“I feel safer. Life is better.”
–Legal Aid Society of Columbus client
OUR MISSION

LASC provides civil legal aid and advocacy to combat unfairness and injustice and to help people rise out of poverty.

Cover: Pro Bono Coordinator Patricia Vargas Vegas (center) assists a client at the Franklin County Driver’s License clinic.
In 2019, the Legal Aid Society of Columbus helped more low-income individuals and families than ever before. LASC lawyers were proactive in efforts to provide our traditional and much-needed legal services in areas such as domestic violence and consumer law, as well as adding areas of practice like community economic development and initiating new service delivery methods.

In this report, you will read about the county-wide impact of our Tenant Advocacy Project (TAP), which assists Franklin County tenants with disputing eviction filings as well as removing evictions from their records. You will also read about the creation and success of our driver’s license reinstatement clinics—a new focus area for our organization’s members and partners.

This year, in collaboration with our partners, we helped more than 2,000 individuals take steps toward reobtaining their licenses and overcoming employment barriers. We also became more connected with the neighborhoods we serve through our community lawyering practice. As a result, we increased the number of safe and available housing options through our nuisance abatement work and support of local organizations and small businesses through our Neighborhood Stabilization program.

These partnerships, coalitions and connections are more important than ever as we navigate 2020 and a public health crisis. While the pandemic and economic fallout may strain our clients and their communities the most, we will be stronger together combatting unfairness and injustice to help people rise out of poverty.

Sincerely,

Janica A. Pierce Tucker, Esq., Chair
Taft Stettinius & Hollister

Kathleen C. McGarvey
Executive Director

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Executive Director
24,941 people helped in 2019

- 11,037 Children
- 11,360 Adults
- 2,544 Seniors

"[LASC] improved my life by giving me this opportunity."
– Legal Aid Society of Columbus client

10,396 total cases

Languages spoken by clients
Spanish, Somali, Russian, Chinese, Arabic, French, Korean, Portuguese, American Sign Language, English
Franklinton Cycle Works was growing and wanted to expand its facilities on Columbus’ West Side. The nonprofit, which provides low-cost access to bikes and safety classes, wanted to buy its existing retail space and the neighboring building. In need of legal representation to facilitate the purchase, they turned to LASC. “It was very helpful to have someone familiar with the process walk us through it,” says Jonathan Youngman, executive director of Franklinton Cycle Works. “Legal Aid made the process so easy.”

Thanks to funding provided by the Ohio Access to Justice Foundation from a Bank of America settlement, LASC assists nonprofits and low-income small business owners with their legal needs, says Staff Attorney Paul Bryson.

“The grant allows us to magnify the impact of other organizations that are also focused on helping low-income people rise out of poverty,” he says. “Using staff attorneys and pro bono volunteers, we provide free assistance, allowing them to put a greater percentage of their limited funds toward their good works.”

Cycle Works began in 2011 to support largely low-income households that use bicycles as their primary means of transportation and quickly became a fixture in the neighborhood. Youngman and his volunteers not only teach bike owners maintenance and repair, they provide a sense of community where those they help often return to assist others. “For the people who come through our shop, bikes are their lifeline. It’s the difference between keeping a job and not having a job,” Youngman says. “Legal Aid’s help in securing this piece of property is absolutely going to have a long-term impact.”

About the grant:
Ohio Access to Justice Foundation awarded LASC the grant in 2017 to promote neighborhood revitalization by providing legal support to help economically stabilize several transitioning neighborhoods near downtown Columbus. The grant also funds estate planning services for low-income senior homeowners and efforts to address large-scale housing conditions problems.
NUISANCE ABATEMENT SUIT IMPROVES HOUSING CONDITIONS

Vacant, boarded-up houses blight communities and threaten the well-being of entire neighborhoods. By working to abate nuisance properties and improve housing conditions in occupied units, LASC is helping to increase the availability of safe rental housing. LASC filed a nuisance abatement suit against a 190-unit HUD-subsidized apartment complex in Linden. When the complaint was filed, the complex had more than 90 outstanding code violation notices from the city, citing 622 separate violations. While the case against the complex continues, 75% of the violation notices have been addressed. Additionally, LASC has already secured approximately $14,000 in rent abatement and other damages for our

LASC ASSISTS SISTERS OF EMPOWERMENT

Sisters of Empowerment is a nonprofit that provides job readiness, financial literacy and home ownership training to low-income people. LASC helped the organization secure a licensing agreement and grant to provide a trademarked financial education program to its clients. At the graduation program for the first cohort, all participants reported saving an unprecedented amount of their income, and two participants were in the process of securing a loan to buy their first home.
COURT MOTIONS LEAD TO EVICTION RECORDS PURGE

Thousands of low-income tenants struggle to find safe and affordable housing and end up homeless because of prior eviction cases. For decades, all Franklin County eviction filings—regardless of outcome—were publicly available on the court’s online database. Those “records” followed tenants even in cases in which the evictions were improperly filed. Landlords relied on those eviction filings and records to make decisions about whether to rent to would-be tenants.

“While many of these tenants were never evicted, they were hampered by court records linking them to an eviction. Often, they had steady income and money for a security deposit but still could not find a place to rent,” explains LASC Housing Attorney James Mackey. “Once an eviction is filed against a tenant, it has a sort of blacklisting effect, preventing that tenant from finding approval from a new landlord.”

To challenge this unfair practice, LASC housing advocates began filing court motions to remove eviction records from the online docket in cases in which an eviction should never have been filed. After receiving a favorable decision in February 2019, attorneys filed additional motions to highlight the magnitude of the problem, leading the court to invite LASC to serve on a committee that would help develop a new online records policy.
Based in part on LASC’s input, the court decided that all eviction records older than three years would be removed from its online database. The court also created procedures through which people who do not want to wait three years for the automatic removal can file motions to remove eviction records.

“This policy change has greatly increased housing opportunities for many in our community,” Mackey said. “It delivers justice for all renters, not just low-income tenants.”

“We just want to make sure housing is available, and maybe lessen the number of hoops that people have to jump through,” Franklin County Municipal Court Clerk Lori M. Tyack said. “A lot of times, people just look to see if there are any records when they do a search. They don’t necessarily open it to see how it was settled.”

(The Columbus Dispatch, Jan. 14, 2020)

The initial purge resulted in the removal of more than 400,000 eviction records from the court’s online database.

Moving forward, the court anticipates deleting 15,000 additional records annually.
Driver’s License Clinics Get Many Back on the Road

For years, Shawn King wanted to take a more active role in his family's business, but his contributions were limited because he did not have a driver’s license. Without a license, he couldn't make bank deposits or pick up supplies for the restaurant and bar. Instead, he found a factory job and relied on his mom to take him to and from work.

King attended a driver’s license reinstatement clinic at the Franklin County Municipal Court in April 2019. Working with legal aid and numerous state and county agencies, he was able to resolve a child support issue that led to his license suspension more than a decade ago. “Everything was right there. It made it easy,” he says. “Everyone there wanted to help. I got my license within a month of the event.”

King now works full-time in the family business and enjoys the freedom and financial stability that come with a driver’s license. “I can go anywhere. I’m not always looking over my shoulder,” he says. “It also took a lot of stress and burden off of my mother.”

In Ohio, where drivers can lose their licenses for more than 30 reasons, it can cost thousands of dollars to have them reinstated. For many low-income people this becomes an insurmountable roadblock that leads to limited employment and education opportunities, missed medical appointments, and decreased access to essential services. More than 60% of the state's 3 million-plus driver’s license suspensions are unrelated to safe driving. Instead, most stem from missing child support, insurance or court-related payments, or failing to appear in court.

When the state legislature approved a pilot amnesty program that waived Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles’ reinstatement fees, LASC saw an opportunity to help many clients address a significant barrier to prosperity. Legal Aid partnered with local courts and clerks, BMV, Ohio Access to Justice Foundation, Ohio State Bar Association, county Job & Family Services and Child Support Enforcement, volunteer attorneys, and insurance agencies to organize clinics designed to provide each participant with individual reinstatement steps and an opportunity to resolve as many steps as possible in one day. Nearly 1,500 people attended two clinics in Franklin County. Clinics serving several dozen more clients were held in Marion and Delaware counties.

More than 10% of clients served were able to apply for limited driving privileges on the day of the clinic.
CQE Awareness Boosts Job Opportunities

Building on the success of monthly clinics to assist clients with record sealing and applications for Certificates of Qualification for Employment (CQEs), LASC Staff Attorney Kathi Schear helped form Second Chance Opportunities for Restorative Employment Ohio. The SCORE Ohio coalition focuses on educating employers about second-chance hiring.

The group, which includes representatives from state agencies, human resource officials and the Columbus Chamber of Commerce, organizes events and outreach to introduce employers to CQEs – a rigorous review of a person’s background and criminal convictions designed to increase job opportunities for those with a criminal past by providing assurances to employers about the holder’s employability.

During his keynote address at one event, Lt. Gov. Jon Husted called on attendees “to knock down the barriers that stand in people’s way,” adding that restored citizens could add much to the job market. “We have to prepare ourselves as a state and nation to prosper,” he said.

FRANKLIN COUNTY DRIVER’S LICENSE CLINICS AT A GLANCE:

- **1400+** clients served
- **$118,000+** in costs/fines dismissed by the court
- **$20,000+** in waived filing fees
- **$445,000+** waived by Ohio BMV

LASC attorneys Patrick Higgins and Kathi Schear

Lt. Gov. Jon Husted
The Urban Resurrection Community Development Corporation awarded **William H. Ross** the “Mission and Outreach Service Award” for his work at the monthly Brief Advice clinics held at the Mt. Olivet Baptist Church in Columbus.

**Kathi Schear** received the “2019 Legal Advocacy Social Justice Award” from Think Make Live Youth, a nonprofit that provides innovative leadership programs for at-risk youth. The award recognized Schear’s work to increase opportunities for people with barriers related to past mistakes.

Ethiopian Tewahedo Social Services presented the **Domestic Team** with its “Advocate for Justice Award” in recognition of LASC’s work on behalf of immigrants and refugees.

“They handled everything—during the entire process, which took a lot of stress off me. I feel as though everyone...took a special interest in me and treated me as a person instead of a case file. It felt like [LASC] genuinely cared about the outcome.”

–Legal Aid Society of Columbus client
FINANCIALS

2019 PROJECTED REVENUE

$7,020,000

- Grants: 86.7%
- Contributions: 1.9%
- Attorney Fees: 0.2%
- Investment Income: 10.5%
- Other: 0.7%

100.0%

2019 PROJECTED EXPENSES

$6,210,000

- Legal Program: 92.0%
- General & Administrative: 6.8%
- Fundraising: 1.2%

100.0%
DONORS

$2 - 3 Million
Ohio Access to Justice Foundation

$1 - 2 Million
Legal Services Corporation

$100,000 - $199,999
ADAMH Board of Franklin County
City of Columbus
Columbus Bar Foundation
Internal Revenue Service Low Income Taxpayer Clinic
Nationwide Children’s Hospital
Ohioans for Better Birth Outcomes
Victims of Crime Act

$50,000 - $99,999
American Electric Power
Central Ohio Office on Aging

$20,000 - $49,999
Equal Justice Works Foundation
GUND Foundation
National Health Law Foundation
Porter Wright Morris & Arthur
Senior Options
Supreme Court of Ohio
United States Housing and Urban Development
United Way of Central Ohio
Vorys Sater Seymour & Pease

$10,000 - $19,999
American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers Foundation
Baker Hostetler
Brickler & Eckler

$5,000 - $9,999
Arnold, James
Babich, Larry
Bailey Cavalieri
Barnes & Thornburg
Benesch Friedlander Coplan & Arnnoff
Carpenter Lipps & Leland
Crabbe Brown & James
Jones Day

$2,500 - $4,999
Alexander, David
Cardinal Health
Drake, Brenda & Michael
Gallagher Gams Pryor Tallan & Littrell
Itani, Catriona R.
Kitrick Lewis & Harris
Maguire Schneider Hassay
Mock, Carol and Baum, Lawrence
Opelt, Vivian
PNC Fundraiser for Children
Pryce, Deborah D.

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Itani, Catriona R.
Kitrick Lewis & Harris
Maguire Schneider Hassay
Mock, Carol and Baum, Lawrence
Opelt, Vivian
PNC Fundraiser for Children
Pryce, Deborah D.
Ray, Frank
Reminger
Sferra, Anne Marie
Zeiger Tigges & Little

$1,000 - $2,499
Allen Stovall Neuman Fisher & Ashton
Alliance Data
Anonymous
Baker, Lisa & Rhodes
Banvard, Kris & Deming, Paula
Boyer, John
Boylan, Mr. & Mrs. John (in honor of David J. Boylan & Kara H. Hernstein)
Carlile Patchen & Murphy
Crabbe Brown & James
Crabtree, Molly
English, Faye
Fisher, Judith
Grandon, Pamela

$500 - $999
Bonasera, Thomas
Buchenroth, Stephen & Vicki
Credit Education Coalition
Gallicchio, Nova
Ghazi, Nicol
Hoffman, John & Lisa
Isaac Wiles Burkholder & Teetor
IWIRC
Jones, Daniel M.
Jordan, Michael S.
Key Bank
Khorrami, Mina & Jam
Lester, Brandon J.
Luper Neidenthal & Logan
Mathews, Annie
Moots, Philip
Network for Good
Newhouse Prophater Kolman & Hogan
Pierce Tucker, Janica

$1 - $499
Addams, Lester A.
Amazon Smile
Baker, Judith
BalletMet
Barcelona Restaurant
Beall, Clifford J.
Beare, Carrie
Bent, Virginia
Biehl, Adam
Bimler, Joseph & Patricia
Blackwell, Bonnie
Bowers, Brenda
Powers, Victoria
Schneider Downs
Strip Hoppers Leithart McGrath & Terlecky
Terlecky, Myron & Karen
Weiler, Robert
Weltman Weinberg & Reis
Each year, dedicated volunteers join LASC to pursue our mission of combatting unfairness and injustice. We are grateful to the following for their time and expertise.

James Abrams
Christina Abdelshahid
Eunice Ahn
Laing Akers
Becca Alexander
Devon Alexander
Sean Alto
Daniel Anderson
Mark Anderson
Samantha Anderson
Doug Anderson
Beth Angell
Betty Appell
Lisa Armour
Jocelyn Armstrong
Veronica Armstrong
Ingrid Arvelo
Josef Asfoura
Tanya Askew
Angela Atamas
Mary Augsburger
Martin Baba
Vicki Babbert
Lawrence Babich
Ted Babich
Ashley Baker
Shannon Baldwin
William Ballam
Lisa Banal
Belinda Barnes
Carol Barnum
Julia Barragate
Sarah Barrett
Gillian Bateyunga
Howard Baumwell
Richard Bechtol
Lauren Beck
Eric Becker
Jason Beehler
Christopher Begin
Ken Bellaire
Vladimir Belo
Yass Benis
Adam Bennett
James Berendsen
Robert Bergman
Ian Betts
David Bhaerman
Jason Bichsel
Audrey Bidwell
Katie Biega
Jacob Bigby
Kim Biggs
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Erica Bishop
Mark Bjertness
Peggy Blackmore
Desiree Blankenship
David Bloomfield
Sally Bloomfield
Lilly Boehmer
Kelley Boller
Alvin Borromeo
Arlene Boruchowitz
Amy Bostic
Hannah Botkin-Doty
Carolyn Boyce
Josh Bradford
Doug Brant
John Brant
Marjorie Brant
Edward Braum
Alexa Breitenstine
Karissa Brenneman
Emily Brewer
Katy Brewer
Margaret Brewer
Derek Bricker
Jennifer Brisco
Aileen Brock
Erin Broderick
John Brody
Sasha Brooks
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Pam Burkitt
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Miriam Burroughs
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George Calloway
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Rosina Caponi
Rose Carlyon
Kendra Carpenter
Sandra Carrillo
Jacob Carruthers
Allen Carter
Heidi Carter
Julia Cash
Elaine Cashy
Cassandra Casto
Christol Caudill
Sophia Chang
Eric Cheng
Abigail Chin
Pearl Chin
Susan Choe
Ann Marie Christ
Samantha Cira
Scott Ciszewski
Joe Clark
Lynda Clark
Nicole Clark
Micah Clark Moody
Patrick Clark
Akunnaya Cleghorn
Holly Coats
Johanna Coffin
Marshall Cohen
Robert Cohen
Karen Cohn
Joseph Colburn
John Coming
Tyler Compton
Kimberly Conery
Myra Conley
Laura Conway
Guylynn Cook
Ben Cooper
Tyler Cope
Paula Copeland
Matthew Corcoran
Mary Coridan
Peggy Corn
Abigail Counts
James Coutinho
Caroline Cox
Michael Cox
Molly Crabtree
Matthew Crawford
Margaret Crookston
Casey Cross
Amy Crossin
Cain Crouse
Nathan Crowell
Rachel Crowl
Juliea Crumes
Caitlyn Cunningham
Christopher Curley
W. Charles Curley
Chris Curry
Christine Cushman
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Jack Dahm
Kristina Dahmann
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Lydia DeLord
Lucia DeMatteo
Danielle Demming
Elizabeth Dengler
Patrick Denier
David Dennis
Pat Devine
Ryan DeYoung
Gregory Dick
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William Donovan
Robert Dorans
Troy Doucet
Daveon Douglin
William Dowling
Brian Doyle-Wenger
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Kevin Duffy
Trudy Farrar Casper
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Micheal Ealy
Tom Eck
Anne Eckhart
Zachary Eddy
DeGerald Edwards
Sarah Edwards
Erii Egan
Kathy Ehrle
Joel Elkin
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Taylor Ellerkamp
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Justin Frey
Angela Frost
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Danelle Gagliardi
Claire Gaglione
Chuck Gall
Matthew Galla
Amanda Gallant
Christopher Gallutia
Yanling Gao
Jason Gardner
Shanel Garrett
Jessa Gary
Ian Gaunt
Steven Gazdag
Susan Gellman
Jason Gerken
Elle Gerwig
Ajeet Gill
Camille Gill
Gurjeevan Gill
Victoria Giller
John Gilligan
Chelsea Gilmore
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Dinu Godage
Ken Goldberg
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Kate Graham
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Ryan Graham
Katharine Granger
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Quinn Gray
Amy Grayem
Hannah Grayem
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Haleigh Hamad
Lisa Hamant
Orsolya Hamar-Hilt
Christina Hambleton
Karen Hamilton
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Jiwon Han
Sue Fauber
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Beth Harding
Aly Haque
Howard Harsh IV
Michael Hardesty
Beth Harding
Araminta Harmon
Eryka Harper