



Executive Director's Report to the Board of Directors: 4/16/2020

So much of the Legal Aid news is related to coronavirus. That information is included in other documents in the board packet. This report is limited to other news.

Staff:

- **Promotions/New Positions:**
 - Senior Attorney **Kimberly Barnett-Mills** has moved into a new role – Supervising Attorney in the Intake / Volunteer Lawyers Program Group.
 - Intake Specialist **Ahlon Gonzalez** will soon move to the Economic Justice Group – and be promoted to Paralegal 1.
 - **Anne Schleicher** was a temporary paralegal who has been hired into a regular position as a Paralegal in the Housing Group.
 - **Tracy Ferron** has been promoted to Paralegal 2 in the Family Group. Tracy has been with Legal Aid for 22 years, in the Jefferson office.

 - **Departures:**
 - Law graduate **Johnathan Duffie** left Legal Aid in March. We were very sorry to see him leave. Johnathan moved back to Chicago for family reasons. We're hoping that his life path brings him back to Cleveland and to Legal Aid at some point in the future.
 - Staff Attorney **Gardner Hensill** has announced that he is moving to California in July. Gardner is part of our Medical Legal Partnership with MetroHealth and does a lot of work in the Broadway-Slavic Village neighborhood. I'm hoping he lands with our sister organization – Legal Services of Northern California!

 - **Congratulations!**
 - Supervising Attorney **Hazel Remesch** was named by the Plain Dealer as a Cleveland Champion. Hazel earned this recognition for her leadership in Right to Counsel.
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Right to Counsel: We are moving forward in implementation of Right to Counsel – Cleveland. The following staff members will have roles in this project:

- **Abigail Staudt**, Managing Attorney, Housing (Abby will manage the entire Housing Group, including the RTC Team)
- **Rebecca King**, Paralegal 1, RTC (Moving from Economic Justice)
- **Paige Nofel**, Paralegal 2, RTC
- **Hazel Remesch**, Supervising Attorney and RTC Project Manager (Hazel will work with RTC and the entire Housing Group)
- **Jenny Sheeche**, Supervising Attorney, RTC



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- **Joe Tomino**, Staff Attorney, RTC (moving from Intake/VLP)
 - **Matt Vincel**, Supervising Attorney, RTC (moving from his role as Senior Attorney in MLP)
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Diversity & Inclusion Committee: This Committee has engaged Compass Consulting to conduct an Equity Audit. Tameka Taylor is Compass' President and as our primary consultant. She has been meeting with the committee. She and her colleagues will interview a number of staff members, some external partners, and conduct focus groups. They will then make recommendations about ways we can improve to get closer to our goal of an organization of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Artwork: We installed new artwork in the Cleveland office. We used things we already had – old banners, our history book, signs and flyers to create a truly unique set of artwork. And, our history is now framed and displayed in the Conference Center. We'll produce some for the other offices too, once we have refreshed them, and once we are back in them.

Cost of Caring: We sponsored a Lunch 'n Learn, attended by many staff members on "The Cost of Caring – Secondary Trauma and the Importance of Self-Care." The program was presented by the CWRU Center on Trauma and Adversity.

A few highlights of our work with clients:

- **Reentry Advocacy:** Members of Legal Aid's Reentry Committee, working with other reentry advocates in the community, have long been engaged in work to better understand the impact of criminal convictions on those seeking subsidized housing. This resulted in issuance of a report: *A Never-Ending Sentence: The Impact of Criminal Convictions in Project-Based Section 8 Housing Tenant Selection Plans in Cuyahoga County*. The report was featured in a Cleveland.com article and a Sound of Ideas interview.
- On February 11, **Alexandria Ruden** argued on behalf of *amicus* in the Ohio Supreme Court in the case of *Bey v. Rasawehr*. Alexandria argued that provisions of a civil stalking protection order banning online and social media postings about a victim are a necessary legal safeguard against further stalking, and not an unconstitutional prior restraint on free speech barred by the First Amendment. Alexandria, Haley Martinelli, and Tonya Whitsett drafted the amicus brief which was filed in the case on behalf of the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland and Ohio Domestic Violence Network.

Alexandria was particularly effective in explaining how Appellant's behavior (postings on billboards and the internet) became stalking conduct that removed it from First Amendment protections. Additionally, her counter argument to Appellant's claim that the proper remedy for Appellees was a libel lawsuit was persuasive. She focused on the fact that the remedies



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for libel are inadequate, while civil stalking orders are tailored to the specific needs of the victims. Additionally, she reminded the Court that trial courts are empowered to create remedies based on past conduct in order to prevent future harm.

- Great news from 8th District Court of Appeals in a pro bono adoption case. In a lengthy, well-reasoned decision, the Court of Appeals affirmed the decision of the Probate Court in favor of our client's objection to the adoption by the Guardian. This case turned primarily on the trial court's finding of facts. While the right to counsel in private adoption matters was not before the appellate court, the 8th District in its conclusion referred to a U.S. Supreme Court decision that stated that natural parents have a fundamental liberty interest in the care, custody and management of their child that is not easily extinguished. Thompson Hine Attorneys representing the client were Marilyn Eble, former Family Law summer associate, and Frank DeSantis, former Legal Aid Board President.

New Service Delivery Systems:

- We launched the new **Worker Information Line**, modelled after our Tenant Information Line. Callers can get information about unemployment and employment. When callers need advice or representation they are transferred into that system.
- We also launched new **Virtual Advice Clinics**. We are starting in the areas of employment and unemployment and plan to expand into other areas soon. Volunteer attorneys call clients from their own phone, provide advice, and can record their notes directly into Legal Aid's case management system.

2020 Salaries: We implemented our new salary grades, effective March 28, 2020. The grades were increased 2%. Individual salaries were increased according to our policy, based on: scope of responsibility, quality of work, where the individual's salary falls in the grade, and years of experience.

Dashboards: Attached are Client and Cases Dashboards. And VLP Dashboards.

Executive Director in the Community (although clearly this is all virtual right now):

- I am **Chair** of the **Saint Luke's Foundation Board**.
- I am a member of the new **Lead Safe Cleveland Coalition** Steering Committee.



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- I serve as **President** of the **United Way of Greater Cleveland Council of Agency Executives**.
- As CAE President, I am a member of the **United Way of Greater Cleveland Board of Directors**. I serve on the Strategic Programs and Planning Committee.
- I **co-chair the Say Yes to Education Legal Services Task Force** and serve on the Postsecondary Planning System Task Force.
- I am **Vice President** of **Alliance of Ohio Legal Aids**.
- I am a member of the **Accountable Health Communities Greater Cleveland Consortium Advisory Board**. This is a collaboration of United Way, MetroHealth and other partners which received a \$4.5 million federal grant to address social determinants of health.
- I am a member of the **Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association Board** as Legal Aid's delegate.
- I serve on the **Cleveland Marshall School of Law Board of Visitors** Board.