

Wages Unpaid

Housing Threatened

Healthcare Denied

Elderly Forgotten

Institutional Abuse

Poverty Exploited

Rights Ignored

Education Impeded

Families Divided

Barriers Erected

Children At Risk



 **LEGAL AID
JUSTICE CENTER**



We've been achieving real results at the state, local and individual level for more than 40 years. Help us continue our work amidst ever-increasing need for our services.

Legal Aid Justice Center is one of the most effective legal aid organizations in Virginia, uniquely able to leverage issues of individual justice to create systemic change. We're client focused, with a state-wide presence. We're courtroom litigators, and effective advocates in the halls of Richmond. Our proximity to Washington

DC and our nationally-recognized team of attorneys brings national visibility to the issues we raise and the causes we embrace. Yet we never lose sight of the most important reason we come to work every day... to give voice to the voiceless and ensure justice for those who might otherwise have none.

If there were more justice in the world, there would be less poverty. That is a guiding principle behind the work of the Legal Aid Justice Center. We also believe that justice is not a commodity—it should be equally available to all. Our belief in the truth of these ideas is what led to our founding in 1967, and that belief still guides us today.

When we discover that people in poverty are being treated unfairly or denied access, we get involved. And we stay involved.

The Legal Aid Justice Center strives to achieve “justice for all” one case at a time. At the same time, we know that we must work for change at local, state and national levels to institute fair policies that ensure equal opportunity for all. In these pages, you will see a few examples of the work we do, the people we help, and the positive impact we have in your community and across Virginia.

Alex R. Gulotta

Executive Director





*Promoting Stability
Strengthening Protections*

*Preventing
Exploitation*

Protecting Employment



WAGES RECOVERED

Over the past decade, our advocates have recovered nearly \$6 million in lost wages for our clients.

Hired to dig ditches on the multi-billion dollar expansion of Verizon's residential fiber optic communications network, workers experienced hard physical labor, low pay, and, in some cases, no pay at all. Hired by a confusing web of Verizon contractors and subcontractors, 14 different crews contacted the Legal Aid Justice Center reporting that they were cheated out of their pay.

With our help, two crews of workers took subcontractors to federal court and won judgments, but were unable to force the Verizon subcontractors to pay up.

Through the persistent efforts of our Immigrant Advocacy Program, plus group action coordinated with partner non-profit organizations from D.C. and Maryland, the workers got a meeting with senior Verizon officials.

Our work is about helping our clients get a seat at the table. In this case, it was a massive conference table in the plush conference room of Verizon's D.C. headquarters, with our clients sitting in the high-backed leather chairs making their demands.

*Preventing
Homelessness*

Defending Residents

Advocating for Availability

Ending Abuse



HOUSING PRESERVED

By preventing or forestalling the eviction of nearly 350 people each year, our attorneys and advocates help nearly one person each day to remain in their home—providing our clients with the domestic stability they need to live their lives.

After long neglect by its owners, the City of Richmond condemned the Carrington Gardens Northridge apartment complex. Inspectors found frozen water pipes burst, unoccupied units with doors and windows broken, faulty electrical wiring, uncollected garbage piling up, and squatters in the complex. Declaring the complex a safety hazard, they informed the residents they had eight hours to find a new home. With such short notice, the residents lost most of their belongings and were taken to a hotel. The Legal

Aid Justice Center and two other firms filed suit, seeking compensatory damages for lost belongings and moving expenses.

Without going to court, the owners agreed on a total of \$240,000 to settle the action.

Settlements such as this one represent victories for everyone who is victimized by unscrupulous and neglectful landlords.



Improving
delivery

Promoting
Access

Empowering
Communities



HEALTHCARE SECURED

Our Elder Care Initiative spearheaded a national alliance of elder advocates to fight the use of medication as “chemical restraints” in nursing homes. Our advocates successfully pushed the Department of Health and Human Services for stronger regulation and increased enforcement of existing laws.

One year short of eligibility for Medicare, Carolyn was diagnosed with cancer. As the owner of a day care center in her home, health care coverage was unaffordable. Carolyn’s diagnosis required immediate chemotherapy and radiation, and she was no longer able to operate her business. With bills totaling more than \$170,000, Carolyn applied for Medicaid and charitable care.

When Carolyn learned that she was denied, she thought she would lose everything. It was difficult

enough to wage a battle against cancer, without having to fight with billing agencies too. Fortunately, Carolyn was introduced to the Legal Aid Justice Center. Her advocate discovered that she was improperly denied coverage and re-filed the claim.

Carolyn was awarded benefits, and the \$170,000 debt was paid in full. Help from the Legal Aid Justice Center allowed Carolyn to focus on her recovery instead of spending precious energy worrying about paying her bills.



Dismantling Barriers

Restoring Rights

Advancing Policies

*Improving
Outcomes*

Need pic:
Sylvia Jones



EDUCATION DEFENDED

Our efforts eliminated unlawful school fees, enabling nearly 500,000 children from low-income families to participate fully in school activities. As a result, fees for optional activities now include a clear waiver policy for students facing financial hardship.

Perverse incentives can reward schools for producing higher test scores at the expense of lower-performing students who are allowed or even encouraged to drop out. Our JustChildren program mobilized concerned parents and community members to press state leaders to improve graduation rates and add completion targets to the state's Standards of Learning.

In 2009, Virginia became one of the first states in the nation to put graduation rates on equal footing with test scores in determining high school accreditation.

Still, not all students enjoy equal opportunities to prepare for college, work, and life beyond high school. Stark racial and economic disparities persist in both graduation rates and diploma awards. Increased investment is needed to close achievement gaps and keep kids in school, and we continue to spend considerable time in the General Assembly advocating for state support of public education, especially for programs that support at-risk students.

Protecting Security

Ensuring Fairness

Improving Conditions

Advancing Reform



OPPORTUNITY RESTORED

Black males make up 12% of the student population in Virginia, yet they receive 40% of all suspensions and expulsions. Legal Aid Justice Center is forcing schools and policymakers to examine this and other unfair disciplinary practices.

Youth who serve time in adult prisons are subject to abuse by older inmates and often reoffend at higher rates. After taking part in a carjacking at age 16, a client received a seven-year sentence to be served in a juvenile prison until age 21, followed by adult prison time. Attorneys from our JustChildren program immediately began advocating for him to receive appropriate educational services while incarcerated. As a result, he was able to earn a high school diploma instead of the GED he was being encouraged to pursue.

Step-down programs like a halfway house have been shown to produce better outcomes for young people when it comes to re-integrating into the community. After the client had served nearly five years, the judge—recognizing the client's progress and rehabilitation—suspended his adult prison time and allowed him to go to a juvenile halfway house instead.

Due to our advocacy as well as his own efforts while in the system, this young man avoided adult prison and instead became an honor-roll college student who is now working and otherwise excelling in life.



Spotlighting Disparities

Changing Policies

Defending Rights

Organizing Communities



JUSTICE ASSURED

In a typical year, we directly represent nearly 2,500 individual clients. Including family members, these actions can actually impact more than twice that many people. Awards and settlements have exceed \$2 million, plus another \$1 million in expenses and payments avoided each year.

Mean-spirited anti-immigrant legislation is introduced every year in Virginia. Some of these bills would require schools to check the immigration status of parents when they enroll their children, divide families and gut local community policing efforts by requiring arresting officers to conduct immigration status inquiries, require day labor centers to use the federal E-verify program, or require criminal defendants to pay for the cost of an interpreter if they need one. Few become law.

Many forces at play, but we know that our efforts are making a real difference for immigrants in Virginia. With the elected leaders of both the Virginia Coalition of Latino Organizations, and the Coalition of Asian Pacific Americans of Virginia on our staff, we are able to leverage the power of these communities to help shape the dialogue in Richmond.

We have worked with many partners, but for more than ten years our Immigrant Advocacy Program has been a leading voice in the effort to keep Virginia a welcoming place for immigrants.



OUR TEAM

Mission:

To seek equal justice for all by solving clients' legal problems, strengthening the voices of low-income communities, and rooting out the inequalities that keep people in poverty.



LOOKING FORWARD

Ours is a job that's never finished. Sadly, poverty is something that never goes away. Neither does the temptation for unscrupulous people to take advantage of the vulnerable. At the same time, the sometimes-unintended consequences of state and local policies can create additional obstacles to stability and success.

As we work to represent the interests of our clients in the coming months and years, we will continue to:

- Protect employment and promote fair wages and practices
- Promote safe and healthy conditions for institutionalized persons, including children
- Secure access to quality, affordable healthcare and benefits

- Advocate for policies that promote increased achievement and higher graduation rates
- Organize communities to combat racial and ethnic inequities
- Ensure youth in the justice system receive fair and age-appropriate treatment.

Looking ahead, uncertain economic and cultural climates will continue cause the needs of our client communities to shift and grow. Legal Aid Justice Center will continue responding along multiple fronts, with both traditional and innovative strategies, to meet the changing needs of the families and communities we serve.

JOIN US!

2017 marks our 50th year of service. Over time we have built a robust organization whose work reaches from the local streets to the national stage. But as the needs of low-income and vulnerable Virginians change and grow, so does the need for our services. Additional legal and administrative staff in all of our offices, expanded capabilities in Northern Virginia, and increased policy-advocacy capacity in Richmond will all be required as we go forward.

If you agree with us that Justice for All means both equal and accessible to justice for everyone, please join us in our efforts with your tax-deductible contribution.

www.justice4all.org

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taproot logo
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