

MISSISSIPPI CENTER FOR JUSTICE

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A Mississippi Nonprofit Corporation

2009 Public Interest Law Summer Internships

The Mississippi Center for Justice invites law students to apply for our summer internships to take part in our work to advance social justice in Mississippi. Although we cannot provide a stipend, we will work with students to meet grant application deadlines at their schools or with other funders. We will encourage all summer interns accepted into our program to submit an application to Equal Justice Works Summer Corps to earn a \$1000 education award. (Applications open in spring 2009. Check www.equaljusticeworks.org for more information.) We also offer a unique legal experience that isn't limited by the walls of a courtroom. You'll gain invaluable insight into the many ways that the law can and should improve the quality of life for all citizens.

The Mississippi Center for Justice opened its doors in 2003, giving Mississippi a critical capacity to pursue racial and economic justice through advocacy for systemic change. The Mississippi Center for Justice carries out its mission through a *community lawyering* approach that advances specific social justice campaigns in partnership with national and local organizations and community leaders. The Mississippi Center for Justice has two offices in Mississippi, one in Jackson and one in Biloxi. Our team includes attorneys, legal assistants and other professionals who are committed to making Mississippi a model social justice state.

Since its inception, the Mississippi Center for Justice has been at the forefront of policy battles on the state and federal levels to bring about systemic change that improves the social justice environment for all Mississippians. In 2003, a U.S. Department of Justice investigation report about intolerable conditions at the training schools became a springboard for action. In September 2003, we co-convened the first meeting of the Mississippi Coalition to Prevent Schoolhouse to Jailhouse. Through a combination of litigation strategies, media advocacy and legislative advocacy, we helped remediate unconstitutional conditions and achieve a substantial reduction in the number of children incarcerated.

The Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2005 was hailed by *The Clarion-Ledger* as the "most important legislation to emerge from the 2005 session." In 2006, a similar legislative advocacy effort by the Coalition resulted in enactment of the Mississippi Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Act, which provided significant funding for community-based incarceration alternatives, imposed training requirements for court-appointed juvenile public defenders, and set comprehensive standards for juvenile detention centers.

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Deep South affiliate of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

In 2004, we scored another legal victory in *Vinson v. Barbour*, a federal court class action lawsuit that prevented 65,000 poverty level aged and disabled (PLAD) Mississippians from losing their Medicaid benefits.

In 2005, Mississippi was struck by the worst natural disaster in the nation's history. In the immediate wake of Hurricane Katrina, the Center recognized that rebuilding coastal Mississippi presented a unique opportunity to rectify persistent racial and economic inequities, but that this possibility would be lost without effective legal and policy advocacy on behalf of minority and low-income people and communities at every phase of the process. With the opening of our Katrina Recovery Office in Biloxi in October 2005, we put our community lawyering approach into action – creating partnerships with and taking direction from community leaders – in service to Katrina survivors to achieve two goals:

- To make Mississippi's low-income housing recovery on the Gulf Coast a model of racial and economic justice by promoting affordable housing as a hallmark of the recovery process. An equitable recovery would advance home equity as a primary tool for low-income households to build wealth and would also provide for affordable rental housing. The Mississippi Center for Justice provided systemic advocacy with the governmental and planning agencies whose decisions would determine the post-Katrina landscape and helped to meet individual legal needs in the areas of housing and consumer practices.
- To build a post-Katrina legal delivery system that more nearly fulfills the promise of justice for all. The destruction wrought by the hurricane cast a spotlight on the historic inadequacies of Mississippi's legal aid and pro bono delivery systems to meet an already overwhelming need, but it also produced an outpouring of generous offers of legal assistance from both in and out of state.

The Mississippi Center for Justice continues to help develop an upgraded system that effectively matches needs with legal services on a number of issues that combat economic, social and racial injustice across the state. Today, the Mississippi Center for Justice is active in campaigns that:

- Combat predatory payday lending practices
- Mediate mortgage payments to help homeowners avoid foreclosure
- Advocate for affordable housing, including rental properties, for Mississippi's coastal communities
- Assist victims of Hurricane Katrina overcome barriers for accessing recovery grants and other aid
- Ensure fair discipline processes and hearings for students in grades K-12
- Empower communities to become advocates for protecting their neighborhoods from environmental injustices
- Remove state-imposed administrative barriers that deny qualified children access to federally-funded healthcare programs

- Encourage the use of unallocated federal funds to supplement affordable childcare for working families

Law students have helped advance all of our campaigns. The projects are shaped and supervised by our staff attorneys but they are limited only by our interns' imaginations and desire to become part of the fabric of Mississippi life.

Some examples of student work include:

Legal Representation

Law students provide counseling and conduct in-take at legal clinics organized by the Center. From conducting public outreach to preparing files for referral to pro bono attorneys, students provide a much-needed source of hands-on action to meet the needs on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, as well as in other regions of the state. Law clinics have focused on issues ranging from contractor fraud to foreclosure prevention. Students also work directly with their supervising attorneys to assist Mississippi Center for Justice clients.

Surveys and Research

Students conduct surveys and research projects to help communities and neighborhoods better understand how to become advocates for their own fair housing needs. By educating and advising residents, students are empowering residents to become engaged in local land use issues, public housing improvements and economic justice campaigns.

The results of the surveys have been used in strategic ways to move our work forward. Most recently one of these surveys became a matter of public record when used in testimony provided by the Mississippi Center for Justice before US Congressional committees that continue to evaluate the state's diversion of emergency recovery funds intended for affordable house projects to business-related interests.

Public Outreach and Community Organizing

The barrier to action is often a lack of information. From foreclosure prevention to predatory lending and accessing healthcare benefits, education is often the key to community action. Law students have worked with community groups to assist in local community and economic development efforts and have been the driving force in our work with public housing tenants. Students are often the source for creating public education materials and disseminating information that empowers advocates and residents to access services and avoid scams.

Public education materials are typically developed in conjunction with pro bono attorneys from the across the United States, providing students yet another opportunity to interact and develop relationships with attorneys from a wide range of practice areas.

Students should submit a résumé with current contact information, including an e-mail address, and a cover letter that outlines your interest in the Mississippi Center for Justice and our work, and identifies what kind of experiences and policy areas draw you to our

organization. Students also include three references. If you are applying for a summer grant from an external source, please make any deadlines you must meet clear in the opening paragraph. Please also indicate whether you have a preference for working out of our Jackson or Biloxi office, or if you are open to placement in either office.

Applications for Summer 2009 placement must be postmarked AND received via e-mail by February 2, 2009.

Send resume, cover letter and references to:

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ALSO, send via e-mail to: croby@mscenterforjustice.org