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April 2023

Transformational County Grant Supports Expansion of Housing Stability Advocacy for Tenants

The number of evictions and foreclosures in Miami-Dade has increased alarmingly in recent years, with almost 20,000 evictions filed during 2022. **The odds are stacked against tenants in courts as 81% of landlords are represented by legal counsel in evictions, but fewer than 2% of tenants in Miami-Dade eviction cases have legal representation.**

As part of a larger effort to combat the affordability housing crisis and keep tenants in their homes, **Miami-Dade County recently awarded \$2.9M to Legal Services to develop a groundbreaking Eviction Diversion Pilot Program. The Pilot Program is designed to enhance access to legal representation for tenants in eviction cases, and to raise awareness of tenants' rights through outreach and community education.**

This cutting edge initiative will also **assess the impact of legal representation** on the housing stability of the residents served, developing data to support the thesis that **legal advocacy is essential to prevent homelessness and promote housing stability.** Without representation, most tenants lose their cases and are ultimately evicted, disproportionately harming marginalized communities, and resulting in lasting negative effects on mental and physical health, family unity, and economic well-being.

Since its inception, Legal Services has been a **leader in creative, aggressive advocacy to achieve housing justice in Mi-**

ami-Dade County. Last year, **56% of all cases handled were housing related**, including more than 3,000 tenants' rights cases. Based on this well-established record, **Legal Services will serve as lead agency of the Pilot Program, creating a comprehensive referral and intake system and coordinating the efforts of five local, community-based non-profits to render free legal assistance to more than 850 at-risk tenants and their families.** In a push to assist residents gain knowledge about their rights, one of the partner agencies will conduct door-to-door outreach to households facing eviction, as well as training on tenants' rights.



Agustin's* story demonstrates the difference an attorney can make to further housing stability for financially vulnerable residents. At 74 years old, Agustin found himself facing

a wrongful eviction from his home of over 16 years. As a low-income retiree relying mostly on income from Social Security, Agustin could only afford an efficiency. His landlord used aggressive tactics to try to quickly push Agustin out when she decided she had new plans for the space.

Initially the landlord sent numerous improper notices to scare Agustin out of his home. Then she filed an **improper eviction for non-payment of rent, despite**

the fact that Agustin's rental payments were current. A frantic Agustin, who only speaks Spanish and is not tech savvy, came to Legal Services desperate for help. **A Legal Services attorney prepared an answer to the eviction on Agustin's behalf asserting defective notice. The answer also asserted retaliation** because Agustin had complained to the landlord regarding an array of issues that were never cured, including a broken stove and septic odor due to backyard flooding. **At the court hearing, the Judge ultimately dismissed the eviction.**

Having an advocate to champion his rights enabled Agustin to stay in his home and educated him on his rights as a tenant. He now has time to plan where to move and can avoid being in a vulnerable position.

The combination of this transformational county grant and others detailed in the prior newsletter **will more than double the number of in-house advocates dedicated to eviction defense. Besides increasing capacity to further advance this important work, it gives Legal Services a unique opportunity to partner with local nonprofits to strengthen the community and be part of a collective effort to fight for housing justice through the protection of tenants' rights.** Legal Services is excited to lead this effort and demonstrate the impact and benefit large-scale representation of tenants has in advancing housing stability.

**Client's name and photo changed to protect confidentiality.*



From the Chief Executive Officer Monica Vignes-Pitan

As Miami continues to suffer from a severe housing crisis, **we are honored and grateful to have been awarded \$2.9 million by Miami-Dade County to lead an Eviction Diversion Pilot Program.** This significant public investment in response to the crisis provides us with the **opportunity to have a greater leadership role as a housing advocate in the community.**

Beyond helping residents stay in their homes, we work with local government and other partners to enforce tenant protections, educate the public on tenants' rights, and relentlessly advocate for systemic changes.

To bring further awareness to the housing crisis, we recently assembled a panel of experts to discuss innovative solutions to navigate it. The panelists agreed **timing is urgent and bold solutions are needed.** The crisis impacts every one of us in some way, and we must collectively act to rectify it.

To sustain our advocacy well into the future, last month we launched our planned giving program offering our supporters and friends a concrete way to make a strong, lasting legacy to Legal Services. The pioneer members of **The Legacy Society** are three accomplished women who share the belief in Equal Justice for All - Jacqueline Allee Smith, Edie Laquer, and former Executive Director known to you all, Marcia Cypen. Marcia's life mission was to expand access to justice, and her gift ensures the organization she is so passionate about and has championed, remains secure into the future and beyond her lifetime.

I am extremely grateful for the generosity of these pioneers and encourage you to follow in their path. **Please consider including a planned gift of any size to Legal Services in your estate plans. We would be honored to thank and recognize you as a member of The Legacy Society.**

I extend my deepest gratitude to our entire leadership team and staff for their tireless work, as well as to our donors for their generous support. Please continue to stand with us in making a difference and improving the lives of the most vulnerable in our community.

How You Can Help

By all accounts, Miami is booming. Our hotels are full, and our restaurants are thriving. Wynwood, the Miami Design District, South Beach and Mary Brickell Village are packed. Events such as the Boat Show, Art Basel, the Miami Grand Prix and the Food and Wine Festival attract international attention. Businesses and people are moving here from foreign countries and other states.

Beneath the surface, however, exists an existential crisis, one that involves the lack of affordable housing in Miami. Our community is now recognized as the epicenter of the affordable housing crisis, having surpassed both New York City and Los Angeles for that dubious distinction. Although Mayor Daniella Levine Cava and the County Commission have taken several laudable steps to provide rental relief and incentivize the development of new affordable housing, such efforts barely scratch the surface of meeting the need.

At Legal Services, we seek to even the playing field on behalf of those less fortunate who are unable to do so on their own. We provide legal services to better enable our neighbors to remain in their homes, and our other advocacy focuses on improving their lives by ensuring they have access to income and other essentials. Doing so provides stability and benefits all of us.

While we are able to serve thousands of clients, limited resources do not allow us to serve all of those who need our help. **We therefore ask for your support which will enable us to do more. Our entire community will be better off for it.**

Click [HERE](#) to make a gift today.

Stanley H. Wakshlag, Esq.
Of Counsel, Kenny Nachwalter



From the Foundation Board President Stanley H. Wakshlag



Jose Sabatier, Esq.

Saves Elderly Widow's Home from Reverse Mortgage Foreclosure

Allegra*, a widow in her 80s, has a reverse mortgage loan on her home of over 40 years, which allows her to utilize the equity in her home to meet her living expenses.

She became worried and contacted Legal Services after her lender swiftly moved to foreclose on her home, assertedly for failing to pay property taxes and insurance. Legal Services Attorney Jose Sabatier argued the lender's demand of over \$8,000 in arrears was unenforceable and presented proof of payments made for hazard and flood insurance. After Legal Services engaged in extensive negotiations, the



lender amended its original demand, significantly reducing the amount owed by

nearly \$6,000. Additionally, the lender agreed to a reasonable monthly repayment plan for the outstanding \$2,000. Subsequently, the lender dismissed the foreclosure suit, which meant the world to Allegra who remains safely in her home.

*Client's name and photo changed to protect confidentiality.

Medical-Legal Partnership Offers Disabled Man Access to Healthcare & Benefits



Manuel's* life was turned upside down when he began losing his sight in his mid-50s. He began having difficulty going about the tasks of daily life, and his vision impairment severely impacted his ability to work, as well as care for his elderly mother who suffers from dementia.

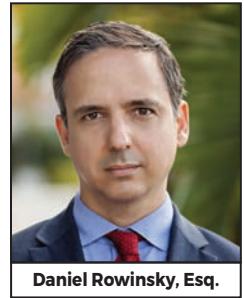
Over a year ago, Manuel was admitted to West Kendall Baptist Hospital for an unrelated matter. There a case manager told him about the medical-legal partnership



(MLP) between Legal Services and the hospital. After meeting with Legal Services Senior Attorney Daniel Rowinsky, Manuel learned he was eligible for food stamps, health insurance, and disability benefits. As a result of our advocacy, the Social Security Administration quickly processed and approved his claim for disability benefits. Manuel now has fixed income to meet his basic needs, as well as nutritional support and healthcare benefits through Medicaid.

While his life will never be the same, Manuel has expressed gratitude for this medical-legal partnership that helped him overcome significant obstacles to benefits and healthcare coverage, especially important in his case for eye care services that would otherwise not be available to him.

*Client's name and photo changed to protect confidentiality.



Daniel Rowinsky, Esq.

2022

BY THE NUMBERS



22,654
PEOPLE HELPED



4,521
CASES HANDLED

LEVERAGING THE POWER OF PRO BONO TO MAXIMIZE IMPACT

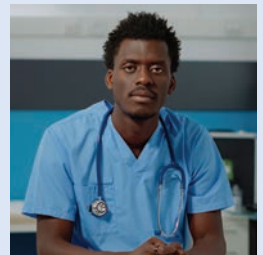
Pro Bono Attorney Recovers Unpaid Wages for Low-Wage Worker

Walter* was hired as a medical assistant at a healthcare facility in Miami. For nearly two years he worked as an hourly employee, and occasionally picked up overtime shifts and incurred work-related travel expenses.

Walter alleged his former employer owed him over \$8,000 in unpaid wages and nearly \$500 in unpaid travel expenses, so he sought the assistance of Legal Services, who connected him with pro bono attorney, Melanie D. Sigel, Associate at Simon Reed & Salazar. As a low-wage worker, Walter struggled to meet daily expenses. The unpaid wages were creating a financial hardship. Ms. Sigel sued to recover the alleged

unpaid wages under the Fair Labor Standards Act and the Florida Minimum Wage Act. To gather evidence, Ms. Sigel subpoenaed documents, served written discovery, and prepared to depose the employer. After discussions with opposing counsel, Ms. Sigel favorably resolved the case for the entire amount originally demanded. Subsequently, the Judge approved the settlement agreement.

Pro bono attorney, Ms. Sigel shared, "I'm happy I was able to assist my client through a difficult time and appreciate that Legal Services was able to connect us. Attorney Zac Davis also worked on this case with me, starting when he was a 3L law student as part of the Florida Pro Bono Law School Challenge. He and I both felt strongly about this case and achieving a positive outcome for our client. Our client often expressed to us how grateful he was for our work."



*Client's name and photo changed to protect confidentiality.



Melanie D. Sigel, Esq.



Our work is made possible through the generous support of our

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Blue Diamond 100,000+

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Donor levels reflect cumulative giving for the campaign period January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2025. Pledges and gifts as of 3/20/2023.

LAW FIRMS, YOU'RE INVITED TO JOIN OUR LEADERSHIP CIRCLE!

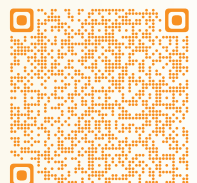
For over five decades, Legal Services has served a critically important role in ensuring access to justice for low-income families and vulnerable populations in our community.

We invite all law firms with offices in Miami and the Florida Keys, regardless of their size, to financially support Legal Services because **we all share the common principle that access to justice is fundamental, regardless of one's circumstances or ability to afford a lawyer.** With the full support of the legal community, we can do much more.

The Leadership Circle recognizes **sustained giving over a three-year period.** Join this distinguished group of supporters, which includes dozens of law firms, who have made a substantial commitment to Building a Community of Equal Justice.

Click [HERE](#) for information on levels and benefits.

**SCAN
TO LEARN
MORE**



Thank you for your consideration!

Making the Case in the Business Community

Housing Insecurity: What It Means For You & Your Business



HOUSING PANEL POSES WITH OUR CEO (from left):

- JASON T. SMITH**, Director of Equity & Engagement, Office of Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava
- ANNIE LORD**, Executive Director, Miami Homes For All
- MONICA VIGUES-PITAN**, CEO, Legal Services of Greater Miami
- ALBERTO MILO, JR.**, President, Related Urban Development Group
- MATT HAGGMAN**, EVP, Opportunity Miami, Miami-Dade Beacon Council

The annual **Business Breakfast Panel** hosted in **February** focused on innovative solutions by different sectors to **tackle Miami's pressing housing crisis** that hurts low-income individuals, the workforce, and small businesses. **Mayor Daniella Levine Cava** kicked off the discussion with warm welcome remarks by video. The panel was moderated by Matt Haggman and featured changemakers across different sectors.

The panelists feel hopeful and are in agreement that this is the time to take action a step further. Through continued open discussions on the crisis, public and private partnerships, and our community coming together, the housing shortage can be rectified.

We are eternally grateful to our **repeat sponsor, Greenberg Traurig**, and all speakers for their expertise and perspective.



Chesterfield Smith Society



ANNUAL FLORIDA BAR FEES ARE DUE SOON! Become a member of the Chesterfield Smith Society when you make a gift in lieu of pro bono. Chesterfield Smith devoted his life to making certain there is a level playing field for everyone and that the rights of the most vulnerable among us are protected with the highest quality of legal advocacy. Your support follows the legacy of Chesterfield Smith and places one more family on the path to economic stability.

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Donor levels reflect annual gifts for the period beginning January 1, 2022. Pledges & gifts as of 3/17/2023. If errors or omissions have occurred, please accept our apologies and call 305-438-2513 to report corrections. Thank you!

* Sustainers

Join

THE LEGACY SOCIETY



The Legacy Society promotes the economic stability of our most vulnerable neighbors and builds a stronger community for generations to come.

Marcia Cypen, former Legal Services Executive Director and founding member of The Legacy Society, has been helping us spread the word about the importance of sound planned giving.



“My past contribution to equal justice is simply not enough—it is essential that I also make a commitment to the future.”

Legal Services is what it is today because of your contributions. Your legacy gift will help ensure that Legal Services continues to thrive in the future.”

Your legacy will serve as a testament to your compassion, creating a bright future for our entire community. Follow Marcia’s example and transform the future of your neighbors by becoming a member of The Legacy Society.

We Thank Our Pioneer Members for Paving the Way!

- Jacqueline Allee Smith*
- Edie Laquer
- Marcia K. Cypen

*Realized gift

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS COUNCIL

The Young Professionals Council’s **mission is to advance access to equal justice by connecting young professionals through community involvement, service, and philanthropy.** The Council members serve as active ambassadors in the community, volunteer time and services, raise funds for clients in need, and host various events.

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Council member, **Brianna Hathaway**, moderated our **Conversations with Leaders** featuring **Judge Rosemary Barkett**. This event series features Miami leaders and is hosted by the Council multiple times throughout the year.



One of the ways the Council supports our clients is through raising money for the Client Fund throughout the year. During their March meeting, they took a hands-on approach and **packed boxes for kids in client families who rely on school lunches**, ensuring that they would have snacks during their Spring Break.

SAVE THE DATE

**JUNE 15
 6:00PM**

Conversations with Leaders Featuring U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of Florida **DARRIN P. GAYLES**

Please Join Us

THE FOURTEENTH ANNUAL

Heart of Giving



May 18, 2023 | 6:30 pm

PRESENTATION OF

**2023 EQUAL JUSTICE
LEADERSHIP AWARD**



ALAN G. GREER, ESQ.
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**PLEASE JOIN US FOR AN EVENING OF LAVISH COCKTAILS,
HORS D'OEUVRES, BUFFET SELECTIONS, AND NETWORKING.**

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