



JOB ANNOUNCEMENT
FAIR HOUSING LEGISLATIVE ADVOCATE

The Mississippi Center for Justice seeks to contract with an experienced Legislative Advocate to work on behalf of its Housing Campaign, which aims to replace current Mississippi eviction law and enact new rent-to-own housing regulation. The Center seeks someone with an interest and experience in working with the Mississippi Legislature to draft and pass legislation. This is a part-time contractual position with an estimated time commitment of 20 to 25 hours per week through spring 2022. The position will be based in Jackson.

The Center is a nonprofit, public interest law firm committed to advancing racial and economic justice statewide. Our lawyers work with community leaders to support their social justice campaigns and to channel the energies of the legal community to combat discrimination and poverty. With offices in Jackson, Biloxi and Indianola, we seek systemic solutions that protect the rights of consumers and immigrants, secure access to healthcare, and make fair and affordable housing available for all Mississippians.

Position Summary

The Legislative Advocate will be responsible for drafting and lobbying for the passage of legislation concerning eviction and rent-to-own housing regulation on behalf of the Mississippi Center for Justice.

In 2019, the Mississippi Legislature passed three amendments to the MS Landlord – Tenant Act. These amendments reversed decades of established practice and procedure with respect to: (1) the time period allowed before removal of a tenant after entry of a judgment of eviction founded upon nonpayment of rent; and (2) the procedure for disposing of the personal possessions of a tenant following entry of a judgment of eviction founded upon nonpayment of rent.

The harsh 2019 amendments violate the Due Process Clause of the U.S. Constitution, the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution, and effectively deny the right of a tenant to perfect an appeal with supersedeas. Inevitably, the State of Mississippi will be required to spend scarce resources defending these clearly indefensible and clumsy enactments. In fact, a challenge to these amendments is already underway in the Federal District Court for the Northern District of Mississippi. *Conner v. Alltin, LLC*, Cause No. 3:20CV57-MPM-RP, filed June 17, 2020. This case and others to come will require the Mississippi Attorney General’s office to defend the 2019 amendments at tremendous waste of taxpayer money and state personnel time. The Mississippi Center for Justice’s goal is to pass legislation, which will serve as a just, equitable, and constitutional eviction law.

The current lack of regulation around rent-to-own real estate contracts in Mississippi is a major roadblock to homeownership and wealth accumulation for our communities of color and impoverished communities. Regulation is needed to combat the perpetration of predatory “rent to own” real estate

schemes by property owners against low-income purchasers and to provide a check on this dangerous, emerging housing industry.

In addition to drafting and lobbying for the passage of the necessary legislation to combat the issues described above, the Legislative Advocate will develop, lead, and implement the communication and branding strategy for this effort. The Legislative Advocate is responsible for developing and implementing all marketing strategies, strategic communication, and public relations activities. This will include education and outreach to potential partners, allies, and supporters, as well as traditional and new media. It will also include preparing staff, allies, and witnesses for events with media, partners, and legislators.

Our Ideal Candidate

Our ideal candidate is a personable, true self-starter with deep experience balancing projects and priorities, exceptional media and lobbying skills, and a vested interest in advancing racial equality and fighting inequity. Hands-on expertise leading successful lobbying strategies with state legislators on housing law, economic justice, or racial justice preferred. A high degree of integrity, alignment with MCJ's mission and values, and proven experience and results in successful legislative advocacy are musts.

Job Duties

- Drafting legislation.
- Building coalitions to support passage of legislation.
- Working with housing campaign and communication personnel to plan and promote media campaigns.
- Drafting legislation information packets, press releases, press advisories, statements, op-eds and letters to the editor
- Guiding strategy on press outreach, including messaging in press releases, creation of press kits and materials, talking points, interview preparation, and responses to media requests
- Preparing staff for interviews with media and testimony to legislature.
- Identifying potential allies and partners and designing and implementing a campaign to engage these allies and partners.
- Building and maintaining relationships with community partners.
- Planning, implementing, and publicizing community presentations describing legislation and the necessity of its passage.
- Meeting with legislators, legislative staff, and legislative committees to promote passage of legislation.
- Building and maintaining relationships with legislators and legislative staffers.

Qualifications

- Juris Doctor preferred.
- Five years of experience with legislative advocacy.
- A background in housing law, or nonprofit advocacy is encouraged.
- Deep experience with public speaking, including media presentation.
- Excellent written and verbal communications skills.
- Excellent organizational, networking and relationship-building skills.

- Flexible and a self-starter; able to manage concurrent projects while also being highly detail-oriented with an attention to quality.
- Demonstrated resourcefulness in setting priorities, proposing new ways of creating efficiencies, and guiding investment in people and systems.
- Proficient in Excel, PowerPoint, and Word.
- Commitment to advancing racial justice, working across lines of difference, and working with a diversity of stakeholders.
- Personal qualities of integrity, credibility, and a commitment to the mission of the Mississippi Center for Justice.

Salary

Salary is competitive and dependent on experience.

To Apply

Please send brief letter of interest, resume and three (3) references (two from past employers if available) to:

William Bedwell, Staff Attorney

wbedwell@mscenterforjustice.org

Please, no telephone inquiries

The position will stay open until filled.

The Mississippi Center for Justice is an Equal Opportunity Employer. We value a work place that is diverse in race, gender, economic status, age, geographic origin, sexual orientation, and other differences that enrich our organizational culture