



The Campaign for Legal Aid

EXTENDING THE REACH OF JUSTICE



More than a Century of Service



5th oldest

LEGAL AID ORGANIZATION
IN THE UNITED STATES

Founded in 1905, The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland provides civil legal services in areas of law that impact safety, health, shelter, education, and economic security. These services are provided at no cost to families living in poverty, helping ensure fairness for all in the justice system. Legal Aid attorneys and volunteer lawyers prevent foreclosure and evictions, create pathways to education and employment, and secure safety from domestic violence. Annually, Legal Aid increases assets and income and reduces debt for its clients by \$14 million.

This work is vital to Northeast Ohio as poverty continues to affect the region – generation after generation.

- Legal Aid serves residents of Cuyahoga, Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake, and Lorain counties with incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines.
- One out of every three residents in the counties Legal Aid serves are eligible for Legal Aid's services.
- Legal Aid's clients are the working poor, veterans, homeowners and renters, families with children, people with disabilities, and the elderly.
- 83 percent of the households that Legal Aid serves have incomes less than \$25,000/year.
- Nearly half of children (43 percent) who are born into the poorest families will remain poor in adulthood.

When people face legal challenges that can deprive them of life's essentials and alter their future, Legal Aid provides a second chance through legal intervention. Because clients' financial situations are tenuous to begin with, their legal struggles can quickly lead to a cascade of problems, such as a veteran erroneously cut off from his benefits and now unable to pay the rent and at risk of eviction. Even when people have rights, the unfortunate reality is that without the representation of a knowledgeable attorney these rights may go unenforced. Legal Aid levels the playing field by giving a voice to the voiceless. The resolution of clients' legal cases is life changing: Legal Aid's involvement can tip the scales between shelter and homelessness, safety and danger, and economic security and poverty.

Now is the Time for Growth

Legal Aid's counsel is needed now more than ever as Northeast Ohio struggles with multi-generational poverty that holds back the region and its residents. Civil legal counsel is proven to foster fairness, empower individuals and eliminate many of the barriers that block families living in poverty from financial stability and greater engagement in their communities. Legal Aid is deeply connected to the community and has established innovative programs and fostered diverse partnerships to reach its clients.

The single biggest obstacle to Legal Aid playing a greater role in the community's solutions to systemic poverty is having the financial resources to reach more families when and where they need civil legal counsel. Steady growth in donor support through *The Campaign for Legal Aid* extends Legal Aid's reach in Northeast Ohio and helps more families living in poverty when civil legal matters threaten their health, shelter, safety, education or economic security.

The Campaign for Legal Aid is a comprehensive five-year effort to raise the resources needed to grow and sustain proven programs and build new opportunities for serving families living in poverty. This includes raising funds for operating, capital and endowment. By blending gifts to support these three areas, donors will see the impact of their giving today and know their support continues Legal Aid's mission and work in the future.

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I've been involved with Legal Aid for more than 25 years. Over that time, I've come to know a great deal about the marvelous services that Legal Aid provides to many, many people below the poverty line. I am a true believer in the great work of Legal Aid and understand why they need and deserve financial and *pro bono* support.

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— Dick Pogue
Senior Advisor, Jones Day



Donors Extend the Reach of Justice

By participating in *The Campaign for Legal Aid*, donors provide the resources for Legal Aid and its attorneys to reach thousands of additional people and spread the impact of civil legal counsel more broadly across a five-county area.

Increased donor support will:



IMPACT MORE FAMILIES THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS



REMOVE BARRIERS TO OPPORTUNITY



ELEVATE LEGAL AID AS A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE

Legal Aid's Ripple Effect

STEADY AND SUSTAINED INCREASE IN ANNUAL OPERATING RESOURCES

EXTENDS LEGAL AID'S REACH TO MORE FAMILIES WHERE AND WHEN THEY NEED CIVIL LEGAL COUNSEL TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO OPPORTUNITY

BRINGS GREATER STABILITY TO FAMILIES WHEN THEIR QUALITY OF LIFE OR LIVELIHOODS ARE THREATENED

MOVES FAMILIES FROM POVERTY TO GREATER ENGAGEMENT IN OUR COMMUNITY

FOSTERS A STRONGER AND THRIVING DEMOCRACY IN OUR COMMUNITY





IMPACT MORE FAMILIES THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS



Civil legal counsel at the right moment stops a situation from escalating to an emergency. Community partnerships bring Legal Aid to the places where low-income families live, seek other services, work and go

to school. From these accessible, familiar locations, Legal Aid attorneys and the people they serve can begin conversations about civil legal matters at those important junctures. Partnerships include:

- Placing Legal Aid at or near schools to help families whose housing or financial instability interfere with a child's education.
- Building medical-legal partnerships with area health care systems that integrate Legal Aid attorneys in patient care settings to identify and resolve issues that jeopardize health and wellness.
- Collaborating with social services organizations on the frontlines with families facing domestic violence and other threats to safety and stability.
- Convening legal advice clinics to provide counsel to people where and when they need help at libraries, places of worship, and other community-based locations.
- Providing smart community legal education, which empowers families living in poverty with legal information and advice so they make informed decisions.

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The medical-legal partnership with Legal Aid gives me a partner who is trained in the law. We work together to meet the complex needs of our patients, but the Legal Aid lawyer can also take the issue to the next level and work system-wide to make changes for the community.

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— Dr. Robert Needlman
MetroHealth



A LEGAL AID VOLUNTEER MEETS WITH A CLIENT AT THE CLEVELAND PUBLIC LIBRARY.

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Legal Aid sees the Cleveland Public Library as a natural partner, and our work together is now a national model for other cities.

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— Felton Thomas
*Executive Director and CEO,
Cleveland Public Library*

EXTENDING THE REACH OF JUSTICE FOR HELENE CHO

Every day was a struggle for Helene Cho. Afflicted by a back injury that left her unemployed, Helene was physically and financially stressed. These struggles compounded as the student loans Helene had taken out for her son were pushing her further into debt. Her son's education was a priority and seeing him pursue a college degree was a dream come true for her. She never imagined the financial hardship that would follow. With limited English ability, Helene had tried in vain to work out a lower payment plan with the private loan company that hassled her regularly for the \$410 monthly payments she couldn't afford. She was desperate for help. She had heard of Legal Aid, but didn't know how to access the organization's help. Yet, one day she saw that Legal Aid attorneys would be on site at her library, Cleveland Public Library's Hough Branch. Armed with her notes and paperwork, she was nervous. Given her language barrier, would she be able to communicate her circumstances? She got the help she needed. With the help of an interpreter, the Legal Aid attorney pieced together her payment history and contacted the lender to negotiate several months of loan forbearance. This extension gave Helene time to secure a loan consolidation at a new, affordable rate of \$150/month. With the help of Legal Aid, Helene now has financial security. On that spring Saturday at Cleveland Public Library's Hough Branch, Helene was given a voice – one that was heard and understood – and an opportunity to move forward in her life.





REMOVE BARRIERS TO OPPORTUNITY

The “land of opportunity” doesn’t always hold true for families living in poverty. Legal Aid lawyers play an instrumental role in helping families living in poverty overcome barriers to education, employment, security, and housing. For example, these attorneys work to:

- Reinstatement a suspended license for reliable transportation to work.
- Expunge an old minor offense record in order to obtain employment.
- Advocate for families with children who require special education so they may thrive in school.
- Represent victims of crime, including domestic violence, stalking and trafficking.
- Represent tenants and homeowners to stabilize housing.



// **Just because someone falls in a lower socioeconomic category doesn’t mean that his or her**

concerns are less important. Helping to lift these individuals up, to be better parents or to find a way to get an education, ultimately benefits our entire community. And this all starts with Legal Aid.

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— Harlin Adelman
*Vice President and Deputy General Counsel,
University Hospitals Health System*



ILAH ADKINS TURNED TO LEGAL AID FOR HELP WITH A DIFFICULT DIVORCE, BUT MET AN ATTORNEY WHO INSPIRED HER. SHE WENT BACK TO SCHOOL, BECAME AN ATTORNEY, AND EVENTUALLY SERVED AS LEGAL AID’S BOARD PRESIDENT.

EXTENDING THE REACH OF JUSTICE FOR ILAH ADKINS

Ilah Adkins first entered the doors at Legal Aid in 1995 as a soon-to-be single young mother. Weighed down by a troubled childhood of foster and group homes and desperate to find a way out of her at-risk marriage, Ilah was terrified. She met with her Legal Aid attorney, and for the first time ever, she felt a sense of empowerment and hope. Hope for the future – for her and her family. The Legal Aid attorney not only addressed the circumstances around her marriage, but also talked about her future and the legacy she wanted to leave her children. This was the first time someone pushed her to be better. Walking out of the Legal Aid offices that day, Ilah decided to go to college. Over the course of a year, while her Legal Aid attorney was handling her domestic violence case and finalizing her divorce, Ilah started classes at Cuyahoga Community College. She transferred to Cleveland State University and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in political science – just four years after she first walked into Legal Aid. She didn’t stop there. Ilah had always been intrigued by how her Legal Aid attorney was changing lives for women and children by virtue of her education. In 2001, she pursued a law degree from Cleveland-Marshall College of Law and upon graduation took a position as legal counsel for Charter One Bank. Never forgetting that pivotal moment when someone was there for her when she was most vulnerable, Ilah has taken every opportunity to pay it forward, including serving as a volunteer lawyer for Legal Aid. In 2006, Ilah was elected to Legal Aid’s Board of Directors – a position in which she passionately served for 6 years. In 2011, she served as Legal Aid’s Board President.





ELEVATE LEGAL AID AS A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE

Legal Aid’s efforts can effect change at the macro level, and that’s good for the region and our democracy. When Legal Aid educates community leaders and decision makers, sharing its on-the-ground insights and experiences, important community changes happen. Through their expertise in poverty law, Legal Aid attorneys create greater protection and fairness in the community. Current and ongoing efforts include:

- Educating housing authorities and utility departments so they may better understand the civil legal rights of their customers.
- Serving as the legal experts in a community-wide strategy to eliminate lead poisoning in Greater Cleveland.
- Decreasing the number of delinquent property tax cases by collaborating with Cuyahoga County to improve processes and create more efficient interactions between government agencies and homeowners.
- Addressing issues of court fees and fines that have a disparate impact on families living in poverty.
- Creating a right to counsel in housing cases so housing stability can be the baseline for future opportunity.
- Enforcing current laws related to healthy standards in rental housing and creating a system that incentivizes private landlords to proactively offer healthier places to live.

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I believe with Legal Aid that anything is possible. I believe it’s possible because of their tremendous track record. I’ve never seen them rely on what they did last year and be satisfied, so I have great faith in their continued innovation, their growth, and I’m excited to see whatever they do.

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 — Anne Goodman
President and CEO, Saint Luke’s Foundation



ADVOCACY FOR SAFE AND STABLE HOUSING MEANS MORE THAN JUST HANDLING CASES – IT INCLUDES EXAMINING THE LARGER PROBLEMS AND LONG-TERM POLICY SOLUTIONS IN COLLABORATION WITH LEADERS FROM ALL OF NORTHEAST OHIO.

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Early on in my career as an attorney representing a local housing authority, I worked hand-in-hand with Legal Aid to advance public subsidized housing throughout Greater Cleveland. Over the years I’ve seen Legal Aid continue to collaborate and expand to address the needs of this region’s poor.

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 — Steve O’Bryan
Of Counsel, Taft Stettinius & Hollister LLP

EXTENDING THE REACH OF JUSTICE FOR A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY

Lead poisoning causes irreparable harm in children – from brain and nervous system damage to learning and behavioral problems. In Cleveland, 14 percent of children tested had elevated blood lead levels. Legal Aid knows all too well the impact of lead poisoning – standing with clients whose children and grandchildren have been poisoned just by breathing lead dust in their bedrooms. Legal Aid is part of a community-wide effort to eliminate lead poisoning in Greater Cleveland. By representing families in landlord-tenant cases, Legal Aid attorneys prevent evictions, ensure landlords fix dangerous conditions, and make sure that landlords relocate their tenants if need be. For children who have been poisoned and suffer from learning disabilities, Legal Aid represents families seeking the special services their children need at school and access to health care to mitigate the medical consequences of lead poisoning. And, Legal Aid attorneys are on the ground working with city government to improve systems so that lead hazards are removed before a child is poisoned. By leveraging the expertise of Legal Aid staff and volunteers, educating the region, and partnering with community leaders, Legal Aid is working to create a healthier community.



A Community Responsibility and Role

Unlike in the criminal justice system, the U.S. Constitution doesn't guarantee representation in civil legal matters. For over a century, Legal Aid has been a vital safety net for families living in poverty who cannot afford to hire a lawyer. Legal Aid attorneys bring fairness, equity and justice to all they counsel. More so, they offer the hope of breaking down barriers and rising out of poverty to greater engagement in their communities.

The Campaign for Legal Aid is for donors from across the community who believe in these fundamental rights, and the remedies they offer to the region's systemic poverty. Through donors' generous support, more families will be stabilized, Northeast Ohio will be strengthened by these families' deeper engagement in the community, and democracy will thrive.

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Our Constitution does not guarantee an attorney to anyone in a civil situation, but people whose homes are being threatened, whose children's education is being threatened, they need access to justice. Without Legal Aid they would not have access to justice.
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— Rita Maimbourg
Partner, Tucker Ellis and Legal Aid Board Member



Thank you
for your interest
in *The Campaign
for Legal Aid*.

We hope you'll join the other leaders in our community who have stepped up their support to extend the reach of justice in Northeast Ohio.

To learn even more about our proven programs and partnerships and our commitment to building new opportunities to reach families living in poverty, contact:

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