

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Poetic Justice

Volume 17 Issue 1 Spring 2020

Stories of Philanthropy and Hope from The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland

« PRESIDENT'S Special Message »

I'm truly inspired by what I'm seeing. As we all work together to confront and endure a pandemic that no one could have imagined, we are seeing precisely what we'd expect of Legal Aid.

As President of Legal Aid's Board of Directors, I can personally assure you that:

- Legal Aid is **essential**, responding to the basic needs of our low-income clients who are particularly vulnerable right now;
- Legal Aid is **open** for our clients, many of whom need our free legal services more than ever; and
- Legal Aid was **ahead of the curve**, taking immediate, coordinated steps the weekend of March 14 to ensure the safety of our nearly 100-strong staff members and our clients as we seamlessly moved our operations off-site.

The ABA recently announced the creation of a new nationwide Task Force on Legal Needs Arising Out of the 2020 Pandemic. Its charge is to make recommendations for addressing the legal needs of low-income people related to COVID-19 and help mobilize volunteer lawyers for people who need legal help for basic needs. That task force is chaired by James Sandman, former president of the Legal Services Corporation, the nations' largest funder of civil legal aid for low-income Americans. Jim is an incredible leader, and he was just in Cleveland for our annual meeting. It would come as no surprise to him that our Legal Aid is already "mobilized" and helping those in need.

I've been in touch, literally on a daily basis, both with Legal Aid's leadership team and with our highly engaged Board and committee members. What I've witnessed in the early days of this new reality is nothing short of amazing.

Under the direction of Colleen Cotter – our visionary and indefatigable leader, and truly as talented an Executive Director as one could find – Legal Aid staff nimbly and quickly transitioned to working from home. Thanks to a strong infrastructure, this strong team of staff and volunteers are working in the trenches to deal with many matters for which there are no plays in the proverbial playbook.

One result of this crisis, of course, is the horrible economic toll, which seemingly overnight rendered a growing percentage of our community to become eligible for Legal Aid's services.

Bottom line: We need your help now more than ever. Please join me and many others in supporting Legal Aid, which is battling on the front lines to help clients address pandemic-related issues such as lost jobs, housing, safety and security, and benefits. Thus, **please consider a special gift to Legal Aid. Use the enclosed envelope or give online at www.lasclev.org.**

No matter what you financially contribute, I hope you will also join me in thanking our public officials, our judges and court staffs, our public defenders, our prosecutors, and, of course, the private bar of Northeast Ohio. I also want to especially thank the leadership of all the bar associations in our service area. The entire legal profession truly shines in moments like these, unwavering commitment to assuring access to justice for those who so desperately need it.

Before I conclude, I'd be remiss if I didn't specifically shout out our extraordinary Board of Directors. In addition to 100% attendance at every recent committee meeting (wow!), we've also been taking full advantage of the broad, deep, and diverse array of Board talent and perspectives.

Thank you, in advance, for any contribution you can make to help us provide the best legal representation for our clients, keep our staff safe, and continue our high-priority mission of ensuring access to justice. Please stay safe and healthy– and please let me know if there is anything I can do to help you support Legal Aid: email me at mungar@ulmer.com.




Legal Aid Board President Mike Ungar assisting clients at a recent clinic.

WE'RE WORKING TOGETHER TO EXTEND JUSTICE

We may come from different faith traditions and celebrate different holidays, but we are united as partners with Legal Aid. Together, we believe in breaking the cycle of poverty to improve the health and well-being of our community.



16,710 PEOPLE IMPACTED THROUGH
7,297 CIVIL LEGAL CASES

"Legal Aid freed me from staying in an abusive marriage and made me feel safe at court."

LEARN ABOUT LEGAL AID'S CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Helping people with legal issues related to basic needs

www.lasclev.org/coronavirus #ExtendJustice



The Legal Aid Society
of Cleveland
Since 1965

JAM FOR JUSTICE

SEPTEMBER 2, 2020

House of Blues, downtown Cleveland

Featuring: DJ Wolfe Entertainment • Faith & Whiskey • First Offenders • Luke Lindberg and the Hung Jury
No Name Band • Out of Order • Razing the Bar • Rule 11 & the Sanctions

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Learn more at: www.lasclev.org/2020Jam

Legal Aid's Rapid Response to Coronavirus

HELP WANTED!

In times of crisis, Legal Aid provides hope to those whose lives and livelihoods have been upended. And we need your help. The population eligible for our services grew significantly after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While our 52 in-house staff attorneys have powered a robust response to this challenge, we are also calling on *pro bono* volunteer lawyers to meet the new demand in our community. Both new and current volunteers are encouraged to help:

- Sign-up to help with our new “Virtual Advice Clinics” – www.lasclev.org/volunteer/covid19
- Visit this page to “Take a Case” – www.lasclev.org/volunteer/attorneys/take-a-case



Extending Justice in Many Ways

Legal Aid launched www.lasclev.org/coronavirus to educate the community about the various impacts of COVID-19 as well as up-to-date information about Legal Aid's current work.

Legal Aid's online intake is open for clients 24/7 and phone intake is available during select business hours. Although our physical offices are closed and in-person intake is suspended, we remain very much available to provide critical legal assistance related to basic needs. Legal Aid anticipates an increase in requests for service related to debt/bankruptcy, employment law, unemployment compensation, wage theft, housing stability and domestic relations.

We are working to leverage technology to further support and enhance our remote work. For example, we will engage volunteers to provide legal advice through “virtual” advice clinics.

Knowledge is power. Uncertainty about one's rights and options contributes to stress and can delay or deny needed access to important supports. We will continue to expand this community education page as new issues arise.

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Harlin Adelman, Esq. University Hospitals	Andre Dowdy Community Representative Nominated by the VA Medical Center	Gladys B. Reed Community Representative nominated by Cleveland Tenants Organization
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GIVE NOW!



Your gift will provide important and needed legal assistance as Legal Aid sees an increase in requests for legal services related to debt/bankruptcy, employment law, unemployment compensation, wage theft, housing stability and domestic violence.

Legal Aid Welcomes New Board Members, Officers

On December 6, 2019, Legal Aid held its last Board Meeting the year. It was a bittersweet occasion, as we said goodbye to board members who finished terms and new board members were elected.

Legal Aid is grateful to the following people who concluded their Board service in 2019; over the years, these outstanding individuals contributed much to our organization and our community:

Jillian Charles, Esq. / **Phil Fastenau, Esq.** University Hospitals / **Karen Giffen, Esq.** Giffen & Kaminski
Delores Gray Community Representative / **Ron Johnson, Esq.** KeyBank / **Ed Moore, Esq.** RPM International

Legal Aid is proud to announce the following officers for 2020:

Mike Ungar, Esq. (Ulmer Berne) *President* / **Gladys Reed** Community Representative *Vice President*
Rita Maimbourg, Esq. (Tucker Ellis) *Vice President* / **Jonathan Leiken, Esq.** (Diebold Nixdorf) *Vice President*
Steve Fazio, Esq. (Squire Patton Boggs US) *Secretary/Treasurer*

And, Legal Aid welcomes the following new Board Members who begin their service in 2020:



Harlin Adelman, Esq.
University Hospitals



Craig Beazer, Esq.
KeyBank



Jan Roller, Esq.
Giffen & Kaminski



Doug Wang
Retired from
Northern Trust

Immigration Practice Removes Barriers, Transforms Lives

The Immigration Legal Services Fund was created through the Cleveland Foundation in 2018 to addresses the urgent needs of our region's immigrant population. One of their initial grants was for Legal Aid's immigration practice.

At Legal Aid, three full-time staff attorneys and a paralegal focus on immigration cases. In collaboration with Catholic Charities, the attorneys make regular trips to area jails, where they present “Know Your Rights” sessions for inmates and conduct intake sessions to determine if anyone qualifies for free legal assistance.

The success stories from this program are truly remarkable. One example is the story of Elena, a single mother with four little girls (*name changed to protect client privacy*). She had been living in Northeast Ohio for 15 years before she encountered any issues with her immigration status. In 2019, a neighbor called the police to report a heated argument between Elena and a family member. Because Elena speaks Spanish,

the police suspected that she may not be a U.S. citizen. When they confirmed Elena was undocumented, the police officers called Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Elena was promptly transferred to ICE custody and detained at the Geauga County jail to await a hearing before the Cleveland Immigration Court. Suddenly, Elena was separated from her four daughters (who were U.S. citizens) and at risk of deportation.



Corrylee Drozda, Esq.

Elena had suffered domestic abuse both in her home country of Honduras and in the United States. She worked as a childcare provider in her own home and had no criminal record. Legal Aid attorney Corrylee Drozda met with Elena and determined she qualified for “cancellation of removal,” which would require proving: 1) she has lived in the

BIG ANNOUNCEMENT!

Legal Aid is Bolstered as Catalyst for Community Change

Legal Aid has received a **\$2.25 million 3-year grant from the Cleveland Foundation** to support our work to implement right to counsel in Cleveland Housing Court.

The City of Cleveland asked United Way to manage implementation for the new law, and Legal Aid is the program's legal provider. Initial work for this program, called Right to Counsel Cleveland, will be funded jointly by philanthropy/private support and government support. The long-term viability of the program will rely on data and evaluation, which will influence the structure of sustainable government support.

Legal Aid will ensure that every eligible family receives free and high-quality legal representation beginning in July of 2020. Legal Aid will provide this legal representation via staff attorneys, contract attorneys, and pro bono volunteers.

Cleveland is the first city in Ohio and fourth in the United States to implement right to counsel in housing.

Public Officials Breakfast Highlights Right to Counsel Movement

On March 6, more than 100 public officials gathered at Legal Aid for a breakfast event highlighting Legal Aid's work to ensure housing stability.

After a welcome by Board President Mike Ungar and an introduction by Executive Director Colleen Cotter, Legal Aid attorneys Hazel Remesch and Abigail Staudt described Legal Aid's joint work with United Way of Greater Cleveland to implement right to counsel in the City of Cleveland. The presentation focused on how Cleveland's new Right to Counsel law will help level the playing field for families in poverty facing eviction.

The presentation was followed by keynote remarks from United States Senator Rob Portman. Portman championed Legal Aid as an advocate for justice and described the bill he co-sponsored along with Democratic Senator Michael Bennet (CO) to address the eviction crisis. The Eviction Crisis Act aims to shed light on the root causes of the eviction crisis, reduce preventable evictions, and limit the devastation to families when eviction is unavoidable.

Legal Aid is excited to expand our eviction advocacy work beyond the scope of Cleveland's new law. This event, which brought local officials together to talk, learn, and collaborate, was an important step towards future progress beyond Cleveland's recent right to counsel legislation. Change is certainly happening in Northeast Ohio, and Legal Aid continue its work to preserve rights, dignity, and justice for all.



1. Legal Aid Executive Director **Colleen Cotter** with Ohio Supreme Court Justice **Patrick Fischer**; 2. Ohio Supreme Court Justice **Judi French**; **Hazel Remesch, Esq.** (Legal Aid); **Andrew Katusin** (United Way) and **Julie Wisneski** (United Way); 3. **Mark Bennett, Esq.** (US Attorney's Office); US Senator **Rob Portman**; **Colleen Cotter, Esq.** (Legal Aid); 4. Legal Aid Board President **Mike Ungar, Esq.** (Ulmer Berne) and Cleveland City Council President **Kevin Kelley**; 5. Ohio Senator **Nikki Antonio** and Ohio Representative **Jeff Crossman**; 6. Councilperson **Vivian Walker** (Woodmere Village); **Jettye Matlock, Esq.**; Magistrate **Tracey Gonzalez** (Cleveland Housing Court); Councilperson **Earl Williams** (Cleveland Heights); 7. US Senator **Rob Portman** and **Barbara Simmons** (Legal Aid)