



ANNUAL REPORT

2024

A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

TJC's secret strength has always come from what Bryan Stevenson calls the "power of proximity," staying close to and drawing inspiration from those who are too often ignored or scapegoated by those in power. Our neighbors' daily realities are unrelenting, heartbreaking, and infuriating. Our careful documentation of those realities defies a political culture more focused on deception than facts, on marketing than problem solving, and on social media posturing than preventing pain.

This year, our brave clients in the *A.M.C. v. Smith* case achieved a monumental victory for the 1.4 million children and adults who rely on TennCare, Tennessee's Medicaid program. Their powerful testimony revealed the harrowing realities for families desperately trying to hold onto TennCare coverage for a child with cancer, or for a grandparent suffocating with emphysema. The court's 120-page opinion was a stinging indictment of the state's callous indifference, which has resulted in 500,000 people losing health coverage. Of those, 70% were never found ineligible but were cut off simply because of their inability to overcome the red tape. We are working now to convert our big court victory into the effective reforms that families need and deserve.

When we moved to this neighborhood, walk-in traffic quickly became intensive, with neighbors coming to our doors who had not had a real meal in days. They were victims of the state's mismanagement of the SNAP ("food stamp") program. In the first four months of the year, 279,000 people – a third of households on the program – lost benefits. As with TennCare, it wasn't because most were ineligible, but because of red tape and state agency dysfunction. We added staff and trained volunteers to enable us to handle over 1,200 individual cases, and in that process gained insights and a wealth of compelling evidence. The culmination of that work was the filing of a federal class action entitled *Bull v. Carter*, which seeks to remedy the systemic flaws that are causing so much suffering.

Just as proud as I am of the TJC team doing all of that work, I am in awe of the inspiring clients who step forward to challenge official falsehoods and seek justice for their neighbors. This includes heroes like Ghulam Mustafa Safa and his family, who escaped a hostile regime in their native Afghanistan, where they faced retribution as a result of his service to the U.S. Embassy. Settled in Nashville with the help of a refugee resettlement agency, Mr. Safa sought out SNAP assistance. For months, he repeatedly provided proof of his eligibility for the SNAP program, only to have DHS disregard that proof and deny his family critical SNAP assistance. He tried unsuccessfully to reach someone at the DHS call center and spent hours more waiting in a DHS office packed with people desperately seeking help to no avail. Mr. Safa is typical of the extraordinary clients who, having gained relief for their own families, are now helping us win relief for thousands of others.

The year ahead is likely to be our most challenging yet in terms of attacks on the safety net programs on which millions of Americans depend. But the "power of proximity" will get us through, exposing us not just to the injustices our clients face, but their courage and generosity of spirit. They demonstrate a stubborn faith in our country's goodness and capacity to be better, and an intractable resilience that keeps them speaking up for others.

This proximity prompts us to be better and work harder. As we embark on a year of work plans that will surely test our resilience, we know from our clients that together we can make the impossible possible. Thanks for being a part of this vital work and for standing with us and our heroic clients.



Michelle M. Johnson

A large, faint purple silhouette of a person, likely a personification of justice, holding a sword aloft in their right hand and a pair of scales in their left. The figure is centered in the background of the page.

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

A DEFINING WIN FOR HEALTHCARE ACCESS

In partnership with the National Health Law Program, National Center for Law & Economic Justice, and Selendy Gay PLLC, the Tennessee Justice Center (TJC) achieved a landmark victory on August 26, 2024, when the U.S. District Court ruled in favor of our clients in the *AMC v. Smith* case against TennCare, Tennessee's Medicaid program. After years of litigation, TJC and our partner firms proved TennCare violated the rights of Tennesseans under the Medicaid Act, the Due Process Clause, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The court emphasized, "Poor, disabled, and otherwise disadvantaged Tennesseans should not require luck, perseverance, and zealous lawyering to receive healthcare benefits they are entitled to under the law." This ruling impacts more than 2.3 million individuals, highlights TennCare's systemic failures, and underscores the necessity of TJC's work in holding systems accountable.

This case reflects TJC's broader efforts in 2024, including securing \$11.7 million in benefits and advancing equitable healthcare access for all Tennesseans.

EXPANDING NUTRITION ACCESS

TJC made significant strides in combating food insecurity and improving access to essential nutrition programs, ensuring families and children across Tennessee could lead healthier lives.

- **WIC Advocacy and Growth:** By leveraging innovative outreach and strong partnerships, TJC achieved a 17% increase in WIC participation, reaching 144,000 participants by the end of 2024. Research initiatives and statewide collaborations provided actionable insights that empowered healthcare providers to better connect families with WIC benefits, closing gaps in access, and improving program awareness.
- **SNAP Improvements:** Addressing persistent challenges in SNAP administration, TJC advocated for expedited application processing, improved reimbursement for victims of SNAP fraud, and pushed for better support for families in disaster-affected areas. By working with partners at the federal and state levels, TJC also influenced key Farm Bill negotiations to protect and strengthen this essential program for low-income Tennesseans.
- **School and Summer Meal Advocacy:** TJC mobilized over 750 advocates to push for Tennessee's participation in the 2025 Summer EBT program, building on the success of 2024, when 656,000 children received critical food assistance during summer months. The organization also expanded its School Meals campaign, rallying support for legislation that ensures all students have access to nutritious meals, thereby addressing hunger and promoting academic success.

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.

AT A GLANCE

2.3M individuals across Tennessee benefited from systemic issue resolutions achieved through TJC's advocacy



1.78M social media impressions in 2024 - a record breaking achievement

17% increase in WIC participation across the state due to TJC's targeted outreach and advocacy



87 news media features, including in *The New York Times*, *Reuters*, and *Last Week Tonight With John Oliver*

11,430 volunteer hours leveraged



CHAMPIONS FOR **FAMILIES**

A mother of six from Memphis, TN, Ms. Candace Pegues is the picture of resilience, advocacy, and compassion. Candace juggles full-time mothering while undergoing dialysis 12 hours a week for chronic kidney failure, a diagnosis she received in March 2020. With six kids and her own health challenges, finding work that was flexible and sympathetic to her needs became significantly difficult.

With limited income, Candace had to manage paying for rent, utilities, clothes, transportation, school materials, and food for six growing kids. If not for the SNAP program, Candace would have to choose between paying rent or buying food. Many SNAP recipients— including Candace— experienced a loss of benefits due to DHS implementing a new technological system. Candace's family was dropped three times since the new system was put in place, and DHS failed to adequately notify her of a necessary verification submission. After reapplying, she didn't hear from DHS for over a month despite federal regulation requiring applications be processed within 30 days.

After learning about TJC's assistance with SNAP in a news story, Candace immediately reached out for help. With TJC's support, her family's benefits were reinstated and backdated to the original application date.



2,953

TOTAL CASES

\$11.7M

TOTAL CLIENT
BENEFITS SECURED

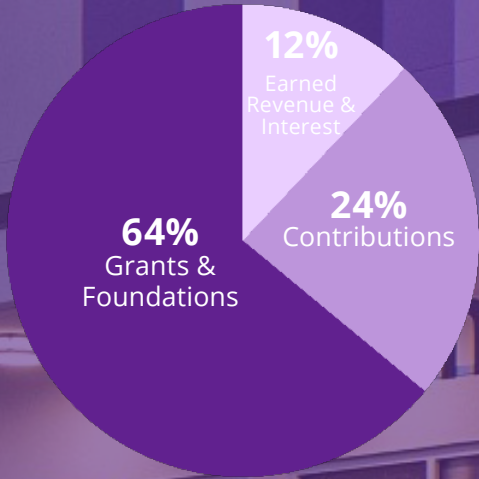
94

COUNTIES
REACHED



2024 FINANCIAL INFORMATION

TJC relies on generous foundations and donors to make our work possible. In 2024, TJC was granted \$2.94 million by 20 private foundations and government agencies. Additionally, 816 unique donors contributed \$1.08 million to our programmatic work.



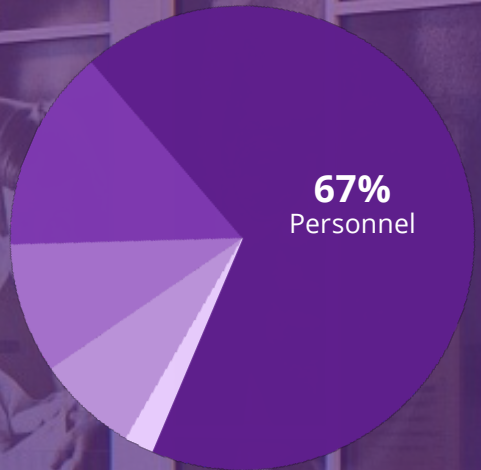
TOTAL INCOME

\$4,578,723

TOTAL EXPENSES

\$4,129,310

- 14%** Contracts & Subgrants
- 9%** Office & Operating
- 7%** Occupancy
- 2%** Fundraising (Non-Personnel)



Based on unaudited financial statements.

BUILDING OUR **FUTURE**

In addition to the support received for our programmatic work, TJC received \$1,052,783 in support for our continued Capital Campaign efforts in 2024. Thanks to this support, we have only \$361,224 left to be debt free! We are grateful to the 172 donors who have made it possible for us to better serve our fellow Tennesseans from our forever home.

SPECIAL THANKS TO

ANONYMOUS FUND

CARPENTER FAMILY FOUNDATION

THE FRIST FOUNDATION

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MARLENE & SPENCER HAYS FOUNDATION

HCA HEALTHCARE FOUNDATION

KHARIS FOUNDATION

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IRIS SOCIETY MEMBERS

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 partners and community members, we are faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles every day. We could not continue our work 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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★ Sustaining Star

† Legacy Donor

TJC NEXT GENERATION

YOUNG LEADERS WITH A LASTING IMPACT

JESUIT VOLUNTEER CORPS



We are proud to partner with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps (JVC), an organization that empowers young leaders to serve those in need and work toward justice. Through JVC, passionate volunteers join our team, bringing fresh energy and dedication to the fight for health and economic equity in Tennessee. Their service reflects the JVC mission of accompaniment and justice, strengthening TJC's work to build a more just and hopeful world.

HEALTHCARE JUSTICE CLINIC



Belmont's College of Law was awarded \$260,000 by the Speer Foundation to fund the Healthcare Justice Clinic, the College's first hybrid clinic that is embedded at TJC. The grant funds a two-year pilot of the clinic for the 2024-25 and 2025-26 academic years.

This collaboration combines expert advocacy with hands-on learning to create lasting impact. We are honored to partner with Belmont's College of Law and grateful to the Speer Foundation for making this possible.

Photo by Sam Simpkins, Belmont University Photographer

INTERNS AT TJC

TJC's internship program provides hands-on experience for students passionate about social justice and public health law.

These emerging leaders bring enthusiasm, dedication, and innovative ideas, contributing to meaningful change for the communities we serve. Whether assisting clients, researching legal issues, or helping with development efforts, our interns leave with the skills and knowledge to continue striving towards being the change they want to see in our society.



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EVENT SUPPORT



RAISING THE BAR

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.

PLATINUM



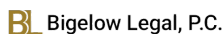
GOLD



SILVER



BRONZE





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