

INTRODUCTION FROM OUR DIRECTOR

I am pleased to present our 2020-2021 Annual Report. Since its launch in the spring of 2019, the Center for Social Justice (Center or CSJ) has achieved remarkable success accomplishing its mission of

I am confident that we will build on our early momentum and grow the Center into a preeminent hub for social justice in our community and beyond.

Operating a relatively new entity during COVID-19—amid the greatest public health emergency the United States has experienced in at least 100 years—has been difficult. The challenge of not knowing what lies ahead, is daunting. And yet, the pandemic has also afforded us many unique opportunities:

by going virtual last year, we were able to broadcast our programming to those far and wide, routinely garnering audiences of more than 500 attendees at Center events;

we were able to quickly pivot to focus in real time on the important social justice implications of both COVID-19 and the renewed racial justice calls to action following the tragic deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, David McAtee, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, and the others who lost their lives at the hands of the police and as a result of racially motivated violence;

we mobilized rapid legal responses to COVID-19 with funding from MassMutual that supported faculty members and students pursuing meaningful social justice work; and

we have been working with others to establish technology access points for individuals in our community who now face an immense digital divide that prevents access to the courts, healthcare, schools, community centers, and so much more.

Two strategies will be critical to our continued growth: innovation and collaboration. Part of our success has been a commitment to innovation—to adapting, as we must, to the new way of the world. The late Supreme Judicial Court Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants, a tireless advocate for access to justice who passed away in September 2020, assured those in the legal field that virtual court is here to stay. There is simply no going back to “normal.” With that knowledge, and our experience navigating today’s online legal world, we determined that innovation should be added as one of the key elements in our mission statement. Our work is cutting edge – now and looking ahead.

The other essential component has been intentional, strategic, and robust collaboration. We strongly believe that together, we can do more, and do better for others. This has certainly been true of our relationship with Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company (“MassMutual”), which supports the Center’s work with not only incredibly generous financial contributions, but also with support from volunteers, their Law Department Pro Bono Committee’s support and guidance, and collaboration with their Community Responsibility team and Foundation to invest in programming to benefit the citizens of Springfield who most need our help. It is a remarkable partnership, and one that we hope to replicate with others across the region and state.

We are also grateful for the other donors, supporters, and partners that we have been able to develop over the past two years. We could not do this work without the help of so many in our community, and are deeply grateful to be engaging in this work with you.

Thank you for joining us!

A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2021- 2022

From March to October 2020, the Center engaged in a robust, multifaceted listening tour leading up to the creation of its first strategic plan. Center Director Ariel Clemmer spoke with internal, external, and key justice stakeholders from across the University and the region during this creative visioning process. These meetings included Law School faculty, staff, and students; student group leaders; community partners; alumni; potential and actual funders; city officials; and University administrators, faculty, students, and staff. The Center also has had regular communications with its two Law School faculty advisors, Harris Freeman and Lauren Carasik, and Dean Sudha Setty.

The central questions sought to understand what the Center currently is, can be, and should do as we look to the future. These conversations included:

- Identifying the Center's institutional strengths (including faculty expertise, Law School/University resources, and regional dominance)
- Seeking input on the future potential of the CSJ
- Identifying ongoing needs and challenges, and
- Developing concrete ideas and strategies to strengthen and institutionalize the Center as a key initiative of the Law School and University.

At the end of October 2020, Director Clemmer presented a draft strategic plan to the Law School faculty. Discussion was held at the October 30, 2020 faculty meeting, after which a revised draft was created and disseminated to all members of the Law School community for additional comment in November 2020. The finalized plan was presented to external stakeholders, including funders and CSJ partners, in December 2020. A copy is available on the Impact tab of our [website](#).

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Launched in 2019, the Center strengthens collaborative efforts between the Law School and the region to work toward

The Center provides a cohesive hub for the Law School's justice-related teaching, scholarship, and service. We also broaden social justice academic offerings, help students aspiring to be social justice lawyers achieve their goals, imbue a culture of pro bono volunteerism in students, faculty, and other legal professionals, manage in-house pro bono projects, and work closely with community organizations and partners to identify and address unmet needs that require a multi-dimensional response cutting across law and other fields.

We aim to be a preeminent Center for Social Justice –
Locally, regionally, and nationally – that works to
*understand and address the root causes of social injustice
and develop innovative, human-centered solutions for change.*



CENTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVES

The CSJ has grown tremendously in the past year. In addition to our social justice programming, we provided, for the first time in 2020-2021, the following in-house pro bono initiatives:

Sealing and Expungement Initiative:

The Cost of Gun Violence in Springfield: this project examines the cost of gun violence in our city in collaboration with a local activist group, Greater Springfield Nonviolence. Our research will generate a proposal to the city council and mayor asking for changes in the allocation of anti-violence funds.

Racial Justice Sentencing Project(s): the CSJ has joined in partnership with both CPCS and several private Children and Family Law attorneys to explore the issues of racially disparate sentencing outcomes and court involvement for people of color in our community. These projects are data-driven and research-based and involve drafting a forthcoming report of findings and recommendations for change.

Addressing Racism as a Social Determinant of Health through Restorative Racial Healing Dialogue: the CSJ was awarded a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging grant by Health New England to pilot a two-part program, launching this summer, designed to (1) educate the WNEU community about the connection between racism and health disparities, as well as the structural barriers to equity that exist across society; and (2) facilitate racial healing and relationship-building between and among our institution and the local community through restorative justice healing circle conversations.

Independent Pro Bono Project: students are always welcome to pursue pro bono projects independently with the CSJ. In the past year, we hosted several students researching pipeline initiative best practices, as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion projects.

Social Media and Website Volunteers: we are lucky to have several marketing and communications volunteers throughout the year who help to promote the CSJ's important work through our new website and social media accounts. If you have not yet, make sure to like and follow the CSJ on twitter, Instagram, and Facebook!

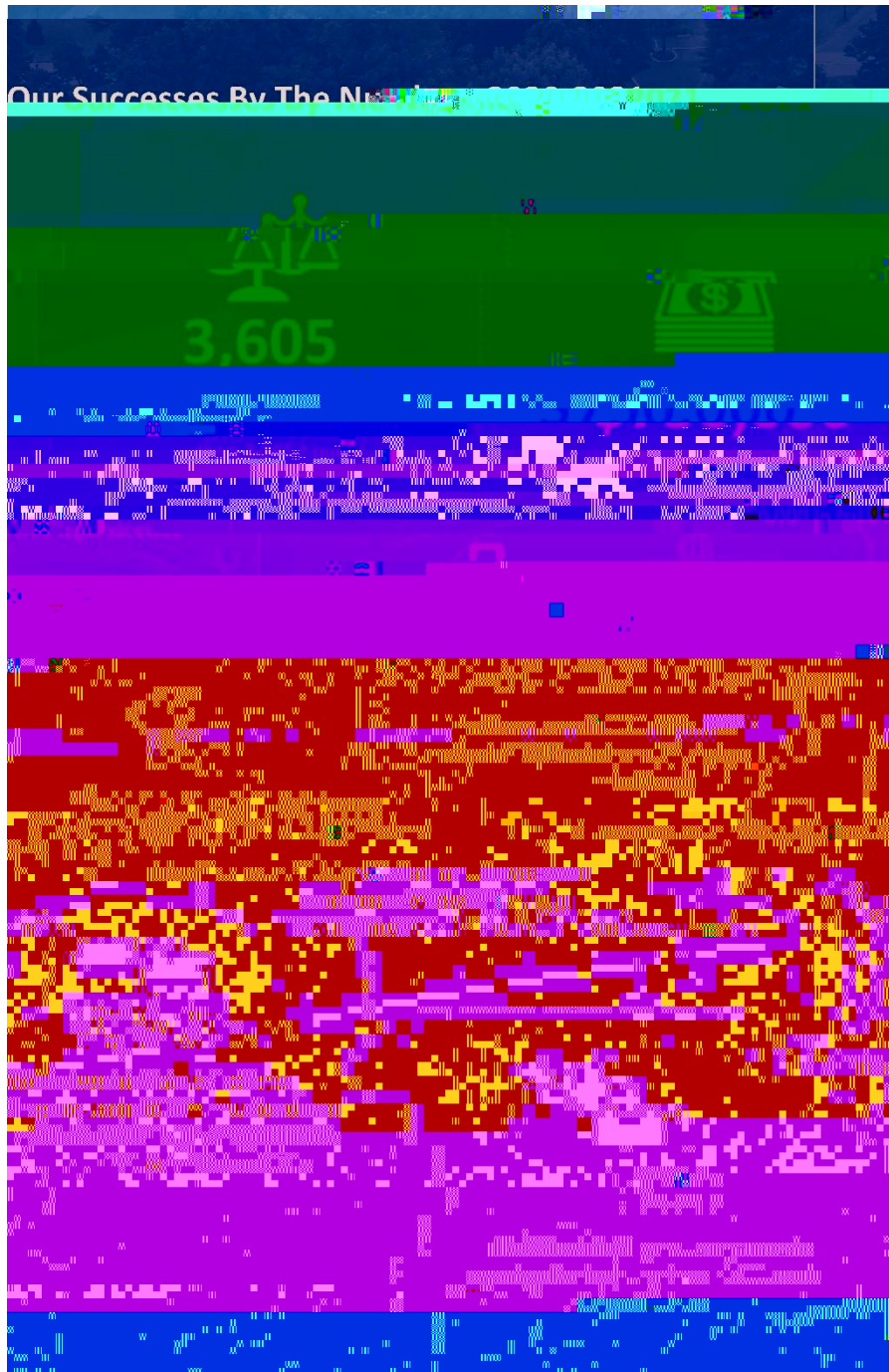


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CENTER FOCUS AREAS

In recognition of the intersected nature of many social justice issues, we have adopted a holistic approach to the substantive focus areas of the Center's work. These include:

OUR IMPACT



Consumer Debt Initiative:

70% of clients are low-income women of color



Our Volunteers:

We had 225 total volunteers (194 unique volunteers)



Funding:

Raised \$802,000 in grant funding since May 2020



CSJ PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

We hosted and co-sponsored several well-attended events recently, including:

Gervino-Ward LGBTQ+ Speaker Series

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Clason Speaker Series Lecture, Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia:

A conversation with Black Panther Party Chairman Elaine Brown

Dr. Vicki Vernon Lott,

-A National Association of Women Judges panel hosted by the CSJ and WLB
Chair Jennifer Taub
panel co-hosted with COTAD

CSJ movie nights: and

We also provided the following trainings:

CDI Basics and Advanced Level Trainings

Massachusetts Expungement and Sealing Trainings

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