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September 2022

# Amidst Housing Crisis, Legal Services Expands Funding Streams to Stabilize Households & Improve Tenants' Protections

Legal Services is a leader in creative, aggressive advocacy to defend and enforce tenants' rights. In 2021, 55% of all cases handled by the program were housing related, a direct consequence of Miami-Dade's affordable housing crisis, which was only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Rents in Miami rose 49% between December 2020 and December 2021, and according to the recent Census Pulse Data, 36.7% of Miami tenants say eviction/foreclosure is likely in the next two months. Due to these circumstances, Secretary Marcia Fudge of U.S. Housing and Urban Development declared Miami the epicenter of the housing crisis in this country.

**Legal advocacy to prevent the loss of housing is vital.** Without representation, most tenants lose their cases and are ultimately evicted. 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. Evictions also disproportionately harm marginalized communities and have lasting negative effects on

**81% of landlords are represented by legal counsel in evictions, but fewer than 2% of tenants in Miami-Dade eviction cases have legal representation**

mental and physical health, family unity, and economic well-being.

To support the continued delivery of high-quality eviction defense legal assistance and meet the increased demand for services, Legal Services has actively

pursued funding to support our eviction defense work. Here are some updates on these efforts:

- Recently awarded a two-year grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to represent tenants in eviction cases;
- Received grant funding from Miami-Dade Commissioner Eileen Higgins;
- Received two grants from the City of Miami through the Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) Program; and
- Received two consecutive grants from the City of Miami Beach to provide eviction defense to residents in District 5 and Miami Beach respectively.

In addition, Legal Services is continually pursuing resources to increase access to legal assistance so that tenants who are facing the complex eviction process are represented in court, giving tenants a fair chance to defend their rights and stay in their homes.

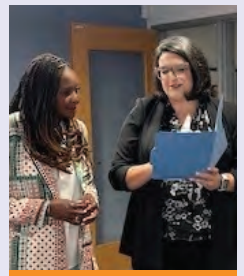


## From the Executive Director Monica Vignes-Pitan

Our community is struggling to thrive amidst soaring inflation and a housing crisis. Legal advocacy to secure and protect basic needs such as housing, healthcare, education and income is critical for low-income families. However, the need for assistance exceeds our community's resources, and it's a national problem. The Legal Services Corporation recently issued the **2022 Justice Gap Report**, a national survey of the "justice gap" — the difference between the civil legal needs of the low-income community and the resources available to meet them. It estimates that **low-income Americans do not get any or enough legal help for 92% of their substantial civil legal problems**. Additionally, it reported that in the South, 75% of households living in poverty had one or more legal problems in the past year. In Miami-Dade that represents approximately 300,000, low-income residents that had a legal problem last year.

Although the need can be overwhelming, legal advocacy has a lasting impact on our clients and community. Every family that we assist is in a stronger position to access opportunities and achieve their goals. Therefore, we are focusing on expanding our capacity to provide high quality legal advocacy to bridge the justice gap. Since last spring, we have onboarded eight new attorneys.

Our efforts were recently recognized when we had the privilege of sitting down with the newly installed **American Bar Association President Deborah Enix-Ross** to talk about our advocacy and response efforts. Given our reputation as a model legal services program, our attorneys had the chance to share their insights on the current environment. We look forward to this as the first of many opportunities to collaborate.



## How You Can Help

As the South Florida real estate market boom explodes into even the most modest areas, Legal Services of Greater Miami needs your help. The staggering statistics are not limited to gleaming high-rise apartments on Brickell Avenue. **Median rents increased 58% in Miami over the last two years** to an average of \$2,988. Two-bedroom apartments in Little Havana and Overtown currently average \$1,849 and \$1,665, respectively. Aside from the fact that most workers can barely afford to live within remote proximity to their jobs, the market phenomenon is fertile ground for tenant issues. **Legal Services is part of the solution to the legal challenges facing the working poor and financially vulnerable in our community.** It is expanding its housing advocacy unit to address these needs. We can all help by investing in Legal Services through pro bono or donating within our means.

Think about those in our local service industries with whom we interface daily, either physically or virtually. Imagine businesses seeking to hire or retain employees who cannot reach them. **Without a stable place to live, the workforce that serves our economic engine dwindles. Without appropriate staff, our local businesses and the entire community suffers.**

While Legal Services cannot solve this critical problem single-handedly, it is part of the solution. Please join them in this endeavor.

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

Aleida Martinez-Molina  
Partner, AXS Law Group



## From Board Member Aleida Martinez-Molina





Kathryn Mesa, Esq.

## Fighting Chance for Family Living on Edge of Eviction

Ekaterina and her husband are **hardworking parents to their two teenage children**. The **pandemic deeply impacted their ability to work as artisans**. When they found a new rental property that allowed them to perform carpentry and other reparative work as a means to pay rent, they were grateful to be able to use their natural gifts and talents to secure stable housing. However, **after moving into the property and making significant repairs, the landlord reneged on their rental negotiations and sought to evict them**.

They turned to Legal Services for help. Attorney **Kathryn Mesa successfully defended them against the eviction and negotiated a favorable agreement**. The settlement agreement allowed them to **stay housed through the summertime** to avoid disrupting their children's lives during the school year and **saved them at least \$6,000**. Additionally, it **avoided a court judgment** on their record, which enabled them to find alternate housing. Our legal advocacy played a critical role in keeping Ekaterina and her family housed.



## Increased Tax Savings for Nonprofits Generate Long-Term Benefits

Legal Services' Community Economic Development (CED) attorneys applied for charitable and affordable housing property tax exemptions on behalf of several Miami nonprofits that are building affordable housing and providing other supportive services critical to low-income communities. **Because of Legal Services' assistance, these nonprofits are saving approximately \$130,000 annually, which they can now reinvest into their charitable programs and affordable housing**. This provides support for the development and growth of these nonprofits to carry out their mission and to continue to play an important role in our community.

**One such nonprofit is Touching Miami with Love (TML) who serves nearly 1,000 children and adults** by providing hope, opportunities, and resources to inspire, educate, and empower. TML's all-encompassing educational enrichment programs provide needed support for K-12th Graders through after-school programs, summer camps, and in-school services.

*"Touching Miami with Love is so thankful for the impeccable service, and guidance CED has provided our organization. Through CED services, we have successfully positioned our organization for continual growth, which will positively impact our Overtown and Homestead communities,"* said TML's CEO Trina Harris.

## Pro Bono Attorneys Save Senior's Only Asset, Her Home



Dolores and her mother were very close. They lived together in Dolores' mother's home in Miami and pulled resources and shared expenses. Her **mother passed away in 2008 without a will, and the mortgaged home was still in her mother's name**.

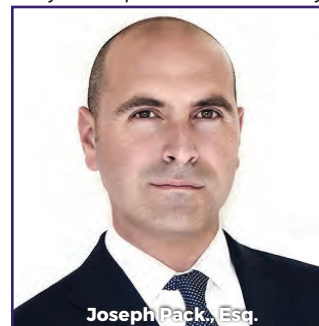
**Dolores continued to live in the house and continued to timely pay the mortgage, property taxes, and other expenses**. Months passed before the mortgage lender realized that the borrower passed away and defaulted the loan before allowing Dolores to explain. The **mortgage lender demanded immediate payment of the full loan amount** as

Dolores was neither the mortgage holder nor the homeowner. She was overwhelmed and **found herself under serious threat of foreclosure**. Making matters worse, the mortgage lender would not cooperate with Dolores until her mother's estate was probated, a seemingly insurmountable challenge with siblings in South America. Dolores found a family friend willing to buy the \$37,000 mortgage and become her lender.

**Then, Pack Law stepped in to prepare the loan documents between Dolores and the new debt-holder, as well as handle the probate work for her pro bono as the home was the only asset**. The matter transpired over a year, requiring that Pack Law defend the alleged loan defaults (none of which were monetary) and the imminent foreclosure threat and probate the estate, coordinating those matters internationally to ensure legal title of the home would be properly transferred to Dolores, clearing the way for her to adjudicate issues with the mortgage lender.

**The pro bono team did a fabulous job. Dolores kept the home she shared with her late mother and negotiated fiercely with the bank for a favorable outcome**. When the case was finally resolved Dolores expressed, *"I am very grateful to attorneys Joseph Pack and Jessey Krehl for taking my case, for helping me through this process in very difficult times. They taught me that there is light at the end of the tunnel. I cannot thank them enough."*

**Campaign Committee member Joseph Pack originally became involved with Legal Services through his pro bono work**. *"As part of Pack Law's commitment to giving back and supporting a greater good, we were happy to donate our services to help save from foreclosure an elderly homeowner who is able to make payments. No matter how complex the legal nuances are, we're ready to tackle them and do whatever it takes to help victims who need it – anytime."* – Joe Pack.



PACK LAW

## SUPPORT EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE THROUGH PRO BONO SERVICE

Follow Joe and Jessey's lead as well as countless other pro bono attorneys who give of their time and skills to create a meaningful impact.

### PRO BONO OPPORTUNITIES

#### ON DEMAND CLE TRAINING IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- Tenants' Equal Justice Clinic
- Eviction Defense Project

Mentorship and malpractice insurance provided.





# The Thirteenth Annual HEART OF GIVING

## From Our Hearts to Yours, THANK YOU for a Successful Heart of Giving Celebration!

Over 300 people representing the legal, business, and civic community gathered at the beautiful Paradise Plaza Event Space in the Miami Design District, Thursday, May 12, 2022 at the **Thirteenth Annual Heart of Giving Celebration & Judicial Reception**.

The **2022 Equal Justice Leadership Awards** were presented to **The Honorable Cecilia M. Altonaga**, Chief United States District Judge of the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida, **The Honorable Michael A. Hanzman**, Circuit Judge of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit Court, **The Honorable Nushin G. Sayfie**, Chief Judge of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit Court for their outstanding contributions to the pursuit of justice.

Legal Services also presented the **2022 Equal Justice Public Service Awards** to **Chairman Jose "Pepe" Diaz** and **Commissioner Sally Heyman** of the Miami-Dade County Commission.

**Louis Aguirre**, **WPLG Local 10 News Anchor**, served as Master of Ceremonies, and the 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 Vigues-Pitan**.

Title sponsors for the evening were **Kozyak Tropin and Throckmorton** and **Ryder System**, and **Bacardi** was the exclusive liquor sponsor. Without the incredible generosity of our sponsors, attendees and event partners, this event would not be possible.

### SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR HOST COMMITTEE:

Lilly Ann Sanchez, *Chair* | Jason Alderman | Alexandra Bach Lagos | Deborah Baker | Tiffani Lee Cary Lubetsky | Christopher Noel | Sheila Oretsky

To learn more, [READ HERE](#) the press release published in The Florida Bar News.



Bob Fatovic, Laura Galeano, and Kitty Dumas



Commissioner Sally A. Heyman and Chairman Pepe Diaz



Commissioner Sally A. Heyman (Honoree), Chairman Jose "Pepe" Diaz (Honoree), Judge Nushin G. Sayfie (Honoree), Monica Vigues-Pitan, Judge Michael A. Hanzman (Honoree), and Morris Copeland



Judge Cecilia Altonaga (Honoree)



Coral Lopez-Castro and Judge Michael A. Hanzman



Darrell Payne, Jeffrey Crockett, Monica Vigues-Pitan, Teresa Enriquez, Marissa Glatzer and Jordi Gusó



Louis Aguirre and Lilly Ann Sanchez (Event Chair)



Commissioner Sally A. Heyman, Judge Patricia A. Seitz and Judge Gina Beovides



# Celebration & Judicial Reception



Hannah Kula, Elliot Kula and Eric Bluestein



John Kozyak, Judge Nushin G. Sayfie and Judge Alan Fine



Judge Nushin G. Sayfie, Judge Michael A. Hanzman and Lilly Ann Sanchez



Monica Vignes-Pitan, Ida Wright, Rochelle Jackson, Juanita Alvarez, Sonya Brown-Wilson and Rochelle Hampton



John Hughes, David McDonald, Maria McDonald and John "Jack" McLuskey



Porpoise Evans, Manuel Dobrinsky, and Sophia and David Howard



Jim Robinson, Joseph Pack, Zachary Dickens, Andrew M. Moss, and Judge Rodolfo Ruiz II



Judge Alexander Bokor, Raoul Cantero and Jim Robinson



Richard Fechter, Monica Vignes-Pitan and Tiffani Lee



Scott Dimond and Sarah Engel



Judge Bronwyn Miller, Judge Michael A. Hanzman, Sarah Egan and Judge Migna Sanchez-Llorens



Stanley Wakshlag, James Meyer and Katie DeLuca



Joshua Truppman and Alaina Fotiu-Wojtowicz



Donell Hicks and Matthew Dates



Wifredo Ferrer, Lilly Ann Sanchez, Judge Nushin G. Sayfie, and Monica Vignes-Pitan

Our work is made possible through the generous support of our

## Leadership Circle Donors

### Blue Diamond 100,000+

Edie Laquer Foundation – *Endowed Women & Children's Rights Attorney Chair*  
Harke Clasby & Bushman – *Social Justice Fellowship in Honor of Nancy T. Clasby*  
Holland & Knight  
Jacqueline Allee Smith – *Jacqueline and Chesterfield Smith Fellows Program*  
Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson, P.A.

### Diamond 50,000+

The Fine & Greenwald Foundation  
Helliwell Family Foundation - *In Memory of Paul L. E. Helliwell, Esq.*  
Ryder System, Inc.  
Yavitz Cypen Foundation - *Harry & Irving Cypen Tax Fellowship*

### Gold 25,000+

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Coffey Burlington, PL  
Cole, Scott & Kissane, P.A.  
Genovese Joblove & Battista, P.A.  
Gunster  
Hunton Andrews Kurth  
Kluger Kaplan Silverman Katzen & Levine, PL  
Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton  
McDermott Will & Emery  
McLuskey, McDonald & Hughes, P.A.  
Ross & Girten  
Ver Ploeg & Marino  
Weiss Serota Helfman Cole & Bierman  
White & Case

### Silver 10,000+

Honorable A. Leo Adderly  
Dolan Dobrinsky Rosenblum Bluestein  
Evensky & Katz/Foldes Wealth Management  
Greenberg Traurig  
Hamilton Miller & Birthisel  
Harper Meyer Perez Hagen O'Connor  
Albert Dribin & DeLuca  
Heffler Claims Group – *Cy Pres Award*  
Commissioner Sally A. Heyman, District 4 Office  
Kevin & Yolonda Jacobs  
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Kenny Nachwalter, P.A.  
Leon Cosgrove  
Levine Kellogg Lehman Schneider + Grossman  
Meland Budwick, P.A.  
Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner & Smith, Inc. – *Cy Pres Award*  
Morgan, Lewis & Bockius  
The Moskowitz Law Firm  
Nelson Mullins  
Peckar & Abramson  
Podhurst Orseck  
Rivero Mestre  
William J. & Tina Rosenberg Foundation

### Bronze 5,000+

A to Z Injury Law  
Scott L. Baena  
Berk, Merchant, & Sims, PLC  
Berkowitz Pollack Brant Advisors + CPAs  
Boies Schiller Flexner  
Karen Brooks  
Buckner, Shifrin, Etter, Dugan & Bradfute  
Day Pitney  
First Horizon Bank  
The Honorable Mary Jo Francis  
Gamba & Herrera Trial Lawyers  
Gelber Schacter Greenberg, P.A.  
Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani  
Grove Bank & Trust  
Gwen S. Cherry Black Women Lawyers Association  
The Jill & Neil Berman Philanthropic Fund  
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Wiseheart Foundation

Donor levels reflect cumulative giving for the campaign period January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2022. Pledges and Gifts as of 8/2/2022

## Join Our Monthly Giving Program & Become a Sustainer

Monthly giving is an automatic, impactful, and affordable way to support Legal Services' mission year-round. Your commitment allows us to think and plan for the future of Legal Services and our community members. Our supporters are the reason we're able to passionately pursue equal justice. Consider becoming a Sustainer today with a recurring gift.

**Thank you to our founding Sustainers!**

**William Burdette ■ Marcia Cypen ■ Rachel Glade ■ Eric Hinz ■ Sandra Regner**



# Donor Spotlight: Fellowship Program

## THE JACQUELINE ALLEE SMITH FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM



This summer we have 15 law clerks in the Jacqueline A. Smith Legal Fellowship Program, all thanks to the generosity of our fellowship funders. Smith herself was a pioneer and leader in the legal community. To honor her memory, Legal Services developed the fellowship program creating greater access to justice and educating future lawyers on the needs of our community and the impact of their engagement. These funded opportunities allow us to hire some of the best and brightest students, teaching them the importance of legal aid work and giving them vital hands-on law firm experience. Thanks to these donors, we can develop a strong fellowship program that will flourish for years to come.

## JULIE AZUAJE LEGAL FELLOWSHIP



Funded by a multi-year pledge from Ryder, in memory of General Counsel, Julie Azuaje, who served on the Legal Services Board of Directors for almost 15 years and was First Vice-President.

## HELLIWELL LEGAL FELLOWSHIP



Funded by a multi-year pledge from The Helliwell Family Foundation in honor of Paul L.E. Helliwell, an attorney who committed his career to his country and understood the importance of service.

## GWEN S. CHERRY FELLOWSHIP



Funded by the Gwen S. Cherry Black Women Lawyers Association in memory of Gwen S. Cherry, who served as a staff attorney at Legal Services during its founding years.

## HARRY & IRVING CYPEN TAX FELLOWSHIP



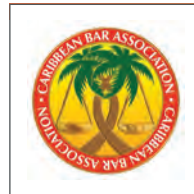
Funded by a gift from the Yavitz Cypen Foundation, in memory of Stephen H. Cypen's father Irving and his uncle Harry.

## KAUFMAN ROSSIN ACCOUNTING FELLOWSHIP



As part of its rich tradition of social responsibility, Kaufman Rossin established this fellowship to provide opportunities for future accountants by working in Legal Services' finance department.

## CARIBBEAN BAR LAW CLERK SCHOLARSHIP



Funded by the Caribbean Bar Association to give opportunities to Caribbean-American law students.

This experience is providing me with insight into the intricacies of working with litigants in my community and advocating for those clients to accomplish their legal goals. This is an all-encompassing experience that has made me cognizant of the legal work in the public sector.

**Michelle Rodriguez**  
Julie Azuaje Legal Fellow

I am honored to give back to the community I grew up in by informing individuals of their rights as tenants. Working here has empowered me to practice law with compassion and understanding.

**Ana Cook**  
Helliwell Legal Fellow

Having an interest in tax, I am extremely fortunate to have this fellowship because it provides me an opportunity to give back to my city while obtaining helpful experience from Legal Services' attorneys.

**Alec Ede**  
Cypen Tax Fellow

# Build Your Legacy and Support a Community of Equal Justice

## THE LEGACY SOCIETY

Legal Services' Legacy Society was established to promote the economic stability of our most vulnerable neighbors and build a stronger community for generations to come. When you make a bequest to Legal Services, you leave a legacy of empowerment, placing individuals and families on a stable path to the future.

These are some of the ways you can create a legacy at Legal Services:

- Designate Legal Services as a beneficiary of your last will and testament or trust.
- Establish Legal Services as a beneficiary of your life insurance.
- Direct IRA transfers.
- Create a Charitable Remainder Trust.

Your planned gift to Legal Services will serve as testament to your legacy of care, concern and compassion, creating a brighter future for the entire community.

*Become a member of **The Legacy Society** and transform someone's future. To learn more, contact [MViguesPitan@legalservicesmiami.org](mailto:MViguesPitan@legalservicesmiami.org).*

## THE YOUNG PROFESSIONALS COUNCIL

### Please Join Us

OCT  
12  
6:30  
PM

THE YOUNG  
PROFESSIONALS  
COUNCIL  
PRESENTS:

### Conversations with Leaders

Featuring Chief Judge of the  
U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the  
Southern District of Florida  
**LAUREL M. ISICOFF**

**REGISTER**

The Young Professionals Council is committed to making an impact on our community and serving as ambassadors for Legal Services. The Council hosts quarterly meetings and events, such as Happy Hours and our Conversations with Leaders series. These events generate support and awareness for our organization.

#### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

##### CHAIR

Christopher Noel, Esq.

##### VICE CHAIR

Alex Jimenez

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Jacqueline Durand, Esq.

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Daniel Rowinsky, Esq.  
Jessica L. Saiontz, Esq.  
Daniel Sanchez  
Payton Skeens



**PHOTO (L):** The Council held a meeting at Anthony's Coal Fired Pizza in April where Anthony's generously donated 20% of the proceeds to the Client Fund.

**PHOTO (R):** In May, the Council hosted a social at Racket after the Heart of Giving to keep the celebration going!

Contact [JGeeker@legalservicesmiami.org](mailto:JGeeker@legalservicesmiami.org) for information on the Young Professionals Council.