

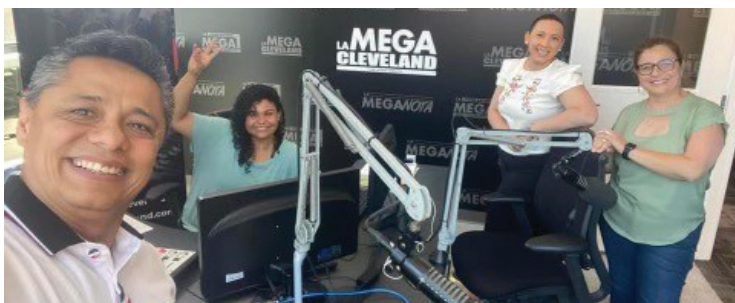


# Poetic Justice

Volume 19 Issue 2 Summer 2022

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

## Legal Aid increases Spanish-language outreach



Earlier this year we established a formal partnership with La Mega Media to run ads in Spanish across all of La Mega's media platforms, including its print newspaper, radio station, website, and social media channels. This spring, La Mega featured Legal Aid in an interview on La Mega Radio – and it was the first radio interview conducted fully en Español!



Claudia Luongo of La Mega

We are especially grateful to La Mega's Director of Community Outreach, Claudia Luongo, who has helped spread the word about Legal Aid to La Mega's audience.

"Community services are never going to be effective if they're not reaching the populations they're meant to serve," Claudia says. "And members of the Hispanic community, particularly people whose first language is not English, are often left out of messaging and marketing strategies. By partnering with La Mega to spread the word about Legal Aid services to the local Hispanic community, Legal Aid ensures everyone – regardless of language – can understand when and how to seek its free legal help. We are very proud of this collaboration and look forward to continuing our partnership for many years to come."

In addition to Spanish, Legal Aid provides interpretation and translation for all clients who need it. Both live interpreters and simultaneous phone translation are available.

Of all the various languages Legal Aid clients speak, Spanish is the most prevalent. Currently, 13 Legal Aid staff members speak Spanish, and our informational brochures and flyers are now bilingual. Thanks to support from a Skadden Foundation Flom Incubator grant, we created a Spanish-language option for online intake portal in October 2021. By mid-year 2022, the online Spanish intake portal processed more than 400 new applications.

One of those applications was from Carolina (*name changed for privacy*), a woman from Peru whose green card was expiring. Spanish is Carolina's preferred language, so when she discovered Legal Aid's Spanish online intake portal, she used it to apply for help. Carolina was quickly connected with a Legal Aid attorney who speaks fluent Spanish.

The attorney worked with Carolina on all the required forms and helped her assemble all the documents she needed for the green card renewal. The process was complicated; not only did it require an FBI background check, but it also involved obtaining documentation about public benefits Carolina was receiving, including food assistance (SNAP) and Medicaid. The attorney's assistance resulted in a fast approval of Carolina's new green card. She picked it up from Legal Aid's office in early May and is excited to be able to travel to Peru this summer to see family. Before closing Carolina's case, the attorney also provided Carolina with detailed instructions regarding the naturalization process for when she becomes eligible.

**To apply for legal help in Spanish:**



 **Spanish intake line: 216.586.3190**  
Visit [lasclv.org](https://lasclv.org), click "Apply for Free Legal Help" and select Spanish.



## Staff News



### **Colleen Cotter appointed to serve on Cuyahoga County Citizens' Advisory Council on Equity**

**Colleen M. Cotter, Esq.**, Executive Director of The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, was recently appointed by Cuyahoga County Executive Armond Budish to serve on the Cuyahoga County Citizens' Advisory Council on Equity. Comprised of fifteen County residents, the Citizens' Advisory Council on Equity was formed in response to the County's declaration of racism as a public health crisis.

The Council is charged with providing recommendations to reduce disparity in areas such as the criminal justice system, safe and affordable housing, economic opportunity, child welfare, access to healthy foods, and education. The Council also provides recommendations and input to the Executive and County Council regarding the development of equity goals and strategies.



### **Tonya Whitsett joins Advocacy and Protective Services board**

**Tonya Whitsett, Esq.** Managing Attorney of Legal Aid's Family Practice Group, was recently appointed to the board of trustees for Advocacy and Protective Services, Inc. (APSI). APSI is a not-for-profit organization, which strives to provide guardianship services while promoting self-determination, self-advocacy, and principles of least restrictive services focused on person-centered planning.

Tonya uses her experience in family law to serve Legal Aid clients and others in the community. She is active on the Ohio Supreme Court Advisory Committee on Children and Families, the Family Law Reform Implementation Subcommittee, and the Subcommittee on Adult Guardianships. She is a member of a guardianship monitoring workgroup, she serves on the planning team for the statewide Legal Aid Family Law Task Force, and she is a member of the Lorain County Domestic Violence Task Force.



### **Abigail Staudt to lead Legal Aid efforts in Ashtabula, Lake, and Geauga Counties**

**Abigail Staudt, Esq.**, previously Managing Attorney of Legal Aid's Housing Practice Group, recently transitioned into a new role at Legal Aid as the Managing Attorney of Ashtabula, Geauga, and Lake Counties. In this new role, Abby will focus on increasing Legal Aid's partnerships in the eastern section of Legal

Aid's 5-county service area to deepen Legal Aid's engagement with community partners, courts, and bar associations, and help identify and resolve barriers to justice for clients.

Abby began her public interest work with Legal Aid in 2006, representing low-income residents in Lake County in housing and domestic violence issues. Her practice grew into only housing work and, since 2015, she served as Managing Attorney of Legal Aid's Housing Practice Group. She led the Practice Group through a period of major growth - due in part to growing community needs, and the City of Cleveland's newly legislated right to counsel.



### **Hazel Remesch to lead Housing Practice Group, address White House Summit on eviction**

**Hazel Remesch, Esq.**, previously Managing Attorney of Legal Aid's Right To Counsel Program, now has a new role as Managing Attorney of Legal Aid's Housing Practice Group (which includes the Right To Counsel Program).

In this expanded role, Hazel will provide expertise and leadership for Legal Aid's growing housing team.

Hazel began her career with Legal Aid in 2008 and uses her housing law experience to help the local community and create systemic change. She had the honor of presenting at a White House Summit on eviction reform in early August 2022. The event, called "Building on Emergency Rental Assistance to Ensure Long-Term Eviction Reform," included panelists and speakers from across the country.

## Q & A: Legal Aid Housing Paralegals



Legal Aid paralegals are highly skilled, knowledgeable, and flexible. The demands of this fast-paced role at Legal Aid include calling clients, conducting research, drafting documents, maintaining files, and more. To learn more, we checked in with the paralegals in Legal Aid's Housing Practice Group:

### What is the most rewarding part of your job?

**Anna Kallmeyer:** Fighting (and oftentimes, succeeding) to keep clients and their children in their homes. Losing your home—whether you rent or own—is a deeply unsettling, traumatic, and destabilizing event. A home is the foundation to everything else in life. To play just a small part in sustaining that foundation (like scheduling a client meeting or helping an attorney draft a motion) is incredibly rewarding.

### Can you describe a case that really stands out to you as having a big impact on a client?

**Anna Seballos:** Being able to set up a presentation at a HUD (federally subsidized) apartment, with two interpreters and having over 20 tenants show up was a huge highlight for me! It's great getting to see tenants become empowered.

### What is your favorite thing about working at Legal Aid?

**Anne Schleicher:** I love my colleagues! Brilliant, and dedicated to our cause. I also love our clients.

### Who inspires you?

**Anthony Perrins:** As an aspiring attorney, I am particularly inspired by those who have used the practice of law to fight injustice and inequality. Two individuals that stand out to me are Nelson Mandela and William Kunstler. I hope to live up to the examples they set during the fight against apartheid in South Africa and the fight for civil rights here in the United States.

### What drew you to a career in the legal profession/ public service?

**Donnell Collins:** What drew me to this career is my love to assist people. I have always wanted to be a lawyer and I believe that everyone should have the ability to see their dreams come true if they are willing to put in the work. I believe that this work makes people feel like they matter.

**Emily Spinelli:** I was a psychology major who also took many criminal justice classes. It opened my eyes to the amount of research coming out that isn't being applied in the real world. In my career, I really want to help bridge the gap between science and legal practitioners.

**Tyra Washington:** I've always had the desire to help people and give back to my community. Legal Aid does a great job at providing services and resources to people in need. That's what drew me to a career in the legal profession/ public service, specifically, Legal Aid.

**Paige Nofel Kuri:** With a background in policy work, I was drawn to Legal Aid because I wanted the opportunity to affect real, positive change in my community. It is rewarding to me to see that the work I am doing helps families stay in their home, and/or obtain affordable, stable, safe housing.

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## Volunteer Spotlight: Gerry Meader

Six years ago, Legal Aid volunteer attorney Gerry Meader returned to his hometown, Cleveland, after spending many years away.

Gerry enlisted in the Air Force soon after graduating from Berea High School in 1975. While in the military, Gerry earned his law degree from the University of

Colorado School of Law and his Master of Laws from Georgetown, where he studied international law. After retiring from the military as an Air Force Lieutenant Colonel and Judge Advocate, Gerry began a second career in the federal civil service. Then in 2016, "I retired without a plan," Gerry says.

He was looking for ways to give back through volunteering when he realized he could use his law degree to best help those in need. "So, I got my license to practice law in Ohio and knocked on the door of The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland," Gerry says.

His question of "Do you need help?" was quickly answered by Ann McGowan Porath, who managed the Volunteer Lawyers Program at that time. Ann directed his help towards elder law, and then focused his research skills on expungement work.

Lauren Gilbride, Legal Aid's current managing attorney of Intake and the Volunteer Lawyers Program, says the Legal Aid practice around expungements is what it is because of Gerry.

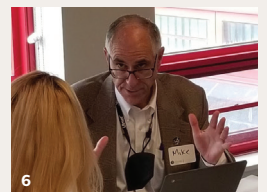
"Since 2012, expungement rules in Ohio have grown wider, and Legal Aid's need for resources grew with an increased demand for services," Lauren explains. "Gerry has become the resident expert on record sealing; he stays on top of any related laws and updates Legal Aid brochures. Our staff use his expertise when reviewing client eligibility." Gerry also frequently attends expungement clinics and helps other volunteer attorneys.

When clients are not eligible to expunge a record, Gerry prepares an advice letter explaining why they are not eligible and potential steps they may take. "I want people to know their options," Gerry says, adding that helping people get back on their feet gives him a feeling of fulfillment.

Gerry spends almost all of his time helping others and giving back to his community. When he's not volunteering with Legal Aid or caring for family members, Gerry can often be spotted around Playhouse Square in downtown Cleveland, where he is a volunteer Red Coat (usher) and part-time House Manager.

**Interested in volunteering with Legal Aid? Visit [lasclev.org/volunteer](https://lasclev.org/volunteer) to learn more or email [probono@lasclev.org](mailto:probono@lasclev.org)**

## Legal Aid in the Community



1. **Donna Dubs** (paralegal) and **Kasey Redding** (summer associate at Calfee, student at OSU Moritz College of Law)
2. Ashtabula Foundation board members (left and right) **Lynn Miric Zalewski** and **JT Kanicki**, with Legal Aid staff (middle) **Melanie Shakarian, Esq.** and **Abigail Staudt, Esq.**
3. Legal Aid's 2022 Summer Associates and In-House Volunteers
4. **Neil Vakharia, Esq.** (McKinsey) and **Jonathan Leiken, Esq.** (Diebold)
5. **Agustin Ponce De Leon, Esq.** (Legal Aid)
6. **Mike Ungar, Esq.** (Ulmer Berne)
7. Attorneys and staff from **KeyBank** at Legal Aid's office for Neighbors Make a Difference Day
8. Attorneys and staff from **Jones Day** and the **Cleveland Clinic** volunteer for Legal Aid



# '22 JAM FOR JUSTICE

**Legal Aid's annual summer fundraiser  
is back in-person!**

Support Legal Aid's great work  
while enjoying musical acts all headlined by  
local law students, attorneys, and judges.

## JAM SESSIONS:

Emcee: Stephanie Haney (WKYC)

### East Side

**Wednesday, August 24: 7 p.m.** @ BottleHouse Brewery  
2050 Lee Road, Cleveland Heights  
Luke Lindberg & The Hung Jury • CWRU's Razing the Bar

### West Side

**Wednesday, August 31: 7 p.m.** @ The Brothers Lounge  
11609 Detroit Avenue, Cleveland  
The No Name Band • Out of Order

## DOWNTOWN CLEVELAND

**Thursday, September 8: 6 p.m.**

@ House of Blues - 308 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland

Emcees: DJ Brad Wolfe (Brad Wolfe Law, L.L.C.) & Delanté Spencer Thomas (President, Norman S. Minor Bar Association)

**Debut performance by the General Counsel Glee Club at 7:15 p.m.**

with First Offenders • Faith & Whiskey

**\$150** All Access VIP Pass (donation to Legal Aid, admission to all events)

**\$50** (September 8 downtown event featuring General Counsel Glee Club)

**\$25** (August 24 East Side or August 31 West Side Jam Session)

» More info, tickets, make a gift: [lasclev.org/2022Jam](https://lasclev.org/2022Jam) «

Are you an in-house attorney? Sign up for the Glee Club here: [lasclev.org/2022GleeClub](https://lasclev.org/2022GleeClub)

Sponsorship packages (which include tickets) are available

This is an all-ages event: children under 18 free with adult ticket. To request a child ticket, call 216.861.5144

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## *Research and Action for Racial Justice*

### *Legal Aid leads creation of report on barriers to reentry*

Legal Aid attorneys noticed a string of cases where clients were effectively barred from accessing health insurance because of Medicare late enrollment penalties incurred during incarceration. Through the Reentry Committee (an internal team from Legal Aid's 5-county service area), additional research was done and more barriers to healthcare after incarceration were identified. That work led to a more targeted Health Equity for Reentering Ohioans (HERO) Project to investigate the impacts of these issues on the reentry community.

Over the past year, this group spent hundreds of hours investigating the racial and systemic inequities that create barriers to healthcare for people reentering society after incarceration. The project's core team (attorneys Jenn Kinsley Smith, Deborah Dallmann, Julia Lauritzen, Maria Smith, Katie Feldman; paralegal Liz Lattner; Dr. Paul Hergenroder; Dr. Allie Kriener; and medical student Zoe Rhodes) met every two weeks to advance project goals. In between meetings, team members met with stakeholders in the healthcare and criminal justice systems.

Together they turned their research into a comprehensive report that you can read on our website at [\*\*laslev.org/barrierstoreentryreport\*\*](https://laslev.org/barrierstoreentryreport). The report was funded, in part, by an Ohio Access to Justice Foundation Racial Justice grant. "Basically, we wanted to talk with anyone who touches this problem, and ask them: what are you seeing?", says Jenn Kinsley Smith, Senior Attorney.

The paper also details potential steps toward sustainable solutions. For example, the team observed that various states across the country used Section 1115 waivers to expand Medicaid benefits for justice-involved individuals. They suggest advocates and stakeholders in Ohio request similar waivers to help the justice-involved population.

Now, the team is focused on elevating its message and partnering with others to solve the problems it has identified.

***Interested in connecting? Share the report on social media and tag @LegalAidCLE***

