Despite these challenges, the Justice Center continues to call on its remarkable staff to carry on the traditions of its predecessor organizations.

It is deeply gratifying to all of us who were part of the birth of the Justice Center to see that it's not only still here but flourishing. The concept of multi-forum advocacy has stood the test of time. The organization has grown and taken on that role – and it has emerged as the leader for progressive change in our state.

We extend our congratulations to all who helped build and sustain the Justice Center. Here's to the next 20 years!



Greg Malhoit & Andrew Foster
Founding Co-Executive Directors



Willis Williams & Victor Boone
Founding Board Co-Chairs

The North Carolina Justice Center was born out of a long history of efforts to build pathways to a fairer and more prosperous state.

We have lifted up just some of the milestones in the work to fight poverty achieved by our organization, North Carolina leaders, communities, and those living in poverty.

The Justice Center's 20-year plus history of work shows an institution always responsive to the historical moment but never limited by it.

LEADING A WAR ON POVERTY: The North Carolina Fund and Its Legacy

In the 1960s, Governor Terry Sanford's vision gave rise to the North Carolina Fund – an ambitious initiative that tackled the task of alleviating poverty by providing direct services, building connections to economic opportunity, and empowering local communities. The North Carolina Fund laid the foundation for a community-based model for fighting poverty—one that sought not just to alleviate the challenges of economic hardship but also to change the systems that allowed such hardship to persist.

Before closing in 1968, the North Carolina Fund established a set of community-based institutions across the state and trained leaders who would continue to be instrumental in the work to fight poverty. This early model for improving access to resources for the



In 1964, Gov. Terry Sanford (second from right, middle row) accompanied President Lyndon Johnson on the North Carolina leg of his "Poverty Tour" of southern states. This photo was taken in Rocky Mount by Billy E. Barnes.

state's poorest residents gave earliest seed to the North Carolina Justice Center.

Thou Shalt Not Ration Justice

One of the most effective aspects in the efforts to combat poverty in our state was increased legal representation.

Service agencies dedicated to legal representation of the poor began operations in Greensboro, Charlotte, and Durham in 1967. A few years later, the North Carolina Bar Association began studying the feasibility of a statewide legal aid system to increase the reach of this effective model serving poor

North Carolinians.

Shortly before the end of his presidency in 1974, President Richard Nixon signed the Legal Services Corporation Act, allowing legal representation to dramatically expand across the country.

Legal Services of North Carolina was established in 1976 as a confederation of existing legal services programs, expanding access to legal representation for poor North Carolinians. For the first time in many areas of the state,

poor people had legal representation available to them.

Not surprisingly, the phenomenon of lawyers advocating for poor clients in many arenas was often controversial. Right from the start, Legal Services programs encountered opposition from powerful interests that sought to shut off and/or restrict their funding. Despite this opposition, legal services lawyers in North Carolina brought numerous landmark lawsuits, helped draw up new statutes, and established important new rights for many of the state's most vulnerable residents.



Members of the original NC Justice & Community Development Center board included Joe Moody of Roanoke Rapids and Willis Williams (with wife, Delsie) of Bertie, Martin, Washington Community Development Corporation.

Through sustained and effective advocacy, Legal Services programs in North Carolina were able to fundamentally change the way that public and private entities dealt with the poor. Legal representation of the poor served to change the way courts operated, simplifying procedures and rules to make them more accessible and to provide education and self-help to clients.

In 1982, Legal Services of North Carolina consolidated its state-level advocacy into a new program, the North Carolina Legal Services Resource Center, one of the Justice

Center's predecessor organizations. The Resource Center initially specialized in: housing, employment, public assistance and benefits, consumer protection, family law, community economic development, lobbying on behalf of clients at the General



Carlene McNulty

Carolina, engaged in advocacy to increase public and private sector resources available to support community-based economic development, and research on the barriers faced by community economic development practitioners.

By 1992, the Resource Center had established the Education and Law Project to focus on improving the state's public education system so that it would better serve low-income children and children of color. In 1994, a national effort led by the Ford Foundation, C.S. Mott Foundation, and Annie



Bill Rowe

Assembly, and serving as substantive experts for legal services advocates across the state. The Client Center, also part of Legal Services of North

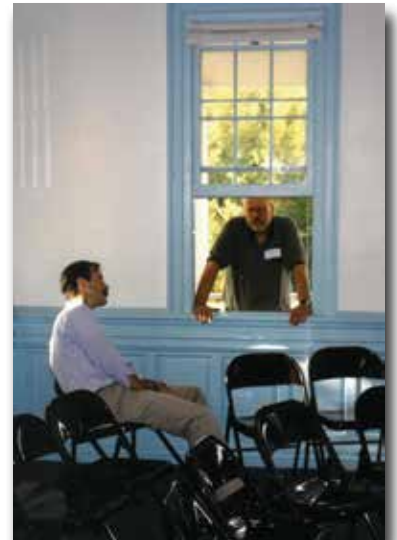
E. Casey Foundation, with leadership from the Center on Budget & Policy Priorities, provided funding to start the Budget & Tax Center and expanded the capacity of the project to conduct research and analysis of budget, tax, and economic issues.

Working closely together, the federally-funded legal services programs in North Carolina engaged



Sorien Schmidt

to curtail LSC, the legal services programs in North Carolina continued to be a strong and effective voice for poor people in North Carolina.



Rob Schofield and Greg Malhoit take part in an outreach session in Warren County in 1998.

in effective advocacy at the legislature, in the courts, and in communities across the state. However, such

programs remained at the center of political controversy as Congress repeatedly attempted to reduce funding and limit the types of activities undertaken by LSC program staff. In the 1980s, despite efforts



An early gathering of parent advocates coordinated by the Education and Law Project.

Welfare Reform and the Origins of the North Carolina Justice Center

1996 marked both the founding of the North Carolina Justice Center and the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity



Adam Searing

Act, which would substantially cut welfare funding and dramatically reduce access to services, thus limiting the ability of these public programs to move people into greater economic security.

As a result of the welfare “reform” legislation, funding to poor families

both in North Carolina and across the country collapsed. While welfare reform aimed to help the poor work their way out of poverty, people in low-wage jobs with little or no benefits could not improve their livelihood and were left without a critical lifeline, as were those unable to work.

In that same year, Congress also limited the kinds of legal work that LSC-funded programs could undertake on behalf of eligible clients, including class action litigation, welfare reform advocacy, and most affirmative lobbying and rulemaking activities. In addition, LSC programs were prohibited from claiming or collecting attorneys’ fees and would no longer be able to represent most categories of immigrants. Congress also eliminated LSC funding for national and state support centers such as the North Carolina Resource Center.

Legal Services of North Carolina had already initiated an internal strategic planning process in response to the potential restrictions a year before, ultimately leading to the creation of the North Carolina Justice and Community Development Center, joining the Resource Center with the North Carolina Client and Community Development Center.

Both organizations had elected to stop receiving funds from Legal Services so that they would not be bound by the new restrictions placed on Legal Services programs by Congress. The organizations took this dramatic step to pioneer a “community-centered” model of anti-poverty advocacy that was better able to respond to the challenges faced by low-income people in our state.

The new organization’s attachment to both legal and policy advocacy set the stage for the work ahead. They continued work they had been historically doing, and took on the work that could not be done by local legal services organizations, including class action litigation and representation of immigrants. In the statement announcing the Center’s creation, Board of Directors co-chair Ken Schorr stated that the merger was an “important and affirmative step” that ensured low-income families the protections they received under the former organizations.



Long-time Deputy Director Debra Tyler-Horton with Greg Malhoit.

Justice, Justice Shalt Thou Pursue

The North Carolina Justice and Community Development Center entered into this new era with a strong foundation in litigation and policy advocacy and substantive expertise across a range of issues. However, it became increasingly clear resources would be needed to effect change on the range of systems that were blocking pathways out of poverty for too many North Carolinians.

The North Carolina State Bar stepped in to provide critical financial assistance with its Interest on Lawyers’ Trust

Accounts (IOLTA) plan. IOLTA funds helped the Center gain its footing, retain a small staff, and start working on some of its earliest cases. The support of philanthropic organizations with deep roots in the fight against poverty—Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, notably—was also instrumental in supporting the early years of work at the Justice Center.



Attracta Kelly

By the mid-2000s, the NC Justice Center had established a unique model that incorporated multiple issues and strategies—litigation, strategic communication, policy advocacy, research, and community engagement.



Nicole Dozier, Al Ripley

Recession, Reaction and Planning for a More Prosperous State

The past decade has seen a mix of success and challenges for the NC Justice Center, which officially adopted its new, more compact name in 2006. The Justice Center, like other organizations oriented towards progress, helped conceive and shepherd several important new laws designed to advance a more prosperous and inclusive state in the early 2000s only to see many of them undone during the last several years.

Before the start of the Great Recession, North Carolina had established a series of nationally recognized laws that served to protect wealth, boost incomes, and insure workers and their families against economic downturns. The North Carolina Justice Center was, alternatively, behind the scenes, at the forefront or working side by side with numerous partners on many of these items, including:

- Helping to ban predatory “payday” lending throughout the state
- Establishing a state Affordable Housing Trust Fund
- Creating a state Earned Income Tax Credit
- Expanding children’s health insurance
- Establishing funding mechanisms to deliver a sound, basic education for every child



The Justice Center's Melinda Lawrence and Ron Garcia-Fogarty, along with MaryBe McMillan of the AFL-CIO, board the Truth and Hope tour bus in 2012.

The Great Recession, while devastating to many North Carolinians, would have been worse without the unemployment insurance system established as part of the New Deal in the 1930s and improved upon in North Carolina throughout the 1990s and early 2000s – often as the direct result of advocacy conducted by the Justice Center. Similarly, poor North Carolinians and communities would have been harder hit without the pursuit of a balanced approach to the revenue losses that was advocated by the Justice Center’s Budget & Tax Center and resulted in fewer cuts than otherwise would have been necessary.

The passage of the Affordable Care Act gave further support to a wide swath of North Carolinians who did not have access to health care coverage. The Justice Center’s Health Advocacy Project was at the forefront of efforts not just to advocate for Medicaid Expansion but to make sure that North Carolinians could sign up and access health insurance, many for the first time.

The Truth & Hope Poverty Tour in 2012, led by Rev. Dr. William Barber



Melinda Lawrence, Executive Director from 2008-2015, speaking at a 2012 school voucher press conference.

and supported by the NC Justice Center and UNC Center for Poverty, Work and Opportunity, sought to shed light on the failure of the recovery to make change in regions struggling with persistent and concentrated poverty. The faces of poverty could be seen at each tour stop, from the North East to the Foothills, and the North Carolina Justice Center committed once again to changing the

systems that allowed such economic challenges to persist in our state and country.

2013 was a year of backlash when, emboldened by supermajorities in the House and Senate and Governor’s mansion, the state pursued a dismantling of the systems that afforded pathways out of poverty:

tax cuts for the wealthy while becoming the only state to eliminate an existing state EITC; reduction in state investments in workforce development while gutting unemployment insurance; and privatization of public education while reducing per capita commitments to public education. ■



Current and former staff of the Budget & Tax Center gathered for its 20th anniversary celebration in 2014.

Since its origins in the Legal Aid movement, the Justice Center's mission has been, quite simply, to reduce and eliminate poverty in North Carolina by helping to ensure every household has access to the resources, services, and fair treatment it needs in order to achieve economic security.

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

- **Jobs that are safe**, pay a living wage, and provide benefits
- Access to quality and **affordable health care**
- Quality **public education** for every child
- **Consumer protections** from abusive practices
- Safe and **affordable housing**
- **Public investments** that expand opportunities for economic security
- 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

The Justice Center's effectiveness in advocating for policies that improve the lives of people throughout communities stems from a unique five-strategy approach that includes litigation, public policy advocacy, research, community engagement, and communications across **seven issue-area projects**.

The Budget & Tax Center, North Carolina's leading source for information on how fiscal and economic policies shape opportunities for working families, was established as part of the Justice Center in 1994. BTC analyzes pressing budget, tax, and economic decisions facing the state and local communities, with an eye to ensuring economic opportunity is expanded for all. Over the years BTC has:

- **Documented the connection between the achievement gap and public school funding**, particularly during *Leandro v. North Carolina* in 1999. BTC worked to identify and promote financing methods that would boost student achievement by ensuring resources were available to deliver quality education in every classroom to every child, regardless of wealth.
- **Opposed the establishment of the North Carolina Lottery** on the basis that it would fail to provide adequate and stable revenue for education and would hit poor North Carolinians the hardest.
- **Supported repeal of the state tax on groceries** that made it more difficult for poor and low-income North Carolinians to afford the basics and boost their local economies through spending.
- **Produced the first Living Income Standard**, resulting in a Legislative Study Committee that led to a successful minimum wage campaign in the early 2000s. BTC continues to produce the Living Income Standard every two years.
- **Led a coalition of diverse partners in successfully achieving the enactment of a state Earned Income Tax Credit.** Although the NC EITC was repealed in 2013, BTC continues its efforts to reinstate this policy for the estimated 1 million working families who struggle to make ends meet.

- **Advocated for and secured, in collaboration with a broad range of partners, a balanced approach to budget deficits caused by the Great Recession that include revenue as well as targeted spending cuts.** A temporary tax package was allowed to expire before revenues recovered to replace the worst of cuts.
 - **Scrupulously documented the recent damaging impact of shifting taxes** off the wealthy and large profitable corporations and onto North Carolinians living in poverty.
 - **Provided research and analysis of the labor market, economic expansion, and economic hardship** to design a roadmap for the public and policymakers to build an economy where there is opportunity for all North Carolinians.
- BTC has faced down a commitment to reducing the state's tools to addressing poverty and, unabated, continues to research, lobby, engage, and inform North Carolinians and lawmakers. Thanks to the project's team of researchers and long-term vision for what is possible in North Carolina to build an economy that works for all, the Budget & Tax Center is charting a path that seeks to raise the bar and invest to support children, families, and communities. This past year, BTC continued its work to protect low-income families by:
- **Successfully fighting off efforts to enact TABOR**, a constitutional amendment to our state constitution that the state Senate passed this year.



The BTC team, from left: Tazra Mitchell, Mel Umbarger, Alexandra Sirota (Director), Marion Johnson, Cedric Johnson, Patrick McHugh, Jonela Rogers, Brian Kennedy.

- **Lobbying against legislation to add other constitutional amendments** that would have set arbitrary and low-income tax rate caps – the opposite of the public investment our state needs. This legislation ultimately failed.
- **Fighting for SNAP benefits (food assistance) that people need to build a productive future.** BTC worked to improve legislation – which eventually stalled in the Senate – that would have made it more difficult for SNAP recipients to access this critical support.
- **Continued tracking economic data and policies that impact poverty and workforce development**, encouraging proposals that support economic growth and statewide equity.
- **Utilizing the #StoptheCuts campaign to explain the importance of revenue** in our state and the harmful impact of a lack of revenue on core public services. ■

At the core of the Consumer and Housing Project's work are some of the foundational issues of the Justice Center, dating back to the creation of the North Carolina Legal Resource Center in 1982. The team focuses on unfair and deceptive practices targeting North Carolina consumers, fair landlord/tenant laws, affordable housing, and lending abuses.

Center staff have successfully advocated for landmark laws protecting against predatory lending, mortgage servicing abuses, and debt buyer abuses, to name a few. They have engaged in successful class action litigation against unscrupulous mortgage brokers and payday lenders, and have coordinated statewide foreclosure defense work. Some of these hard fought victories were accomplished through the Center's effective relationships with policymakers, allied attorneys, and organizations from across the state working in coalition. Over the years, the project's attorneys and lobbyists have advanced work on numerous legislative issues including:

- **Stopping predatory lending practices** and defeating legislation that would let lenders raise interests on consumer loans.
- **Improving protections of tenants in the state landlord/tenant law**, including protections for victims of domestic violence and increased rights for tenants in foreclosed properties
- **Improving North Carolina's Fair Housing Act** by making it a fair housing violation for local governments to refuse to allow housing development because it is "affordable."
- **Obtaining increased funding for NC's Housing Trust Fund** and establishing a state housing tax credit to provide deeper subsidies for housing developed for North Carolina's poorest citizens.

- **Protecting manufactured home buyers from abusive lending and sales tactics.**
- **Protecting consumers from unfair collection practices.**

The Consumer & Housing Project continues to work through litigation and other non-legislative efforts on behalf of consumers, tenants, homeowners, and low-income families by:

- **Co-leading the Fair Housing Project with Legal Aid of NC**, which fights housing discrimination, creates safe and affordable housing, and enforces protections and rights for tenants.
- **Working to reduce the loss of homes to foreclosures based on predatory mortgage servicing practices, foreclosure rescue scams, and HOA abuses**, and helping lead statewide foreclosure defense work.
- **Representing students who have fallen prey to predatory practices of for-profit schools** through the Predatory For-Profit Schools Project, which educates students and the general public on this abusive practice.
- **Keeping payday and car-title lending out of our state** by working with allies to fight efforts to lower regulations and increase fees for companies seeking to make predatory loans.



Consumer and Housing staff, from left: Al Ripley (Director), Jason Pikler, Seonaid Rijo, Bill Rowe, Carlene McNulty, Jack Holtzman.

- **Creating affordable access to utilities and transportation**, including increasing public transit options, ensuring transit and housing plans to serve all families, and striving to make sure utilities are accessible and affordable even in remote or impoverished areas.
- **Working with partners to promote a Clean Power Plan (CPP) for NC** that complies with carbon reduction goals required by the EPA and takes advantage of incorporating energy efficiency to benefit North Carolina households struggling to pay high energy bills.
- **Working with partners to increase opportunities for community-supported housing** for individuals with severe mental illness. ■

The Justice Center's Education and Law Project's work began in 1992 as part of the North Carolina Legal Resource Center to improve the state's public education system and ensure that all students – regardless of the color of their skin, disability, national origin, or socio-economic class – have equal and fair access to high-quality education.

As part of its efforts to advocate for expanded opportunities and educational outcomes for historically underserved communities, the Education and Law Project has:

- **Led successful efforts to prevent passage of school discipline laws** that would have resulted in more students being excluded from public schools.
- **Helped pass legislation requiring special services for at-risk students in public schools** and improved legislation that would have held back large numbers of students due to a single test score.
- **Led successful efforts to appropriate new funds for local schools** so that they are able to offer education programs for non-English speaking students.
- **Secured passage of a state law that put an end to the “zero tolerance” disciplinary policies** that disproportionately excluded many minority students from the opportunity to get an education.
- **Fought harmful resegregation** through Office of Civil Rights complaints with the Department of Education after the loss of Wake County's nationally-recognized diversity policy for school assignment.
- **Provided legal assistance to families that encounter barriers to accessing public schools,**

including difficulty in registering students, accessing educational supports tailored to individual students, overcoming language barriers, discriminatory admissions processes, and discriminatory application of school discipline rules.

Today, the Education and Law Project engages in efforts to improve and reform public education through tireless policy advocacy at the General Assembly, community outreach, communications and media, and litigation, as well as:

- **Continuing to lobby for expanded early learning opportunities** at the state level and the creation of innovative early childhood programs in local communities that serve low-income, at-risk or underserved students.
- **Lobbying against unlimited charter school expansion** and unfair school funding formulas that would divert millions of dollars of revenue from local public school districts at a time when North Carolina's schools are among the lowest-funded in the nation.
- **Opposing virtual charter schools** and working to hold existing schools accountable given their use of public funds, lack of oversight, and unprecedented poor results for students.
- **Successfully fighting off changes** to integrated math courses of study that would have disrupted teaching and learning by requiring schools to offer two distinct courses of study for math and subjecting students to outdated learning models in the process.
- **Fighting for improved accountability for the Opportunity Scholarship voucher program,** which diverts public funding to private schools despite the lack of any meaningful financial oversight or information on how well the

program is educating North Carolina's students.

- **Supporting increased spending in K-12 public schools** to keep up with enrollment growth, and pushing for increased funding for digital resources, school connectivity, and professional development for teachers to use technology in innovative ways in the classroom. ■



Education and Law staff: Matt Ellinwood (Director) and Kris Nordstrom.

The Justice Center's North Carolina Health Access Coalition, now the Health Advocacy Project (HAP), was founded in 1993 to educate the public and policymakers about health care reform options and enable consumers to become active participants in developing health policy for the state's residents.

Over the years HAP—first as part of the NC Legal Services Resource Center and now the Justice Center—offered policy proposals for solving the problems of health insurance in North Carolina and the country at large, including active involvement in crafting the state's Children Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and advocating for more mental health coverage funding. The Justice Center's health team:

- **Led efforts to provide health insurance coverage for 100,000 uninsured children of the working poor** through the establishment, expansion, and improvement of North Carolina's Health Choice program. Nearly 95 percent of children have health coverage in the state.
- **Led efforts to improve dental care for children on NC's Medicaid program.** The effort, accompanied by a class action lawsuit filed by the Justice Center and other groups, led to an increased dental reimbursement rate and annual budget.
- **Led consumer health advocates in calling for establishment of a health trust fund,** resulting in a projected \$1 billion health trust (over 25 years) to improve the health of North Carolinians.
- **Led efforts to build one of the largest, diverse coalitions of health advocates in the state** to inform and mobilize stakeholders on health reform. The health team also worked with

fellow advocates to keep Blue Cross Blue Shield from conversion to a for-profit entity.

The Center took the lead in North Carolina in lobbying for the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) to transform the health care system by writing research papers, lobbying members of Congress, collecting personal stories, and arguing for adoption of the law in the media. Today, the Health Advocacy Project continues its work to ensure that all North Carolinians have meaningful access to high quality, affordable, equitable, and comprehensive health care by:

- **Advocating for the expansion of NC Medicaid so that 500,000 North Carolinians in the Coverage Gap have access to quality health care, and for further improvements to the ACA.** The health team utilizes research and analysis to document the economic and health impact of Medicaid expansion, public forums, and social media to push for legislation at the General Assembly that would expand Medicaid eligibility.
- **Providing analysis on state efforts to reform North Carolina Medicaid** by highlighting how Medicaid expansion supports and strengthens the aims and initiatives in reform.
- **Leading community educational events to promote the use of the ACA Marketplace.** North Carolina consistently ranks in the top five states for enrollment.

- **Expanding and protecting access to health services for low- and moderate-income individuals and families** by serving as a voice for health equity and coordinating with partner groups to organize lobby days and press events.
- **Providing information to health care consumers, community members, and stakeholders.** HAP meets with communities about enrolling for health coverage and necessary improvements to overall health care experiences.



Health Advocacy Project staff: Ciara Zachary, Nicole Dozier (Director), and Brendan Riley.

- **Promoting the consumer perspective on state and federal health care policy** in the press, on statewide committees, and at public forums. ■

The North Carolina Justice and Community Development Center's Immigrant Legal Assistance Project began in 1996 and evolved into the Justice Center's current Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project (IRRP).

IRRP works to ensure low-income immigrants have legal representation, to advance public policies that improve the well-being of immigrant families, and to promote acceptance and understanding of immigrants and refugee communities in North Carolina. IRRP:

- **Created and sustained the Eastern Carolina Immigrants' Rights Project in 2007**, a joint effort of Legal Services of North Carolina and the North Carolina Justice Center, to serve immigrants in Eastern NC who are not eligible for federally-funded legal assistance. Pursuing these goals continues today in the efforts of IRRP and the Workers' Rights Project.
- **Worked on behalf of low-income immigrants** to collect wages owed for violation of minimum wage and overtime laws, to protect their rights to safe housing, and to protect them from unfair consumer transactions.
- **Represented thousands of low-income immigrants** in obtaining the legal status they need to be able to live and work in North Carolina.
- **Fought for immigrants to have fair access to public benefits, educational opportunities, drivers' licenses, and government offices**, while opposing discriminatory bills that would seek to limit immigrants' ability to fully interact with government and integrate into society.

Today, the Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project provides support to immigrant organizations throughout the state. The project leads workgroups and coalitions of advocates and community leaders to coordinate education, advocacy, and strategic action



Immigrant and Refugee Rights staff: Mindy Lemus, Juan Calderon, Dani Moore (Director), Raul Pinto, Kate Woomer-Deters.

on a wide range of issues, including anti-immigrant legislation, in-state tuition for immigrant students, the unjust federal immigration system, language access, policies that promote integration and economic opportunity, and strategies for community organizing. IRRP also provides individual representation in the areas of immigration law, workers' rights, housing and consumer law, and public benefits. Highlights of the staff's work include:

- **Comprehensive anti-immigrant legislation response and coordination**, including efforts to limit use of local and organizational IDs to determine a person's identity or residency and attempts to limit refugee resettlement in North Carolina. IRRP created and provides staff support to the Movement to End Racism and Islamophobia.
- **Improving immigrant access to health care** through education and advocacy efforts that inform the public about immigrant eligibility for public benefits such as Medicaid, Social Security, and the ACA, and assisting individuals to obtain needed benefits.
- **Assisting clients and their family members seeking to obtain, extend or retain lawful immigration status or citizenship in the United States.** The project provides high-quality representation in a wide-range of immigration matters including U visas for victims of crime; asylum for those escaping persecution; women and children who suffered neglect or abuse; and family members seeking reunification.
- **Advocating for an administrative relief program** that would change removal priorities, expand Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and create a new work permit for parents of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents. IRRP personally assisted more than 2,000 young people with their DACA applications and played a leading role in the state for other nonprofit organizations implementing DACA programming.
- **Representing immigrants who are victims of fraud** and working to stop businesses from engaging in predatory and illegal practices, such as *notarios*, or unauthorized practitioners of law who prey on the immigrant community.
- **Providing critical research about the positive impact of immigrants on North Carolina's economy**, and the economic benefits that could be gained from licensing all qualified drivers or enabling more immigrant students to enroll in our state's universities and community colleges.
- **Expanding access to interpreters for all people who access the court system** by collaborating with the state and federal government, lawyers, interpreters, court staff, judges, and community advocates to push for additional improvements to interpreter access in court. ■

Originally founded in 2004, NC Policy Watch joined the Justice Center as its “front page” news and commentary project in 2007. Since the outset, the overarching objective of NC Policy Watch has remained straightforward: To inform and elevate public policy debates and, ultimately, to ensure that progressive policy solutions win the “battle of ideas.” The project operates under the guiding premise that the progressive movement can only succeed through a sustained, relentless, long-haul commitment to producing compelling news stories, commentary, research, and analysis in order to turn the tide and ensure a future built on just and sound policy choices.

Conceived initially as an outlet for progressive commentary that would help to counter the network of well-funded conservative “think tanks” dominating the state public policy debate, NC Policy Watch has since grown into a fully-fledged multimedia operation that features a team of eight full-time professionals who produce thousands of words in original news and opinion. Top priority areas of work include:

- **Education reporting** on the impact of state budget cuts on the K-12 system and higher education, vouchers and the expansion of charter schools, and slashed funding for teacher assistants, textbooks, and services, even as per-pupil spending plummets across the state.
- **Environmental reporting** on regular examinations of how pro-business agendas have trumped environmental concerns, North Carolina’s disastrous 2014 coal ash spill, fracking, and climate change’s impact on our state.
- **Courts and law reporting** on voting restrictions and voter suppression, how the state Supreme Court advanced the conservative agenda, the impact of federal decisions on our state and,

most recently, House Bill 2, North Carolina’s sweeping anti-LGBT legislation.

- **All-purpose investigative reporting**, including general topics such as corruption, waste, and fraud – a 2012 investigation led to a conviction and prison sentence for a powerful state legislator – and specific areas like the state lottery, turmoil at the Department of Health and Human Services, the UNC system, and Medicaid privatization.
- **Daily news commentary**, in which experts tackle the tough issues, including: poverty and economic justice, voting rights, tax fairness, legislative accountability and credibility, racial discrimination, reproductive freedom, LGBT equality, the death penalty and criminal justice, predatory consumer practices, gun violence, and myriad others.
- **Serving as a resource and media outlet to the broader Justice Center and the state’s progressive advocacy community**, including providing the state’s mainstream news reporters with a weekly “tip sheet” of recommended news stories; co-sponsoring monthly “Crucial Conversation” luncheons at which nonprofit leaders address timely subjects; coordinating a progressive op-ed service (“Progressive Voices”) that distributes free opinion pieces each week to news outlets throughout the state; and producing a statewide syndicated radio show “News and Views” that features dozens of the state’s nonprofit advocacy leaders every year.

As the size and capabilities of the traditional, mainstream news media have ebbed in recent years, Policy Watch reporters and commentators have often represented the only news outlet documenting and critiquing many of the important shifts in state policy and reporting on the stories that most affect



NC Policy Watch staff: Clayton Henkel, Billy Ball, Lisa Sorg, Chris Fitzsimon (Director), Rob Schofield, Joe Killian.

North Carolinians. This fact has been rendered all the more important over the last half-decade as various policymakers set about repealing decades of progress in an array of critical areas. Policy Watch’s efforts were highlighted in December 2015 with the release of a seminal report, **“Altered State: How five years of conservative rule have redefined North Carolina.”**

The reach and impact of NC Policy Watch’s work is reflected in the consistent and impressive growth of its audience. Policy Watch now measures annual pageviews in the millions and has hundreds of thousands of “unique visitors.” NC Policy Watch commentaries, news stories, and original radio content appeared in more than 50 newspapers and stations, and combined social media followers on Facebook and Twitter shot past 35,000.

As it enters its 13th year, NC Policy Watch is bigger, better and more impactful than it has ever been. Its staff members look forward to redoubling efforts to promote a fairer, healthier, and more prosperous North Carolina in the years ahead. ■

The Workers' Rights Project works to enforce and expand policies that ensure safe workplaces, a living wage, and a strong safety net in times of hardship. The team empowers workers to advocate for their rights in the workplace, secures public policies that improve economic security for working families, and ensures workers get the training they need for quality jobs. Over the years, attorneys, lobbyists, and analysts have:

- **Filed class actions on behalf of H2A farmworkers and H2B workers in North Carolina** to ensure they were fairly paid their transportation and visa costs and the promised wage.
- **Supported passage of legislation increasing the state's minimum wage to the federal minimum wage level**, increasing wages for over 30,000 workers.
- **Supported passage of legislation that expands eligibility for unemployment benefit payments to thousands of jobless workers.**
- **Played a key role in securing worker protection reforms** after the Hamlet fire tragedy, including adoption of protections against retaliation in the workplace and more OSHA inspectors.
- **Helped establish an enhanced system to combat "misclassification" of workers as independent contractors** which leads to workers being denied protections and benefits.
- **Led efforts to reduce barriers to reentry for individuals with criminal records** by improving expunction laws, creating certificates of relief, establishing reentry councils, and prohibiting occupational licensing boards from automatically disqualifying individuals with criminal records.
- **Worked with partners to pass legislation and**

regulations expanding protections for migrant workers in the areas of pesticide exposure and migrant housing.

The Workers' Rights Project carries on that work to this day by fighting to change policies that prevent people with criminal convictions from finding employment and housing, advocating for laws and workplace policies that improve conditions for migrant workers and caregivers, and providing legal representation to farmworkers and other low-wage workers, as well as:

- **Improving the state's Unemployment Insurance Program and restoring benefits cut in 2013.** The project works to educate lawmakers and the public on how the state's unemployment insurance now provides too little for too short a period to too few of North Carolina's jobless workers.
- **Fighting for pro-family policies**, including

legislation that expands eligibility for unpaid, job-protected leave under the Family Medical Leave Act, allows working North Carolinians to earn more paid sick days, and prevents discrimination against pregnant people.

- **Raising the minimum wage.** The team works with partners to support legislative proposals and lead campaigns (such as #WageWeek) that would increase the minimum wage in North Carolina, allowing working families to better meet the needs of their families.
- **Combating wage theft.** Justice Center advocates demand that the NC Labor Commissioner upholds the law and makes companies pay their workers, and have filed class action litigation to uphold workers' rights to be paid for their work.
- **Supporting Second Chances**, including expanding certificates of relief and expunction, and legislation that would require judges setting aside a wrongful conviction to issue an order expunging the crime from all official records.

• **Battling House Bill 2 and its indoctrination of employment discrimination.** The Justice Center worked with partners to fight the harmful bill that empowers businesses to discriminate and weakens the ability of local governments to raise wages. ■



Workers' Rights staff: Clermont Ripley, Carol Brooke, Daniel Bowes, Mindy Lemus, Allan Freyer (Director), Ana Pardo, Bill Rowe.

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