

ANNUAL REPORT 2018

COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES





LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



*CLS Executive Director
Debby Freedman*

As the Executive Director of Community Legal Services (CLS), I want to take a moment to thank you.

Your support has allowed us to continue to grow, as we provide exceptional legal representation to the people who need us. **This year we helped 1,700 more people than last year – 10,718 total! That 18% increase is made possible by our funders' and donors' contributions to fight injustice. Because of our generous supporters, we are able to effectively challenge systems that perpetuate inequality,** and expand our work advocating for people in need.

For more than 50 years, we have been fighting for justice for our clients. Our staff works to prevent homelessness and eviction, secure basic necessities for children, break down barriers to employment, and help older adults age comfortably and with dignity in the community. We keep families together and make sure they have heat in the winter. It's challenging work, but it's vital to our community and we are committed to our mission.

On the pages of this annual report you'll read about some of our important work. **One thing that is incredibly exciting is that this year we have increasingly been working side-by-side with our clients on important advocacy efforts.** I hope when you read about that, you are as proud of the work as we are to partner with our clients.

In recent months, our clients have faced unprecedented attacks on their lives and livelihoods, but together, we are standing strong. I thank you for standing with us, and for your commitment to justice.

Sincerely,

Debby Freedman
Executive Director

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CLS BOARD MEMBER ADRIANNE'S STORY

My name is Adrianne Gunter, I'm 33 years old, and I have multiple sclerosis.

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an incurable auto-immune disease that attacks the central nervous system. I walk with a cane, but it's hard to lift my legs. My hands don't grip the way they used to and I need help getting the lid off a jar of peanut butter. No matter how well I chew my food, I have difficulty swallowing. I have full-body tremors and I never know when they're going to happen. I have all of these problems and more.

I wanted to make movies and television, and in 2013, I graduated from the University of the Arts with a BFA. It was the best four years of my life—I loved every minute of it. So imagine my surprise when MS struck my senior year. Suddenly, I'm turning in my homework late. Suddenly, I'm missing class. Suddenly, I'm tired all the time. Suddenly, I don't understand. I thought it was stress; nevertheless, after graduation, I thought the stress was over and I could focus on getting my career together. And that's when I lost vision in my left eye.

I got an MRI and learned that I have MS. My life came to a crashing halt. Instantly, I became unemployed and unemployable. The fatigue, the brain fog, and the muscle weakness were only getting worse. I was living at home with my Mom, but I wasn't able to contribute anything. I felt terrible.

I needed income, so I applied for Supplemental Security Income (SSI), but I was denied, because the Social Security Administration (SSA) believed I was well enough to work, even though the most basic tasks are a huge struggle. After I was rejected, I appealed the decision. I needed help to make my case, so I came to Community Legal Services.

SSA is dealing with a huge backlog. In Philadelphia, it can take two years just to get a hearing. That's two long years I had to go without income. When my wait was finally over, CLS argued my case and proved that I was too disabled to work. Without CLS, I may not have won my case.

One of the hardest parts of waiting so long to get benefits was the feeling like I couldn't contribute even a little, like I could before my condition got worse. Finally, I have disability income and can help my mom pay rent and pay for other things I need.

I didn't want people to have to go through what I went through, waiting years to find out if I would ever get the income I needed. **When CLS asked if I would share my story with *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, I jumped at the chance.** I had shared the story of my MS when Medicaid expansion was under attack, so I knew it could help. What I didn't know was just how much it could help.

Area Congresspeople Boyle, Evans, Brady and Norcross read my story and took action immediately as soon as they learned about the backlog, along with Senator Casey and CLS. SSA agreed to send nine more judges to Philadelphia to shorten the wait time for hearings, and they made other changes as well. Without CLS, I may not have won my case. Advocating side-by-side with CLS, we were able to significantly shorten the backlog.

I didn't ask for this disease. I don't want it. If I could reach inside myself and rip this disease out of me, I would, but I can't. But I can work hard to help other people. **I've since become a Board member at CLS and Philadelphia Legal Assistance,** where I am looking forward to working with their staffs. I am so grateful to CLS and now I want to give back to others in need.





CLS ADVOCACY: WORKING WITH NATIONAL IMPACT

Our advocacy work has a national impact, helping millions of people across the country. Here are just a few of the things we are working on:

- CLS's incredible victory with Clean Slate in Pennsylvania is being recognized throughout the country as a critical next step for creating second chances. CLS's Employment Unit provides support for lawyers across the country who handle criminal record-clearing cases through the National Clean Slate Clearinghouse, funded by the U.S. Departments of Labor and Justice. We provided webinars, published papers, spoke at conferences, and provided individual consultations. The highlight of our work in 2018 was the **sold-out first national convening on record-clearing as part of the American Bar Association (ABA) and National Legal Aid Defender Association (NLADA) Equal Justice Conference** in May.
- In 2018, CLS led advocacy seeking to prevent states from reintroducing new administrative hurdles in the Social Security

disability review process, authored federal comments on how Social Security can improve pathways to work for youth with disabilities, and **contributed to a U.S. Supreme Court amicus brief on vocational expertise in disability hearings**. CLS's SSI Unit participates in several national advocacy coalitions, providing expertise about our clients' experiences, and how changes in federal law can make their lives better.

- In addition to leadership in Pennsylvania, CLS has been a **key stakeholder in the national Protecting Immigrant Families campaign** to oppose the President's proposal to dramatically expand "public charge" policies. If implemented, the proposed public charge policy will make it impossible for many low- and moderate-income immigrant mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, sons and daughters of U.S. citizens to get a visa or green card so they can live with their families. It will also deter many thousands of immigrant families, which include millions of children, including many citizen children, from accessing vital services— everything from health care to nutrition assistance. Our advocacy has been focused on generating comments to the federal government in opposition to the proposal, and on community education for advocates and immigrant communities.
- **CLS attorneys and staff have been featured speakers at multiple national conferences**, presenting about

our cutting-edge legal advocacy, including the **ABA** Section of Litigation Conference, the **NLADA** Conference, the **ABA/NLADA Equal Justice Conference**, and multiple conferences hosted by the **National Consumer Law Center**.

- The **American College of Trial Lawyers** (ACTL) awarded a \$50,000 grant to CLS's **Youth Justice Project** (YJP). YJP also received national recognition by being named a model program by the **ABA Homeless Youth Legal Network**. **YJP was one of twelve model programs across the country to receive this honor**. YJP seeks to transform the way legal services are provided to vulnerable youth ages 16-24 who face significant challenges, including high rates of unemployment and deep poverty, homelessness, and involvement in the child welfare and juvenile/criminal justice systems. YJP also advocates for systemic changes that open doors to opportunity, stability, and success for youth who would otherwise fall through the cracks.
- CLS is a leader in working to keep families together and in creating laws and policies to support children and their parents. CLS continued our participation in **United Family Advocates (UFA)**, a national bipartisan workgroup dedicated to reforming the child welfare system. This group was formed in the wake of the last Presidential election to bring together people from both parties to unite around the cause of safely reducing

the number of children in foster care by ensuring adequate services to keep children safely at home and avoiding unnecessary interference by the government in family life. In June, legislation proposed by UFA, HR 6233, the **Poverty is Not Neglect Act**, was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives.





RONALD'S STORY

I am a father, a husband, a son, a friend, and ambitious to get ahead in life. I started my own company so that I can give other people second chances by hiring them to work for me. I give freely of my time to be a role model to kids in my community and to younger men who are tempted by the streets. But to so many people, I am an “ex-offender,” and nothing more.

More than 10 years ago, when I was 25, I was convicted of two misdemeanors. In one case, I was on the street with my brother when he was selling drugs, and I warned him that the police were coming. In the other, I tried to steal a pocketbook at Neiman Marcus. I did my probation for these cases, and have been a law-abiding citizen ever since.

I'll never forget the first time I was turned down for a job because of my record. I had been on the job for about a month when my background check came back. I was called into Human Resources and told they had to fire me because of my record. Security was called to immediately remove me from the building. It was the worst feeling of my life. It was humiliating to tell my family, who had been so proud of me, that I had failed again.

That was the first of many times that I was turned away from jobs that I was qualified for because of my minor record. More times than I can count, companies have told me, "You'll be great. Your skills are exactly what we are looking for." But then that question about my background comes up. So many doors have been closed in my face, I know what wood tastes like. And because of my record, I can't even take my kids on school field trips. Do you know how devastating that is?

When I first came to Community Legal Services for help, there was nothing they could do. That's when we went to work. **CLS and the Center for American Progress had the idea for Clean Slate**, a program to automatically seal criminal records like mine. They worked to create a bill to establish the program, and asked me to share my story, so people in Harrisburg could understand how important this is.

I traveled to Harrisburg and Washington, DC to tell my story. I appeared on national television and in local news. I wanted people to know how much this matters.

After years of hard work, Clean Slate passed, and now people like me will get a fresh start. I'm excited to be able to go on field trips with my kids and **to not be defined by mistakes I made long ago.**



I am really happy that I told my story. It involved me in a cause bigger than myself. I am proud of myself that I have stood up in front of so many people for what is right. My mom sleeps better, knowing what I stand for. My son sees his dad standing for something. This is the most gratifying cause that I have ever been involved with, and I am thankful for the opportunity to work with CLS.



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Stopping Sexual Harassment of Restaurant Workers in Its Tracks



CLS and other members of CRSH providing a training to restaurant managers and employees on how to address and prevent sexual harassment in the workplace.

With their focus on “socializing” and the flow of alcohol, restaurants are workplaces in which sexual harassment is especially prevalent. This is especially true for low-wage and immigrant workers, who may be exploited because of their status. To combat sexual harassment in restaurants, CLS and our partners have created the **Coalition for Restaurant Safety and Health (CRSH)**—a project that’s one of the first of its kind in the country. Through CRSH, CLS attorneys provide free anti-harassment training to restaurant employers and workers, which helps employers identify harassment and stop it before it starts. We also offer guidance for employers who wish to adopt anti-harassment policies.

Balancing the Scales of Justice for Tenants



CLS's Housing Unit celebrates the launch of the Philadelphia Eviction Prevention Project. Together, CLS and our partners stand up for tenants and help them advocate for their rights.

CLS advocates are getting justice for tenants in Philadelphia, changing the way the court works for renters, and ensuring fairness. With the support of the City of Philadelphia, and in response to Philadelphia's eviction crisis, the **Philadelphia Eviction Prevention Project (PEPP)** was launched in January 2018. PEPP is utilizing best practices and innovative strategies, high quality legal representation, community outreach, technology, and collaboration to reduce evictions, prevent homelessness, improve housing conditions, and stabilize communities in Philadelphia. We work to level the playing field at Municipal Court from one

where landlords, most of whom are represented by attorneys, have had the ability to define how the court works, to one where tenants have a voice in decisions and the ability to enforce their legal rights. PEPP also ensures that tenants know their rights before they come to court, so that eviction filings and default judgments can be reduced. Since the start of PEPP, hundreds of tenants have received excellent legal representation, hundreds more have received advice and referrals, and thousands have accessed self-help materials through our website.

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Pioneering Automation of Criminal Record Sealing



Governor Tom Wolf with CLS Litigation Director Sharon Dietrich and staff from the Center for American Progress, the team that conceived of and advocated for Clean Slate.

Employer rejection of job applicants based on criminal records is one of the primary reasons for poverty among the working poor. Hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians who are eligible to expunge or seal minor criminal cases do not get that relief, because they have no access to lawyers or the legal process. In December 2014, **CLS and the Center for American Progress** conceived of “Clean Slate,” the use of computer technology to seal records

without requiring petitions in court. In **June 2018, Pennsylvania became the first state to enact Clean Slate**, with CLS’s policy and technology expertise playing a key role. In addition to automated sealing, Clean Slate expands eligibility for sealing old misdemeanors. Congress and other states are now looking at replicating Clean Slate as a way of closing the “Second Chance Gap.”

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A Court Victory Leads to Help for Vulnerable Pennsylvanians



CLS client and lead plaintiff Billie Washington celebrates the restoration of General Assistance with CLS attorneys Richard Weishaupt and Michael Froehlich, who argued the case.

In a unanimous decision in June 2018, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ordered the **restoration of Pennsylvania's General Assistance (GA) program** and the elimination of harmful work requirements. GA provides a maximum of \$205 per month for children who live with someone they are not related to, people fleeing domestic violence and

individuals with serious disabilities who are awaiting Social Security benefits. After the Pennsylvania legislature eliminated GA in 2012, CLS sued on behalf of clients who lost their benefits. Restoration of this lifeline program will help thousands of Pennsylvanians pay for transportation, medical co-pays, a phone, or a roof over their heads.

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Community College Students Can Now Access Fresh, Nutritious Food



*CLS's advocacy means that many community college students can access SNAP for the first time. Here, a student gets help applying for SNAP through **Single Stop** at Community College of Philadelphia, one of our partners.*

As a result of CLS advocacy, a new Pennsylvania policy will allow 25,000 community college students to access food stamps for the first time. Until now, most students could only get SNAP, also known as food stamps, in narrowly defined circumstances. Now, Pennsylvania's community college students who are in programs that will improve their employability can qualify for SNAP. The new policy

will result in thousands of students at **Community College of Philadelphia**—and many more statewide—becoming **eligible for food stamps**. This is a critical support for low-income students who are working hard to further their education. These newly eligible students will be able to focus on their education goals without sacrificing their basic needs.

CLS and CHOP Launch Medical-Legal Partnership



Our medical-legal partnerships (MLPs) address critical needs for children and their families, so they can be healthy and thrive.

Photo courtesy of Holly Clark Photography.

This year, CLS and the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) **launched a medical-legal partnership (MLP) at CHOP's Karabots Pediatric Care Center** at 48th and Market, the largest pediatric primary care center in the nation. CLS advocates partner with the Karabots medical team to

identify and address health-harming legal issues like utility shut-offs and mold and lead in homes. By working in partnership with children's medical providers and meeting busy families where they are, CLS ensures that patient families are happier and healthier.

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CLS Executive Director Debby Freedman and CLS Senior Attorney Monty Wilson with Philadelphia Revenue Commissioner Frank Breslin. CLS and the Revenue Department have worked together to find solutions to property tax foreclosure.

The Philadelphia Dept. of Revenue issued its annual report showing that the **City's Owner-Occupied Tax Payment Agreement program (OOPA)** has helped over **16,000 homeowners** preserve their homes while paying their property taxes. The program allows homeowners to make reasonable monthly payments, based on their income, on property taxes they owe to the city. This program helps families avoid tax foreclosure while allowing the City to collect the revenue it needs. CLS, City Council and the

Dept. of Revenue spent a year and half designing and implementing the innovative OOPA payment plan program. The new report shows that, from the program's start in October of 2013 through December of 2017, 16,361 households have either completed an OOPA payment plan or are currently in an agreement. The report also shows that 3,643 of those same taxpayers were also newly enrolled in the City Homestead Exemption in 2017—helping to reduce their annual tax bills by about \$400 each year.

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Banishing the SSI Backlog



Highlighting the SSI backlog and advocating for solutions, CLS attorneys Jen Burdick and Claire Grandison held a recent panel event with The Philadelphia Inquirer's Claudia Vargas, Congressman Brendan Boyle, and co-chairs of the Philadelphia Bar Association Social Security Disability Group, Marjorie Portnoy and Tom Giordano.

In recent years, people with disabilities have faced the worst Social Security Administration (SSA) delays in history when seeking Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, which provide life-sustaining income. In Philadelphia, the wait topped 25 months in early 2018. CLS teamed up with fellow legal advocates, including law firm **Pond Lehocky Stern Giordano**, client and **Board member Adrienne Gunter**, **Congresspeople Boyle, Evans, Brady**

and Norcross and **Senator Bob Casey**. As a result, SSA dedicated nine new Administrative Law Judges to process disability appeals in Philadelphia, and allocated resources for 15,000 "On the Record" (OTR) decisions, or disability findings issued without full hearings in particularly strong cases. Just a few months later, applicants' hearings are being scheduled in Philadelphia much more quickly.

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Justice Prevails in Making Utilities Affordable

CLS's Energy Unit intervened after PGW filed for a rate increase in early 2017, and we were hugely successful. PGW made multiple efforts to limit our participation, but we prevailed and ensured our clients' rights to fully participate and be heard in this rate proceeding. As a result, we staved off threats to programs that assist low-income customers, and obtained new program benefits. Commercial and industrial customers argued that they should not have to contribute to help low-income customers, but we fought to ensure that they have to pay their fair share. Furthermore, we obtained additional funding to help low-income customers with hazardous or inoperable heating systems, and made modifications to PGW's LIHEAP Crisis policies that will allow more customers to have safe heat in their homes.



LEGAL UNITS

CLS houses a wide range of legal expertise. With eleven different legal units and projects, CLS advocates often collaborate to solve clients' complex and intersecting problems.



AGING AND DISABILITIES UNIT

Specializes in representing seniors and people with disabilities in a wide range of public benefits and consumer matters, including challenges to denials of Medicaid, Medicare, or disability benefits; decisions by managed care organizations to deny care; and violations of residents' rights and quality-of-care requirements in nursing homes and personal care homes.



FAMILY ADVOCACY UNIT (FAU)

Provides high quality interdisciplinary legal representation to parents in Philadelphia dependency proceedings, with the goal of strengthening families and keeping children safely at home. The FAU model incorporates direct representation, community outreach and education, and systemic legislative and policy advocacy for families involved in the child welfare system.



LANGUAGE ACCESS PROJECT

Works to ensure CLS services are available to Philadelphia communities with limited ability to speak, read, write, or understand English. The unit addresses legal issues specific to this population and collaborates with other units to represent individuals and families in challenging language barriers to benefits, services, and access to justice.



EMPLOYMENT UNIT

Represents clients with employment-related problems, including tackling barriers to employment, seeking unpaid wages, and preserving jobs. The unit advocates at the national and state levels on low-income workers' rights issues, such as preventing overbroad disqualifications of workers with criminal records.



HOMEOWNERSHIP AND CONSUMER RIGHTS UNIT

Represents homeowners facing mortgage and tax foreclosures, and pursues economic justice on behalf of clients facing fraudulent consumer practices, abusive debt collection, and a variety of consumer scams affecting low-income families. The unit is heavily litigation-focused, but also advocates with city, state, and federal agencies for more consumer-friendly policies and laws.



WELFARE UNIT

Represents clients seeking or facing termination of public benefits such as cash assistance, food stamps, or health insurance. The unit provides education and outreach services and advocates for improvements to the programs that provide these benefits at the federal, state and local levels.



ENERGY UNIT

Advocates so that people have access to affordable water, heat, and electricity in their homes. Through direct legal representation, policy advocacy, and pushing for legislation to improve energy affordability, our cutting-edge work promotes health and safety in Philadelphia and across Pennsylvania.



HOUSING UNIT

Represents private, public, and subsidized housing tenants in matters involving eviction, illegal lockouts, and substandard housing. The unit also uses systems advocacy and litigation to address issues ranging from lead paint elimination, to federal housing policy changes, to tenant eviction laws.



SSI UNIT

Represents individuals in administrative hearings and federal court who have been denied SSI, a core Social Security benefit that provides monetary support to individuals with serious disabilities, including children. The unit also advocates at the national and state levels for fair, sustainable Social Security policies.



MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS (MLPs)

Addresses health-harming legal issues like lack of heat, unstable housing, or food insecurity. In 2014, CLS launched its first MLP at the Rising Sun Health Center, which serves a diverse immigrant population. In 2018, CLS launched a second MLP at CHOP's Karabots Pediatric Care Center, which treats more than 35,000 children each year, most of whom are low-income. At the MLPs, CLS advocates work alongside health care team members to prevent or resolve legal issues.



YOUTH JUSTICE PROJECT

Provides holistic representation and engages in community-based outreach to ensure that young people transitioning to adulthood are able to connect to the services they need to gain stability and access opportunity.

FINANCIALS

As of June 30, 2018

	UNRESTRICTED	TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED	TOTAL
REVENUE & OTHER SUPPORT:			
Contract & Grants	10,237,316	15,116	10,252,432
Contributions	2,064,343	395,500	2,459,843
Attorney Fees	151,614		151,614
Interest Income	76,449		76,449
Other Income	4,812		4,812
Net Assets released from restrictions	<u>903,973</u>	<u>-903,973</u>	<u></u>
Subtotal Revenue	13,438,507	-493,357	12,945,150
EXPENSES:			
Program Services	10,112,401		10,112,401
Management and General	858,903		858,903
Fundraising	<u>460,100</u>		<u>460,100</u>
Total Expenses	11,431,404	<u>0</u>	<u>11,431,404</u>
Change in Assets	2,007,103	-493,357	2,007,103
Net Assets			
Beginning of Year	<u>8,695,793</u>	<u>2,770,776</u>	<u>11,466,589</u>
End of Year	<u><u>10,702,896</u></u>	<u><u>2,277,419</u></u>	<u><u>12,980,315</u></u>

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