

poetic justice

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Legal Aid removes barrier to employment

Douglas Walls was a driver working for a local trucking company. He was in the process of purchasing his big rig in a lease-to-own arrangement and had paid \$5,000 of the \$12,000 cost to the employer. One Friday, Mr. Walls was pre-loading the truck for the following Monday's run when a supervisor asked for a word. Citing a verbal warning on Mr. Walls' record, the supervisor said the company was severing their lease-to-own agreement – and keeping Mr. Walls' \$5,000. Shortly after that incident, Mr. Walls was let go.

Mr. Walls approached Legal Aid, and his case was handled by Stephanie Jackson, managing attorney of the Health-Education-Work-Income-Immigration Unit. Ms. Jackson, who oversees Legal Aid's Wage Project, explains: "The Wage Project has several goals, including working to preserve rights for low income workers, removing barriers to employment, and ensuring self-sufficiency for our clients. Mr. Walls is exactly the type of client that the project is designed to help. When Mr. Walls came to us, he was facing a significant barrier to his employment. His truck, which is the primary tool needed to earn income as an independent truck driver, had been wrongfully taken from him."

Legal Aid sued the trucking company for breach of contract and unjust enrichment. As soon as the complaint was filed, the trucking company agreed to a settlement: they slashed the remaining cost of the truck in half. The company also gave Mr. Walls several months to pay off the rest of the truck,



Douglas Walls

which now sits in Mr. Walls' East Cleveland driveway. Mr. Walls found new work with another trucking company: he now uses his truck to haul steel coils around the country, sometimes driving as far as Texas.

Ms. Jackson adds, "The beauty of the case is that we did not simply provide Mr. Walls with a fish, but obtained the tools Mr. Walls needed to fish for a lifetime." ●



Stephanie Jackson, Esq.

Inside this issue:

On page 2, Legal Aid works with the City of Cleveland to protect domestic violence survivors

Staff Attorney Profile: *Harold Williams*



Harold Williams, Esq.

Harold Williams is a man of few words, but he holds a wealth of wit. When asked what has kept him at Legal Aid for 35 years, Mr. Williams slyly smiles and jokes, “Inertia,” before clarifying that he likes to be “on the right side of the issues.”

Joseph Meissner, senior attorney in the Consumer Law Unit, calls Mr. Williams “one of the icons” of Legal Aid. Mr. Williams started at Legal Aid in 1975, working in a neighborhood office and the Law Reform Unit before becoming managing attorney of the Consumer Law Unit in 2003. Deputy Director David Dawson observes: “[Harold] is so well grounded in the law and practice that he can move readily from one area of consumer law to another. When the foreclosure crisis hit, he knew it, he knew the area, and he knew the law.”

Mr. Williams also supervises Legal Aid’s substantive law participation in the statewide *Save the Dream* foreclosure prevention program and serves as the editor and principal author of *Ohio Consumer Law*, a West publication used by judges, law practitioners and students statewide.

Mr. Williams cites a 1978 case as his most memorable: *Akers v. Ohio Department of Liquor Control*. This statewide class action lawsuit charged the liquor control department with racial discrimination toward its employees. When Mr. Williams and his co-counsel, Dennis Luttenauer, asked the court for six months to prepare for trial, they were given six weeks. “We worked around the clock,” he says. “We were in the office at 3:00, 4:00 in the morning.” The attorneys eventually won the case.

“Even had we lost,” Mr. Williams says, “the work we put into it was a valuable lesson to me about preparation. The only thing you can do is prepare.”

Julie Robie, a staff attorney in the Consumer Law Unit, says Mr. Williams leads by example: “I have learned a great deal from Harold from watching his rational, composed approach in client interactions and court appearances; his advocacy style has earned him great respect with colleagues and the court.”

In March 2010, Mr. Williams was presented with the first William J. Brown Consumer Protection Award from the Ohio Attorney General. The award honors an individual who demonstrates an unwavering commitment to a safe and fair marketplace and is named for former Ohio Attorney General William J. Brown, who created the office’s first Consumer Protection Section.

In his acceptance speech, Mr. Williams referenced a discrimination case from his time as a summer clerk at the Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights: “I saw the power of the law working to help the vulnerable and the power of legal representation to enforce those rights to which all people are entitled – not just the wealthy, but also the poor and disenfranchised that otherwise would not receive legal representation.” ●

Cleveland City Council supports U Visas with passage of resolution

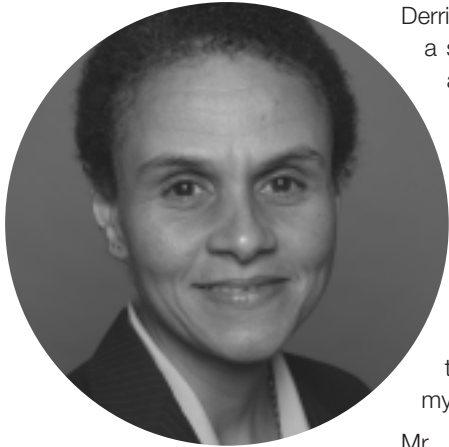
On March 22, Cleveland City Council passed Resolution No. 374-10, introduced by Council President Martin Sweeney and Councilman Jay Westbrook, encouraging the use of U Visas for victims of crime in Cleveland. U Visas give victims of crime and cooperating witnesses legal status and are often issued to protect survivors of domestic abuse. At the City Council Meeting, Legal Aid staff attorney Megan Sprecher addressed the City Council, Mayor Frank Jackson, police Chief Michael McGrath, and an audience that included Legal Aid clients assisted by the U Visa program. The following Sunday, a *Plain Dealer* editorial co-authored by Ms. Sprecher and Chief McGrath reinforced the importance of U Visas: “Many victims remain with their abusers and do not seek the help of police for fear of deportation. The U Visa promotes safe communities by encouraging immigrant victims of crimes to make police reports.” ●



Megan Sprecher, Esq. with (L-R) Councilman Martin Sweeney, Chief Michael McGrath, Mayor Frank Jackson and Councilman Jay Westbrook.



Legal Aid's re-entry work helps father find housing



Maria Smith, Esq.

Derrick Lincoln needed a home for his family. He was a single father who, after serving a prison term for a non-violent offense, was the sole caretaker of his daughter and son with special needs. They had been living with Mr. Lincoln's mother, who passed away. Mr. Lincoln's siblings tried to help financially. Still, Mr. Lincoln could not depend on his family forever – he needed to find a permanent home. He applied for subsidized housing, but was denied because of his prison record. Says Mr. Lincoln, "They based the decision on something I did. But this was for my child, it wasn't just me."

Mr. Lincoln came to Legal Aid, and Maria Smith, supervising attorney in the Housing Unit, took his case. Ms. Smith was able to secure Mr. Lincoln housing through the Emerald Development and Economic Network (EDEN). A Legal Aid partner organization,

EDEN is a non-profit agency which provides and encourages the availability of safe, decent, affordable housing and housing support services for persons who are low-income, mentally ill, and/or disabled. Letric Newton, a Housing Eligibility Specialist with EDEN, worked on Mr. Lincoln's case. She says, "Mr. Lincoln's first priority is his children, and he was doing the right thing to raise them."

Mr. Lincoln has nothing but praise for his attorney: "Maria was wonderful. She took me when I had no hope. She was honest with me."

Ms. Smith adds, "The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction expects that well over 40,000 inmates may return to Ohio communities in 2010; that's a lot of families affected by re-entry issues. Housing and employment are the biggest of those issues. Access to both means a lower recidivism rate and more stable communities." ●

THE PRESENCE OF JUSTICE

Legal Aid's Annual Report to the Community
with **The Honorable Sonia Sotomayor**
Justice of the United States Supreme Court

Friday, September 10, 2010

Renaissance Cleveland Hotel · 24 Public Square · Cleveland, Ohio 44113

- 6:00 p.m. Cocktails
- 7:00 p.m. Dinner and Program
- 8:30 p.m. Dessert Reception and Entertainment by The No Name Band

Make your reservations at **216.861.5506** or securely online at **www.lasclev.org**.
Seating is limited, reservations are necessary by August 23.

Dress: Business Attire





Washington D.C.

In March 2010, Legal Aid staff and board members traveled to Washington D.C. to meet with the seven members of the Ohio Congressional delegation who represent Legal Aid's clients, including Representatives Fudge (OH-10), Kaptur (OH-9), Kucinich (OH-10), LaTourette (OH-14), and Sutton (OH-13), and Senators Voinovich and Brown.

The goal of the meetings was to update the Congressional delegation on Legal Aid activities over the past year and highlight an appropriations request made for Legal Aid's employment law practice.

Legal Aid's board president Richard Panza believes "these Capitol Hill visits can become an annual occurrence so we can keep our representatives updated on the work we do in Northeast Ohio." ●

Richard Panza, Esq. (Board President), Congressman Louis Stokes, Esq. (Board Member) and Colleen Cotter, Esq. (Executive Director) on the steps of the U.S. Capitol.

Legal Aid's Deputy Director Honored

David B. Dawson, Legal Aid's deputy director and attorney with the organization since 1971, is the winner of the 2010 Denis Murphy Award from the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation (OLAF). The Award honors OLAF's founding board president and is presented each year to recognize outstanding leadership and advocacy within Ohio's legal aid societies. ●

David B. Dawson, Esq., Deputy Director, with wife Virginia Dawson at Legal Aid's 2009 Annual Luncheon.



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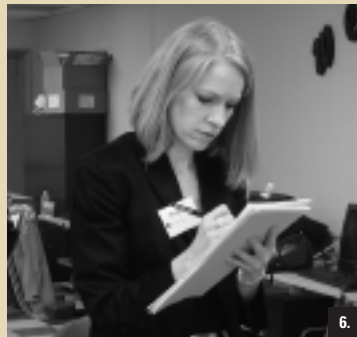


Volunteer Lawyers Program [vlp]



Volunteer attorneys at recent brief advice clinics.

1. **Richard D. Petrulis, Esq.** (KeyBank) and **Rebecca Petrulis** (Cleveland-Marshall College of Law)
2. **Margaret L. Montano, Esq.** (Thompson Hine)
3. **Stacy E. Cozart, Esq.** (Sharon & Kálnoki LLC) and **Sarah Greenlee** (CWRU School of Law)
4. **Wm. Joseph Baker, Esq.** (Giffen & Kaminski, LLC)
5. **Adrian D. Thompson, Esq.** (Taft/)
6. **Andrea S. Wilson, Esq.** (Electrolux USA, NEOACC)
7. **Cynthia A. Binns, Esq.** (GrafTech International Ltd., NEOACC)



B In Memoriam: William I. Kohn *S* (1951 - 2010)

Legal Aid mourns the loss of friend and supporter Will Kohn. Mr. Kohn was responsible for the initiation and development of Legal Aid's successful Bankruptcy By-Pass Program. He chaired the American Board of Certification for the ABA's Business and Consumer Bankruptcy Practice and was a former adjunct professor of Bankruptcy and Banking Law at the University of Notre Dame Law School. Mr. Kohn recognized the importance of giving back to the communities in which he lived and worked. A graduate of The Ohio State Moritz College of Law, he endowed two scholarships at Moritz.

While living in Chicago, Mr. Kohn established an award-winning program for the region's disabled and financially disadvantaged to avoid bankruptcy. After moving to Cleveland, he approached Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers Program about implementing a similar model in Northeast Ohio. In just over a year, the resulting Bankruptcy By-Pass clinics have helped over 100 people start the journey toward financial stability. Ann McGowan Porath, Managing Attorney of the Volunteer Lawyers Program, underscores the contribution Mr. Kohn made to Cleveland's low-income community: "The success of the By-Pass project is due to Will's recognition of the responsibility attorneys have to provide access to justice. Will's thoughtful dedication to helping low-income disabled persons continues to inspire all of us." In honor of Mr. Kohn, the Legal Aid Bankruptcy By-Pass Program will be renamed The Will Kohn Bankruptcy By-Pass Program. ●





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of Cleveland

The Annual Campaign for Legal Aid
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Stories of philanthropy and hope from The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland

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Legal Aid

our mission:

To secure justice and resolve fundamental problems for those who are low income and vulnerable by providing high quality legal services and working for systemic solutions.

Apply for Legal Aid's Board of Directors

The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland is accepting applications from attorneys in Cuyahoga County who are interested in serving on its Board of Directors.

For more information and to obtain an application, go to: <http://www.lasclev.org/boardapplication.html> ●

