



The
Legal Aid Society
of Cleveland
Since 1905

For Immediate Release

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Page 1/2

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Legal Aid kicks off Volunteer Lawyers Program

Beginning Wednesday, January 26, more low income families will have access to free legal services. The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland will kick-off its Volunteer Lawyers Program (VLP) with a Law Firm Clinic at Legal Aid's downtown Cleveland office.

The Cleveland office of the law firm Porter Wright Morris & Arthur is staffing this inaugural Clinic. Appointments for this Clinic have already been filled by clients.

Hugh McKay, partner-in-charge of Porter Wright's Cleveland office states, "Our firm is pleased and honored to be the pacesetter for Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers Program. In this community, there is a crisis facing low income families in need of legal assistance. Our lawyers need to not just talk the talk, but also walk the walk, and deal with this crisis. Legal Aid is a particularly compelling way to help."

Porter Wright Morris & Arthur is a law firm with more than 300 lawyers in six offices located in Ohio, Florida, and Washington, D.C.; Porter Wright attorneys and staff in each office enthusiastically volunteer their time, knowledge and skills to a wide variety of civic, community and charitable organizations and events.

The clinics continue on Saturday, January 29, with a Brief Advice & Referral Clinic at Catholic Charities' St. Martin de Porres Family Center in Cleveland's Glenville neighborhood. Attorneys from the Cleveland office of Jones Day will staff this Brief Advice Clinic, which is open to anyone interested in legal assistance.

continued on page 2

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Legal Aid kicks off Volunteer Lawyers Program

The Volunteer Lawyers Program strives to mobilize the private bar to assist in making legal advice and representation more accessible to low income persons and families. Legal Aid attorneys - experts in poverty law -- will serve as trainers and mentors to private attorney volunteers. This is an innovative program for Ohio.

Legal problems handled through the Clinics will be related to housing, immigration, employment, income survival, unconscionable businesses practices, family law, and more. Other law firms and individuals have volunteered for future Clinics through 2005.

The Clinics of Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers Program include:

- **Law Firm Clinics** will be held monthly, and will be staffed by members of law firms, government agencies, solo practitioners and Legal Aid attorneys.
- **Brief Advice & Referral Clinics** will be monthly first-come, first-served clinics at neighborhood community centers. Clients will have an opportunity to discuss civil legal programs with volunteer attorneys and receive general advice, information or referrals.
- **Special Focus Programs** will provide assistance by issue area, such as landlord tenant, or by client group, such as elder law. They will include community legal education presentations, brief advice, referrals and direct individual representation.

Since 1905, The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland has provided high-quality free legal assistance to low income clients in Northeast Ohio. In 2004, over 8,500 cases were handled by 39 attorneys. As part of its delivery of legal services to the poor, Legal Aid has always relied on the support of volunteers. Unfortunately, the need for legal services from low income clients for basic legal needs such as housing or employment exceeds the capacity of full-time Legal Aid attorneys.

Local bar associations have been extremely supportive of Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers Program. The Cleveland Bar Association's "Our Commitment to Our Community" initiative recruited over 70,000 volunteer hours for Legal Aid and other local charities. The Cuyahoga County Bar Association is working with Legal Aid to recruit solo practitioners and law firms.

Generous funding for the Volunteer Lawyers Program is provided by The Eva L. and Joseph M. Bruening Foundation and The Murphy Family Foundation. More foundations and law firms are being solicited for ongoing support.

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