

Special Holiday Edition Newsletter

A Home for the Holidays



*Steven S. Flores, Managing Attorney and
Director of the Housing Law Center, with
Geraldine, RILS Client*

No longer living in her car

Meet Geraldine. When she came to Rhode Island Legal Services, she had been living in her car for six weeks. The reason - she was being ignored by housing managers that she claimed had previously promised her an apartment. With temperatures dropping by the day, the RILS housing team moved quickly. Through a combination of aggressive pre-litigation communications with housing management and rapid

RILS Housing Stability Project

**Geraldine
could have
easily slipped
through the
cracks, but
thanks to your
support she
has a new
home for the
holidays**

**Help us help
others like
Geraldine**

**With your
support we
are
changing
Rhode Island
one family at
a time**

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negotiations on Geraldine's behalf, she moved into a new apartment on Halloween!

Family and Pets Stay Together

No Pet Left Behind

Virginia came to RILS nearly six months ago with eviction court papers in hand. Three generations of family lived under Virginia's roof, and they were entirely dependent on that housing. Virginia's apartment was also home to her beloved support dog, a Chihuahua mix Sasha Joy, and cats Raisin, Romeo, and Spazz. If forced to move out, Virginia feared that she would be faced with an unthinkable choice: leave her pets behind or risk never finding alternative housing that could accommodate her entire family including her precious animals. After an exhaustive litigation process with two opposing attorneys in two separate cases, RILS was able to negotiate dismissals of the eviction cases against Virginia which allowed for everyone to remain together as a family!

With your help, RILS can continue to assist clients like Virginia have a happy, secure future!



Virginia, RILS Client, and her Chihuahua Sasha Joy

Rest assured, Virginia and her family are together for the holidays because of your generous support!

Donate here to spread holiday cheer!

A Growing Eviction Crisis: The

Pressing Need for Eviction Defense

A Focus on Eviction Defense

Since the launch of the Rhode Island Legal Services Housing Stability Project in August of this year, RILS has helped low-income Rhode Islanders secure housing through eviction defense work and other means. Thanks to the efforts of our Housing Stability team, more Rhode Islanders can have a safe, warm, and comfortable home for themselves and their families. But demand for these services far outstrips our resources. Rhode Island is in the midst of an acute eviction crisis, and your help is needed now more than ever.



Nora Salomon. Supervising Attorney of the Housing Stability Project

According to the Providence Journal, Providence has nearly 3 times as many evictions as neighboring Boston, based on the findings from the [Eviction Lab](#) at Princeton University. This article also states that "evictions prompt a downward spiral for low-income families, often leading to unemployment, educational disruption for children, and loss of personal possessions and even access to public benefits" ([read full article here](#)).

In other words, evictions are not only a symptom of poverty but a cause of it. One of RILS' strategic goals is to identify and address the most pressing civil legal needs of Rhode Island's low-income and elderly community. Additional funding is required in assist those facing evictions, and for us to continue our important work in helping those who fear they will not have a place to spend their holiday season.

[Thank you for your continued support and please donate below to help those in need of a home for the holidays!](#)

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Financial Stability Project

Provides A Second Chance

A Dreamer follows his career goals

As a twenty-four year old Dreamer, Mr. F wanted to better his life and advance his education at a local training program. However, a misdemeanor charge for Driving with a Suspended License prevented him from enrolling in the program.

He came to RILS for help, and the Financial Stability Project successfully expunged his conviction. Based on this expungement, Mr. F. was able to pass a background check and was accepted into the program where he was extremely successful. Upon completing his training, he was chosen to speak at his class' graduation ceremony. Mr. F. received a full-time job offer at a bank he interned with while enrolled in the training program. RILS provided a second chance to Mr. F. who is now able to follow his dreams.

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Senior Gets Tax Liability Slashed By Nearly Two Thirds

LITC LOW INCOME
TAXPAYER CLINICS

Representation • Education • Advocacy

In 2013, our 77 year old client, with a deteriorating memory, drained her 401k account. Years later, the IRS came knocking with a tax bill of more than \$20,000, which had compounded over time since taxes had not been timely paid on the client's 2013 withdrawal. Confused and alone, the client agreed to a burdensome IRS payment plan that only made things worse by automatically deducting a large portion of her income every month. Then she came to RILS for help.

After significant negotiation, RILS was able to reduce the tax liability to a fraction of its original amount, stop the automatic withdrawal of income from the client's bank account, and have the client placed on "hardship status" which protects the client from IRS collection tactics. Thanks to the dedicated service of the RILS Low Income Taxpayer Clinic, our client not only has an additional \$300 each month for living and housing expenses, she also has the peace of mind that comes along with this result.

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Administrative Law Judge Reverses SSA Finding for Elder Widow

A disabled senior was referred to RILS for assistance with widow's benefits. Her benefits were being withheld due to a fraud report by the SSA. When her estranged husband died, she applied for widow's benefits and reported (accurately) that they separated years earlier, but was confused about which year they had separated.

The SSA referred her case for an investigation, and the OIG fraud unit issued a report stating

The Public Benefits Group

**RILS has
helped
secure
\$44,000 in
monthly**

she had provided false statements. SSA then charged her with a \$61,000+ SSI overpayment and withheld 6 months of her benefits as a civil penalty for providing false statements.

At RILS' request, the ALJ issued a subpoena for all documents obtained by the fraud unit that showed our client made false statements. The fraud unit refused to respond, indicating that the documents were not in its possession or it would be inappropriate to provide them.

After a full hearing, the ALJ issued a decision finding that the SSA had failed to produce evidence to justify the civil penalty or prove the alleged overpayment. Thanks to the hard work of the Public Benefits Group, our client was refunded the six months of widow's benefits that had been withheld and had a removal of the \$61,000+ overpayment from her record.

**benefits
for clients**

**A total of
\$280,000
in 2018 in
retroactive
benefits
and
correction
of over-
payments**

Donate

Elder Protection

Senior Protected from Financial Abuse, Moves into Safe Housing

Astrid and her husband Paul purchased their home in 1984. In 2008, Paul was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Prior to his death, he deeded their home to the couple's daughter, with the understanding that she would take care of Astrid after his death. Unfortunately, after Paul's death, the relationship soured to the point where Astrid's daughter was threatening to evict Astrid from the home and sell the property. Astrid had nowhere to go, and because of her fixed income, she could not afford to pay market rent.



Eric Bither, Attorney in the Elder Protection Project

Fortunately, Astrid contacted RILS' Elder Protection Project. RILS

pressed Astrid's rights as a tenant of the property and assisted her with applying for federally subsidized housing. When Astrid's daughter sold the property, the Elder Protection Project negotiated a settlement on her behalf that required her daughter to pay a substantial sum to Astrid that allowed her to move into and pay for safe and secure housing so she could enjoy her golden years once and for all.

Donate Here!

Rhode Island Legal Services, 56 Pine Street Suite 400, Providence RI 02903 [Visit our Website](#)

STAY CONNECTED

