

Letter from the Executive Director

On April 25, 1996, the 104th Congress approved the Omnibus Budget Bill containing new restrictions on federally funded legal services programs. These restrictions undoubtedly have a negative impact on the concept of equal justice for all. Nevertheless, committed advocates nationwide are responding in force to this latest crisis by designing new and effective ways to deliver quality legal services to low-income clients.

At the recent Pro Bono Conference sponsored by the American Bar Association (ABA), attorneys from every region in the country worked to meet the challenge of reshaping a delivery system that ensures equal access to justice for low-income clients. Furthermore, in partnership with the National Legal Aid and Defender Association, the ABA has established SPAN (State Planning Assistance Network) to facilitate the exchange of information and coordination of state planning efforts in the delivery of legal services.

Attorneys at federally funded legal services programs are adjusting to the new restrictions with a focus on legal methods they can employ to serve their clients well. In some cases, attorneys are leaving federally funded programs to work at other nonprofit organizations that allow them the full range of activities enjoyed by private attorneys.

It is with bittersweet emotions that I announce the establishment of the Clearinghouse's Poverty Law Project. This project is created to serve the subscribers to the Clearinghouse's services better by adding one of the nation's most prestigious welfare law teams to the Clearinghouse staff. Formerly the Welfare Law Team of the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago, the Poverty Law Project includes John Bouman, the project director, and staff attorneys Daniel Lesser, Wendy Pollack, Dory Rand, and Margaret Stapleton.

The Poverty Law Project is funded with grants from the Woods Fund of Chicago, the Fry Foundation, the Polk Bros. Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, and the Paternal Involvement Demonstration Project. The project will provide broad representation and advocacy for welfare recipients in Illinois. New information, strategies, and experiences of the project regarding specific changes in social welfare programs will be analyzed for the CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW to benefit advocates nationwide.

To assist further in the redesign of legal services, the Clearinghouse will reach out to legal services advocates to identify and cover emerging legal issues under the new restrictions, creative ways for addressing them, as well as the innovative ways advocates will continue to provide legal services to the poor.

The Clearinghouse applauds legal services and pro bono advocates nationwide in their efforts to move forward. It is the Clearinghouse's goal to support these advocates with the highest-quality research and communication services.



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