# Access to Civil Justice for Low Income People



The Georgia Legal Services Program (GLSP) began to take shape in the late 1960s when members of the Younger Lawyers Section (YLS) of the State Bar of Georgia studied the need for lawyers for the poor. They found a "distressing disproportion" between the true need for legal services by poor people and the availability of legal services for them, and that lawyers tend to concentrate in urban areas, whereas many of the poor live in rural areas where legal help is less available. Through these efforts, GLSP was incorporated in 1971 to "provide legal services to indigent persons to the fullest extent possible." Today, GLSP's 10 regional offices across the state serve an estimated two million people in poverty who reside outside metro Atlanta in 154 of Georgia's 159 counties.

"The legal help I received from Georgia Legal Services allowed me and my 6 year old son to remain in our home, rather than face homelessness. To all single mothers, you know words cannot describe this kind of gratitude! Thank you so much for this service. You are super heroes to me and my small family. Keep fighting the good fight." – A.M.

"I wanted to get my affairs in order. I have numerous health issues. I must have called 10 lawyers from the yellow pages. Someone gave me GLSP's phone number. I can now rest and feel my children will have it easier when my time comes." – J.A.

"My eight siblings – four boys and four girls – were abandoned and homeless. I became their primary caregiver. However, without legal documentation to substantiate guardianship, my abilities were very limited. Georgia Legal Services answered my family's outcry for help. We received all assistance promised in a timely and accurate manner. Thank you." – R.K.

GLSP is a nonprofit corporation with a mission to provide civil legal services for persons with low incomes, creating equal access to justice and opportunities out of poverty.

Client stories are used with permission. Photographs and names do not necessarily represent actual clients.

**OU are our heroes!** We start our comments on 2017 with our thanks to our dedicated board members for their engagement and commitment to several new initiatives. We are also so grateful to our donors and volunteers who have individually supported our work in so many ways. Your financial contributions are critically important and support unique initiatives for which other funding is not available. In addition, we are grateful to our pro bono participants, many of whom drop other work to save a client in need.

Several donors responded to our special requests in 2015 to help defray the cost of printing "Know Your Rights" material to provide to students and their parents. We distributed these materials – pencils, refrigerator magnets, brochures – at "back to school" fairs and other venues where this topic was a priority. We were able to expand our work in representing students threatened with unfair or unwarranted discipline.

Donors helped to support our Benefits Hotline, by which GLSP paralegals helped 672 individuals and families secure safety net benefits worth over \$2,000,000 in 2015. Home-bound seniors and persons with disabilities were able to call the GLSP Benefits Hotline where trained paralegals helped untangle red tape that was preventing them from getting benefits to which they were entitled, including food and medicine.

Support from our donors and volunteers also helped us to expand initiatives to break down language barriers and enable Spanish-speaking clients to secure court services, access to benefits, and relief from consumer problems. We helped more survivors of domestic violence escape and get court protection and ancillary benefits such as safe housing, child support, and counseling for traumatized children.

Members of our generous Board of Directors spent significant time developing a new mission statement and a strategic plan that targeted goals for board development, succession planning, technology, better communication, improved pro bono recruitment and services, and utilization of our statewide structure for more impactful advocacy for clients.

In this report we provide the stories of many of our clients. You helped us help them. Thank you!!

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Albert P. Reichert, Jr. President



Phyllis J. Holmen Executive Director



Albert P. Reichert, Jr. President

# s. Rachael Lee's husband had been arrested for family violence on four separate occasions. He choked,



punched, and hit her, and on one occasion broke the windows out of her car. The last straw occurred when he bashed her head into a fireplace and punched her in the face multiple times, all in front of their daughter.

For the second time, Ms. Lee reached out for a protective order, and also contacted Georgia Legal Services. With help from her attorney, she was awarded a protective order, as well as a court order settling child support and possession of her home and car.

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Legal help to settle the details of these horrible, violent incidents can provide holistic results that enable the survivor and her children to escape to safety and freedom.

# GLSP is a leading voice advocating on behalf of domestic violence survivors.

In 2015, GLSP lawyers closed more than 2,350 cases for survivors and their children, and secured \$2.5 million in financial support for them, including child support, housing, food stamp benefits, Medicaid, and TANF benefits (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families).

We set high goals to shape the narrative around how our society can assist survivors to escape the violence and lead quality lives away from their abusers. From our advocacy, we know that survivors seek economic stability that only court ordered support can assure. Without this support, many survivors end up back in violent households.

GLSP is active in giving a voice to survivors in the media – ensuring our articles and messages appear several times a month in a range of news outlets from small-town to national. We are shaping the national narrative around family violence away from victim-blaming and toward supportive, holistic, results-oriented solutions.

# Veterans are 7% of Georgia's population and 12% of its homeless population,

according to 2014 American Community Survey Reports from the U.S. Census. Our work with veterans helps to break the cycle of poverty by providing access to quality information about benefits for which they qualify, but are not aware, and to help them apply for and retain benefits for which they are eligible.

In 2015, GLSP's Benefits Hotline secured \$2,094,325 in core benefits, such as Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, Energy Assistance and more for 648 individuals, including the elderly, people with disabilities, and veterans. In addition, more than 637 individuals were advised on how to apply for Affordable Care Act coverage.

# ichael Hussein, a U.S. citizen with 16 years of service in the Armed Forces, was hungry and jobless.

In June 2015, Mr. Hussein had applied for food stamps, and, with verification of his place of birth and citizenship, he was approved. Four months later he received a notice saying that additional documents were required to verify his citizenship, without which his benefits would be terminated. He submitted his drivers license and a court order approving his change of name, and benefits continued. Two months later his benefits were again terminated. This time, Mr. Hussein reached out to the Georgia Legal Services Benefits Hotline, established by GLSP



to provide "intensive troubleshooting" for individuals who have difficulties obtaining the benefits they need and for which they are eligible. Often these individuals are disabled, elderly, isolated, or simply cannot navigate the long and winding road to the help they need. The GLSP Benefits Hotline staff are highly trained to provide critical help. They saved the day for Mr. Hussein.

# s. Cathy Jameson, who is 63-years old, was confused and frustrated when she contacted Georgia Legal Services after having been swindled by a security

**system company.** A salesman came to Ms. Jameson's door insisting that she needed an upgrade to her home security system, even though the one she owned at the time was functioning. Though she told him this, he persisted. The salesman gave her some paperwork and told her where to sign, which she did. Immediately a work crew came into her home and replaced the entire security system. When Ms. Jameson asked the salesman what to do with the old one, he advised her to throw it away and she did.

The next month, Ms. Jameson received not one but two security system bills – a burdensome additional expense given her low fixed income. When she called the company to dispute the charge, she was told she had agreed to a contract and was bound by it. After calling the system of the previous system's company,



she learned that they too insisted that her contract with the first company was also valid.

Without an attorney, Ms. Jameson was fighting a losing battle against the two companies. She called GLSP for help. Her GLSP attorney intervened, negotiating with the new company until they agreed to cancel the contracts. Ms. Jameson was also able to have her prior system re-installed without charge.

# ighth-grader Ashley has a rare anxiety disorder that means she is unable to communicate effectively in some social settings, like at school. One day she was exiting the bathroom



when another student pointed out that she had a hole in her jeans. The classroom monitor – who was aware of Ashley's anxiety struggles – informed Ashley that the hole violated the dress code. The monitor then came over to Ashley and instructed her to turn around so that she could inspect the hole and measure its size in front of the entire class. Ashley tried to walk away from the monitor when the monitor grabbed her and slung her to the ground. Ashley was accused of pushing the teacher in response.

Ashley was informed that she would receive a disciplinary hearing for pushing the teacher, and her mother contacted Georgia Legal Services for help. One of our attorneys represented Ashley at a two-day hearing where numerous students testified that Ashley did not push the class monitor. Still Ashley was found guilty.

Ashley's selective mutism means that she has an Individualized Education Program that provides extra support for her needs. Our attorney got Ashley a manifestation hearing, where the attorney had the opportunity to argue that Ashley's actions were a manifestation of her disability. He did so successfully, and Ashley was permitted to return to school immediately.

The Georgia Legal Services attorney also appealed Ashley's original finding of guilt to the local board. The decision was reversed and Ashley's record was cleared.

# welve-year-old Matthew has autism, Tourette's syndrome, attention deficit disorder, auditory processing and an

eye disorder. The Department of Community Health determined Matthew's



condition was deemed not severe enough to retain his eligibility for a special Medicaid waiver that covers treatment for children with extreme needs. Matthew's parents were certain that he continued to be eligible. He depends on regular speech, physical, and occupational therapies covered by Medicaid. Without the coverage, his parents were panicked about what they would do as they couldn't afford such treatment otherwise. They contacted Georgia Legal Services for help. We were able to prove that Matthew needed all the care and services he received. The family never lost eligibility, and was able to continue paying for Matthew's medical care with the waiver's support.

r. Sam Edwards came to attorney because he had see a Georgia Legal Services received notice from the local housing authority that he and his sons would soon be evicted. The children's mother had died recently, and although Mr. Edwards was their biological father, he had not formally legitimated the children yet so he was not a recognized parent. Because of this, the housing authority was prepared to terminate the late mother's lease and evict the family. A GLSP attorney convinced the housing authority staff to cease eviction efforts while she represented Mr. Edwards in a legitimation action in Superior Court. Our advocacy ensured that Mr. Edwards not only legitimated his sons but was also granted sole custody, and they were able to stay in their home.



# s. Emma Green, who is 82 years old, was swindled out of her home by her adult son.

Ms. Green's son executed a fraudulent deed and forged his mother's signature

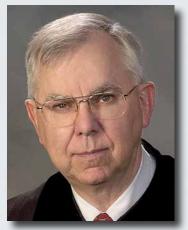


on the document to transfer her home to him. Ms. Green, who has been in poor health for a while, was living in her home at the time, but she had no knowledge of her son's scheme. Her son had talked to her several times about transferring her home to him, and each time she adamantly refused.

Ms. Green's daughter saw that her mother's poor health was getting worse, so she and her husband moved Ms. Green into their house in another town, temporarily, to take care of her until they could find a suitable facility for her to get the long-term professional medical care she needs. Seven months later, Ms. Green's daughter found out about the fraudulent deed transfer of her mother's home that was executed by her brother, when she tried to obtain nursing home Medicaid assistance for her mother. She was told by the nursing home that her mother was not eligible, because of the transfer of her home to her son. In order to be eligible for Medicaid, a person cannot have recently transferred assets.

A GLSP lawyer filed an action to set aside the fraudulent deed. The judge ruled in favor of Ms. Green, and the GLSP lawyer filed

the order to set aside the deed that afternoon. Ms. Green took out a criminal warrant against her son, who has yet to be found.



Hon. Hugh Thompson Chief Justice Georgia Supreme Court

"Equal justice for all is the promise embodied in our Constitution as envisioned by our forefathers. But too many hard-working Georgians believe that justice is out of their reach, either because it's too expensive or because of where they live. Georgia's judicial system is sound, and it is strong – for those who can afford a lawyer. But to safeguard its future, we must guarantee access to justice for all people, as our laws were not made for just a few."

- Chief Justice High Thompson

Hon. Hugh Thompson (Atlanta) is a Champion in recognition of his long and strong support for legal services for the poor. From his first moment as Chief Justice, he used the power of the podium, with his most soothing Southern drawl, to vigorously and compellingly point out the need for access to justice and the deficiencies in Georgia. He was frank in his comments that the justice system was not created for some, but for all, and that Georgia has serious problems in the availability of legal services for those who cannot pay. He pointed out how judges worry about unfair trials and unjust results and that "people who represent themselves often lose." He went on to say that "where one party has a lawyer and the other side does not, judges find it difficult to believe that justice has in fact been done." He also pointed out the special needs of persons in our state who do not speak English. Subsequent to his inaugural speech as Chief Justice in early 2014, Chief Justice Thompson spoke on these themes and about these problems across the state as often as he could, pressing all those who heard him to embrace the need to assure justice for all and the Rule of Law in Georgia.

2015 HAMPÍONS OF JUSTICE



Hon. James Bass Superior Court Eastern District of Georgia

"There is no nobler calling for one in the legal profession than that of a Legal Services lawyer – a professional who unselfishly dedicates his or her skills to advocate for the voiceless in securing social justice. I am proud to say that I am a part of this movement."

– Judge James Bass

**Hon. James Bass (Savannah)** began his legal career as a staff attorney with Georgia Legal Services in its Savannah Regional Office upon his graduation from the law school at Cornell College. He quickly moved to the position of supervising attorney and, while best known for his work in jail conditions, and litigation and advocacy on behalf of disabled children in the public school system, he excelled in the day to day work of the legal services practitioner. He was much loved by his clients and well respected by his colleagues.

He was appointed to the Superior Court on May 18, 1995, by then-Governor Zell Miller. While on the bench, he has served as Chairman of the Access to Justice and Fairness in the Courts Committee of the Council of Superior Court Judges from 2000-2008, and Chairman of the Georgia State Commission on Family Violence from 2006-2009. Additionally he has served on the Georgia Supreme Court Commission on Marriage, Children and Family Law from 2007-2009, and the Georgia Supreme Court Commission on Drug Courts from 2006-2009. He currently serves on the Mandatory Continuing Judicial Education Committee, the Special Committee on Drug Courts of the Council of Superior Court Judges, and the Georgia Supreme Court Committee on Equality. Judge Bass began the first Drug Court in Chatham County on October 2, 2001.

He continues to be supportive of the local Georgia Legal Services office, maintaining close ties to those with whom he worked. He frequently stops by the office, always unannounced, visits with his colleagues and gets to know the new lawyers, law students and volunteers. He continues to support the local GLSP office financially and can always be counted upon to attend fundraisers and other events of import to legal services and its mission. His interest and support have been vital to the local office's success.

# GLSP's Champions of Justice 2015



Mary Jean Macon

Mary Jean Macon (Albany) is recognized for her dedicated service to the cause of justice in her capacity as a member of the Board of Directors of Georgia Legal Services Program for eight years, beginning in September 2006. She was elected a member-at-large of the Executive Committee in 2011, and as vice president in 2012, where she served until she rotated off the GLSP Board in 2014. Ms. Macon is an active, outspoken advocate, making sure that the needs of clients came first, and supporting efforts to increase resources to meet more needs.

"I gave all of my best during my eight years of GLSP Board service. I was rewarded with the opportunity to touch the lives of many poor people as they were seeking legal assistance. I was able to work with lawyers who were seeking to fulfill the promise of justice for all. My wonderful years with GLSP will be forever etched in my mind."

– Mary Jean Macon



Andrew M.Scherffius, III

Andrew M. Scherffius, III (Atlanta) is a longstanding and generous supporter of Georgia Legal Services Program. He is the highest individual donor, having generously provided 30 substantial gifts over a period of 27 years. He also contributed original artwork to the Program in the form of two nautical oil paintings which hang in conference rooms of the Central Office of GLSP and inspire viewers to think deeply and "beyond the horizon" to solve client problems. Andy is the kind of person who will return a call from the GLSP Executive Director about his contribution while he is standing on a mountain top, and he'll feel guilty about having had to wait until he reached a lower elevation to call!

# GLSP's Champions of Justice 2015



Nancy Terrill

"Congratulations to my co-honorees. I am proud and humbled to be recognized alongside you. Thank you for your lifetime commitments to ensuring equal protection under the law and access to justice for all. I accept this award in honor of the attorneys, paralegals, and staff, past and present, of the GLSP Macon Office. They are my Champions of Justice."

Nancy Terrill (Macon) is recognized for her long career with and support of Georgia Legal Services Program. Nancy joined the staff of GLSP initially as a VISTA volunteer and staff paralegal, before enrolling in law school at Mercer University where she was a brilliant student. For much of her law school experience she worked part-time at the GLSP office in Macon, until she graduated and became a full-time staff attorney. She served as Supervising Attorney of the GLSP office in Dublin, then later as Legislative Monitor in the Georgia General Assembly, working on issues that affected GLSP's low-income clients. Nancy held other jobs over the years including 12 years as the Continuing Education Coordinator for Mercer Law School. She served twice on the GLSP Board of Directors, and still leads its Macon fundraising campaign. Nancy is the kind of person who, with wit and a sharp edge, will instantly re-inspire you when you are discouraged by the challenges of being a legal services staffer.

– Nancy Terrill

# A Salute to Our Supporters

We are grateful for your generosity.

# 2015 Honor Roll of Contributors

The following individuals and law firms contributed \$150 or more to the "And Justice for All" State Bar Campaign for the Georgia Legal Services Program from 4/1/2015 – 3/31/2016.

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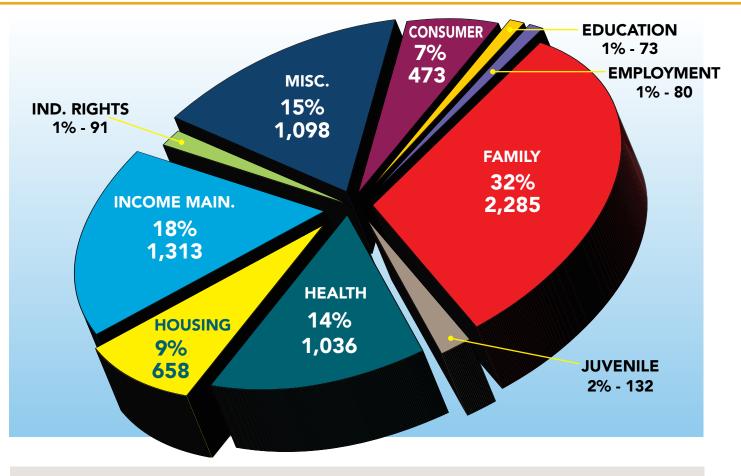
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# Financial Overview

| Net Assets - Beginning of Year                                   | \$ | 2,469,235  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|----|------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| 2015 Income  |    |            |  |  |  |  |  |
| Legal Services Corporation                                       | \$ | 7,755,678  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Older Americans Act Contracts                                    | \$ | 1,578,026  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Judicial Council of Georgia                                      | \$ | 1,499,496  |  |  |  |  |  |
| State Bar of Georgia Campaign for Georgia Legal Services Program | \$ | 568,700    |  |  |  |  |  |
| Georgia Bar Foundation   | \$ | 318,785    |  |  |  |  |  |
| Department of Justice  | \$ | 415,280    |  |  |  |  |  |
| State Bar of Georgia Pro Bono Project                            | \$ | 203,065    |  |  |  |  |  |
| Criminal Justice Coordinating Council                            | \$ | 161,717    |  |  |  |  |  |
| Georgia Legal Services Foundation                                | \$ | 4,216      |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other  | \$ | 1,177,023  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Total  | \$ | 16,151,221 |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |    |            |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2015 Expenses  |    |            |  |  |  |  |  |
| Salaries   | \$ | 7,607,914  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Fringe Benefits  | \$ | 2,766,502  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Space  | \$ | 965,678    |  |  |  |  |  |
| Equipment  | \$ | 175,822    |  |  |  |  |  |
| Contract Services  | \$ | 230,210    |  |  |  |  |  |
| Travel   | \$ | 429,251    |  |  |  |  |  |
| Telephone  | \$ | 217,435    |  |  |  |  |  |
| Supplies   | \$ | 210,847    |  |  |  |  |  |
| Library  | \$ | 54,553     |  |  |  |  |  |
| Audit  | \$ | 34,500     |  |  |  |  |  |
| Professional Liability & General Insurance                       | \$ | 41,463     |  |  |  |  |  |
| Litigation   | \$ | 55,460     |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other  | \$ | 226,652    |  |  |  |  |  |
| Total  | \$ | 13,016,287 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Net Assets - End of Year   | \$ | 3,134,934  |  |  |  |  |  |

\$665,699 increase in Net Assets

# 7,239 Case Closings



GLSP's intake paralegals handled **10,777 intakes** for people who qualified for GLSP's legal assistance in 2015. Clients must have incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, which is \$4,042 monthly for a family of four. The actual monthly incomes of GLSP's clients are much less.

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209 7th Street, 4th Floor Augusta, Georgia 30901 P.O. Box 2185 (30903) (706) 721-2327 (800) 248-6697

# **Brunswick Office**

1607 Union Street Brunswick, Georgia 31520 (912) 264-7301 (877) 808-0553

# **Columbus Office**

233 12th Street, Suite 910 The Corporate Center P.O. Box 176 Columbus, Georgia 31902-0176 (706) 649-7493 (800) 533-3140

# **Dalton Office**

219 West Crawford Street Dalton, Georgia 30720 P.O. Box 2004 (30722-2004) (706) 272-2924 (888) 408-1004

# **Gainesville Office**

705 Washington Street, Suite B-1 Gainesville, Georgia 30501 P.O. Drawer 1337 (30503) (770) 535-5717 (800) 745-5717

# **Macon Office**

241 Third Street Macon, Georgia 31201 (478) 751-6261 (800) 560-2855

# **Piedmont Office**

104 Marietta Street, N.W., Suite 240 Atlanta, Georgia 30303 (404) 894-7707 (800) 822-5391

# Savannah Office

6602 Abercorn Street, Suite 203 Savannah, Georgia 31405-5848 (912) 651-2180 (888) 220-8399

### Farmworker Rights Division

104 Marietta Street, N.W. Suite 250 Atlanta, Georgia 30303 (404) 463-1633 (800) 537-7496

### **Georgia Clients Council**

104 Marietta Street, N.W. Suite 250 Atlanta, Georgia 30303 (404) 463-1952

# The Pro Bono Project of the State Bar of Georgia

104 Marietta Street, N.W. Suite 100 Atlanta, Georgia 30303 (404) 527-8762 (800) 334-6865



| 1971   | 1976   | 1981   | 1990  | 1996   | 2001   |
|--|--|--|---|--|--|
| Georgia Legal Services<br>Program incorporated by<br>members of the Younger<br>Lawyers Section of the<br>State Bar of Georgia.   | Georgia Clients Council<br>is founded to serve as<br>an advisory group to<br>Georgia Legal Services.   | Georgia Legal Services<br>and the State Bar of<br>Georgia establish the<br>Pro Bono Project.   | Phyllis J. Holmen<br>becomes the fourth<br>executive director.  | Georgia Legal<br>Services Foundation is<br>established with a \$1<br>million cy pres award<br>by U.S. District Judge<br>Marvin Shoob from the<br>remainder funds of a<br>national class action.  | Georgia Legal Services<br>launches capital<br>campaign in Macon and<br>successfully raises funds<br>to purchase the historic<br>Eagles Building for its<br>Macon Office. |
| 2002   | 2003   | 2007   | 2008  | 2009   | 2010   |
| Georgia Legal Services<br>launches capital<br>campaign in Macon and<br>successfully raises funds<br>to purchase the historic<br>Eagles Building for its<br>Macon Office.   | Central Office of<br>Georgia Legal Services<br>relocates to the new<br>State Bar Center.   | Georgia Legal Services<br>opens a field office in<br>Athens-Clarke County<br>due to the dire need for<br>more and better legal<br>services for the low-<br>income community in<br>that area. | Georgia Legal Services<br>expands use of<br>technology to improve<br>services to clients.   | Georgia Legal Services<br>launches a Latino<br>Outreach and Education<br>initiative to address the<br>impact of the economic<br>downturn on the civil<br>legal problems of low-<br>income Latinos outside<br>metro Atlanta.  | Georgia Legal Services is<br>named the beneficiary of<br>the signature fundraiser<br>of the Young Lawyers<br>Division (YLD) of the<br>State Bar of Georgia.              |
| 2011   | 2012   | 2013   | 2014  | 2015   |  |
| Georgia Legal Services<br>launches its Champions<br>of Justice Recognition<br>Program in honor of<br>lawyers and community<br>activists for advancing<br>GLSP's mission, their<br>contributions to justice<br>for all, and support of<br>GLSP. | Georgia Legal Services<br>opens a field office in<br>Athens-Clarke County<br>due to the dire need for<br>more and better legal<br>services for the low-<br>income community in<br>that area. | Georgia Legal Services<br>expands use of<br>technology to improve<br>services to clients.  | Georgia Legal Services<br>launches a Latino<br>Outreach and Education<br>initiative to address the<br>impact of the economic<br>downturn on the civil<br>legal problems of low-<br>income Latinos outside<br>metro Atlanta. | GLSP is awarded the<br>Commitment to Equality<br>Award from the State Bar<br>of Georgia Committee to<br>Promote Inclusion in the<br>Profession for its work to<br>support diversity within<br>the legal profession and<br>for its dedicated service to<br>diverse communities. |  |

104 Marietta Street, N.W. Suite 250 • Atlanta, GA 30303 • (404) 206-5175 • 1-800-498-9469 www.glsp.org • www.GeorgiaLegalAid.org • www.georgiaadvocates.org GEORGIA LEGAL Services Program<sup>®</sup>

Access to Justice and Opportunities Out of Poverty