

Empowering People Through the Law

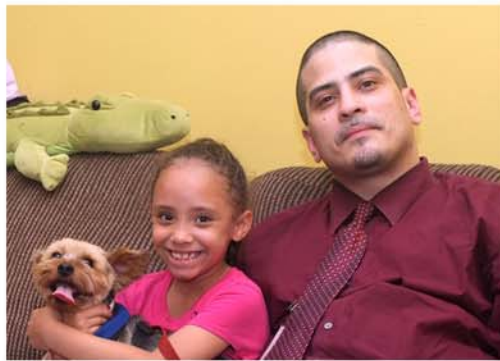
THE CITY BAR JUSTICE CENTER increases access to justice by leveraging the resources of the New York City legal community. Drawing upon our relationship with the New York City Bar, the Justice Center provides legal assistance to those in need; mobilizes lawyers, law firms, corporate legal departments, and other legal institutions to provide pro bono legal services; educates the public on legal issues; fosters strategic relationships; and impacts public policy.

Legal Clinic for the Homeless – Removing Barriers & Shoring Up the Safety Net

The Justice Center's Legal Clinic for the Homeless (LCH) works with attorneys, law students, and other legal professionals to assist New York City's homeless families in securing state and federal public benefits, vital tools in poverty prevention and alleviation. Staff and volunteer attorneys, paralegals, and law students provide clients with advice, advocacy, and representation on issues such as accessing and contesting denials and reductions of public assistance, food stamps, Medicaid, and public housing. Through the information and assistance provided, clients are empowered to advocate for their rights and obtain the benefits to which they are entitled. By facilitating clients' efforts to become more self-reliant and independent, LCH helps prevent further homelessness.

"The sharp increase in family homelessness is caused, in large part, by the steep decline in affordable and subsidized housing in New York City. Our pro bono legal clinics at shelters offer critical legal support to vulnerable families who often have a hard time navigating the city's difficult bureaucracies."

**- Lisa Pearlstein, Director
of the Legal Clinic for
the Homeless**



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Client Advocacy: Making Voices Heard

Many LCH clients have tried to advocate on their own behalf with little success. Having a legal representative advocate for them provides another voice to aid in the process. "For many clients, working with the Legal Clinic volunteers gives them, for the first time, an opportunity to have someone take an active interest in their well-being, show compassion, and fight for them," says Brittany Bacon of Hunton & Williams LLP. "The work entailed with securing public assistance benefits for our clients is negligible in comparison to the level of meaningful impact our effort provides to these individuals." Many cases have led to the satisfying outcome of hundreds of dollars in benefits awarded to clients or in accommodations for clients with disabilities.

In order to escape domestic violence, Ms. R., a disabled mother, entered the NYC shelter system with her 13-year-old daughter. They were homeless for three years. The Housing Authority (NYCHA) denied Ms. R.'s application for public housing alleging a history of poor rent payment in the apartment she resided in prior to shelter. Ms. R.'s pro bono attorney succeeded in reversing the denial by demonstrating to NYCHA through the presentation of housing court records that Ms. R. did not owe any rent arrears. Ms. R. and her daughter moved out of shelter into a NYCHA apartment.

Five-year-old N. has acute sickle cell anemia. She and her mother resided in a shelter with no kitchen or bathroom in their unit. The family presented a letter from N.'s doctor to the Department of Homeless Services requesting a transfer to a shelter with an in-unit kitchen and bathroom to accommodate N.'s medical needs. The agency did not respond. N.'s attorney contacted a City attorney and requested the accommodation of N.'s medical needs. The family was immediately transferred to an appropriate shelter.

Ms. B. is a homeless mother living in a shelter with her very young son. The shelter does not provide meals and her room only has a small refrigerator and tiny microwave. Unable to cook or pay to eat in restaurants, Ms. B. was having difficulty feeding herself and her child. Ms. B.'s legal advocate pressed the City to provide a restaurant allowance owed to this family as well as housing search monies. The City issued to Ms. B. \$1,558 in retroactive benefits as well as ongoing restaurant and apartment search allowances.

"Through the Legal Clinic for the Homeless, attorneys at Herrick Feinstein are able to secure much needed benefits for families in desperate need of our help. Whether we obtain a few hundred dollars in allowances for a client to spend on food for their children, or succeed in overturning a sanction that prevents our client from transitioning out of the shelter system, the successes here are gratifying for us and, more importantly, meaningful to our clients."

— Ross Hirsch, Herrick Feinstein LLP



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