



Legal Aid Society  
OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

MAKING JUSTICE REAL

# MAKING JUSTICE REAL

2015 ANNUAL REPORT

# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friend of Legal Aid:

As supporters of Legal Aid know, income inequality remains an intractable problem in the Nation's capital. *USA Today* recently reported that income inequality in the District is higher than in any state in the country. Other sources find that the District has the fourth highest level of income inequality among America's largest cities. D.C. is one of the most economically successful *and* one of the most economically unequal cities in the nation. Although D.C. has far more lawyers per capita than any other city in the world, there are far too many people living in poverty who cannot get access to the legal help they urgently need.

That is where the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia comes in. Legal Aid provides often life-changing representation to our neighbors living in poverty in the District, neighbors like Pearline Snow of Ward 1, pictured on the cover, or LeNard Short of Ward 8, pictured on the facing page. In this year's report, you will see the photographs and read the stories of clients with whom we have worked this past year—clients whose homes we have saved or whose safety we have ensured. As you will read, Legal Aid representation can keep a family from homelessness or provide desperately needed personal or economic security. By reading about our clients' struggles and the profound impact of our representation, we hope you will better understand Legal Aid and the importance of our work.

We cannot do this without your support. Even with our growth—we have a larger staff and helped more people in the past calendar year than ever in our history—the need far outstrips our capacity. Most of our budget comes from private donations. Your donation is critical to our ability to continue *making justice real* for D.C. residents.

Thank you,



Daniel G. Jarcho  
Alston & Bird LLP  
President, Board of Trustees



Eric S. Angel  
Executive Director



# MAKING JUSTICE REAL

2015 was an exciting year at Legal Aid. As you will read, it was a year of expansion and new programs, with a renewed emphasis on affirmative work to help make justice real for our client community.

With the support of people like you, last year Legal Aid helped thousands of low-income D.C. residents. Our work also resulted in millions of dollars in financial benefit to our clients. But perhaps more important are those benefits that simply cannot be quantified: getting to safety, staying in one's home, obtaining justice. We work to solve problems with respect to the most fundamental issues in our clients' lives. We also work to change the systems affecting D.C. residents living in poverty—knowing that sometimes an appellate ruling, or a regulatory or legislative change, can help hundreds, if not thousands, of our clients in profound and far-reaching ways.

This annual report contains just a series of snapshots of our work. The D.C. residents and families we feature reflect just a few examples of the thousands of people we help every year with their family, domestic violence, public benefits, housing, and consumer law issues. Subscribe to our blog, *MakingJusticeReal.org*, or follow us on Facebook or Twitter to learn more about our work and the many ways we make justice real for—and with—our client community.



## LENARD SHORT

"When Legal Aid won my case, it lifted a big burden off my shoulders."



# HOUSING LAW

Where you sleep at night has so much to do with your health, happiness, and sense of security. It is therefore not at all surprising that our clients consistently tell us that being able to live in safe, affordable housing ranks at the very top of their concerns.

Legal Aid's Housing Law Unit is by far the largest group of housing lawyers helping tenants in the District. It is also the practice area which experienced our most significant expansion this past year—an innovative subsidized housing representation project funded by the District's Access to Justice Grant Program, administered by the D.C. Bar Foundation. This project, which will have a substantial pro bono component, is the culmination of a two-year collaboration among members of the local legal services community, the District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission, and the law firm community to address the lack of safe, affordable, accessible, and stable housing for low-income people in the District.



## SERGIO MOREIRA

"I'm so grateful. My attorney worked hard for me so I could stay in my home."

When Sergio Moreira came to Legal Aid, he was confused, frustrated, and scared. His landlord had sued him for eviction, claiming he owed more than \$7,000 in unpaid rent. Mr. Moreira, who became paralyzed from the waist down in a construction accident, knew he could not afford anywhere near that amount, relying as he does on disability benefits. Moreover, Mr. Moreira was sure he was fully paid up on his rent—and also reported living in deplorable conditions, which included bed bugs, roaches, mice, and peeling paint. With Legal Aid by Mr. Moreira's side, the landlord ultimately had to admit that Mr. Moreira did not owe anything—and, indeed, that repairs were long overdue.

## GROUP REPRESENTATION

We often represent our clients one household at a time. By getting the heat turned on in winter, we can ensure that families sleep soundly in their homes. By preventing an unnecessary eviction, we promote family stability and well-being—and may also keep a child in his or her local public school.

But sometimes tenants in an entire building need our help. Legal Aid, as part of a coalition of attorneys from Arnold & Porter and the Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center (APALRC), and advocates from Housing Counseling Services and the National Housing Trust, is fighting to protect the homes of the nearly 300 individuals and families who live at the Museum Square building in Chinatown. Although the case is on appeal, the team prevailed at the trial court level, successfully persuading the judge that the owners' offer to sell the building to the tenants for \$250 million—far in excess of the property's market value—did not comply with D.C. law. APALRC recognized the entire "Save Museum Square" team with Access to Justice Awards for their extraordinary (ongoing) efforts to preserve affordable housing for these long-time Chinatown residents.



## VIRGINIA PATTERSON

"A lot of times I felt like throwing in the towel, but Legal Aid said 'hang in there.' I'm sure glad I did!"

Other group representations may receive less attention but are no less life-changing for those involved. Pictured above, from left to right, are long-time Northeast D.C. residents Anthony Compton, Virginia Patterson, William Jenkins, and Robert Marzet Graham, who nearly lost their apartments when a new landlord tried to double their rent. Legal Aid's multi-year efforts on behalf of the Carrolton Apartments Tenant Association resulted not only in long-overdue repairs but also in protection from significant rent increases, ensuring their apartments will remain affordable as long as the association members live there.

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE/FAMILY LAW

Legal Aid's Domestic Violence/Family Law Unit helps people at the most crucial moments of their lives. Legal Aid is there when a survivor of domestic violence comes to one of the Court's Domestic Violence Intake Centers—either at the courthouse in Northwest or at United Medical Center in Southeast—and decides that this time, with an experienced lawyer by her side, she will get her family to safety. Legal Aid represents survivors of domestic violence as they secure civil protection orders, and we also specialize in more extended representation, including custody, child support, and divorce, for these clients. We also play a critical role representing both petitioners and respondents in child support cases.



## EBONY ZAHO

"Legal Aid was in my corner every step of the way."

When Ebony Zaho was brutally assaulted by her ex-boyfriend on Christmas Day, it was the worst day of her life. Sadly, it was not the first time he had physically attacked her. There was a long history of abuse, including when she was pregnant. But, as you can see from the photo, with the help of Legal Aid, Ebony and her children are now thriving.



## DONNA STEWART

"My Legal Aid lawyer fought for me until we won."

Sometimes, even when you have done all the right things, your past comes back to haunt you. This is what happened to Donna Stewart. She had two children with a dangerous, abusive, and at times terrifying, man. But she had put all of that well behind her, making the decision to leave him and raise her children in a safe and peaceful home. Unfortunately, last year, Ms. Stewart's batterer tried to come back into their lives. He showed up out of the blue to a Stewart family get-together, where he threatened and assaulted her

But if her abuser was thinking that Ms. Stewart would give in to his threats, he was sorely mistaken. Legal Aid represented Ms. Stewart in her domestic violence case. With her Legal Aid lawyer at her side, she stood up to her abuser, once again securing safety for her family.



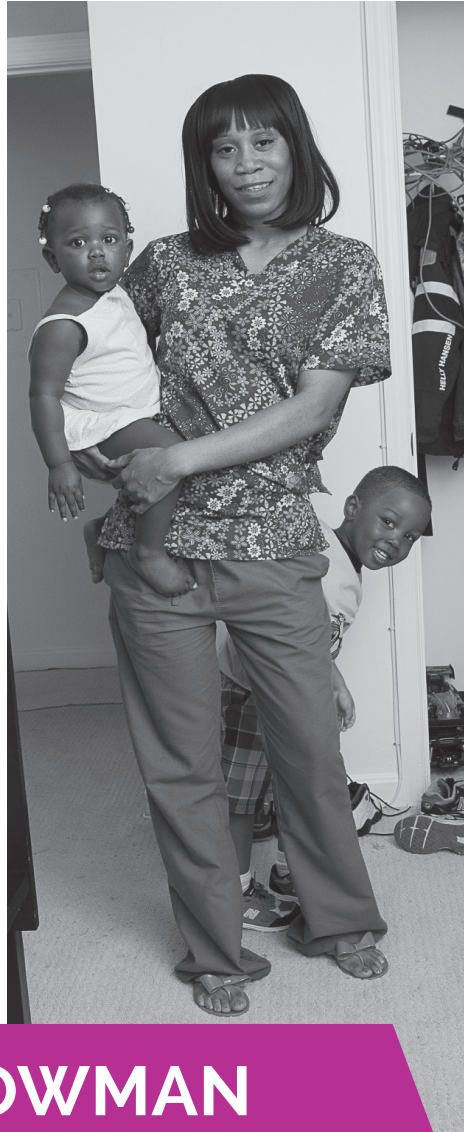
# ACCESS TO CRITICAL SAFETY NET BENEFITS

In the best of all worlds, our clients would never need a lawyer to obtain safety net benefits which they desperately need and to which they are entitled under the law. But that is not the world we live in.

Legal Aid's Public Benefits Law Unit—the largest in the District—plays a critical role in helping D.C. residents obtain necessary lifeline benefits, as well as serving as a watchdog when, as is far too often the case, the government fails to provide those benefits fairly and efficiently. In the past year, we have placed a particular emphasis on ensuring that health care reform is implemented in ways that take our client community into account.

Paulette Bowman is a single mother with three children. Receiving a diagnosis of sickle cell disease for her baby boy was devastating. But the Social Security Administration's denial of his application for SSI benefits added insult and hardship to injury. Fortunately, with Legal Aid by her side, her son Joseph was approved for benefits, resulting in a substantial back payment as well as ongoing benefits to make sure that his needs can be met in the years to come.

In addition to helping Joseph and others with disabilities receive benefits, Legal Aid is working to protect the due process rights of our clients and potentially hundreds of others who are current or former Social Security beneficiaries. This past year, Legal Aid attorneys, co-counseling with Board President Daniel Jarcho, filed a class action lawsuit against the Social Security Administration (SSA) on behalf of Pearline Snow (featured on our cover) and two other D.C. residents whose income tax refunds were seized by SSA, without proper notice or explanation, for debts that were allegedly incurred decades ago.



## PAULETTE BOWMAN

“Without Legal Aid, Joseph’s benefits would never have been approved.”



# SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY

Legal Aid engages in systemic advocacy across a broad range of legal issues. The Barbara McDowell Appellate Advocacy Project—our nationally-recognized program, named in memory of its founding director, esteemed appellate advocate Barbara McDowell—litigates precedent-setting poverty law cases in the D.C. Court of Appeals and beyond. In March 2015, Legal Aid was delighted to welcome veteran Department of Justice appellate attorney Jonathan Levy as the new Project Director. This past year, the Project won significant legal victories involving rights of the poor, benefiting hundreds, if not thousands, of D.C. residents. Most recently, with the assistance of noted Supreme Court advocate (and 2013 Servant of Justice Honoree) Paul Smith, Legal Aid prevailed in an important case regarding attorneys' fees for legal services organizations that could have significant precedential effect both in D.C. and throughout the country.



## JACKIE YOUNG

"I'm proud to have been a part of a case that will have a lasting impact on so many others."

*Ms. Young, expressing her thanks to Legal Aid and its supporters in American Sign Language.*

But not all of our systemic advances were from appellate victories. Notably, Southeast resident Jackie Young, who communicates primarily through American Sign Language, came to Legal Aid for help persuading the D.C. Housing Authority (DCHA) to modify her housing voucher so it would cover an apartment large enough for her three children to live with her. We learned that DCHA was ill-equipped to communicate effectively with and serve her or other clients who are deaf or hard of hearing. Working with Relman, Dane & Colfax, we represented Ms. Young and another client, along with Deaf REACH, a D.C.-based non-profit serving deaf and hard of hearing individuals, in a lawsuit against DCHA. After almost two years of litigation, DCHA agreed not only to a significant monetary settlement, but also to institute new policies to ensure equal access to housing programs for all individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

# CONSUMER LAW

Our consumer representation has a direct, positive effect on our clients' lives—whether it is by protecting their limited assets, enhancing their stability, or increasing the likelihood of them staying in their homes. Legal Aid's Consumer Law Unit—our newest and fastest-growing practice group—focuses on preventing foreclosure for low-income homeowners and protecting vulnerable individuals from abusive debt collection practices.



*Consumer Law attorneys: (left to right) Stacy Santin, Tom Papson, Jenny Joseph, Jennifer Lavallee, and Heather Latino.*

Legal Aid often gets busy as winter approaches. Usually it is our housing unit, rushing into court to require a landlord to turn on the heat. This past year it was our consumer unit. Joyce Williams\*, a single mother of two, had spent an entire winter shivering, trying to keep her family warm with just electric space heaters. Her gas had been turned off in a billing dispute—and the gas company was taking a hard line: it would not reinstate service until the entire balance was paid in full. Fortunately, with the benefit of Legal Aid representation, the company relented in early December, just in time to heat Ms. Williams's apartment during this past winter's record-breaking freezing temperatures.



## JOYCE WILLIAMS

"This experience taught me that it is ok to ask for help."

*\*Name changed to protect client confidentiality.*

## FORECLOSURE PREVENTION

Since the financial crisis, Legal Aid has been heavily involved in efforts to try to ensure that the foreclosure process is fair and accessible to D.C. residents. In last year's report, we noted that we had been appointed amicus curiae in a series of foreclosure cases pending in Superior Court. An extraordinary collaboration ensued, with the Court, lenders, Legal Aid, Legal Counsel for the Elderly, and D.C.'s Office of the Attorney General working to create fair procedures for processing the influx of judicial foreclosure cases. Out of these productive discussions, the Court created a new judicial foreclosure calendar in which homeowners sued for foreclosure are encouraged to come to court and request mediation, even in cases of default. The new procedures—combined with having legal services lawyers and housing counselors on-site to assist distressed homeowners—are giving hundreds of the District's most vulnerable residents a chance to maintain ownership and stay in their homes.



## DOUGLAS COLEMAN

"Having Legal Aid champion my cause gave me a newfound sense of confidence. A fresh start."

Douglas Coleman is convinced that he would have lost his home but for Legal Aid. He came to us at the proverbial last minute—after he had defaulted on his loan and had been sued in court. But, with the help of the new foreclosure procedures established by the Court and working with an experienced Legal Aid advocate, Mr. Coleman secured a loan modification. Working at a food truck by day, a hospital by night, and several other part-time jobs, Mr. Coleman is now current on his mortgage and stable in his home.

# PRO BONO PROGRAM

Legal Aid integrates pro bono into almost every aspect of our program, vastly expanding our impact and effectiveness. This past year, we began two ambitious, city-wide pro bono projects—a subsidized housing representation project and, in collaboration with the D.C. Chapter of the Association of Pro Bono Counsel, a Social Security disability application project. Our Barbara McDowell Appellate Advocacy Project benefits from the hundreds of hours spent annually by noted appellate advocate David Reiser of Zuckerman Spaeder. We also benefit from extraordinary senior lawyers who devote substantial time serving as part-time Volunteer Staff Attorneys at Legal Aid, including Joyce Gwadz and Tom Papson. Overall, last year, pro bono attorneys provided more than 33,000 hours—valued at over \$17 million—to help make justice real for our client community.

Ward 7 homeowners Raymond and Ella Walters run a small business, and, like many small business owners, they often struggle to make ends meet. They fell behind on their house payments when Mr. Walters fell off a roof and was temporarily unable to work. Fortunately, Legal Aid connected them with a team of pro bono lawyers from Cohen Milstein Sellers & Toll. Attorneys Bruce Rinaldi, Genevieve Fontan, and Robert Braun discovered a number of problems with the Walters's mortgage documents—problems that only lawyers would likely recognize. Through dogged research and skilled litigation, they helped the Walters restructure their debt on fair but favorable terms, allowing them to stay in their home.



## THE WALTERS FAMILY

"Without our lawyers, we would have been out on the streets."



Ms. Jackson may well have been evicted from her Southeast home if it were not for the critical pro bono help of McKenna Long & Aldridge (now Dentons)'s Feng Shan and Cass Christenson.



## MS. JACKSON

“When it was over, I swear I could have kissed them through the phone, I was so grateful.”

## SUPPORT LEGAL AID

Please help us continue to make justice real for those who need it most.

**One-Time Gift:** Make your Annual Appeal gift today, using the enclosed self-addressed envelope, or by donating online at [www.LegalAidDC.org](http://www.LegalAidDC.org).

**Monthly Giving:** Become a monthly supporter. It's easy and secure.

**Bequests:** Include Legal Aid in your will or designate Legal Aid as a beneficiary of your life insurance policy or charitable trust.

**Employer Matching Gifts:** Enhance the power of your gift through an employer matching program.

**Generous Associates Campaign:** Contact us about participating in the 2016 Campaign, which kicks off in June.

**Servant of Justice Dinner:** Join us on April 28, 2016.

**United Way/Combined Federal Campaign:** Designate #8140 (United Way) or #81566 (CFC).



If you have any questions, please contact Gregg Kelley, Director of Development, at (202) 661-5964 or [gkelley@legallaidc.org](mailto:gkelley@legallaidc.org).

Scan to donate now!

# ANNUAL SERVANT OF JUSTICE AWARDS DINNER

On May 6, 2015, Legal Aid honored Wade Henderson, President and CEO of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, and Philip W. Horton, long-time Chair of Arnold & Porter's pro bono committee and a former Legal Aid Board President, with our Servant of Justice Award.

Wade Henderson's award was presented by Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, who spoke about Wade's extraordinary contributions to the civil rights movement both nationally and here in D.C. In his remarks, Wade recalled growing up in the LeDroit Park neighborhood, attending schools that remained de facto segregated even after *Brown v. Board of Education* and its progeny. He pointedly noted that, even when rights exist on paper, organizations like Legal Aid are vital to making them a reality for everyday Washingtonians.

Phil Horton received his award from Jim Sandman, President of the Legal Services Corporation. In introducing his long-time friend and colleague, Jim recalled one of Phil's favorite Albert Schweitzer quotations: "No one has the right to take for granted his advantages over others in health, in talents, in ability, in success, in a happy childhood or congenial home conditions. One must pay a price for all these boons. What one owes in return is a special responsibility for other lives." In his remarks, Phil spoke eloquently about his toughest pro bono cases, and about how he often learned more from his losses than from his victories.

The 2015 Klepper Prize for Volunteer Excellence went to Dan Russell, for his extraordinary contributions to Legal Aid's pro bono program while at McKenna Long & Aldridge (now Dentons).

Legal Aid thanks all of its supporters, and especially the Dinner Steering Committee, led by Graeme Bush of Zuckerman Spaeder and Dionne Lomax of Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo, who co-chaired this memorable celebration.



*Servant of Justice Award winner Wade Henderson (right), pictured with Executive Director Eric Angel.*



*Legal Services Corporation President Jim Sandman, Servant of Justice Honoree Phil Horton, Eric Angel, and Board President Dan Jarcho.*

*Photography by Jill James.*

# GENEROUS ASSOCIATES CAMPAIGN

The 2015 Generous Associates Campaign—led by Honorary Chair Kathy Ruemmler of Latham & Watkins, our 14 Co-Chairs, and an extraordinary team of Coordinators from more than 70 law firms—raised a record-breaking \$1,367,000. We also had a record number of non-partner attorneys and staff who donated \$250 or more, earning them the "Outstanding Generous Associates!" designation. The amateur chefs at Miller & Chevalier won the post-campaign Cooking Competition for the second year in a row, with Goodwin Procter and Wiley Rein coming in second and third, respectively. The recreational cooking school CulinAerie generously hosted this wonderful event.

## 2015 TOP FIRM COMPETITION RESULTS

### 301 + Attorneys

Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP	\$ 136,295
Steptoe & Johnson LLP	\$ 39,784
Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP	\$ 34,681
Arnold & Porter LLP	\$ 33,861
Hogan Lovells US LLP	\$ 32,447

### 251 – 300 Attorneys

Latham & Watkins LLP	\$ 165,025
Williams & Connolly LLP	\$ 69,487
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP	\$ 53,771
Jones Day	\$ 21,740
Sidley Austin LLP	\$ 17,250

### 201 – 250 Attorneys

Wiley Rein LLP	\$ 40,690
Kirkland & Ellis LLP	\$ 28,522
Venable LLP	\$ 25,450
Arent Fox LLP	\$ 24,570

### 151 – 200 Attorneys

Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP	\$ 43,699
Mayer Brown LLP	\$ 37,517
King & Spalding LLP	\$ 15,718
Dentons US LLP	\$ 13,176
K&L Gates LLP	\$ 8,846

### 101 – 150 Attorneys

Dickstein Shapiro LLP	\$ 18,088
Baker Botts L.L.P.	\$ 17,935
BuckleySandler LLP	\$ 14,647
Goodwin Procter LLP	\$ 5,650
Cooley LLP	\$ 5,055

### 51 – 100 Attorneys

Miller & Chevalier Chartered Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP	\$ 37,782
Alston & Bird LLP	\$ 30,675
Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP	\$ 24,168
Reed Smith LLP	\$ 21,366

### 1 – 50 Attorneys

Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP	\$ 21,630
Bryan Cave LLP	\$ 21,172
Gilbert LLP	\$ 17,410
McGuireWoodsLLP	\$ 8,071
Boies, Schiller & Flexner LLP	\$ 7,800

## 2015 GENEROUS ASSOCIATES CAMPAIGN CO-CHAIRS

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## ANNUAL LAW FIRM, CORPORATE, AND FOUNDATION GIFT RECOGNITION PROGRAM

The Leadership Cabinet recognizes our most generous organizational donors (9/1/2014 to 8/31/2015).

### Platinum Patron - \$75,000 & above

D.C. Office of Victim Services  
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Latham & Watkins LLP\*  
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*\*Represents firms participating in the D.C. Access to Justice Commission's Raising the Bar in D.C. Campaign. The Campaign's goal is to substantially increase financial support to the District's legal services community by establishing benchmarks for law firm giving and annually recognizing and celebrating those firms that have donated at those levels.*



# MAKING JUSTICE REAL GIVING CIRCLE

## ANNUAL INDIVIDUAL GIFT RECOGNITION PROGRAM

The Making Justice Real Giving Circle recognizes our most generous individual donors (9/1/2014 to 8/31/2015).

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Jerry Hartman in memory of  
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<sup>^</sup>Represents members of the Outstanding Generous Associates! recognition program (see page 13).

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# FINANCIAL STATEMENT (1/1/2014 TO 12/31/2014)

## Revenue

Adjusted Grants and Contributions	\$ 3,653,216
Contributed Services	\$ 17,476,122
Special Events	\$ 1,080,875
Investment Income	\$ 55,497
Sublease Income	\$ 24,000
Total Revenue	\$22,334,670
Contributions to Endowments	\$ 68,750
Total Revenue Less Endowment Gifts and Contributed Services	\$ 4,744,838

## Expenses

Program Services	\$21,143,587
Management and General	\$ 469,130
Fundraising	\$ 561,025
Total Expenses Less Contributed Services	\$ 4,697,620

Please visit [www.LegalAidDC.org](http://www.LegalAidDC.org) to see our complete audited financial statement and IRS Form 990.

## SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to those who provided generous architectural and other services for our Southeast office expansion: Gensler (Steve Martin, Principal, Elena Fiammengolo); Harvey Cleary (Ed Green, Len Pfeiffer, Dusty Harrelson); Allegra Print, Signs & Designs; WSP Group (Nicole M. Oliveira); and Sidley Austin LLP.

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