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November 2009

Dear Friend of the Tennessee Justice Center:

Thank you for standing up for the rights of all through your support of the Tennessee Justice Center. As we reach the end of a most challenging year, I urge you to stand with us once again. We value your support and need your help. And so do the many vulnerable Tennesseans who look to TJC to make America's promise of Equal Justice for All a reality in their lives.

On my desk is a postcard picture of Nelson Mandela, bearing his reminder that achieving justice "always seems impossible until it's done." Down the hall are historical images depicting inspiring Tennesseans of past generations, many of whom are nameless today. They worked tirelessly – fighting slavery, standing up for better working conditions and votes for women, marching for Civil Rights – to hold our nation true to its ideals. They remind us daily that nothing ever happens without the effort of lots of people who persevere even when justice seems unattainable. Their stories keep us going.

*Most of all, it is our clients' stories that keep us going.* They remind us why TJC's work for justice matters, even at times when justice seems all too distant.

Their cases involve the brutal necessities of life: subsistence for the states' poorest families, health care, foster care, mental health services. Typical is the experience of Trina, who just learned that her 10 year old son, Darius, had brain cancer. Days later, she learned that his health coverage had been cancelled. The doctors said it was imperative for Darius to undergo surgery at once, but the hospital refused the surgery until Trina could produce proof of coverage. TennCare insisted Darius was not eligible, and his distraught mother could not get either TennCare or the hospital to budge. She contacted TJC, we got his TennCare reinstated immediately, and Darius underwent a successful operation. Relieved from the terror that her child would go untreated, Trina is now able to devote herself to mothering Darius through chemotherapy, and his doctors are optimistic.

Through your help TJC is the source of such life-giving support to hundreds of individual families yearly who have no place else to turn. And TJC's class action and policy advocacy extend the impact of our work on behalf of individual clients like Darius to many thousands more. This year, for example, our TennCare advocacy preserved \$300 million of medical and mental health services for some 45,000 adults and children with disabilities. And TJC identified unused federal economic recovery funds that enabled the legislature to restore another \$25 million in services for foster children and people with severe mental illness.

TJC's experience serving individual clients has also enabled us to identify structural weaknesses in the existing Medicaid program. Several reforms proposed by TJC have made their way into the pending health reform legislation. These include provisions that would:

- strengthen Medicaid patients' access to physician services;
- tighten accountability by states and managed care contractors for their expenditure of federal Medicaid funds; and

- enable low income seniors to obtain affordable Medicare Supplement insurance when they lose Medicaid coverage

These technical fixes are “inside baseball,” devoid of the political and ideological overtones that have roiled the debate around health reform. But, if enacted, they have the potential to help hundreds of thousands of vulnerable Americans nationwide.

And yet, for all of TJC’s remarkable record of success, we don’t always succeed. No account of the past year would be accurate without acknowledging our failures. Because so much is at stake, the consequences of failure are often tragic, and cruelly unjust.

This year has been very difficult for hundreds of thousands of Tennessee families. The combined impact of the recession and of misguided state policies has cost Tennesseans hundreds of millions of dollars of much needed medical and mental health care. TJC lost several clients this year whose life-saving care was interrupted when they lost their health coverage. Many other clients had to watch their children suffer needlessly because the family lacked insurance.

As we have done for years, TJC has helped these families tell their stories to the media, at public forums and in legislative hearings. These courageous clients have reminded us that bearing witness against injustice is most essential at those very moments when justice seems most distant. We have been determined to stand with them in educating the public about how the current system betrays our national commitment to justice and equality.

But now, with health reform at the fore, we see glimmers that even work done without hope of tangible return may sometimes touch others in ways that matter. One of several clients who died needlessly in 2005, in the wake of TennCare purges that TJC slowed but could not stop, was a beautiful, vivacious young woman from Bristol named Nikki White. Her life-threatening lupus went untreated after she was cut from TennCare. Her doctor wrote sadly that, “Nikki died of complications of the failing American health care system.” It is too painful to imagine what her parents have suffered. Can injustice ever be crueler than when it costs your child’s life? Can justice ever feel more remote?

After Nikki died, I spoke to a reporter who interviewed Nikki’s parents and wrote a gripping account of Nikki’s death for the *Wall Street Journal*. Her story made an impression on T.R. Reid, who included it in his influential book, *The Healing of America*. In recent months, the story has been repeated in columns and editorials, cutting through the acrimony and political posturing to remind us all of what matters.

We don’t know at this point if there will be real health reform or, if there is, how to measure the impact of Nikki’s story. But surely her courageous parents have moved hearts and minds by their selfless desire to save others the pain they have suffered, and by their unflinching faith that America can be more just.

It is a privilege for TJC to serve such clients, and to work for the ideals we all hold dear. Please continue to be an indispensable partner in our work for justice. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,



Gordon Bonnyman  
Executive Director