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Dear Friends of the Tennessee Justice Center:

Twenty years ago this month, a group of civic-minded Tennesseans came together to found the Tennessee Justice Center. Their nonpartisan community leadership provides an inspiring lesson for our present, fractious times. Two decades later, their legacy continues to touch thousands of Tennesseans' lives.

In 1995 as now, politics were polarized. Harsh rhetoric had taken the place of civil discourse in Washington, and Congress and the White House were at odds. Congress had thwarted equal justice under law by severely restricting the activities and funding of Legal Services programs across the country, and some Washington politicians were intent on doing away with those services completely. This denial of justice demeaned millions of Americans and threatened our nation's cherished principles of fairness, equality and the rule of law.

Community leaders from all parts of our state and from every part of the political spectrum, including leaders in the legal profession, Legal Services colleagues, and compassionate donors, founded TJC to help vulnerable Tennesseans overcome the barriers to justice that Congress had just erected. Their example became a model that inspired similar efforts across the country, and continues to inspire me today.

So much has changed in the intervening decades. In 1995, I was a new law school graduate just getting started at her dream job. Now I'm a mother of three boys who are nearly as tall as I am! TJC has also grown. We only had one and a half laptop computers when we started (counting the one with the cracked screen), phones manufactured in 1975, and hand-me-down law books. Phone messages were taken on paper slips, and we had no email. Now we collaborate with pro bono co-counsel in national law firms using cloud-based evidence storage. Our colleagues are able to serve TJC's clients from their firms' offices in Montgomery, Washington, and New York. We can access a client's file from anywhere using our smart phones, or file federal court briefs from an airport waiting area. TJC's young, creative staffers have taught us to use social media as a powerful advocacy tool, and they are now asked to national conferences to teach other nonprofits how to do the same.

And yet, in the ways that count most, TJC remains unchanged. TJC still provides low income Tennesseans representation that matches the quality of that available to their powerful adversaries. Just as in 1995, we draw inspiration from our courageous clients. We are so grateful for being allowed into their difficult lives and for the privilege of standing with them, when no one else will, in moments of pain and heartache. TJC's history has been written in landmark court

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decisions laws, and public policy reforms that demonstrate the majesty of a legal system that equally respects the dignity and worth of every person. TJC has improved health and mental health care for 750,000 low income kids, established the right of Medicare patients to enforce federal care standards, won improvements in long term care for the frail elderly, and pushed reforms to help single mothers to become self-supporting. Despite some hard knocks over the years, TJC is still an indomitable organization that holds powerful institutions accountable before the law on behalf of tens of thousands of citizens each year.

Our office remains an exciting place, where staff are inspired by our clients and energized by TJC's founding vision. Over the years, that team has grown beyond our office walls. Legions of volunteers and donors continue to sustain our founders' legacy of concern for the most vulnerable among us.

For TJC staff, every landmark conjures memories of clients whom we know and admire, and whose stories tell TJC's story. Clients like Marvin Berry, who was paralyzed in a shooting accident when he was a little boy. In spite of difficult circumstances, Marvin learned to live independently, with the crucial help of the nurse aides who come to his house a couple of hours a day. Marvin worked hard, graduated college, and opened a small business.

But when Marvin was twenty-five, his HMO took steps to eliminate the home care he relied on. The HMO told him he would have to move to a nursing home, away from his friends and family, cut off from the life he had built for himself. TJC helped Marvin and other clients bring a case that restored home services to those who needed them. The case ultimately redirected hundreds of millions of Medicaid dollars away from institutions to home services. About the case, Marvin says, "TJC rescued me from a nursing home sentence. I would not have survived my twenties and thirties in an institution. They didn't just save my life; their work enabled me to have a full life and a bright future." Marvin recently joined TJC's board of directors, and continues to lend his courage, compassion, and insight to our present work and to shaping our future course. His infectious optimism and kindness are a blessing to all who know him.

Last week, we held a great event in Nashville to honor TJC's visionary founders and to celebrate the twenty years of service they made possible. If you were able to attend or otherwise support the event, thank you again. If not, the celebration continues, and it's not too late to join. Every day, our staff, volunteers, and generous supporters celebrate the legacy of TJC's founders by helping to provide an effective voice for vulnerable children and families across Tennessee. Thank you so much for being part of this exciting legacy, and let the celebration continue!

Sincerely yours,

Michele Johnson