The Center’s mission is to advance civil rights and social justice, especially in the American South. The Center strives to empower individuals and communities to overcome economic disadvantages, racial discrimination, social isolation, governmental unfairness, and political exclusion.

**Education Advancement and Fair Opportunities:**
Promoting educational opportunities by seeking resource equity and diversity in K-12 and advancing diversity in higher education.

**Community Inclusion and Economic Development:**
Enhancing low-income and minority communities by combating municipal exclusion, protecting assets in land, and promoting fair housing.

**Strategies for Pursuing These Initiatives**

**Community Empowerment:** helping communities organize and advocate for solutions to their needs

**Public Advocacy:** bringing public attention to problems and issues

**Legal Protection:** when required, engaging in litigation and seeking new legislation to protect rights

**Advancing Knowledge:** conducting and disseminating scholarship and research

**Hands-On Conferences:** convening conferences for community advocates, public officials, scholars, and students

**Training the Next Generation:** attracting and involving law students to become civil rights and social justice advocates

**Joining With Advocates:** connecting with state, regional, and national social justice organizations
Wake County's socio-economic diversity policy was lauded by state and local education advocates since its inception in 2000. It also became a model for districts across the country seeking to support integrated public schools consistent with the Supreme Court's decision in the Parents Involved ruling. This plan was largely successful until a new majority took control of the school board in December 2009, and promptly proceeded to dismantle the diversity policy and reassign students to “neighborhood” schools.

The Center is now coordinating the efforts of national education experts, legal advocates, and community organizations to combat the return to segregated schools and to coordinate a legal response to the Board's actions. In addition, we have provided policy advice and research to community members who support the diversity policy, and legal advice and support to several organizations engaged in the struggle in Wake County. The Center is also bringing short-term legal challenges to thwart or decelerate the Board's attempts to resegregate public schools, including challenges to statutory or procedural violations.

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In May 2009 the court approved a consent order between the Halifax County School Board, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the State Board of Education to implement a three-year intervention plan to ensure that Halifax County Schools provide every student with a Leandro-compliant “sound basic education”.

In July 2009, members of The Committee to Save Education In Halifax County contacted the Center seeking legal representation to enjoin the closing of Eastman and Brawley Middle Schools and to prevent future school closings.

The Center is working with The Committee on a four part strategy to address education issues in Halifax County. With the Center's assistance, community activists organized and successfully secured a commitment from the Board of Education to conduct a detailed feasibility study, with substantial community input and engagement, prior to closing any additional schools.

The Center also conducted a series of well-attended parent trainings and community meetings in Halifax County during the 2009-10 school year. At the Committee's First Anniversary Banquet in June, 2010, the Committee recognized the Center's commitment to the Committee and our steadfast support and unwavering persistence in the development of communities, parents, and students through education on civil rights.

The Pitt County School System is one of a handful of NC districts still under a federal school desegregation order (secured by Julius Chambers in 1970). In 2006, the Greenville Parents Association challenged the continuing viability of these orders in a complaint filed with the U.S. Department of Education. The Center intervened in the case, representing four families and the Pitt County Coalition for Educating Black Children.

The parties reached a settlement agreement in early 2009. In approving the settlement, the court held that the desegregation orders are still applicable, and that Pitt County Schools still bear the vestiges of racial discrimination from a segregated, dual system. The court also ordered the Board to “fulfill its obligation” to attain unitary status, and to report back to the court by December 31, 2012, showing how it has “eliminated the vestiges of past discrimination to the extent practicable.”

In preparation for the court’s deadline of December, 2012, the Center is providing ongoing legal representation to the Coalition and has partnered with the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University to implement community dialogues and a media campaign about school diversity.
Education

In 2005, the Center intervened in the long-running Leandro case on behalf of several students, parents, and the Charlotte branch of the NAACP, arguing that the resegregation of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) in the wake of the district’s unitary status ruling violates the state constitutional right to a sound basic education. The court denied intervention for our claims focused on student assignment and on equal protection, but allowed the Center to pursue the claim that the inadequate allocation of resources violated the students’ constitutional rights. Following this ruling the court signed a consent order between CMS and the State for the implementation of a school turnaround plan, and also stayed further litigation pending reports on the success of that plan.

During the pendency of the stay, the Center and CMS entered into a data sharing agreement that would allow experts retained by the Center to independently evaluate the implementation and outcomes of the turnaround plan. As part of their analysis, these experts are focusing on the impediments to school success created by concentrating low-income, academically non-proficient youth into schools, and they are also quantifying the amount of significantly heightened resources minimally necessary to provide disadvantaged students in high poverty schools with a constitutionally compliant sound, basic education.

In addition to active case work, the Center is engaged in research and advocacy to promote policies that foster school integration nationwide. In April 2009, the Center convened a conference to present research on the benefits of diverse K-12 public schools. Some of the research was published in Volume 88, Issue 3 in March 2010 of the UNC Law Review. Following the overwhelming response to this conference, the Center was part of a national coalition of civil rights organizations that co-convened a conference in November 2009 in Washington, DC to discuss the federal government’s role in promoting public school diversity.

Our current research and policy priorities include the resegregation trends in both traditional and charter schools across North Carolina.

A February 2010 report on segregation in charter schools by The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA showed that North Carolina charter schools are among the most racially isolated in the country. As the state faces internal and external pressures to raise the existing charter school cap, the Center plans to work with CRP during the next several months to educate policymakers and the public about the scope and impact of racial and socioeconomic isolation in the state’s charter schools, as well as to advocate for stronger enforcement of the diversity provisions in the North Carolina Charters Act.

Over the next year, the Center hopes to capitalize on Governor Beverly Perdue’s recent statements in support of efforts to combat school resegregation and engage state lawmakers on the issue of resegregation. Through these efforts, we hope to encourage legislative participation in developing broad based analysis of the problem and potential solutions, including the creation of a legislative study commission on school resegregation, as well as potential legislation to provide incentives for districts to develop student assignment policies that promote school diversity.

Community Inclusion

Brandy Creek Community After being annexed by Roanoke Rapids without notice in 2006, Brandy Creek has subsequently been subjected to increased property taxes of 700-1000%. The Center has aided community members in challenging their tax values to a much lower rate, and is working with their state representative to have the community de-annexed in the 2011 legislative session.

Midway Community Association (Moore County) The Midway Community Association and lawyers from the Center secured support from the Aberdeen Town Council to seek a legislative annexation which came about in June 2009. The Center will work with the Midway community over the next fiscal year to develop a strategy that addresses housing concerns. The Center is also helping the Midway community to have part of the community re-zoned and we are working with the community and Habitat for Humanity to remove or restore dilapidated houses in Midway.

Waynor Road in Action (Moore County, NC) Under the guidance of Center attorneys, Waynor Road residents achieved full political inclusion into Southern Pines in 2009. The annexation became effective Dec. 31, 2009.

“It is necessary that we do more than just file a lawsuit. In addition to legal action we must also deal with the hearts and minds of people.” -Julius Chambers
Community Inclusion

Continued from page 3

Even though town water and sewer lines run less than 400 yards from the community, Waynor Road residents had no access to water and sewer service. Southern Pines secured a $750,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to provide water and sewer to this community. Construction and installation of the water and sewer lines drew to a close in January 2010 and residents now receive public water and sewer service.

Jackson Hamlet Community Action (Moore County) With assistance from Center attorneys and in collaboration with Pinehurst town officials, Jackson Hamlet residents secured $920,125 of CDBG funding in 2007 to extend sewer to one-third of its homes (Phase 1). Phase I was completed in the spring of 2009 and 51 households now receive public sewer services.

Additionally, Jackson Hamlet and the Town secured special CDBG monies to initiate Phase II of the sewer project. This phase will provide sewer services to the bulk of remaining Jackson Hamlet residents. The Town was awarded that funding in June 2009 and construction is slated to begin during August 2010.

Cameron Heights Community Action Project (Hoke County) The community has been plagued by many of the ill effects that accompany municipal exclusion including dilapidated housing, illegal dumping of trash, and increased criminal activity. Center attorneys have partnered with members of the Cameron Heights Community Action Project Board of Directors to devise and distribute a community needs assessment to identify and prioritize issues important to residents. We have also assisted the community association in its efforts to secure grant funding to address health and safety issues related to the dilapidated housing. The community association began using its first grant to clear two overgrown lots with decaying structures this summer and further cleanup efforts and grant applications are underway.

Lincoln Heights (Halifax County) This community, which has been provided water and sewer, was once considered but rejected for annexation. For decades the community has not only been denied municipal services, but has been the site of several municipal landfills. While the Center is coordinating many efforts in Lincoln Heights related to municipal exclusion, including crime, illegal dumping, and dilapidated housing, our primary work is to assist the community in preventing the construction of a new waste transfer station just outside the community.

Annexation Reform Efforts During the 2009-2010 legislative session of the North Carolina General Assembly, the Center for Civil Rights coordinated a legislative strategy to help revise state annexation laws to address the legacy of residential segregation and exclusion as well as better accommodate the needs of low-wealth, excluded communities. The historical lack of essential services in these communities has led to the long-term and persistent underdevelopment of these areas, including the constraint of property values and minimal economic opportunity. As a result, these communities are unable to meet the current statutory requirements for voluntary and involuntary annexation.

The Center’s efforts resulted in the addition of three critical provisions to House Bill 524 (Annexation Omnibus Changes) that specifically target the unique challenges faced by low-income, minority communities. The bill is currently pending in the Senate. As a result of the controversial and highly politicized nature of HB 524, the Center is currently working with members of the Poverty Reduction and Economic Recovery Study Commission to ensure these provisions remain at the forefront of this debate. At the present time, the Study Commission has recommended that our proposals be included in the final report of the Commission with accompanying draft legislation to be introduced during the 2010 short session.

Advocacy

Habitat for Humanity

Fair Housing On May 22, 2009 attorneys from the Center for Civil Rights and the Winston-Salem office of Kilpatrick Stockton, working as pro bono co-counsel with the Center, filed a lawsuit on behalf of Habitat for Humanity of the North Carolina Sandhills alleging violations of federal fair housing laws and interference with contract related to Habitat’s purchase of land and proposed affordable housing development in Pinebluff, NC. Pinebluff’s mayor, board of commissioners, and town attorneys are named as defendants in the complaint, as well as the sellers and purchasers of the property.

During the fall of 2009, attorneys for the Center and Kilpatrick Stockton successfully challenged the removal of the case from state court to federal court based on the failure of all defendants to timely and unambiguously consent to the removal. The case was settled on May 25, 2010.
Community Inclusion

Heirs' Property Retention Coalition
The Center for Civil Rights is a member of the Heirs’ Property Retention Coalition. Formed in the summer of 2006 as an organization of lawyers, advocates, and academics, its members work together to identify and tackle litigation, legislative reform, and scholarly study related to heirs’ property, and in particular to the preservation of heirs’ property within low-income African-American communities.

Land Loss Prevention
The Center for Civil Rights represents one of three organizational members working directly with clients in North Carolina, the main focus of the Coalition. The Coalition connects the Center with national partners which increases our capacity to reach out and serve families struggling to maintain land within their family.

Currently, the Center is targeting its efforts in communities in which it has an existing relationship. Center attorneys and UNC Law students have conducted educational workshops regarding heirs’ property and distributed surveys to assist in identifying individuals and families who presently own or are at risk of owning heirs’ property. As a result, Center attorneys are currently assisting several families from its client communities to resolve issues related to their property.

UNC Pro Bono Spring and Fall Break Wills Project
To augment its heirs’ property work and formulate a proactive approach to land loss among African American and low-income communities, the Center for Civil Rights began a collaborative partnership with the UNC School of Law and Legal Aid of North Carolina to craft a student-led, pro bono project that provides underserved and low-income families with critical legal documents. These efforts resulted in the creation of the UNC Wills Project. The project dispatches 20-30 students across the state during their spring and fall breaks to set up mobile legal clinics to draft wills and other advanced

directives for low-income and elderly residents.

The inaugural trip took place in Spring 2009 and focused on several eastern North Carolina counties. Students returned to eastern North Carolina in March 2010 and, due to soaring student interest in the Project, a second mobile legal clinic was established in the western region of the state in Boone, NC. The Center had the pleasure of leading the 2009 fall break trip to Moore County, NC to serve three of its client communities.

To date, the UNC Wills Project has served 127 clients and students have drafted over four hundred wills and advanced directives.

Wills Project

Message from Board Chair Jane Pigott
“Children should have access to quality education.” That statement seems so fundamentally appropriate, but apparently its appropriateness is not that obvious as this right remains at the forefront of seminal litigation in the United States. Unfortunately, our country has a long history of asserting that “separate but equal” translates into the plain meaning of those words and creates the best educational environment. We know neither is true.

In 1971, the Supreme Court’s unanimous decision in Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenberg Board of Education found that little progress had been made in desegregating public schools after the Supreme Court’s 1954 decision in Brown v. Board of Education and, therefore, the scope of the district court’s equitable powers to remedy past wrongs was construed to be broad and flexible. Julius Chambers led that successful legal effort and now forty years later he leads this Civil Rights Center and its partners in a battle to prevent re-segregation of public school systems, most immediately the schools in Wake County, North Carolina.

Protecting the right of a child to access quality public education remains an imperative that requires trained people and material resources. The Center for Civil Rights is an important leader in the continuing battle to maintain this fundamental right. The need for institutions dedicated to advancing civil rights and social justice is as great today as it was in the 60s and 70s. You can play a role. The Center is actively raising the funds that will ensure its financial ability and independence to continue the eternal vigilance necessary to guard these freedoms.
Ashley Osment, Senior Attorney, died May 28, 2010 after a gallant three-year struggle against ovarian cancer. Dean Boger wrote in part: “Ashley led the Center’s advocacy efforts in public education for nearly five years, especially the Center’s outreach to parent communities in the state. . . At the UNC Center, Ashley was charged with building the Center into a regional hub for advocacy, litigation and research in addressing school desegregation in the 21st century… She carried out her charge brilliantly...taking a major role in legal actions challenging resegregation.” We will miss Ashley’s drive, determination, and dedication. Her spirit remains to inspire us.