

WE ARE THE PEOPLE
WE **SERVE**.



BACK TO SCHOOL! BACK TO ADVOCACY

AUGUST 2025
FROM THE DESK
OF THE CEO



It's Back to School Season!

Parents across this nation are preparing to send their scholars back to school with hopes of academic excellence and positive social development. Young people are anticipating a new grade, new teachers, new friends, and catching up with old ones about the events of their summers.

In a perfect world, parents wouldn't worry about their child's safety. Students wouldn't navigate social anxiety, peer violence, or the economic burden of school lunches, bus fare, or fees. But in today's political climate—where the highest good for every child has been deprioritized by political posturing, funding cuts, and the erasure of history and literature that reflect all children's experiences—this back-to-school season is a return to the frontlines of advocacy for our children, their families, our communities, and our futures.

This calls us to ask: *What kind of world are we sending our children into? What is shaping their minds, their identities, and their possibilities?*

The hard truth is our schools have become the spoils of legislative violence, economic disinvestment, and personal piety. They are cracks where our children and their futures are being lost, predetermined by race, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender identity, economic standing, or religious understanding. Southern youth still lack access to comprehensive reproductive and sexual health education, affirming environments for queer and trans youth, and adequate state budgets for campus social safety net services for teens navigating puberty, parenthood, or homelessness.

Our fight to advance reproductive and sexual justice is critical for every student, their parents or guardians, the teachers shaping their minds, and the communities they navigate daily. **Youth Justice is Reproductive and Sexual Justice. Youth Justice is Human Rights.**

Last month, SisterReach coordinated a back-to-school event intended to create a fun, safe, empowering experience for scholars and families. But due to unexpected ICE raids led by bounty hunters and law enforcement, we changed our plans midstream. SisterReach serves some of Memphis' most vulnerable residents, including undocumented families. Creating an event where ICE could prey upon families, tearing them apart, was more than our hearts and righteous indignation could bear. We shifted the event to serve families as safely and efficiently as possible.

This is the America we live in—a country where children fear going to school and parents fear going to work for risk of deportation and violence. We're not just sending our children back to school; we're sending them into systems of oppression, expecting them to emerge unscathed. **Our kids deserve better. Our families deserve better.** None of us has the luxury to sit idly by until ICE or another threat breaks down our doors and snatches away our peace of mind. We have a responsibility to fight for our freedom.

Peace, Love & Power

Cherisse Scott
Founder & CEO, SisterReach

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WE HAVE
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SCHOLARSHIPS
COVERAGE INCLUDES:

- Roundtrip airfare to and from Memphis (U.S.-based applicants only)
- Symposium registration
- Ground transportation to/from Memphis International Airport
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APPLICATION DEADLINE
AUG 22
IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS,
PLEASE CONTACT US AT:

VICTOR HANNAH
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901-614-9906
WWW.SISTERREACH-TN.ORG

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2025

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ANNOUNCEMENTS
ANNOUNCEMENTS
ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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DR. JAMAL
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OUR PLENARY
SPEAKER!

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State of Our Schools: Education at the Crossroads of Justice



In Tennessee and across the South, school systems have become breeding grounds for political cowardice, anti-Blackness, anti-queerness, youth criminalization, and the erosion of parental rights—targeting vulnerable young people of color, undocumented youth, and their families. Students navigate hostile learning environments shaped by political agendas, not public health, youth development, or equity. Increasingly, co-opted religious ideology shapes the policies, education, discipline, and resources children receive.



Here's what we're seeing:

- **Lack of Comprehensive Sex Education**

Tennessee does not mandate comprehensive sex ed. Instead, abstinence-only programs dominate, often excluding LGBTQIA+ identities and omitting medically accurate, culturally responsive information.

- **Anti-LGBTQIA+ Policies in Schools**

1. Proposed and enacted laws require or permit:
2. School staff to misgender students
3. Forcible outing of LGBTQIA+ students to parents/guardians without consent
4. Bans on gender-affirming resources and education
5. These measures contribute to hostile and unsafe environments for queer and trans youth.

- **Limited Support for Pregnant and Parenting Students**

Few school systems have formal policies to support pregnant or parenting students. Lack of childcare, lactation accommodations, and academic flexibility often results in these students being stigmatized or pushed out of school.

- **Censorship and Curriculum Control**

Book bans and educational gag orders are limiting access to vital lessons on race, gender, sexual health, and social justice—erasing student voices and promoting misinformation.

- **Cuts to School-Based Health Services**

Reductions in funding and politically motivated resistance have weakened access to:

1. HIV prevention programs
2. STI testing and treatment
3. Contraceptive education and access

These losses hit hardest in communities already impacted by systemic inequities.

- **Faith-Based Disinformation**

Religious rhetoric is increasingly shaping policy and curriculum, replacing evidence-based sex ed with shame-based models and erasing the diverse realities of students.

We believe every student deserves education that affirms their body, their identity, and their right to make informed choices.

This back-to-school season, our advocacy isn't optional—it's essential. Because justice doesn't start after graduation—it starts in kindergarten.

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WHAT
YOU
CAN
DO?



1. STAY INFORMED

- Follow local school board agendas and state education legislation.
- Use resources from [Tennessee Equality Project](#), ACLU of Tennessee and SIECUS to track sex ed and LGBTQIA+ policies

2. Contact Decision-Makers

- Write or call your local and state representatives to oppose discriminatory legislation and demand comprehensive, inclusive education policies.
- Advocate for student protections, funding for school-based health services and support for parenting students.

3. Show Up

- Attend school board meetings, curriculum hearings and public forums to voice support for inclusive education.
- Volunteer with organizations offering mentorship, youth services, or reproductive health resources in schools.

4. Support Local Efforts

- Donate to grassroots and advocacy organizations working to protect youth rights and expand access to education and healthcare.
- [Join The Reach Collective](#)—SisterReach's monthly giving community—and help sustain a movement committed to justice for every student.

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Thank You Shelby County! \$150,000

Join The Reach Collective—our monthly giving community committed to sustaining this work year-round.

Thanks to a generous \$150,000 match from Shelby County, every new or increased monthly gift will be matched dollar for dollar. That means your commitment goes twice as far in funding reproductive and sexual justice, HIV advocacy, harm reduction and health equity in Memphis, TN and beyond. Join us today.



Did you catch last month's newsletter?

We know inboxes get full—
but if you missed our June Faith & Advocacy Newsletter, it's worth a read. Tap in and stay connected to the movement.

[See July's Newsletter](#)

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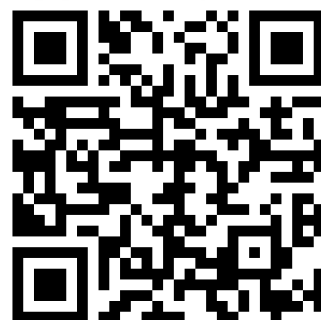
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