

Advocacy and partnership

December 10, 2009



Kentucky Equal Justice Center
201 W. Short Street, Suite 310
Lexington, KY 40507

P: 859-233-3057
F: 859-233-0007

Dear Friend,

“Advocacy and partnership.” We’ve been living it since 1976. Many of our friends helped us celebrate our 30th anniversary—now almost three years ago. It’s time to get back in touch, tell you what we’re doing and invite you to be part of our work. We face tough times like all nonprofits—just when there’s more to do than ever—but we’re still going and even growing. ***You can help!***

Most important, ***we’re fighting the good fight for low income Kentuckians*** in the courts, the legislature and before government agencies—and getting results. Recent highlights:

We’re building a new coalition to tackle payday loans. It doesn’t sound like much: \$15 to borrow each \$100. But the debt must be paid back entirely in two weeks. That’s an annual percentage rate of 391 percent. Sadly, people often can’t afford to pay it back. They take out a new loan right away—the national average is nine loans per year—and get caught in a debt trap. Congress has capped interest rates at 36 percent for military families. We’re helping build the new Kentucky Coalition for Responsible Lending to do the same for *all Kentucky families*. One of our contributions: Senior Staff Attorney **Anne Marie Regan** has drafted the coalition’s proposed bill. We shared it with the Governor’s office just last week.

We’re the new home for a unique immigration law clinic: Originally an all-volunteer effort, Maxwell Street Legal Clinic offers free or low cost help with immigration law to low income families in the Bluegrass Region and across the state. It is profound, inspiring work: reuniting families, helping refugees and asylum-seekers escape persecution and find freedom here in America. Immigration Attorney **Cori Hash** came to us under a national fellowship in 2004. In a partnership with Maxwell Street, we placed her at the Clinic. Cori has stayed on three years since her fellowship ended, growing in knowledge and expertise. In November, she argued her first case before the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals. In early 2008, Maxwell Street Legal Clinic became part of Kentucky Equal Justice Center.

We’re helping show the need for health care reform: A new health care coalition in Kentucky, Kentucky Voices for Health, brings together health care groups like the Heart, Lung and Cancer associations, faith-based members, low income advocates and more. I’m serving as co-chair. One of my jobs in the coalition: help coordinate research and launch policy papers, like the one that showed that over 60,000 Kentucky children were eligible for coverage under the Kentucky Children’s Health Insurance program—or Medicaid—but not enrolled. Many groups pitched in to change that: when Governor Beshear toured the state last year, he heard about children and health care everywhere he went. He launched a plan to enroll more kids. He announced results in November: 32,000 new children signed up, an average of 2,600 a month.

We're enforcing workers' rights to fair treatment: Anne Marie and Cori handled one of my favorite cases. Nine horse farm workers hadn't been paid, some for months, a total of about \$90,000. Through creative legal work, Anne Marie and Cori obtained security interests in the farm's thoroughbreds. When the horses were sold at Keeneland—one for over a million dollars—the workers at last got paid, along with numerous other creditors of the farm. The story made the front page of *La Voz*, the English-Spanish paper here in Lexington, with a photo showing the workers holding their paychecks. But we knew we were just scratching the surface. Together with our board, we planned a new employment law initiative. We are delighted to announce that a national foundation has approved a grant. We're bringing on a new attorney to lead the Bluegrass Employment Law Launch project, starting in a few weeks.

You can help!

You can probably tell I'm excited about our work. I'm also excited about our staff and our Board. We've worked hard to recruit diverse, engaged Board members to help us plan and build for the future. You can read more on our website and in the enclosed brochure about our advocacy and our work with community partners: to make human trafficking illegal in Kentucky, to stop nursing homes from "dumping" elderly patients with behavioral problems, to improve mortgage lending protections and more.

Mostly, we're hard at work in our usual no-nonsense, diligent and constructive way. We seldom take the time to celebrate a success. We just move on the next issue, the next case, the next challenge. But it occurs to me you might want to be part of it all.

As we tackle new challenges, we invite you to be a contributor and partner. You'd be amazed how much even a small contribution inspires us—and helps keep the lights on. Please return your gift in the enclosed envelope or contribute online at www.kyequaljustice.org.

Thank you so much for your interest and support!

Sincerely,

Richard J. Seckel
Director

P.S — Many of you remember us by our original name, "*Office of Kentucky Legal Services Programs.*" It sounded like a government agency, when in fact we're a small public interest nonprofit. We adopted the new name in 2007 to make that clear. Because we're a 501(3) nonprofit, your donation may be tax deductible.