Sustaining Family Stability

ANNUAL REPORT 2022

Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati
Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio, LLC
DEAR FRIENDS:

2022 was a tough year for many low-income families. Just as they recovered from the pandemic’s impact, home prices and rents increased dramatically, constraining their ability to obtain or retain affordable housing.

In this annual report, we highlight our efforts to help families sustain income and housing stability. Often, families needed legal help to ensure that one issue did not devolve into a cascade of problems. Our cover story details how our representation, over the course of two years, helped one family retain their child’s Social Security disability payments.

Our housing attorneys prevented 1,242 evictions and 286 foreclosures last year. We share one client’s story that is illustrative of our efforts. We also continued to collaborate with Community Action Agencies, Departments of Jobs and Family Services, and the Ohio Housing Finance Agency to get rent and mortgage assistance applications approved and checks sent quickly so eviction or foreclosure proceedings were dismissed.

2022 also saw a post-pandemic increase in our systemic work to preserve existing affordable rental housing. We joined the City of Cincinnati in lawsuits that aim to improve housing conditions and stop predatory rental practices affecting over 2,000 families. Our legal representation will assist thousands of tenants in our community to stay stable.

We are grateful for the ongoing support from local governments, philanthropic funders and our generous individual donors that enabled us to maintain clients’ family stability. Thank you as well to our partner organizations, volunteer attorneys, board of trustees, and our staff for their efforts that made such a difference in fulfilling our mission.

Mary Asbury
Executive Director

Christine Wheatley
President

Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati’s mission is to resolve serious legal problems of low-income people, to promote economic and family stability, and to reduce poverty through effective legal assistance.

Photos by Julia Frymier

Cover Photo: A'Miracle and her family at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital.
Appealing a benefits denial can be a complex, time-consuming process. Families often need legal help to do so, especially when a federal agency is involved. Child HeLP, our Health-Law Partnership with Cincinnati Children’s, referred working mom Tellena Royce to Legal Aid for help with a threatened termination of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for her daughter.

Six-year-old A’Miracle has complex cyanotic congenital heart disease, a rare, incurable, and often deadly condition. A’Miracle has undergone three open-heart surgeries, the first when she was just seven days old. Because her condition is so disabling, A’Miracle has received SSI benefit payments since birth to help support her special needs.

However, after the third surgery, Social Security proposed to terminate the benefits, saying A’Miracle had “medically improved”. While her condition is managed with numerous treatments, and medications, she will need more surgeries as she grows and may need a new heart. Tellena could not cover the expenses to keep A’Miracle healthy without the $700 a month SSI payment.

Legal Aid attorney Rachel Barr stepped in to prevent the termination of A’Miracle’s SSI benefits. She quickly ensured that the SSI benefits continued during the appeal process. Then, Rachel requested a review of the agency’s decision, providing significant evidence to back her claim that A’Miracle remained disabled and that the SSI benefits should continue. Despite all her efforts, Rachel did not prevail initially.

However, she continued to fight for A’Miracle and her family by filing an appeal and requesting a hearing. She received assistance from A’Miracle’s pediatric cardiologist, Dr. James Cnota, whose tests showed the scope of A’Miracle’s disability.

As a result of Rachel’s advocacy, the administrative judge ruled in A’Miracle’s favor. Now, after a two-year legal ordeal, A’Miracle’s SSI benefits are secure, enabling her parents to maintain her health and their family’s financial stability.
Keeping Families Housed

Legal Aid prevents homelessness for low-income families. Our advocates appear in court, negotiate with landlords and lenders, and ensure assistance funds are available in time to prevent evictions or mortgage foreclosures. Our results show that combining legal representation with rent or mortgage assistance effectively keeps families housed and landlords/lenders whole.

In 2022, we prevented foreclosures for 286 homeowners, 190 of whom were Black. We helped them obtain cash assistance funds through Save the Dream Ohio, managed by the Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA), and City of Cincinnati Community Block Grant funds. We negotiated loan modifications to make sure that future payments would be affordable and allowed families to retain the equity in their homes.

We prevented evictions for a record 1,242 people. We helped them obtain rental assistance funds, negotiated with landlords to accept the funds, or represented them in court.

One client’s experience reflects the scope of our housing stabilization efforts. Jerry and Bethany Stuckey live in Brown County with their five-year-old son, Jerry Jr., in subsidized rental housing. When they tried to complete the annual rent subsidy recertification, the landlord would not accept their income documentation nor meet with them. The landlord’s unwillingness was particularly difficult for them because Jerry Jr. was diagnosed with brain cancer and the family was traveling to Cincinnati Children’s in Avondale multiple times a week for his treatment.

The deadline to submit passed. As a result, the rent jumped threefold to market rate, but the landlord did not inform the family. Instead, he filed for eviction on the grounds that the lapsed recertification was a lease violation and nonpayment of the increased rent.

Legal Aid Attorney John Altman represented the Stuckeys. He filed counterclaims based on the unsafe and unsanitary conditions of the home, including significant mold, non-working major appliances, and baseboard heaters that repeatedly caught on fire. At trial, the judge ruled in the Stuckey’s favor, dismissing the eviction, reducing the rent to the original amount, and ordering the landlord to make repairs.
Maintaining and improving existing affordable rental housing stock is critical to providing safe, livable housing for low-income families. We advocate to hold landlords, especially of large multi-unit buildings, accountable to provide habitable conditions.

Currently, we represent tenants of VineBrook Homes and Williamsburg Apartments to address systemic issues such as failure to maintain properties, illegal lease provisions, and self-help evictions. These landlords are two of the most prolific eviction filers in Hamilton County.

VineBrook, an out of state investment firm, owns six thousand single family rental homes around the country, including over 3,300 in Greater Cincinnati neighborhoods.

Our client, Jenike Allen, experienced significant problems with VineBrook for over a year. VineBrook increased her rent without notice and then filed an eviction against her. Ms. Allen entered into a settlement agreement with VineBrook to resolve the eviction which VineBrook quickly violated. Legal Aid, on Ms. Allen’s behalf, then requested a court order to get VineBrook to comply.

Recently, Legal Aid filed a motion on behalf of several residents to intervene in the City of Cincinnati’s suit against VineBrook. The residents are seeking changes in the form leases that improperly shift the landlord’s legal obligation for making repairs onto the tenants, and changes to VineBrook’s management and billing practices including posting charges to tenants’ accounts that are not owed, and rents being increased without notice, as well as evictions being filed with no legal basis.

VineBrook’s treatment of tenants came to the attention of NBC News who interviewed Ms. Allen and her Legal Aid attorney, Jordan Cotleur, last fall, airing the story in November.
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All private donation income is used in support of our mission, and in accordance with Legal Services Corporation and other funder regulations.

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In honor of Alpha Taylor
Nick DiNardo

In honor of Elizabeth Tull Laureano
Anonymous
Our Clients

Cases by Area
- 49% Securing Housing and Helping the Homeowner
- 27% Helping Children and Families
- 22% Helping Obtain and Maintain Employment and Healthcare
- 2% Other Types of Assistance

Income
- 41% Below $10,000
- 23% $10K - $19,999
- 17% $20K - $29,999
- 19% $30K and above

Age
- 7% Below 18
- 40% 18-35
- 35% 36-54
- 18% 55 and above

Requests for Individual Case Services
January - December 2022

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>Requests for Service</th>
<th>Sent Written Materials</th>
<th>Made External Referral</th>
<th>LAS Case Open</th>
<th>VLP Case Open</th>
<th>Pending LAS &amp; VLP</th>
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<td>BROWN</td>
<td>277</td>
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<td>88</td>
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<td>BUTLER</td>
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<td>254</td>
<td>673</td>
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<td>CLERMONT</td>
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<td>CLINTON</td>
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<td>69</td>
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<td>HAMILTON</td>
<td>16,315</td>
<td>1,278</td>
<td>2,258</td>
<td>4,884</td>
<td>1,138</td>
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<td>HIGHLAND</td>
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<td>WARREN</td>
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<td>158</td>
<td>144</td>
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<td>UNSPECIFIED</td>
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<td>1,161</td>
<td>383</td>
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<td>380</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>24,368</td>
<td>1,881</td>
<td>4,727</td>
<td>6,369</td>
<td>1,368</td>
<td>4,808</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati/Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio, LLC/Volunteer Lawyers Project
The Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati and its affiliate the Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio, LLC provide civil legal services in seven southwest Ohio counties: Hamilton, Butler, Clermont, Brown, Warren, Clinton, and Highland. Legal Services Corporation supports only the activities of the Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati. The Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati provides staff support for the Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP). This Annual Report provides information about both Legal Aid Societies and the VLP.

### Statements of FINANCIAL POSITION

#### OPERATING REVENUE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>2021</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Access to Justice Foundation</td>
<td>2,690,211</td>
<td>1,495,079</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal Services Corporation</td>
<td>2,089,392</td>
<td>1,953,644</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Grants &amp; Contracts</td>
<td>4,791,007</td>
<td>4,770,896</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rental Income</td>
<td>278,559</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>467,596</td>
<td>350,997</td>
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<td>Forgiveness of PPP Loan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>950,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>37,689</td>
<td>56,611</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donated services</td>
<td>96,633</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investment return</td>
<td>(757,051)</td>
<td>735,482</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Operating Revenue</strong></td>
<td>10,109,097</td>
<td>11,319,456</td>
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#### FUNCTIONAL EXPENSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>2022</th>
<th>2021</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing &amp; Consumer Program</td>
<td>2,762,387</td>
<td>2,258,525</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment &amp; Benefits Program</td>
<td>1,124,883</td>
<td>1,339,866</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family and Children/Education Programs</td>
<td>3,854,787</td>
<td>3,817,368</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Civil &amp; VLP</td>
<td>362,069</td>
<td>268,735</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management &amp; General</td>
<td>1,929,627</td>
<td>1,380,160</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>169,140</td>
<td>149,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental Property</td>
<td>274,660</td>
<td>268,212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Expenses</strong></td>
<td>10,477,553</td>
<td>9,932,706</td>
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#### Change in net assets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change in net assets w/o donor restrictions</td>
<td>(293,833)</td>
<td>1,435,662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in net assets w/ donor restrictions</td>
<td>(220,060)</td>
<td>(200,767)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Change in Net Assets</strong></td>
<td>(513,893)</td>
<td>1,234,895</td>
</tr>
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</table>

#### Net assets, beginning of the year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net assets, beginning of the year</strong></td>
<td>10,315,586</td>
<td>9,080,691</td>
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### ASSETS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>2021</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash and Cash Equivalents</td>
<td>1,683,818</td>
<td>2,221,801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash held in trust for clients</td>
<td>55,524</td>
<td>125,754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investments</td>
<td>4,903,760</td>
<td>4,722,413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants and Contracts receivable</td>
<td>761,859</td>
<td>874,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions receivable, net</td>
<td>145,444</td>
<td>200,830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property and equipment, net</td>
<td>3,096,323</td>
<td>3,247,685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right-of-use assets, net-operating leases</td>
<td>133,648</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>160,093</td>
<td>150,356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest rate swap agreement</td>
<td>16,388</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investments restricted by donors for endowment</td>
<td>667,658</td>
<td>667,658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Assets</strong></td>
<td>11,624,515</td>
<td>12,211,012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

#### Liabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounts payable</td>
<td>114,410</td>
<td>153,286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accrued annual leave</td>
<td>393,379</td>
<td>416,646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accrued Expense</td>
<td>137,383</td>
<td>121,551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assets held for others</td>
<td>55,524</td>
<td>125,754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refundable advance</td>
<td>247,772</td>
<td>150,809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest rate swap agreement</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>58,335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lease liabilities - operating leases</td>
<td>135,549</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note Payable, bank</td>
<td>738,605</td>
<td>869,145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Liabilities</strong></td>
<td>1,823,822</td>
<td>1,095,426</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Net Assets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Without Restrictions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating</td>
<td>1,581,819</td>
<td>2,399,404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board designated</td>
<td>4,999,197</td>
<td>4,772,658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net investment in property and equipment</td>
<td>2,357,518</td>
<td>2,320,305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total without restrictions</strong></td>
<td>8,938,534</td>
<td>9,232,361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With donor restrictions</td>
<td>863,159</td>
<td>1,083,219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total net assets</strong></td>
<td>9,801,693</td>
<td>10,315,586</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Total liabilities and net assets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total liabilities and net assets</strong></td>
<td>11,624,515</td>
<td>12,211,012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MAKE A BEQUEST

Please consider including a gift to the Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati in your estate plan through your will, trust, or life insurance. It is simple to do. Just name us: Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati, include our Tax ID: 31-056673, and state the amount or percentage gift you choose to bequeath to us. You will leave a legacy that will improve the lives of future Legal Aid clients.

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Donald P. Klekamp Community Law Center Building,
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https://www.lascinti.org