

LEGAL AID SOCIETY OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE AND THE CUMBERLANDS

INFORMATION FOR RELEASE

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LEGAL AID SOCIETY ATTORNEY WINS TBA PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD *Overby's advocacy has touched tens of thousands of Tennesseans.*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. Dec. 11, 2007 – The Tennessee Bar Association recently announced that Russell Overby, an attorney with the Legal Aid Society, was awarded the Ashley Wiltshire Public Service Award for his role in improving the lives of low-income families in Middle Tennessee and beyond. Nominated by both the Legal Aid Society and the Tennessee Justice Center, Overby was hailed for his courage, dedication and fortitude in his fight for equal justice for the working poor.

“Russ is an historic asset to the equal justice movement in Tennessee,” said Neil McBride, general counsel for Legal Aid Society. “I cannot think of anyone more appropriate to win the first award offered in Ashley Wiltshire’s name.” The award is named for the former executive director of Legal Aid Society, who led the organization for 32 years before his retirement in 2007.

Overby serves as a managing attorney in the Nashville office of the Legal Aid Society, where he dedicates his time to cases involving public assistance, health access, housing and family law. He is nationally known for his work in shaping Tennessee’s “Families First” program, which provides temporary assistance to needy families. Among many examples of his work to make Families First more efficient and effective is Overby’s advocacy for the “Specialized Case Management” (SCM) program, which provides social workers to families dealing with mental disorders, addiction or domestic abuse. The Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights recognized SCM as a national model.

“The SCM program helped many heads of families become workers and end their families’ dependence on public benefits,” wrote Gordon Bonnyman, executive director of the Tennessee Justice Center, in his nomination letter. “SCM preserved subsistence payments for others by exempting them from work requirements which, due to their disabilities, they could not meet.”

Among his other accomplishments, Overby led a successful effort to reform the Social Security disability insurance system in Tennessee so that thousands of disabled workers are no longer denied Social Security pensions. He also served as lead counsel in a case

that successfully preserved health care coverage for many thousands of Tennesseans who would have been erroneously terminated from TennCare for improper reasons.

Overby is a graduate of the Vanderbilt University School of Law. He began his career with the Legal Aid Society in 1974. In 1997, he took a leave of absence to work with the Tennessee Justice Center to advocate for welfare reform and improved health access for the poor. He returned to the Legal Aid Society in 2006.

The Legal Aid Society gives free legal aid to people who have nowhere else to turn. It has eight offices and 30 attorneys who serve families in 48 counties throughout middle and east Tennessee.

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