

INNOVATIONS

A special edition of the Pursuing Justice Newsletter

From the desk of Kate McGarvey, LASCO Executive Director

At LASCO, innovation isn't about chasing trends—it's about responding to real needs in our communities with urgency, creativity, and purpose. Every day, our team looks beyond the immediate legal issue to ask a deeper question: How can we solve this problem in a way that helps more people and prevents harm before it starts?

This special edition of our newsletter highlights the ways Legal Aid is innovating to expand access to justice. From new service delivery approaches to creative partnerships and technology-driven tools, we are continually finding new solutions.

These innovations are powered and sustained by our dedicated attorneys and staff—trusted, well-known, and truly embedded in the communities we serve. Those connections allow us to identify gaps, build partnerships, and remove barriers to justice.

As the need for legal help continues to grow, so does our commitment to adapt, lead, and ensure that justice is not a privilege, but a promise.

Partnership Improves Guardianship Application Process

For families caring for loved ones with complex disabilities or conditions related to aging, the process for establishing legal guardianship can be intimidating. By combining innovative technology with our Guardianship Resource Center, LASCO is redesigning the guardianship process to be more accessible and straightforward.

With a shift to online filing in the guardianship process, families without reliable internet or computer access struggle to complete the required paperwork, leading to delays, repeated trips to the courthouse, or giving up altogether. For some families, language barriers can further complicate the process.

LASCO is working with the Franklin County Probate Court to develop a web-based program that walks users through the guardianship application. The program presents questions in plain language and multiple languages, then uses the responses to generate the required legal documents. "Funded through a partnership with the Court, this combination of digital tools and in-person support is already revolutionizing the guardianship process by removing barriers and expanding access to justice. We hope this is just the beginning, with the potential for these innovations to extend into other areas of our work," LASCO Managing Attorney Paul Bryson said.

When it's fully launched, families will be able to complete court forms accurately and efficiently, without making several trips to the courthouse.

[Read more](#)



LASCO guardianship client and her daughter



[From left to right]: Justice for All Fellow Santiago Garcia-Mata and LASCO Supervising Housing Attorney Melissa Lenz with Tenant Advocacy Project Intern Emily McCurry

Reimagining Rent Escrow: LASCO's Clinic Makes the Process Clearer

LASCO's monthly Rent Escrow Brief Advice Clinic is reshaping how tenants access and understand one of the strongest—but often misunderstood—tools available to enforce safe living conditions. Held at the Franklin County Municipal Court, the clinic provides in-person support where tenants are already navigating the process and helps prevent mistakes that can derail an escrow case before it begins.

The clinic challenges the misconception that tenants with repair problems should "just move," said Melissa Lenz, supervising housing attorney. "People love their neighbors, their schools, their routines. They're not trying to uproot their lives," said Lenz, who started the clinic last year. LASCO recognizes that many tenants want safe housing right where they are, she said, and that reality shapes the clinic's work.

In a tight housing market, rent escrow is a crucial accountability tool, and sometimes the only leverage tenants have when repairs aren't being made.

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Innovating Housing Support in Rural Communities

The Rural Housing Team launched a Housing Hotline in 2024 to provide fast, accessible legal help for tenants facing housing issues. Designed to be responsive and efficient, the Hotline connects tenants with experienced Legal Aid attorneys for brief, 20-minute phone consultations.

Many housing disputes can be resolved with quick legal guidance—often preventing eviction or preserving housing assistance before a crisis occurs, said Kristen Lewis, director of advocacy for LASCO's rural program. The Hotline serves about 60 tenants each month, helping families protect their homes and maintain stability.

This innovative approach reflects LASCO's commitment to adapting legal services so they are accessible and responsive—providing timely support when it matters most.

"We know that timely legal advice can make all the difference," Lewis said. "By rethinking how we deliver services, the Hotline helps us protect homes, reduce housing instability, and reach tenants when help matters most."

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Modernizing the Pro Bono Experience

Our new Paladin Pro Bono Calendar streamlines the volunteer experience, making it more transparent and accessible for individuals interested in multiple clinic options.

Volunteers can easily browse all 2026 clinic dates, explore opportunities at a glance, and sign up—no profile needed. Smart filters help volunteers sort by practice area, engagement type, cause, community served, volunteer role, or even the skills they want to develop, such as in-court experience, client counseling, or community education.

"Every innovation we adopt is in service of one goal: making justice more accessible," said Dianna Parker, director of pro bono & community engagement.

Explore the calendar at www.lasco.org/volunteer-calendar and join us in expanding access to justice.

Transforming Access in Fairfield: LASCO's On-Site Legal Help Center

LASCO launched the Fairfield County Legal Help Center in June in partnership with the Fairfield County Clerk of Courts—bringing attorneys right into the courthouse to provide needed on-site help. Whether it's preparing for court, completing paperwork, or getting a case started correctly, Legal Aid is there to solve problems before they become bigger hurdles.

Clerk of Courts Branden Meyer said, "Having Legal Aid on-site means people get help when they need it most. Sometimes all it takes is immediate guidance to move forward with confidence—and LASCO is making that happen."

Domestic cases can be complex and resource-intensive, so LASCO can't fully represent everyone. The Legal Help Center bridges that gap, giving people the support they need to open their cases properly and take the next steps with assurance.

Jason, a father fighting to regain custody of his three children, experienced the difference firsthand. "I came in desperate, and they met me with patience. They helped me get the correct documents ready for court that same day. Without them, I wouldn't have come prepared."



Jason, Legal Help Center client

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