Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc.

Lawyers Ending Homelessness

Annual Report 2016
A Message From Our Leaders

Antonia Fasanelli  
Executive Director

Irving Walker  
Board President

We are pleased to present the 2016 Annual Report for the Homeless Persons Representation Project (HPRP), with highlights of our successful legal work, which you helped to make possible. You are helping to change lives and end homelessness in Maryland. Thank you!

The HPRP legal team, including 9 in-house attorneys and 429 pro bono attorneys, paralegals, and law students, opened 1,567 cases this year – double the number of cases opened in 2015. HPRP was selected to work with the Mayor’s Office of Employment Development as part of the One Baltimore for Jobs (1B4J) initiative, opening 5 new legal clinics with Associated Catholic Charities, BioTechnical Institute of Maryland, Humanim, New Pathways, and the Youth Empowered Society (YES) Drop-In Center eliminating barriers to employment for young people enrolled in job training programs.

HPRP was part of the legal team in an historic legal settlement addressing decades of housing discrimination in Baltimore County, and approved by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. HPRP also served on the state-level Steering Committee for Youth REACH, the homeless youth count pilot project created by legislation HPRP championed in 2014. The Youth REACH count took place in the fall of 2015, with HPRP staff leading the counting effort in Baltimore City. HPRP is again leading the local effort in 2017.

Every day, HPRP provides real help to real people, providing legal assistance to eliminate extraordinary and unreasonable barriers to stable housing, income, and employment. This work is only possible because of you and the support of many volunteers, donors, foundation funders, and community partners. Thank you for your leadership, your commitment, and your generous financial support.
2016 At A Glance

**Action**

752 cases closed, affecting 1,244 people

**Impact**

HPRP clients recovered $231,944 in benefits in 2016

**Service**

429 Attorneys, paralegals, & law students volunteered 1,255 hours in pro bono services, valued at $337,721.00
Ensuring Access to Stable Housing

The primary solution to homelessness is housing. HPRP represents tenants of federally subsidized housing in court eviction proceedings and in administrative hearings with the Housing Authority of Baltimore City.

A Spanish-speaking client and her family, faced with either moving to the other side of town or losing their housing subsidy and becoming homeless, can now stay in their home thanks to her HPRP housing attorney.

“She had been in a permanent supportive housing program for people suffering with HIV/AIDS and with Limited English Proficiency for seven years,” said senior staff attorney Karen Wabeke (pictured). “Then she got a termination notice—in English!”

The notice said the client had to relocate because her adult daughter moved out and she no longer qualified for a three-bedroom unit. “And that’s not a problem,” Karen said. “But the notice said she had to move to a specific property in a different part of town that was owned by the permanent supportive housing program. She did not want to move to that neighborhood. Her doctors were close by and her son was an honors student in the local high school near where they currently lived. The new commute would have taken two hours.”

Under federal law, the permanent supportive housing program could not dictate or steer a participant to any particular building. “We wrote a demand letter pointing out that they couldn’t require her to move to a specific building and that the best interests of the client should be driving the decision” said Karen.

The program backed down. “We prevented the loss of her housing subsidy and prevented her from having to make the difficult decision to move to another part of town in order to avoid homelessness,” Karen said. “Now, her son can finish high school in his community.”
Advocacy to End Homelessness

HPRP works to end homelessness through systemic advocacy to eliminate extraordinary and unreasonable barriers to stable housing, income, and employment.

After four years of negotiations, Baltimore Neighborhoods Inc., the NAACP of Baltimore Co., three residents of Baltimore County and the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) signed an agreement with Baltimore County to begin unwinding decades of housing discrimination against African Americans, families with children, and people with disabilities.

The complainants were represented by attorneys from the Homeless Persons Representation Project, Maryland Legal Aid, Maryland Disability Law Center, the Public Justice Center, the ACLU of Maryland, and the national NAACP.

The agreement is the result of a complaint filed with HUD in 2011 over long-term Baltimore County practices that ignored the needs of a significant portion of county residents and promoted residential segregation. Those practices included exclusionary zoning, resistance to subsidized housing, and openly discriminatory housing and development policies funded, in large part, by federal tax dollars.

Key provisions include development of 1,000 affordable homes, and the placement of 2,000 families with housing vouchers in areas of opportunity throughout the county. The County also agreed to provide $30 million in local funds over the next 10 years to help finance the new affordable housing and an additional $3 million to pay for disability upgrades to existing affordable homes.

The county residents with disabilities in the complaint said they paid full rent for units that lacked accessible toilets, showers and kitchens. Rhonda Myers, another complainant, was happy that the agreement was finally signed. “I joined this fight so other people can have homes that are fully accessible,” Myers said. “It has been a long time coming.”
The Veteran’s Legal Assistance Project helps veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness obtain critical VA disability benefits and discharge upgrades to create access to stable housing, benefits, and other services.

With HPRP’s help, a veteran who suffered a knee injury while serving in the U.S. Army in the 1980s saw his monthly disability payments increase more than ten times, along with a six-figure retroactive award.

“In June 2008, he had partial knee replacement surgery,” said Director of Pro Bono Services Swapna Yeluri (pictured). “He had spent more than two years in physical therapy, followed by a second surgery in 2010. He has been unable to work and was adjudicated to be totally disabled by the Social Security Administration.”

Nearly three years after his original claim was submitted to the VA, this veteran came to HPRP for help challenging his 2012 rating decision. Even though the veteran filed a “Notice of Disagreement” on his own, the VA failed to review the veteran’s challenge while his financial circumstances, not to mention his physical and emotional health, deteriorated.

After extensive submissions to the VA by HPRP and volunteer attorney Paul Spence, the agency recognized its error and increased the veteran’s monthly benefits to almost $3,000. He also received an award of $188,000 in benefits retroactive to the date of his original claim. “This vet now has the financial means to secure his home, reorder his finances and move forward with a stable and dignified life,” Paul said.

In 2016, HPRP expanded its veteran outreach with a new legal clinic in St. Mary’s County at the Three Oaks Center in Lexington Park. This clinic joins HPRP’s other legal clinics at the VA Medical Center Annex in Baltimore City and on the grounds of the Perry Point VA Medical Center in Cecil County.
Linda Kennedy Fellowship

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 2015-2016 Linda Kennedy Fellow, Melissa View, was a second-year student at the University of Baltimore School of Law. During the 2016 Maryland General Assembly legislative session, Melissa researched and prepared testimony in support of bills related to youth homelessness, including a tuition waiver for homeless youth, waiving GED testing fees for homeless youth and ensuring foster youth receive income supports while in care. Melissa was also involved in the planning and implementation of Youth REACH, the state homeless youth counting effort, and supported coalition partners in developing a successful campaign for an affordable housing trust fund in Baltimore.

The 2015-2016 fellowship was generously supported by:
Anonymous
Hon. Theresa Furnari
Lenna Kennedy
HPRP opened 1,567 cases and closed 752 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 1,297 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 2016, volunteers donated over 1,255 hours of service to HPRP and its clients, including over 1,111 hours, valued at $333,330, donated by attorneys.

In 2016, HPRP continued the strong development of its pro bono program, growing to 429 volunteers.

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Volunteer Appreciation Reception

On April 26, 2016, 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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Sara Gross
Baltimore City Law Department
Kellie Lego
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Financial Highlights

Total Revenue: $1,113,797

- Foundations: $236,354
- Grants: $442,930
- Contributions: $345,908
- Program Services: $7,191
- Settlement & Interest: $75,852
- Other Income: $5,562

Total Expenses: $1,143,244

- Program Services: $939,520
- Fundraising: $126,220
- Management & General: $77,504
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