Cities and States to Lead Criminal Justice Reform

Troubled Waters: Tennessee Families Stand Up for a Clean Environment

Marguerite Casey Foundation: Listening and Learning From Grantee Organizations
In 2001, Marguerite Casey Foundation embarked on a path with a vision unlike almost any other in philanthropy: That no family should live in poverty and that we’d nurture a national movement of low-income families working for positive change.

As an independent, national philanthropy, we’d support this movement building through steps that might now be viewed as innovative. That is, genuine trust of poor families and unrestricted grants to community organizations across multiple topics affecting poverty.

We arrived at this mission by asking, in particular, working families about their lives. We listened and acted on feedback and guidance. We have built upon this framework to include the voice of tens of thousands of families.

In life, a new vision or idea might be out of sync with others. But it is always possible to be an outlier with conviction. Since we’ve opened, our ethos has always centered on trust in poor families leading the way to find solutions to poverty.

Now, 16 years later, I am pleased more philanthropies are embracing movement building, working with poor families, adopting unrestricted grants and supporting regions that have high poverty rates. There has never been a solo actor when it comes to success.

In our Spring 2018 edition of Equal Voice Magazine, you’ll see a broader snapshot of our philanthropic work, particularly our investments in democracy, civic engagement and youth leadership.

The true progress of families still powers me every day. We are not islands unto ourselves. As Richard Blanco, the poet, once observed about the American condition and idea of inclusion: “Always under one sky, our sky, and always, one moon.”

I am proud Marguerite Casey Foundation holds true to its vision and innovates, when needed, to reflect a changing America. I moved here as a girl from Nicaragua. Now, this is my home. This is our community.

When we come together and use our voice to work out differences and focus on progress, our potential is – and always will be – beyond belief.

Luz Vega-Marquis
@LuzVegaMarquis
President and CEO
Marguerite Casey Foundation
Focus on Philanthropy

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Learn more about Marguerite Casey Foundation's mission of nurturing a national movement of low-income families who are advocating for positive change.

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Marguerite Casey Foundation lives by its brand promise of: "Ask. Listen. Act." It regularly surveys grantees for feedback and suggestions. Learn about the findings.

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April Jarocki, a resident in Tennessee’s Cumberland Mountains, tests water in May 2017 for any pollutants that might have come from coal mining activity.
Tennessee Families Stand Up for a Clean Environment

Troubled Waters

By Keith Griffith
Special to Equal Voice News

Photos by Valerie Vozza
Published: August 2, 2017

In February 2017, President Donald Trump revoked the Stream Protection Rule, which had increased water testing and protection measures especially for Americans who rely on natural sources for drinking.

The coal industry supported the move, but families in Tennessee and elsewhere are raising serious concerns about drinking water contamination and irreversible damage to the environment.

Equal Voice News visited the Cumberland Mountains to learn what grassroots advocates are doing to protect the water quality, their families and this portion of the historic Appalachian region.

On the northern slope of Cooper Ridge – a long, low-slung rise in Tennessee’s Cumberland Mountains – sits the 127-year-old Hatfield Cemetery, a well-maintained strip of flower-adorned plots where gravestones older than a century sit next to still-fresh graves.

Bright pink ribbons hang in the tree branches surrounding the cemetery, marking 100 feet from the burial grounds. Beyond them is planned one of the largest surface coal mines in Tennessee’s history. The mine will soon surround the cemetery. On an afternoon in May, a swath of clear-cut logging was visible through the trees, and heavy machinery could be heard over the sound of chirping birds.

Takeaways

In February 2017, President Donald Trump revoked the Stream Protection Rule, which had increased water testing and protection measures especially for Americans who rely on natural sources for drinking.

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The Cooper Ridge mine will span a total of roughly 1,400 acres of land, both above and below ground, stretching from the southern tip of the ridge where it will encircle Hatfield Cemetery to the northern tip, where it will sit right above the Clairfield Elementary School, which serves 92 students.

But environmental advocates fear that weakened protections under President Donald Trump could aggravate the mine’s impact on local residents. They point to legislation Trump signed in February rolling back the Stream Protection Rule, a regulation that had increased water testing and protection measures, such as “hydrologic balance” as the Sierra Club points out, near surface mines.

Some locals fear the damage to their drinking water – not to mention to the mountains they call home – could be irreversible.

Around the country, safe drinking water has soared...

April Jarocki
A MOTHER OF FIVE WHO HAS LIVED IN THIS TENNESSEE COMMUNITY FOR NINE YEARS.
as a topic of concern for families and environmental justice advocates, after dangerously high levels of lead in the drinking water of Flint, Michigan prompted a federal emergency in 2016. The Standing Rock protests in 2016 also drew worldwide attention to the issue of clean water, which has surfaced in smaller communities, such as Tornillo, Texas.

More than 4 million Americans – many of them in rural areas – live in places where dangerous contaminants in drinking waters exceed legal limits, according to a new database from the Environmental Working Group.

In Claiborne County, where Cooper Ridge is located, and in the surrounding rural counties, nearly everyone gets their drinking water from wells. The water table in the mountains is complex and unpredictable, and the heavy metals and waste exposed by surface mining can potentially affect drinking water miles away.

Children are especially at risk when it comes to the effects of heavy metal contamination of drinking water, with the toxic byproducts of coal mining frequently including lead, mercury and arsenic.

Long-term exposure to these toxins can stunt neurological development and damage vital organs, and some heavy metals can even cause cancer.

"Most of the mines around here are back in the hills, back in the hollers, and this one is going to be right in your face," said April Jarocki, a mother of five who has lived in this Tennessee community for nine years.

"The mine is literally hundreds of feet above an elementary school," said local resident DJ Coker, who, along with Jarocki, is co-coordinator of the Citizen's Water Monitoring Project, a local initiative that recruits volunteers to test the streams and ponds that dapple the area's mountains.

The project catalogs the existing effects of acid mine runoff from decades of the industry. It also helps serve as an early warning system for damage to the watershed from new mines.

"We don't have much here, so we have to protect what we have and care for what we have, and that's what bonds us together," said Coker, who grew up in the area, left for college, and then returned abruptly before completing his studies to help care for his mother, who was seriously injured in a car crash.

"We care for other people, we care for everything," he said. "The environment gives you so much. It gives you peace, it gives you food when you need it, and the least I can do is protect it."

"We're the treehuggers"

On the northwest side of Cooper Ridge sits Clearfork Valley, a community cobbled together from several unincorporated towns along the Clear Fork Creek. The residents of the valley are relatively isolated even from their county governments – they've lobbied unsuccessfully for several years to get an ambulance station, since the closest one is over a half hour away.

Cell phone service is practically nonexistent, and the two options for internet service are an expensive satellite uplink or archaic dial-up connections.

Much of the land surrounding the valley is owned by out-of-state shell corporations. But since 1977, the Woodland Community Land Trust has been purchasing land in the area a few acres at a time, to return it to community use and protect it from strip mining.

"We own 450 acres, so we're competing with them, our 450 to their thousands," said Tonia Brookman, director of the trust.

Then, she said, letting out a laugh: "We're the treehuggers."

Brookman, though personally opposed to further strip mining in the area, realizes that jobs are the first priority for the community, where employment options are limited. Unemployment in this area remains high, and many residents live on $600 to $700 a month.

The operators of the Cooper Ridge mine project say that it will create about 85 jobs at its peak, each paying around $50,000. The mine is expected to operate for about nine years.

"When you have no jobs, 85 jobs sounds like a lot to this community," Brookman said. "When you're thinking about this type of employment, you're not going to say anything negative about it."

It is a dilemma faced by many Appalachian communities, which have seen coal mining employment declining steadily as major seams are exhausted, and cheaper natural gas and Wyoming coal flood the market, diminishing demand.

Brookman and other community members in this part of northern Tennessee, as well as in Appalachia in general, have been pushing for new solutions beyond ever larger and higher altitude surface mines.

The land trust includes two long-abandoned coal mines, which could be eligible for federal remediation funding.
In cooperation with the University of Tennessee’s agriculture program, the land trust has applied for an EPA Brownfields grant, which they want to use to reclaim one of the abandoned sites and turn it into a hops farm.

The working farm, which would be hydroponic because of the region’s poor topsoil, could employ as many as 65 people, Brookman said.

There’s only one problem with the plan, but it’s a big one. The federal budget proposal put forward by Trump includes huge cuts to the Brownfields program, a popular initiative that helps communities convert abandoned industrial sites into productive economic uses. Trump’s budget would cut the program by more than 30 percent.

Brookman fears that, far from boosting the economy of Appalachia, which voted heavily in favor of Trump in November, the president’s policies and budget proposals could devastate the region. The administration’s budget also proposes eliminating the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), a multi-state agency that injects millions of dollars in economic and infrastructure development grants into the region.

In April, Mick Mulvaney, the president’s budget director, said in a television interview that Trump “probably didn’t know what the Appalachian Regional Commission did,” but had decided to eliminate the agency anyhow.

“ARC does so much for this community,” said Brookman, noting that financial support for several of the homes on the land trust came from the agency in the 1990s.

“The sad part is: How long is it going to take after this funding gets cut? How many years is it going to take before they realize what’s happened? It’s going to make a huge impact here, and not just here but all rural communities. And rural communities are the ones that voted for Trump. They believed what he said – that he was going to make it great again. Everything he’s cutting is affecting the people who supported him and believed in him.”

A Game of Cat and Mouse

On a May afternoon, Jarocki and Coker headed up the northern base of Cooper Ridge to one of their water testing sites in Valley Creek. Next to the creek is a natural gas wellhead that appears to be abandoned, protruding from a foul-smelling rust-orange pond coated with a filmy sheen.

The pond spills an orange plume into Valley Creek, where Jarocki, wearing waders, measured the creek’s temperature, acidity and conductivity. A mile or so downstream, Valley Creek joins the Clear Fork, which runs past Clairfield Elementary School and then hooks
They believed what he said – that he was going to make it great again. Everything he’s cutting is affecting the people who supported him and believed in him.”

Tonia Brookman
DIRECTOR, WOODLAND COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

north into Kentucky to join the Cumberland River, which wanders back into Tennessee before joining the Ohio River and, ultimately, the Mississippi.

The region’s complex hydrology means that even with planning, mining often has unintended consequences on the water table. Ann League is the executive director of SOCM, a member-run organization formally known as Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment. SOCM fights for economic and environmental causes in Tennessee.

League had little interest in politics until strip miners began razing Zeb Mountain near her home. Soon after, her well water turned orange – so much so that after a shower she’d wake up with rust-colored stains on her pillow.

Stories like this abound in the Cumberland Mountains, making the Citizen’s Water Monitoring Project something of an environmental neighborhood watch program. Volunteers from the community join Coker and Jarocki once a month to check water quality at various testing sites in the area.

The test results are fed into an open database maintained by the Appalachian Citizens Enforcement Project, which collects citizen water quality data from similar groups in four states.

If the water quality test results are concerning, as they frequently are, they can be used to file official complaints that trigger a state inspection. The testing
data also can be used to put citizen lobbying pressure on lawmakers and bolster lawsuits against mining companies.

But it’s a task that can feel thankless, and requires a constant game of cat and mouse. Jarocki and Cocker are careful not to trespass.

**Fighting for the Future**

The Cooper Ridge mine has received all but one of the permits it needs to move forward, and appears set to open soon, barring massive community outcry. The jobs it will create will be among the few new Appalachian coal mining jobs created so far under the Trump administration.

But many residents are concerned about long-lasting impacts on health, especially children’s health. Claiborne County, where Cooper Ridge is located, has one of the highest childhood asthma rates in the state, at 18 percent.

The permit area of the surface mine extends to within roughly a half-mile of Clairfield Elementary, right up the slope from the school, raising concerns about dust from the mine further jeopardizing the children’s health.

“It’s a very different time we’re in, and I’m still wrapping my head around what it means for our communities,” said Bonnie Swinford, an organizer with the Tennessee Sierra Club.

“The massive funding cuts that are happening right now are especially disappointing at a time where we’re getting beyond the talk about the ‘war on coal.’ Communities are ready to figure out what is next for their economy, and we’re no longer stuck in this place where it’s taboo to talk about what’s beyond coal,” she said.

DJ Coker and April Jarocki worry that by the time the environmental impact on their community becomes clear, long-lasting damage will have already been done.

To build upon the grassroots efforts to protect the environment, they want to expand their water testing efforts and recruit more volunteers.

“I spent a lot of years looking for home,” Jarocki said. “My children love these mountains. There’s something about this part of the mountains that feels like home.”

“I want my kids to see that when they’re older, and I want my grandkids to see that. I want those kids to swim in the creeks, and to see these beautiful mountains.”

KEITH GRIFFITH is a freelance journalist in New York City. His work has appeared in the Chicago Sun-Times, Chicago Reader and Business Insider. In 2016, he wrote “An Act of Courage: The Fight to Vote in Gould” for Equal Voice News. This story has been updated to remove a statement, which appeared in the original text and an accompanying video. It could not be confirmed.
When I heard the news, I wept.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions was in the middle of announcing his decision to rescind DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), the Obama-era program that has provided 800,000 young immigrants the opportunity to work and pursue an education without exposing themselves to the risk of deportation.

My tears fell for the hundreds of thousands of young people whose horizons abruptly shrank with the administration's decree. How many would be forced to return to lives of hiding, fear and missed potential? Brought to the United States as children – sometimes as babies in the arms of their parents – how many would now be separated from family members, deported to countries they barely know?

By Luz Vega-Marquis
President and CEO
Marguerite Casey Foundation

Photos by Mike Kane
Published: September 27, 2017
The U.S. Congress has until early March 2018 to find a policy solution to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which gives work and education opportunities to youth who were brought to the U.S. as children.

In 2017, President Donald Trump announced he was winding down the program, though public opinion polls showed majority support for these youth who know no other home country and are contributing to the U.S.

In this heartfelt essay, Luz Vega-Marquis, president and CEO of Marguerite Casey Foundation, writes about arriving from Nicaragua, being separated from her family and how watching people of any age speak truth to power restores her faith in the democratic promise.
As I mourned the dreams of these young people, I was also crying for myself — not the successful professional, not the mother and grandmother of an American-born family thriving on U.S. soil, but for the 13-year-old new arrival I still carry inside me; the scared little girl whose voice speaks through mine.

Although I was lucky to have documentation when I came to this country, there are many aspects of the “DREAMer” experience to which I can relate. (DREAMers, of course, are named for the DREAM Act, a legislative effort to protect young immigrants that Congress has failed to enact.)

I was 13 years old when my family fled political turmoil in Nicaragua. Caught up, like DREAMers, in political tailwinds beyond my control, I spent my first year at the home of a half-brother I barely knew, separated from my parents and all but one of my siblings.

I know what it’s like to live with deep uncertainty. I know what it’s like to feel totally lost, to be mocked by my classmates for having the wrong shoes. You try to find the space where you will be least noticed so you can get through the day in one piece. That is a feeling that never entirely goes away.

More than anything, I relate to the fear so many are feeling in the wake of the administration’s DACA announcement — the primal fear of being separated from your family, the parents who gave birth to you, the people you trust most. Bureaucratic issues and the size of my family made it impossible for all of us to come here together. I arrived with one sister, unsure when I would see my parents again — if ever.

I remember how tightly I clung to my sister when the time came for us to go to separate classrooms at school. We were so inseparable people thought we were one person. The truth is, we were terrified of losing one another.

I was lucky — my worst fears were not realized in the end. After a year that felt like an eternity, my parents arrived, with documents that offered reassurance against future separation. But children are marked by these early experiences. The fear and uncertainty you feel when your family bond is threatened never fully go away.

This is why I weep for the children of DACA. The attorney general has yanked the rug out from under them, and the president has challenged Congress to reweave it. Perhaps that will happen. But even if protections are eventually restored, these children will be marked forever by the frightening limbo into which they’ve been cast.

Several years ago, I returned to Nicaragua for the first time. The trip was a shock. As much as I wanted to feel part of the country of my birth, the truth was that I no longer belonged there. The displacement hurt.

For the young people made vulnerable by the decision to terminate DACA — many of whom remember no country but America — deportation would be tragic. I try to imagine what it might be like for them, thrust into an unfamiliar environment, perhaps not even speaking the language, and all I can imagine is terror and despair.

At Marguerite Casey Foundation, we are dedicated to comprehensive immigration reform. It’s a key part of our commitment to all families who feel pushed to the outskirts of the American mainstream by income, education, where they live, or where they come from.

Because I understand what it is to live in fear, the DREAMers themselves have my deepest admiration. This generation knows how to fight for its fundamental right to family in a way I could not have imagined as a teenager. When I see them in action, protesting, organizing, speaking out in public — asserting not only their rights but their fundamental humanity, despite very real personal risk — they restore my faith in the promise of democracy. This, of course, is the same promise that draws generation after generation to these shores.

In the midst of what I know must be profound confusion, facing the threat of terrible consequences, the DREAMers find the courage to speak truth to power. They remind me that we are all human beings and contribute to the American economy, whether or not we have papers to prove it. Together, we have the ability to bring that humanity to its greatest fruition, and to demand others respect it.

As I mourned the dreams of these young people, I was also crying for myself — not the successful professional, not the mother and grandmother of an American-born family thriving on U.S. soil, but for the 13-year-old new arrival I still carry inside me; the scared little girl whose voice speaks through mine.

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Luz Vega-Marquis
PRESIDENT AND CEO, MARGUERITE CASEY FOUNDATION
Each year, Marguerite Casey Foundation honors “America’s Next Leaders,” who are the recipients of the Sargent Shriver Youth Warriors Against Poverty Leadership Award. The Marguerite Casey Foundation award honors young people who, in the spirit of Sargent Shriver, have demonstrated a deep commitment to social justice and have transformed that commitment into effective action across an array of issues.

Marguerite Casey Foundation supports and promotes “America’s Next Leaders” in order to recognize their resolve and courage and to help them build a network that will foster their individual and collective work moving forward.

Each year, Marguerite Casey Foundation board members meet with the youth to talk about their social justice work, lives, communities and plans for the future.

Read more about these incredible young people and their accomplishments at caseygrants.org.
BET ON

Cities and States to Lead Criminal Justice Reform

By Paul Nyhan
Equal Voice News
Photos by Mike Kane
Published: September 6, 2017

Martha Shearer is a community organizer at Greater Birmingham Ministries, where she works full time, in Birmingham.
Martha Shearer understands the War on Drugs because she was one of its casualties. In the 1990s, Shearer spent five years in federal prison for possession of roughly 2 grams of crack cocaine, convicted under a mandatory minimum sentence, she said. After Shearer left prison, she wanted to change a criminal justice system she had just seen crush, instead of rehabilitate, too many people’s lives. So once she returned home to this city she went back to school, earning an associate’s degree, a bachelor’s degree, two master’s degrees, and then embarking on a doctorate. As a newly minted social worker, she began to see how grassroots changes in cities and statewide could reform the nation’s criminal justice system. She joined a campaign that restored food stamps and welfare benefits to people with felony drug convictions, which had been denied under state statutes even though both provide some stability to families, and another campaign in 2017 that restored the right to vote for many formerly incarcerated residents. Shearer’s work on local and state reforms over the last decade has been part of a grassroots movement that is slowly transforming how the nation thinks about criminal justice, moving that thinking, and sometimes policies, away from the worst excesses of mass incarceration and the War on Drugs. After peaking in 2009 the number of people in federal and state prisons in the U.S. has dropped nearly 5 percent, according to The Sentencing Project.
Shearer, now 54, and a community organizer at Greater Birmingham Ministries said, “I just look at my life and look at the things I was able to accomplish. I think that same opportunity is there for other people if they would change the way they accept people...once they return home [from prison].”

Now, as the Trump administration threatens to resume the War on Drugs, with harsher federal sentencing and a renewed commitment to private prisons, grassroots work for state and local changes may be the best hope for criminal justice reform in America in the coming years.

Far from the Trump White House, state legislators are debating bail reform in California. San Antonio, Texas is the latest city to make it easier for those with convictions to apply for municipal jobs. Louisiana is reforming sentencing, parole and the juvenile justice system. Illinois is adding new protections for youth charged with certain crimes.

Taken alone, these local steps may appear small. Banning a single box indicating a criminal history on job applications in one city will hardly revolutionize criminal justice.

But taken together, all of these policies can begin to change courts, bail, and even prisons, regardless of what happens federally. When San Antonio banned the criminal-history box it was only the latest in a long line, as this change spread from San Francisco around the nation.

More importantly, local policy changes create models that can spread to other cities, counties and states. These models, in turn, can generate momentum and ideas for Democrats and Republicans – improving punishment and rehabilitation can be bipartisan work in many communities – during the next few years.

Around the country, policymakers from both parties already are leading reform efforts, including:

- The New Orleans City Council voted to get rid of bail for many nonviolent and minor municipal offenses, after a campaign by the Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition (OPPRC), which includes the New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice.

When it comes to criminal justice in America, President Donald Trump is talking about a new War on Drugs, harsher federal sentencing and private prisons.

But true criminal justice reform – positive change that community organizers say will strengthen neighborhoods – is occurring outside of Washington, D.C. at the state, county and city levels thanks to efforts from families directly affected by policies.

Equal Voice News spent time with Martha Shearer, a community organizer with Greater Birmingham Ministries in Alabama, to learn about her efforts to reform the criminal justice system and how they relate to a nationwide movement of local change.
• Also in New Orleans in 2017, judges, public defenders and community groups created a clinic where roughly 1,300 people went before a judge and worked to have fines and fees waived, cases closed, warrants lifted, and driver’s licenses restored, according to the Center.

• In 2017, Louisiana – known as the incarceration capital of the world – enacted 10 bills that will reform sentencing, parole, probation and fines, with the goal of reducing its prison population, according to the Center.

• The Illinois state House and Senate passed legislation designed to get rid of booking stations in schools, according to the United Congress of Community and Religious Organizations. Gov. Bruce Rauner approved the legislation in August.

• In 2016 grassroots advocates won new protections for youth charged with serious crimes in Illinois, including greater access to lawyers and video recordings of some interrogations while they are in custody.

• Connecticut Gov. Dannel Malloy has led a sustained campaign to reform his state’s prison system into one more focused on rehabilitation and successful re-entry, reducing solitary confinement and making other changes, The Atlantic reports in its special project, “The Presence of Justice: Beyond the age of mass incarceration.”

“What I have hope for is that there are so many people who have been engaged in reforms at the local level and state level…it would take a mighty, mighty effort to derail all of these reform efforts,” said Tshaka Barrows, executive director of The W. Haywood Burns Institute, which works with communities nationwide to eliminate racial disparities in the juvenile justice system. “The opportunities are enormous.”

Progress in Red and Blue

Despite tough-on-crime rhetoric flowing from President Donald Trump’s administration, even red states packed with his supporters – such as Martha Shearer’s home state of Alabama, where Trump won 63 percent of the vote – are embracing criminal justice reforms. Two years ago, Alabama’s Republican-dominated state Legislature passed sweeping sentencing and prison reforms. The reforms reduced the penalty for simple drug possession, which meant decreased incarceration rates, improved post-incarceration supervision and encouraged alternatives to prison through drug and mental health courts, according to Carol Gundlach, a policy analyst at the Alabama-based Arise Citizens’ Policy Project.

“I just look at my life and look at the things I was able to accomplish. I think that same opportunity is there for other people once they return home.”

Martha Shearer
COMMUNITY ORGANIZER WITH GREATER BIRMINGHAM MINISTRIES
Together, these moves have begun easing chronic crowding inside the state’s prisons.

At the same time, Alabama began easing the transition from prison to the outside world by restoring access to food stamps and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families – commonly known as welfare – for people with felony drug convictions. Then earlier in 2017, Alabama restored the right to vote to thousands of residents by changing restrictions on people with felony convictions casting ballots.

“Changes we have seen in Alabama have been Republican led,” Gundlach said. Criminal justice reform is “an initiative that really has brought the left and the right together.”

Heading into the next legislative session, Gundlach hopes this bipartisan momentum will carry a statewide bill that would remove the criminal-history box from applications for state jobs to the governor’s desk.

“It’s all basically on grassroots [leadership]. Because without it, I don’t think we would have got as far as we had,” Martha Shearer said.

Alabama’s prisons and courts need a lot more help, Gundlach added, but “we have taken some good and important first steps.”

Local Reforms Feed Bigger Impacts

On the other side of the country, California is taking even bigger steps.

Three years after voters passed Proposition 47, a pioneering reform that reclassified some felony drug offenses as misdemeanors and allowed thousands to have old charges reduced, state legislators are tackling other parts of the court system.
What I have hope for is that there are so many people who have engaged in reforms at the local level and state level. The opportunities are enormous.

Tshaka Barrows
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE W. HAYWOOD BURNS INSTITUTE

In 2017, they were debating legislation that would reduce reliance on bail and work to eliminate racial disparities in that system, according to Zachary Norris, executive director of the Oakland-based Ella Baker Center for Human Rights.

Legislators are also considering the RISE Act, which would limit the practice of tacking on an extra three years to a felony drug conviction when an individual has a prior drug conviction.

Both ideas are moving. The RISE Act is headed for a vote on the Assembly floor in September. In August, California Gov. Jerry Brown gave bail reform a major boost when he said he will work with key sponsors of the measure and others this fall to craft a workable plan.

There has been opposition, though. The Assembly already rejected a bail reform bill, The Mercury News reported. The proposal also has been criticized for its costs, challenges in implementation and approach to crime, according to the Los Angeles Times.

Supporters counter that the legislation is a step toward a new approach to criminal justice.

Trump “is aiming to jump-start the failed War on Drugs and restart and ramp it up further...At the same time here in California we are trying to roll it back,” Ella Baker Center’s Norris said. “There is hope at the local level of putting forward a new vision of community safety that is not grounded in punishment and prison, but is grounded in restorative justice and economic opportunity.”

Dig a little deeper in California and you find these statewide bills are fed by local streams. Nearly two years ago, Santa Clara County’s Board of Supervisors approved bail reforms that presaged the bills in the state Legislature.

Today, those reforms are keeping more people out of jail while they await trial in that county, and saving the local government money, according to Silicon Valley De-Bug, which with its director, Raj Jayadev, helped lead the grassroots campaign for the changes.

Often, reform begins on an even smaller scale – like a single neighborhood in Asbury Park, New Jersey. In a handful of city blocks in this city on the Jersey Shore, too many young men and women were cycling in and out of juvenile detention for probation violations.

The W. Haywood Burns Institute worked with local agencies to figure out why, analyzing data and connecting with the community. Together, they hired men and women, who had been through the same juvenile justice system, as community coaches to work with youth who were landing back in detention.

Results were dramatic. In this one neighborhood, from 2009 to 2012, the number of young men and women of color sent back to detention for violating probation each month dropped to 6 from 31, according to a case study.

Since then, this data-driven approach has spread to other parts of the country. Today in California, for example, Ventura County is using the same model to develop solutions to reduce the number of children in detention, according to Barrows.

“There are all of these kinds of minutiae: inner workings at the local level you can really dig your hands into for meaningful reform,” Barrows said.

Together, these inner workings of city, county and statewide reforms are continuing to fuel a grassroots movement that has been growing for a decade. Yet, in a sense, the movement remains near the starting line, with a long road ahead to reach advocates’ desired reforms.

But with the Trump administration signaling a return to the War on Drugs and the rise in mass incarceration that would mean, these local reforms are more vital than ever.

They could drive changes in criminal justice in America, regardless of what happens in Washington, D.C.

“It’s tough to quantify the breakdown of progress toward reform, but if you could, I suspect it would be heavily skewed toward the states, since the most significant federal reform proposals (such as the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act) died in the last Congress and haven’t yet been renewed,” Ames Grawert, counsel at the Brennan Center for Justice, wrote in an email.

“Contrast that with the states, where conservative governors have led very successful reform efforts.”

Hope for Change in Alabama

Here in Alabama, Martha Shearer continues to work toward changing this state’s criminal justice system. Now, she is focusing on banning the box for felony convictions from state job applications, something the city of Birmingham has already done. When she started working on the Birmingham campaign, she was told it would “never happen.”

Not only did it happen in Birmingham, known as “The Magic City,” the Senate passed a statewide version in 2017 and she is optimistic the Legislature will move it next year.

As for Trump and the threat of a new War on Drugs, “I have been so busy doing other things. I just really have not paid attention to him,” Shearer said.

PAUL NYHAN is the senior writer for Marguerite Casey Foundation’s Equal Voice News.
Shay Couch-Murray, an AmeriCorps volunteer with The Choice Program at UMBC, heads to Baltimore’s Lakeland neighborhood in June 2017 to meet youth and their parents.
The drive to Southwest Baltimore takes about 20 minutes on this early evening, as downtown streets become congested following a steam pipe explosion that sent emergency vehicles into the streets.

Shay Couch-Murray, an AmeriCorps education volunteer with The Choice Program at The University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), maneuvers her gray Hyundai sedan by a police roadblock and takes a detour, passing the Orioles baseball park of Camden Yards.

Her work with students, parents and school officials is part of a youth engagement process by Choice Program AmeriCorps Community Service Learning Fellows, as the 50 or so volunteers who help yearly are formally known. The fellows in the Choice education initiative, who are called members by the AmeriCorps service program, assist students by serving as a bridge between school officials and families. The goal is to cut down on suspensions, expulsions and arrests.

The 30-year-old Black woman from the Bronx is heading to this city's Lakeland neighborhood to support youth and families with home visits.

On this humid day, she passes modest two-story brick houses in this low-income neighborhood that is home to predominantly Black and Latino families.

“It’s not about ‘helping,’” says Shay, who almost always goes by her first name. “It’s about supporting – giving people the means for them to do something on their own.”

The Choice Program at UMBC started in the late 1980s as The Choice Intensive Advocacy Program. Mark Shriver, son of anti-poverty leaders Sargent Shriver and Eunice Kennedy Shriver, launched The Choice Program after realizing that incarceration was affecting particularly youth of color and families in this city.

Shriver structured the program so that community solutions could be found as alternatives to incarcerating city youth.
Since its founding, The Choice Program has grown to include advocacy partnerships with the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services, Baltimore City Department of Social Services and Baltimore City Public Schools.

Baltimore youth participate in The Choice Program after school administrators, support teams of teachers and counselors, or city and state officials make referrals. Students in The Choice Education Program, for example, might be facing behavior, emotional well-being or attendance issues in the classroom.

Woven into this work is the grinding instability of poverty that, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, affects at least 1 out of every 5 residents in this city of about 614,700 people.

Given the prevalence of poverty, says The Choice Program Director LaMar Davis, one of the first questions AmeriCorps volunteers in the schools are encouraged to ask youth is: “Did you eat today?”

“Our kids have complex lives,” he says. “What happens at home affects school.”

Nationwide, families and community advocates – including youth – also are continuing efforts to end the school-to-prison pipeline. That pipeline, families and advocates say, revolves around what they view as overly punitive school disciplinary measures that disproportionately affect Black and Latino students.

AmeriCorps volunteers such as Shay, and The Choice Program staff, view themselves as part of this nationwide movement to reduce incarceration in communities of color, especially in low-income neighborhoods.

We’re planting seeds, and those seeds are for belief and hope. Belief in self and family. Belief in community. And belief that youth can navigate the complexities of the world.”

LaMar Davis
CHOICE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

In conversations with youth in Baltimore, Shay Couch-Murray weaves in humor, warmth, sports and support.
But what do those efforts look like? How is community progress accomplished?

In many ways, these efforts mean finding committed people to:

• Drive a car through a police detour at the end of a long work day to listen to youth and parents.
• Work at schools during the day and make evening home visits to build trust and communicate with youth, parents, teachers, administrators and authorities.
• Cheer on a student at a school awards ceremony because her parents work minimum wage jobs and can’t afford to leave.
• Inform parents and youth of school policies and procedures that lead to an official suspension or expulsion.
• Answer late-night calls on an old-school flip phone to support youth with urgent questions.

It also means being willing to work with families up to 60 hours per week – and often on holidays – to take small steps and find pathways for progress in the face of the trauma that poverty can bring.

Shay might walk outside a classroom or play basketball with a student for a few minutes, instead of having a teacher send a youth directly to the principal’s office for a behavior infraction.

“Our goal is to get them back to the classroom within 15 minutes,” Davis says.

For 30 years, The Choice Program at The University of Maryland, Baltimore County has supported Baltimore City youth, including young people facing poverty.

Each year, about 50 AmeriCorps volunteers work with The Choice Program and Baltimore City families to find community solutions and reduce suspensions and incarceration.

Equal Voice News spent time with Shay Couch-Murray, a 2016-17 AmeriCorps volunteer, and the families she worked with in the Lakeland neighborhood to learn more about youth engagement and mentoring.
“We’re planting seeds, and those seeds are for belief and hope. Belief in self and family. Belief in community. And belief that youth can navigate the complexities of the world.”

///

Shay’s gray sedan rolls up to the park in Lakeland, a neighborhood some residents say is isolated because a highway cuts through it. The neighborhood has a fast-food chicken restaurant, a doughnut shop and an independent supermarket.

During the day, when classes are in session, Shay and another AmeriCorps volunteer assist students at Lakeland Elementary/Middle School. On this early evening, Shay looks out her car window and spots young people from the school.

As she exits her car, kids run up the park’s slight slope. “Miss Shay! Miss Shay!” they yell. She clasps hands and offers hugs.

“You good?” she asks in a reassuring and welcoming way, as she makes her way to outdoor basketball courts.

Basketballs fly in the air as a group of boys and young men try to sink shots. One boy pedals his bicycle, circling the courts. A few kids sit on cement blocks near sloping grass.

Shay carries the demeanor of an older cousin – one who believes in face-to-face conversations, nonjudgmental support and simply being present, as much as possible, whenever a question surfaces.

She calls 14-year-old David over to talk about what he has learned over the year by working with her and previous AmeriCorps volunteers.

David once confided to her that he has difficulty in getting to school on time, and questioned whether classroom studies were for him. He thought all he needed, at his age, was a job.

Shay encouraged him to stay in school, saying small steps can lead to major accomplishments. Tonight, her presence at the park seems to reassure him.

“She keeps me out of trouble. She tells me to keep my grades up. She doesn’t yell,” David, who is Black, says. “You don’t get people like that often. You need to keep her around.”

///

AmeriCorps volunteers such as Shay only spend a year with The Choice Program at UMBC. But it’s these frequent, small interactions with youth over that year that volunteers and program organizers hope will build trust and contribute to the larger goal of disrupting suspensions, expulsions and arrests.

Parents offer guidance and support. But poverty and trauma remain powerful factors affecting Baltimore City families, Davis says. Some studies, he notes, now consider racism to be a form of trauma.

Many low-income families in the area, he says, are “keeping their heads above water.” While the work of AmeriCorps volunteers with The Choice Program is worthwhile, the long hours make it difficult for people to serve a second year.

At the park, David pauses to reflect on how he has grown with Shay as a mentor. “She tells me the people who are bad, don’t keep them around. Only keep the good people around. She made me a better leader,” he says.

“It’s about mutual respect. I’m here to guide them,” Shay says. “There’s a beautiful relationship where you can ask: ‘Did you do your homework?’”

///

Around 7 p.m., a boy dribbling a basketball approaches Shay, who is wearing a black polo shirt and gray pants. Her aviator sunglasses are perched on her short hair.

“Hey, Miss Shay, you want to go 1-on-1?”

“What do you go to? Seven?”

The New York City native drops her sunglasses on the court. She folds her body to the height of the boy. The game is on.

As she plays basketball, Dorrion, another Black youth, stops to talk about working with her for the past school year. His demeanor can seem serious to those who don’t know him well.

“I can relate to her. We grew up in the same circumstances,” he says of Shay, who is Black and earned her bachelor’s degree in sociology from Morgan State University. “She is blunt, but she cares.”

Shay says later that Dorrion can be a quiet teen but his seriousness disappears as he gets to know a person.
If she and other AmeriCorps volunteers weren’t around to offer support, where do Dorrion and David think they’d be?

“I’d probably be in the streets, doing stuff,” Dorrion, 14, says quietly, with no other youth nearby.

David also appreciates Shay’s efforts. Without her support, “I’d be getting bad grades. I’d be repeating the eighth grade,” he says.

One way David knows he has grown as a teenager is that he now tells younger kids in the neighborhood to stick with good people and avoid troublemakers – the same message Shay shares with him.

As David thinks about that idea, the serious expression on his 14-year-old face disappears. A wide smile quickly replaces it.

Before Shay leaves the park, she turns to Dorrion and reminds him of a work and mentorship opportunity offered by The Choice Program in partnership with Starbucks.

“Tomorrow, you have job training, and wear that shirt,” she says, before turning to more kids.

“Y’all be safe.”

The low-income Baltimore neighborhoods in which AmeriCorps volunteers with The Choice Program work have prompted some leaders in the city to suggest that the outreach workers wear bullet-proof vests for safety during community visits.

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SUPPORTING
HEALTHY YOUTH
DEVELOPMENT

Citing studies about trauma and Adverse Childhood
Experiences, LaMar Davis, director of The Choice
Program at UMBC offers these ways to support young
people so they can have long-term resiliency:

• Encourage caring adult relationships whenever
possible, such as with relatives, teachers, coaches
and community leaders.

• Ensure meaningful participation, such as in
academics, music, sports and the arts, so youth
can build confidence and know they’re part of a
community.

• Set high expectations so young people know
they can and will succeed.
Another time, she and other Baltimore youth traveled to the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture to learn about Black leaders such as Harriet Tubman, Booker T. Washington and Chuck Berry.

Shay has taken neighborhood youth for archery lessons, where they learned about the body positioning necessary for arrows to fly properly. At first, the youth dismissed archery as “phony,” she says, but they ended up loving the experience.

“It gives the kids something else to do,” says Dexter Harris, David’s dad. “Inner-city kids don’t get to see a lot of that.”

Shay believes in the power of education.

Davis adds that The Choice Program’s overall partnership with Lakeland Elementary/Middle School has improved test results campus-wide.

By about 8:50 p.m., after a day of work and attending a community art unveiling at the Baltimore Police Department Headquarters, Shay sits in her car and fills out a form describing her work in Lakeland.

Before she returns to downtown Baltimore, she shares why she values this work. She says she identifies with the neighborhood kids: She grew up in a poor part of the Bronx. Her mom and grandmother raised her.

“Education is the key to everything,” she says. “The program teaches kids to dream beyond themselves, beyond Lakeland and beyond Baltimore. Sometimes, you need someone to validate your dreams.”

This fall, Shay is back at Morgan State University. She is pursuing her master’s degree in social work.

A new group of AmeriCorps volunteers, Davis confirms, is already showing up in Baltimore City neighborhoods to listen to families and offer support.

BRAD WONG is news editor for Marguerite Casey Foundation’s Equal Voice News.

ON RACE, BALTIMORE AND BREAKFAST

On the day I returned to Seattle, I had one last meeting with Choice Program youth in Baltimore.

The group was composed of mostly young Black men, who had participated in the program as students. We found a breakfast place near my hotel, blocks from the city’s Inner Harbor.

As we entered, the patrons – about a dozen White people – quickly swung their heads and gave us glares you’d remember forever. The silence, though fleeting, seemed to last minutes.

I’ve received glares and glances before but nothing like that. I felt like perspiration was going to drip down my back.

The youth found a table for all of us. Over food, we talked about Baltimore, their lives, Seattle and sports.

Our time was tight. They had a meeting to attend. So, I approached the waitress, who is White, at the cash register and gave my credit card to pay the bill.

She lowered her voice and said, “I’m really glad you’re doing this type of work with them. We need more efforts like this.”

Her concern was genuine. In hindsight, I should have said these youth – wearing shirts with The Choice Program logo – are the true agents of positive change. They are leaders and mentors, who are putting their heads together and working with older adults to find community solutions.

I just happened to be an Asian-American guy visiting from Seattle who had a credit card.

Outside, before I left, I took a photo of some of the youth. Later, as I looked at it, I saw bright smiles. One youth flashed a peace sign.

It was the best sight of my day.

– Brad Wong of Equal Voice News
Grassroots leaders and local officials wasted little time organizing a coordinated campaign to fight SB 4, a new Texas law that targets cities, towns and sheriffs that don't cooperate with federal immigration enforcement.

Only nine days after Texas Republican Gov. Greg Abbott signed the legislation, formally known as Senate Bill 4, into law, grassroots advocates announced a “Summer of Resistance” campaign May 16, 2017. The statute allows police officers, sheriff deputies and Texas state troopers to ask about a person’s immigration status - whether they are here legally - during a routine stop.

It also permits putting sheriffs and police chiefs in jail if they don’t cooperate with federal immigration agents.

It’s been called the anti-sanctuary law because it targets cities and towns that, in general, do not cooperate with agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Courts have ruled that immigration enforcement is the responsibility of the federal government. Over the years, though, some local law enforcement agencies have entered into agreements to cooperate with the U.S. government, especially to hold an individual until federal immigration agents arrive.

The new measure has sparked an outcry among families, grassroots advocates and some politicians, who say it will unfairly target immigrants.

Critics say SB 4 will lead to racial profiling in a state in which nearly 40 percent of its 28 million residents are Latino, strain local law enforcement agencies and make cities and towns less safe by eroding community trust with local authorities.

“We are going to fight tooth and nail until SB 4 is 6 feet under the ground,” El Paso County Commissioner David Stout said during a media briefing. “This law makes all Texans less safe.”

El Paso County Commissioners already voted to authorize legal action, San Antonio is discussing possible action, and Dallas is poised to talk about it on May 24, 2017.

IMMIGRATION ADVOCATES ON SB 4: We’re Resisting in Texas

By Paul Nyhan
Equal Voice News
Published: May 18, 2017
Immigration policy and enforcement has typically been the job of the U.S. government. But in 2017, Texas enacted SB 4, which permitted, among many things, local law enforcement officials to ask about a person’s immigration status during routine stops.

Many families, immigrant rights advocates and elected officials stood up to oppose the law. They said it would strike fear in communities and that civil rights would be at risk.

Eventually, organizations challenged the law and part of it went into effect. Equal Voice News looks at the issue and the “Summer of Resistance” to SB 4.

According to Austin City Council Member Greg Casar. The Austin City Council is expected to vote on a measure that would allow the city’s legal team to challenge the law, The Austin Chronicle reported.

In addition, sheriffs and police chiefs from five big cities in Texas have come out against the plan, according to The Center for Popular Democracy.

The campaign’s legal strategy is emerging, though lawyers will collaborate about where and how to move forward rapidly in May, Casar added. A legal challenge to SB 4, which starts on Sept. 1, 2017, can occur at the state and federal levels.

During the “Summer of Resistance” the Workers Defense Project and Texas Organizing Project are among the groups that will organize protests and street rallies to fight the law.

Abbott signed SB 4 into law on May 7, 2017 - a Sunday - with no advance notice to the public. His office broadcast the signing on Facebook Live.

Since then, immigrants and social justice advocates have held vigils, including ones in the Rio Grande Valley and Austin, opposing it.

“Abbott had his say, now it’s time for the people of Texas to have theirs. We are moving this fight from Abbott’s backyard to our home turf - where Texas communities fight for their families every day,” said Jose Garza, executive director of the Workers Defense Project.

A day after the signing, Terri Burke, executive director of the ACLU of Texas, voiced opposition to SB 4, saying it’s an affront to the values of the Lone Star State.

"This is also about unraveling democracy," she said during a media briefing. "People elected by voters can be removed from office through a mechanism of this bill."

She also pointed out concerns with SB 4 and possible actions by troopers with the Texas Department of Public Safety, which reports to the governor.

If people are stopped under SB 4, she added, the ACLU of Texas suggests they follow requests by law enforcement officials but contact an attorney as soon as possible.

Abbott has said the statute upholds the law, echoing a broader push nationally by Republicans who want local law enforcement to help crack down on undocumented immigrants who are also criminals.

“We will defend the most vulnerable, and we will defend the voiceless who often times get used (for political purposes),” San Antonio Council Member Rey Saldaña said during a media briefing.

Immigration rights advocates in Texas point to successful legal and grassroots challenges in recent years that stopped similar laws in Arizona and Alabama.

In recent weeks, Texas state lawmakers also have approved or considered other bills that social justice advocates are calling anti-immigrant and anti-family.

One is an approved bill that permits family immigration detention facilities, in this case one run by the GEO Group, to be classified as child care providers.

The other bill, under consideration as of May 17, 2017, would end work-study aid to students attending public universities in Texas and who have status under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.

Paul Nyhan is the senior writer for Marguerite Casey Foundation’s Equal Voice News. Brad Wong, news editor for Equal Voice News contributed to this report, which includes information from The Associated Press.
Change for families.
By families.
Each year, Marguerite Casey Foundation produces reports shedding light on grassroots and policy developments in the four U.S. regions in which the Foundation conducts its grantmaking: the Southwest, West, Midwest and South.

These reports highlight why the Foundation invests in these geographic regions, as well as information about low-income families and how the areas align with the philanthropy’s mission of issuing multi-year unrestricted grants to support a family-led movement for change. That is, when low-income families and poor people of all backgrounds come together to advocate for solutions to poverty at all levels and to build more just and equitable communities.

Community progress is occurring, but the stakes for poor families remain high. While the poverty rate dropped from 2015 to 2016, 40.6 million people out
of a population of 319.1 million remained officially poor, according to the latest U.S. Census Bureau data. Nearly one third of those Americans were kids. The largest portion of poor Americans were White (42.5 percent), followed by Hispanic (27.4 percent), Black (22.7 percent) and Asian (4.7 percent).

These reports—which the Foundation calls regional analyses—highlight the many steps low-income families take to accomplish policy victories, such as better hourly wages or affordable housing ordinances to address gentrification, at various levels. Topics affecting low-income families include criminal justice reform, immigration, education, employment protections, child care, the minimum wage, fair lending and health care access.

The regional analyses also show the results of long-term investments by the Foundation, lessons learned and how collaboration and progress can unfold through support from networks of families and nonprofit organizations that stand for positive change.

Rami Nashashibi, executive director of Chicago grantee Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) and a new Marguerite Casey Foundation board member, believes there is a key reason why his home city, unlike others in the United States, has largely avoided recent confrontational and violent protests with authorities.

His thought, as summarized in the Midwest regional analysis: “Organizations in the Chicago Equal Voice Network are successfully channeling the frustration of marginalized communities toward positive action.”

All of this exemplifies how Marguerite Casey Foundation, its mission, and grants totaling more than $421 million since 2001 are working to ensure that positive change is truly possible and no family lives in poverty. These examples also illustrate how philanthropy supports democracy in America.
WHAT WE LEARNED

Marguerite Casey Foundation lives by its brand promise of “Ask. Listen. Act.” It’s a way to engage, as a partner, with grantee organizations and low-income families who are advocating on their own behalf for positive change.

In 2017, the Foundation worked with The Center for Effective Philanthropy to conduct an independent survey of grantee organizations to obtain feedback and learn about opportunities for improvement.

Grantees viewed Marguerite Casey Foundation as “exceptionally positive” when it came to the Foundation’s impact on their organizations and the sustainability of their work in the future. Grantees also rated the Foundation highly for the extent to which it has an impact on their fields of work, particularly on their efforts to improve public policy.

"Ask. Listen. Act." reflects not only the Foundation’s external learning philosophy but also its promise to continually question itself, reject and improve.

71% GRANTEE RESPONSE RATE

OUR COMMITMENT

We seek to build strong relationships with grantees, and provide multi-year, general operating support as well as non-monetary resources including convenings, in order to build the capacity of grantees to engage families in organizing, advocacy and activism to create a more socially and economically just society for all.
Marguerite Casey Foundation learned valuable feedback from grantees and is taking steps to build upon its strong relationships with grantees. In the survey, grantees expressed the desire for more consistent contact with Foundation staff members. The Foundation recently formed “cross-regional teams” which pair two program officers to foster more communication across geographic areas, follow grantees’ progress, help problem solve, and connect grantees to other organizations, funders and resources. To further deepen communication with grantees, the Foundation also instituted an enhanced relationship management process which expands typical program officer communications and makes the program officer available for check-ins that provide mutual updates and respond to any grantee needs or requests.

WHAT WE’VE CHANGED

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KEY FINDINGS FROM THE CENTER FOR EFFECTIVE PHILANTHROPY

CEP compared our results to those from its database of over 300 funders.

IMPACT ON SUSTAINABILITY
Grantees say MCF general support grants have an exceptional impact on their ability to sustain their work.

98th percentile

IMPACT ON PUBLIC POLICY
Grantees rated MCF highly on the extent to which the Foundation has affected public policy.

84th percentile

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT
Grantees rate the Foundation as having significant positive impact on their organizations.

96th percentile

IMPACT ON GRANTEE FIELDS
Grantees rated the Foundation in the top 10 percent of funders for our impact on their fields.

90th percentile

WHO IS CEP?

The Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) is a nonprofit organization focused on the development of comparative data to enable higher-performing philanthropic funders.

www.cep.org

Marguerite Casey Foundation is one of, if not the, most significant funders of community-organizing and movement building. Their emphasis on long-term, general operating [grants], and trusting the leaders of the organization they fund is unique in the field.”

MARGUERITE CASEY FOUNDATION GRANTEE
In late 2017, Marguerite Casey Foundation issued $4 million in flexible grants to 35 community organizations nationwide to boost greater public participation in democracy through nonpartisan “integrated voter engagement (IVE).”

Nonpartisan integrated voter engagement emphasizes education and leadership development to inform communities about issues that affect them and engage them in the solutions.

What makes these grants distinct is that the Foundation issued them in December 2017 so community organizations can have time to plan nonpartisan activities to encourage more democratic participation, regardless of whether an election is around the corner.

These grants reflect Marguerite Casey Foundation’s efforts to support a civic culture of inclusion for people—especially those who have historically been overlooked or intentionally excluded—to be part of public life in the United States.

Marguerite Casey Foundation is dedicated to creating a movement of poor families advocating on their own behalf for change. We strive to bring humility and hope to our work. Our actions are guided by the firm belief that significant positive change is not only possible, but absolutely necessary.
IN 2002 THE FOUNDATION’S ENDOWMENT WAS AROUND $292.5 MILLION. IN 16 YEARS, THE FOUNDATION HAS PAID OUT $421 MILLION IN GRANTS.

WHAT IS CLEAR IS THAT THE FOUNDATION’S PROVISION OF LONG-TERM GENERAL SUPPORT FOR GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS WORKS TO EMPHASIZE THE FOUNDATION-GRANTEE RELATIONSHIP, MCF’S BOARD OF DIRECTORS HOLDS ITS QUARTERLY MEETINGS IN GRANTEE COMMUNITIES.

THE KIDS COUNT DATA GAVE MARGUERITE CASEY FOUNDATION A SNAPSHOT OF THE REGIONS WHERE FAMILIES WERE IN THE MOST NEED.

THEY ARE NOT LAUGHING NOW.
COLLABORATION IS ESSENTIAL TO THE FOUNDATION’S MISSION OF MOBILIZING COMMUNITIES TO ADVOCATE FOR THEMSELVES.

David Villa
MARGUERITE CASEY FOUNDATION BOARD MEMBER

Midwest Grantees: Action Now Institute • American Indian Center • Brighton Park Neighborhood Council • Chicago Coalition for the Homeless • Communities United • Enlace Chicago • Grassroots Collaborative • Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights • Inner-City Muslim Action Network • Kenwood Oakland Community Organization • Logan Square Neighborhood Association • Metropolitan Tenants Organization • Organizing Neighborhoods for Equality: Northside • People’s Lobby Education Institute • Southwest Organizing Project • TARGET Area Development Corporation • United Congress of Community and Religious Organizations (FS: Inner-City Muslim Action Network) • Westside Health Authority

National Grantees: Advancement Project • Alaska Community Foundation: Progressive and Social Justice Fund • Alliance for Justice • Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy • Aspen Forum for Community Solutions (FS: The Aspen Institute) • Association of Black Foundation Executives • Black Youth Project 100 (FS: National Korean American Service and Education Consortium) • Center for Community Change • Center for Popular Democracy • Demos: A Network for Ideas and Action Ltd • Economic Policy Institute • Equal Voice Action • Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute • Gamaliel Foundation • Grassroots Global Justice • Hispanics In Philanthropy • Interfaith Worker Justice • Jobs for the Future • Jobs with Justice Education Fund • Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies • National Association for the Advancement of Colored People • National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy • National LGBTQ Task Force • National Collaborative for Health Equity (FS: New Venture Fund) • National Domestic Workers Alliance • National Partnership for New Americans • National Youth Alliance on Boys and Men of Color (FS: Bend The Arc-A Jewish Partnership for Justice) • National Urban League • Native Americans in Philanthropy • National Urban Indian Family Coalition (FS: Native American Youth and Family Center) • Neighborhood Funders Group • OneAmerica • Opportunity Agenda (FS: Tides

Board Members

Freeman A. Hrabowski, III (Chair) • Patricia Schroeder (Vice-Chair) • David Villa (Treasurer) • Douglas X. Patiño (Secretary) • Melody Barnes • Chad Boettcher • Angela Diaz • Tessie Guillermo • Rami Nashashibi • Carmen Rojas • Jack Thomas

Marguerite Casey Foundation
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Change is possible
WE ARE GOING TO DO THIS TOGETHER. IT'S IMPORTANT THAT WE PUT OUR FEAR ASIDE. WE HAVE TO PERSEVERE. WE ARE GOING TO BUILD THIS MOVEMENT TOGETHER.

LUZ VEGA-MARQUIS
MARGUERITE CASEY FOUNDATION
PRESIDENT AND CEO