

Justice is Love in Action
Capital Area



Justice Ministry

CREATING A MORE Just AND Loving COMMUNITY

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January 2026 Newsletter



The Gospel is Free.... But Ministry Has a Cost

CAJM, like all organizations, requires funds to do its work. We depend on individual and congregational investments, grants, and business partnerships to be an effective voice for justice in our community.

We recently sent out receipts with our sincere thanks for your support. If you have a question about your investment or how to support CAJM financially, please contact our Treasurer Carla McBride at cmcbride@capitalareajustice.org or call (850) 264-2851.

Please make your 2026 investment now, \$200 is sincerely asked for, any amount is gratefully received. You may pay all at once, monthly or quarterly. Scan the QR code or visit our [website](#).





CAJM Vision 2026

C – Capacity

Strengthening our internal foundation to ensure long-term organizational health and stability. This includes robust administrative infrastructure and staffing support so CAJM can move boldly, sustainably and effectively in pursuit of justice.

A – Accountability

Follow-through both internally and externally. Ensuring that our decisions, investments and commitments result in real, meaningful outcomes for people in our communities.

J – Judicious

Engaging interconnected justice priorities in ways that make meaningful, lasting impact. We are clear about why we engage in the issues we take on, guided by judicious discernment, moral clarity, lived experience and strategic focus.

M – Momentum

Sustaining forward movement by leveraging the skills, experience and expertise of our members and congregations. Expanding our influence, strengthening partnerships and amplifying our voice in faith-based justice advocacy.

Help be part of building people power and carrying the work of justice with integrity, courage and staying power.



Consideration of the FIRST Affordable Housing Project!!

Members of CAJM's Affordable Housing Strategy Team met with county housing staff recently concerning the first proposal to use funds from the county's Affordable Housing Gap Financing and Incentive Program. Volunteers of America Florida has applied for a \$187,500 loan for an 86-unit rental housing project to be called Via Nova that will target people exiting homelessness. The 6-story building will be located just south of the intersection of Wallis Road and South Monroe Street.

Staff will ask the County Commission, at its meeting on January 27th, to ratify action by the County Housing Finance Authority Board approving the VOA Florida application. **Let's mobilize our CAJM Network People Power to demonstrate our support to the County**

Commission at their meeting on Tuesday, January 27th at 3:00 pm on the 5th floor of the County Courthouse. Watch for more information as the date approaches.

Funds for the \$187,500 loan will be drawn in equal parts from the city's and county's shares of the Blueprint Office of Economic Vitality (OEV) allocation for the Gap Financing and Incentive Program. The award is contingent on the project receiving funding for which it has applied from the Florida Housing Finance Corporation (FHFC).

The project will meet the minimum requirement of the county Gap Financing and Incentive Program to include units for extremely-low income (ELIA) and/or very-low income (VLI) households by setting aside 15% of the units (13 units)

for ELI households (defined by the FHFC as 40% or less of the Leon County Area Median Income or AMI) and 85% (73 units) for households earning 60% or less AMI. VOA Florida also has committed to maintaining the set asides in perpetuity which is one of two preference criteria for the Gap Financing Program. (The other, which they do not meet, is setting aside more than the minimums required by the FHFC.)

This is an opportunity for CAJM to celebrate our success after over three years of efforts to develop a local funding program to promote development of more rental housing that families with very-low and extremely-low incomes can afford!



Food Insecurity Research Team Update

Root Causes of Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is complex and systemic. It is primarily driven by poverty, economic instability, and inequality, and is compounded by social, environmental, and structural factors that disrupt access to affordable, nutritious food.

Economic and Income Factors

- **Poverty and Low Wages:** Insufficient income forces households to choose between food and other essentials such as rent or healthcare.
- **Unemployment and Underemployment:** Job loss or unstable work significantly reduces a household's ability to purchase food.
- **Economic Inequality:** Wealth disparities and systemic barriers disproportionately affect low-income communities and communities of color.

Social and Systemic Issues

- **Racism and Discrimination:** Structural racism contributes to what many describe as “food apart-

heid,” limiting access to healthy food in communities of color.

- **Lack of Affordable Housing and Healthcare:** High housing and medical costs leave less money available for food.
- **Weak Infrastructure:** Inadequate transportation, sanitation, and disaster preparedness hinder food access and production.

Environmental and Agricultural Factors

- **Climate Change and Natural Disasters:** Droughts, floods, and storms damage crops and disrupt food systems.
- **Agricultural Inequities and Food Waste:** Unequal access to resources for small farmers and inefficiencies in food distribution result in significant food loss.

In short, food insecurity is not merely about a lack of food, but about systemic failures that prevent people from accessing it consistently.

Hunger and Food Insecurity in Our Local Community

The Big Bend region includes five of the ten Florida counties with the highest rates of food insecurity. Approximately 51% of residents are living paycheck to paycheck, just above the federal poverty level, and are unable to afford basic living expenses.

In 2024, Second Harvest of the Big Bend distributed more than 21.1 million pounds of food at no cost, up from 14 million pounds in 2022. Roughly 50,000 Leon County residents rely on Second Harvest-supported food distributions each month.

At least 16.7% of census tracts lack a grocery store that accepts SNAP benefits, and predominantly Black neighborhoods are especially likely to lack supermarkets. Child food insecurity affects 17.6% of children—approximately 9,540 youth.

Access challenges are significant:

- Many residents rely on gas stations or distant stores for food
- Bus travel to grocery stores can take most of a day
- About 32.3% of Leon County residents lack access to a large grocery store within a reasonable distance, compared to 24.6% nationally

Existing Resources in Our Community

Leon County Government Initiatives:

Leon County has adopted food-security-related policies through its current five-year Strategic Plan (2022–2027). Relevant initiatives include:

- Coordinating with Second Harvest of the Big Bend and the City of Tallahassee to hold community meetings in neighborhoods with the highest food insecurity to identify barriers and solutions



Food Insecurity

- Partnering with the City through the Neighborhood First Program to address poverty and inequity in targeted neighborhoods.

The County also supports nutrition education and promotes community gardening through the Office of Sustainability, providing \$1,000 grants for start-up supplies. More than 60 gardens have been supported in schools, neighborhoods, and community centers.

City of Tallahassee Initiatives:

- Neighborhood First Program: A neighborhood-led planning initiative that engages residents in leadership and working groups to develop community-driven revitalization plans. Current participating neighborhoods include Greater Bond, Griffin Heights, Frenchtown, Providence, and South City.
- Community Gardens: The City supports community gardens by providing access to public land, water supplies, and educational resources for starting and sustaining gardens.

Emerging and Promising Initiatives

Food Council:

A regional Food Council has recently formed and is in its early stages. Four members of our research team are participating alongside representatives from City and County government, local colleges, Second Harvest, and other stakeholders.

Charter Amendment Discussion:

Two team members attended a Citizen Charter Review Committee meeting focused on food insecurity. Committee staff are developing language related to food system security, including the possible creation of an Office of Food System security. If approved, the proposal could advance to County Commissioners and potentially appear on the 2026 ballot.

Please welcome Betsy Staudt Willet

Betsy has accepted a temporary, part-time position to focus on building leadership capacity within our CAJM network. She will be coaching our research and congregational team leaders to increase our organizational strength and effectiveness. Betsy is excited to work with CAJM building with many faith groups, one CAJM voice in solidarity with the needs in Leon and surrounding counties. “I’m excited to listen deeply, see injustice perceptively, create solutions purposefully, and organize powerfully.”



Upcoming Meetings & Events

Tuesday, January 27 at 3 PM

Leon County Commission Chambers

Show up to witness and celebrate the first housing project for very low and extremely- low income residents made possible by the funds for which CAJM advocated. See the housing update for more information.

Mental Health Team

February 3, 6 PM via Zoom

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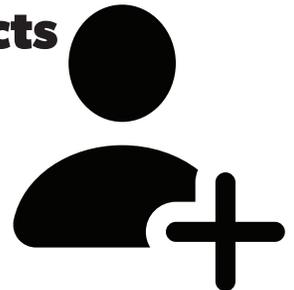


Interfaith Immigration Justice Vigil

Every Sunday at 4PM at the Old Capitol Steps

Team Contacts

If you are interested in working with the following teams, please contact:



Food Insecurity Team

Contact Susan Robinson

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Gun Violence

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Immigration Team

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