

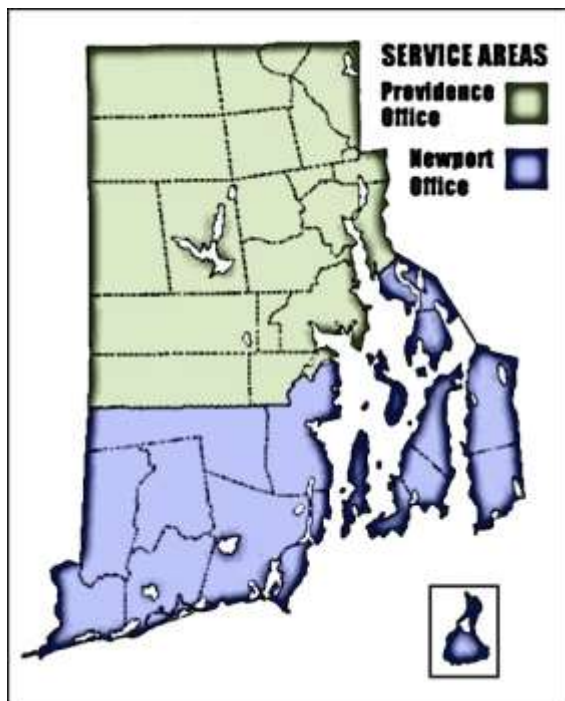
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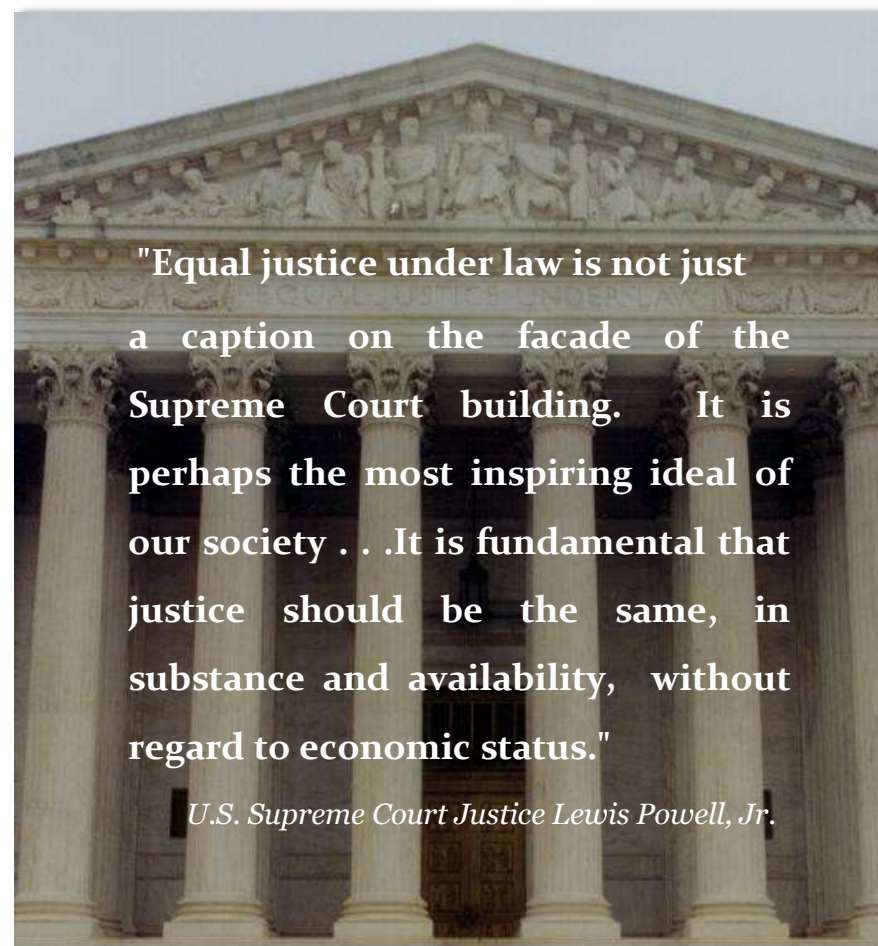


RILS WEBSITES

WWW.RILS.ORG
WWW.HELPRILAW.ORG
WWW.LOWINCOMETAXCLINIC.ORG

RHODE ISLAND LEGAL SERVICES, INC.

A N N U A L R E P O R T
2 0 1 4



"Equal justice under law is not just a caption on the facade of the Supreme Court building. It is perhaps the most inspiring ideal of our society . . . It is fundamental that justice should be the same, in substance and availability, without regard to economic status."

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell, Jr.

Robert D. Oster, Esq. Chairman of the Board: Leadership in Challenging Times



Robert Oster, Esq.
Chairman of Board

Robert D. Oster, Esq. has served as Chairman of the Board of Directors since October of 2010. He replaced Associate Justice Walter R. Stone. Mr. Oster's leadership abilities were immediately tested as RILS struggled to address the financial crisis that gripped the Nation. As the real estate market crashed, Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA) plummeted resulting in a dramatic reduction in the grant funds received from the Rhode Island Bar Foundation.

RILS was not alone, as legal aid programs nationwide reduced staff and services. RILS and District 1199 negotiated a Reduction in Hours Plan to save jobs and services. Even in tense times, Chairman Oster always maintained his composure and remained poised. On his watch, RILS secured new funding from: the Kresge Foundation to support the Holistic Legal Assistance Network; the Attorney General's Mortgage Settlement Fund; and Equal Justice Works. Each is an innovative project that addresses critical client need.

*"I'll be there
when you
need me."*

Robert Oster, Esq.

Chairman Oster has a long history of working for Rhode Island Legal Services. He joined the Board in 1994 during the merger of the Legal Aid Society of Rhode Island into Rhode Island Legal Services, Inc. After serving three initial terms, he was appointed a second time in 2006.

THE MISSION

Rhode Island Legal Services provides high quality legal assistance and representation to low-income individuals and eligible client groups for the purpose of improving their economic condition and overall wellbeing by protecting and enforcing legal rights, stabilizing the family unit and communities where clients live, promoting self-reliance, ending domestic violence, preventing homelessness, affording dignity to all people, and reaching out to groups with added burdens on their ability to access the civil justice system.

2014 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

RILS 2014 Staff Members

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Robert M. Sabel, Esq., Director of Litigation
Elizabeth Segovis, Esq., Director of Training
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Jeffrey Ankrom, Esq., Staff Attorney
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Juan Lopez, Legal Assistant
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Latri-c-ea McClendon-Hunt, Esq., AmeriCorps Fellow
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Sonia Sanchez, Legal Secretary
Lia Stuhlsatz, Esq., Supervising Attorney
Charles Wilson, Technology Consultant
Michael Zabelin, Esq., Staff Attorney

Holistic Legal Assistance Network: An Interdisciplinary Approach

This innovative project, the Holistic Legal Assistance Network (HLAN) established an interdisciplinary team of legal, financial and social service providers. The team will assist 600 families over a three year grant period in resolving their legal problems and establishing financial stability.

Holistic Legal Assistance Network clients benefit from the interdisciplinary association of a social service provider working with the legal service provider to address their complex legal and social needs and to resolve their problems. RILS has determined that the relationship of the legal and social service provider is best facilitated by the presence of a social worker on staff.



Rhea Logan, Social Worker and Nora Salomon, Esq.,
Supervising Attorney
Holistic Legal Assistance Network

In June of 2013, Rhea Logan joined the staff of RILS as a social worker. Historically, cases at Rhode Island Legal Services have been staffed with attorneys, legal assistants, and legal secretaries. The HLAN is unique in that its cases are also staffed by Rhea, who has been given the title, "Guide to Public Services", or, "GPS". Ms. Logan works with clients to identify the social factors and stressors that are inhibiting a client's ability to attain the legal success that will ultimately translate to

Rhode Island
Legal Services
incorporates
Social Worker
into Delivery
System

financial success.

The Champlin Foundations Awards Grant To Upgrade Office Space and Technology

In November of 2014, The Champlin Foundations awarded RILS a grant in the amount of \$39,600 for the purpose of making office space improvements and to purchase computers.



Nicola Carrara, Executive Assistant and Office Manager working to prepare new Surface 2 Tablets for the staff.



office.

New cubicles improve the look and function of the Library

Other office improvements include: the purchase of cubicles for the library; installation of a new floor and remodel of the copy room; and installation of an additional cubicle on the fifth floor.

PROGRAMS OF RHODE ISLAND LEGAL SERVICES

- ❖ *Low Income Taxpayer Clinic:*
- ❖ *Consumer Debt Group:*
- ❖ *Family Preservation Project:*
- ❖ *Education Law Project:*
- ❖ *Responsible Parent Project:*
- ❖ *Employment Opportunity Legal Corps*
- ❖ *Safe Family Project:*
- ❖ *Volunteer Lawyer Program:*
- ❖ *Housing Law Center*
- ❖ *Public Benefits Group*
- ❖ *Foreclosure Prevention Project*

6,267 Closed Cases in 2014

Consumer Debt:	613 Cases
Family:	904 Cases
Education:	97 Cases
Employment:	344 Cases
Health:	302 Cases
Housing:	1548 Cases
Income Maintenance:	801 Cases
Juvenile:	797 Cases
Individual Rights	33 Cases
Miscellaneous and other:	202 Cases
Volunteer Lawyer Program:	626 Cases

RILS Partners with the Rhode Island Bar Association's Volunteer Lawyer Program to Prevent Foreclosures

RILS collaborated with the Rhode Island Bar Association through its Volunteer Lawyer Program to assist in increasing awareness of available resources in the battle to stop the foreclosure crisis. Pro

Bono assistance and outreach are important tools in Rhode Island's battle to stop foreclosures.



In 2013, two "Ask a Lawyer" events were sponsored by the Volunteer Lawyer Program and held at WJAR Channel 10. At each of these evening call-in events, four volunteer attorneys fielded calls from the public in regard to the rights of homeowners and tenants.

In addition, RILS and the VLP

jointly presented two trainings, "Foreclosure Prevention & Defense for Homeowners & Tenants," and "A Roadmap to Loan Modification and Loss Mitigation." In order to register, attorneys agreed to join the Volunteer Lawyer Program and accept a pro bono case or to provide basic legal advice at a community clinic. Attendance was over 40 participants at both seminars, allowing effective placement of cases that are a conflict for Rhode Island Legal Services.

Bruce McIntyre, Esq.
President Rhode Island Bar Association

Rhode Island Legal Services spends an amount equal to at least 12.5% of its Legal Services Corporation Basic Field Grant on private attorney involvement sub-granting IOLTA funds to the Rhode Island Bar Association to administer the Volunteer Lawyer Program (VLP).

Roger Williams University
School of Law Confers
Honorary Degree
On RILS Executive Director



On May 19, 2014, the Board of Trustees of Roger Williams University, upon the recommendation of the faculty of the School of Law, conferred upon Robert M. Barge, Esq., the Degree of Doctor of Law. Mr. Barge was recognized for his long tenure as Executive Director of RILS.

Robert M. Barge, Esq., congratulates keynote speaker Judge Judith Kaye at the 2014 Law School Commencement

Mr. Barge's career as Executive Director began on March 15, 1990. At that time, RILS was highly dependent on funding from the Legal Services Corporation which constituted approximately 60 percent of total revenue of \$900,000. The Program used a manual accounting system and attorneys lacked access to personal computers. RILS rented its office space. The staff, while talented had dwindled to twelve attorneys.

Today, RILS is recognized as a "High Quality Program" with innovative and creative delivery system. The Program is anchored by 26 talented Attorneys supported by a cadre of experienced legal assistants. RILS has diversified its funding with Legal Services Corporation funds constituting only 28 percent of the Program's total budget of \$3.7 Million. It owns and occupies 15,000 sq. ft. of the Hanley Building.

Attorney General Kilmartin Awards Rhode Island Legal Services \$1.071 Million to Extend Its Foreclosure Prevention Project through 2016



Attorney General Peter Kilmartin makes a second grant of \$1.071 million to support Rhode Island Legal Services (RILS) Foreclosure Prevention Project through 2016.

The Foreclosure Prevention Project grant is funded through the National Mortgage Settlement between the five largest mortgage providers and general nationwide. Under the terms of the national mortgage settlement, the State of Rhode Island, at the direction of Attorney General Kilmartin, received a direct payment of \$8.9 million to help fund consumer service attorneys

Attorney General
Peter F. Kilmartin



Housing Law Center Staff (Left to Right)
Eric Bither, Esq., Juan Lopez, Legal Assistant, Jeff Ankrom, Esq. Michael Zabelin, Esq., Sonia Sanchez, Secretary, Owen Rice, Esq., Steven Fischbach, Esq. Supervising Attorney and Steve Bagian, Esq.

protection and state foreclosure protection services.

RILS Launches Employment Opportunity Legal Corps



In August of 2014, with funding from AmeriCorps Equal Justice Works, RILS launched the Employment Opportunity Legal Corps. The Project's advocates seek to remove barriers to employment and to empower clients to seek employment and help end poverty one person at a time.



Latri-c-a McClendon Hunt, Esq. and Brian Furgal, Esq.,
AmeriCorps Fellows

The AmeriCorps Fellows and law students that comprise the Employment Opportunity Legal Corps provide legal assistance, including legal advice and counsel, brief service and direct legal representation to their clients. These efforts are focused on removing legal barriers to employment including but not limited to, the expungement of minor criminal records or sealing under state or federal law, and correction of errors in criminal records.

What will be done?

- ✓ *Expunge, seal or correct criminal records*
- ✓ *Challenge the suspension of drivers' licenses*
- ✓ *Challenge the loss of an occupational license*
- ✓ *Repair or correct credit history*
- ✓ *Help connect clients with employment agencies*

Responsible Parent Project

Helping parents to assume their child responsibilities in a manner that is fair and equitable to all parties

Rhode Island Legal Services' Responsible Parent Project fulfills an important role in the Rhode Island Family Court by representing those parents threatened with incarceration for failure to pay court ordered child support. The focus of the project remains Defendants who are facing incarceration as a result of a Motion to Adjudge in Contempt in the area of child support, who cannot afford an attorney. They are referred to the Responsible Parent Project for full legal representation.



Brooklin Eleoff, Esq., Denise C. Aiken, Esq.
Supervising Attorney
Daniel DiCecco, Esq., Staff Attorney

The Family Preservation Project

In 1998, RILS implemented the Family Preservation Project (FPP) providing innovative and zealous legal representation for parents caught in the child welfare system and facing abuse and neglect or even termination of parental rights charges. The Family Preservation Project functions as an integral component of the Rhode Island Family Court's child welfare system. Parents brought before the court are often in severe crisis and wary of the child welfare system. They are also confused and apprehensive about the court system and how it will impact them and their children.



Lia Stuhlsatz, Esq.
Supervising Attorney
Family Preservation Project

The dedicated attorneys in the Family Preservation Project fight for families in the Family Court – defending parents against the painful and sometimes unnecessary removal of their children. FPP clients are the parents and primary caregivers of thousands of children in Rhode Island at risk of being permanently separated from their families and uprooted from their communities.

The preservation of families is a priority for Rhode Island Legal Services. Families are the building blocks of every community and parents have a fundamental constitutional right to the care and custody of their children. FPP clients struggle to retain the right to make basic decisions about their families when faced with

having their children removed from their care based upon allegations

supported by little evidence. Despite the numerous studies showing that children are better off staying with their own parents, parents in Rhode Island are at risk of being targeted in child neglect and abuse investigations because they have marginal resources or employment, have unstable housing, suffer from mental illness or addiction, or are victims of abuse themselves. Each year, these issues drive thousands of children into the child protection system. Once in the system, children often languish in foster homes as their parents and caretakers attempt to meet the court's requirements to secure their return.

In one case referred to the FPP, a mother sought representation regarding a petition that caused her daughter to be removed from her due to mental health issues and alleged neglect of her child. During the following years, mother had 2 more children, both of whom were adopted, with mother having continued visitation through an Open Adoption. During this time, DCYF filed a petition to terminate mother's parental rights to the oldest child, which was dismissed by the Family Court because there was no viable pre-adoptive home for that child. Part of that agreement was that DCYF would no longer provide mother with services to work toward reunification. The child was moved from one pre-adoptive home to another, struggling in care due in large part to her strong desire to return home to the only constant in her life, her mother. Over the years, mother reunited with her biological father, who assisted mother in turning her life around. With the assistance of her counsel, mother requested, and was awarded, services to reunify with her

Families are the building blocks of every community and parents have a fundamental constitutional right to the care and custody of their children.

daughter. Her mental health stabilized and she was able to incorporate the services needed to support reunification with her daughter. The child was reunified and the DCYF case was subsequently closed. This was a classic example of the work of the Family Preservation Project.