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Tennessee Justice Center Co-Founder Michele Johnson Named Equal Justice Works 40×40 Alumni Changemaker

Nashville, TN, September 30, 2026 – Tennessee Justice Center (TJC) Co-Founder and Executive Director Michele Johnson has been named one of Equal Justice Works' 40×40 Alumni Changemakers, a national recognition honoring 40 alumni whose leadership and service have advanced justice and strengthened communities across the country.

The recognition is part of Equal Justice Works' 40th anniversary celebration and honors public interest leaders from across four decades. Johnson was selected for her leadership in expanding access to healthcare and nutrition programs and building TJC into a statewide organization serving Tennesseans across all 95 counties.

Johnson helped found TJC in 1996 after federal restrictions threatened the ability of legal services organizations to advocate for systemic change on behalf of low-income families. She has since helped lead TJC's work to remove barriers to healthcare and nutrition programs through individual representation, litigation, and policy advocacy.

As lead counsel, Johnson negotiated a landmark class action settlement that reformed healthcare for hundreds of thousands of Tennessee children enrolled in TennCare. Over the past 30 years, TJC's work has secured more than \$8 billion in healthcare benefits and hundreds of millions of dollars in nutrition assistance for Tennesseans.

"Being recognized alongside so many people who have dedicated their careers to public service is an incredible honor," said Johnson. "When we started TJC 30 years ago, we wanted Tennesseans to have somewhere to turn when systems meant to help them fell short. I'm proud of what we've built, the families who have trusted us and the advocates and public interest lawyers who continue to choose this work."

Under Johnson's leadership, TJC has grown from a seven-person organization to a staff of 30. She also led a \$9 million campaign to establish TJC's permanent home in Nashville and has become a nationally recognized voice on healthcare, Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Johnson's connection to Equal Justice Works spans nearly three decades. TJC has hosted Equal Justice Works Fellows since 1998, helping early-career attorneys build careers in public interest law while expanding the organization's capacity to serve Tennessee families.

"Equal Justice Works was founded on the belief that talented lawyers can help communities turn the promise of justice into reality," said Verna Williams, CEO of Equal Justice Works. "Forty years later, these 40 Changemakers show what that investment can make possible."

The 40×40 Alumni Changemakers will be recognized throughout Equal Justice Works' anniversary year, including at the organization's annual Scales of Justice gala on October 22, 2026, in Washington, D.C.

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[About Tennessee Justice Center / www.tnjustice.org](http://www.tnjustice.org)

For over 30 years, the Tennessee Justice Center has been standing with vulnerable Tennessee families and helping them access basic necessities of life. Since opening our doors in 1996, TJC has used lawsuits, legislation and coalition building to overcome injustice, winning \$8 billion in health care and hundreds of millions in financial and nutrition assistance for Tennesseans. Aside from lawsuits, TJC helps assist seniors and other individuals with TennCare, SNAP and other public benefit programs.

[About Equal Justice Works / www.equaljusticeworks.org](http://www.equaljusticeworks.org)

Equal Justice Works is the nation's largest facilitator of opportunities in public interest law. Since 1986, the organization has created opportunities for law students and lawyers to expand access to justice and bring lasting change to underserved communities across the country. Equal Justice Works has mobilized more than 2,650 Fellows, of which more than 85 percent remain in public service.