

SEPTEMBER 2018



Rhode Island
LEGAL SERVICES
50 CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS
Since 1969

Annual Stand Down Weekend

RILS Helping Veterans

Rhode Island Legal Services helped veterans at Operation Stand Down's Annual Stand Down Weekend. Attorneys Stephanie Coleman, Steve Flores, and Brian Furgal as well as social worker Adela Alfaia provided legal advice and resources to many Rhode Island veterans.

RILS is a proud partner of Operation Stand Down. Thanks for organizing such a successful event that assists veterans in our community! See more about the event and Operation Stand Down by clicking the link [here](#).

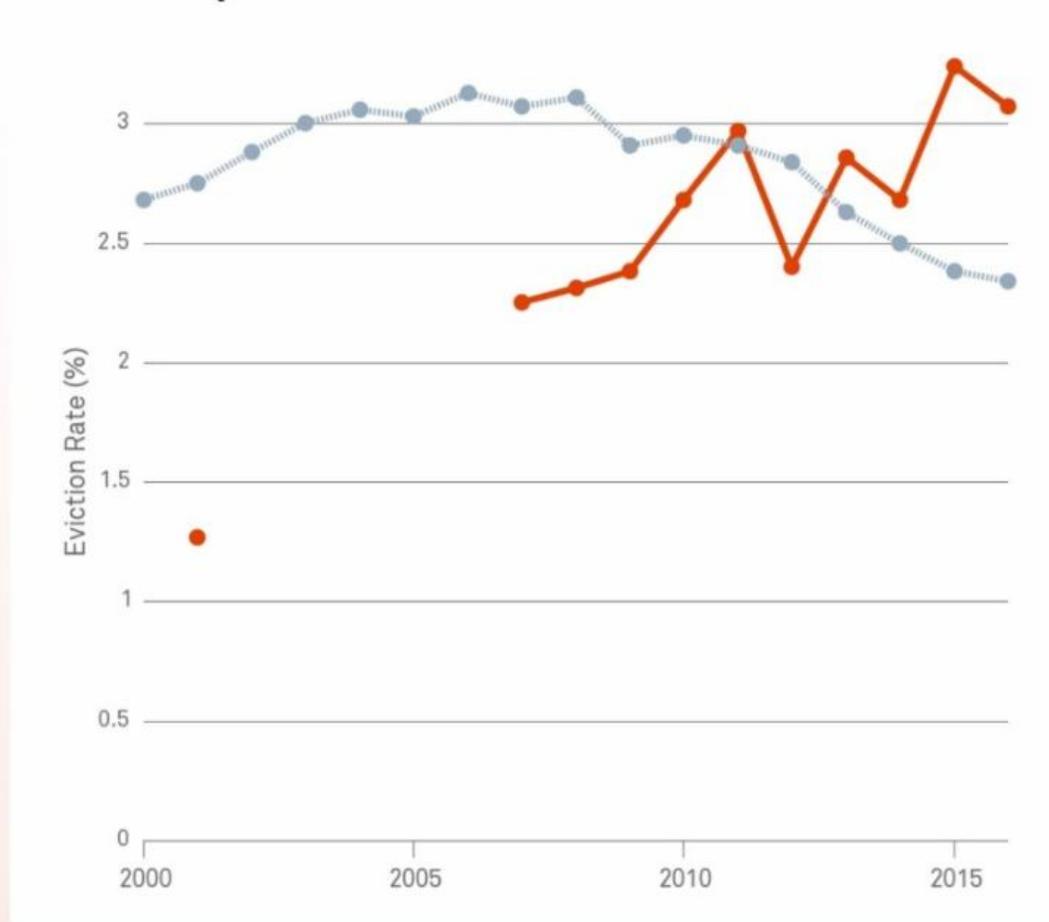


Attorney Brian Furgal and Attorney Steve Flores at the Annual Stand Down Weekend event.

LAUNCHING THE HOUSING STABILITY PROJECT

A Focus on Eviction Defense

Comparison of eviction rates over time



— Rhode Island
..... United States

Image Source: Eviction Lab by Princeton University. "Eviction Map & Data." Eviction Lab, 2018. Link: <https://evictionlab.org/map/#/2016?geography=states&bounds=-134.128,21.933,-55.382,52.914&locations=44,-71.598,41.181>

Rhode Island Legal Services conducted a Legal Needs Survey to highlight areas requiring more legal assistance for Rhode Island residents. The survey participants agreed that more support is needed for housing issues, especially concerning Private Landlord-Tenant evictions. RILS aims to focus efforts on these issues by implementing the Housing Stability Project to expand eviction defense work and continue our foreclosure prevention efforts. According to the Providence Journal, Providence has nearly 3 times as many evictions as neighboring Boston, based on "new data from the [Eviction Lab](#) at Princeton University. This group is led by sociologist Matthew Desmond, [author] of *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (2016)." The article also stated 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, as well as, victims of crime. Additional funding is required in assist those facing evictions. RILS will be reaching out to stakeholders such as the Rhode Island Judiciary and the Rhode Island Center for Justice later this Fall to discuss how to better address this

PROTECTING STUDENT RIGHTS

Keeping transportation free at Warwick schools



Rhode Island Legal Services partnered with the American Civil Liberties Union of Rhode Island to draft a letter urging the state of Rhode Island to reject the Warwick School System's proposal to charge students \$1 to ride the school bus. The letter stated "such fees are not only contrary to law, they are also contrary to Rhode Island's longstanding policy of ensuring that public education is free and therefore equally available to all children regardless of economic status." And that "to grant this request would not only undermine a century and a half of educational policy, it would open the door to every other school district seeking similar or more expansive waivers in order to balance their budgets on the backs of students and their families."

Warwick schools have had difficulties in recent years managing their budget due to a lack of funding. Other efforts to balance the budget include closing schools, laying off teachers and other contract employees, suspending funding for student-community programs, and charging student athletes to participate in sports.

Thanks to the efforts of Attorney Veronika Kot of RILS and the ACLU, a child's right to receive free transportation to and from school was reinforced and thus prevented the formation of any new precedents involving fees for school transportation.

[See the full story here!](#)

Visit our testimonials page!

Please support RILS and help us continue to do great work for the Rhode Island community!

Click the button below to donate:

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FAREWELL TO ELIZABETH SEGOVIS AND STEVE FICSHBACH

Elizabeth Segovis Retiring After 25 Years

Liz Segovis has been with Rhode Island Legal Services for 25 years, advocating and excelling in numerous projects. She found her stride as the Director of Training and the Director of the Low Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC) which she built from the ground up. Her primary practice area has been representing clients in disputes with the Internal Revenue Service.

Liz is active on the Public Service and Family Court Bench Bar Committees of the Rhode Island Bar Association and is a frequent presenter on tax issues at legal seminars. Liz is a 1978 graduate of Southern Methodist University School of Law. Her B.A. is from Cornell University. She has a Master of Arts degree in Criminal Justice from the SUNY Albany and a Master of Science in Taxation from Bryant University.



Executive Director Robert Barge and Deputy Director Janet Gilligan present Liz Segovis with the Jack Donahue Award

Liz has been the recipient of numerous awards and recognition for her commitment to equal justice. Among her many honors, Liz was the recipient of the Dorothy Lohmann Community Service Award in 2000 from the Rhode Island Bar Association. She received the Mission Possible award in 2004 from the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. She was presented the Founders Award in 2012 by the Grayson County Bar Association of Sherman, Texas.

Her dedication to the program, her coworkers, and the people of Providence is remarkable. Liz's hard work and perseverance will certainly be missed at RILS as she retires. We hope Liz will continue to remain involved with RILS as a volunteer attorney while enjoying her retirement. Thank you Liz for all your commitment and passion to RILS and its mission!

Steven Fischbach Moving On

Steven Fischbach has worked at Rhode Island Legal Services as a Supervising Attorney in the program's Housing and Foreclosure Prevention unit for 30 years. His legal experience spans a variety of racial justice issues, including environmental justice, community reinvestment and disinvestment, urban school reform, siting of low income housing and facilities for the homeless and preservation of public and subsidized housing units. His foreclosure related work includes drafting legislation preventing eviction of tenants and former homeowners who reside in foreclosed properties without just cause; and spearheading a study of all foreclosure related evictions filed in Rhode Island courts in 2008.

Steve is also known for his environmental justice work which included litigation and development of policies related to the siting of schools relative to environmental hazards. Steve has developed and led trainings on environmental justice, healthy housing, community lawyering, and racial justice advocacy for legal services attorneys and is a frequent speaker at national conferences sponsored by the US Environmental Protection Agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the



Executive Director Robert Barge

National Legal Aid and Defenders Association, and the National Housing Law Project. Steve is a graduate of Brandeis University and Boston University School of Law.

present Steve Fischbach with the Jack Donahue Award

Steve is moving to Virginia to pursue a position as Litigation Director at the Virginia Poverty Law Center.

RILS will be at a loss, but we know that Steve will succeed in wherever his career takes him.

Welcoming new attorneys to our RILS team!

Stephanie Coleman

Managing Attorney and Director, Low Income Taxpayer Clinic

Stephanie has joined Rhode Island Legal Services as the new Managing Attorney and Director of the Low Income Taxpayer Clinic, where she advocates on behalf of taxpayers. She previously has represented a large number of taxpayers both with non-profit law firms and a large tax resolution company. She actively presents with the American Bar Association Section of Taxation and contributes to Public Comments to Proposed Regulations of the Tax Code. She is also a chapter reviewer for the ABA's Effectively Representing Your Client Before the IRS. She has held leadership roles in the West Virginia government as



Director of the Governor's EEO Office, Assistant Attorney General of the Civil Rights Divisions, and Attorney for the WV Division of Personnel. Stephanie is a founding member of the WV Women Attorneys and a member of the RI Women's Bar Association.

She received her BA in Journalism from Washington & Lee University and is a member of its first class of women. She received her J.D. from William & Mary Law School. She has also worked as a legislative assistant for U.S. House of Representative Marcy Kaptur. Stephanie grew up in Louisville, Kentucky. Aside from her legal, professional, and philanthropic accomplishments, she is the proud mother of Mychala, a junior at Northwestern University, and Starrie, a freshman at Colorado College.

Steven Flores

Managing Attorney and Director, Housing Law Center

Steven S. Flores has joined Rhode Island Legal Services as the new Managing Attorney and Director of the Housing Law Center. Steven comes to Rhode Island Legal Services from the New York City law firm of Togut, Segal & Segal LLP, where he was the Partner in charge of the firm's Litigation Group. He has extensive experience advocating for clients in Federal Courts. Steven was selected to the *Super Lawyers* NY Metro Area list from 2015-2018, and was also placed on the list of "Rising Stars" in 2011 for his litigation work. Prior to his time at Togut, Segal & Segal LLP, Steven worked for two international law firms, and also clerked for the Honorable F.A. Little, Jr. (retired) in the United States District Court for the Western District of Louisiana.



Steven graduated from Rutgers Law School, with honors, in 1999 and received his undergraduate degree in Sociology from the University of California at Berkeley in 1993. He has spent significant time in his career working with underrepresented clients on a pro bono basis.

Rachel Horsman

Staff Attorney, Domestic Violence Unit

Rachel is the newest attorney in the Safe Family Project Unit. Prior to joining Rhode Island Legal Services, Rachel was a Judicial Law Clerk and Juvenile Law Specialist in Connecticut Superior Court. During her time at Roger Williams University School of Law, Rachel interned with the Rhode Island Office of Attorney General, the Rhode Island Supreme Court, the Providence Redevelopment Agency, and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families. She is excited to further her knowledge in the field of Family Law.

Rachel is originally from Massachusetts. In her free time, Rachel enjoys reading, traveling, and spending time with friends and family.



Valerie Leon

Staff Attorney, Housing Law Center

Valerie serves Rhode Island Legal Services clients in the Housing Law Center as a Staff Attorney. Born and raised in Connecticut, Valerie attended Catawba College as a Tom E. Smith Scholar for her Undergraduate Bachelor of Science in Economics. Valerie then attended Roger Williams University School of Law as a Leadership Scholar. Valerie is currently pursuing her Masters in Business Administration at the University of Rhode Island. She was admitted to the Rhode Island State Bar in November of 2015 and to the United States District Court Bar for the District of Rhode Island in February 2017. Before joining RILS, Valerie worked as a Lead Attorney for a Providence based Title Company completing extensive residential and commercial title reviews and residential real estate closings.



Employment Opportunities at RILS:

Rule-9/Senior Law Student

Looking for 2 Rule-9 or senior law students to work in our Housing Stability Project. This is a paid position.

[Apply Here!](#)

Law Students Internship

Looking for 4 law students to work in cooperation with AmeriCorps JD Equal Justice Works serving veterans.

[Apply Here!](#)

Attorney Fellowship

Looking for 2 fellows to work in cooperation with AmeriCorps JD Equal Justice Works serving veterans.

[Apply Here!](#)

Please see our job postings on Indeed for more information.

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