

MECKLENBURG ACCESS TO JUSTICE CAMPAIGN

[Bridging the Gap] in 2020



charlotte center
for legal advocacy

justice lives here.



friends,

I hope you and yours are safe and healthy. I do not offer that wish lightly as this year has presented challenges that have affected all of us. But if we've learned anything from 2020, it's that this health crisis has laid bare the severe inequities deeply rooted in our society.

Mecklenburg County is North Carolina's epicenter for the coronavirus with hundreds more cases confirmed than any other county. For those living on the socioeconomic margins in our community, the pandemic has exacerbated their instability in extreme ways, creating an overwhelming need for legal assistance.

COVID-related losses in employment and health coverage, along with food and housing insecurity, have created an entirely new population in need, while low-income people and communities of color already fighting to overcome systemically racist barriers to opportunity have been disproportionately impacted.

Fortunately, that's why Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy and Legal Aid of North Carolina-Charlotte are here.

Advocates at these organizations have worked on the front lines of the pandemic to maintain and strengthen the safety net for clients by adapting programs and services to work safely and remotely, navigating changes in public benefits that impact clients; developing support for unemployed workers and working to keep housing stable.

They respond to our community's calls for help, fighting for equal access to resources and fairness under the law to meet basic needs and promote opportunity.

Last year, 7 out of 10 low-income people experienced a civil legal problem that significantly impacted their daily lives, but only 14% of those residents had access to the legal assistance they needed to address their problem. Prior to the pandemic, there was only one legal aid attorney for every 11,500 low-income residents in need of assistance from these organizations.

This is the "justice gap" our community faces and the reason I am writing you today.

Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy and Legal Aid of North Carolina's intervention can change the trajectory of our neighbors who desperately need legal help to remain stable but can't afford it. As our community struggles to find stability, their work is more critical now than ever. We must support these organizations to expand access to legal assistance.

You can help by donating to the Access to Justice Campaign to ensure these organizations can address the most pressing needs of our community. It is your support that helps us bridge the "justice gap."

I have already made my gift of support this year and look forward to having you join me. Thank you to those who have already taken a stand for Access to Justice by contributing to this year's campaign.

Together we can build a stronger, more just community for ALL. Will you join us?



Chris Lam,
2021 Access to Justice
Campaign Chair

"The reality is that justice today depends on one's ability to obtain accurate and sound legal advice. If I know that's needed, and I know it's not happening, it seems to me I have an obligation to look for a solution. I can't change everything wrong with society.
But I can support justice for ALL."

- Bob Penny,
longtime ATJ sustainer

Join our movement to build a more just community. Support the 2021 Access to Justice Campaign!



Donate online at bit.ly/ATJCLT
Gifts of \$1,000+ made by Nov. 24 will be recognized during #GivingTuesdayCLT!

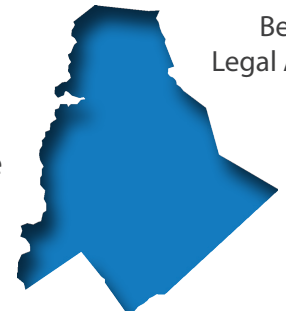
i support
justice for ALL

[The Justice Gap] in Mecklenburg County

Before COVID-19 our community already had a significant gap in access to legal assistance.

71% of low-income people had a civil legal problem last year  **14%** received legal help needed for their problem.

1 in 3 residents is low-income




Between Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy and Legal Aid of North Carolina, there is **1** legal aid attorney for every **11,500** low-income residents.


the need is everywhere. that's why we're here.


fighting for ACCESS in 2020

Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy

Legal Aid of North Carolina, Charlotte

 **119** criminal records expunged with 100% success rate


550 evictions prevented, families stabilized in Mecklenburg County. 

367 adults and children served to preserve safety and protect family stability through the immigrant justice program. 

1072 families served protecting access to affordable housing.

\$7.2 million in disability payments and benefits, supporting health and economic security. do-pro- 

405 domestic violence cases providing advice and representation to protect survivors and their children. mestic violence

407 Mecklenburg County veterans served with legal assistance obtaining more than \$1.8 million in VA and other benefits. 

155 protective orders granted or enforced through legal assistance.

 **2500** assisted in signing up for health insurance through navigator appointments promoting access to health care with affordable coverage options.

6791 families served by Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy and Legal Aid of North Carolina-Charlotte last fiscal year.

[Bridging the Gap]


responding to a community in crisis



Over one million North Carolinians have applied for unemployment benefits since March. The overwhelming volume of applications paired with implementing new assistance programs has caused significant delays, making the process more confusing for applicants. Working together, Charlotte Center for


Legal Advocacy and Legal Aid of North Carolina-Charlotte answered the calls of thousands of frustrated workers to guide them through the application process and appeals. Through direct action and systemic advocacy, these organizations ensured that those who had fallen through the cracks had access to the full payments they deserved.

Fighting for people like Trish ... The COVID-19 pandemic hit just after Trish Usher lost her job. She applied for unemployment benefits but was denied because of a misunderstanding between her employer and the Department of Employment Security. Trish reached out to Legal Aid to assist with her appeal. At the time her hearing was scheduled, the governor had issued the stay at home order. Ordinarily, Legal Aid would have conducted the hearing remotely, but because Trish is autistic, she requested to be in person with attorney Cindy Patton during the call. Masked up and six feet apart, Legal Aid successfully restored and extended her unemployment benefits under the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program. "I felt like she had my back that she was going to do her best, which she did," Trish said, "I would rather be working, but at least I have something coming in."



Fighting for people like Susan ... Blindsided by a sudden divorce, Susan Polly lost her health insurance at 59 years old and did not know where to turn for help. She was unsure how she could afford such a high premium—over \$1250 dollars a month. "All it takes is one bad thing happening and you can lose everything," Susan shared. After meeting with a Health Insurance Navigator, Susan found an insurance plan that lowered her premium to 350 dollars. Knowing she has affordable health insurance gives Susan a "peace of mind" during the COVID-19 pandemic.

demanding equity and equal access to justice



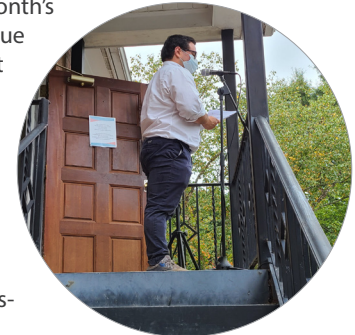
Fighting for people like Javourya ... who describes the several charges she had from her youth as a result of being "young and reckless." Lashieka Hardin, attorney with Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy, expunged several of Javourya's charges. No longer burdened with past mistakes, Javourya "felt like the world lifted off my shoulders. . . I've heard 'no' so much because of my record that it finally feels good to be able to say sooner or later I'm going to hear a 'yes.'" As a result, Javourya has been able to support herself and her three-year old and is going back to school for real estate this fall.

Systemic racism plagues our community. Civil legal issues such as access to healthcare, home preservation, and income security are more likely to impact Black, Indigenous, and people of color than white people. At Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy and Legal Aid of North Carolina-Charlotte, we believe that ALL people should have access to legal assistance and resources that ensure stability and promote opportunity. We have enabled many to obtain gainful employment and secure housing through expunging criminal records and

launching our driver's license restoration project. Racial equity is inherent to our work and mission to fight for justice for all.

"This is a breath of fresh air. What I needed the most was to clean up my record instead of giving up," -Expunction client

Adapting services during COVID-19... 39% of NC families living in rental housing are unconfident in their ability to pay next month's rent. Black and Latino residents are at higher risk for eviction due to COVID-19: "Because of the virus we lost our jobs and that put us behind on rent," Isamar, an undocumented client, notes, "a lot of us are going through this." Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy and Legal Aid of NC-Charlotte have stepped up to represent those facing eviction—and have found creative ways to do so. Attorney Juan Hernandez organized a "curbside" clinic to educate families on the CDC Eviction Moratorium. Evictions cases have grown six-fold, but The Advocacy Center and Legal Aid continue to preserve our neighbor's housing even under adverse circumstances.



MECKLENBURG ACCESS TO JUSTICE CAMPAIGN

thank
you from
those
we serve



“ ”

words of gratitude
from clients in 2020

“I want to truly thank my attorney and the staff for their professionalism, manners and patience with me.”

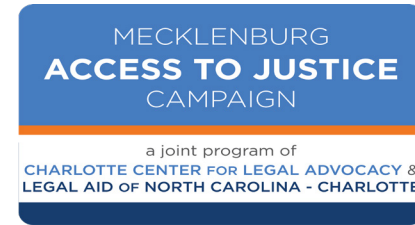


“You did a wonderful job for me. Thank you.”

“The first case lawyer I had told me there was nothing he could do for me. But you proved him wrong.”



“Just amazing people, people with a heart.”



Together, we can bridge the gap.



Financial information about Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy and Legal Aid of North Carolina and copies of their licenses are available from the State Solicitation Licensing Branch at (888) 830-4989. The license is not an endorsement by the state.