



Poetic Justice

Volume 19 Issue 1 Spring 2022

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

Legal Aid Client Testifies before United States Senate Banking Committee

If you're having a bad day, Robyn King has some advice:

"Call it a bad moment, a bad hour, but not a whole day, because you can always turn it around."

Robyn's positivity is infectious. A former teacher's assistant, the 57-year old mother of three now works part-time when she's not volunteering with young children or older adults. Her sunny outlook is all the more impressive when you hear about the ordeal that consumed much of her life for the past two years.

Robyn's mother passed away on October 3, 2020. Two days before, on October 1, she found out she was personally being sued by her mother's nursing home for close to \$80,000. The nursing home had failed to let Robyn know that her mother's Medicaid renewal was denied as soon as it happened. As her mother's representative, Robyn should have been informed of this right away. Instead, bills went unpaid for months, until the amount owed had grown huge.



U.S. Senator Brown and Robyn King

Robyn came to Legal Aid for help, and two veteran attorneys helped her fight the lawsuit and avoid any personal liability for the medical debt. Still, the emotional toll the lawsuit had on Robyn and her family was considerable, and the nursing home can still pursue Robyn's mother's estate for the funds. The whole saga would prove hard to forget. That's why, in early March, when Senator Sherrod Brown asked

Legal Aid if a client would testify at an upcoming hearing about the devastating toll of medical debt, Robyn got a call right away.

On March 29, 2022 Robyn delivered a passionate and powerful message to the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

An excerpt is below. The full text of Robyn's testimony is available online at www.banking.senate.gov/hearings/economic-impact-of-the-growing-burden-of-medical-debt.

Legal Aid is honored to have worked with Robyn, and we are grateful for her advocacy on behalf of people around the country facing exorbitant medical debt.



Robyn King

"There is no reason I should go into massive debt so that my mother could live out her final months in a safe and comfortable place, with her basic needs met.... Getting sick or having a family member get sick should not force people to face crushing amounts of debt.... There is just no excuse for this in America.

I thought that I had done everything right in taking care of my Mom, but without the good fortune of having Legal Aid represent me, I would have had an enormous judgment against me, and my family's financial future would have been devastated.

As I stand here today, I cannot tell you how relieved I am to know I can keep my home, keep providing for my kids, keep my life as it is. I want my story to shed light on what's happening to normal, everyday people in this country who are just trying to care for themselves and one another.

I hope you [Senate Committee Members] can take action to protect people like me, and not allow medical debt to upend people's lives.... I do still believe in the positive potential of every day, and I hope that today, you can help me turn my story into something positive."

Right to Counsel Annual Report Highlights Great Impact



On January 31, 2022, United Way of Greater Cleveland and Legal Aid delivered to City of Cleveland leaders the first annual report of Cleveland's Housing Right to Counsel. The global consulting firm Stout Risius Ross is contracted by United Way to conduct a yearly analysis of Right to Counsel, and its recent report demonstrates the incredible impact Legal Aid's advocacy has on housing stability and justice in the city of Cleveland. Cleveland's "Right to Counsel" law guarantees free civil legal representation to families facing eviction if they have children and incomes that meet federal poverty guidelines. The law passed in 2019 and took effect in July 2020. Highlights include:

- 93% of Legal Aid clients who were seeking to prevent an eviction or involuntary move achieved that outcome
- 83% of Legal Aid clients seeking rental assistance secured it
- Legal Aid represented an estimated 60% of all tenants who were eligible for Right to Counsel, and turned none away
- Cleveland/Cuyahoga County saved an estimated \$4.3 to \$4.7 million because of Right to Counsel

Legal Aid continues to grow its housing team in response to the high demand for representation for housing help. The entire report and more key points can be found at freeevictionhelpresults.org.

In Memory of Susan Stauffer, Harold Williams

With heavy hearts we share the news that two long-time Legal Aid attorneys passed away this spring.



Susan Stauffer spent 54 years as an advocate at Legal Aid – two years as a law student intern from Case Western Reserve University followed by 52 years as an attorney. She built Legal Aid's Family Practice Group at a time when many legal aid organizations did not practice family law. Susan saw the need to represent clients as they experienced one of the most painful and vulnerable times of their lives; she wanted to ensure they were able to create safe, economically secure homes for themselves and their children. Most importantly, Susan helped her clients find and use their voice. Susan always found time to help and mentor new attorneys and volunteers. Just days before her passing, she was at a Legal Aid advice clinic mentoring volunteers and helping clients. You can read more about Susan's legacy at: lasclev.org/InMemoryOfSusan



Harold Williams worked for Legal Aid from 1975 until his retirement in 2011. During his 36-year tenure, Harold shaped employment and consumer law in Ohio. At Legal Aid, he worked for decades on the Black Shield case, which forced Cleveland to hire and promote black police officers; handled a case that ended discriminatory staffing at state liquor stores; and took on robo-signing and foreclosure cases. In a Plain Dealer story which highlighted his 2011 retirement, Williams said that as a law intern working with poor people in the South, he saw his clients stand taller and become confident with a lawyer by their side. "I saw then the power of the law to make a difference -- to people who are vulnerable," he said. "It's about empowering them and giving them the type of dignity they deserve." Read more about Harold and his amazing career at: lasclev.org/InMemoryOfHarold

New Medical-Legal Partnership with Cleveland Clinic will Improve Community Health

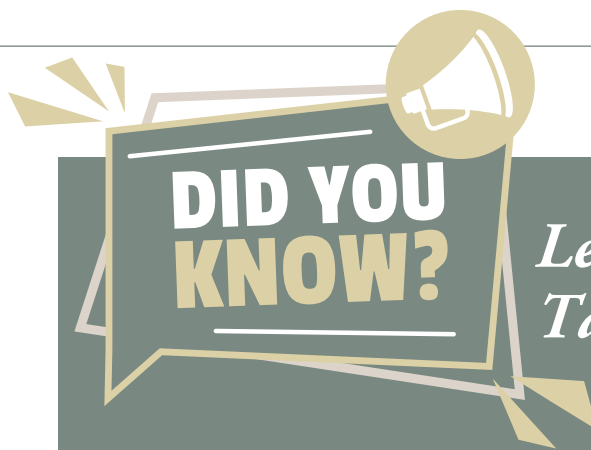
Last month, Legal Aid launched a medical-legal partnership with the Cleveland Clinic, bringing our total number of medical-legal partnerships to four and establishing our presence at every major health care institution in Northeast Ohio.

The Cleveland Clinic partnership integrates Legal Aid attorneys into the health care setting to solve legal problems that impact patient health alongside Cleveland Clinic clinicians, case managers, and social workers.



Medical-legal partnerships are evidence-based models that address the social determinants of health, or those social and economic factors that contribute to 80% of a person's health outcomes. Attorneys are embedded into the health care setting to collaborate with health providers to solve the problems at the root of patient health. A Legal Aid attorney can, for example, secure food assistance benefits for families struggling to afford healthy meals; obtain utility shut-off protection for people with health complications; and prevent evictions, keeping our community's children safely housed.

Legal Aid created the first medical-legal partnership in Ohio (and only the 4th in the United States) when we formalized our program with MetroHealth in 2003. Legal Aid grew to St. Vincent Charity Medical Center, University Hospitals, and now the Cleveland Clinic. Today, medical-legal partnerships are in 450 health organizations across the country, and Cleveland remains a leader.



Legal Aid has a Tax Practice!

Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic Helps People Solve Disputes with the IRS



Dennis Dobos, Esq.

Issues with the IRS can feel frightening and overwhelming, but Legal Aid has relieved some anxiety for taxpayers through its Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC).

"The clinic was established almost 21 years ago, and we represent taxpayers with low incomes in IRS disputes," says Legal Aid attorney Dennis Dobos, who directs the LITC. "If the IRS is pursuing underpayments from you or you feel that the IRS owes you money, we can get involved."

The Clinic's free legal services are available year-round to help individuals who have disputes with the IRS. Legal Aid attorneys do not prepare or file taxes, but can refer people to community organizations that do provide that service.

"We do audits, due process hearings, and collection appeals," says Dennis. "We go into tax court and district court; examples of tax issues the Clinic handles include earned tax income credit, child tax credit, ID theft, preparer fraud, spousal abuses in connection with tax returns, and income issues."

For example, attorneys can help people negotiate with the IRS to settle a debt for less than the full amount owed, or lower/eliminate taxable income from debts that were forgiven from banks and credit card companies.

Legal Aid also helps H-2A workers file taxes (an important step towards gaining citizenship) and advises taxpayers on their rights and obligations regarding the health care marketplace.

"We are pretty effective in the representation of clients," says Dennis. "There are many ways to deal with tax debt. We are fortunate to have a lot of tools available to help people."

We are always looking for *pro bono* volunteers to help with tax cases. Interested? Email probono@lasclev.org.

Staff Spotlight: Rausienne Broome



Rausienne Broome

There are 120 staff at Legal Aid, and each person's specialized role contributes to the overall impact of our organization. One of the most important roles is that of Intake Specialist.

Intake Specialists are often the first staff person a client meets, and they serve as a guiding presence through those initial interactions. Intake Specialists gather key information to determine if people are eligible to receive free legal help from Legal Aid. Rausienne Broome has been an Intake Specialist with Legal Aid for two years. We recently sat down with Rausienne to learn a little more about her and her experiences in this position.

What brought you to Legal Aid?

I was laid off from my job of 15 years. My husband owns a café, and I started working with him. I met a woman in the building where my husband's café is located. She is a program coordinator and knew people that worked at Legal Aid. She told me that Legal Aid had an opening for the position of Intake Specialist and that I should apply. My previous job was in mortgage title insurance. I never did legal work for my livelihood.

I went online to look up more about Legal Aid. After learning more, I really wanted to be a part of it. It coincided with the other part of my life - my husband is a pastor, and we do a lot of ministry outreach. This position allows me to give back daily and help people in other ways.

What is your favorite thing about Legal Aid?

It is so rewarding to know that what I do helps others. This gives the caller hope. Often, we are not the first organization that they have gone to for help. When they are accepted for review, you can hear the sound of relief in their voices.

Even when we tell the callers that we can't help them, they still tell us "thank you." They are thankful that someone took the time to listen to them. It keeps me humble. You hear from people with so many issues and they are hurting. It allows me the opportunity to help make a difference in their day.

What are your duties as an Intake Specialist?

As an Intake Specialist, I ask applicants questions and provide information to the applicants. One thing about this position I did not realize was that I would have to be aware of current events. For instance, during the pandemic, I would have callers asking me about the eviction moratorium. It was necessary for me to know how the moratorium affected the community and I had to be able to provide them with information from attorney-supervisors to help them. I also assist my team with printing and mail, training, and covering the receptionist desk.

What are your hobbies?

I love going to the gym and crocheting, but I only stick to scarves and blankets. I also love spending time with my six grandchildren: 8-year-old twin grandsons and four granddaughters, ages 5, 4, 3, and 1.

Board of Directors

Harlin Adelman, Esq.
University Hospitals

Hugh McKay, Esq.
Porter Wright Morris & Arthur LLP

Jason Bristol, Esq.
Cohen Rosenthal & Kramer LLP

Joseph Rodgers, Esq.
Eaton Corporation

Carolyn Butler
Community Representative

Jan Roller, Esq.
Giffen & Kaminski

Quo Vadis Cobb, Esq.
Jacobs Engineering

Sonya Shakir
Community Representative

Steven Dettelbach, Esq.
BakerHostetler

Robin Turner
Community Representative

Stephen M. Fazio, Esq.
Squire Patton Boggs

Ted Tywang, Esq.
Haslam Sports Group
(Cleveland Browns)

Joe Gaston
Community Representative

Michael N. Ungar, Esq.
Ulmer & Berne LLP

Nathan Genovese, Esq.
Community Representative

Daniel C. Urban, Esq.
Wickens Herzer Panza

Gwen Graffenreed
Community Representative

Neil Vakharia, Esq.
McKinsey & Company

Erica Hughes
Community Representative

Doug Wang
retired from Northern Trust

Jonathan Leiken, Esq.
Diebold Nixdorf

Rhonda Wilson
Community Representative

Rita Maimbourg, Esq.
Tucker Ellis LLP

Administration & Newsletter Staff

ADMINISTRATION

Colleen M. Cotter, Esq.
Executive Director

Tom Mlakar, Esq.
Deputy Director for Advocacy

Jason Nedley, CPA
Director of Finance and Administrative Operations

Melanie A. Shakarian, Esq.
Director of Development & Communications

Jennifer Teeter
Executive Assistant & Organizational Development Coordinator

NEWSLETTER STAFF

Editor
Melanie A. Shakarian, Esq.

Staff
Camille Dickson
Erin Horan
Laura Klingler
Erik Meinhardt
Tonya Sams
Sarah Shaw

In-House Volunteer
Irene Meyerhoefer

Legal Aid in the Community

In-Person Brief Advice Clinics are Back!

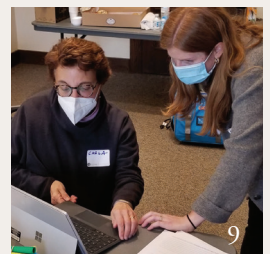
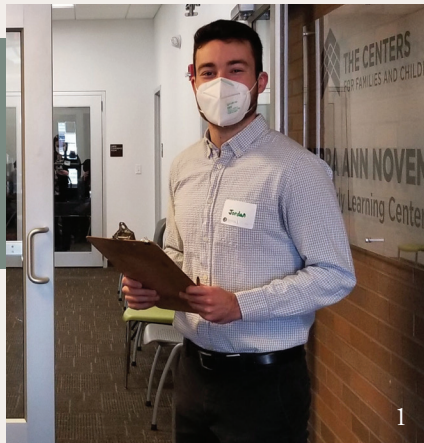
When COVID-19 began, Legal Aid's Brief Advice and Referral Clinics went virtual to still provide services while keeping staff, volunteers, and clients safe.

Now, Legal Aid is excited to announce the return of in-person clinics. Our staff and volunteer attorneys are back in neighborhoods of Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, and Lorain counties to offer advice about civil legal issues related to shelter, safety, consumer rights, health, education, work, and income. Some clinics are by appointment only, but many are first-come, first-serve. This year, we are especially excited to announce a new brief advice clinic in Lake County at Lakeland Community College.

Find a flyer with upcoming clinic details online at laslev.org/summerflyer2022. A complete calendar of legal advice clinics is available at laslev.org/events.



Together we #ExtendJustice



1. Jordan Swaim-Fox (Legal Aid) 2. Nicolette Jordan, law student (Cleveland-Marshall College of Law) + Corey Sparks, Esq. (Benesch) 3. Christopher St. Marie, Esq. (Hahn Loeser)
4. Norman S. Minor Bar Association members volunteer together for Legal Aid at the Maple Heights Library 5. Joe Rodgers, Esq. (Eaton) 6. Volunteer attorneys listening to a case briefing from a law student at the Memorial Nottingham Branch of the Cleveland Public Library 7. Rose Fini, Esq. (Cleveland Metroparks and current president of the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association)
8. David Hopkins, Esq. (Benesch) + Joanna Lopez Inman, Esq. (Cleveland Municipal Court) 9. Carla Tricarichi, Esq. (Tricarichi & Carnes LLC) with Lauren Gilbride, Esq. (Legal Aid)



The
Legal Aid Society
of Cleveland

1223 West Sixth Street
Cleveland, Ohio 44113

Non Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Cleveland, Ohio
Permit No. 104

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



**Together
We Can**
create real change



The
Legal Aid Society
of Cleveland
Since 1905

**Is your name
on the list?**

**Deadline is June 30, 2022 for
The Campaign for Legal Aid**

visit
ExtendJustice.org
to add your name!