



CATHOLIC COMMUNITY SERVICES  
OF KING COUNTY

## Legal Action Center Update

### From the Director

It has been a busy summer here at the Legal Action Center. The number of tenants requiring assistance has grown, due in large part to increased foreclosure and mortgage delinquencies. High unemployment rates and predatory lending practices have caused a significant portion of King County to face foreclosure; many have lost their home and entered the rental market. The steady stream of new tenants has increased competition for low-income housing, increased the cost to rent, and decreased available opportunities for vulnerable communities to remain stable in rental communities. Though the Attorney General's recent settlement may help some victims of predatory lending practices recoup their losses, the housing crisis' effect on the rental market remains problematic. However, the Legal Action Center remains committed to assisting as many tenants as possible. Our Neighborhood Clinics are full each week; our interns and attorneys continue to resolve habitability issues and creditor/debtor claims to help tenants retain stable housing or qualify to rent. Our eviction team continues to provide eviction defense for clients in Seattle being illegally evicted, working often to help the disabled. The Legal Action Center continues to work toward productive and convenient resolutions to help tenants resolve issues before the litigation phase.

Times are tough, and some of the most vulnerable populations in our community are struggling to find, maintain, or afford housing. On the bright side, tough times provide a unique and meaningful opportunity for communities to become cohesive in the interest of the greater good. With the reduction in government funding and foundation resources, the Legal Action Center has become more dependent upon contributions from the general public. Please consider making a donation to the Legal Action Center so that we can continue to provide these unique and vital services.

### Updates from our Interns

- ❖ I recently worked with a client whose landlord had illegally retained her security deposit. The landlord had also made statements to potential landlords which prevented the client from being approved for housing. When she came to us, she was homeless. With our efforts she was able to find new housing and is no longer homeless. It was a very good day when she called to tell us she had been approved for a new apartment and was moving in within the week.

- ❖ I assisted a client who had received two eviction notices in the past year. The client, who receives Section 8 assistance, suffers from a range of substance abuse and mental health disabilities. LAC prevented two evictions, and was successful; however, it was also essential that the client retain her Section 8 voucher. This seemed unlikely given the two eviction hearings in the last year. We compiled a collection of letters from her doctors and also drafted our own letter asking Section 8 not to terminate her participation in the program. The housing authority decided not to terminate our client from the program, which was an excellent and rewarding result.

## Tenants and Mold

Washington's rainy weather and moist climate has caused a significant number of tenants to seek our assistance with mold problems. Landlords do have a duty to rent habitable dwellings under the Residential Landlord Tenant Act; upon written notice from a tenant, landlords must fix any water leaks or ventilation problems. If one of these problems arises, make sure to act quickly by providing your landlord written notice of the problem; proactive actions regarding repairs will help prevent mold before conditions worsen.

### **How do I know if I have mold?**

Mold is usually easily detectable by sight or by smell. Black or green spores usually develop along the baseline of walls near the carpet line or behind any items placed against a wall. One can prevent the development of mold by keeping their living spaces well ventilated and by remedying any water or moisture spills immediately. Tenants in the city of Seattle can contact the American Lung Association at 206-441-5100 for a free mold inspection and report.

### **Who is responsible for damage caused by mold?**

Landlords should provide tenants with a mold addendum upon move-in. Generally, if mold is caused by a tenant's negligence, a landlord will not be responsible for damages to personal property caused by the mold; however, if the landlord rents a dwelling already inhabited by mold or fails to remedy mold upon written notice, a tenant may be able to sue in small claims court to recover the cost of any damage to property caused by the landlord's inattention.

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### **For more information please visit:**

Washington Department of Health Website:

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/HomeSafety/Contaminants/Mold/RentersLandlordsandMold.aspx>

American Lung Association:

<http://www.lung.org/associations/states/washington/>

## HUD Newsletter

For those of you interested in receiving a monthly update on housing issues around the northwest, check out HUD's website:

<http://www.hud.gov/local/shared/working/r10/newsletters/hudhighlights.cfm?state=wa>

This link will provide you with all past issues as well as the ability to sign up for future newsletters. HUD's newsletter is a great way to keep in touch with what is going on!

## A little bit about our interns...

*Jasmine Hay-Jasmine* is originally from the UK, but spent the last four years in Princeton, NJ working on a Chemistry degree. Starting in August 2012, Jasmine will be attending UVA School of Law. Jasmine spent the summer as one of our eviction interns and will be missed come fall.

*Constance Locklear-Constance* is a second-year law student at Seattle University. She enjoys and is interested in mediation and negotiation and will be staying with LAC this fall.

*MJ McCallum-MJ* is a second-year law student at Seattle University. She worked as a domestic violence advocate for seven years in Snohomish county and hopes to eventually provide domestic violence services as an attorney in Snohomish county.

*Max Gibbs-Ruby-Max* is also a second-year law student at Seattle University. Max is interested in social justice and acquiring a broad range of experiences.

*Erin Anderson-Erin* is a rising second-year law student at the University of Washington. As a life-long Seattle native, Erin enjoys running, skiing, and cheering on the Husky football and basketball teams.

## LAC Staff

Mark Chattin, Directing Attorney

John O'Brien, Staff Attorney

Kate Thibault,  
Administrator/Paralegal

Nadia Kourehdar, Paralegal

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