

Message from the President of Legal Aid's Board of Trustees

March 2, 2022

Dear Friends of Legal Aid:

As many of you may already know, yesterday Eric Angel stepped down as Executive Director of the Legal Aid Society after more than 20 extraordinary years at the organization.

During Eric's tenure as Executive Director, Legal Aid's annual budget grew from \$3.1 million in 2010 to \$9.9 million last year. Legal Aid's staff grew from 35 to 95 over that same period, and its practice grew substantially in scope and sophistication. Under Eric's leadership, Legal Aid established innovative courthouse offices in the landlord & tenant branch, the paternity & support branch, the domestic violence intake center, and the foreclosure and debt collection branches of the D.C. Superior Court, and expanded our presence East of the River at the Domestic Violence Intake Center in Southeast DC. Legal Aid also established a policy advocacy unit, grew its appellate advocacy project, and led a wide range of anti-poverty, systemic litigation, legislative reform, and access to justice efforts.

In his next chapter, Eric will be working on Bruce Spiva's campaign for DC Attorney General as a Senior Policy Advisor. We sincerely thank Eric for his service and contributions during his tenure and wish him all the best in his future endeavors. The Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees is forming a search committee to begin the process of hiring a new Executive Director.

I am pleased to announce that Jennifer Mezey and Rachel Rintelmann will serve as Interim Co-Executive Directors until a new Executive Director is hired. Jennifer and Rachel are eminently capable of leading the organization, having been with Legal Aid for many years as advocates for the economic, health, and housing needs of low-income District residents. Jennifer joined Legal Aid in 2004 as a Supervising Attorney in our Public Benefits Unit, and has been a Deputy Legal Director since 2020. Rachel joined Legal Aid in 2011 as a staff attorney in our Housing Law Unit before becoming a Supervising Attorney in 2014 and Acting Deputy Legal Director in 2021.

Under Jennifer and Rachel's leadership, Legal Aid and its extraordinary staff will carry on their important work uninterrupted. And, there is much to be excited about on the horizon. Legal Aid has just welcomed Patrick Orciani as Legal Aid's first Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. We have restructured our leadership team and are in the process of hiring two new legal directors, one to manage our Direct Legal Services Program and one to expand and manage our Systemic Advocacy and Law Reform Program. We are exploring strategic growth in the areas of intake, brief services, and community outreach and engagement. And in all of our work, we are centering the needs of our clients and focusing on advancing racial, social, and economic justice.

I am very excited about the future of Legal Aid, and I look forward to celebrating Legal Aid's work with you all at the Servant of Justice Awards Dinner in May.

Sincerely,

Joan E. McKown
President, Board of Trustees