

LEGAL SERVICES OF GREATER MIAMI, INC.

Passionately Committed to Equal Justice



Through aggressive advocacy and innovative collaboration with our community partners, we strive to empower our clients and alleviate the hardships of poverty.

www.lsgmi.org



President's Message

Legal Services of Greater Miami, Inc.
"Together, We Must" Campaign for Justice

Each day, tens of thousands of families in Miami-Dade County living in abject poverty struggle to keep a roof over their head. Thousands more teetering on the brink of poverty are discriminated against daily in the workplace and cannot afford an attorney. Many more are wrongfully denied disability and Medicaid benefits. The number of inequities within our community is staggering; every situation is unique and involves potential dire consequences to real people.

It is ironic that the United States, the country with the world's highest concentration of lawyers, has one of the least adequate systems of legal assistance. The poor in Miami-Dade County rarely have a safety net, so their legal needs take on a special urgency. This is exacerbated by today's economic climate. Thankfully, organizations like Legal Services of Greater Miami, Inc. ("LSGMI") exist. LSGMI addresses these injustices by providing the poor in our community with effective advocates to assist them with their legal issues.

As the economy continues to slide, those requiring LSGMI's services have reached record highs. In 2010, unemployment compensation cases increased by 19%; consumer cases by 48%; and mortgage foreclosure cases by 160%. Unfortunately, many of LSGMI's traditional funding sources have declined and, in certain circumstances, been eliminated.

Fortunately, members of the legal and business community and the community at-large have helped make up the deficit by supporting LSGMI's "Together, We Must" Campaign for Justice. Through the generosity of many, the Campaign has raised over \$983,000.00 in gifts and pledges to date enabling LSGMI to increase its attorney staff by 10%. Great strides have been made but there is still work to be done in ensuring that our community's poor are adequately represented and provided a voice. As the need for free legal services in our community continues to escalate, the money raised through the Campaign allows LSGMI to continue its mission of providing equal justice under the law.

Our heartfelt thanks to each of you who have supported our Campaign. For those of you, who have not yet done so, please join us in making a gift to the Campaign and helping the poor in our community. For more information about Legal Services of Greater Miami, Inc. and the "Together, We Must" Campaign, visit our website at www.lsgmi.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Garrett J. Biondo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Garrett J. Biondo
President, LSGMI Board of Directors

Because of You...



Hello, my name is Michael Schwab and this is my wife Esther. We want to share with you how Legal Services of Greater Miami was able to help us in our time of need.

In 2007 our four year old daughter Aliza almost drowned. She is now in a coma state, fully dependent on a ventilator and fed through a tube. Aliza lives at home with us and requires 24/7 skilled nursing care. Although my wife and I are very involved in her care, we don't have the skills necessary to care for her alone especially in an emergency situation.

Because Aliza is a Medicaid recipient, her eligibility for continued nursing care is reviewed every six months. In August of 2009 Medicaid reduced the number of hours of Aliza's nursing care. We right away appealed the decision because we love our daughter very much and her life would be in danger if she did not get the care she needed. Her doctor told us that without 24/7 nursing care, Aliza would have to be put back in the hospital which would tear our family apart. We enjoy having her home with us and part of our family.

This was very stressful on my wife and me. We did not know how we were going to fight the state to get Aliza the care she needed. We met with several private attorneys who all wanted more money than we could afford. We were at a loss because we knew that we could not win the case without an attorney.

We contacted CMS which is a program that helps chronically ill kids and they referred us to Legal Services of Greater Miami. After sharing our story and all the challenges we were facing to continue nursing coverage for Aliza so that we could keep her home with us, LSGMI accepted our case. This was a tremendous relief to us. Our LSGMI attorneys put in countless hours and effort and made this case a top priority, and were very supportive and helpful to us. At the hearing they were incredible in delivering the facts about why it was medically necessary for Aliza to continue with her 24/7 care.

Thanks to all their hard work and effort we won the appeal. Aliza now receives 24/7 care and we were able to remain a family together. We could not have done this without their help. We thank them from the bottom of our hearts for all their hard work and dedication. We also would like to thank everybody here tonight for their help in supporting this law firm. It is because of you that they were able to help us and many other families in situations like ours.

Sincerely,

Michael Schwab

Michael Schwab

*Each year we provide
free legal services
benefiting more than
30,000 people*

Households

68% Working Poor
59% Headed by Women
37% Children
23% Headed by Seniors

Types of Cases

49% Housing
33% Government Benefits
5% Consumer
5% Health
3% Family and Education
3% Miscellaneous
2% Immigration

Race/Ethnicity

40% Hispanic
35% African American
11% Haitian
9% White
5% Other

\$1.36 million

recovered for clients in disability,
unemployment, child support, and
government benefits

The federal Legal Services Corporation, the Florida Bar Foundation, and Miami-Dade County are our main funding sources, with additional funding coming from state, local and private grants. LSGMI also receives contributions from individual donors and the United Way Contributor Choice program.

Donations by attorneys satisfy the Florida Bar pro bono responsibility.

Figures for 2009. In most cases, eligibility for services is based on an annual income at or below 125% of the federal poverty guidelines (\$27,562.50 for a family of four).

Since we opened our doors over 40 years ago:

- Six one-attorney neighborhood offices have grown to a staff of over 30 attorneys.
- The original grant of \$199,146 has grown to an annual budget of over \$6 million.
- A successful capital campaign provided the resources to purchase our main office facility in 1997 and pay off the mortgage in less than nine years. The Chesterfield Smith Center for Equal Justice is now home to seven nonprofit organizations in our community.

Promoting Equal Justice

Today we continue to provide innovative, effective legal services which help thousands of individuals and families in our community annually, creating a positive impact on the community as a whole.

We are now the largest provider of broad-based civil legal services for the poor in Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties and are recognized in the state and in the nation as a model legal services program. Our diverse staff provides clients with legal services in three languages from regional offices located in Miami and South Dade, and from neighborhood offices throughout our service area.

Making an Impact

Our talented and dedicated attorneys provide advice and representation in individual cases, address systemic issues, and empower clients through community education and self-help clinics. Our staff receives support and guidance from our volunteer Board of Directors composed of attorneys appointed by local bar associations. In addition, local social services agencies appoint representatives who are financially eligible for our services. Their presence on our Board is vital in keeping us in touch with the community we serve.

Supporting the Mission

Individuals and law firms have joined our efforts by providing us with financial support through the “Together, We Must” Campaign for Justice. Law firms and corporations contribute through the Campaign Leadership Circle. Contributions are also received through the Chesterfield Smith Society for Equal Justice. The Society was formed to continue the legacy of Chesterfield Smith, who passionately believed that every individual was entitled to legal representation before a court of law. We have proven to be excellent stewards of donated dollars with 95% of contributions going directly to client programs and services.

Building for Tomorrow

With over 500,000 people and 20% of the children in our community living in poverty, free legal services have never been needed more. As poverty continues to escalate, LSGMI is positioned to play a prominent role in keeping the doors of justice open. We cannot rely on fluctuating government funding to meet our future needs, which is why private support remains critical. Join the fight for justice with your contribution.

Four Reasons to Support the “Together, We Must” Campaign for Justice:

“Until you have been thrown to the wolves, you don’t know what it feels like to be rescued.”
-Cynthia El Dehar, LSGMI client

- Huge numbers of homeowners face homelessness as the mortgage foreclosure rate jumps 700%
- Historic rates of unemployment push workers and their families into poverty
- Demand for help with civil legal problems escalates, while funding declines.
- LSGMI makes the justice system more accessible, the courts function more efficiently, and the community a better place to live.

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"LSQMI helped me get disability benefits when I was homeless and unable to work."

-Jacqueline

Legal Services of Greater Miami provides free civil legal services to the neediest individuals in our community. Our clients are mostly women, children, seniors, and the working poor. In many cases, we are the safety net preventing these individuals from becoming homeless or dependent on welfare. On a daily basis, our team of attorneys, who are organized into legal specialty units and projects, provide high quality representation to clients in the following areas:

Protection of vulnerable populations

The **AIDS Legal Advocacy Project** (sponsored by Miami-Dade County Ryan White Program) helps people who are HIV positive or who have AIDS with problems concerning employment, healthcare related services, disability and other benefits.

The **Homeless Legal Assistance Project** (sponsored by Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust) provides specialized services to homeless people to remove legal barriers to stability and self-sufficiency. The Project also helps them receive available government assistance, such as Supplemental Security Income disability benefits, Medicaid and food stamps.

The **Renters Education and Advocacy Legal Lines** (sponsored by Camillus House and The Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program) prevents homelessness by providing telephone legal assistance to low income renters facing eviction.

Legal Rights Education

Through the **Community Legal Education Project**, (sponsored by Ruden McClosky Smith Schuster & Russell P.A.) individuals learn about their legal rights and responsibilities, enabling them to avoid legal problems and understand how to resolve them when they occur.

The Small Claims Court Clinic (sponsored by Legal Services Corporation) offers free legal advice from pro bono attorneys on how to file or defend small claims court matters. Common problems resolved by the clinic include worthless checks from employers, landlord/tenant disputes involving money, and auto repair disputes.

The Legal Education Institute (sponsored by The Sain Orr Royak DeForest Steadman Foundation) develops educational programs and workshops for the staff of social service providers. This training helps them teach their clients how to avoid legal problems, identify situations where legal counsel is necessary, and know where to turn when legal help is needed.



“LSGMI is the means by which equality is provided to thousands of people in this community, and now is the time to support them.”

-Senator Bob Graham

Innovative Service Models

The Connect Familias Little Havana Community Partnership Legal Project (sponsored by The Little Havana Community Partnership through The Children’s Trust) offers free legal services to low income families within the Little Havana area. The Project seeks to affirm the premise that children do better when their families are strong, and families do better when they live in places that help them succeed as parents and productive citizens.

The Miami Workers Center Neighborhood Office (sponsored by Miami-Dade County) is co-located with a grassroots organization in the heart of Liberty City. LSGMI and the Miami Workers Center collaborate to serve people in their own neighborhood during early evening office hours.

“LSGMI helped me get unemployment compensation to support my family after I lost my job.”

-Jeannette





"LSQMI helped me get custody of my grandsons after my daughter was killed in a car accident."

-Josefa

Promotion of employment, economic security, and access to healthcare

One of our top priorities is to promote economic security for clients so that they can obtain and preserve a source of income.

The Unemployment Compensation Project (sponsored by McLuskey & McDonald, P.A.) establishes eligibility for unemployment compensation benefits to help people avoid falling into poverty and homelessness while they seek new employment.

Through the **Supplemental Security Income Disability Project** (supported by Florida Access to Civil Legal Assistance) we represent elderly and disabled adults in administrative hearings to obtain disability benefits. With the help of the Project's skilled attorneys, over 80% of benefit denials are reversed at the hearing level, bringing much needed cash and Medicaid benefits to these individuals.

Low wage taxpayers are the most highly audited group in the United States. Our **Community Tax Clinic** (sponsored by the Internal Revenue Service) provides free tax advice and legal representation to resolve income tax controversies with the Internal Revenue Service.

Promote safety and stability for families

The Children's Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Project (sponsored by The Florida Bar Foundation and McDermott Will & Emery, LLP) represents disabled children in administrative law proceedings to obtain SSI disability benefits. Legal representation is critical because, with the assistance of an attorney, almost 90% of the benefit denials are reversed at the administrative hearing level.

The Special Education Advocacy Project (sponsored by The Florida Bar Foundation and Shook Hardy & Bacon, LLP) helps parents maneuver through the complex administrative and legal bureaucracy to ensure that their disabled children receive an appropriate public education.

The Foster Youth Project (sponsored by The Florida Bar Foundation) is a collaborative effort to promote access to legal services for youth exiting foster care. The goal is to promote their successful transition to independent living.

Preserve and promote housing

The Mortgage Foreclosure Defense Project

(sponsored by Institute for Foreclosure Legal Assistance, National Foreclosure Mitigation Counseling Program, The Office of the Attorney General and Miami-Dade County) prevents the loss of homes due to mortgage or lien foreclosures, preventing a downward spiral into homelessness. The Project also prevents the loss of homes by helping people rescind unfair mortgages, reduce interest rates, return finance charges and challenge predatory lending practices.

The Community Economic Development Project

(sponsored by Funding In Memory of Frances and Louis M. Jepeway) provides transactional legal assistance to nonprofit developers engaged in neighborhood revitalization.

The Affordable Housing Project

(sponsored by The Florida Bar Foundation) was established to address the housing crisis in Miami-Dade County. The Project promotes the preservation and development of affordable housing for low and very low income people.

The Tenants' Rights Project

(sponsored by The University of Miami School of Law and Legal Services Corporation) provides representation to tenants facing eviction from rental housing. Priority is given to evictions involving tenants living in government subsidized housing.

Helping Our Nation's Heroes:

The Military Legal Advocacy Project

The Military Legal Advocacy Project (MLAP)

(sponsored by the Dade Community Foundation through the Braive Fund Initiative) offers free civil legal services to veterans, military personnel (active duty, guard or reserve) and their families whose lives have been directly impacted by military service in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom. The Project's purpose is to resolve civil legal problems that pose a barrier to successful reintegration after military discharge or pose economic and social challenges due to military deployment in these campaigns. In addition to the civil legal services normally provided by LSGMI, the Project focuses on providing quality legal assistance to appeal denials of Veteran's Administration benefits.

Satisfy your Florida Bar Pro Bono Responsibility:

- Volunteer to take a pro bono case
- Volunteer at a clinic
- Co-counsel with an LSGMI attorney

AND

Donate today at www.lsgmi.org

*"LSGMI saved me from
being tricked out of my home."*

-Thelma





Pro Bono Opportunities

"What greater public good is there than to help those who truly do not otherwise have access to justice. I encourage you to continue to work in your communities."

-Chief Justice Peggy Quince

WHAT

With over 500,000 low income individuals and families in our community, the need for free legal services cannot be met by LSGMI staff alone. Pro bono resources are critical to supplement the work we do and to help address the many unmet legal needs. LSGMI welcomes pro bono assistance from law firms, individual attorneys, law students, and other volunteers, and provides the necessary training and mentoring to support those volunteers. We encourage you to become a volunteer with us.

WHY

By offering pro bono services, you will be able to satisfy your Florida Bar Pro Bono responsibility. You will also:

- Grow professionally and gain personal satisfaction
- Gain respect and recognition from your colleagues and the community
- Learn new areas of law and obtain valuable hands-on experience

And most importantly, you will change lives.

HOW

Take a Case:

You can provide legal representation for a low income individual or family who otherwise would not get help. Areas of representation include defense of evictions and mortgage foreclosures, bankruptcy, consumer, SSI disability, unemployment compensation, tax, transactional work for non-profit developers, and special education.

Co-Counsel:

You can assist an LSGMI staff attorney as co-counsel.

Volunteer at a Clinic:

You can provide individual advice to pro se litigants at one of our Self Help Clinics.

Training:

You can present a training on a legal topic or practice skills area for our staff attorneys.

Mentoring:

You can provide leadership and guidance to one of our staff attorneys in a substantive area within your expertise.

Note: We provide malpractice insurance for our pro bono volunteers.

WHO

"I do pro bono work because of the satisfaction I get in knowing that I can make a huge difference in someone's life."

Nancy Ciampa - Carlton Fields

"As Florida lawyers, we can, and must, take the time to do pro bono work, because the need is so great. Some of the most rewarding legal work that I have done, both professionally and personally, has been on behalf of pro bono clients. It won't take as much time as you think; you will enjoy the experience; and you will make a difference."

Darrell Payne - Stearns Weaver Miller

For more information, please contact Vivian Chavez: vchavez@lsgmi.org

The Put Something Back Program (PSB) will be notified when you take a pro bono case from LSGMI so that you will receive pro bono credit through PSB.

*Legal Services of Greater Miami, Inc.
extends heartfelt thanks to
our dedicated leaders of the
"Together, We Must" Campaign for Justice*



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Passionately Committed to Equal Justice



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