



2010 ANNUAL REPORT

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FIGHTING FOR RIGHTS  
ENSURING DIGNITY  
MAKING JUSTICE REAL

## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In the 78 years since it was founded, Legal Aid has never been needed more than it is today. Communities living in poverty are in crisis, worsened by the persistence of the recession. Jobs have been lost, applications for public benefits have increased, and foreclosures persist.

Legal assistance to address basic human needs is critical. As we have seen in the recent reports from the Census Bureau, poverty is on the rise. Three out of every ten District children live below the federal poverty line and 43% of African American children are poor. One in five District residents receives Food Stamps, up 16% in a single year.

The Legal Aid staff has risen to meet the challenge. Our advocates bring skill and compassion to bear when solving problems that go to the most fundamental issues of family safety, housing, food, health care and income supports.

Each client of Legal Aid has a story to tell. In this report, you will find the stories and photographs of four clients with whom we have worked this past year. By understanding their struggles, their partnership for justice with Legal Aid, and the impact of our representation, you will better understand Legal Aid and the importance of our work.

Many people make this work possible. Your support of Legal Aid is critical to our ability to continue to meet the need.

Thank you.



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Shaw Pittman LLP



Jonathan M. Smith  
Executive Director  
Legal Aid Society of  
the District of Columbia



## MAKING JUSTICE REAL

Making Justice Real is more than a motto. For the board, staff and volunteers of Legal Aid, it is a deep commitment and a guiding principle. It is what Legal Aid does every day.

Justice is not self-executing. There are many ingredients to ensuring that everyone, regardless of income or wealth, receives a fair result in a legal dispute. It is necessary to have good laws and effective courts and administrative tribunals. But it is also essential to have lawyers.

When a family is facing eviction, when the custody of a child is at stake, when there is domestic violence, when benefits are wrongly denied or when a foreclosure is imminent, a fair result can often only be achieved if one or both of the parties are represented. Litigants with mental disabilities, persons who face language barriers or individuals who are vulnerable to intimidation because of age, victimization or other factors are at a particular disadvantage.

Legal Aid is here to help. We work to ensure that our clients' rights are respected, that their voices are heard and that they are treated with dignity. Day in and day out, our lawyers and staff are there to Make Justice Real.



*M*aria Silva was abused by her son's father. She left the relationship and got an order of protection, yet he continued to fight his obligation to pay child support. He used the child support proceedings to intimidate and manipulate her: it was an extension of the abuse. Although he had the ability to pay the child support order, he asked the Court to reduce his obligation. A Legal Aid lawyer took on Ms. Silva's case and maintained the order of support. Ms. Silva sent a clear message to the father that he could no longer use the Court to maintain power and control over her.

## RESPONDING TO CHANGE

The recession has hit communities living in poverty very hard. The effects of high unemployment, increasing rates of foreclosure and the loss of government funded and charitable services have brought more people to Legal Aid's door. The recession has not just increased the number of people needing help, but has created new problems and a greater urgency in existing areas of need.

Legal Aid has responded to the changing need. We expanded our consumer practice to add a fellow who works exclusively on foreclosure prevention, developed a program to reach tenants facing eviction because a landlord lost the property due to foreclosure, and recruited five young associates who had been deferred from their law firms for a year to help expand our capacity. In addition, we expanded our office in Anacostia and are deepening our relationship with the pediatric clinic at the Town Hall Education, Arts and Recreation Center (THEARC).

## COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES

Legal Aid is deeply committed to reducing barriers to our services. We established offices in underserved neighborhoods and at the Superior Court to expand our capacity beyond that of our main office in Northwest. Legal Aid lawyers are available to clients in three locations east of the Anacostia River: the Domestic Violence Intake Center located in the United Medical Center, The Children's National Medical Center Clinic in THEARC and an office in the Historic Anacostia neighborhood. Clients can also seek help at the Landlord and Tenant Branch of the Superior Court. Community offices are essential. Families living at or below the poverty line may be forced to choose between the cost of transportation into downtown D.C. or buying food. For low-wage workers, it may be impossible to get the necessary time away from their job. Time and again, clients who could not make it to our main office are able to get help in their neighborhood or at the Courthouse.



**G**ynnette Edwards was caring for her two grandsons and recovering from a hospital stay when she discovered she was facing foreclosure. With nowhere else to turn, she asked her former employer for help. He is a lawyer and she trusted him. He promised to lend her money to save her home. Instead, he gave her a loan obligating her to pay back many times what she owed, and had her sign papers giving her home away to his company. Not knowing she had given up her home, she tried to keep up with the payments, but soon fell behind. She faced foreclosure again right before Christmas. A Legal Aid lawyer stepped in and persuaded a judge to stop the foreclosure, get rid of the loan, and restore Ms. Edwards and her grandsons to their home.



**P**erry Haywood's landlord refused to make repairs in his apartment. The plumbing was failing and he had problems with vermin. He complained and the landlord did nothing, so he started to withhold his rent. Rather than make the repairs, the landlord sued Mr. Haywood for eviction.

*Mr. Haywood appeared in Court and was referred to the Legal Aid office there. A Legal Aid lawyer stepped in since the landlord's conduct clearly violated the D.C. Housing Code. The landlord was ordered to make repairs, Mr. Haywood received a large rent rebate for the time he was forced to live in substandard conditions and the eviction case was dismissed.*

## MEETING CLIENTS' MULTIPLE NEEDS

We augment our neighborhood presence with outreach to clients. We conduct forums on foreclosure, a Spanish-speaking lawyer meets often with adult students at the Carlos Rosario Center and we provide regular trainings to social services providers to educate them about the benefits programs available to their clients. Each December, we send teams of lawyers and volunteers into senior public housing and gathering places to help low-income beneficiaries navigate the Medicare Part D drug benefit program. These are just a few of the many ways in which we reach out to our clients to educate them about their rights and the availability of services.

Legal Aid clients often present multiple interlocking problems. One legal issue can create another and related disputes can arise from a single cause. Women with children who are escaping violence need not only protection, but also child support and a child custody order. Families facing eviction may be at risk because a loss in public benefits rendered them unable to afford rent payments.

Legal Aid tries to address these related needs to achieve a complete solution. If the problem crosses practice areas, specialists in different units will work together for the client.

## CHANGING LIVES

The demand for our help extends far beyond our capacity. We attempt to select those cases in which the risk is the greatest, the client is most vulnerable or a lawyer can make the most significant difference. Day after day, week after week, Legal Aid lawyers take on cases in which a critical aspect of a client's life is at stake. We work to ensure that clients have a fair chance, that their lives are made stable and that disaster is avoided.



**L**ucila Beshir is 63 years old and lives with a physical disability. As a result of her disability and low income, a portion of her rent is paid through a government funded voucher. Her landlord failed to keep her apartment up to code and violations were found during its annual inspection. The landlord was required to either fix the problems or move her, but he did neither. Ms. Beshir continued to pay her portion of rent, but as a result of the violations the government had stopped paying its portion. The landlord sued to evict her and she came to Legal Aid for help. A Legal Aid lawyer secured the dismissal of her case and helped to make arrangements to bring the apartment up to code.

*While working with Ms. Beshir, her lawyer became aware that nearly \$100 was being deducted from her Social Security check each month to pay for Medicare Part B. This expense was unnecessary since she was eligible for a program to pay this premium. A Legal Aid Public Benefits lawyer stepped in and had her Social Security check restored to its proper amount and she was reimbursed for the monthly premiums she had paid.*

## WORKING FOR CHANGE

Legal Aid's clients often present problems that are widespread or require a change in government practices to find a solution. In addition to our legal work on behalf of individuals, we also work with the courts and the government to bring about change. Legal Aid staff members work on committees of the Superior Court, on the D.C. Access to Justice Commission and on initiatives to bring about agency, policy or legislative reforms. Among other issues, we have been leading advocates in making courts, administrative tribunals and government agencies language accessible and are helping form a coalition to work with the District on health care reform.

## APPELLATE LITIGATION

Legal Aid also has made a significant commitment to appellate litigation. Most disputes involving persons living in poverty are resolved in high-volume courts or before under-resourced administrative tribunals. The law frequently takes second seat to efficiency and justice is subordinated to speed. However, a decision from the Court of Appeals can often address a problem affecting thousands of litigants.

To bring the voice of low-income litigants to the Court of Appeals, Legal Aid created the Barbara McDowell Appellate Advocacy Project. The Project was named in memory of its founding director, an extraordinary advocate deeply committed to social justice.

Through the Project, Legal Aid brings cases in the District of Columbia Court of Appeals and the District of Columbia Circuit that advance the rights of low-income individuals and communities. We have won important victories in a broad range of areas.

## PRO BONO

Private and government lawyers and law students partner with Legal Aid to work for equal justice. Through our Pro Bono Program, volunteers donate time each year to our clients that is valued at more than \$6 million. Lawyers and students participate in a broad range of ways. Teams of lawyers interview new clients, the law firms of Arnold & Porter LLP, Crowell & Moring LLP, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP, and Steptoe & Johnson LLP loan associates on full-time six month rotations, firms and government lawyers accept placements of more than 100 cases each year, senior lawyers and lawyers with deferred start dates work as members of our staff, volunteer lawyers work in-house on special projects, and students spend the summer or a semester providing critical support to our staff.

### Volunteer Profile – David Reiser, Zuckerman Spaeder LLP



David Reiser is an important part of the Legal Aid team. He joined us as a volunteer in 2004 when we were developing the Appellate Advocacy Project. He worked closely with Barbara McDowell to help her build the program to be a respected voice on poverty law issues in the D.C. Court of Appeals. David was instrumental in keeping the Project going after Barbara's death and has continued to be a key member of the Project team. He has dedicated thousands of hours to the Project.

David's contribution has extended far beyond our appellate work. He has mentored staff on complex trials and provided trusted counsel on policy issues. But what Legal Aid values most is David's commitment to ensuring equal justice for people living in poverty. He is relentless and uncompromising in his advocacy that the Courts must protect the substance of justice.

In August of this year, the American Bar Association awarded David its Pro Bono Publico Award in recognition of his contributions to Legal Aid. David's efforts would not be possible without the generous support of his firm, Zuckerman Spaeder LLP. The firm encourages David and other lawyers to work with Legal Aid. The firm has helped in innumerable ways, encouraging David and other lawyers to work with Legal Aid and to accept a variety of cases pro bono.

BARBARA M<sup>C</sup>DOWELL led the Appellate Advocacy Project for five years and established it as an important and persuasive voice on poverty law in the District of Columbia. Barbara litigated significant cases involving fair housing, domestic violence, child custody, administrative law, unemployment compensation and other areas. Barbara died much too young in early 2009. She is greatly missed by the staff at Legal Aid.

## ANNUAL SERVANT OF JUSTICE AWARDS DINNER

Legal Aid's annual awards dinner was a remarkable success again this year. **Vernon E. Jordan, Jr.** of **Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP** and **Florence Wagman Roisman** of the **Indiana University School of Law - Indianapolis** were the recipients of the **Servant of Justice Awards**. Both were recognized for their long-standing dedication to equal justice.

The **Partnership Award** was presented to **Fair Budget Coalition** for its collaboration with Legal Aid to preserve and enhance District-funded programs supporting poor and low-income residents.

**Randall Brater** of **Arent Fox LLP** received the **Klepper Prize for Volunteer Excellence**. In addition to coordinating his firm's intake volunteer effort at Legal Aid, Mr. Brater has served on the leadership committee for the Generous Associates Campaign, contributing to record-breaking fundraising both at his firm and citywide.

Legal Aid is grateful to the legal and corporate communities, as well as to the Dinner Steering Committee Co-Chaired by **Deborah B. Baum** of **Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP**, **David R. Berz** of **Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP**, **Anne Coffey Proctor** of **Covington & Burling LLP**, and **Kurt Richter** of **Cassidy Turley** for their amazing success in raising over \$740,000.



Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP (left);  
Florence Wagman Roisman, Indiana University School of Law – Indianapolis;  
Kristi Matthews, Fair Budget Coalition; Randall Brater, Arent Fox LLP

*“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”*

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Photo: Jill James Photography



## GENEROUS ASSOCIATES CAMPAIGN

### EQUAL JUSTICE, EQUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Across the District more than 100 law firm associates at over 50 law firms raised a remarkable \$678,000 on behalf of Legal Aid. More than half of the firms exceeded their fundraising amounts from last year. Congratulations to everyone involved in making the Campaign a success.

Each year firms compete to earn a top five placement in their size category. The results, in order of amount raised, are as follows:

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Latham & Watkins LLP  
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Gilbert LLP  
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Wiltshire & Grannis LLP  
Cohen Milstein Sellers & Toll PLLC  
Brown Rudnick LLP

Legal Aid would like to thank **Michele A. Roberts** of Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, the Campaign's Honorary Chair, for her support.

In addition, this Campaign depends on remarkable associate leadership for its success. Thank you to all the Campaign Co-Chairs:

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## LEADERSHIP CABINET ANNUAL GIFT RECOGNITION PROGRAM

The Legal Aid Society created the Leadership Cabinet in order to recognize those donors who support the organization in significant ways. We are proud to recognize members for their generosity during the period of 9/1/2009 through 8/31/2010:

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**\$75,000 & above**

The District of Columbia Bar Foundation  
Eugene & Agnes E. Meyer Foundation

### GOLD PATRON

**\$50,000 - \$74,999**

Covington & Burling LLP  
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### SILVER PATRON

**\$30,000 - \$49,999**

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Legal Aid would like to thank the District of Columbia's Office of Victim Services and the Office of the Tenant Advocate for their support of our Family Law and Housing Programs. We would also like to recognize the Barbara McDowell Endowment Fund for Appellate Litigation for the support it provides for our Appellate Advocacy Project and the Klepper Endowment for supporting the annually awarded Klepper Prize for Volunteer Excellence.

## SUPPORTERS

The Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia extends its gratitude to the following supporters for their generosity (gifts from 9/1/2009 – 8/31/2010):

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## FINANCIAL STATEMENT

### REVENUE (1/1/2009 to 12/31/2009)

Grants and Contributions	\$ 2,669,882
Contributed Services	6,979,111
Special Events	640,910
Interest	31,056
Miscellaneous Income	4,204
Contributions to Endowments	168,728
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>10,325,103</b>
<b>Total Revenue Less Endowment Gifts and Contributed Services</b>	<b>\$ 3,177,264</b>

### EXPENSES

Program Services	\$ 9,313,855
Management and General	208,547
Fundraising	419,911
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>9,942,313</b>
<b>Total Expenses Less Contributed Services</b>	<b>\$ 2,963,202</b>

Copies of our audited financial statements are available upon request by contacting the Development Department at (202) 661-5964.

## STAFF

**Eric Angel**, *Legal Director*  
**Rosanne Avilés**, *Staff Attorney*  
**Julie Becker**, *Senior Staff Attorney*  
**Gary Cunningham**,  
*Intake Coordinator/Investigator*  
**Jodi Feldman**, *Director of Pro Bono and*  
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**Yaida Ford**, *Staff Attorney*  
**Beth Mellen Harrison**, *Senior Staff*  
*Attorney & Director, Court Based Legal*  
*Services Project*  
**Jennifer Hatton**, *Staff Attorney*  
**Katherine Hays**, *Chief Operations Officer*  
**Jeannette Henderson**,  
*Administrative Assistant*  
**Deborah Cuevas Hill**, *Senior Staff Attorney*  
**Shirley Hornig**, *Staff Attorney*  
**Gregg A. Kelley**, *Director of Development*  
**Jennifer Klein**,  
*Legal Administrative Assistant*  
**Juliana Lee**, *Staff Attorney*  
**Jennifer Mezey**, *Supervising Attorney*  
**Trisha Monroe**, *Senior Staff Attorney and*  
*Director, SE Domestic Violence Project*  
**Lucy Newton**, *Senior Staff Attorney*  
*and Director, Community-Based*  
*Lawyering Project*  
**Rachel Nadas**,  
*Legal Administrative Assistant*  
**Andrew Patterson**, *Staff Attorney*

**Anna Purinton**, *Staff Attorney*  
**Sandra Read-Brown**,  
*Development Associate*  
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*McDowell Appellate Advocacy Project*  
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*Legal Administrative Assistant*  
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**Alessandro Terenzoni**, *Staff Attorney*  
**Tianna Terry**, *Staff Attorney*  
**Stephanie Troyer**, *Staff Attorney*  
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**Andrea Zumbrum**,  
*Intake Coordinator/Investigator*  
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*Assistant (2008 – 2010)*  
**Valerie Grab**, *Senior Staff Attorney*  
*(2007-2010)*  
**Robin Murphy**, *Supervising Attorney*  
*(2007 – 2010)*  
**Lucia Rich**, *Legal Administrative*  
*Assistant (2008 – 2010)*  
**Elizabeth Yates**, *Legal Administrative*  
*Assistant (2008 – 2010)*

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**Lucy Noyola**, *Crowell & Moring LLP Loaned Associate*  
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