

Welcome to Memphis Area Legal Services, Inc.'s Website

A CASE FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Memphis Area Legal Services, Inc. (MALS) entered its fifth decade with the same commitment and determination that inspired 30 members of the legal profession in the wake of Dr. Martin Luther King's death to coalesce around a shared vision to establish an organization whose single purpose was to provide means by which the legal problems of the poor could be addressed.

Today, MALS continues that tradition of "excellence in legal advocacy," as a non-profit firm geared to provide the highest quality legal assistance possible to the most vulnerable residents of our community. MALS has a staff composed of experienced, or as some may say "seasoned," advocates with legal skills honed over decades who are complemented and inspired by a cadre of young and capable advocates and staff who are similarly committed to affording access to our justice system to the most vulnerable members of our community.

Even with a dedicated staff, it cannot meet the compelling need today that is more acute because the "justice gap" is widening only compounded by the economic woes of our time. As the recent census reveals that more than 57 million individuals live at or below the poverty line, representing more than a 14 million increase since the 2000 Decennial Census. We expect that the county-by-county census figures will confirm that Shelby, Tipton, Lauderdale, and Fayette counties, comprising MALS' service area, has increased to over 200,000, a 29% increase.

The worsening situation of poverty presents a challenge not only to MALS but our community as a whole, most especially the legal community. It is crucial that MALS' staff, board and volunteers communicate MALS' mission and importance to this community with clarity so that community appreciates the vital resource that MALS is.

We at MALS are very appreciative of the outpouring of support of our volunteers and contributors in 2010. The Campaign for Equal Justice exceeded its \$300,000 goal in 2010. The 2011 Campaign kicked off in February at Calvary Episcopal Church on one of the worst winter days of the season. Because of her belief in MALS, Chief Justice Cornelia Clark of the Tennessee Supreme Court traveled from Nashville and returned in the throes of horrendous weather, but beforehand challenged nearly 80 attendees to support MALS with both their gifts of time and financial support.

Your support for the 2011 Campaign is more crucial today than ever before for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), MALS' largest funder (40%), is facing a new threat in the 2012 federal budgeting and appropriation processes. While LSC fared better than some agencies in the 2011 federal budget, it nevertheless experienced a \$15.8 million, or a 4 % reduction in the Federal Budget Compromise for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2011. The FY 2012 appropriation bill reported out of the House Appropriations Committee calls for a \$104 million cut in LSC's funding. Of \$404 million in 2011, this would represent a 26% reduction solely in the program budget line. A 26% reduction, if approved, would mean over \$400,000 reduction in MALS' 2010 budget. MALS could not sustain its current operation and level of services should such a draconian cut occur. Almost immediately, layoff of a significant number of staff would occur. While MALS appreciates the economics of the times, it questions the thinking that the most vulnerable

members of our community – individuals with limited income, largely women and children, the elderly, and the disabled should bear the brunt of such decisions.

We thank you, our supporters, who softened the blow and impact in 2011. In 2012, your support is being called on once again, as the cornerstone of our democracy – “equal justice under law” – will be undermined, should the proposed cuts occur.

What can you do? Simply, volunteer your time willingly and generously contribute \$300.00 minimally, or just give what you are able to give to the 2011 Campaign for Equal Justice, chaired by George T. “Buck” Lewis. The Campaign goal is \$325,000 but the overall organizational goal set is \$450,000.

Again, welcome to our website. We hope you find it informative and leave with a better understanding of the various activities and important services we provide our community.

Thank you!