



A publication of the Mississippi Center for Justice
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Grants awarded to support elder work, Katrina recovery

[The Atlantic Philanthropies](#) recently awarded Mississippi Center for Justice a two-year, \$800,000 grant to support the Center's *Campaign to Advance Economic Security for Elders*. With this support, Mississippi Center for Justice, in partnership with the National Consumer Law Center and other national and local organizations, will work to strengthen consumer protections for Mississippi elders. Mississippi's current policy environment provides few safeguards for protecting consumers across the board, including such areas as foreclosure prevention, payday lending and medical debt collection. [Read more here.](#)

The New Year also brought a grant from the Gulf Coast Community Foundation to support our on-going Katrina recovery work. [Read the press release here.](#)

Student work saves Mississippi home



When a group of students from the University of Maryland School of Law came to Mississippi for a week in January, they were excited about the opportunity to volunteer and learn more about public interest law. Little did they know they would end up helping a cancer patient save his home from foreclosure. [Read the full story here.](#)

Photo: Students from the University of Maryland School of Law with Rep. John Hines (center).

Contractor fraud, unemployment insurance reform focus of legislative agenda



During the 2010 session of the Mississippi Legislature, the Mississippi Center for Justice is seeking to strengthen consumer protections. Reforms to the state's contractor licensing requirements, as well as the establishment of a fund to provide financial relief to victims of contractor fraud, are key issues. The Mississippi Center for Justice presented testimony about contractor fraud during a key subcommittee hearing Jan. 27. [Read the testimony here.](#)

We are also working with the Mississippi State Conference NAACP, the Mississippi Economic Policy Center and other organizations to educate policymakers about the importance of accepting recovery funds that will allow Mississippi to update its Unemployment Insurance system. The state's system has not been updated since 1935, and currently provides benefits to only one in four hardworking Mississippians who lose their jobs due to no fault of their own. A bill to reauthorize the state's department of employment security and accept the recovery funds -- funds that will provide unemployment benefits to nearly 40,000 Mississippians -- passed two key committee votes in the House of Representatives Feb. 2.

Photo: Mississippi Center for Justice attorneys Crystal Utley (left) and Linda Rigsby prepare for the Legislative hearing regarding contractor fraud.

Pro Bono spotlight: Child support services



We are seeking *pro bono* assistance to evaluate the effectiveness of the Mississippi Department of Human Services' current method of collecting child support. We want a better understanding about their rate of successful collection, how much is actually disbursed to the family, and what the cost benefit of using DHS to collect child support is to the state.

Additionally, in Mississippi, single parents are required to file a claim for child support against the noncustodial parent through the Department of Human Services before they are eligible to receive child care certificates. We have found that single mothers often do not want to file such a claim, for any number of reasons, including fear of retribution or out of a desire not to disrupt a support arrangement that is already in place. We believe that the number of single mothers in Mississippi is disproportionately African-American, so a policy that targets single mothers has a disparate impact on African-Americans and is discriminatory. We seek *pro bono* assistance researching this requirement and determining whether legal action to change the provision is viable.

For more information about this or other *pro bono* projects, please contact *pro bono* counsel Crystal Utley at (228) 435-7284 or via e-mail at cutley@mscenterforjustice.org. We also invite you to visit our latest [Pro Bono Wish List](#).

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