

# LEGAL AID SOCIETY OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE AND THE CUMBERLANDS

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## **CHIEF JUSTICE CHALLENGES LAWYERS TO DONATE TIME, MONEY TO HELP LEGAL AID SOCIETY**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. March 7, 2007 – Tennessee Supreme Court Chief Justice William Barker challenged an assembled group of lawyers, judges and elected officials to donate their time and money to “fill the gap” for those who cannot afford legal services and depend on the help of Legal Aid Society.

“We have an obligation in this country to see that justice isn’t rationed out,” he said, speaking at kick off lunch for Legal Aid Society’s 2007 fundraising campaign.

Barker said that out of the 6 million people in Tennessee, more than 769,000 qualify for help from legal services, but only about 20 percent receive representation.

“Federal funds for legal services decrease, while the need increases,” he said. “Tennessee allocates \$21 million per year for criminal defense, but only \$3 million for civil issues. It is up to us to fill that gap.”

Barker said that the *Model Rules of Professional Conduct* states that every lawyer has an obligation to offer his or her services for free to clients who cannot afford to pay. He challenged the senior partners at every Nashville law firm to encourage their staff to participate in the Nashville Pro Bono Program.

“What better image can you give to a young attorney than to be seen by members of your firm donating hours of your time and talent to someone who can’t afford it,” he said. “I challenge everyone to donate 50 hours a year to the Pro Bono program. Donate money to the Legal Aid Society and encourage your colleagues, friends and neighbors to do the same. There are people out there right now struggling with landlord/tenant issues. Or are victims of domestic violence. We can’t look to the federal government for more money. We have to fill the gap.”

Legal Aid Society represents low-income families in civil matters in the areas of housing, consumer law, healthcare, income security and family law. In 2006, Legal Aid Society, along with 406 volunteer attorneys working with the Nashville Pro Bono Program, handled 6,231 cases.

Founded in 1968, the Legal Aid Society is a private, not-for-profit organization governed by a local board of directors comprised of attorneys and members of the client population. Legal Aid Society provides free legal assistance in civil matters to people in 48 Middle Tennessee counties with a total eligible population of 382,000. They have offices in Nashville, Gallatin, Clarksville, Murfreesboro, Columbia, Tullahoma, Cookeville and Oak Ridge.