Dear Friends,

What a year! TJC specializes in hard years, but my extroverted self found this the absolute hardest one in our 25-year history. TJC didn’t stop solving problems, amplifying voices, or reminding our clients they were cherished. It just felt like we were in the back of the station wagon trying to drive it by Zoom. I can only say thank you for reminding us we weren’t alone, joining your voice to ours and donating time and treasure to enable TJC to be there for all the Tennesseans who rely on us.

It was a great honor to be Congressman Cooper’s guest at President Trump’s State of the Union address early in the year. In retrospect, it foreshadowed the rest of the year. I am not easily shocked, but the cruelty and contempt in the president’s speech kept me awake all that night. I wondered how TJC could help give voice to the “better angels of our nature” in repairing our deeply wounded nation. How could we remind our community of the need to include all Americans, if our great, diverse nation is to work?

Two weeks later, a TJC intern had one of the first confirmed COVID-19 cases in the state, and we were among the first organizations to switch to remote work. Our team adapted so quickly that the flow of client casework was never interrupted even once during the tumultuous year. Katie Ann Twiggs lost her home and all of her belongings in the Nashville tornado. Two days later, she was delivering a letter to Governor Lee, co-signed by organizations serving the elderly and people with disabilities, asking him to pause all TennCare eligibility reviews that threatened to disrupt care for nursing home residents. The letter prompted him to make Tennessee the first state to protect this vulnerable population from dislocation during the pandemic.

In April, after learning we were going to cancel our annual fundraiser because of the pandemic, a longtime TJC friend called from a hospital to say, “The show must go on!” Stricken by COVID and fighting for his life, he offered a challenge grant to support a virtual event. Thankfully, he recovered and the event proved our most successful ever.

We brought suit to restore coverage to 178,000 children and adults who had lost their coverage during the preceding year due to systemic defects in the TennCare eligibility process. TennCare immediately hurried to fix a number of flaws they had ignored for months. But the eligibility process remains troubled, and we are pressing ahead for comprehensive reforms. With unemployment claims increasing by 1,300% and COVID relief policies in constant flux, TJC became a clearinghouse for families and other agencies seeking aid. Our COVID resource page was viewed by 11,442 people. Scores of other agencies relied on our webinars and bulletins as staff fielded calls from thousands of families.

Throughout its history, TJC has fought the racial inequities in health and wealth that are the legacy of four centuries of unrelenting violence, theft, and oppression. The tragedies of 2020 forced me and other white members of the TJC family to see the enormity of racism with new eyes. We recognize with fresh urgency the need to overcome it in ourselves, and in every aspect of TJC’s work for justice.

Throughout the year, you and other generous supporters enabled TJC to raise more than ever, enabling us to touch many thousands of lives. In a plague year, you helped produce miracles. We hope you enjoy reading about some of them here.
OUR HISTORY

For 25 years, the Tennessee Justice Center (TJC) has been standing with vulnerable Tennessee families and helping them access basic necessities of life. After Congress placed restrictions on Legal Aid programs, community and bar leaders from all parts of our state and across the political spectrum established TJC in 1996 to fill the gap in representation of vulnerable Tennesseans.

WHAT WE DO

TJC helps families from Memphis to Mountain City, by cutting through red tape to access vital services like health care and nutrition. Using what we learn from individual cases, TJC pursues systemic reforms that benefit all Tennesseans. TJC advocates for a state that supports the health care and economic infrastructure on which our communities depend.

VICTORIES

TJC uses legal tools to improve the lives of millions of Tennesseans and hold government accountable. Some of our successes include:

• Winning health care for over a hundred thousand children and adults whose TennCare applications had been lost or delayed for months. (Wilson v. Gordon)

• Securing and preserving appeal rights for individuals whose TennCare HMOs denied services ordered by their doctors. (Binta B. v. Gordon)

• Winning extensive improvements to TennCare services for over 750,000 children, ensuring they had access to all medically necessary services ordered by their doctor. (John B. v. Emkes)

• Restoring health care to tens of thousands of Tennesseans after the state wrongfully terminated their TennCare coverage. (Rosen v. Goetz)

• Protecting the health and independence of older adults and people with disabilities by ensuring access to comparable services at home rather than in a nursing home. (Newberry v. Goetz)

• Blocking state legislation that would make 300,000 more Tennesseans food insecure by cutting SNAP benefits.

• Joining partners and affected families to persuade state officials to establish a “Katie Beckett” program in Tennessee, winning over 3,000 families the Medicaid home health services they need to care for their medically fragile children at home and avoid their institutionalization.

OUR COMMITMENT TO EQUITY

Tennessee Justice Center believes that diversity, equity, and inclusion are intrinsically valuable and necessary to manifest our mission of 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 are committed to expanding and continuing our advocacy, education, and litigation work as a means towards greater equity.

SPOTLIGHT PANDEMIC EBT (P-EBT)

In 2020, TJC played a crucial leadership role in getting nearly $200 million in food aid to low-income Tennessee children.

In March, as the pandemic closed schools throughout the country, Congress gave states the option of providing federal financial assistance to children who had been receiving free meals at school. The Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) program enables families to buy food to replace those missed school meals. 718,000 Tennessee children were eligible for the benefits in March-May, if the state would agree to distribute them.

When state officials hesitated, TJC organized a statewide coalition of anti-hunger agencies and educators to advocate for Tennessee to make P-EBT benefits available to Tennessee’s children. The state relented and assigned the Department of Human Services the task of distributing the federal benefits. Each of the 330,000 children who were already receiving SNAP (formerly “food stamps”) immediately received $250 in food aid, which was added electronically to their families’ SNAP cards.

Compelling the state to get P-EBT to the other 388,000 children, who were not receiving SNAP, required a months-long campaign. In June, DHS required those children—all of whom were already certified as eligible by their local schools—to re-apply online during a poorly publicized two-week window. Few families were aware of the requirement or had the requisite online access or computer skills, and only a few thousand applied. TJC helped over 750 individual children, enabling it to document the pervasive flaws in the process. Three times over the next five months, the TJC-led coalition stopped DHS from returning the other children’s benefits to Washington. With legal analysis, negotiations, and media advocacy, the TJC-led coalition finally obtained the state’s commitment to issue benefits to all those eligible. TJC continues working to improve the distribution of P-EBT during the current school year.
DIJUANA DAVIS

DiJuana is the mother of six children. She was born and raised in Nashville, where she currently lives with her family. DiJuana reached out to the Tennessee Justice Center after she took her daughter to the emergency room and learned that she and her children had all been terminated from TennCare. This came as a shock because they never received any notice in the mail. While working with the Davis family to help them get their TennCare reinstated, it was discovered that their renewal materials had been sent to a family they had never heard of, in a city where they had never lived! The family was terminated for not responding to notices they never received.

DiJuana has severe anemia requiring infusions and her children have health conditions including asthma, allergies, and ADHD, making reliable health insurance very important to them. Ms. Davis learned about TJC from a flier she received from one of her children’s schools, and TJC helped the family get a continuation of benefits on their eligibility appeals so they could get coverage back until a decision was made on their appeals.

Even after the state claimed to have fixed the problem, one of the children was still without coverage, and TJC found the family’s TennCare account had been merged with that of another family across the state. Using the appeal process established years before as a result of TJC’s Rosen victory, Ms. Davis was finally able to get her whole family covered. The Davis family is now a plaintiff in A.M.C. v. Smith, TJC’s pending class action lawsuit against the state for wrongfully terminating people.
ADVOCACY FOR TENNESSEANS

When systemic problems affect lots of people, we find a way to address the laws, practices, and policies that cause those problems. We address these issues in the courts, work with partners to educate and inform lawmakers and the public, and equip Tennesseans with the tools they need to make their voices heard.

75,000
SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENTS

73
EARNED MEDIA HITS

19,807
SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS

72,914
WEBSITE VISITORS

3,512
LETTERS AND EMAILS TO LEGISLATORS

HEALTH EQUITY

TJC has built out an impressive webpage that features data visualizations and other resources about health disparities and policies, such as expanding coverage, to advance health equity. In July 2020, the Tennessee Justice Center authored a policy brief on health disparities in Tennessee and the need for Medicaid expansion: Rooted in Racism: An Analysis of Health Disparities in Tennessee. TJC, along with the Equity Alliance, issued a press release about the brief that included a quote from The Equity Alliance.

In addition, TJC has developed new messaging for the campaign that frames Medicaid expansion as one step in addressing health disparities, which has been effective messaging to re-engage a lot of stakeholders (mayors, coalition partners, etc.). Since TJC published our policy brief about racism, health disparities, and Medicaid expansion, TJC has been invited to speak on topics related to Medicaid and health equity at several conferences and events held by partner organizations, reaching approximately 650 people. We continue to post new content on the health equity webpage to uplift solutions to the systemic barriers that drive racial disparities. We also drove almost 200 emails to Gov. Lee urging him to restore funding for TennCare postpartum coverage after it was announced that the pilot program was abandoned due to the pandemic.

Preconception, prenatal, and postpartum coverage is a proven solution to help reduce maternal mortality rates, which are disproportionately higher for Black mothers.

TJC receives no government funds and relies on private foundations and generous donors to make our work possible. Donors and corporations contributed $911,692 to the work in 2020. Gifts came from 995 households, of which 299 are new donors and 85 are recurring donors. The Iris Society honors donors who contribute $1,000 or more within the calendar year or include TJC in their estate plans.

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7,500
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FINANCIAL INFORMATION

TOTAL INCOME
$2,352,111

TOTAL EXPENSES
$2,135,106

59% CONTRIBUTIONS
40% FOUNDATIONS & GRANTS
1% EARNED INCOME

82% PERSONNEL
7% OCCUPANCY
6% OFFICE
3% OUTREACH
2% FUNDRAISING (NON-PERSONNEL)

FOUNDATION AND PARTNER SUPPORTERS

RAISING THE BAR LAW FIRMS

GOLD LEVEL

SILVER LEVEL

BRONZE LEVEL