

LEGAL AID SOCIETY

OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE AND THE CUMBERLANDS

Information for Release

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LEGAL AID SOCIETY LAWYERS SEEK JUSTICE IN AND OUT OF COURTROOM

NASHVILLE, Tenn. Jan. 30, 2008 – Popular TV shows and movies often portray lawyers as fist-pounding firebrands defending their clients with impassioned courtroom speeches. But the courtroom isn't the only place to find justice. Often, lawyers can be just as passionate about their clients' rights – and just as effective in protecting those rights – without the drama. Much of the Legal Aid Society's work is spent helping and teaching people how to help themselves.

“Our attorneys successfully argue many cases in court,” said Gary Housepian, executive director of Legal Aid Society. “But much of what we do is promoting self-help and giving advice. We make sure people understand their legal rights and responsibilities. We help clients file court papers or simply explain a client's legal options.”

The Legal Aid Society gives free legal help to people who have nowhere else to turn. But with only 30 lawyers to help more than 300,000 eligible people in 48 counties, the firm can help only a fraction of those who ask for representation. To reach to as many people as possible, the Legal Aid Society also runs a successful community education program.

A key piece of this program is the creation and distribution of brochures and booklets on common legal problems. These self-help booklets cover a wide range of topics including financial problems, landlord/tenant issues, parenting, domestic violence, income tax, employment and health care. The guides, in English and Spanish, are available for free from all of the eight offices of the Legal Aid Society. They may also be downloaded from the society's web site at www.las.org.

“Our goal is answer basic questions about legal issues in plain language,” said Adinah Robertson, community outreach coordinator for Legal Aid Society. “Giving people this kind of self-help information is one of several ways we can help those who we cannot represent in person.”

The booklets are very popular. Legal Aid handed out more than 174,000 last year. Many of these publications are used by organizations around the state. Two examples are the booklets “Getting Medicaid to Pay for Nursing Home Costs” and “What You Need To Know About Special Education.” Health care organizations regularly hand out these materials to their patients.

Legal Aid also leverages its resources by making community presentations. Attorneys and staff spoke to more than 7,790 people at 262 events last year. The Legal Aid Society can provide speakers to civic groups in Middle Tennessee and East Tennessee. Speakers can be booked by calling Rae Anne Seay at (615) 844-7142 or rseay@las.org.

The Legal Aid Society also reaches more clients by partnering with volunteer lawyers through the Nashville Pro Bono Program. Nashville Pro Bono holds walk-in legal advice clinics in Davidson and Williamson counties. Those who qualify for help can speak privately with an attorney. At some clinics, translators are available for Spanish-speaking clients.

“Helping low-income families can be satisfying work for attorneys who don’t normally get a chance to take these kinds of cases,” said Lucinda Smith, director of the Nashville Pro Bono Program. “The legal community has shown us a lot of support.”

For more information about the Legal Aid Society, call 1-800-238-1443, or go to the web site at www.las.org.

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