



ALABAMA APPLESEED ADVOCATE

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Chief Justice Drayton Nabers Names Executive Director John Pickens to

Blue Ribbon Task Force!

Alabama Appleseed has been at the forefront of the Indigent Defense Reform effort for the past two years. In July of this year Chief Justice Drayton Nabers, Jr. appointed a blue-ribbon task force charged with developing legislative recommendations for reform of Alabama's indigent defense system to be implemented during the 2006 legislative session. Alabama Appleseed's Executive Director, John Pickens, has been named to this task force. The task force is working on legislation that would establish a statewide Indigent Defense Commission, which would ensure that there is quality legal representation for indigent defendants in each judicial circuit in the state and would bring much-needed fiscal and budgetary accountability to the funding structure for indigent defense.

New: HISPANIC FINANCIAL ACCESS PROJECT

Alabama Appleseed is undertaking a new project called the Hispanic Financial Access Project to improve the accessibility of banks and other financial services to Hispanic immigrants in Alabama. Alabama is the home to over 75,830 Hispanic immigrants. The Hispanic population in Alabama has grown over 200% in the last ten years. The goal of the project is to expand the banking services offered to the Hispanic community to include a diverse spectrum of financial services. We have contacted law firms and grassroots organizations across the state to help introduce the project in their areas. With their help we will reach out to both the banking community and to the Hispanic community in an effort to educate and assure both communities that increasing financial access to Hispanic immigrants living in Alabama is mutually beneficial.

We believe this project will help stabilize the Hispanic workforce by giving them access to banking services and helping Hispanic immigrants understand the value of developing a banking history and a good credit rating. By increasing their financial access to banking services, the project will lessen the risk of Hispanic immigrants being victims of crimes of robberies and burglaries and predatory lending practices.

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Our On-Going Advocacy Projects

SMALL BUSINESS/HEALTH INSURANCE PROJECT: As a collaborative project with three other Appleseed Centers, we have been working to develop affordable solutions to the high cost of health insurance for small businesses and their employees. We have worked directly with the Health Care sub-committee of Governor Riley's *Black Belt Action Commission*. In the coming year, we will continue to work with the commission to find and develop solutions that could be developed and modeled for statewide application. As an extension of this project, we will work to assist with the development and distribution of information that small business owners can provide to their employees about public benefits such as health insurance, food stamps, child care subsidies and earned income tax credit that their employees can access.

LANDLORD / TENANT LAW REFORM: Alabama remains one of two states that does not have a modern, up-to-date residential landlord/tenant law. We have worked for the enactment of a model, uniform act that was developed by a committee of the Alabama Law Institute. This model bill is fair and balanced as between the rights and obligations of both landlords and tenants.

JUDICIAL ELECTIONS REFORM: We continue to advocate for a change in the way we elect appellate court judges in the State. We are supportive of the current proposal by the State Bar for merit selection and retention elections of appellate court judges.

LIVING WAGE ADVOCACY: We have worked to initiate a living wage educational campaign in the City of Birmingham. By facilitating the campaign we were able to form the *Alabama Alliance For A Living Wage* from Birmingham-area groups concerned with the "Living Wage" issue. Alabama Appleseed is working with the coalition in the role of organizer of the coalition group and will continue serving the coalition in that role.

Ongoing Support

Your donations will help ensure our continuing advocacy for those with little or no voice in the public affairs of Alabama. We would greatly appreciate your consideration of a financial donation to Alabama Appleseed as we conclude our 2005 Annual Campaign. A return envelope is enclosed for your convenience.

WHO WE ARE

Alabama Appleseed is a non-profit, non-partisan organization founded in 1999 to identify significant needs in the State of Alabama, tackle their root causes, and craft practical, lasting solutions through legal advocacy, community activism, and policy expertise.