



ANNUAL REPORT

2021



**LEGAL AID OF
EAST TENNESSEE**

**ADVANCING JUSTICE.
STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES.**





Letter from the President: Keith Alley

The past few years have tested our community and challenged our resources. We all felt and continue to feel the effects of the pandemic and the changes that resulted from it. Perhaps no one has felt these effects more significantly than the at-risk individuals Legal Aid of East Tennessee (“LAET”) serves. As President of LAET’s Board of Directors, it’s been my honor to witness the resilience of our community and the inspiring individuals who have overcome every obstacle thrown at them since the beginning of the pandemic. Our staff’s work is stressful and detailed, but now more than ever, we see how essential our legal services are to the clients we serve. The work we accomplish changes lives and sometimes even saves lives. I want to extend my thanks to every person who plays a role in our organization’s work. After 10 years on the Board, I am still amazed by the outstanding and compassionate work of the attorneys and staff of LAET and the hope and perseverance of the clients of LAET.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the members of the Board of Directors. Their dedication during this challenging time and their passion for LAET’s mission has made all the difference!

In this report, you will see why our organization is vital to our community. The work of LAET has always focused on the needs of our most vulnerable neighbors; the elderly, the disabled, the children, the victimized, the veterans, and other populations facing unique challenges. This report is about people who face incredible challenges and whose very survival may be in doubt. We know we make a difference, and we are honored to share a few of our client’s stories here.

To all of you reading this who have supported Legal Aid of East Tennessee whether once or for many years, you have our undying gratitude. Whether you are a staff member, Board member, volunteer, community partner, or donor, your commitment to LAET’s mission and dedication makes what we do possible.



Keith Alley, LAET BOARD President





Letter from the Executive Director: Debra House

As I reflect on the accomplishments and tests of 2021, I can honestly say that it was a year like no other. While 2020 brought the myriad challenges of running a law office and serving our clients at the beginning of the pandemic, 2021 saw us deep in the throes of the pandemic with the ongoing challenge of developing innovative ways to meet the ever-increasing need for legal help for our most disadvantaged neighbors. We certainly drew upon the many lessons during the pandemic, not the least of which was the resiliency of our staff and our clients. I was appointed Executive Director of LAET in January of 2021 and had the honor and privilege of leading our dedicated staff as we expanded the services we provide to our clients throughout East Tennessee. LAET is stronger than it has ever been with a group of attorneys, many of them new to the practice of law, eager to help those most in need in our community. Our attorneys could not do their jobs without the support of our skilled paralegals and other support personnel. My deepest gratitude goes to each and every member of the LAET staff.

While it is not possible to speak to all of the great work LAET has undertaken in the past year, I want to highlight two areas. First is our eviction prevention/housing stability work. The pandemic had a profound impact on the ability of our clients to remain in their homes. While the eviction moratorium that protected people in the early days of the pandemic was a great benefit to so many, once it lifted, our clients were left owing many months of back rent and facing the very real threat of homelessness. We started two new eviction prevention projects in Chattanooga and Knoxville that helped many families access available financial and other help that enabled them to stay in their homes

Another significant achievement last year was the expansion of our Pro Bono Project (PBP). We added new talent and leadership to our PBP and vastly increased the number of legal clinics available throughout our service area, addressing a wide range of substantive areas while also expanding direct services to clients. Our volunteer lawyers play a vital role in our ability to service the legal needs of so many in our area, and for that we are grateful.

Beyond these two projects, our staff continued to provide outstanding legal help to those in our community. LAET closed over 5,700 cases impacting more than 11,500 clients and family members in 2021. All of this despite the ongoing pandemic and all of the related challenges that often make it difficult for our clients to seek the help they need and our staff to provide services.

The following pages contain our 2021 annual report, which highlights the work of our staff and the gratitude of our clients. Please join me in thanking our exceptional staff for their hard work and dedication in another most unusual year. As we look forward to new accomplishments in 2022, we realize many of the challenges we have faced in the past remain. Only the staff of LAET could overcome those challenges.



Debra House, LAET Executive Director



ONE VISION. ONE FIRM. ONE COMMUNITY.

The mission of Legal Aid of East Tennessee is to strengthen communities and change lives through high quality legal services.

Our vision is an East Tennessee where justice is a community value and no one faces a legal problem alone.

Across 26 counties – from Chattanooga to the Tri Cities – Legal Aid of East Tennessee provides civil legal representation free of charge for those who need it most. The elderly. Victims of domestic violence. Low-income families. All those who face a legal challenge yet don't have the vital legal help they need. Every day, we proudly answer the call for high-quality legal services that help change lives and improve communities.

2021 IMPACT

11,653 CLIENTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS IMPACTED

CASES BY TYPE

2054
SENIORS

INCLUDING
4117
CHILDREN

427
PRO BONO CASES

1082
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

333
VETERANS

139
VOLUNTEER ATTORNEYS

66
JUVENILE

324
INCOME

79
EMPLOYMENT

87
HEALTH

634
CONSUMER

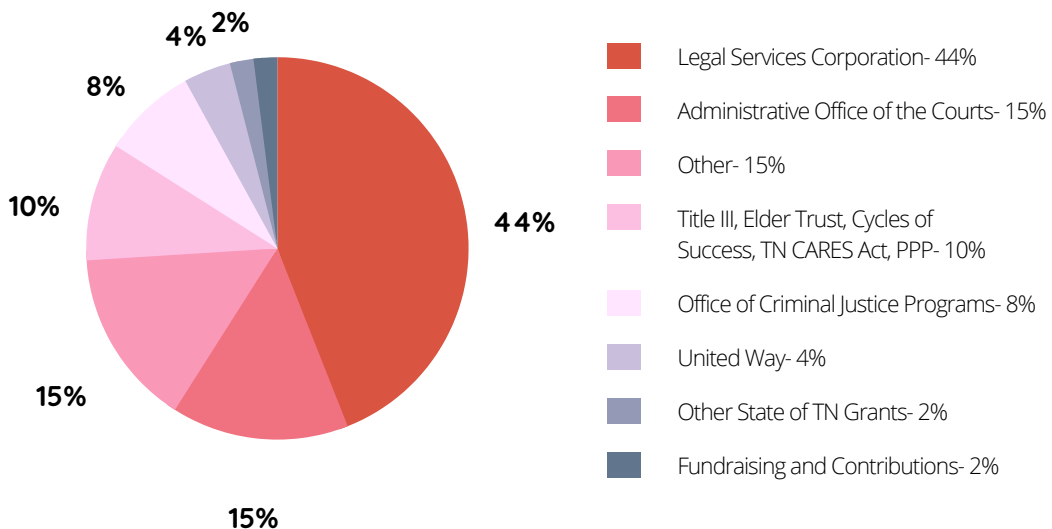
1217
MISC

1692
HOUSING

1695
FAMILY



2021 REVENUE SOURCES



Every \$1 donated to LAET creates \$11.21 in local impact

CLIENT TESTIMONIALS

“Legal Aid was able to reinstate my food stamps which allows me to eat.”

“This case gave me confidence and courage to standup for myself.”

“You give a voice to people no one listens to.”

“This case allowed me to keep my unemployment benefits.”

“When my husband passed away, I was so scared I would have to leave my home. I was amazed how easy it was to get help.”

“Legal Aid kept me from being homeless.”

“The pressure to take care of this debt was overwhelming. Thank you for your prompt service and clear information.”

“This case gave my family their lives back! We have been able to thrive and heal.”

“I was able to get my unemployment benefits that were wrongfully withheld.”

“Helped me financially as well as emotionally during tough times.”

“I thought I would not be able to get the medicine I needed. It has taken a lot of stress and worry off me. Legal Aid had a great impact on my quality of life.”

OUR CLIENT STORIES



The adverse party was an evil magician. "Brittany" worked as his assistant. The much older magician groomed Brittany into a sexual relationship when she was just a teen. After she informed their mutual boss of the abusive sexual relationship, the evil magician obtained an ex parte order of protection against Brittany alleging our client was stalking him. At the hearing, LAET produced text messages proving the magician initiated the abusive relationship, and that the evil magician was the true stalker and had even tried to install a tracking app on her cell phone. LAET argued that this was a situation where a person in authority was using the courts to victimize someone into silence. The court agreed and dismissed the evil magician's fraudulent petition.

At the height of the pandemic, "Lisa" was on the verge of being removed from her home for non-payment of rent. The sheriff was scheduled to remove Lisa from her home the next day. A LAET attorney was able to get several eviction cases dismissed by negotiating with landlords using funds from a combination of resources, including private funds, city funds, and federal CARES act funds. In one such case, he prevented an eviction at the 11th hour by requesting funds and negotiating with the landlord to cancel the service of the writ of possession scheduled to be served the very next day. LAET accessed the special COVID response funds to prevent eviction, such as this one, from proceeding against tenants in arrears, saving the tenants the additional costs associated with landlord attorney fees, court costs, service of process, and keeping them housed.



"Robert" is an elderly, severely disabled veteran living in a rural area of East Tennessee. Without warning, his landlord placed new gravel on the driveway from the street to the client's rented mobile home and around the mailbox. His wheelchair would sink deeply into the new, large gravel, rendering the client completely immobile and unable to get to his car. Hence, he could not leave his home for medical care, to get food, or retrieve his mail. The client requested that the gravel be removed. The landlord refused but offered to have someone bring him his mail once a week. Feeling trapped, Robert reached out to Legal Aid of East Tennessee. LAET made a home visit, assessed the situation, and then made written demand that the gravel be immediately removed as a reasonable accommodation for the client's disability and threatened a housing discrimination lawsuit. The landlord removed the gravel in response to LAET's demand letter. As a result, Robert can now safely come and go from his home.

VOLUNTEERS

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\$5,000+

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(800) 572-7457

JOHNSON CITY

(423) 928-8311
(800) 821-1312

CLEVELAND

(423) 303-2266
(800) 572-7457

KNOXVILLE

(865) 637-0484

MORRISTOWN

(423) 587-4850
(800) 821-1309

MARYVILLE

(865) 981-1818

FAMILY JUSTICE CENTERS

Providing legal help for those in abusive, violent, and trafficking situations

BRANCH HOUSE - THE FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER OF SULLIVAN COUNTY

(423) 574-7233

JOHNSON CITY / WASHINGTON COUNTY FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER

(423) 722-3720

CHATTANOOGA FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER

(423) 643-7600

KNOXVILLE FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER

(865) 215-6830

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Providing legal assistance that improves medical outcomes

Mental Health Law Partnership

Providing free assistance that
improves mental health

For McNabb Patients Only

Ballad Medical Legal Partnership

Providing free assistance that
improves medical outcomes

For Bristol and Holston Valley Patients Only

(276) 244-1289



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