



THE  
CHICAGO  
COMMUNITY  
TRUST

AND AFFILIATES

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**NEW REPORT SHOWS SIGNIFICANT ADVANCES OVER THE PAST 7 YEARS FOR COOK COUNTY'S PRO BONO AND LEGAL AID SYSTEM BUT GROWING NUMBER OF LOW-INCOME PEOPLE IN NEED OF HELP**

***Only 300 legal aid attorneys to serve the civil legal needs of over 1.3 million low-income people in Cook County***

**Chicago, IL** – With increased funding for legal aid services from most sources—particularly Chicago's legal community and area foundations— Cook County's pro bono and legal aid system has significantly increased its service capacity over the past seven years. However, this progress is tempered by the fact that pro bono and legal aid organizations in Cook County report skyrocketing demands for their help during this time period. Today, The Chicago Community Trust and The Chicago Bar Foundation released *Legal Aid in Cook County: A Report on Basic Trends in Need, Service and Funding* (available at [www.cct.org](http://www.cct.org) and [www.chicagobarfoundation.org](http://www.chicagobarfoundation.org)).

Currently in Cook County, there are only about 300 full-time legal aid lawyers working at a network of 35 nonprofit organizations to meet the civil legal needs of over 1.3 million low-income people. The economic decline has only intensified the demand for

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## **LEGAL AID REPORT ADD ONE**

free legal help with problems that range from foreclosure, domestic violence and access to health care. For many people, obtaining the legal help they need can mean the difference between hunger and food on the table, bankruptcy and economic stability and abuse and physical safety.

“Legal aid is an important part of our community’s safety net, which helps stabilize families and their lives. Tens of thousands of people across Cook County desperately need access to legal protection from foreclosure, eviction, domestic violence or elder abuse,” said Ngoan Le, vice president of program for The Chicago Community Trust. “Although this report documents significant advances made over the past seven years, much work remains to continue to build on this progress.”

Among the advances cited by the report include:

- Overall funding for legal aid grew significantly during the past seven years through 2009. Notably, the legal community’s support of legal aid, both directly and through The Chicago Bar Foundation (CBF), has more than doubled during this period. The legal community now funds almost 20% of Cook County’s pro bono and legal aid system, with the CBF increasing its grants to pro bono and legal aid programs over 400% between 2003 and 2009.
- Foundations, such as The Chicago Community Trust and the Polk Bros. Foundation, substantially stepped up their support as well. The Chicago Community Trust almost doubled grants to legal aid during this same period.
- From 2003 to 2009, pro bono and legal aid organizations reported revenue growth of 64% while the number of people served by Cook County’s pro bono and legal aid system rose by 105% in the same time period. The system served almost 180,000 people in 2009, and almost 1 million more were able to obtain helpful legal information and resources on [www.IllinoisLegalAid.org](http://www.IllinoisLegalAid.org).

Despite this great progress, beginning in 2009 all funding sources for legal aid are under pressure, with overall revenues declining.

“The good news is that the Chicago-area legal community has significantly increased its support of legal aid over the past seven years, which has helped thousands more low-income Chicagoans get the legal help they need,” said Steve Patton, a partner at Kirkland & Ellis and president of The Chicago Bar Foundation. “The bad news is that we’re still falling short of what is needed to ensure that all Chicagoans have equal access to justice. Thousands upon thousands of low-income people in our community continue to grapple with often complex legal problems on their own, without the assistance of a lawyer. We simply have to do more.”

## **LEGAL AID REPORT ADD TWO**

Although the system has made many advances, the need for legal aid continues to outstrip the available resources, a situation that has only been exacerbated by the recent economic crisis. In 2009, over 25% of Cook County's residents are considered low-income, defined in the report as 150% of the federal poverty guidelines, or an annual income of \$31,800 for a family of four or less. The number of low-income people grew both in the City and the suburbs.

Prior studies have found that over 50% of low-income households have at least one civil legal need. The number is even higher for households that include a member with a disability.

"Requests for help in all areas of law were up significantly over the past year. We saw increases in calls for help with mortgage foreclosures, evictions, bankruptcy and consumer/debt collection matters and family law/divorce," said Allen C. Schwartz, executive director of CARPLS Legal Aid, a legal aid hotline serving Cook County and the point of entry for many low-income people seeking help with their legal problems. "Although CARPLS developed and adopted a number of technological improvements that permitted us to serve more people and to serve them more efficiently, we are still unable to meet the demands for help from everybody contacting our hotline. Even though we served over 50,000 people last year, we still can answer only 1 out of every 3 calls to our hotline."

The report, a collaborative effort between The Chicago Community Trust and The Chicago Bar Foundation, provides an update on the state of Cook County's pro bono and legal aid delivery system since the last major legal needs study in Illinois, which was based on data from 2003. Among the issues addressed in the report are the current demand for services, how services are being provided and where funding comes from for this work. Data for the report were provided by pro bono and legal aid organizations, and independent sources. Analysis of the data was provided by Rob Paral & Associates and The Chicago Bar Foundation.

### **About The Chicago Bar Foundation**

*The Chicago Bar Foundation (CBF) mobilizes Chicago's legal community to use their time, money and influence so that low-income and disadvantaged people in the Chicago area can access the legal help they need. Through grants, advocacy, pro bono and partnerships, the CBF takes a system-wide approach to improving access to justice.*

*The CBF's work is made possible by the generous contributions of thousands of dedicated individuals, more than 200 law firms and corporations and many other*

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*committed partners. The CBF is the charitable arm of The Chicago Bar Association.*

*For more information about the CBF, please call Bob Glaves at 312-554-1205 or email him at [bglaves@chicagobar.org](mailto:bglaves@chicagobar.org), or visit [www.chicagobarfoundation.org](http://www.chicagobarfoundation.org).*

**About The Chicago Community Trust**

*For 95 years, The Chicago Community Trust, our region's community foundation, has connected the generosity of donors with community needs by making grants to organizations working to improve metropolitan Chicago. In 2010, the Trust, together with its donors, granted more than \$100 million to nonprofit organizations: developing new audiences to sustain Chicago's vibrant arts organizations, protecting the human success safety net for those hardest hit by the recession, stemming the devastating effects of foreclosures on our communities, elevating teaching to meet world class standards and improving conditions for healthy and active lifestyles. To learn more, please visit the Trust online at [www.cct.org](http://www.cct.org).*

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