



➤ [2009 Annual Report](#)



Community Legal Services of Philadelphia

# MEETS PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE





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Every day, low-income people in need of legal help walk into our offices and hear "How can I help you?" from someone who means it.  
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➤ **Since its founding in 1966,** Community Legal Services has been committed to providing access to justice for low-income Philadelphians. In the economic turmoil of the past year, clients have needed our legal expertise more than ever.

Every day, low-income people in need of legal help walk into our offices and hear, “How can I help you?” from someone who means it. When clients come through our doors, we often spend hours listening to them and helping them find solutions to some of the most difficult obstacles in their lives. Even when it feels like everything else is against them, our clients trust us and find solace in knowing that someone is looking out for their best interests. No matter what the situation is—helping our clients access benefits, housing, medical care, or employment—CLS meets people where they are. We give our clients more than expert legal advice; we offer compassion and empowerment in an environment where clients are at ease.

At the same time, our presence in the community we serve has allowed us to address the needs of the poor on a larger scale. Through our work with individual clients we identify problems that are affecting many people in their community. We are able to tackle these issues through sophisticated advocacy work, and make legal change that has great impact on low-income people in Philadelphia and beyond.

In times of trouble, the need for CLS’ combination of expertise in poverty law and genuine concern for our clients is immeasurable. In this annual report, we hope to give you a glimpse of how CLS’ place in Philadelphia’s low-income community allows us not only to help our clients in the field, but also make a larger difference in the lives of low-income people everywhere. We invite you to join us in supporting this important work, bringing us one step closer to achieving our goal of justice for all.



Catherine C. Carr, Esq.  
Executive Director



Barbara T. Sicalides, Esq.  
Chair, Board of Trustees



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# DUPED BY



## ➤ Renting into foreclosure

At the age of 70, Mrs. G did not want or need to own a home for the first time in her life. But when she realized she needed to buy a home to care for her grandchildren, that had to change.

Mrs. G walked into a realtor's office hoping to buy the home that would help her care for her grandchildren. Her pile of \$5, \$10, and \$20 bills was not enough to buy a home outright, but the realtor told Mrs. G it was enough to sign a "rent-to-own" contract. She signed, and moved in.

Several years later, Mrs. G came to CLS, confused by a notice she received stating that she should send her rent to the bank.

# A FRAUD SCHEME

## ➤ Uncovering a scam

CLS paralegal Esther Alvarez realized she had already encountered the same problem twice that week—a person duped by a scheme in which a real estate scammer takes out mortgages on homes he has promised to sell through a lease-purchase transaction. The "buyers" are then told to make the repairs to the dilapidated houses, and the "seller" gets the benefit of the increase in the value of the home when he takes out the loan.

When Ms. Alvarez saw more than ten Spanish-speaking clients in one month with the same problem, she knew something was wrong.

## ➤ Keeping clients in their homes

With the help of CLS, Philadelphia Volunteers for the Indigent Program, Philadelphia Legal Assistance and the Philadelphia Mortgage Foreclosure Diversion Project, the court has halted nearly 200 sheriff's sales of properties thought to have been involved in this fraud scheme.

➤ For Mrs. G and others like her, CLS is there to make sure people can preserve and stay in their homes.

//

**With the help of CLS...the court has halted nearly 200 sheriff's sales of properties thought to have been involved in this fraud scheme.**

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Thank you



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# DISABILITIES



## ➤ Carrying a burden

Mr. O regularly comes to CLS' North Philadelphia office carrying bags full of mail. Mr. O's eyesight is so poor he can only see a very large print, and even then he has limited reading ability.

Mr. O can't read his mail, and he doesn't have a phone. Through no fault of his own, he couldn't communicate with the people at the Social Security office to get the benefits he needs—benefits designed specifically to help aged, blind, and disabled people who have little or no income. He was one of the many who needed CLS' legal advocacy to overcome administrative barriers, and was slipping through the cracks.

# ARE DISMISSED

## ➤ Seeking assistance

After hearing there were people in his neighborhood who could help him, Mr. O walked the short distance from his house to CLS' Law Center North Central at Broad Street and Erie Avenue. CLS attorney Louise Hayes worked with Mr. O to ensure the Social Security Administration properly handled his case, and that he was able to fully understand and participate in the necessary process to get benefits.

## ➤ Delivering a solution

Mr. O's difficulty with the Social Security office stemmed in part from problems with Mr. O's identity documents. His mother changed his last name informally when he was a child in Texas. His birth certificate has a different name from the name he has used all his life. Ms. Hayes convinced Social Security to process his application anyway, and sought help from CLS attorney Kasetta Coleman, who worked to obtain the documents needed for Texas to issue a delayed birth certificate with the last name he has used all his life.

Initially denied by Social Security, Ms. Hayes worked with Mr. O to keep his application active by ensuring he got and kept necessary appointments. When she needed to talk to him during the process, Ms. Hayes didn't send him mail, instead, she went to his house and taped a piece of paper on his door that read "COME TO CLS" in letters as large as the paper would allow.

After several trips to his house and several bags of unread mail, Ms. Hayes helped Mr. O get ongoing monthly benefits. In the past year, CLS' advocacy has helped more than 3,000 people receive the public benefits to which they are entitled.

➤ **For Mr. O and others like him, CLS is there to make sure people can get the help they need, regardless of their physical or mental limitations.**

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**In the past year, CLS' advocacy has helped more than 3,000 people receive the public benefits to which they are entitled.**

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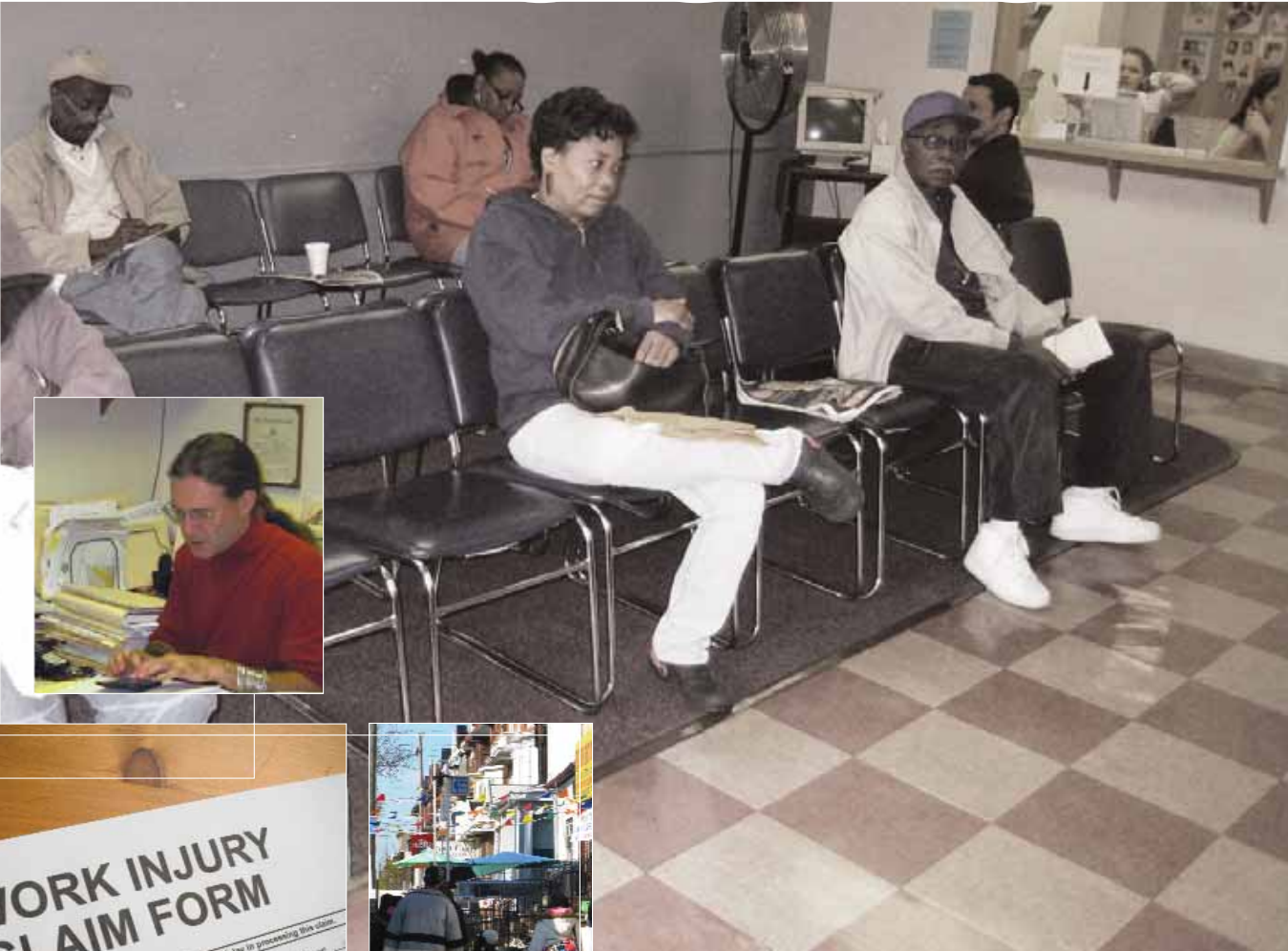


ON CALL - John  
Consumer - Monty  
AGING + Disa - BRONDA  
Welfare - John + Pebeo  
Interpreters - Lily P.  
                          Sonia C.  
                          Lillian C.



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# LANGUAGE



**WORK INJURY  
CLAIM FORM**

Failure to complete this form in its entirety may result in a delay in processing this claim.

NAME FOR (check all that apply):  
 Injury Only  
 Temporary Disability  
 Permanent Disability  
 Death/Benefit  
 Life Policy Proceeds

Work Injury Compensation  
 Hospital Indemnity  
 Policy Number

Work Injury Compensation  
 Hospital Indemnity  
 Policy Number

Work Injury Compensation  
 Hospital Indemnity  
 Policy Number





## ▶ Extending a crooked hand

Last winter, the Nationalities Service Center referred a Cambodian man, Mr. N, to CLS. Mr. N had suffered an injury at his workplace. A few days after the injury, a liaison showed up at Mr. N's home and offered to bring him to an attorney to get compensation for the injury. Mr. N did not speak English, but the liaison did.

While the attorney was working to get Mr. N a settlement, the liaison convinced Mr. N to move in with him. Once the case settled, however, the liaison kicked Mr. N to the curb, leaving him homeless.

Mr. N's settlement of more than \$30,000 was divided into two checks. When Mr. N received the first check, the liaison demanded more than half of it as a fee. Mr. N not only failed to receive the second check of more than \$20,000, he didn't even know a second check existed.

# BECOMES A BARRIER

## ▶ Working with the State

CLS attorney Samuel Brooks agreed to represent Mr. N in obtaining a replacement check, pursuing the liaison so as to put an end to his scams. Mr. Brooks contacted the Pennsylvania Office of Inspector General, which was investigating the case, and assisted Mr. N during the investigation.

When the OIG compared Mr. N's signature to the signature on the cashed check, it wasn't even close to a match.

## ▶ Protecting the community

Mr. Brooks identified another member of Mr. N's community to speak to the investigator and relate stories about the liaison, who had a history of bilking other Cambodian-American citizens out of Social Security and SSI money. CLS was successful in advocating for Mr. N—the liaison was recently arrested by the Philadelphia Police Department, and charged with several felonies.

Language is often a barrier to people seeking to obtain their entitlements and to get help from the legal system. Often, people will choose not to participate in the legal process because of the language barrier, and liaisons like the one in Mr. N's case prey upon these fears and take advantage of individuals' inability to access the justice system. CLS' representation of clients like Mr. N encourages victims to come forward when they are taken advantage of and prevents criminals from taking advantage of the legal system.

▶ For Mr. N and others like him, CLS is there to make sure people in the local immigrant community can obtain justice despite language barriers.

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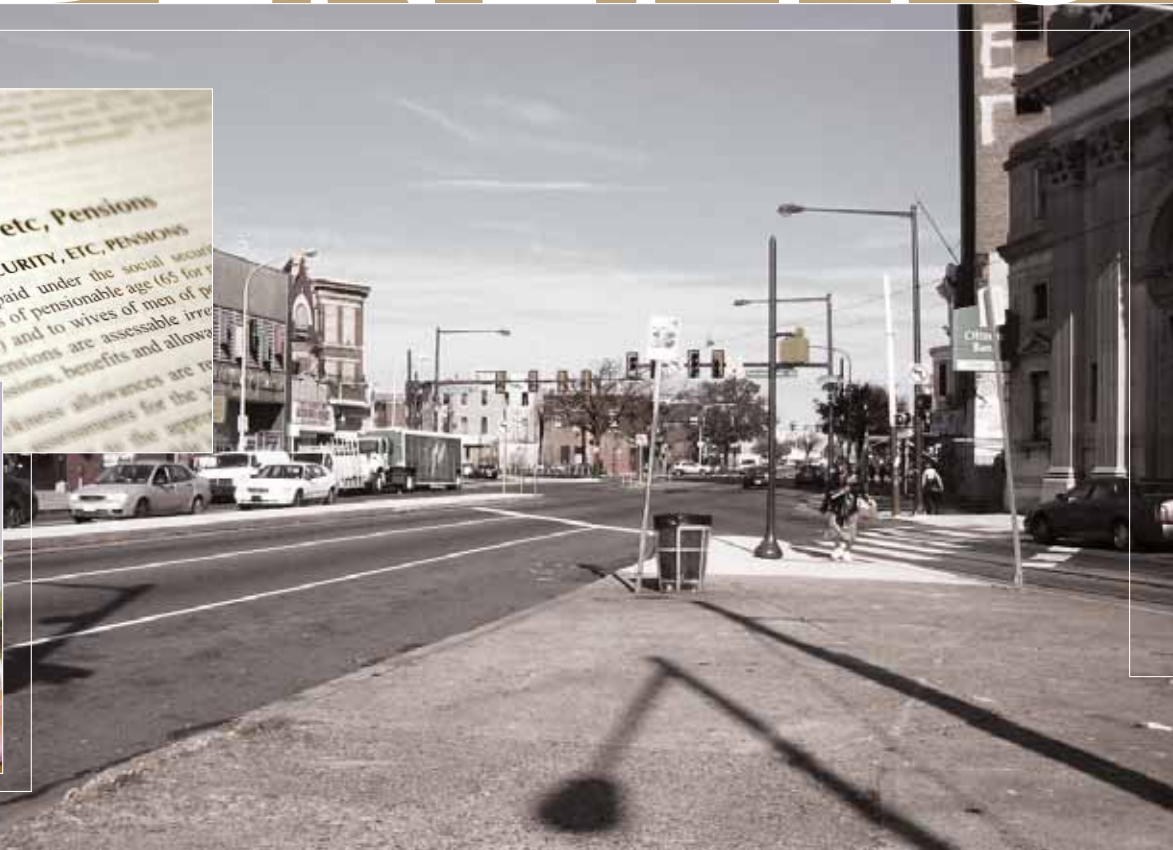
**CLS' representation of clients like Mr. N encourages victims to come forward when they are taken advantage of and prevents criminals from taking advantage of the legal system.**

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# BENEFITS



## ➤ **Rejecting a widow**

After her husband died, 67-year-old Mrs. B came to CLS with her denial letter for widow's benefits through Social Security because records showed that her husband had re-married.

Mrs. B was adamant that they had separated, but never divorced. Even if they had been divorced, she would still be entitled to widow's benefits because at the time of his death, they had been legally married at least 10 years.

## ➤ **Contacting the Courts**

When Mrs. B came to CLS, attorneys Beth Shapiro and Brenda Marrero filed an appeal with Social Security and contacted each jurisdiction where Mrs. B's husband had lived to request a certified statement from that county's Family Court that no divorce decree was ever filed for Mrs. B and her deceased husband.

The process took months of tedious work by Ms. Marrero and two of CLS' summer law interns, Gilman Knox and Emma Reynolds. Getting certified statements from each jurisdiction required hours of phone calls, follow-up calls, and paperwork, but CLS secured statements from all 11 different Family Courts across the country including several in California, and others in Virginia, Florida, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C.

//  
**CLS attorneys are able to help win these cases by understanding the Social Security Administration's regulations and policies, and forging a relationship with the case handler, who is often more responsive to a lawyer than to an applicant.**  
//

# ARE DENIED

## ➤ **Collecting the payment**

Presented with evidence provided by CLS, the Social Security administrator awarded Mrs. B a payment for back money totaling more than \$25,000 and a monthly benefit of \$1,181—which is nearly twice her income prior to receiving widow's benefits.

Every day, many low-income people are denied social security benefits. Many of these people, however, do not appeal, appeal too late, or appeal their case without representation and the case is not handled well. CLS attorneys are able to help win these cases by understanding the Social Security Administration's regulations and policies, and forging a relationship with the case handler, who is often more responsive to a lawyer than to an applicant.

➤ **For Mrs. B and others like her, CLS is there to make sure people receive the benefits to which they are entitled so that they can be financially stable in their old age.**

# FISCAL YEAR 2009

## Expenditures

Salaries .....	6,226,872
Fringe Benefits .....	1,897,006
Consultant and Contractors .....	383,995
Travel .....	53,326
Space Costs .....	671,456
Consumable Supplies .....	78,561
Furniture & Equipment .....	95,318
Insurance & Bonding .....	26,454
Printing Costs .....	24,158
Dues to Prof.Org. ....	17,991
Tuition/Seminar .....	25,294
Advertisements .....	850
Relocation Expense .....	9,196
Library-New Sets .....	1,151
Library-Upkeep .....	64,909
Library Subscriptions .....	4,388
Telephone .....	40,254
Postage .....	26,053
Connectivity .....	18,729
Court Costs .....	19,578
Miscellaneous .....	26,890
Interest Expense .....	3,842
Depreciation .....	-4,538
Acquisition of Property .....	53,763
Total Exp .....	9,716,269

## Support and Revenues

Access to Justice .....	2,094,474
Attorneys Fees .....	352,226
Disability Advocacy Project .....	303,789
Foundation Grants .....	1,610,524
Individual Contributions .....	85,034
Interest and Other .....	639,618
IOLTA .....	652,344
Local Government Funded Contracts	2,375,459
State Government Funded Contracts	1,784,250
Total Revenue .....	9,897,718

## An opportunity to make a difference...

Your generous support enables Community Legal Services to provide outstanding civil legal services free of charge to our low-income clients at what is often the most critical time in their lives. To make a gift online, or to learn about the many ways in which you can aid CLS in helping low-income Philadelphians, please visit our website at [www.clsphila.org](http://www.clsphila.org) and click on "How You Can Help." Or call the Development Office at 215.981.3732.



*CLS does not charge clients for our services. We can petition the court for attorneys' fees in certain cases.*



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Presented by Regional Housing Legal Services

### **Catherine C. Carr, Esq.**

2009 Philadelphia Bar Foundation Award  
Presented by the Philadelphia Bar Foundation

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Dom Vetri "Champion of the Public Interest" Award  
Presented by the University of Oregon School of Law,  
Public Interest/Public Service Program

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Justice William J. Brennan, Jr. Award  
Presented by Philadelphia Volunteers  
for the Indigent Program

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Housing Alliance Leadership Award  
Presented by the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania

### **George D. Gould, Esq.**

Pennsylvania Super Lawyer 2009  
Presented by Super Lawyers

### **Linda Ware Johnson, Esq.**

Andrew Hamilton Award  
Presented by the Philadelphia Bar Association,  
Public Interest Section

### **Edgardo Reyes**

Legal Services Recognition Award  
Presented by Philadelphia Volunteers  
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PennDot Advocacy Team Award  
Presented by HIAS and Council

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Senior Attorney Sabbatical Fellowship  
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Presented by Super Lawyers

## → CLS CHAMPION OF JUSTICE AND EQUAL JUSTICE AWARDS

The Champion of Justice and Equal Justice awards are given annually by Community Legal Services to recognize those who have made extraordinary efforts to ensure equal access to justice for all, regardless of income.

### **2009 Champion of Justice Award**

#### **Leventhal Sutton & Gornstein**

#### **The Honorable Annette M. Rizzo**

Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas

### **2009 Equal Justice Award**

#### **Michael Ruffin**

Paralegal for Community Legal Services'  
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#### **Suzanne J. Young, Esq.**

Supervising Attorney of Community Legal Services'  
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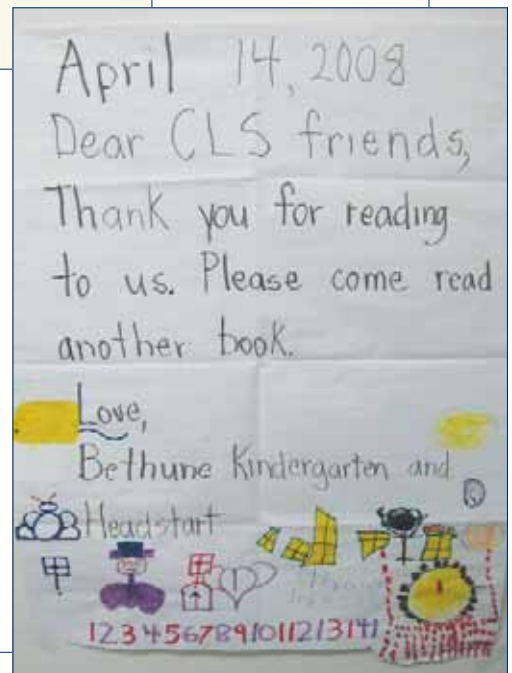
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## CLC UNITS

The Philadelphia Bar Association established Community Legal Services as an independent, 501(c)(3) organization in 1966 to provide free legal services, in civil matters, to low-income Philadelphians. CLS has served more than one million clients who could not afford to pay for quality legal representation, and who would have faced a variety of devastating ends without dedicated knowledgeable attorneys on their side.

Community Legal Services comprises nine legal units specializing in particular areas of civil poverty law. Each unit represents individual clients, engages in advocacy concerning systemic issues identified through direct client work, and provides community education on relevant legal issues to clients, professionals, and advocates.

### ➤ Housing Unit

Represents private, public, and subsidized housing tenants in matters involving eviction, illegal lock-outs, 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.

### ➤ Public Benefits Unit

Counsels clients, provides education and outreach services, and advocates regionally and nationally on welfare, disability, and healthcare issues. The unit also includes the Advocating on Behalf of Children Project, which helps disabled children access medical care.

### ➤ Family Advocacy Unit

Advocates for parents to keep their children at home or have them returned from foster care to a safe home, and provides assistance and training to other family advocates. The unit monitors and advocates for improvements in dependency court and foster care.

### ➤ Energy Unit

Protects the rights of low-income utility customers on service and payment issues, represents group clients on utility rate change cases and serves as the Public Advocate in representing all Philadelphia Gas Works residential customers.

### ➤ Employment Unit

Represents clients with employment-related problems, including claims on fair wages, family and medical leave, discrimination, and barriers to employment. The unit advocates at the national and state levels on workers' rights issues such as maintaining the protections of the unemployment compensation system.

### ➤ 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 benefits, decisions by managed care organizations to deny care, and violations of residents' right and quality-of-care requirements in nursing homes and personal care homes.

### ➤ Consumer / Housing Unit

Represents homeowners in disputes, residential mortgage foreclosures, fraudulent consumer practices, and issues with banking or check-cashing agencies. The unit uses systems advocacy and litigation to address the predatory lending crisis and other fringe banking issues.

### ➤ Community Economic Development Unit

Represents small and start-up community associations, faith-based institutions, social service organizations, nonprofits, and businesses to improve the quality of life and the economic viability of Philadelphia's low-income neighborhoods. The Child Care Law Project (CLLP), a special project of the CED Unit, is devoted to representing child care providers.

### ➤ Language Access Project

Works to ensure that Community Legal Services is accessible to Philadelphia communities with limited or no English speaking ability, and that legal issues specific to this population are addressed. The illegal failure to provide interpretation and translation services necessary for these communities to access public services is an important focus of the project's work.

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