

2023

Annual Report



A client's child swims in the pool at the extended stay hotel where her family is living.

photo by Dustin Chambers

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Nakul Warrior

2023

OUTSTANDING OUTCOMES

9,761

cases related to housing

\$16M+

of financial benefit!



A Letter from the Executive Director

2023 was a particularly eventful year for Atlanta Legal Aid

And the future holds even greater promise as we celebrate our centennial anniversary!

I joined Atlanta Legal Aid as executive director on Tuesday, August 1, 2023. What drew me to Legal Aid were the talented attorneys and other legal professionals. Eighty attorneys and seventy-five other professionals work hard every day to help low-income people meet basic needs, removing barriers to justice through civil legal assistance. We help with housing, family law, consumer issues, health-related issues, and numerous special projects. In 2023, we expanded services in several significant ways:

- **Veterans Law Project:** We formally launched and expanded the Veterans Law Project to assist military veterans and service members with eviction defense, VA benefits, public benefits and health insurance, access to support services, disability rights, poor housing conditions, end of life planning, family law, and consumer law. In our first year, the project opened 725 cases and obtained \$600,000 in outcomes for our veteran clients and their families.
- **Rental Assistance:** We partnered with the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to advise persons at risk of eviction and to assist them in applying for rental assistance through the DCA. In just 5 months, we assisted 700 people in obtaining more than \$8 million in rental assistance benefits to help them remain in their homes.
- **Grady Medical Legal Partnership:** Thanks to new state funding, we created a medical legal partnership (MLP) with Grady Hospital. The Grady MLP integrates an attorney into the healthcare team to intervene to improve the physical, social, and economic environments in which many low-income families live, resulting in their improved health and quality of life.

Leadership Transition: Of course, 2023 was eventful in another significant way. We celebrated the retirement of Steve Gottlieb, who served as executive director for 43 years. Legal Aid grew tremendously during Steve's tenure; his legacy of innovating programs and funding sources endures. Deputy Director Kimberly Charles served as interim executive director upon Steve's retirement until I came on board in August 2023. Her years of experience as a staff attorney, managing attorney, and deputy director were assets during the transition, and she has been an invaluable partner since my arrival.

Our Centennial & the Next 100 Years: The year 2024 marks Legal Aid's centennial, a remarkable accomplishment for any nonprofit law firm. We will celebrate the solid foundation built in our first 100 years, but we will primarily focus on the future. I am focused on two critical short-term goals: (1) to normalize our staff salaries to enhance recruitment and retention of outstanding staff; and (2) to improve and enhance our infrastructure to better support the needs of our staff, clients, funders, and community today and in the future. This will help us build capacity to meet the evolving needs of our community. I am eager to lead us through transformational change to ensure we are on a trajectory toward 2124!

Thank you for your support, through dollars, volunteering, or in other ways.

We will strive to continue earning your support and that of your friends and colleagues. Please join me in ensuring that more low-income persons in our community are able to access justice to address a variety of civil legal needs.

Regards,



Rita A. Sheffey



Legal Aid Core Work & Special Projects Atlanta



HOUSING

Senior
Citizens
Law Project
1975

Hispanic
Outreach
Project
1991

Breast Cancer
Legal Project
2005



FAMILY LAW

Disability
Integration
Project
1988

Kinship
Care
Project
1997

Veterans
Legal Project
2023



CONSUMER

Home
Defense
Program
1989

Georgia
Senior
Legal Aid
1998

Eviction
Prevention
Initiative
2023



HEALTH LAW

AIDS Legal
Project/ALS
Cancer Initiative
1989

Health Law
Partnership
(HeLP)
2004

Grady
MLP
2023

In 2023 Atlanta Legal Aid worked

20,848 cases

Totaling

\$36,428,551

in financial benefit for the households we served!



Securing Generational Wealth

\$8,201,078

in home equity saved 

Atlanta Legal Aid Family Law Cases

5,480

cases



\$2,413,080

in financial benefit



Atlanta Legal Aid Health Law Cases

680

cases



\$2,454,463

in financial benefit

Keeping Seniors & Families Healthy

\$1,614,120

in Medicare/Medicaid/Peachcare benefits secured





HOUSING LAW

Legal Aid's housing practice represents the core of the program's work. Virtually every area of work across offices and projects involves ensuring that clients are safely and appropriately housed. The cases can be simple or complex; either way, our housing work results in safety and stability for thousands of families every year.

Cobb Legal Aid attorney Brittany Taylor represented Lori, a single mother, in an eviction.

Brittany got the eviction dismissed by utilizing rental assistance. Then, at our answer clinic in the Cobb Magistrate Court, Brittany helped Lori assert a counterclaim against the landlord for its failure to repair a ceiling leak and manage a cockroach infestation. As a result of our counterclaim, the landlord started providing weekly pest control treatments to the client's apartment and fixed the leak. Lori is now secure in her home with her children.

NOTABLE HOUSING LAW OUTCOMES

7,988

landlord/tenant cases

2,110 households

housing obtained/retained

\$13.6M+

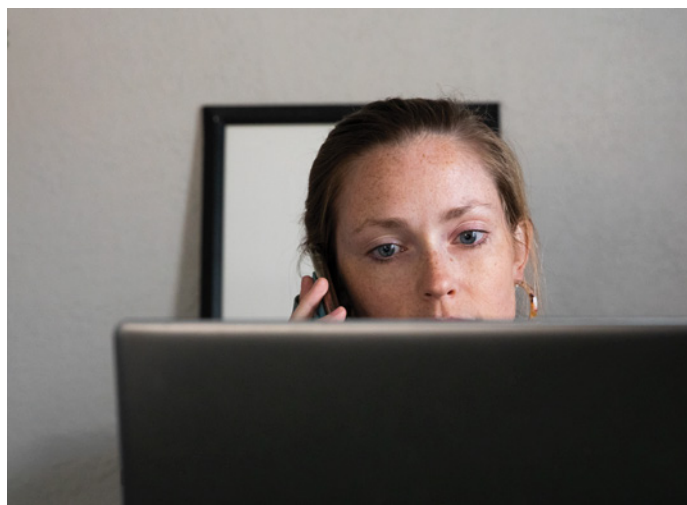
in rental assistance obtained



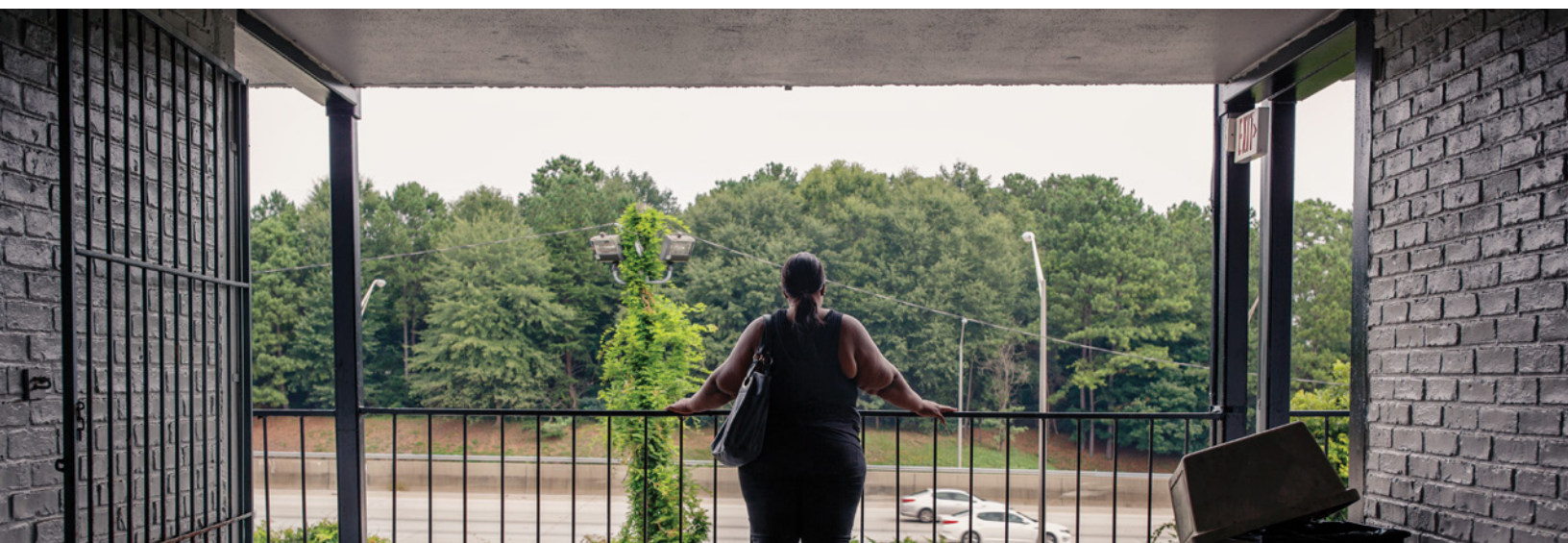
Efficiency Lodge v. Neason

A Victory for Tenants Across Georgia

Legal Aid's housing advocacy practice won a victory in the Supreme Court of Georgia for residents of extended stay hotels. During the pandemic, proprietors of extended stay hotels, which have become homes for thousands of low-income residents as housing prices skyrocketed, were locking out tenants who had lived in their rooms for months and even for many years. **Staff attorneys at Legal Aid argued that the Georgia innkeeper's statute automatically converted guests to tenants and proprietors to landlords after 30 days**, obliging the hotel proprietors to file a proper eviction to remove tenants. The Supreme Court of Georgia agreed with Legal Aid, despite fierce arguments from the landlords.



In *Efficiency Lodge v. Neason*, the Supreme Court of Georgia created a new framework that focused much more on what it means to be in possession of real property and how you know if someone is using that property as their dwelling place. The Court said the relationship could be one of landlord/tenant, innkeeper/guest, or something else entirely— it's not binary. Residents whose landlords allowed them to treat their rooms as their homes will have protection from immediate and often devastating lockouts. Many long-term residents will now have the rights of tenants and afforded the tenant protection that an eviction allows. **Continued advocacy by Atlanta Legal Aid will be critical to ensure the law develops in the way we hope following the Supreme Court's broad-based decision.**





FAMILY LAW

Legal Aid's family law attorneys handle all aspects of family law, from divorce to custody to temporary protective orders against family violence, and is our second largest practice area. Our clients are usually survivors of domestic violence and other abuses and are individuals who could never afford quality representation without our help. Without our lawyers, navigators, and paralegals, these vulnerable people could not navigate the complexities of the legal system on their own.

DeKalb-based attorneys Nicole Jhin and Don Coleman successfully concluded a jury trial in a divorce case. After a 19-year marriage, John—a teacher for 23 years—filed for divorce from our client, Mary, a stay-at-home parent. He cited an irretrievably broken marriage as grounds for divorce and planned to leave Mary without much in assets. Don and Nicole filed a counterclaim based on

adultery and cruel treatment. The marital assets included the home equity (\$98,000), a 401(k) account, and a Georgia Teacher Retirement Fund account, which cannot be distributed until John retires. Mary wanted a 50-50 division of the marital assets and \$650 per month in alimony. John offered only \$24,000 in marital assets and a lump sum alimony payment of \$10,000.

In the trial, Nicole and Don showed the jury that, despite her struggle with chronic illness, Mary was an excellent mother, homemaker, and spouse. For instance, their now-adult son, diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, with her support, graduated cum laude from college. **The jury awarded Mary 50% of the marital home equity, 50% of the 401(k), and \$1200 per month in permanent alimony. Mary can now securely rebuild her life and provide for her children.**

NOTABLE FAMILY LAW OUTCOMES

756

protected from violence

401

more stable living conditions provided for children

\$1.2M+

in child support secured



Clients come to our Health Law Unit with cases ranging from disability benefits to insurance to our core work in housing, consumer, employment, and family law. Health Law helps individuals with AIDS/HIV and cancer navigate the complex legal system with a focus on outcomes that will improve the client's health.

Jenny was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. Sadly, she lost her insurance and contacted Legal Aid for

assistance. Our Health Law Unit attorney, Stefanie Sparks, advised her about Women's Health Medicaid and discussed the eligibility guidelines with her. Stefanie determined that the client was eligible and contacted the DeKalb Board of Health on Jenny's behalf and arranged for the DeKalb Women's Health Medicaid department to meet with her. Jenny is now insured for breast cancer coverage and does not have to worry about either crippling medical debt or inadequate healthcare.

NOTABLE HEALTH LAW OUTCOMES

187 cases Medicare/Medicaid
peachcare benefits secured

\$309,000 skilled care/
personal care benefit secured

\$2.4M+
in financial benefits received

New Projects

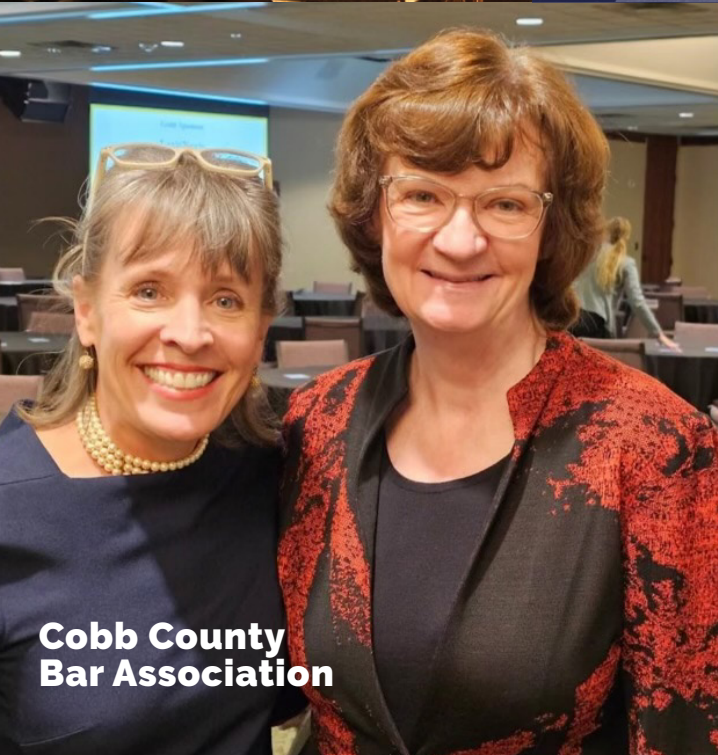
The Grady Medical-Legal Partnership started in October 2023 as a 10-hour per week pilot led by Health Law Unit attorney Candice Priest. It complements our Health Law Partnership with Children's Healthcare of Atlanta and the Georgia State University College of Law. Through the MLP, Candice is providing legal services to patients of Grady's Trauma Recovery Center and Grady's hospital-based violence intervention program, the Interrupting Violence with Youth and Young Adults Project. The work is focused on addressing health-harming legal issues as categorized by the National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership's acronym I-HELP: Income/Insurance, Housing and Utilities, Education and Employment, Legal Status and Personal and Family Stability. From October to December 2023, 42 patients were referred for help with public benefits, victims compensation, family law matters, and estate planning.



The Veterans Law Project became a full time general law-style project in February 2023 under the leadership of Kristin Verrill. The project boasts three attorneys and two paralegals. In 2023, 725 cases, many of which came through HOPE Atlanta's referral process, were opened by staff. Project staff partner with the Veterans Administration and other agencies to provide holistic services. Many clients come in with three to five legal matters and over 75% of the clients have disabilities. The Veterans Law Project's mission is to help clients find stability in their lives through ensuring healthcare access, safe housing, stable family life, and trauma recovery after serving our country.

The Eviction Prevention Initiative (EPI) began in August 2023 as an expansion of our vibrant housing practice. Led by Grace Dinger, the effort is a collaboration with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to provide rental assistance and legal help for families facing eviction. The staff of three attorneys and seven navigators secured over \$8 million in rental assistance and kept 700 families housed from August to December 2023. Staff negotiated with courts and landlords and shepherded clients' rental applications through DCA's dedicated portal.







19,415
volunteer hours

772
cases

697
volunteers

PRO BONO REPORT

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Evan Dunn **Robbins Firm**
Christine Emello **Troutman Pepper**
Daniel Fowler (Chair) **King & Spalding**
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Taylor English Duma

Freeman Mathis & Gary

Cobb Pro Bono

Stearns Montgomery & Proctor

Gentry Law Firm

Georgia Wills Trusts & Probate Firm

O'Dell O'Neal Hungerford & Blanchard

Domestic Relations Unit

Fatherhood, Inc.

Professional Services

Smith & Files

State Bar of Georgia Family Law Section

Enhanced Services Project

Purdue University Global

Siemens Corporation

Siemens Energy, Inc.

Estate Planning Project

Alston & Bird

Fulton County Probate Court

Georgia Association of Black Women Attorneys

Georgia Association of Black Women Attorneys
Foundation

Georgia Association of Paralegals

Georgia State University's Center for Access to
Justice's Pro Bono Program

Hunton Andrews Kurth

Impact Church

Thank Me Later

Gender-Affirming Name Change Project

Troutman Pepper

Alston & Bird

BlackRock

City of Atlanta Mayor's Division of LGBTQ Affairs

Destination Tomorrow

Fisher & Phillips

Georgia State University's Center for Access to
Justice's Pro Bono Program

Greenberg Traurig

Intown Collaborative Ministries

Jones Day

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Morris, Manning, & Martin

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SnapCo

SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW

Trans Housing Coalition

Trans Legal Defense & Education Fund

Troutman Pepper

Georgia Senior Legal Aid

Alston & Bird

Burr + Foreman

Coca-Cola

Troutman Pepper

Gwinnett Pro Bono

Andersen, Tate & Carr

Powell & Edwards

University of Georgia School of Law

Health Law Partnership

Baker Hostetler

Burr + Foreman

Housing Preservation

Atlanta Beltline Partnership

Grove Park Foundation

Kinship Care

Alston & Bird

Atlanta Bar Association's Family Law Section

Chick-fil-A

Claiborne Fox Bradley

Cobb County School System

DAS Kinship Care Work Team

DeKalb County School System

Georgia Department of Human Services

Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton

Kinship Navigator Program

Marietta City Schools

Project GRANDD at ISDD

Project Healthy Grandparent at Georgia State
University

Troutman Pepper

Mediation

Kennesaw State University's Conflict Management
Program

Senior Citizen's Law Project/QIT

Troutman Pepper

Unemployment Benefits Project

Dentons

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Mariam Akbar
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THANK YOU, STEVE

In May 2023, Atlanta Legal Aid said a sad goodbye to its long-time executive director, Steve Gottlieb. Steve started at Legal Aid as a Reginald Heber Smith fellow in 1969. He worked in various neighborhood offices as a staff attorney before leaving Legal Aid in 1975 to open the brand-new Georgia Legal Services office in Savannah. Returning to the program as deputy director two years later, Steve was promoted to executive director in 1981. Steve guided the program through decades of innovative legal work and amazing growth that including a victory in

the US Supreme Court with *Olmstead vs LC & EW* (a landmark civil rights victory for people with disabilities), the expansion of the program with four full-service county offices, almost a dozen projects targeting special populations, two medical-legal partnerships, and an innovative and diverse funding program. The Atlanta legal community said farewell to Steve Gottlieb with a fundraising dinner in March. The event, chaired by Walter Jospin, netted over \$150,000.

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\$30,000 raised!





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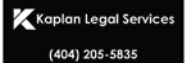
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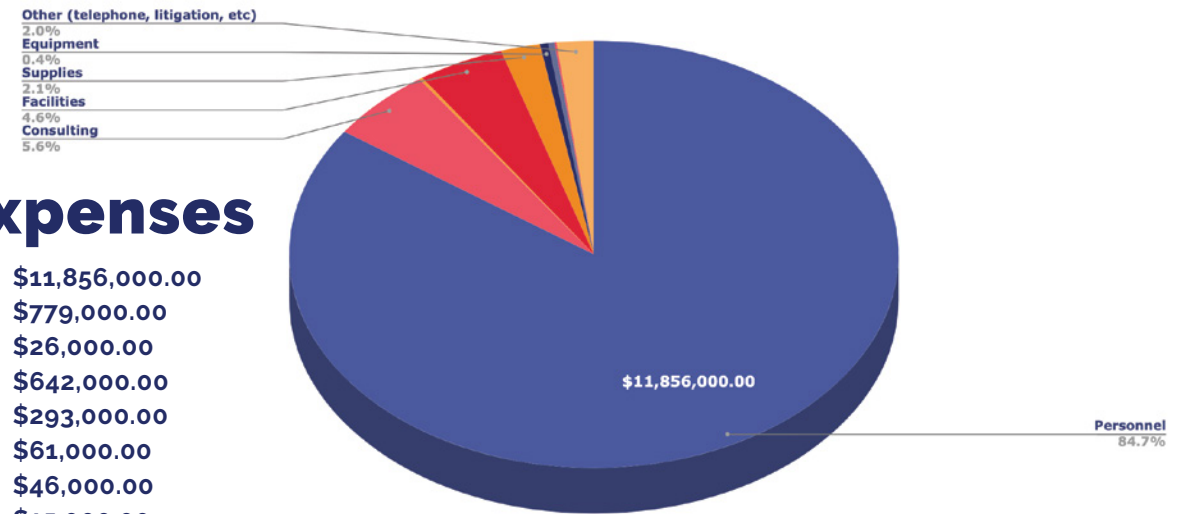
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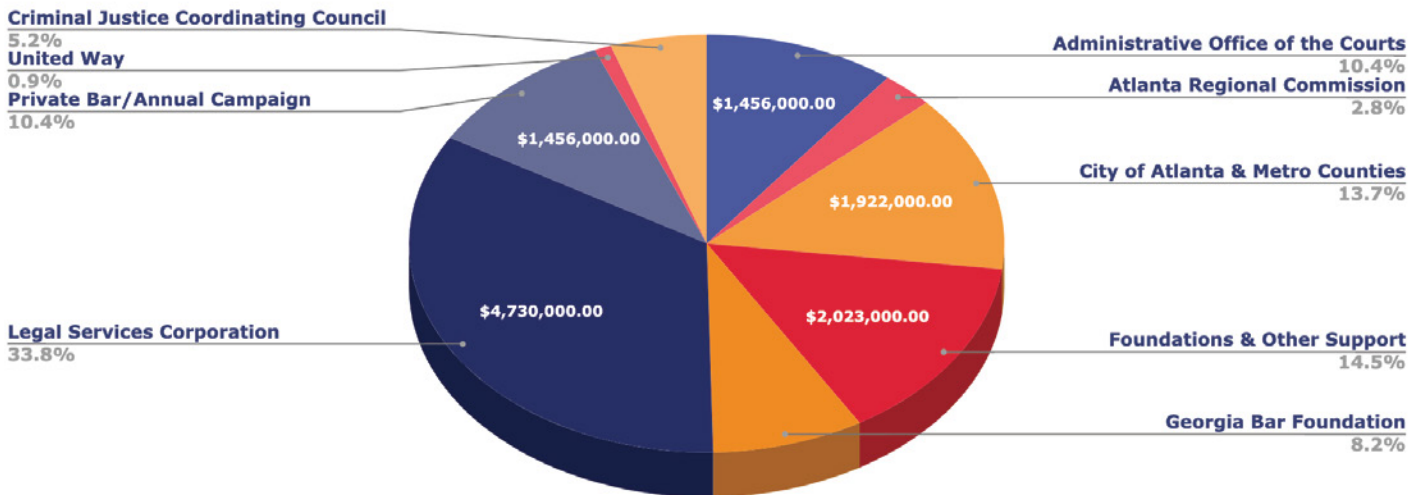
2023 FINANCIALS

2023 expenses

Personnel	\$11,856,000.00
Consulting	\$779,000.00
Travel	\$26,000.00
Facilities	\$642,000.00
Supplies	\$293,000.00
Equipment	\$61,000.00
Insurance	\$46,000.00
Training	\$15,000.00
Other (telephone, litigation, etc)	\$275,000.00



Expense Total: \$13,993,000



2023 income

Administrative Office of the Courts	\$1,456,000.00
Atlanta Regional Commission	\$394,000.00
City of Atlanta & Metro Counties	\$1,922,000.00
Foundations & Other Support	\$2,023,000.00
Georgia Bar Foundation	\$1,153,000.00
Legal Services Corporation	\$4,730,000.00
Private Bar/Annual Campaign	\$1,456,000.00
United Way	\$127,000.00
Criminal Justice Coordinating Council	\$732,000.00

Income Total: \$13,993,000

2023 GRANTS

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Thank You!

Dr. Richard A. Hudson



Photo: Kimberly Charles, Rita Sheffey, Stefanie Sparks, and Haley Schwartz

Planned Giving Focus: Dr. Richard A. Hudson

After a long and complicated struggle with a variety of health issues, Dr. Richard A. Hudson (Rick) passed away at 62 years of age on November 20, 2022. Rick had a variety of passions throughout his life, but more specifically, he was a voracious reader and was fascinated by animals of all shapes and sizes. Rick's passion for animals made him consider becoming a veterinarian, but instead, he settled on pursuing a medical career as a doctor. Rick practiced family medicine for over 20 years at the Hudson Medical Group in Midtown Atlanta and played a critical role in saving hundreds of lives from the beginning of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. He was adamant about prescribing "the cocktail" of drugs as a lifesaving treatment and was well respected by the LGBTQ+ community of Atlanta for his compassionate medical services.

Atlanta Legal Aid Society is honored to receive Rick's planned gift from his estate valued at over \$625,000 through the recommendation of our very own Haley Schwartz, who was previously our Health Law Unit Managing Attorney before moving to Fox Rothschild. Haley worked closely with Rick to manage his estate. Haley's care for Rick and his legacy was strongly felt during Rick's tribute and disbursement of estate funds to a total of 10 Atlanta nonprofits. Rick wanted his legacy to be impactful in his local community of Atlanta and worked with Haley and his devoted friend and partner, Frank, to decide on which nonprofits best aligned with Rick's passions and would benefit from his estate.

Atlanta Legal Aid's Health Law Unit is fortunate to be among the 10 outstanding Atlanta nonprofits that are benefitting from Rick's generosity. Rick and Atlanta Legal Aid had similar concerns for people living with HIV and AIDS, highlighted by our creation of the AIDS Legal Project (now the Health Law Unit) at the height of the HIV and AIDS epidemic.



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