

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

COVID Impact	1
Joint Message from Executive Director & Board President	2
Creating Systemic Change	3
11th Annual HeART of Giving Celebration	4-5
Leadership Circle Donors	6
Message from Deputy Director of Operations	7
Young Professionals Council ..	7
Pro Bono	8



September 2020

Knocking Down Legal Barriers to Economic Stability During Pandemic

The economic impacts of COVID-19 on households, small businesses, and our community could prove devastating and profound. Legal Services has been the first line of defense for many who were either already vulnerable before the pandemic or who have become vulnerable to help them weather its financial effects.

Legal Services has seen a 1500% increase in demand over the prior year in reemployment assistance (RA) claims. With many local businesses closed or operating on reduced schedules, many workers are facing loss of income or reduction in earnings. Olga*, a single mother in her 40s, sought our assistance when her RA claim was denied, even though she had been laid off from her job at the airport due to the pandemic. She filed a second claim but received benefits starting on the date of her second application rather than her initial claim. Legal Services successfully advocated to the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) that Olga was entitled to benefits from the date of her first application. As a result, she received an additional \$6,125 in RA benefits. **Our work ensured Olga access to adequate income for the two months she was erroneously denied, which gave her the safety net she desperately needed to meet her family's basic necessities.**

Additionally, Legal Services has assisted 835 clients with landlord/tenant issues since the start of the pandemic. With so many unable

to pay rent, Legal Services has continued to advise clients of their evolving legal rights under the federal & state eviction moratoriums, as well as the recent Center for Disease Control's order. Our attorneys have primarily been focused on eviction prevention by creating forms, fielding questions from tenants receiving threats, and educating clients on the new protections available.

Legal Services remains responsive to the unique needs of non-profits and small businesses across different sectors that are currently facing volatility and uncertainty. We have provided 68 small businesses with COVID-related assistance so far. With businesses struggling to maintain pre-COVID revenue levels, layoffs have been a common occurrence. But amidst the spikes in unemployment, one client was looking to increase her workforce.

Nadia Decius, owner of Sweet Delight Cheesecakes, moved into her new commercial space in late March, around the same time thousands of other small business owners were struggling to make their own rent payments. Nadia was seeking to expand her workforce to assist fulfilling orders, but with all the uncertainty, she came to Legal Services for legal advice on how best to proceed. With our help, Nadia expand her workforce and sustain her business while also providing opportunities to individuals that may have gone without income. This assistance and her business model **made it affordable for**

this start-up to continue operations and stay afloat.

Similarly, **Legal Services proved an invaluable resource for the Miami Beach Community Development Corporation (MBCDC), after the Small Business Association (SBA) rejected their Emergency Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) application.** This loan is designed to provide economic relief to businesses that are experiencing temporary loss of revenue. Legal Services successfully demonstrated MBCDC, an organization that manages more than a dozen affordable housing properties for low-income and elderly residents, qualified for this relief as it was **crucial to supplant the loss of income of many of its residents in order to continue serving these vulnerable populations. The SBA reversed its original decision and granted MBCDC an EIDL in the amount of \$150,000.**

For the last 50 years, attorneys at Legal Services have worked tirelessly to provide access to justice to those struggling with financial hardship, which makes us well-positioned to help individuals, families, and small businesses avoid the disastrous financial consequences created by this crisis. Now more than ever, Legal Services' role is vital to the community, and the team will continue to fight to mitigate the economic impact on the most vulnerable.

** Client's name changed*

Our Statement on Racial Justice

We condemn racism. The recent murders and violence against Black men and women are a painful reminder not only of the adversity that many of our neighbors endure in living their lives but also of the work to be done in our country before Justice for All is realized. We support the call for justice and an end to the systemic racism that threatens the lives of Black men, women, and children.

There have been pivotal moments in our history when tragedy has advanced the goal of achieving racial equity and justice. We are hopeful that this moment will be one that transforms our country and racial justice is achieved.

For over 50 years, Legal Services of Greater Miami's advocacy has focused on economic and social justice. The inequities endured by low-income communities are disproportionately borne by our Black and Brown neighbors. We continue to advocate for equal justice in our community and to devote ourselves to addressing systemic injustices by ensuring access to safe and affordable housing, healthcare, education, vital government assistance, preserving income, and supporting small businesses that are a financial lifeline for minority communities.

To support racial equity efforts, we remain committed to listening to our community, advocating for justice, and challenging systemic inequality. As part of this commitment, our staff and volunteers will examine our own practices and advocacy to ensure that we are addressing racial inequities and promoting an inclusive community both internally and externally. We are devoted to learning, evaluating, and evolving as we move forward.

South Florida is one of the most diverse communities in our country. We come from all parts of the world with diverse cultures, languages, and traditions. Our diversity is an opportunity to lead by example and build an inclusive community that is strong and resilient.

At Legal Services, we are committed to Building a Community of Equal Justice with Social, Racial and Economic Justice for All.



Monica Vignes-Pitan
Legal Services Executive Director



Manuel Dobrinsky
Legal Services Board President



“Legal Services has granted me the relief of a name change that I thought I wouldn’t have access to for a long time. I can go through the world confidently and self-assured that what I identify as, is reflected in the real world and in my daily life. I am in complete gratitude to this organization of amazing individuals, helping people like me, be themselves.” —Nic

*Pictured from left:
Nic and Legal Services Advocacy
Director Jocelyn Armand*

Legal Services Works on the Front Lines to Bridge the Justice Gap

One of our advocacy goals is to Bridge the Justice Gap so that more people in our community have equal access to the courts, which is fundamental to our justice system. The Justice Gap is the difference between the civil legal needs of low-income Americans and the resources available to meet those needs. Due to limited resources, thousands of litigants must navigate the justice system on their own. **To have meaningful access to the courts, pro se litigants need effective self-help resources to ensure that the facts and law, not the lack of legal representation, determine the outcome in their cases.**

Closing the Justice Gap by Leveling the Playing Field for Tenants Fighting Eviction

In Florida, landlords file an estimated 70,000 evictions per year. While landlords have numerous legal forms approved by the Florida Supreme Court and the Florida Bar, including a form eviction complaint found in the Rules of Civil Procedure, tenants only have two forms – notices to be used when the landlord does not make repairs. **The official forms provide guidance to a landlord at each step of the eviction process, but none help a tenant facing eviction.**

Beginning in 2015, Legal Services Director of Litigation, Jeffrey Hearne, in partnership with three other non-profit organizations, created the **Pro Se Eviction Form Advocacy Group** which sought to change this imbalance, and provide tenants facing eviction with a form eviction answer to help them

present their case to the judge. **As a result of their work, the Florida Supreme Court sent the matter to the Civil Procedure Rules Committee in March 2019, which approved a form eviction answer in November 2019.** The proposed form identifies common defenses the tenant can select, and allows the tenant to file a motion to determine rent when appropriate. The Board of Governors approved the form in January 2020 and the proposed form is pending before the Florida Supreme Court. **If approved by the Florida Supreme Court, this new form will help thousands of unrepresented tenants have access to justice by appropriately responding to eviction lawsuits.**

This unique project did not involve direct representation of clients; however, over a span of several years, this group of advocates pursued and hopes to achieve systemic change within the Bar and Court systems. The result of their efforts has the potential to impact thousands of tenants each year.

Access to the Courts for the Transgender Community

Although the Florida Constitution grants equal access to the courts, pro se litigants were recently denied that access when seeking a name change.

Legal Services assisted transgender individuals complete pro se name change pleadings. However, the Clerk of Court

erroneously abandoned their properly filed pleadings, and directed the petitioners to either obtain legal representation or utilize the Court’s Self-Help Program. Many could not afford legal representation, and were entitled to waive the Self-Help Program because a pro bono attorney had assisted them.

Amending the name and gender marker on legal documents is critical for transgender individuals like Nic, a 23-year old Hispanic trans male who was born female. After completing social and medical gender transitioning, Nic expected his legal change of name and gender marker to be simple. However, Nic’s petitions were never filed by the Clerk or assigned a case number, and instead were wrongfully abandoned.

Legal Services Attorneys Jocelyn Armand and Pamela Flores, in partnership with Southern Legal Counsel, filed writs of mandamus requesting the Clerk be ordered to accept and docket these pro se pleadings in accordance with the Florida Constitution. **A settlement was successfully reached whereby the Clerk agreed to accept, docket, and assign case numbers to all pleadings filed by pro se litigants, and to modify internal policies and procedures to ensure full compliance.**

This agreement will ensure that pro se litigants have full access to the courts, and that transgender people, who are already socially marginalized, do not face additional hurdles to access the courts.

THE ELEVENTH ANNUAL HEART OF GIVING CELEBRATION AND JUDICIAL RECEPTION

We went virtual this year for the 11th Annual HeART of Giving Celebration and Judicial Reception, as we proudly presented the **2020 Equal Justice Judicial Leaderships Awards** to the **Honorable Bronwyn Miller** and the **Honorable Mary Jo Francis**, and presented the **2020 Equal Justice Visionary Award** to **Carl Juste**.



Honorable Bronwyn C. Miller
Third District Court of Appeal

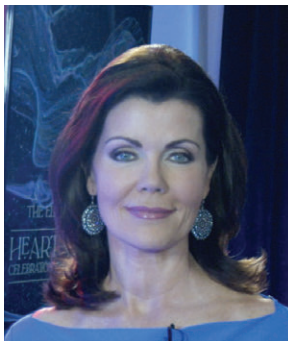


Honorable Mary Jo Francis (Retired)
Miami-Dade County Court



Carl Juste
*Award-Winning
Miami Herald photojournalist*

The celebration began with a wonderful performance by **Nicole Henry**, Award-winning Jazz Singer, and a warm welcome by **Celebrity Host Laurie Jennings**, 6-time Emmy Award-winning TV news reporter and anchor.



Laurie Jennings
Celebrity Host



Nicole Henry
Award-Winning Jazz Singer

Heartfelt messages from **City of Miami Mayor Francis X. Suarez**, and **Title Sponsors JP Morgan and Ryder** were given. The virtual celebration was co-hosted by **Legal Services Campaign Committee Co-Chair, Lilly Ann Sanchez**, as well as **Legal Services Board President Manuel Dobrinsky** and **Legal Services Executive Director Monica Vignes-Pitan**.

Recognized throughout the presentation were the outstanding sponsors dedicated to the support and mission of Legal Services.

To view the HeART of Giving Celebration on demand, please visit [here](#).

From Our Hearts to Yours, THANK YOU for a Successful Virtual HeART of Giving Celebration

Title Sponsors:



J.P. MORGAN CHASE & CO.

Blue Diamond Sponsors

Holland & Knight

STEARNS WEAVER MILLER

Platinum Sponsors

DDRB
DOLAN | DOBRINSKY
ROSENBLUM | BLUESTEIN



McLUSKEY
McDONALD
& HUGHES, P.A.
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Gold Sponsors

BERGER SINGERMAN
FLORIDA'S BUSINESS LAW FIRM | CELEBRATING 35 YEARS

Ellen Leesfield ADR
Pamela Perry, P.A.

HUNTON
ANDREWS KURTH

KAUFMAN | ROSSIN



LS L-S LAW FIRM

NELSON
MULLINS

PodhurstOrseck
TRIAL & APPELLATE LAWYERS

Ross Gitten
APPELLATE LAW FIRM

TD Bank
America's Most Convenient Bank®

WHITE & CASE

Silver Sponsors

Berkowitz
Pollack
Brant
Advisors
+ CPAs

DAY PITNEY LLP

Flagstar
Bank
What solutions can we craft for you?

genesis

GOLDBERG
& ROSEN
TRIAL LAWYERS

IBERIABANK
FIRST HORIZON.

Commissioner
Jose "Pepe" Diaz
District 12

KLSC
Legal
Solutions
+ CPAs

MICHAEL S. OLIN

PAAST

JOEL S. PERWIN

ROSSMAN
BAUMBERGER
REBOSO & SPIER
CORPORATE • REAL ESTATE • PROBATE

SAUL EWING
ARNSTEIN
& LEHR LLP

VPM Ver Ploeg
& Marino

Bronze Sponsors

BERK, MERCHANT & SIMS
PLC

EATON & WOLK PL



HARKE LAW



HINSHAW

Homer
Bonner

Kelley Kronenberg
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

RP
ROBERT L. PARKS, P.L.
LAW OFFICES

Salmon & Dulberg
DISPUTE RESOLUTION
MEDICATION • ARBITRATION
Celebrating 30 Years

Scott L. Baena, P.A.

SERVICES
ON-SITE

Our work is made possible through the generous support of our **Leadership Circle Donors**

BLUE DIAMOND

Edie Laquer Foundation –
Endowed Women & Children's Rights Attorney Chair
Harke Clasby & Bushman –
Social Justice Fellowship in Honor of Nancy T. Clasby
Holland & Knight LLP
Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson, P.A.
Wells Fargo

DIAMOND

Stephen H. Cypen, President, Jerome A. Yavitz Charitable
Foundation, Inc. - *Harry & Irving Cypen Tax Fellowship +*
Gift in Honor of Marcia K. Cypen
Helliwell Family Foundation -
In Memory of Paul L. E. Helliwell, Esq.

PLATINUM

Akerman LLP
Bilzin Sumberg Baena Price & Axelrod LLP
Ver Ploeg & Marino
White & Case LLP

GOLD

Coffey Burlington, PL
Hunton Andrews Kurth
Kluger, Kaplan, Silverman, Katzen & Levine, P.L.
Levine Kellogg Lehman Schneider + Grossman LLP
McLuskey, McDonald & Hughes, P.A.

SILVER

Dolan Dobrinsky Rosenblum LLP
The Fine & Greenwald Foundation
Genovese Joblove & Battista, P.A.
JP Morgan
Kaufman[Rossin – *Accounting Fellowship*

Kenny Nachwalter, P.A.
Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton
Leon Cosgrove
Morgan, Lewis & Bockius
Nelson Mullins
Podhurst Orseck
Ryder System, Inc.
The Sain Orr Royak DeForest Steadman Foundation
Jacqueline Allee Smith – *Jacqueline and Chesterfield Smith*
Fellows Program
Weiss Serota Helfman Cole & Bierman

BRONZE

Honorable A. Leo Adderly
Buckner, Shifrin, Etter, Dugan & Bradfute
Day Pitney LLP
Ernst & Young LLP
Gelber Schacter & Greenberg
Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani
Grove Bank & Trust
Gunster
Kevin & Yolonda Jacobs
Dr. Alma Kadragic
Lott & Fischer, PL
McDermott Will & Emery
McDermott Will & Emery Charitable Foundation
Moore & Company, P.A.
Darrell & Debbie Payne
Rivero Mestre LLP
Ross & Girtin
Schindler Family Foundation – *In Memory of Tobias Simon*
Sherry Law Office
Stanley Wakshlag

Donor Levels Reflect Cumulative Giving for the Campaign Period from January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2023.



VIVIAN Z. CHAVEZ, ESQ. DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS

The COVID pandemic has affected each and every one of us. Life is inherently different and many of us have experienced some kind of loss—whether our jobs are in jeopardy and this leads to financial peril, or worse, we have lost a loved one. While there has been much focus on Legal Services' response to the crisis externally to serve clients and the community at large, we wanted to take a moment to share how we are supporting our team.

We are proud to say that to date there have been no furloughs or layoffs—from secretaries to

attorneys, to the janitorial staff, 100% of the team have retained their positions, which has helped alleviate anxiety and provided stability.

There have been several new hires during the pandemic as well. A few of these positions were opened ahead of mid-March when the pandemic struck, and we decided to move forward to ensure there is adequate staff to serve the anticipated increased workload of clients needing help during this period. These new hires have instilled confidence that in good times and bad, our focus remains on serving our mission and offering adequate coverage while not sacrificing a work/life balance.

Ahead of the staff resuming work at the office, the building was equipped with many safeguards to ensure both staff and visitors feel secure in the environment.

- doors have foot pedals for touch-free opening
- one-way directional arrows to limit contamination
- anyone entering the building has a temperature check at one of three wall-mounted thermometers
- sanitizing stations throughout the building
- social distancing signage is posted
- masks are required in the building
- cleaning crew disinfects day and night

We want to ensure that both our team and our clients know that we value their safety. **Our staff has decades of experience advocating for our community through past crises, and their expertise is an asset for our clients. As we serve the community during these unprecedented times, we will continue to work with our team to provide flexibility while meeting our community's evolving needs.**



JOIN THE LEGAL SERVICES OF GREATER MIAMI YOUNG PROFESSIONALS COUNCIL

The Young Professionals Council consists of members of diverse backgrounds and professional careers who are dedicated to Legal Services' mission of providing high-quality, free civil legal services to low-income individuals and families in Miami Dade and Monroe Counties.

Welcomes all committed to making an impact on our community and seeking opportunities to Build A Community of Equal Justice

YOPRO MEMBERSHIP: A minimum annual contribution \$100 (\$50 for students). The contribution supports Legal Services' advocacy efforts.

Benefits include:

- ▶ Reduced ticket pricing for HeART of Giving Celebration
- ▶ 2 CLEs or Conversations with Leaders in Miami's Legal, Business & Civic Community
- ▶ 3-4 Happy Hours with reduced pricing
- ▶ Invitation to Chesterfield Smith Society events
- ▶ Recognition on website

JOIN

LEGAL SERVICES OF GREATER MIAMI NEEDS YOU

Legal Services of Greater Miami is committed to serving the community by removing legal barriers and achieving equal access to justice for all. Legal Services has a team of attorneys that provide civil legal assistance. However, now more than ever there is a critical need for pro bono assistance to help us bridge the justice gap made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic.

PRO BONO OPPORTUNITIES

On demand CLE training in the following areas:

- Tenants' Rights
- Business Startup
- Eviction Defense
- Nonprofit 501 c(3)
- Consumer Rights

Mentorship and malpractice insurance provided.

#ProBonoStrong

BENEFITS

- ▶ Further Develop Your Professional Skills
- ▶ Directly Connect with the Needs of Your Community & Make an Impact
- ▶ Become a part of the Pro Bono Attorney Network at Legal Services
- ▶ Fulfill Your CLE Requirements
- ▶ Obtain a Rewarding Experience

WITH YOUR HELP, WE CAN BUILD A COMMUNITY OF EQUAL JUSTICE

Save the Date



We invite you to join us for
a virtual appreciation reception
to celebrate our Pro Bono Volunteers'
commitment to Equal Justice.

Pro Bono Recognition

**Thursday, October 29, 2020
6:00 PM – 7:00 PM**

JOIN US