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A Message from FHJP's Founder

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Florida Health Justice Project <FloridaHealthJusticeProject@mailman.bloomerang-mail.com> Thu, May 9, 2024 at 10:54 AM

Reply-To: yager@floridahealthjustice.org

To: Bryan Vicente <ortiz@floridahealthjustice.org>



A Message from FHJP's Founder, Miriam Harmatz:

Dear Friends,

This message is to let you know that I'm stepping down as FHJP's Advocacy Director on May 23, 2024. After taking a long sabbatical, I plan to return part-time in 2025. Along with sharing that personal update, I want to "shout out" to some of the incredible accomplishments of FHJP's current leadership and our clients/storytellers.

FHJP's legal director, Katy DeBriere has successfully litigated major class actions (described [here](#)) that have vastly improved due process and increased access to health care for hundreds of thousands of low-income Floridians. In 2020, 2022, 2023, she received Florida's most prestigious award for cases that impact significant numbers of poor people and address important poverty law issues. And this past year, she won an unprecedented 2 such awards. She is currently FHJP's lead in a major class action with the National Health Law Program challenging the inadequacy of Florida's Medicaid termination notices.

Our clients provide ongoing inspiration. In addition to serving as named plaintiffs in class actions, over 130 Floridians have partnered with us on advocacy addressing health care barriers through our [Stories project](#). Their stories, first published on our website, illustrate how the policies we're challenging impact the lived experience of Floridians. Many of our storytellers have been featured in state and national media, including the New York Times (3 times), the AP, CNN, NPR, and ABC News.

Under the leadership of our executive director, Alison Yager, FHJP's budget has expanded exponentially and our funding over the next few years is solid and growing. In addition to managing a rapidly growing budget and staff, Alison led the coalition that extended postpartum coverage in Florida from 2 months to a full year and she is a leader in Florida's coalitions to expand Medicaid and improve health equity.

And finally, our senior staff attorney, Lynn Hearn, who will be taking over as advocacy director, is one of the most skilled, dedicated and thoughtful lawyers I've ever met. I cannot imagine a better advocacy director.

Thus, with leadership like this, it's a perfect time to step back. After over 40 years of working as a social justice lawyer, including over 3 years as FHJP's executive director and 3 as advocacy director, I'm eager for a break from the intensity of this work. But like many lucky folks who've found careers that "feed our souls," I have no desire to retire and am grateful for the opportunity to return part-time to FHJP in 2025. At the same time, I'm grateful for the opportunity to spend more time with other parts of life that "feed my soul" – friends, family, nature, music, poetry – along with volunteer work on other important activities, e.g. education related to the 2024 election.

We've come a long way since FHJP launched at the end of 2017. At that time, there was a profound need for a new nonprofit with poverty health law experts who could identify and address barriers to care for marginalized Floridians. Fortunately, I had no idea how hard it would be to start a new nonprofit with no seed funding at age 64! But *we built it and they came*. Donors and funders who believed in our team and understood the importance of our mission made an excellent investment. The survival rate of new nonprofits, especially those started with no seed funding, is low. Against poor odds, FHJP has survived and thrived while consistently moving the needle on health justice in a very challenging state.

With ongoing gratitude to the entire outstanding FHJP team, our board, advisory board and all of you,

Miriam Harmatz
Advocacy Director & Founder

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