Vision

An end to homelessness in Maryland.

Mission

HPRP’s mission is to end homelessness in Maryland by providing free legal services, including advice, counsel, education, representation and advocacy, for low-income persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Our direct representation informs broader-based systemic advocacy and impact litigation to address the root causes of homelessness.
A Message From Our Leaders

Antonia Fasanelli  
Executive Director

Irving Walker  
Board President

We are pleased to present the 2015 Annual Report for the Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc. (HPRP). HPRP is committed to bringing an end to homelessness in Maryland by eliminating barriers to income, employment, and housing for individuals and families facing homelessness.

People facing homelessness often cannot access legal services in a traditional manner. The HPRP legal team, including 8 in-house attorneys and 420 pro bono attorneys, paralegals, and law students, brings information, education, and representation directly to clients in their own communities – meeting in government offices, neighborhood centers, shelters, soup kitchens, on the street, as well as at the HPRP office.

In Fiscal Year 2015, HPRP provided free legal services to hundreds of people and resolved 821 legal cases, helping individuals and families obtain and keep affordable housing, stop unlawful evictions, secure public benefits for themselves and their families, and expunge non-convictions and nuisance offenses, leading to new opportunities for employment and housing.

This Annual Report highlights stories, programs and accomplishments of the past year. For example, HPRP launched the Rural Veterans Legal Assistance Project in FY2015. The first legal clinic, opened in Perry Point, Maryland, uses Skype to connect veterans with pro bono attorneys around the state, and provides a model for access to quality legal assistance for those living in areas where legal help otherwise is not available. In 2015, approximately 40% of all HPRP veterans’ cases came through the Perry Point legal clinic.

In addition to vital and accessible legal representation, HPRP works with partners in the community to advocate for regulatory and legislative change to eliminate the root causes of homelessness. In 2015, HPRP led successful advocacy efforts for legislation that now prevents homelessness among youth who age out of the foster care system by requiring provisions for stable housing, education, job training, and health insurance.

Our work is only possible because of you and the support of many other volunteers, donors, foundation funders, and community partners. Thank you for your leadership, your generous financial support, and for making it possible for HPRP to make such an enormous difference in the lives of the people we serve.

It is an honor to stand beside you to work to end homelessness in Maryland.
Housing Access and Preservation

Preventing and ending homelessness are core components of HPRP’s programs. In the Housing Justice Project, HPRP attorneys represented tenants of federally subsidized housing in court eviction proceedings and in administrative hearings with the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) to prevent homelessness. For persons already homeless, HPRP attorneys represented families and individuals in their attempts to access or preserve shelter and housing.

One such client, Mr. S, had been homeless and living on the street since 2013. He came to HPRP after HABC improperly denied him a housing voucher because of minor misdemeanor offenses directly related to his homelessness, which is not a lawful basis for denying a voucher. His HPRP attorney demanded HABC apply the correct screening criteria, and his application was approved. He is now able to have a home.

Access to Public Benefits

While a few hundred dollars per month in public benefits may not seem like a lot of money, it makes a huge difference in our clients’ lives, because many of them have no other source of income. It can mean a family can now make a rent payment, purchase food, clothing, diapers, medication, child care, or bus fare. In 2015, HPRP helped families and individuals recover $302,503 in retroactive state disability, welfare, food stamps, Medicaid, veterans’ and other benefits. By increasing access to public benefits, people are able to meet basic human needs: food, health, and adequate shelter.

A Takoma Park mother with significant tax and public benefit problems came to HPRP’s program at Shepherd’s Table (Silver Spring, MD) with a letter from the IRS. “I looked at her tax return,” said HPRP pro bono attorney Mary Anna Donohoe, “and it was completely fraudulent, with claims for thousands of dollars in charitable contributions. But she only makes $350 every two weeks!”

The client had paid someone in her building to prepare her tax returns and needed to file an amended return. Looking for a pro bono accountant, Mary Anna reached out to Emily Vaias, another HPRP pro bono attorney (and board member), who talked to her accountant, Staci Winters. Staci agreed to help and filed amended returns for 2012 and 2014. The client received almost $6,000 in refunds. Mary Anna also helped her with a bureaucratic snafu that threatened to cut off her public benefits. “She was being treated very badly, but I straightened it out,” she said.
Barriers to Housing and Employment

Erasing criminal charges and convictions for minor offenses from criminal records is a significant part of what HPRP does. That’s because those records are major roadblocks to employment and housing.

A 61-year-old Baltimore City man now has a job and is on his way to ending his homelessness after his HPRP pro bono attorney was successful having his criminal record expunged. HPRP was able to get two charges and an uninsured vehicle traffic offense expunged. The client had been looking for work and a permanent place to stay. The charges came off just before a job interview, and he got the job.

In 346 cases in 2015, HPRP attorneys and volunteers represented people facing homelessness in proceedings to expunge records of charges that resulted in non-convictions or convictions for nuisance offenses, and urged housing providers and employers to provide access. HPRP also supported the Job Opportunities Task Force in its successful leadership to change Maryland’s expungement law to allow more charges to be cleared from criminal records.

Advocacy to End Homelessness

HPRP seeks to end homelessness through legal services and systemic advocacy to promote public awareness of homelessness, build political will for solutions, and increase access to affordable housing, income, and safety net programs.

Just days before adjournment of the 2015 legislative session, the Maryland General Assembly voted unanimously to pass the Information and Services for Foster Children and Former Foster Children Act (HB 439/SB685), a bill to reduce the incidence of homelessness among youth aging out of the foster care system.

HPRP recognized the need for this legislation and led advocacy efforts in support of the bill because many of our Homeless Youth Initiative clients became homeless shortly after exiting foster care. HPRP was honored to collaborate with Advocates for Children and Youth on this important legislation.

“By enhancing and formalizing the focus on housing, public benefits, education and employment by courts and local departments of social services during transition planning for youth leaving care – in addition to several other distinct changes to existing law – this bill will prevent homelessness for Maryland foster youth,” said Ingrid Lofgren, HPRP Homeless Youth Initiative attorney.
The Veterans Legal Assistance Project (VLAP) helps veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness obtain critical VA disability benefits, other federal and state disability benefits, and discharge upgrades. VLAP operates a legal clinic twice-monthly at the VA Medical Center in downtown Baltimore and rotating legal clinics in rural counties. A new initiative, the Rural Veterans Legal Assistance Project, helps Maryland veterans who live far from major metro areas make appointments at local clinics and speak with pro bono volunteers via Skype.

“I’m a veteran who served in the Marine infantry in Viet Nam,” said Ward Coe III of Gallagher Evelius & Jones LLP and a VLAP pro bono attorney. “I firmly believe that when the government puts folks in harm’s way, whether in war or in service to their country, it has an obligation to help those people. It’s so tough—people get injured in lots of ways, both physically and emotionally. Sensitivity to that is improving, but resources are strained. I do it because I consider it to be a social duty.”

The Homeless Youth Initiative provides outreach, legal representation, and advocacy for and with homeless youth ages 13 to 25 who are unaccompanied by a parent or guardian in Baltimore City.

The Homeless Youth Initiative operates a community-based legal clinic at the Youth Empowered Society Drop-In Center. Legal representation is provided in the areas of public benefits, housing, and expungement of criminal records.

In addition, HPRP works with many youth to address the persistent problem of unaccompanied youth homelessness in our state through legislative and policy advocacy. When the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) reopened the Section 8 waiting list for the first time in over eight years, HPRP successfully advocated that HABC add a preference for former foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth on the new Section 8 wait list. Previously, youth were not a priority category and it would have been nearly impossible for unaccompanied homeless youth and former foster youth to obtain housing from the new waiting list.
The Linda Kennedy Fellowship in Advocacy honors the late Linda Kennedy, Esq., a courageous and determined advocate for persons with disabilities and persons without housing. Linda was a champion for equal treatment of our clients and neighbors who struggle with homelessness. Her tireless work, particularly with people seeking to overcome barriers to housing and employment imposed by criminal records, had a significant impact in our community. Linda provided critical representation to our clients in their efforts to expunge arrest records and resolve collateral issues related to criminal records. Linda’s deeply caring manner with which she addressed the needs of each client was special. The Linda Kennedy Fellowship in Advocacy provides a second or third year law student with an internship at HPRP to work on policy and systemic issues that promote an end to homelessness in Baltimore City and in Maryland.

The 2014-2015 Linda Kennedy Fellow, Brittany Favazza, was a second-year student at the University of Baltimore School of Law. During the 2015 Maryland General Assembly legislative session, Brittany conducted extensive research in support of legislation to prevent homelessness amongst youth aging out of foster care. With her advocacy, this legislation passed and became effective October 1, 2015. Brittany also provided research and advocacy in support of legislation to create a grievance process for foster youth. Although the bill did not pass, the Maryland Department of Human Resources implemented several components of the legislation, including the creation of an ombudsman position.

The 2014-2015 fellowship was generously supported by:
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HPRP opened 781 cases and closed 821 cases. These cases constitute matters in which HPRP staff or volunteers represented people struggling with homelessness in legal disputes to prevent or end homelessness. HPRP also received 974 calls where brief advice, information, or referral was given. These calls reflect the “unmet” need because of insufficient resources or other reasons.
HPRP could not have touched the lives of so many individuals this year without its talented and dedicated volunteer lawyers, paralegals, law students and others. In 2015, volunteers donated over 703 hours of service to HPRP and its clients, including over 647 hours, valued at $194,235, donated by attorneys.

In 2015, HPRP continued the strong development of its pro bono program. HPRP increased its number of volunteers from 335 to 420.

Volunteer Darryl Tarver conducts an intake with a client,
Photo credit: Eric Stocklin

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Volunteer Appreciation Reception

On April 21, 2015, HPRP held its annual volunteer appreciation at The University of Baltimore Angelos Law Center, whose generous sponsorship helped to make the event possible. Awardees in the following categories were presented with artwork created by residents of The Helping Up Mission, one of HPRP’s intake locations.

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Financial Highlights

Total Revenue: $1,057,253

- Foundations: $340,266
- Grants: $371,940
- Contributions: $336,885
- Program Services: $7,644
- Other Income: $518

Total Expenses: $1,053,129

- Program Services: $897,785
- Fundraising: $77,460
- Management & General: $77,884
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