



**Legal Aid Justice Center / Answering the Call**

2015-2016 ANNUAL REPORT

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A letter from our  
**Executive Director**

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Dear Friends and Supporters,

Beloved PBS children’s television host, Fred Rogers, said: “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’ To this day... I remember my mother’s words, and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers—so many caring people in this world.”

Having spent my career in public interest law, it has been especially moving to see recent images in the news of lawyers being “helpers” in times of national uncertainty. Because of these news stories, you now know what those of us at the Legal Aid Justice Center have long known about our colleagues and fellow advocates: **In times of trouble, we run toward it, seeking fairness and justice for our clients.**

In this annual report, we will introduce to you a few of the stories from 2015 and 2016 that have inspired and motivated us the most—those of our clients and our supporters.

We are inspired to work harder every day by the resilience and determination of our clients, and bringing them justice is the best reward we could receive. We hold the utmost appreciation for our volunteers, generous donors, supporting organizations and strategic partners for their investment in those victories—they are essential to our ability to seek justice for members of our community and others facing similar struggles. We receive no federal Legal Services Corporation funding, so we rely on our supporters’ generosity and altruism to allow us to continue pushing for a better Virginia.

Thank you to all of you—our clients, supporters, and friends—for all that you do in Virginia and beyond. **You, too, are “helpers,” the caring people in this world.**

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Mary Bauer".

Mary Bauer



**"It's hard to imagine dealing with a serious legal conflict without the help of a lawyer. We are proud to support the Legal Aid Justice Center's work so that more members of our community can get advice on problems threatening their families' financial stability and peace of mind."**

- Karen Moran and Wistar Morris

Charlotte Pierceall is just one of the 10,290 people that the Legal Aid Justice Center helped in 2015 & 2016. And Karen Moran and Wistar Morris are among almost 1,100 individual donors who helped make equal justice a reality for low-income community members, like Charlotte, who needed our help.

# How can I keep my home?

After her husband died, Charlotte Pierceall came to us for help in appealing an eviction order that would have put her out of the home her family had shared for 40 years. The home had been foreclosed upon following the death of Charlotte's husband by a bank that had issued a "reverse mortgage" on the property. The bank had already obtained an eviction order at trial when Charlotte first met with her Legal Aid Justice Center attorney, Brenda Castañeda.

Brenda was able to help Charlotte reach an agreement with the bank that rescinded the foreclosure and allowed Charlotte to remain in her home. Brenda was also able to help push the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to revise regulations on reverse mortgages, like the one issued on Charlotte's home. The revised regulations are now consistent with Congress's stated intent to

protect surviving spouses, like Charlotte, in these transactions. These regulatory changes at the federal level will help thousands of other homeowners in Charlotte's situation avoid the kind of crisis she faced.

Our supporters Karen Moran and, her husband, Wistar Morris—an attorney and personal investment advisor, respectively—appreciate the complexity of financial instruments like reverse mortgages. They know how difficult it can be, even for the most financially savvy among us, to evaluate all potential risks of complex transactions at their outset. The Legal Aid Justice Center's low-income clients are very unlikely to have been able to afford an advocate or advisor when signing an agreement. But our Economic Justice Program (EJP) attorneys, like EJP Legal Director Brenda, are there to help when things have gone wrong and the stakes are highest.



# How can my child learn from his mistakes?

In 2015, 78.3% of youth released from a juvenile prison in Virginia were re-arrested within 36 months of their release. Further, the Center for Public Integrity reported in spring 2015 that, at nearly three times the national rate, Virginia schools had the single highest rate in the nation for student referrals to law enforcement. This makes Virginia the nation's poster child in what is known as the "school-to-prison pipeline."

In 2015 and 2016, our JustChildren team helped build a diverse nonpartisan coalition, made up of advocates on both the left and right, policy and fiscal analysts, associations of professionals who work with young people, faith-based groups, and artists, and launched the RISE (Reinvest in Supportive Environments) for Youth campaign. In 2015, RISE for Youth saw its first major policy success when it advocated for reforms to Virginia's juvenile justice length-of-stay guidelines, resulting in

dramatically shorter prison stays for youth. In 2016, the campaign saw a major breakthrough with the planned closure of one of Virginia's two remaining juvenile prisons and capture of the savings from that closure to invest in youth services. Also in 2016, LAJC helped launch Youth for Rise Advocacy network, a way for youth and young adults affected by the juvenile justice system to connect and advocate.

Statewide legislative advocacy is just one of the ways our JustChildren team helps Virginia's children and their families, as well as helping our low-income clients enroll in school, stay in school, and obtain services to help them finish school. On top of promoting policy reforms, we help and support youth, parents, attorneys, and service providers to be effective advocates for themselves and for young people. We could not do any of this important work without your help and support.

Top Right: Del. Jennifer McClellan meets with youth from Youth for RISE to hear their thoughts on youth incarceration and the school to prison pipeline. Del. McClellan sponsored several bills in 2015 and 2016 aimed at reducing youth incarceration.



Photo Courtesy  
Performing Statistics  
Project

Left: In the summer of 2015, JustChildren advocates worked with Art180 on a collaborative project called *Performing Statistics*. Incarcerated youth produced artwork, which was featured at community events all over the state and brought artists, advocates, teachers, teens, policymakers and police together to talk about alternatives to juvenile detention.

"I support the Legal Aid Justice Center, because I believe strongly in its mission to seek justice for vulnerable members of our communities. In Northern Virginia, legal aid's community organizers and legal advocates do outstanding work helping immigrants understand and protect their rights."

- Ofelia Calderon



## How can I provide for and protect my family?

Ofelia Calderon is a private immigration attorney and a founding member of our Northern Virginia fundraising advisory council. Ofelia's support and expertise help us better meet the legal needs of immigrant clients like Chely [and Luna].

Our client Chely originally met with Legal Aid Justice Center lawyer, Nick Marritz, seeking help in recovering months of unpaid wages from her former employer, a local catering company. Nick helped Chely to win a judgment in federal court, and the catering company is currently paying Chely a settlement of more than \$11,000.

Often, the initial problem that our clients seek help with is just one of several interlocking problems where an advocate's assistance can make a real difference. Nick continues to assist Chely by working with a pro bono attorney to help Chely apply for an immigration status for her nine-year-old daughter Luna that would enable her daughter to obtain a green card. Nick's work is assisting with additional legal issues

that could help Luna to have a significantly safer and more stable childhood and freeing Chely from worry that her young daughter might be deported back to Mexico without a parent there who is willing and able to care for her.

We could not have expanded the range of services provided to our low-income neighbors without the generosity and encouragement of supporters like Ofelia Calderon. Ofelia is a leading immigration-law expert in the Northern Virginia area, and is deeply committed to improving the lives of her fellow residents of Falls Church, where our Northern Virginia office is located. Ofelia serves as a skilled mentor to less-experienced advocates, and provides great insights into how we can best serve our low-income immigrant client community.



# How can I keep my family healthy?

Your support helps ensure that our low-income clients receive better medical care. When Parwiz Mirzabig applied for insurance coverage for his infant son, Adibullah, the application was rejected. Fortunately, a pediatric social worker at UVA Health System knew to refer Parwiz's problem to Mary Frances Charlton, an attorney at the Legal Aid Justice Center, who was able to successfully appeal Adibullah's benefits denial.

Parwiz served in the United States military in his home country of Afghanistan. In 2015, Parwiz and his family, including baby Adibullah, were relocated to central Virginia from Afghanistan as refugees. Mary Frances was able to secure Adibullah's coverage by Virginia's FAMIS program (our state program for providing health insurance to children from families earning less than 200% of the federal poverty level). She

also ensured that these insurance benefits applied retroactively, meaning all previous bills for his Adibullah's care were covered.

Mary Frances is part of the Legal Aid Justice Center's medical-legal partnership with the University of Virginia's School of Medicine and School of Law. Legal Aid lawyers teach doctors, social workers, medical students, and law students how to spot common legal issues—like Parwiz's problem securing medical insurance—that may affect patient health, and then take referrals when patients need help. Other common issues impacting health include special education, housing, public benefits, and employment. Our advocates also help low-income elders with health-related legal issues, and we help low-income Virginians apply for insurance coverage and other benefits that support their health.

Dr. Diane Pappas meets with Parwiz across from LAJC's offices. Dr. Pappas is an Associate Professor of Pediatrics at UVA. More than a decade ago, she helped to found the medical-legal partnership between UVA Medical School, UVA School of Law, and the Legal Aid Justice Center.

**"It breaks my heart to think that patients needing medical attention often forego treatment because they do not have insurance."**

- Diane Pappas



# Highlights

# \$22M

In 2015 and 2016, our advocates closed **3,833 cases** benefiting over **10,290 Virginia residents** and generating nearly **\$22 million in economic benefits** or savings; we also reached over 60,000 low-income community members with information about their legal rights.

## U.S. Customs and Border Protection

We favorably settled a suit alleging that U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents **unlawfully detained** a 4-year-old U.S. citizen and deported her back to Guatemala rather than allowing her to be reunited with her parents.



We favorably settled a suit against one of the largest apartment complexes in Fairfax County that was **charging tenants illegal air condition fees**; our clients received compensation, and the landlord made changes to its standard lease.



We won a **\$782K judgment** on behalf of **200 guest workers** brought to the United States from Guatemala to plant trees who were illegally charged fees, and were not paid in compliance with applicable laws.

## Scott v. Clarke

We favorably settled a federal class-action suit, *Scott v. Clarke*, alleging **inadequate medical care at Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women** in violation of the U.S. Constitution's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment. (Note: the state has failed to live up to their end of the settlement agreement, and an enforcement action has been filed.)



We favorably settled **housing discrimination and civil rights claims** of 33 Richmond-based mobile home park residents; the City of Richmond will pay \$55K in damages, make repairs, and take steps to ensure future compliance with federal law.

## Collection Violations

We favorably settled a class-action suit against IQ Data, a debt collector for a landlord in Northern Virginia, alleging **violations of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act**, including \$125K in damages for the class, and other concessions.

# Highlights

# \$25K

We successfully advocated for \$25,000 in funding for national experts to conduct an independent assessment of our local Charlottesville police force, and provide **training in effective youth interactions**.

## Length of Stay Guidelines

In response to our advocacy, after more than 15 years, Virginia adopted **new "length of stay" guidelines** for juvenile offenders; projected lengths-of-stay under the revised guidelines are significantly shorter, and in line with the most recent and best research.



## Morgan Drexen

We favorably settled a federal suit against a group of attorneys involved in a fraudulent debt-settlement scheme, in concert with Morgan Drexen—currently in bankruptcy proceedings following a large Consumer Finance Protection Bureau judgment against it—for **defrauding our elderly client** out of thousands of dollars of her Social Security income over a four-year period.



Our advocates helped to successfully push for legislation limiting the **harmful use of seclusion and physical restraint** in Virginia public schools.

Our advocacy helped motivate top members of Governor McAuliffe's administration to prioritize **school-to-prison-pipeline** issues.



## Community Service

We actively supported the Governor's 2016 proposal to close **Virginia's juvenile prisons** and to reinvest the savings from closing the prisons into developing more child-appropriate community services. As a result in 2017, the state closed one of the two remaining juvenile prisons and reiterated their commitment to reinvest the savings in community-based care.



A bill we worked on and supported was signed into law and went into effect July 1, 2016, relieving state funded school resource officers (police in schools) of the duty to enforce **student codes of conduct**. This is important because when police enforce codes of conduct, ordinary misbehavior in school is criminalized.

In settlement of claims we have brought, Richmond Public Schools have agreed to improve **policies for non-native English speaking student families**, and also to provide **basic due process protections** to students charged (but not convicted) of certain crimes, who were previously routinely reassigned to home instruction.

## Our Programs



# Since 1967,

the Legal Aid Justice Center has been providing legal representation for low-income Virginia residents. We are celebrating our 50th anniversary in 2017. Our mission continues to be seeking equal justice for all by *solving clients' legal problems, strengthening the voices of low-income communities, and rooting out the inequities that keep people in poverty.* With help from supporters like you, we carry out this mission through our work in the following four program areas:

## Civil Rights & Racial Justice

Officially launched in early 2017 with the hiring of a new legal director, the focus of our **Civil Rights & Racial Justice** program has been central to our mission for many years. Our Civil Rights & Racial Justice advocates seek to end the criminalization of poverty in Virginia by exposing and addressing the connections among policing, poverty, race, and injustice. Through a strategic mix of community organizing, local and statewide policy advocacy, and impact litigation, we seek to reform our criminal justice system's over-reliance on incarceration and to dismantle systems of racial injustice.

## JustChildren

**JustChildren**, Virginia's largest children's law program, relies on a range of strategies to make sure our most vulnerable young people receive the services and support they need to lead successful lives in their communities. Our JustChildren advocates: help our clients enroll in school, stay in school, and obtain services to help them finish school; prepare and distribute educational materials for youth, parents, attorneys, and service providers and train them to be effective advocates for themselves and for young people; support parents and community leaders in calling for improvements to the local and state systems that provide services to youth living in poverty; and promote public policies and systemic reforms that keep children in school and living successfully in their communities.

## Economic Justice

Our **Economic Justice** advocates provide assistance to Central Virginia clients facing legal problems in housing, public benefits, employment, healthcare, consumer protection, and elder law issues, and engages in systemic advocacy in these areas. We also provide outreach and education to community members and social service workers to increase community capacity for solving problems in these areas, and collaborate with private attorneys, law schools, and social service agencies.

## Immigrant Advocacy

Our **Immigrant Advocacy** program supports low income immigrants in their efforts to find justice and fair treatment. In addition to representing clients with individual legal issues, we promote systemic reforms to reduce the abuse and exploitation of immigrants, and work for comprehensive immigration reform. IAP represents low-wage immigrants in legal proceedings, counsels them about their rights under federal and state law, recovers unpaid wages they have earned, and fights workplace and housing discrimination. The program empowers communities being targeted by immigration enforcement to prepare for the worst, assert their constitutional rights, and protect their families; it also includes efforts to help refugee minors establish permanent resident status.

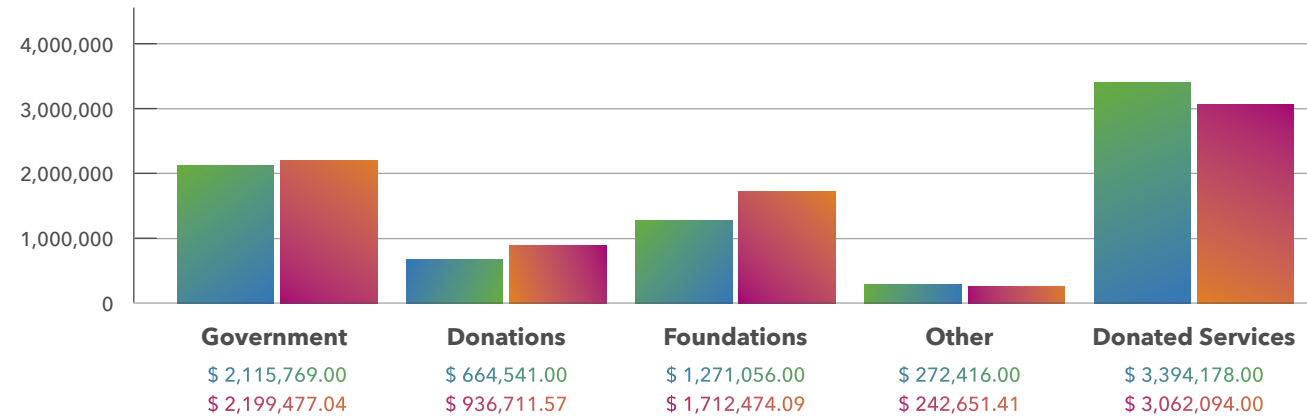


# Financials

2015 2016

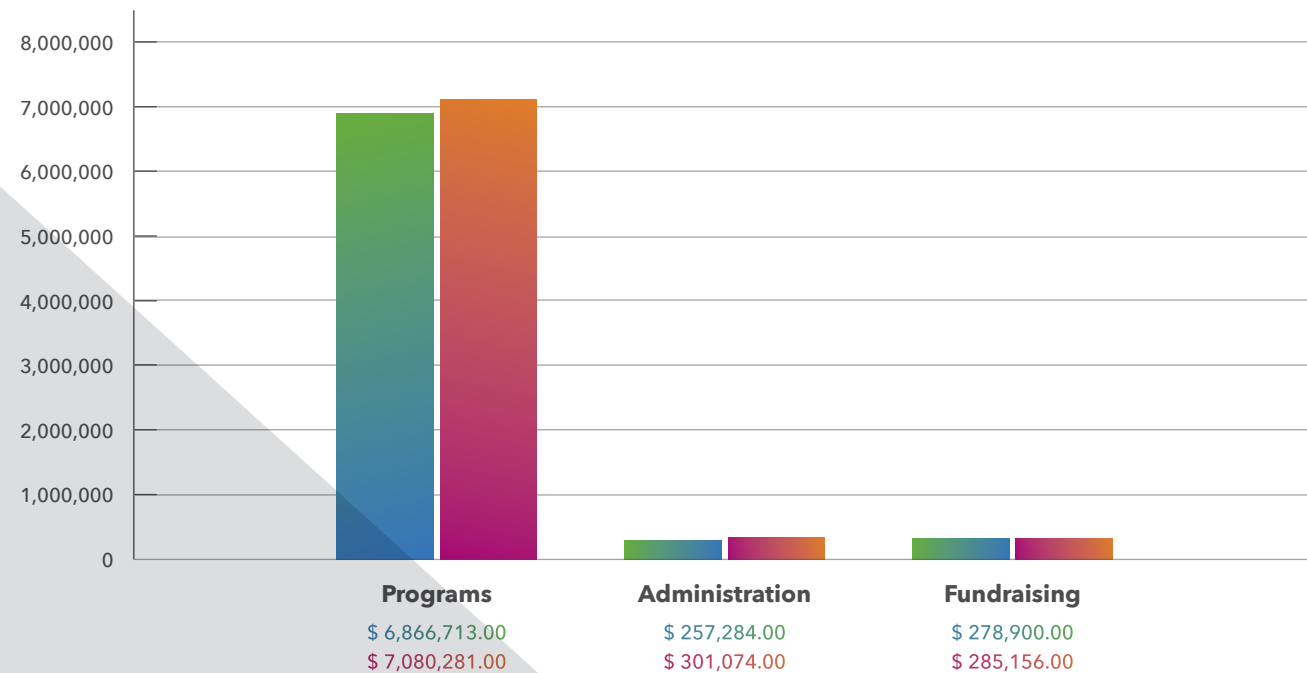
## Revenues

\$ 7,717,960.00 2015 Fiscal Year Total  
 \$ 8,153,408.11 2016 Fiscal Year Total



## Expenses

\$ 7,402,897.00 2015 Fiscal Year Total  
 \$ 7,666,511.00 2016 Fiscal Year Total



### Expenses by Program

	2015	2016
Economic Justice	\$ 3,228,332.06	\$ 3,584,036.28
Immigrant Advocacy	\$ 2,091,738.38	\$ 2,130,814.38
JustChildren	\$ 2,082,826.56	\$ 1,951,660.34
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 7,402,897.00</b>	<b>\$ 7,666,511.00</b>

### Expenses by Location

	2015	2016
Charlottesville	\$ 1,884,313.09	\$ 2,348,923.51
NoVA	\$ 2,535,829.43	\$ 2,209,867.54
Richmond	\$ 2,504,134.83	\$ 2,634,440.68
Petersburg	\$ 478,619.65	\$ 473,279.27
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 7,402,897.00</b>	<b>\$ 7,666,511.00</b>

# Donors

## Levels of Giving

**\$100,000+**  
Justice Circle

**\$50,000 - \$99,999**  
Visionary Circle

**\$20,000 - \$49,999**  
Equity Circle

**\$10,000 - \$19,999**  
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**“Legal Aid Justice Center is their (clients’) voice. It’s important work. It’s wonderful work, and that’s why I support them and have for forty years.”**

- Former Board Member Helen Parrish

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- Board Member Joy Johnson

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(434) 977-0553

**Falls Church**

6066 Leesburg Pike, Suite 520  
Falls Church VA 22041  
(703) 778-3450

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