



# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

BY GUEST COLUMNIST BARBARA BUCKLEY

## LEGAL AID IN NEVADA: BY THE NUMBERS

[ IN FURTHERANCE OF HIS GOAL TO SUPPORT ACCESS TO JUSTICE, PRESIDENT BRYAN SCOTT HAS INVITED BARBARA BUCKLEY TO BE HIS GUEST COLUMNIST THIS MONTH. ]

Twenty-seven years ago, I began my career as a legal aid attorney. Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada has changed so much over the years, expanding to serve the growing legal needs of our community. In case you haven't caught up with us in a while, here's my list of the top 10 things you need to know:

**How many attorneys do you have at the legal aid center today?** We have 40 talented and diverse attorneys: 47 percent are minorities, 77 percent are women and 28 percent are William S. Boyd Law School grads!

**We help kids.** Our Children's Attorneys Project represents abused and/or neglected children in the foster care system, giving these children not only a voice in court, but seasoned attorneys to advocate for their wishes, such as a desire to be adopted or reunified, or to remain with their brothers or sisters. Attorneys also assist parents struggling with the school district to protect their children's special education rights.

**We change people's lives in family court.** Our Family Justice Project lawyers represent domestic violence victims and vulnerable primary caretakers, helping them obtain protective orders, divorce decrees and/or custody of their children. They teach victims living in domestic violence shelters about their legal rights to live lives free of violence. They also provide immigration assistance to battered immigrants, victims of crime and children.

**We protect consumers fighting unfair practices.** Our Consumer Rights Project attorneys fight against abusive debt collection activities, work against fraudulent sales practices, help payday loan borrowers trapped on debt treadmills, represent homeowners going through foreclosure and assist debtors in bankruptcy court seeking a fresh start.

**We provide free legal classes.** In 2015, we offered 435 classes and, through those classes, helped 4,600 people! Staggering feats like this one are made possible annually through an amazing partnership between the William S. Boyd School of Law, Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada and Nevada Legal Services. Every Boyd law student participates; the curriculum teaches community members about divorce, guardianship, bankruptcy, small claims, custody, record sealing, foreclosure and immigration. More than 55,000 community members have participated in the program since it began.

### **Self Help Centers—Legal Emergency Rooms:**

We are proud to operate the Civil Law Self-Help Center and the Family Law Self-Help Center in partnership with the Eighth Judicial District Court and justice courts. Last year, 98,000 customers used both centers, which act as legal emergency rooms,

helping people negotiate the legal system. Check out the help centers' amazing websites at [www.civilalselfhelpcenter.org](http://www.civilalselfhelpcenter.org) and [www.familylawselfhelpcenter.org](http://www.familylawselfhelpcenter.org).

**What about Pro Bono?** Our Pro Bono Project recruits private attorneys to represent clients in all areas of civil law. We provide training for volunteer attorneys and mentor them. We also offer eight "Ask-a-Lawyer" programs through which attorney volunteers can meet with clients who have legal questions. In 2015, 939 lawyers helped 5,935 clients, and logged more than 25,000 volunteer pro bono hours with our organization. Wow!

### **Legal aid groups in Nevada: who does what?**

Legal aid efforts are coordinated by the Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission. We work with Nevada's four other legal aid organizations: Nevada Legal Services, Washoe Legal Services, Volunteer Attorneys of Rural Nevada and Southern Nevada Senior Law Project to make sure we don't duplicate services and are strategic in our mission.

**We're always responding to changing needs in the community.** It's hard to find a time when we are not working on something new! Right now, we are designing a "one stop" record sealing event; it is a herculean effort with many moving parts. We are helping to create a new statewide form/information website. We are also creating a new program to represent individuals in guardianship court. And throughout all of these efforts, we partner—no one group does it all alone.

**So, with this robust civil legal aid system, are all of Nevada's needs being met?** Unfortunately, the answer is no. There are more than 900,000 people in the state who earn less than 200 percent of poverty and qualify for legal aid help. Being forced to turn clients away is the toughest part of our job. There are hundreds of abused or immigrant children in Clark County who have no access to legal aid. Victims of domestic violence are not all helped, despite our valiant efforts to provide them with assistance. There are thousands of people under guardianship who are at risk of exploitation and have no attorney help. It is staggering.

When people ask me what I am proudest of in my legal career, I usually pause for a moment. I am incredibly proud of my 16 years in the Legislature, which culminated in my becoming the first woman Speaker in the history of the state of Nevada. But I am even prouder of Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada and all of our access to justice partners. If you want to get involved, email me at [bbuckley@lacsn.org](mailto:bbuckley@lacsn.org). **NL**

**BARBARA BUCKLEY** is Executive Director of Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada. She served as the Speaker of the Nevada State Assembly and the Assembly Majority Leader in the Nevada Legislature.