MESSAGE FROM THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR

This report is about the efforts the Center makes to achieve its goal of helping people and communities secure substantive civil rights outcomes that rectify injustices imposed on them. The Center's work is being done by an extraordinary staff of advocates. This report is about the progress the Center’s small, dedicated, and hardworking advocates (listed on page 6 of this report) are able to make in furthering social justice and equality. I am privileged to know that work fairly up-close with the team. Let me briefly share some of that knowledge with you.

The Center's current initiatives are designed to achieve outcomes in education, housing, and civic engagement that address the systemic exclusion and disparities facing low-wealth neighborhoods and communities of color. The Center works (1) to improve education so that all children attain sound basic educations; (2) to achieve fair development of communities, neighborhoods, and towns (3) to assure that governments provide fair and adequate governmental services, (4) to prohibit discrimination in housing; and (5) to encourage meaningful civic participation and influence.

Researching. The Center researches and gathers data to engage in public advocacy and engagement. It issues reports, writes op-ed newspaper pieces, maintains a blog, participates in public meetings and conferences and provides a forum to expose unjust public actions.

Organizing. The Center assists communities in developing effective coalitions that empower citizens to advocate on their own behalf. It also advises organizations on the most effective way to bring about change, including addressing local government or state level representatives.

Educating. The Center educates on several levels. It (1) coordinates educational programs for students and other advocates; (2) teaches students to provide legal services to clients; (3) trains summer interns and postdoctoral fellows; (4) sponsors conferences with local, state and national organizations to explore new strategies to more effectively seek justice for minority and poor people; and (5) conducts voter education.

Litigating. The Center initiates litigation to enforce fair housing laws, to stop discriminatory land use practices (such as location of waste dumps), and to challenge policies that maintain racially segregated schools or fail to provide quality educational opportunities for poor and minority students.

Charles E. Daye
Since 2004, the Center for Civil Rights has collaborated with the UNC Law Pro Bono Program to operate the North Carolina call center of the national non-partisan Election Protection voter assistance hotline. The hotline is a toll-free resource to answer voter questions up to and on Election Day. Election Protection is a nationwide voter advocacy and education coalition of more than 100 local, state and national partners. During the May 2012 primary the Center and the UNC Pro Bono Program’s call center fielded hundreds of calls during the voting hours. Many of the issues that arose during the 2012 primary were problems that could have been avoided with more comprehensive voter outreach and education.

In response, the Center launched a pre-election community education program with the goal of ensuring that every eligible voter would be able to exercise their right to vote on Election Day. Throughout September and October, law students and Center attorneys traveled throughout Central and Eastern North Carolina to host voter education sessions. The presentations focused on common voting rights issues, including registration, early voting, absentee ballots, residency requirements, provisional ballots, campaign activities at the polls, voter identification laws, redistricting, access to and assistance at the polling place, and how criminal history affects the right to vote.

Presentations were given in Durham, Hoke, Moore, Wayne, Pitt, Halifax, Orange, and Brunswick Counties.

Once again during the 2012 Presidential Election the Center and the Pro Bono Program operated the North Carolina call center and again provided assistance to voters across North Carolina.
Education

Pitt County
The Center’s work in Pitt County furthers its efforts to develop pro-diversity policies and strategies in midsized, urban-suburban southern school districts and it confronts the unique challenges and opportunities facing districts that still remain under federal desegregation orders.

In a critical ruling in May 2012, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals vacated the lower court’s ruling in favor of the school board regarding its 2011-2012 student assignment plan. The Center argued that the plan increased racial isolation in the district and that the school board opened a new school that is the most racially and socio-economically hyper-segregated in the county. The Fourth Circuit remanded the case with clear instructions for the district court to reconsider the motion, with the burden on the school board to prove that the 2011-2012 plan complies with the district’s affirmative duty to eliminate discrimination and move towards unitary status.

Following the Fourth Circuit’s ruling the Plaintiffs sought reconsideration of their original motion to find that the school board had not met its constitutional obligation. The school board followed with a motion for “unitary status” and requested that the motions be heard jointly. The district court will hear both motions in this matter this spring.

The Pitt County school district has been under court order to eliminate the vestiges to race discrimination in its schools since the early 1970s. Those original legal actions challenging segregation in Pitt County schools were brought by Center Director Emeritus Julius Chambers.

Fisher v. University of Texas
Mark Dorosin and Elizabeth Haddix, of the Center for Civil Rights, along with UNC School of Law Dean Jack Boger, and the UNC-CH Office of University Counsel filed an amicus curiae brief on behalf of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin. The US Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the case on October 10, 2012 and ruling is expected this spring.

Chapel Hill-Carrboro
The Center for Civil Rights submitted a letter to Chapel Hill-Carrboro School System regarding the upcoming 2012-2013 student reassignment plan. Parents and community advocates have expressed concerns about assignment alternatives that concentrate “at-risk” or low-income students in identified schools. Mark Dorosin urged the board to enhance diversity at each school to improve student education and to support every student in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro community.
Community Inclusion

Rogers Road (Orange County)
The Center for Civil Rights continues to advocate for the Rogers Road Neighborhood. The neighborhood is a 150-year-old, majority African American community divided between Chapel Hill and Carrboro, which “hosted” Orange County’s landfills for over 40 years.

The Center has partnered with the Rogers-Eubanks Neighborhood Association for several years in the efforts to address the continuing impacts of the landfill. It has also represented the association in filing Title VI discrimination claims with the U.S. Department of Transportation, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The Center closely monitors the work of Orange County, Chapel Hill, and Carrboro as they discuss remediation of the effects of the landfill on the community.

Halifax County
The Center for Civil Rights continues to represent the residents of the Brandy Creek and Wallace Fork Road Community against the harm caused by the failed plan to develop Carolina Crossroads entertainment district and the Roanoke Rapids Theater in their neighborhood. The residents of the community filed a lawsuit against the county, the City of Roanoke Rapids, and Weldon City Schools seeking a refund of illegally inflated property taxes collected in 2007, 2008 and 2009. After the 2007 property revaluation, their land values and property taxes went up on average of 800% and as high as 1400% an intense hardship which decimated the community.

Brunswick County
The Center continues to represent the Royal Oak Concerned Citizens Association in environmental justice and fair housing litigation against the county over its decisions to site another landfill in this historic African American community and its failure to provide that community with access to public water and sewer.
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ABOUT THE CENTER FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

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.

Current Initiatives

Education Advancement and Fair Opportunities: Challenging school segregation and resegregation and promoting educational equity and diversity in K-12 schools and in higher education

Community Inclusion: Enhancing low-income and minority communities by advocating for equitable access to public services and resources, challenging the discriminatory siting of hazardous land uses, enhancing political participation and promoting fair housing

Strategies for Pursuing These Initiatives

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

Public Education: bringing public attention to problems and issues

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

Advance Knowledge: conducting and disseminating scholarship and research

National Collaboration: 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

Collaborating With Advocates: connecting with state, regional, and national social justice organizations

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