



TENNESSEE
JUSTICE
CENTER



ANNUAL REPORT

2023

A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Gazing out at this snowy day, I ponder the thrill of sledding born of powerlessness. I am more of a distance runner, which is a better fit at TJC. Even though TJC's outsized impact over the past 28 years has never been easy sledding. It has often felt more like a long, uphill slog toward an uncertain future. This past year felt like a continuation of the same marathon in many ways, but with a crucial difference. It was finally clear that TJC is here to stay. For the first time, we could trust that we will be around for as long as it takes to make Tennessee the just and inclusive state, we all long for it to be.

2023 saw hard times for the Tennessee families that TJC is privileged to serve. Thousands lost vital health coverage, the foster care system was in crisis and food assistance that was supposed to reach hungry children within days routinely took months longer than expected to materialize – if at all. TJC ran all out, all year long, trying to address these injustices.

And yet, there was much to celebrate. We moved into our forever home decorated with beautiful, donated art and equipped for the first time with new furniture and up-to-date technology. The space is filled with light, hope and energy, and we are surrounded by inspiring neighbors and partners.

As the state prepared to reassess the TennCare eligibility of 1.7 million children and adults, TJC issued an urgent “Call to Collaborate” to help families maintain coverage. More than 2,000 volunteers, professionals and community agencies responded. With a series of webinars and ongoing technical assistance, we equipped partners to assist tens of thousands of families through the maze of paperwork. They helped us identify systemic glitches and get the state to correct them before more people were hurt.

The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program provides nutrition assistance to pregnant and post-partum mothers, infants and pre-school children. WIC has been shown to have a lifelong impact on children's learning, earnings, health and longevity. Sadly, Tennessee's WIC program ranks 50th in the nation, with only 40% of eligible children receiving benefits. TJC's expertise and track record enabled us to win a large competitive federal grant to identify and address systemic barriers to WIC participation, so that more moms and babies can get the nutrition they need to thrive. For school-age kids, we launched a campaign to win universal school meals, so that all kids can eat healthy and be prepared to learn. And a year-end campaign won state acceptance of a new federal program to supplement children's nutrition during summers.

In November pro bono co-counsel and national nonprofit partners moved to town for 2 weeks, and we put on proof in federal court in a TennCare case about the irreversible consequences of losing health care. It was the first major trial in TJC's 28-year history in which I was not directly involved. I got to attend as a spectator. Watching our team and heroic clients, my heart almost exploded with pride. They rose to the challenge and provided world class proof that people with disabilities deserve accommodation before losing coverage and demonstrated why no one should be deprived of coverage without fair notice and a chance to correct the state's mistakes. While we don't expect a decision in the case for months, the lawsuit has already pressured the state to make reforms in the TennCare eligibility process. These systemic reform efforts are grounded in the insights and inspiration that come from deep personal connections made with thousands of clients, neighbors and partners, as we work together to confront injustice.

Amid a marathon of a year, there were moments where we jumped on the sled and the ice took us on spectacular rides full of sublime gifts and triumphs that we could have never imagined or orchestrated. More quickly than we had dared to hope, the new office has become a place for building community and is now the community's building. In October, the mayor and other leaders dedicated the building and its moving mural depicting the sixteen first graders, several of whom joined us for the dedication, who in 1957 faced down angry mobs to desegregate Nashville's schools. Since, the building has hosted church services, a bar association gathering, arrest record expungement clinics, TennCare and SNAP enrollment fairs, and a listening tour convened by the head of the Federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Neighbors used our commercial kitchen to prepare over 1,000 Thanksgiving meals for the neighborhood. Our new food pantry, stocked by city schools and churches as well as One Generation Away and Second Harvest, has made the building a valuable resource in Nashville's most food insecure area. Sleeping under the snow and ice are 1,500 tulips planted by enthusiastic volunteers.

Thank you for being part of the magical, diverse community of love that comprises the Tennessee Justice Center and makes its work possible. Whether we're running or sledding, your solidarity and support keep us going.



MISSION

To relentlessly protect and improve the laws, policies, and programs that secure dignity and opportunity for all Tennesseans.

VISION

We envision a state where Tennesseans, across the lines of race, class, age, ability, and gender, have their voices heard and their most basic needs met.

CORE VALUES

The ideals that guide our work and drive our daily efforts towards justice for all Tennesseans: **Compassion | Excellence | Knowledge | Courage | Joy**

OUR HISTORY

We have been in this work since 1996, standing alongside Tennessee families and helping them gain access to the programs and benefits necessary for them to live. After Congress placed restrictions on legal services programs, effectively creating a two-tier justice system, community and bar leaders from all parts of the state and across the political spectrum established TJC to provide legal representation to Tennesseans who fall in the gap.

WHAT WE DO

TJC helps families from Memphis to Mountain City cut through the red tape and legal barriers that often deny them vital services like healthcare and nutrition. Using what we learn from individual cases, TJC pursues systemic reforms that benefit all Tennesseans. We advocate for public policies that will make Tennessee a more just, compassionate, and inclusive state for all.

OUR COMMITMENT TO EQUITY

TJC believes that diversity, equity and inclusion are vital to our mission of ensuring justice for all. We recognize that racism is foundational to the social and economic disparities that plague our nation. We work to achieve opportunity, security, and dignity for all Tennesseans. We tackle barriers to inclusion by humbly focusing on what's broken both inside and outside of TJC.

SYSTEM CHANGES

PROTECTING HEALTH COVERAGE

In April the COVID public health emergency officially ended, triggering review of the TennCare eligibility of over 1.5 million Tennesseans in a process that continues throughout 2024. Half are children, and most of the adults are elderly, pregnant or have severe disabilities. The state projects that 500,000 will lose their coverage. Three-fourths are terminated for failing to navigate the dauntingly complex process, rather than because they fail to meet eligibility criteria.

TJC developed an “all hands on deck” strategy for informing the public, training volunteers and engaging organizations across the state to help people maintain their coverage. With a series of webinars and ongoing technical support, TJC trained and supports over 1,000 volunteers and professionals who assist families and refer problems to TJC staff. This immense team effort has not only provided direct assistance that has preserved coverage for thousands of people but has enabled TJC to get the state to address several systemic issues that were affecting thousands more.

In a week-long trial in November TJC and pro-bono colleagues from three national firms presented their case in a class action challenging procedural defects in the TennCare eligibility process and the state’s failure to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities. The case seeks injunctive relief requiring the reinstatement of 108,000 people wrongfully terminated, the prospective reform of TennCare notices and appeals, and the creation of an effective system for accommodating people with disabilities. A ruling is expected by mid-2024, but the state has already adopted some reforms under pressure from the lawsuit.

IMPROVING CHILD NUTRITION

In 2023 TJC launched a comprehensive multi-year strategy to improve nutrition for children from birth to adulthood, by improving the state’s administration of three vital federal nutrition programs that improve children’s cognitive and physical development, with lifelong benefits in learning, earnings, health and longevity.

- The Women, Infants & Children (WIC) program provides supplemental nutrition to pregnant and post-partum mothers and to their infant and pre-school children. Tennessee ranks 50th in the nation, with only two of every five eligible mothers and children receiving WIC. TJC advocacy will benefit thousands of children during a crucial period of their brain development.
- School meal programs provide much needed food security in Grades K-12. For years, TJC has played a leading role in expanding these programs across the state. Our next goal is to win approval of universal eligibility in all schools, a policy shown to materially improve education outcomes for at-risk children.
- The Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) program provided nutrition assistance to millions of children during the COVID pandemic, proving the value of such assistance when school meals are unavailable. Congress authorized a new “Summer EBT” program when school is out, but Tennessee was one of a handful of states that did not sign up. With a December deadline looming, TJC led a coalition of educators, agencies and children’s advocates that persuaded officials to opt in at the last minute. As a result, 644,000 low-income Tennessee children in grades K-12 will be eligible to receive Summer EBT starting this year.

ADVOCACY FOR TENNESSEANS

When systemic problems impact lots of people, TJC steps in to find out why they are happening and what can be done to correct them. We address these issues through the court system. We partner with community organizations to educate and inform lawmakers and members of the public, and we equip Tennesseans with the tools needed to make their voices heard.

AT A GLANCE

55

Systemic issues identified and addressed by working individual cases and in collaboration with partner organizations



17,929

Individuals engaged in meaningful action (attended trainings, called representatives, wrote letters, volunteered, etc.)

1,582

New partners added throughout the state, focusing on groups led by and serving communities of color



1,297

Established partners actively engaged throughout the state

9,409

Volunteer hours leveraged

CHAMPIONS FOR FAMILIES

1,844

TOTAL CASES

\$5.2M


TOTAL CLIENT BENEFITS

SECURED

80

COUNTIES REACHED





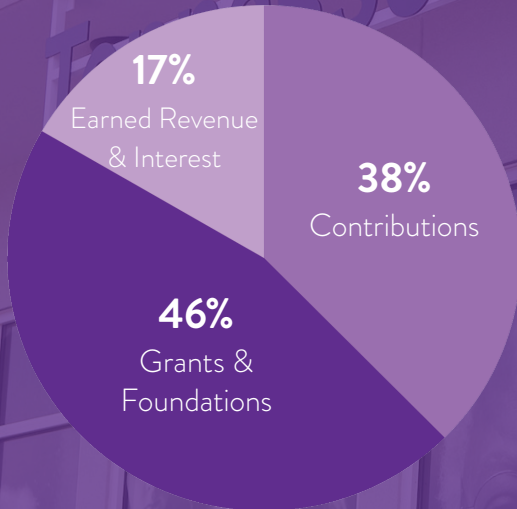
DiJuana Davis reached out to TJC when a visit to the emergency room revealed the termination of her and her children from TennCare without prior notice. DiJuana battles severe anemia, which requires infusions; and her children also suffer from severe medical conditions. As a result, reliable health insurance for her family is crucial. Faced with this crisis, the Davis family turned to TJC for assistance to reinstate their health coverage. To DiJuana's surprise, she discovered that TennCare had sent renewal materials to an unknown person at an unknown address in an unfamiliar city.

DiJuana courageously stepped into the role of a key witness in the *A.M.C. vs Smith* trial, a case that focuses on individuals who have wrongfully been terminated from TennCare. Her testimony vividly illustrated the profound impact of even a temporary loss in health coverage. At trial, she recounted how the loss of insurance made a critical surgery impossible and resulted in a lasting illness. TJC currently awaits the trial ruling.

In the face of adversity, DiJuana works to raise awareness by sharing her story, urging lawmakers to institute changes to prevent such tragedies for other families. She advocates for TennCare to address mistakes promptly and to recognize that real people's health is at stake. Her story underscores the urgency for systemic improvements in healthcare processes— which is what TJC fights for everyday.

2023 FINANCIAL INFORMATION

TJC relies on private foundations and generous donors to make our programmatic work possible. In 2023, 21 private foundations granted TJC \$1.5 million and 951 unique donors contributed \$1.3 million to our programmatic work.



TOTAL INCOME

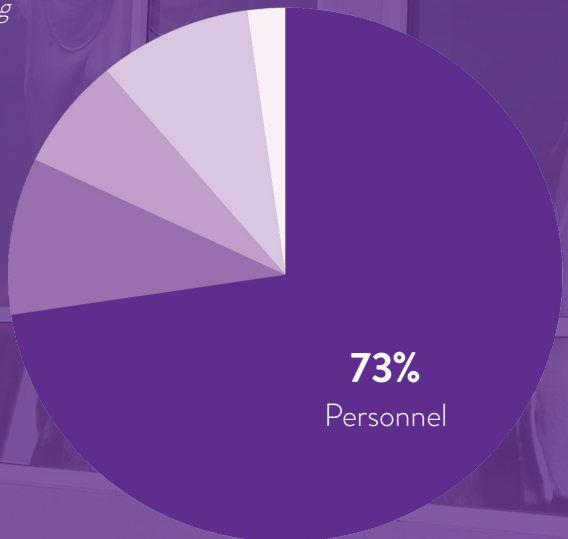
\$3,451,629

TOTAL EXPENSES

\$3,329,527

Excludes one-time, non-recurring employee retention credit.

- 9% Occupancy
- 7% Office & Operating
- 9% Contracts
- 2% Fundraising (Non-Personnel)



Based on unaudited financial statements.

BUILDING OUR **FUTURE**

In addition to the support received for our programmatic work, TJC received \$848,882 in support for our continued Capital Campaign efforts in 2023. Thanks to this support, we have just \$1 million left until we are debt free. We moved in to our new home at 155 Lafayette Street in August of 2023 and have already uncovered many new opportunities that a permanent home provides for better serving our fellow Tennesseans.

SPECIAL THANKS TO

FRANK AND AMY GARRISON

KEN AND LYNN MELKUS

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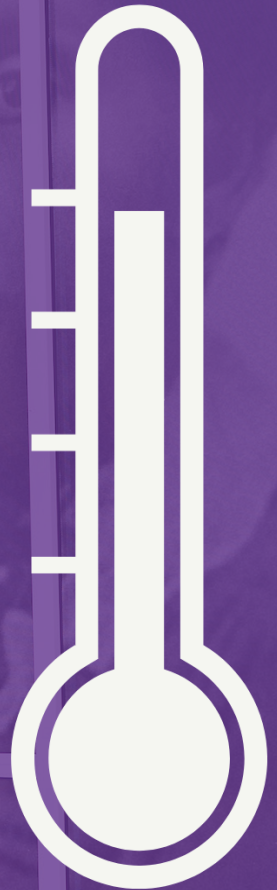
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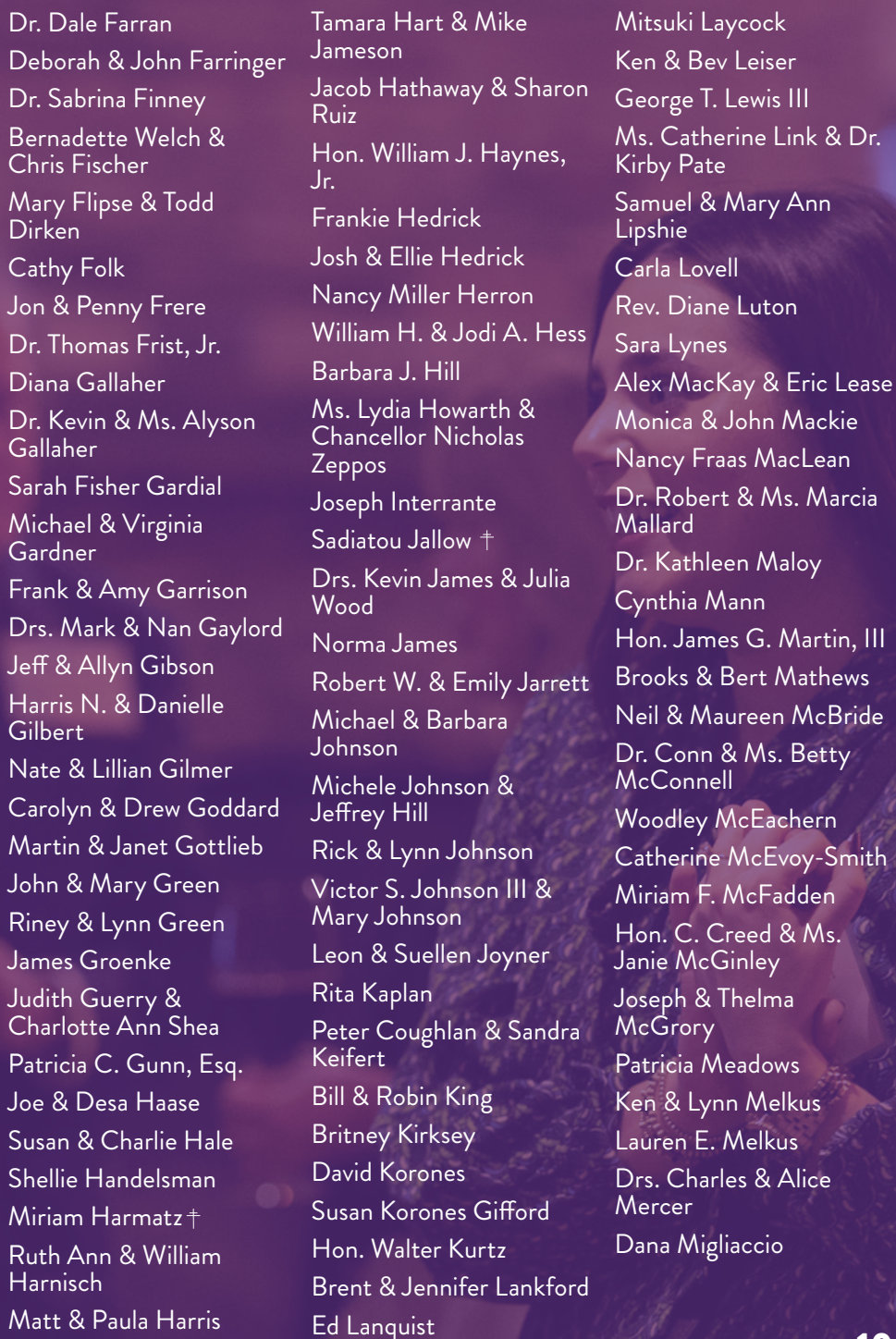
\$1M LEFT BEFORE
WE SETTLE INTO
OUR FOREVER
HOME **DEBT FREE!**



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The Iris Society honors donors who contribute \$1,000 or more within the calendar year or include TJC in their estate plans. Like irises, we are known for our resilience. Like so many of our clients, partners, and community members, we are faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles every day. We just keep working and we could not do so without our supporters. Their generosity and compassion allow us the opportunity to fight for the dignity, independence, and opportunity for all Tennesseans.

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Raising the Bar is a three-year pledge program for law firms. Support from law firms enables TJC to take on exclusively non-paying cases. These cases ensure that families across Tennessee, regardless of their financial means, have access to vital services.

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