

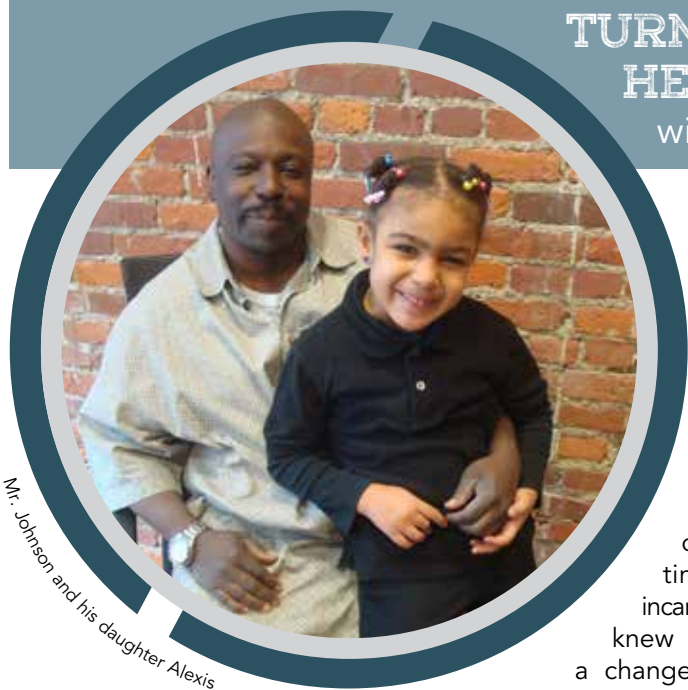


# POETIC JUSTICE

VOLUME 12 ISSUE 1 SPRING '15

STORIES OF PHILANTHROPY AND HOPE FROM THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY OF CLEVELAND

## TURNING HIS LIFE AROUND TO HELP HIS DAUGHTER THRIVE – with help from The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland



Mr. Johnson and his daughter Alexis

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Board President

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explains Mr. Johnson. "I had left my daughter behind and I knew that if I did everything that I was supposed to do, and tried to get my life back together, then I would be able to see my daughter."

Mr. Johnson used every opportunity to better himself. He participated in sessions on anger management, victims' awareness, parenting, depression, addiction and recovery. As he walked out of prison for the final time, he carried with him a stack of certificates that acknowledged his hard work.

On his daughter's fifth birthday, Mr. Johnson saw Alexis for the first time in four years. It was obvious that she had not been well cared for. Her hair was matted and her clothes were dirty. He remembers, "I was angry, but I knew that I couldn't lash out as I had in the past. I had to find a way to put myself in a position to help my child."

After obtaining emergency custody of Alexis, Mr. Johnson took her to see Dr. Irene Dietz,

pediatrician at MetroHealth, who had been trained on legal topics that could impact her patients through Legal Aid's Community Advocacy Program, a medical-legal partnership that helps low-income people overcome barriers to health. She diagnosed Alexis with developmental delays and referred the case to onsite Legal Aid attorney Katie Feldman. "With an advocacy letter from Dr. Dietz, I was able to follow up with the school district and request a special education evaluation. I accompanied Mr. Johnson to meetings at the school where we reviewed the evaluation results and participated in setting up an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Alexis now receives speech therapy, occupational therapy and counseling services, meets with a special education teacher daily, and is provided with curb-to-curb transportation services," states Ms. Feldman, who also consulted with other Legal Aid attorneys to provide Mr. Johnson with the information he needed to obtain permanent custody of Alexis.

April 10 marks the one-year anniversary of when Mr. Johnson and his daughter were first reunited. Just as they did on Alexis' fifth birthday, they plan to celebrate. This time they are both on the mend, looking at a future together made brighter through Mr. Johnson's hard work and the help of Legal Aid. "Legal Aid is an organization geared to help those who are sincerely willing to help themselves," says Mr. Johnson. "They helped me appreciate that my hope to give my best to my daughter was real."



Mr. Johnson with Legal Aid attorney Katie Feldman, Esq.



Frank DeSantis, Esq.

## FRANK R. DESANTIS WORKS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AS LEGAL AID'S NEW BOARD PRESIDENT

"You can't have a true justice system unless everyone has access to it," says Thompson Hine Partner Frank R. DeSantis, The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland's new Board President.

As a young lawyer, Mr. DeSantis volunteered for Legal Aid with his firm. He took one volunteer case after another, feeling the satisfaction of resolving just one problem for some of the city's most vulnerable people. The experience demonstrated for him how Legal Aid operates at the center of numerous challenges faced by the poor and vulnerable: health, finances and employment, housing and education.

"I enjoy being involved in non-profits, and I like to be really involved," he says, modestly adding he usually steps up to serve as president, where he can model his commitment to equality and justice and lead by example. His interests includes civic organizations like Bellflower (now part of the Domestic Violence & Child Advocacy Center) and Hospice of the Western Reserve; religious institutions like the Jesuit Retreat House and St. Mary's Seminary; and professional organizations like Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Foundation.

Mr. DeSantis holds a law degree from Gonzaga University in Spokane, WA and an MBA from Gannon University in Erie, PA., giving him the edge in complex civil and business litigation. "My background is ethics and professionalism so I believe you serve your clients best by a cooperative as opposed to a confrontational approach," he says. He serves as chair of his firm's ethics committee, often handling cases concerning legal ethics

and legal malpractice, and develops professionalism CLEs for local lawyers through the CMBA.

As Legal Aid's newest President, he hopes to inspire broader support for the organization. "We get a great deal of support and we have a great relationship with the legal community, but we need to expand our mission to the corporate community and my goal as president is to start that process."

He and his wife Wendy have three grown children and two grandchildren. When you see Frank, congratulate him not only on his presidency at Legal Aid, but on new grandchildren born in March.

**THOMPSON  
HINE**

## WHAT DO YOU WANT *your legacy* TO BE?

Create a better tomorrow by including The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland in your estate plan and become a charter member of "The 1905 Society." Let Legal Aid know your intentions and enjoy benefits of "1905 Society" membership, including recognition receptions and free CLE's.

Membership in The 1905 Society through a planned gift to Legal Aid will help preserve Legal Aid's future and help the organization continue its mission to secure justice and resolve fundamental problems for people who are low income and vulnerable by providing high quality legal services and working for systemic solutions. Your planned gift of any amount will have a lasting impact for those in need in Northeast Ohio and your legacy will further our work towards equal access to justice for all.

For more information and sample planning documents, visit: [www.lasclev.org/plannedgiving!](http://www.lasclev.org/plannedgiving!)

### YOUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

Your early pledge of support will help Legal Aid plan for the future

### USE THIS ENVELOPE



... and make an early gift to Legal Aid in 2015.

## OPPORTUNITY CORRIDOR ADVOCACY

Homeowners in the path of the Opportunity Corridor know they're getting the maximum benefit they're entitled to, with advice from Legal Aid.

Ohio Department of Transportation's "Opportunity Corridor" -- a \$331 million 3.5 mile road linking I-490 and University Circle -- promises urban transformation with better access to cultural institutions and a chance to redevelop a blighted high-poverty section of the city. The new road and surrounding development could bring jobs back to the neighborhoods and improve access to jobs, education and cultural activities for residents.

Still, 64 homes and 25 businesses remain in the path of construction. The state has the right, by eminent domain, to access the land for development, but what rights do the residents have and who will protect them?

Cleveland's Department of Aging approached The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland for help: homeowners, many older adults, who live along the construction route, needed legal advice. Legal Aid's Deputy Director Tom Mlakar created a referral system for residents to seek counsel from Legal Aid, and in-house volunteer attorney Paul Binder started to research the statutes.

Property owners and residents have rights under the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Policies Act of 1970 and the Code of Federal Regulations for federally funded projects and under the Ohio Revised Code and ODOT administrative regulations on purely state-funded projects. When construction projects go through low income neighborhoods, the federal or state government will find an appropriate residence and/or subsidize an equivalent property.

"The problem with these projects through poor neighborhoods," says Mr. Binder, "is that the money a homeowner could get for their property isn't enough to go out and get anything else," because of neighborhood blight and the drop in home values since 2008.

On behalf of Legal Aid, Mr. Binder has reviewed a number of cases and has

advised several residents whose property is slated to be taken for the Opportunity Corridor. In one case, Legal Aid is pursuing an administrative appeal of ODOT's determination of benefits.

It is possible that a number of residents living in the path of the Opportunity Corridor may have simply moved out after getting a notice from ODOT because they did not understand the extent of the benefits they could receive. One homeowner received a notice to acquire and he didn't get his heat fixed all last winter because he didn't understand the timeline. Even renters are entitled to assistance, says Mr. Binder.

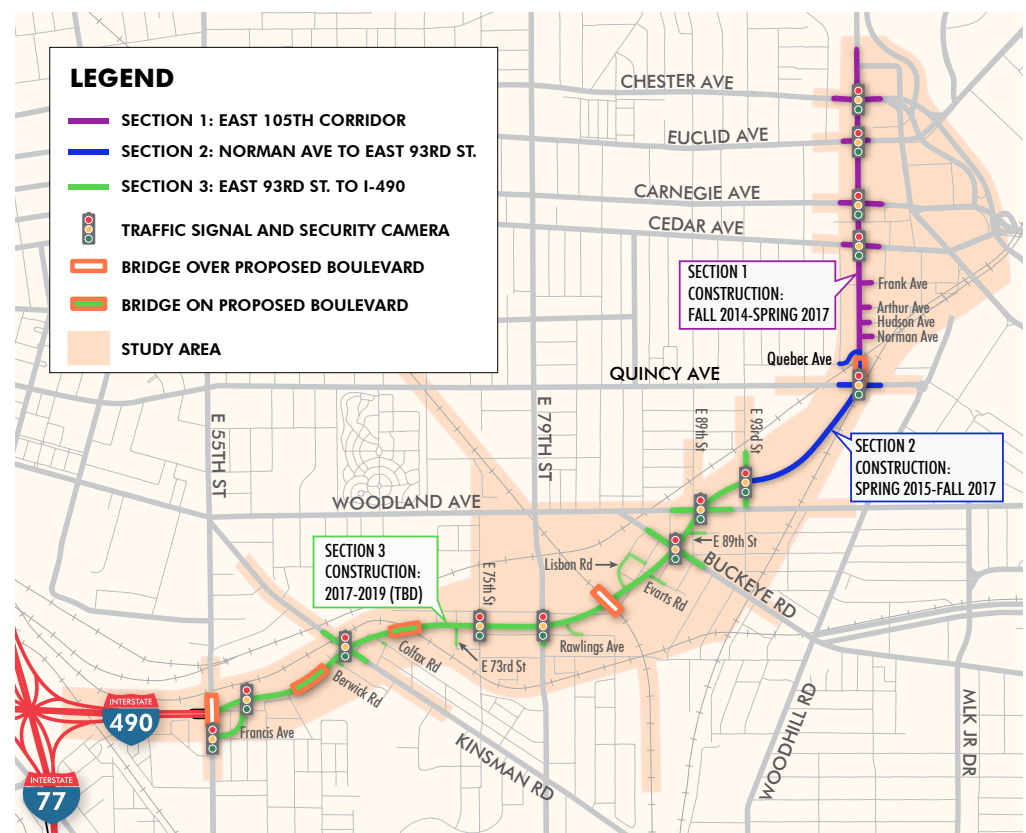
With the right settlement, it can be advantageous, but the negotiations can be complicated.



Paul Binder, Esq.

Mr. Binder brings 36 years of experience as a federal prosecutor to his volunteer work with Legal Aid. He recently retired from his practice of prosecuting anti-trust, fraud and violent crime cases with the U.S. Department of Justice. In retirement, he wanted to continue using his skills as an attorney – and joined Legal Aid as an in-house volunteer under Legal Aid's "ACT2" program. "It's a terrific opportunity to give back," says Mr. Binder.

### WHAT RIGHTS DO THE RESIDENTS HAVE AND WHO WILL PROTECT THEM?



## NEWS FROM LEGAL AID

### Cleveland Public Library presents Legal Aid with 2015 "Drum Major for Change" Award:

The award was presented at the CPL's annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration in January. This award seeks to honor an individual or organization for acts of social justice and community leadership reflective of the spirit, service, works, and leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Legal Aid is the first organization to be recognized with this award.



### Legal Aid expands its medical-legal partnership with The MetroHealth System – adds an attorney at MetroHealth's Senior Health and Wellness Center:

As of January 2015, Legal Aid attorney Karla Perry was added to the team of the nationally known medical-legal partnership. Legal Aid attorneys are integrated at MetroHealth to help patients navigate the complex government and community systems that often hold solutions to many social determinants of health – for example, income support for food insecure families, utility shut-off protection for those with health complications, and eviction prevention that keeps children from becoming homeless.



The program, now with four attorneys and one paralegal, is at four locations at MetroHealth. Through the program, in addition to handling cases and doing advocacy, Legal Aid attorneys educate multi-disciplinary teams of health care providers and students about patients' legal rights.

**Legal Aid Welcomes New Board Members:** The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland's Board of Directors is comprised of 24 members, mostly recommended by partner organizations. Board members serve three-year terms and are actively engaged in the organization. Eight of the 24 board members are people with low income and 15 are attorneys. Board members bring diverse experience and skills together with shared commitment to Legal Aid.

Members of Cleveland Legal Aid's Board of Directors serve as ambassadors, educating the community and building relationships that support our mission. In 2015, four new members were elected to Legal Aid's Board of Directors:



**Andre Dowdy**  
Community Representative  
*nominated by the VA Medical Center*



**Gladys B. Reed**  
Community Representative  
*nominated by Cleveland Tenants Organization*



**David J. Tocco, Esq.**  
Vorys, Sater, Seymour & Pease LLP



**Michael N. Ungar, Esq.**  
Ulmer & Berne LLP

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Carolyn Dennis  
Community Representative  
*nominated by J.F.K. Recreation Center*

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Thompson Hine

Andre Dowdy  
Community Representative  
*nominated by the VA Medical Center*

Phillip S. Fastenau, Ph.D.  
University Hospitals

Karen Giffen, Esq.  
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Frantz Ward

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Community Representative  
*nominated by Beach Brook*

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KeyBank

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Tucker Ellis

Edward W. Moore, Esq.  
RPM International Inc.

Matt Nakon, Esq.  
Wickens, Herzer, Panza, Cook & Batista  
*attorney representative for Lorain County*

Heather Nicastro  
Community Representative  
*nominated by The Arc of Greater Cleveland*

Aaron O'Brien, Esq.  
BakerHostetler

Richard Petrulis, Esq.  
KeyBank (retired)

Elizabeth "Betsy" Rader, Esq.  
Thorman Petrov Griffin

Gladys B. Reed  
Community Representative  
*nominated by Cleveland Tenants Organization*

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Mary Jane Trapp, Esq.  
Thrasher, Dinsmore & Dolan LPA  
*attorney representative for Eastern Counties*

Michael N. Ungar, Esq.  
Ulmer & Berne LLP

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Ida Williams  
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*nominated by Big Brothers Big Sisters of Lorain County*

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Writers: Ellen Brown and Adrienne Fischer  
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## DID YOU KNOW LEGAL AID HAS 2,000 ENGAGED PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS, AND 500 LAWYERS WERE ACTIVE IN CASES AND CLINICS IN 2014?

Check out these photos of our volunteers hard at work at recent Volunteer Lawyers Program events...



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*of Cleveland*  
*Since 1905*

**JAM FOR JUSTICE**



All proceeds from the event will support The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland and its work to ensure shelter, safety and economic security for those most in need

**Quench your thirst for justice at Legal Aid's annual summer fundraiser – Jam for Justice.** Enjoy drinks, food and the music of six awesome bands (and one DJ)... all headlined by local law students, attorneys and judges:

DJ Wolfe Entertainment  
Faith & Whiskey  
Just Us  
Luke Lindberg and the Hung Jury  
The No Name Band  
Out of Order  
Rule 11 and the Sanctions

**ADMISSION: \$50 IN ADVANCE**  
(Tickets on-sale at the door only if available – a sell-out is expected!)  
Visit [www.lasclev.org/2015jam](http://www.lasclev.org/2015jam) to purchase your tickets online and see band performance times.

**Can't be there?**  
**Your online donation is appreciated!**

**Need Tickets? Want to Sponsor?**  
**Have Questions? Call 216-861-5590 or email [ebrown@lasclev.org](mailto:ebrown@lasclev.org)**

**June 18, 2015 from 5:30 pm – 9:30 pm**  
**at the HOUSE OF BLUES**