



Advocates for Families in Need

301 Charlotte Avenue, Nashville, TN 37201
Phone: (615)255-0331 Fax: (615)255-0354
e-mail: gbonnyman@tnjustice.org website: www.tnjustice.org

November 2012

Dear Friends of the Tennessee Justice Center,

Felicia Burk. “Tireless” and “creative” are terms that only begin to describe this woman who, after raising her own family, adopted three children with severe disabilities and has been a foster mom to five other children with special needs. She doesn’t know the meaning of compassion fatigue, continuing to lavish love on kids whom others have left unloved, and tapping into wellsprings of creativity to help them overcome daunting challenges. It has been a privilege to work with Felicia to help get her children the care they need.

TJC is proud to hear our work described with the same words that apply to Felicia and our other clients. The respected health policy journal *Health Affairs* described us as “indefatigable.” Last month, Baptist Healing Trust honored TJC with its “Compassionate Care Award.” And national colleagues praise the creativity of TJC’s response to the challenges posed by the Supreme Court’s landmark health reform decision last June.

Founded 17 years ago as a tax-exempt, public interest law firm, TJC uses the law to seek systemic reforms that improve the lives of low-income Tennesseans. Over the years, TJC has secured access to millions of dollars in health care and nutritional assistance, as well as established invaluable legal protections, for over a million of our most vulnerable neighbors. TJC serves clients throughout Tennessee, ranging from immigrants to people with mental disabilities, from infants in foster care to seniors in nursing homes.

The secret sauce that has made this small nonprofit so effective has many ingredients. It starts with a dedicated staff. Add extraordinary clients, most of whom have few material resources, yet share their experiences and invaluable insights to enable TJC to make life easier for others. Our clients teach us that even when we feel that we have nothing, we each have plenty to share with others.

The collaboration of staff and clients is sustained by a compassionate community of donors, many of whom have supported TJC throughout its entire existence. Their generosity and encouragement have been, and remain, essential.

And then there are the selfless volunteers, from teen participants in our pilot peer counseling program to some of the most gifted attorneys and health care experts in the country. Tennessee colleagues have offered *pro bono* legal services, overcoming HMO denials to help children with special health care needs get the care their doctors have ordered. And last year alone, our *pro bono* co-counsel in the national law firms of

SNR Denton and Kirkland & Ellis provided a breathtaking \$4.9 million in professional services in the *John B.* case.

“Tireless” certainly describes our shared work on *John B.*, a case we brought on behalf of the 750,000 Tennessee children enrolled in TennCare. In 1998, we negotiated a settlement with the State of Tennessee and have since poured enormous resources into implementing the reforms prescribed in that settlement. Last year the state told the federal court that it had fulfilled the settlement and asked that the case be closed. After a month-long trial, the federal court ruled last February in the state’s favor. The court commended TJC for pursuing this case over the years and found that the consent decree had “clearly served its purpose well” by raising the level of service to TennCare children. We agree that the case has driven major improvements. But the doctors and parents with whom we work tell us that there is still much to be done, so the case is now on appeal.

TJC’s work touches many lives beyond Tennessee. We are working with national colleagues to develop technical recommendations for federal officials planning the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) provisions that take effect in 2014. The Supreme Court’s ruling on the ACA presented a whole new set of challenges. While news coverage focused on the Court’s decision to uphold the law, TJC immediately recognized the decision’s threat to coverage for the most vulnerable of uninsured families. As a result of the decision, each state now has the option not to implement the ACA’s Medicaid reforms extending coverage to the state’s poor and near-poor residents. Coverage for 330,000 uninsured Tennesseans hangs on our state’s decision. Nationally, coverage for millions is now up for grabs.

Within hours of the Supreme Court’s ruling, TJC was explaining its implications to Tennessee decision makers, health care providers and community leaders. We have been running at the issue ever since and will continue to do so until the issue is decided sometime next year. TJC has focused on the practical implications of Medicaid reform for Tennessee’s economy, state and local government budgets, and large and small employers. We have distributed analyses and educational materials explaining those implications (posted on our website under “Issues and Resources”). National organizations have distributed the materials, which have been copied and adapted by colleagues for use in other states.

We are grateful to you and to all – staff, clients, donors and volunteers – who partner in TJC’s work, from shaping health reform to helping Felicia’s kids get the care they need. Please continue to give as you are able, so that, together, we can continue to make our community more compassionate, more inclusive and more just – for *everyone*.

Sincerely yours,



Gordon Bonnyman
Executive Director