

THE KNEE REVIEW



 ***Let's Go!***



KNEE CENTER
2026 Annual Report

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KNEE CENTER

Founding, Mission, and Vision

Founded in June 2016 by Dr. Edward Timmons, the Center opened its doors as the "Knee Center for the Study of Occupational Regulation," backed by grants from the Knee Family Foundation and Charles Koch Foundation. Housed at St. Francis University's Shields School of Business in Loretto, PA, the Center spent its first five years studying how occupational licensing shapes labor markets and economic outcomes.

In fall 2021, the Center moved to West Virginia University's John Chambers College of Business and Economics in Morgantown, joining a college with a strong research reputation, AACSB accreditation, and national name recognition. As the Center's research expanded into three focus areas—Labor, Health, and Regulatory Frontiers—it took on a new name to match: the Knee Regulatory Research Center.

In spring 2025, Dr. Alicia Plemmons was named the Center's newest director. She brings a research and policy background centered on entrepreneurship, economic growth, and regulatory policy, with work published in outlets including the Journal of Health Economics and Health Policy and testimony delivered before state and federal legislatures on healthcare licensing modernization.



"Fostering a more prosperous and equitable society."

Mission

Our mission is to empower stakeholders to drive meaningful policy change through the production, communication, and education of data-driven, peer-reviewed, high-quality research.

Vision

We aim to set the standard for regulatory research: producing, communicating, and teaching high-quality, data-driven work that informs policy, engages communities, and improves quality of life by fostering a more prosperous and equitable society.



A circular portrait of Dr. Alicia Plemmons, a woman with long, wavy brown hair and glasses, smiling. The portrait is set against a light background and is framed by a thick yellow border.

A Message from our Director Dr. Alicia Plemmons

Dear Reader,

Time flies when you're having fun, and this year flew by for our team. While the following pages have many of our highlights and exciting wins across different categories, I want to contextualize how this all works together to build a stronger, freer society.

Legislative Impact

Our biggest contribution towards making the world a better place is by helping states find and eliminate regulatory inefficiencies through our research and education. We have accomplished this with a combination of legislative testimony, one-pagers, education seminars for legislators, and one-on-one meetings with policymakers and regulators. In academic year 2025-2026, we worked with over 30 state legislatures and the U.S. House of Representatives.

This year, we focused on relationship building and made key connections in the Texas House of Representatives and Wisconsin Governor's Office that are leading to long-term discussions about how to improve state workforce initiatives. In our coolest new relationship, the National Council of State Legislatures has been utilizing our occupational licensing database and working with us to help make this information more accessible to the public.

From a back-of-the-envelope calculation of the largest policy changes that were guided by our research findings, our work has (conservatively) removed barriers for over two million workers through individual profession changes, removed barriers for over six million people through universal licensing recognition reform, created a pathway to bring an expected 5000 jobs to the Mountain State, changed rules that allowed for nurse practitioner and certified nurse midwives to provide primary care and prenatal care in over 100 counties without adequate resources, and gave psychologists the toolkit to prevent over 160 lives loss to suicide this year.

Student Experiences

The Knee Center is one of the major drivers of undergraduate and graduate research opportunities in the John Chamber College of Business & Economics. This year, our graduate students met policymakers, led projects and policy briefs on different professions, and presented at conferences across the United States and Europe. They published papers on our core topics of occupational licensing, scope of practice, and certificate of need. They are becoming recognized experts in their field, and some have even been invited to serve as experts on panels and in front of committees. Each of our doctoral students are learning grant writing, research communication, and managerial success to ensure they can leave and be productive and impactful career economists.



A Message from our Director Dr. Alicia Plemmons

Our undergraduate students have helped to expand our database to 96 professions! If you would like to see some of their hard work, our students maintain a weekly blog where they talk about the different professions they are researching which can be found on our website (knee.wvu.edu). They have upcoming plans to turn this into a Substack and weekly email for interested supporters. Our Freedom & Flourishing speaker series brings top market-oriented researchers from across the U.S. to meet with our students and provide public talks. Our Knee Fellows Program and Research Apprenticeship Programs trained seven students in undergraduate research and database building. Additionally, we had one Stockman Fellow who worked specifically on healthcare access research and submitted several papers for publication. All our graduating undergraduate students went on to PhD programs, law school, and master's programs.

Faculty Success

I always knew our employees were productive, but this year had a few wins that really showcase how large our impact is. Our small team, of four faculty members and a handful of staff and students, published more high-impact peer review journal articles than every single individual academic department. These departments, such as economics, management, and accounting, have 15 or more faculty members each. Yet, we are continually in front of the pack in terms of both quantity and quality.

Our faculty also hosted several conferences and events. From sponsoring an occupational licensing conference at Stanford University to bringing the top health economics students from around the U.S. to Morgantown, WV in order to give them individualized research assistance, our faculty built and ran more events than we have ever done in our history as the Knee Center.

I am proud of our team, and I hope you are too! Whether you are reading this as a donor, collaborator, supporter, faculty member, student, or someone aspiring to reach out- the impact we make is not possible without you. We are making the world a better, freer, and more prosperous place working together to address and remove unnecessary barriers. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and I hope you enjoy the rest of the report.

Best,



Alicia Plemmons, PhD
Director and Associate Professor
Knee Regulatory Research Center
West Virginia University

KRRC Impact Snapshot

EDUCATION

125+

Undergraduate Students Engaged
Including the Freedom and Flourishing Reading
Group, guest lectures, and more.

POLICY VOICE

127

Legislative Testimonies Delivered
Across 34 states — a new KRRC record, up
from 100 last year.

RESEARCH

20

Peer-Reviewed Papers Published
In B-or-higher journals, including 1 A* and 10 A
rated placements.

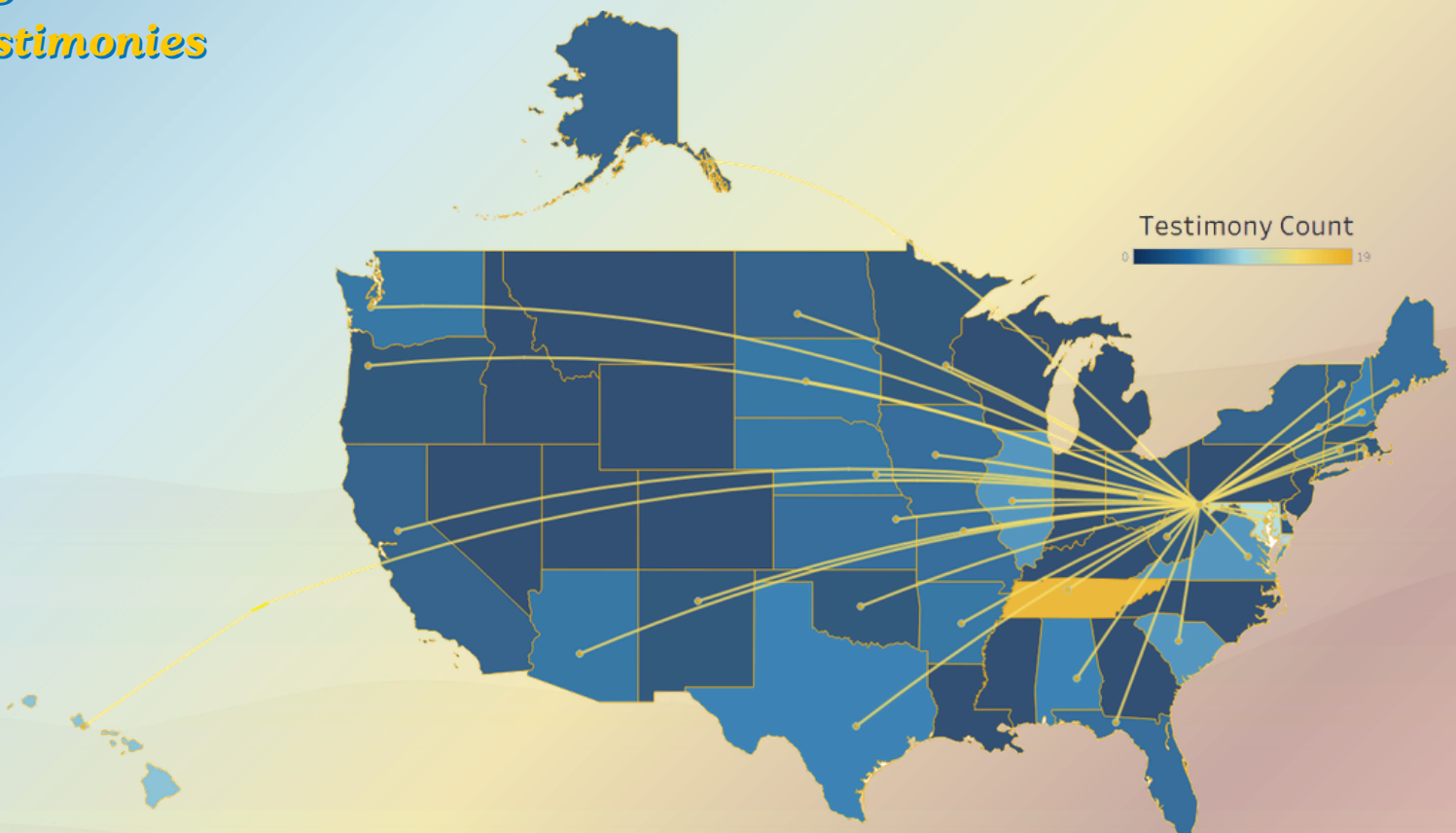
MENTORSHIP

17

Ph.D. Students Mentored
Across 4 universities — 5 at WVU; committees
for 12 additional dissertations.

127

Legislative
Testimonies



The Path Ahead: 2025–26 Strategic Goals

The French writer, poet, journalist, and aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry once wrote, ***"A goal without a plan is just a wish."*** In that spirit, when it came time to set the Knee Center's goals for 2025–26, we didn't just name what we hoped to achieve — we mapped out how we'd get there. The result is what we call The Path Ahead, and it consists of our five core goals, along with the strategies behind each one, built to turn ambition into something achievable. Those five goals — Impact on Students, Testimony, Research, Outreach, and Financial Stewardship — represent standards well worth the work it takes to meet them, and this year, the entire Knee Center team pursued them with real alacrity.



Impact on Students

Goal: Engage and support at least 75 undergraduate and graduate students through research, fellowships, and professional development.

The plan called for expanding fellowship and research assistant positions, integrating undergraduates into ongoing research, and hosting student-focused workshops and reading groups. The Center didn't just meet that bar — it blew past it, engaging more than 115 students through the Knee Fellows, RAP, and Stockman Fellowship programs, reading groups, and guest lectures, well ahead of the 75-student target.



The Path Ahead: 2025–26 Strategic Goals

Testimony

Goal: Provide expert testimony on at least 150 bills, ensuring the Knee Center's research directly informs policy debates.

The plan was to proactively track state legislative calendars, prepare Knee Fellows to help build testimony briefs, and maintain a tracker of every hearing. The Center delivered 127 testimonies across 34 states this year — short of the 150-bill target, but a new Center record, surpassing last year's mark of 100.



Research

Goal: Publish in B-rated and above journals (per ABDC rankings), prioritizing topics connected to the Center's testimony and datasets.

With annual publication targets in place and topics aligned to the Center's policy work, the team delivered 20 peer-reviewed papers in B-or-higher ABDC-ranked journals this year, including 1 A* and 10 A-rated placements. As noted previously, that output surpassed entire departments with more researchers than the Center — a notable mark for a team our size.



The Path Ahead: 2025–26 Strategic Goals

Outreach

Goal: Establish, maintain, and strengthen relationships with key internal and external partners to broaden influence and collaboration.

The plan focused on deepening partnerships across WVU and expanding the Center's public footprint through op-eds, podcasts, social media, and conferences. That played out across the year in a steady stream of media placements, blog posts, public talks, and K–12 outreach that carried the Center's research well beyond campus.



Financial Stewardship

Goal: Maintain fiscal responsibility and integrity while introducing data-driven insights to guide decision-making and long-term planning.

The plan called for quarterly financial reviews, budget-tracking dashboards, and tying spending decisions to measurable outcomes. That led to the development of a new Data-Driven Budget System, keeping the Center's resources aligned with its priorities.



The Path Ahead: 2025–26 Strategic Goals

Taking the Path Less Traveled

This year, the Knee Center exceeded its own ambitions for student impact, engaging more than 115 undergraduates against a goal of 75 — proof that when given real ownership of research, students rise to meet it. On testimony, we set the most ambitious goal in the Center's history: 150 bills, tackled with a smaller testimony team and fewer resources than we've had in years past. We didn't hit that number, but we broke our own record doing it, delivering 127 testimonies across 34 states and surpassing last year's mark of 100. Our research told the same story of reach beyond our size — a small team outpublishing entire academic departments, with consequences that reached well beyond the page. On outreach, our blog reached its strongest year yet, and we deepened relationships across WVU, our national network, and the communities our research serves. And behind all of it, our new Data-Driven Budget System gave us sharper insight into what it actually takes to run the Center — roughly \$1.2 million a year — along with stronger financial reporting to match.

The Knee Center chose to traverse a path less traveled and achieved so much with a small but dedicated team. Why did we decide to challenge ourselves with these goals? Why set so high a standard for the Center to attain? We did so because these goals were a worthwhile measure of what we could do if we focused our best skills and energies into the pursuit of a challenge we felt we must accept. We did this not because it is easy, not because it is our job, not because of an audacious desire to prove ourselves; we did this because it is hard, because it is the right thing to do, because the path hadn't been traveled, and thus we had to in our efforts to make the world a better and freer place.

When looking back at the path we chose to travel this year, there's a lot to be proud of — most notably, the impact our team has had on the lives of those around us. Our research has, conservatively, removed barriers for over two million workers through individual profession changes, over six million through universal licensing recognition reform, opened a pathway to an expected 5,000 jobs for the Mountain State, expanded primary and prenatal care access in over 100 underserved counties, and given psychologists the tools to help prevent more than 160 lives lost to suicide this year.

The Path Ahead: 2025–26 Strategic Goals

Taking the Path Less Traveled

We feel it's appropriate to conclude our look back on the path we took by quoting one of our own Knee Fellows, Sara Ratley. In one of the biweekly reports she submits to WVU's Research Apprenticeship Program, Sara was asked who had the most impact on her over the past two weeks. She answered: ***"The past two weeks I think the whole center and all of the people who make up the center were the most helpful. They always hold check-in meetings, involve us in videos/pictures, keep the research fun, and bring fun treats like donuts. I really appreciate everything they do because sometimes as an undergraduate it can feel overwhelming doing research and being surrounded by professionals."*** Sara doesn't know that we can see these biweekly reports. Therefore, when we look at the people the Knee Center has helped, the impact we've had on policy and on the lives of those around us, and the review Sara unknowingly gave our team, we feel that this is a path worth continuing down.



Hard at Work!



Our Data Mining Undergrads

Programs

The Knee Center's commitment to education runs in both directions — training the next generation of undergraduates just beginning to explore research, and mentoring graduate students already deep into it. Below is a look at both this year.



Undergraduate Programs

This year, the Knee Center made undergraduate research a real priority — not just an internship, but a genuine on-ramp into the kind of work the Center does every day. Eight students came through as Knee Fellows, Research Apprenticeship Program (RAP) participants, and a Stockman Fellow, working directly with the occupational licensing team to compile the 2025 Occupational Licensing Database, presenting original research at WVU's undergraduate poster competition, and even co-authoring a paper currently under review on provider diversity in rural and underserved communities.

Beyond hands-on research, the Center ran two semester-long reading groups — one on Deirdre McCloskey's *Why Liberalism Works*, another on James Otteson's *What Adam Smith Knew* — alongside public talks from visiting scholars Jeremy Horpedahl, Rachel Ferguson, and James Otteson, and a Saturday seminar on Black entrepreneurship that brought in students from as far as Concordia Chicago. Students in these programs didn't just read and listen — they sat down to dinner with visiting speakers, asked their own questions, and pushed the ideas further than a lecture hall usually allows. Several also turned their research into public writing, publishing blog posts on everything from optometry licensure to natural hair braiding regulations.



Programs

Undergraduate Programs

The feedback says it best. One student wrote that the program "helped me not only realize that economics was my passion, but also helped carve my path to graduate school." Another called it "a defining step in my career path," crediting the experience with showing "the importance of good faith dialogue and a commitment to civility in a time where that is often unpopular." This was also the first year multiple students who'd been with the Center across several semesters graduated — several headed to law school and graduate programs, carrying that experience with them.

Graduate Programs

The Center's investment in the next generation of researchers extends well past its own walls. This year, Knee Center personnel mentored 17 Ph.D. students across four universities — five of whom work directly at the Center as Economics Ph.D. students at WVU, while Center faculty also served on dissertation committees for 12 additional Ph.D. students nationwide. That mentorship isn't just advisory — it's translated into real placements, including a WVU Ph.D. student now on faculty at Washington & Jefferson College.

The Center's Ph.D. students didn't just learn the craft — they practiced it at a high level. Several published academic papers in ABDC-ranked B journals this year, a genuinely notable accomplishment for researchers still in their doctoral programs. They also built their research skills hands-on, contributing to data collection for the Occupational Licensing Database and the forthcoming 2026 Health Freedom Index, and represented the Center well at academic conferences, presenting their ongoing research to audiences well beyond WVU. It's graduate education the way the Center's mission describes it: producing researchers who go on to produce research of their own.

Legislative Outreach

While we love talking about our volume of testimonies (127 in 34 states!), this year we also had a big focus on relationship building. We spent hundreds of hours training, meeting, and educating academics and policymakers on our core topic areas.

Testimony Training

We realized that during testimony season, we cannot be everywhere at once. So, we started training researchers at our partner centers to talk to legislators. We have trained teams from the Madden Institute at Florida Atlantic University, the Economic and Policy Innovation Center at the University of South Carolina, the Marian K. Shaughnessy Nurse Leadership Academy and Case Western Reserve University, the Institute for Humane Studies at George Mason University, and individual researchers from Providence College, Troy University, Appalachian State University, University of Washington, Auburn University at Montgomery, and several more!

Student Involvement

Our students are learning how to engage in policy discourse. This year, we had more limited resources than we are normally provided for legislative season. Our team worked together to be creative to do more with less. Our PhD students stepped up by answering time-sensitive legislator questions and supporting our in-person researchers with data and policy briefs. Our undergraduate students stepped up and helped build readily available professional data for our on-the-ground researchers in state houses.

One-on-One Meetings

This year, we experimented with several types of one-on-one meetings with legislators in order to determine what types of outreach are most effective. For example, this included inviting legislators and their staff to informal dinners in Washington and Texas, where we were able to discuss policy issues in a low-pressure environment. We also developed new best practices for office meetings, including a dedicated plan for ensuring legislator follow-up requests are handled in a timely manner and training doctoral students to serve as note takers during meetings so that the research team is able to give their full attention to the legislator and their staff.

Organizational Partnerships

This year, we added more regulator- and legislator-focused conferences and events to our rotation. This aligns with our priority focus on getting research into the right hands earlier in the policymaking process. We had teams networking at major events such as the Federation of Association of Regulatory Boards, the Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation, and the National Council of State Legislatures.

Events, Events, and More Events

We hosted so many impactful events that we will just let the evidence speak for itself.



Occupational Licensing at the Hoover Institute at Stanford University



Regulation and Public Policy with the American Institute for Economic Research and The Stephenson Institute



Innovations and Regulatory Reforms in Healthcare



Regulatory Accumulation Workshop with Pacific Legal Foundation



Abundance and Regulation Conference with Pacific Legal Foundation and Institute for Humane Studies and much more!

In the Classroom

Research and testimony get most of the spotlight, but the Knee Center's mission runs through the classroom too — and this year, ***the team brought its work to hundreds of students across WVU's undergraduate, graduate, and online MBA programs.***



Marcus carried the heaviest teaching load on the team, reaching nearly 300 students across five courses and six sections. In fall 2025, he taught two sections of Econ 200: Survey of Economics (120 students) and Econ 306: History of Economic Thought (31 students); in spring 2026, he taught Econ 200 again (92 students) alongside Econ 481 and Econ 523, both American Economic History (38 and 15 students, respectively).

Conor taught across both the undergraduate and graduate curriculum, covering six sections over the year — three sections of BADM 621: Statistics, ECON 571: Labor Economics, and BADM 724: Regional Economics in fall 2025, followed by BADM 722: Labor Economics in spring 2026.

Drake, Kihwan, and Alicia extended the Center's teaching into WVU's professional programs. Drake taught three courses spanning three semesters — ACCT 201: Principles of Accounting, HMBA 638: Health Supply Chain Management, and BADM 612: Managerial and Team Skills; Kihwan taught BADM 621: Business Research in the Online MBA program; and Alicia taught BADM 721: Public Finance Economics for the DBA program, as well as HMBA 612: Team and Leadership in Healthcare to Healthcare MBA students.

Between all five instructors, the Knee Center's classroom reach this year spanned introductory economics, labor and regional economics, healthcare supply chains, accounting, and graduate business research — proof that educating the next generation isn't confined to fellowships and reading groups alone.

The People, The Moments

The Knee Center does a lot more than what we've chosen to highlight in the sections of this report. If we dedicated full sections to all of it, this report would turn into a novel. So instead, we'd love to just share our people and our moments with you — in small doses.



The Baby Boom of 2026

This year, our Center was fortunate enough to add three new junior affiliates!

First, our Assistant Director Drake Thibodaux and his lovely wife, Dr. Amy Thibodaux, welcomed their first child, a beautiful baby girl, Bridget Elise Thibodaux. Bridget is doing a great job as a junior affiliate, and her current research interests lie in the regulatory impacts of nap time policy. Initial results indicate that when she decides she is tired, nap time is okay. However, when she decides she isn't tired, nap time is very not okay.

Our second junior affiliate added this year is the charming Elias Dean Carneal, son of our great Legislative Analyst Troy Carneal and his amazing wife, Jordan Carneal. Elias is a very insightful junior affiliate, and his ongoing work on how to roll onto his tummy is sure to be a wonderful addition to the literature.

Lastly, our Director of Labor Research, Conor Norris, and his wonderful wife, Melanie Norris, introduced the world to the very cute Theresa Marguerite Norris. Theresa is Conor and Melanie's first child, and already a bright young researcher — currently interested in the impacts occupational licensing had on her father's ability to build her crib. Results so far are inconclusive.



The People, The Moments

The Three Newest Junior Affiliates

Bridget Elise Thibodaux



Elias Dean Carneal



Theresa Marguerite Norris



The People, The Moments

Morris Kleiner Lifetime Achievement in Regulatory Research Award



Dr. Morris Kleiner being presented the award



This year, the Knee Center introduced a new honor: the ***Morris Kleiner Lifetime Achievement in Regulatory Research Award***. Unlike an annual award, this one will only be given when someone has truly earned it through a career of dedicated work advancing regulatory research and reform.

Fittingly, the inaugural award went to the man it's named after: Dr. Morris Kleiner.

It's hard to overstate what Kleiner's work has meant to the field the Knee Center exists to study. Decades of his research on occupational licensing — and its effects on wages, employment, quality, and access — laid the foundation the Center now builds on every day. As the Center put it in announcing the award, the Knee Center simply wouldn't exist without him.

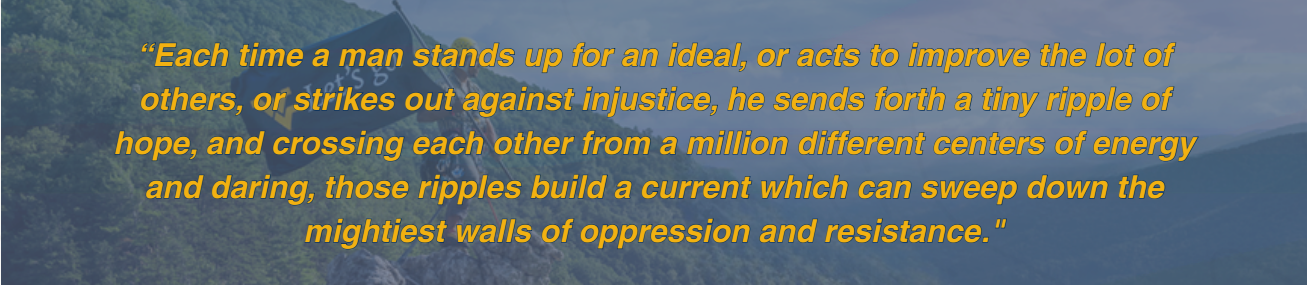
Kleiner spent part of his summer in residence at the Center, where Knee Fellow Sara Ratley sat down with him to reflect on his career — from an accidental start at the Department of Labor (he was assigned occupational licensing because "no one else wanted to do it") to testifying before the U.S. House and Senate and helping drive Arizona's move to universal licensing reciprocity under Governor Doug Ducey. He's not slowing down either: his next project examines how pervasive licensing is worldwide, from Denmark (about 15% of workers need government permission to work) to India (roughly 44%).

Asked what question still keeps him up at night, he pointed to how licensing barriers keep ex-offenders out of the workforce — a fitting note for the Center's first Kleiner Award, from a man whose work is still very much in progress.

One Path, Many Miles to Go

The path the Knee Center chose to pursue this past year did not truly begin on July 1, 2025. No — the path our Center travels upon began in earnest in June, a decade ago at Saint Francis University. What began as an idea for a center to study the effects of occupational licensing on a variety of labor market outcomes has grown, and continues to grow, into a mighty endeavor: to empower stakeholders to drive meaningful policy change through the production, communication, and education of data-driven, peer-reviewed, high-quality research — a mighty endeavor to play our part in improving the quality of life of all citizens by fostering a more prosperous and equitable society.

In a similar spirit, also in June, at a university, but sixty years earlier, in 1966, Robert F. Kennedy delivered his Day of Affirmation address at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. In that speech, Kennedy proclaimed:



"Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

After reading our year-end report, it's our hope that you, like us, believe the Knee Regulatory Research Center is one of those million different centers of energy and daring — sending forth our own tiny ripple of hope, and, through all the good work we do, building a current that can sweep down even the mightiest barriers to human prosperity and individual freedom.

Our decade-old path continues, and we believe there are many miles left to go. So, with the enthusiasm found in the individual spirit of all men, women, children, and especially in Mountaineers, as we prepare to take our next steps down our path, we invite you to join us by saying:



Minds Behind the Mission



Dr. Alicia Plemmons

Director, Knee Regulatory Research Center

Alicia stepped into her first full year as Director by putting the Center's mission into practice at every level — producing rigorous research on healthcare access and economic freedom, communicating it to the public through op-eds and media commentary, and carrying it into rooms where it could shape real decisions, from academic stages to policy conversations. That's the throughline of her year: research that doesn't stay in the journal, but moves outward to educate policymakers and engage the communities it's meant to serve. Alongside leading the Center, she stayed active in the classroom, mentored the next generation of researchers, and continued directing WVU's Center for Free Enterprise — living out the same standard she's setting for the Center as a whole.



Drake A. Thibodaux

Assistant Director, Knee Regulatory Research Center

If Alicia set the direction this year, Drake built the machinery to get there. He wrote the Center's strategic plan from the ground up, shaped its new mission and vision alongside Alicia, and put the same builder's mindset into its finances with a new Data-Driven Budget System. He also helped relaunch the Center's public presence with a new marketing strategy, helped start up the Knee Fellows program, and pitched in on the Occupational Licensing Database. On top of that, he led the upcoming 2026 Health Freedom Index, taught three courses, and represented the Center at conferences in Denver and New Orleans — proof that a lot of what makes a research center run well happens behind the scenes.

Minds Behind the Mission



Dr. Conor Norris

Director of Labor Research, Knee Regulatory Research Center

Conor spent the year digging into one of the Center's core questions: how does regulation shape who gets to work, and at what cost? His research took him from the political economy of direct democracy to the everyday licensing rules that quietly reshape labor markets — publishing on earnings inequality tied to occupational licensing and taking that same research directly to policymakers through the Cato Institute. He also built out new public resources on childcare regulation, including an updated national database and a Wisconsin-focused reform report, extending the Center's research into territory that touches families well beyond the labor economics literature. He carried that work onto conference stages across the country, from North Carolina to Kentucky, and took on a guest editorship for a special issue of the Journal of Regulatory Economics. Alongside all of that, he taught four courses, contributed to the Center's ongoing Certificate-of-Need and childcare regulation projects, and kept the throughline consistent: research that gets communicated, not shelved — exactly the kind of work the Center exists to produce.



Dr. Darwyn Deyo

*Director of Regulatory Frontiers Research,
Knee Regulatory Research Center*

Darwyn spent the year tracing how licensing rules reach into corners of people's lives that don't always make headlines — from criminal records blocking a path back into the workforce, to massage therapists and estheticians navigating rules that shape whether their businesses can grow. That research didn't stay theoretical: she took it straight to lawmakers, submitting written testimony in Maryland and Illinois on reforming licensing restrictions for people with criminal records, and speaking at legislative dinners in Seattle and Raleigh on expanding economic opportunity. She carried that message onto stages on three continents, giving invited talks across the U.S. and New Zealand on labor market barriers and licensing's real-world costs. Alongside her own research pipeline, she took on an editor role for a special issue of the Journal of Regulatory Frontiers and helped organize sessions at major conferences for the Western Economic Association and Public Choice Society.

Minds Behind the Mission



Dr. Kihwan Bae

Research Fellow, Knee Regulatory Research Center

Kihwan had a breakout year on the research front, publishing three peer-reviewed papers that each landed in top-tier journals — from how expedited licensure affects migrant workers to how expanding scope-of-practice rules improves access to eye care. That research quickly found its way into public policy circles, with briefs published through the Archbridge Institute, Pacific Legal Foundation, and Cato Institute translating his findings for a policymaker audience. He carried that momentum across the country and back, presenting at major conferences from the American Economic Association to the Society of Labor Economists, and fielding interview requests along the way, including a conversation with a Wall Street Journal reporter. Beyond his own research, he's building the Center's capacity for the future — leading a major hospital staffing research initiative with national survey data and co-developing an NIH grant proposal on licensure and overdose outcomes. Add in a stint teaching graduate business research and service on a national conference program committee, and it's clear Kihwan's work this year didn't just add to the research pile — it moved the needle on how that research reaches the people who can act on it.



J.D. Joana da Silva-Gonzalez

Manager of Policy Initiatives, Knee Regulatory Research Center

If the Center's research is going to move policy, someone has to make sure it actually gets in front of the right people at the right moment — that's Joana's job, and this year she made it look easy. She kept close tabs on testimony and bill activity across the country, made sure the team was prepared to walk into a hearing room and deliver, and built the kind of relationships with legislators that turn a one-time testimony into an ongoing conversation. She also represented the Center on the road, attending SPN's annual conference in New Orleans, taught courses in the MBA program at Chambers College, and lent her hand to special projects that keep the Center running smoothly behind the scenes. It's the kind of work that doesn't always show up in a citation count, but it's the connective tissue holding the Center's mission together — without it, the research never leaves the page.

Minds Behind the Mission



Dr. Marcus Witcher

*Manager of Undergraduate Programs,
Knee Regulatory Research Center*

Marcus spent the year focused on the classroom and the reading room, giving undergraduates direct access to big ideas and the people behind them. He led two reading groups this year — one on Deirdre McCloskey's *Why Liberalism Works*, another on James Otteson's *What Adam Smith Knew* — and organized public talks and dinners that let students sit down with visiting scholars like Rachel Ferguson and James Otteson. He also worked directly with two Knee Fellows on a longer-term project: curating a collection of Dr. Steve Horwitz's essays for publication, with Dr. Sarah Skwire on board to write the foreword. Beyond the Center, he carried that same educational mission into high schools nationwide through a Foundation for Economic Education curriculum and taught five course sections of his own. It's a year that reflects the Center's mission from a different angle — not just producing research, but making sure the next generation knows how to engage with it.



Troy Carneal

Legislative Analyst, Knee Regulatory Research Center

Troy spent the year in the weeds of policy detail, doing the work that turns research into something lawmakers can actually act on. He delivered testimony on New Hampshire House Bill 1269, contributed to the Center's Pennsylvania chiropractic scope-of-practice project and physical therapy scope project, and helped push out this year's release of the Occupational Licensing Database — the kind of groundwork that keeps the Center's core resources current and useful. He also wrote for the Knee Center blog, putting research findings in front of a public audience, and represented the Center at FARB's conference in Denver. It's a role built around the Center's mission from the ground up: turning data into something legislators and regulators can put to use.

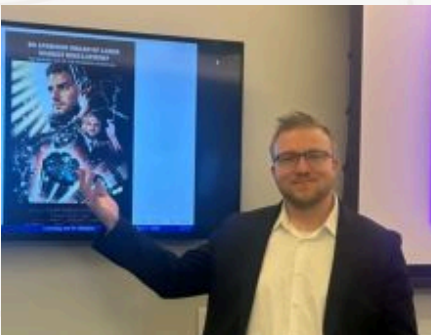
Minds Behind the Mission



Liam Sigaud

Research Associate, Knee Regulatory Research Center

Liam's year was defined by turning research into reach — his health policy work made it into everything from top academic journals to op-ed pages read by hundreds of thousands of people. He co-authored a paper on scope-of-practice expansion and eye care access alongside Kihwan, and pushed back on flawed research linking social media to adolescent mental health, both landing in peer-reviewed journals. That same certificate-of-need and healthcare licensing research showed up again and again in public commentary — seven op-eds across the year, appearing in outlets from the Charleston Gazette-Mail to a string of Southern California papers with a combined circulation well into the hundreds of thousands. He carried that work directly to lawmakers too, writing dozens of pieces of testimony and testifying in person before the Maine legislature on two separate bills. Along the way, he strengthened the Center's ties with partner organizations like the Pacific Legal Foundation and the Bluegrass Institute, co-authoring policy briefs that put Knee Center research directly in the hands of people working on reform. It's exactly the kind of year the Center's mission describes: research that doesn't stop at publication, but travels all the way to the people who can act on it.



Ethan Kelley

Legislative Analyst, Knee Regulatory Research Center

Ethan spent the year building the infrastructure that makes the Center's research usable — literally. He led the 2025 addition to the Occupational Licensing Database and helped bring a new Physical Therapy Scope of Practice database close to the finish line, the kind of unglamorous, detail-heavy work that other researchers rely on every day. He carried that database work on the road too, presenting alongside Conor and Shishir at Classical Liberals in the Carolinas and networking with state regulatory boards at FARB's national conference. He also stretched into new research territory, presenting a draft paper on AI and occupational licensing to the Economics Ph.D. brown-bag seminar, and found time to publish with Econlib and knock out Calculus II and Intro to Statistics along the way — proof that building the Center's foundation and building your own skill set aren't mutually exclusive.

Minds Behind the Mission



Dr. Elisha Denkyirah

*Postdoctoral Fellow,
Knee Regulatory Research Center*

Elisha's research this year tackled some of the most consequential health policy questions the Center studies — from how mask mandates actually affected COVID-19 case counts, to whether recreational marijuana legalization has helped or hurt the opioid crisis, publishing both in respected peer-reviewed journals. He extended that same rigor to Pennsylvania's chiropractic scope-of-practice landscape and has three more papers in the pipeline on Good Samaritan laws and aviation labor markets. That marijuana-and-opioids research didn't stay confined to academia either — it reached a national audience through an op-ed in *The Hill*, syndicated further through AOL. He also brought outside voices into WVU, hosting invited seminars on portfolio risk and Brazilian firm regulation, and presented his own work at conferences from WVU's Economics Seminar to the Association of Private Enterprise Education. On top of it all, he secured a \$5,000 research grant from the Institute for Humane Studies — a strong showing for a postdoctoral fellow still building out an independent research program.

Minds Behind the Mission

Knee PhD Students



Sarah Drain



Yimin Wang



Edgar Orozco



Haoyu (Leonard) Wang



Isaac Saunders



Chengyuan Hua

Minds Behind the Mission

Knee Fellows



Xavier Frankhouser



Annabella Scott



McPherson Stone



Christian Wells

Seated next to Dr. Marcus Witcher at a Knee Center Undergraduate Program event



Sara Ratley



Wyatt Armbrester



Ambika Kulkarni Orus

Stockman Fellow



Peer Reviewed Academic Publications

1. Bae, Kihwan. (2026). "License on the Way: The Effects of Expedited Licensure for Migrant Workers." *Journal of Human Resources*.
2. Bae, Kihwan, and Josh C. Hall. (2026). "Seeking Overdraft Fee Revenue: The Consequences of Bank Competition." *Journal of Financial Economic Policy*.
3. Bae, Kihwan, and Liam Sigaud. (2026). "A Clearer View: Scope-of-Practice Expansion and Access to Eye Care." *Journal of Regulatory Economics*.
4. Callais, Justin, Vincent Geloso, and Alicia Plemmons. (2026). "Economic Freedom and the Environment: Causal Evidence from Liberalization Reforms." *Structural Change and Economic Dynamics*. Forthcoming.
5. Callais, Justin, Vincent Geloso, Alicia Plemmons, and Gary Wagner. (2025). "Institutions Matter: Economic Freedom and Income Mobility." *Economic Modelling*, 157: 107351.
6. Denkyirah, Elisha Kwaku, and Raymond J. March. (2026). "Silver Bullet? The Effect of Mask Mandates on COVID-19 Cases." *Economics & Human Biology*.
7. Denkyirah, Elisha Kwaku, Raymond J. March, Veeshan Rayamajhee, and Ryan M. Yonk. (2025). "Because I Got High? Recreational Marijuana Legalization's Impact on Opioid Overdose Deaths." *Southern Economic Journal*.
8. Fitzpatrick, Joyce, Maxwell Mehlman, Alicia Plemmons, Evelyn Duffy, Joshua Gerlick, Summer Davis, Mark Votruba, and Allison Norful. (2025). "The Impact of Nurse Practitioner Full Practice Authority on Pediatric Care Experiences: A National Secondary Analysis." *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*. Forthcoming.
9. Fitzpatrick, Joyce, Maxwell Mehlman, Alicia Plemmons, Evelyn Duffy, Joshua Gerlick, Summer Davis, Mark Votruba, and Allison Norful. (2026). "The Impact of Nurse Practitioner Full Practice Authority on Chronic Condition-Related Readmissions and Emergency Department Visits in the United States." *Medical Care*, 64(4): 192–197.
10. Fitzpatrick, Joyce, Maxwell Mehlman, Alicia Plemmons, Evelyn Duffy, Joshua Gerlick, Summer Davis, Mark Votruba, and Allison Norful. (2026). "The Role of Full Practice Authority for Nurse Practitioners on Advancing Early Cancer Detection." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. Forthcoming.
11. Fitzpatrick, Joyce, Maxwell Mehlman, Alicia Plemmons, Evelyn Duffy, Joshua Gerlick, Summer Davis, Mark Votruba, and Allison Norful. (2026). "Variations in Nurse Practitioner Full Practice Authority in the United States: Difference-in-Difference Analysis of Access and Health Performance at a National Level." *Health Policy Open*. Forthcoming.
12. Hall, Joshua, and Haoyu Wang. (2025). "The Public Choice of Sports Betting: Evidence from Deadwood, South Dakota." *Applied Economics Letters*, 1–4.

Peer Reviewed Academic Publications

13. Hua, Chengyuan, and Brad R. Humphreys. (2025). "Long Live Hall of Famers? Evidence from Major League Baseball." *Economics Letters*.
14. Hua, Chengyuan, and Brad R. Humphreys. (2025). "The Effects of Negative Labor Market Conditions at Entry: Evidence from the 2004/05 NHL Lockout." *Labour Economics*.
15. Norris, Conor. (2025). "Direct Democracy with Teeth: The Political Economy of Washington Initiative 678." *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 84(5): 729–736.
16. Plemmons, Alicia, Darwyn Deyo, and Walker Rhine. (2025). "The Costs of Licensing for Entrepreneurs and Start-Ups." *Journal of Regulatory Economics*. Forthcoming.
17. Plemmons, Alicia, Darwyn Deyo, and Walker Rhine. (2026). "The Industry Costs and Benefits of Occupational Licensing: Measuring Differences in Establishment Behavior and Quality." *Journal of Regulatory Economics*, 69(8): 1–25.
18. Plemmons, Alicia, Kate Bradley, and David Wittkower. (2026). "Including Nurse Practitioners in the Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Area Calculation." *Medical Care Research and Review*. Forthcoming.
19. Sigaud, Liam, Zachary Rausch, Alec McClean, and Jonathan Haidt. (2026). "Why Three Studies by Vuorre and Przybylski Should Not Be Used to Assess the Impact of Social Media on Adolescent Mental Health." *Clinical Psychological Science*.
20. Wang, Haoyu, and Joshua Hall. (2025). "The Political Economy of Legalized Sports Gaming: Evidence from California's Proposition 26." *Gaming Law Review*, 29(2): 42–44.