



HEARTLAND CENTER FOR **JOBS & FREEDOM**

# IMPACT REPORT 2022

# DEAR FRIENDS,

Happy holidays to each of you and thank you for your continued support. When we opened our doors in 2017, we were building something brand new. We did not know what our path would look like and whether we would succeed. We simply knew that low-wage workers were being exploited in unacceptable ways and attorneys needed to lend their skills to their movements for change. I am very heartened that together, we have come a long way and had the impact we hoped we would.

I am proud to share with you what the team at Heartland Center has accomplished this year. We made huge strides in all of our impact areas: eviction defense, worker and consumer litigation, and movement support. We also dove into implementing Tenant's Right to Counsel and started a new group, the Lawyer's Committee for Jobs and Freedom. In 2023, we're looking forward to launching two new programs: Safe Homes for All and the Worker Power Project. At the heart of every program is the sincere belief that low-wage workers deserve justice in their homes and workplaces and that every person should be able to live a full life free of abuse, exploitation, and poverty.

We wouldn't be able to do the work we do without your backing. Individual donors like you are critical to our success. As you read the following pages, we hope you understand the real impact your dollars have made, and that you would consider donating to reach our year-end fund drive goal of \$25,000. To donate, please go to [jobsandfreedom.org/donate](https://jobsandfreedom.org/donate) or mail a check to 4044 Central St. Kansas City, MO 64111. Thank you for support of our work and mission.



Gina Chiala  
Executive Director  
& Staff Attorney

## 2022 Board of Directors

Carol Smith, President  
Donna Simon, Treasurer  
Che Ramsey, Secretary  
Quiema Spencer  
Robert Swearingen  
Lois Swimmer  
Axel Fuentes

# IMPACT AREAS

## stopping evictions in court

Heartland attorneys represented hundreds of tenants in eviction court in 2022. We conducted outreach in court, negotiated settlements, zealously defended tenants in court, and most importantly, kept evictions off the record of nearly every tenant we represented. Special recognition goes to John Pipes for his incredible advocacy.

## introducing the tenant problem solver

In 2022, we launched a new tool called the Tenant Problem Solver. Tenants can now go onto our website and use this interactive tool to get free information about what to do when they fall behind on rent, get a notice to vacate, live in bad housing conditions, or fail to get their security deposit back, among other issues. Since launching the tool last spring, 935 tenants used it to quickly receive the information they needed about their rights. Visit our website to check it out! A big thank you to Amanda Myers, Erin Bradley, and Candace Ladd for developing this mighty tool!

## building right to counsel

Heartland hit the ground running in 2022, building the Right to Counsel program in time for its June 1st effective date. We brought together the legal organizations necessary to carry out the program, designed a one-stop intake procedure, developed reporting systems, pressed the city to fund and hire the attorneys to carry out the program, and built an ambitious attorney training program. On June 1st, we joined with the Missouri Worker's Center, KC Tenants, and Stand Up KC to celebrate Right to Counsel's arrival, publicize the intake phone number, and press the city to follow through with its remaining obligations. When tenants appeared in court the following day, Right to Counsel was reality!

**89%**  
OF REPRESENTED TENANTS  
**HAD THEIR CASE  
DISMISSED**

# enforcing worker and consumer rights in court

Our litigation team did not miss a beat this year. When a new manager at a major fast food chain fired nearly all of the black workers at its store and replaced them with non-black workers, Heartland took the workers' case. However, the chain attempted to evade our jury system by demanding a hidden arbitration clause be enforced. After months of hard fought litigation, with workers standing their ground, the court denied the fast-food company's motion, a rare victory in today's world of forced arbitration. A special thank you to Amy Sweeny Davis and our legal partner, Paul Bullman for their tenacity and smarts.

## **What is forced arbitration?**

Forced arbitration is when a company requires a consumer or employee to submit any dispute that may arise to binding arbitration as a condition of employment or buying a product or service. Forced arbitration denies workers and consumers the right to go before a judge or jury to decide their case.

Another victory arrived when a court certified a class action case against a landlord known for bullying tenants, stealing their deposits, failing to maintain properties and forcing tenants into unconscionable and oppressive leases. When this landlord wrongfully sued a tenant in eviction court, he had no idea what was coming! The tenant agreed to fight back and Heartland's team, along with Bell Law, now represents all affected tenants in a powerful case that promises transformative results.

Finally, a pizza delivery driver won his case against a major car dealership. The dealership sold him a car that sent him sailing through stoplights with no brakes, and then kept the car and his money. The dealer believed the worker had no way to enforce his rights. They got that one wrong - very wrong. Recognition to Bell Law and Amy Sweeny Davis once again.

# lawyers' committee

This year, Heartland established the inaugural Lawyers' Committee for Jobs and Freedom during a spring event at Westport Cafe. We are proud to have 7 law firms and 9 individual lawyers as founding members. The Lawyers' Committee is committed to sustaining Heartland's momentum, providing legal support and expertise, and lending their skills to the Right to Counsel training program. In the fall, we joined Popham Law to host our first CLE for the committee called "Clients as Change Agents: A Powerful Model of Lawyering. A big thank you to Khatib Williams, Rasheedah Williams, and John Bonacorsi for speaking on the panel.

## Founding Members

- Bell Law
- Dugan Schlozman LLC
- Gregg Lombardi
- Barnes Law Firm
- Popham Law Firm
- BG Law
- Fred Slough
- John Kurtz
- McAllister Law Firm, P.C.
- Burt Haigh
- Williams Dirks Dameron LLC
- Shamberg, Johnson, and Bergman
- Mitchell Moore
- Lynn Bratcher



## yes we can! movement support

In 2022, we helped the Missouri Workers Center grow into a powerful organization. They are organizing low-wage workers across the state of Missouri for higher wages and better working conditions. We showed up on the picket line for striking workers at Starbucks, Taco Bell, and Amazon. Heartland worked with Amazon workers to develop their leadership skills. We look forward to working with MWC on campaigns in the coming year - stay tuned!



# LOOKING AHEAD TO 2023

**2/3rds** of low-income tenants live with major habitability concerns

## safe homes for all

Safe Homes for All is a proactive litigation program to enforce tenants' rights to live in safe, habitable housing. Through our eviction defense work, we know that tenants too often live in bad housing conditions. We have borne witness to infestations, sewage backed up in basements, mold growing in bathrooms and carpets, and much more, even though these conditions are unlawful. Landlords have experienced close to no consequences for violating the law. Safe Homes for All will change that. Through negotiations, litigation, court orders, and public pressure, we aim to transform a culture of lawlessness into a culture of compliance. Safe Homes for All means healthy communities, tenant power, and stability for workers. Recognition to John Bonacorsi for hitting the ground running with this critical project.

## worker power project

Every day, low-wage workers are hurt on the job, lose billions of dollars in stolen wages, and are wrongfully terminated and denied unemployment. Yet, there are no lawyers to enforce workers' rights in many of these areas. Working closely with the Missouri Workers Center and Stand Up KC, we will enforce workers' rights across the board and bring workplace cases that will support workers' organizing goals. Fortunately, the Heartland Center just won its first legal fellowship and will have a full-time attorney devoted to this work for two years! Her name is Jordan Hoffman Kahle and she was awarded the highly respected Skadden Fellowship. Jordan interned with us over a summer, graduated at the top of her law school class, and will serve workers extremely well.



# WHERE DOES YOUR DOLLAR GO?



**77.8% Program Expenses**

**21.5% Operations  
& Overhead**

**0.7%  
Fundraising**

Every dollar counts for a small organization like ours. Small donors make up about 20% of our total budget, allowing us the flexibility to be responsive to community needs and make the most impact.

# THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS

In 2022, we ramped up our efforts to apply for grants to ensure the sustainability of our growing organization. We want to extend a huge thank you to our foundation partners who committed funding for 2023 and beyond.

- Health Forward Foundation
- Hall Family Foundation
- DeHaemers Family Charitable Trust
- Menorah Heritage Foundation
- Hallmark Corporate Foundation
- Skadden Flom Incubator

**To donate, please go to [jobsandfreedom.org/donate](https://jobsandfreedom.org/donate) or mail a check to 4044 Central St. Kansas City, MO 64111.**