



IMPACT REPORT

FROM COURTROOM TO COMMUNITY

2023

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OUR GOOD WORK CONTINUES...



Steven J. McGarrity, Esq.
Executive Director

What's in a name?

Over two decades ago, four separate legal aid organizations came together to form Community Legal Aid. One of the first and most important decisions that needed to be made was what we would call ourselves. Our founding organizations all had names that reflected the geography of the area they served. But we wanted a name that reflected our values and aspirations, demonstrating common concern for everyone. And Community Legal Aid was born.

In 2023, because of the incredible work and efforts of our staff and volunteers, we truly lived up to our name through service and leadership to our community.

Our staff and volunteers were out in the community at a record 866 community events including outreach events, community gatherings, community based legal clinics, training, and more. Our attorneys and paralegals served on more boards, coalitions and task forces than ever before. Our Big Ideas blog discussing important topics affecting our client community reached thousands of community members and decision makers.

On the heels of the successful 2022 Akron Eviction Prevention Summit, we hosted the 2023 Mahoning Valley Eviction Prevention Summit, the largest ever gathering of community leaders in that community focused on identifying solutions to the rental housing crisis in the Mahoning Valley. And all of that is on top of the over 4,700 cases handled by staff and pro bono attorneys.

And none of this would have been possible without the support of the community: our funders, community partners, donors, board members, staff, volunteers. Thank you for being part of our efforts!

In the following pages, you'll learn more about our achievements in 2023 and how we're continuing our work to ensure justice for all in the communities we serve. We have more to do but are confident we can help improve the lives of our neighbors one case at a time.



David E. Butz, Esq.
Board President

SECOND EVICTION SUMMIT

PUTS FOCUS ON MAHONING VALLEY

More than 250 people attended our second Eviction Prevention Summit, which took place in Niles in April 2023. Modeled after our successful event in Akron in 2022, the event brought Matthew Desmond, author of "Evicted," back to our region to continue the dialogue about this important issue.

In addition to Desmond, the day included speakers and panel discussions focused on sharing experiences, learning from each other, and designing innovative and collaborative solutions to forge a new path toward housing security and freedom.



Possible solutions to address our region's eviction challenges were explored at Community Legal Aid's second Eviction Summit.

ATTENDEES IDENTIFIED FIVE STRATEGIES TO HELP ADDRESS THE CONTINUING PROBLEM OF EVICTIONS

1

Right to Counsel

Similar to a successful program in Cleveland, this would provide the services of an attorney to low-income tenants facing eviction to help them navigate the proceedings.

2

Landlord-Tenant Education Campaign

A public education campaign would help both landlords and tenants better understand their rights and responsibilities to each other under the law.

3

Rental Property Registry Systems

Rental property registries exist at both city and county levels to ensure that rental properties comply with applicable property maintenance codes. Still, thousands of rental properties in the Mahoning Valley are not safe and habitable. These systems would be reviewed to identify gaps and enforcement strategies, as well as policies and procedures that govern these systems.

4

Inclusive Zoning

Existing residential zoning ordinances reflect the housing market and community needs of the previous century. Residential zoning ordinances should be modernized to accommodate multi-family dwellings, modular homes and transitional housing in residential neighborhoods with an abundance of vacant lots and dilapidated properties.

5

Pathways for Homeownership

Through community redevelopment efforts, public education, community support and non-traditional lending products, residents in historically redlined (and high eviction rate) neighborhoods would have opportunities to become homeowners.

We are working to bring some of these ideas to fruition, along with our partners throughout the region.



LONGTIME CLA ATTORNEY HONORED WITH STATE JUSTICE AWARD

Community Legal Aid attorney Wayne Sarna was the recipient of the Ohio Access to Justice Foundation's Denis J. Murphy Award in 2023. The award is presented annually to an Ohio legal aid staff member to recognize outstanding leadership and advocacy.

Sarna was honored for his more than four decades of helping Ohioans to resolve civil legal challenges. In the past 20 years alone, he has helped 3,100 clients discharge \$85 million of debt through bankruptcy.

Steven McGarrity, executive director of Community Legal Aid, said Sarna realized many years ago how bankruptcy could help low-income citizens escape the cycle of debt that prevented them from improving their lives. Through his work, his clients were able to discharge debts that prevented them from accessing driver's licenses, jobs and housing.

"Wayne doesn't care to be in the spotlight, but I can't think of anyone more deserving of this honor,"

McGarrity said. "His dedication, determination and compassionate spirit inspire and set a high standard for us all."

Sarna, who retired at the end of the year, played a pivotal role in discovering and investigating

consumer fraud schemes by identifying perpetrators and addressing the harm resulting from the scams. He was also lauded for his work to illuminate and address the disparate impact of court debt on low-income Ohioans and people of color.

Throughout his career he provided education, training and outreach to individuals and debt counseling providers and was also a dedicated mentor, guiding new attorneys as they began their legal careers.

The Foundation created the Denis J. Murphy Award in 1998 to honor the founding board president of the Ohio Access to Justice Foundation and to recognize outstanding leadership and advocacy within Ohio's legal aids.



Community Legal Aid attorney Wayne Sarna, center, is shown with, from left, Angie Lloyd, Esq., executive director of the Ohio Access to Justice Foundation; Steven McGarrity, Esq., executive director of Community Legal Aid; David Butz, Esq., board president of Community Legal Aid; and Bill Dowling, Ohio Access to Justice Foundation board member

MEDICAL LEGAL PARTNERSHIP EXPANDS WITH NEW GRANT FUNDING

Thanks to a \$214,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Community Legal Aid has been able to expand its partnership to provide legal assistance to Akron Children's Hospital patients and their families.



Legal Aid was one of only eight organizations selected nationwide to receive federal funding through the Administration for Children and Families' new demonstration program, Medical-Legal Partnerships Plus (MLP+). The program is designed to address root causes of poor health outcomes, as well as health inequities.

"The bottom line is that this money is going to help us help more kids, and we're thrilled about that,"

said Steven McGarrity, executive director. "We're also grateful that this award further demonstrates the value of collaboration and taking a holistic approach to improving our community's health outcomes. We can do more for our kids and their families by working together."

Legal Aid and the hospital have partnered for over 10 years to improve the health outcomes of patients served through the hospital network. Through our Health, Education, Advocacy and Law (HEAL) project, lawyers get direct referrals from health care providers for legal issues that impact children's health.

Common issues include poor housing conditions, the need for special education resources in school, problems with public benefits, immigration issues and family issues.

Managing attorney Marie Curry, who oversees the legal work performed under the MLP, said there are situations in which health care alone can't resolve the underlying factors that contribute to prolonged or exacerbated health conditions a child faces.

For instance, in the case of a child with asthma, a doctor can prescribe an inhaler and create an asthma treatment plan. "But if that child goes home every night to a house filled with mold, that's going to keep impacting their breathing. An attorney can help the family enforce their rights and compel their landlord to mitigate the mold, and that has a direct effect on the child's health outcomes," Curry said.

Since its inception, this partnership has helped 1,300 families resolve 2,100 legal issues that were affecting children's health outcomes. This additional funding will help Legal Aid address even more issues for families in our region.

VOLUNTEER ATTORNEYS STEP UP TO SUPPORT DIVORCE CLINICS

After a three-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our Volunteer Legal Services Program (VLSP) restarted its Divorce Clinics in 2023, providing clients with free legal advice on how to navigate a divorce proceeding.

Elsa Gottfried, managing attorney for VLSP, said 13 attorneys volunteered their services for the clinics, which are offered in Summit, Stark, Wayne, Medina, Mahoning, Trumbull and Columbiana counties.

“Client requests for family law help is one of Legal Aid’s highest areas of demand for assistance,” Gottfried said.

“Going through a divorce is difficult for a person, both emotionally and physically. Coupling this with the lack of means to afford an attorney makes the process all the more difficult to make a final separation and move on with one’s life.”

Gottfried added that our volunteer attorneys go above and beyond, alleviating stress for those going through a challenging situation.

“The divorce clinic volunteer attorneys ease this process with their needed advice and assistance with preparation of legal documents, giving our low-income clients the tools to navigate the court, obtain a divorce and obtain related orders, providing stability for themselves and their children,” she said.

Additional volunteer attorneys are always welcome to volunteer with Community Legal Aid.

For more information, go to communitylegalaid.org/vlsp or call 330-983-2568

OUR IMPACT

12,154
PEOPLE HELPED
IN THE YEAR 2023

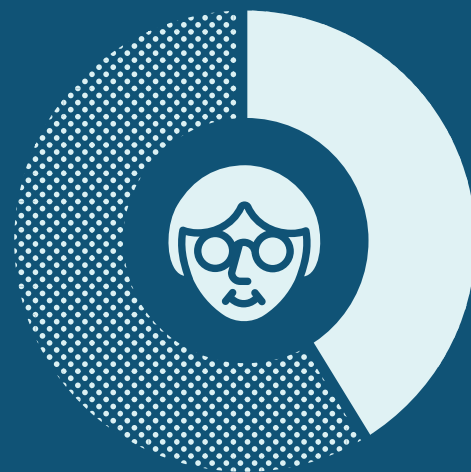
6.99MIL
DOLLARS EARNED OR
SAVED FOR CLIENTS



70% HOUSEHOLDS SERVED MAKE
LESS THAN \$25K/YEAR



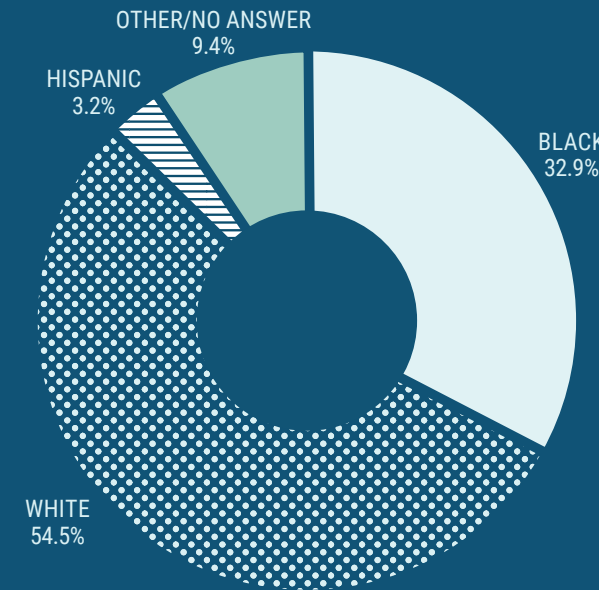
53% HOUSEHOLDS HELPED
INCLUDE CHILDREN



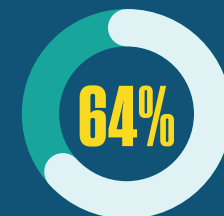
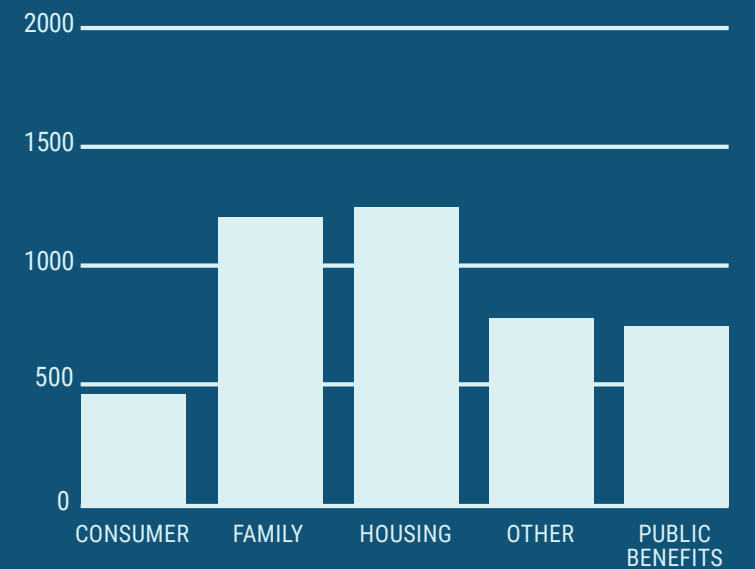
40% HOUSEHOLDS HELPED
INCLUDE SENIORS OR
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



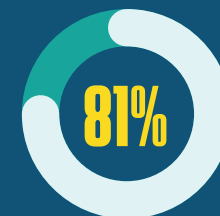
CLIENT RACE/ETHNICITY



CASE BREAKDOWN



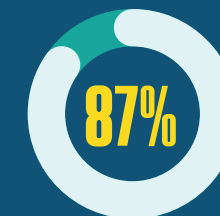
64%
HOMES
SAVED



81%
FINANCIAL
RELIEF



56%
SURVIVORS
PROTECTED



87%
EDUCATION
BARRIERS REMOVED



74%
EMPLOYMENT
BARRIERS REMOVED



FINANCIAL BREAKDOWN

12.2 MILLION BUDGET

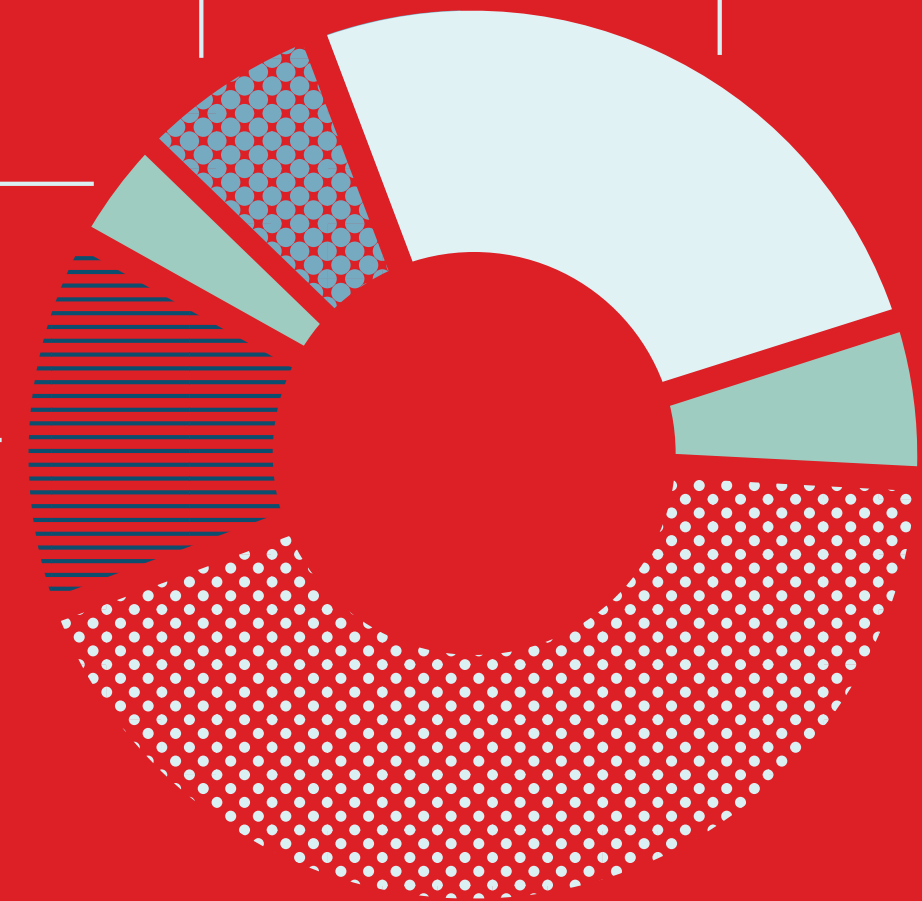
DONATED SERVICES
7%

DONATIONS & PRIVATE GRANTS
4%

GOVERNMENT GRANTS
14%

LEGAL SERVICES CORP
26%

OTHER
5%



EXPENSES

83%

PROGRAM SERVICES

10%

MANAGMENT

7%

DEVELOPMENT

OHIO ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOUNDATION
44%

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The individuals and organizations listed below gave their time, talent, and treasure to help bring CLA's mission to life in 2023. **Thank you** for making this work possible!

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OUR VISION

We believe that all individuals, including those who are impoverished, should have the opportunity to control, improve, and enrich their lives and community.


OUR MISSION

Through legal advocacy, we transform the lives of those in poverty to increase opportunities, fairness, and stability, for a stronger community and justice for all.

OUR VALUES

Diversity | Empathy | Justice | Leadership
Professionalism | Respect | Transformation



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