

# LEGAL AID SOCIETY

## OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE AND THE CUMBERLANDS

Information for Release

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### TENNESSEE BAR ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT URGES ATTORNEYS TO DONATE TIME AND MONEY TO ENHANCE ACCESS TO JUSTICE

#### *Buck Lewis keynotes Legal Aid Society's 2009 campaign kickoff luncheon*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. March 13, 2009 – The Legal Aid Society kicked off its 2009 Campaign for Equal Justice on Tuesday with an important message from Tennessee Bar Association President Buck Lewis: There has been no time in our lives when the poor in our country have needed legal services more.

“We think of ourselves as community leaders,” said Lewis addressing a capacity crowd of attorneys, judges, elected officials and supporters of the Legal Aid Society at the Nashville City Club. “This is our cause and now is the time for us to lead.”

The Legal Aid Society provides free civil legal services in 48 counties in Middle and East Tennessee. The Campaign for Equal Justice is a major fundraising effort for the state’s largest nonprofit law firm. This year’s fundraising goal is \$725,000 and the organization has raised more than half that amount.

Lewis, an attorney with Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, urged the legal community to dedicate 2009 to service to the state’s most vulnerable citizens through donation of time and money to the Legal Aid Society and the Nashville Pro Bono Program.

“Economic hard times mean more and more disadvantaged Tennesseans will need legal assistance,” he said. “When I was elected TBA president last spring, Tennessee already had the highest per capita bankruptcy rate in the country and the Memphis legal aid program was turning away 35 to 40 percent of the eligible clients who came to see them. The demand in Nashville was even higher.

“Since becoming president in June, I have participated in about 10 pro bono clinics,” he added. “I can tell you the lines are getting longer and the problems are getting more difficult to solve. People who had good jobs and were safely paying their mortgages six months ago, are in default and wondering if they’ll be homeless six months from now.”

Lewis thanked the Tennessee Supreme Court for announcing in December that access to justice would be a major focus and for the establishment of an Access to Justice Commission, details of which will be announced on April 3.

“We are fortunate to have such tremendous support from the legal community,” said Gary Housepian, executive director of the Legal Aid Society. “The year ahead is going to be difficult for many in the communities we serve, so we are going to depend more than ever on our volunteers and donors.”

Lewis urged attorneys to make April 4 “Justice 4 All Day,” a Tennessee Bar Association initiative to provide a day of service for attorneys to donate time to helping Tennesseans with common legal issues. There will be more than 50 clinics across the state on April 4, including 23 sponsored by the Legal Aid Society.

“I believe that pro bono service is a patriotic service to our country at a time when Americans need all the help they can get,” Lewis said. “There is no one who cares about this like we do. There is no one who understands what can happen if they don’t get help like we do. There is no one else who can do this work but us and there is no time in our lives when these people and our country have needed us more.”

The Legal Aid Society gives free civil legal aid to people who have nowhere else to turn. It serves 48 counties from offices in Clarksville, Columbia, Cookeville, Gallatin, Murfreesboro, Nashville, Oak Ridge, and Tullahoma. The organization is funded in part by the United Way.

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