

## MALS Expands Fundraising Amidst Cuts

By Bill Dries

[Memphis Area Legal Services Inc.](#) is expanding its annual fundraising drive in both its amount and who the nonprofit is seeking donations from.

MALS has lost \$300,000 in federal government funding as a result of budget cuts this year.

The first \$65,000 was cut in April retroactively for the current budget year. And MALS will lose another \$235,000 next year.

“If you compare what they were getting from the federal government in 2010 to what they will get in 2012, that’s a \$300,000 cut,” said MALS fundraising chairman George T. “Buck” Lewis, a shareholder in Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell and Berkowitz PC and a former president of the Tennessee Bar Association.

Lewis and others seeking the additional contributions hope to have the pledges by the end of the year and the checks by mid-February.

Donations can be pledged and made to MALS executive director Harrison D. McIver at 255-3447 or contributions can be made at [www.malsi.org](http://www.malsi.org) under the heading “contribute now.”

“In the past, most of the asks have been directed to lawyers. We decided we needed to find some new money,” Lewis said. “We’ve expanded it to ask for support from foundations and some corporations.”

He estimates 60 percent of MALS’ work with clients involves family or domestic issues.

“A huge percentage of what they do has to do with families that are in distress, mostly women with children who are having problems with orders of protection or alimony and child support problems or housing issues or benefits and health care issues,” he said.

The fundraising campaign is called the “Campaign For Equal Justice.” The campaign is complicated by the federal funding cuts, which means 85 percent of everything raised in the campaign this year will be used to fill the funding gap.

Lewis is prepared for questions about how much attorneys are giving to the cause. Last year, the campaign set a goal of \$300,000 and raised \$307,000. This year, the goal was raised from \$325,000 to \$350,000 to compensate for the loss of federal funding.

“Many lawyers have been very generous in giving anywhere from 10 to 20 percent more than last year,” he said. “The lawyers have stepped up significantly both in terms of the number of lawyers participating and the size of the gifts. But there’s just no way we can raise that much money just out of the legal community.”

MALS operates on a combination of federal funding and private funding. In 2010, the attorneys handled 20,000 requests for legal assistance.