

MVLP

MISSISSIPPI VOLUNTEER LAWYERS PROJECT

Advancing Justice, Restoring Hope.



2016 IMPACT REPORT



Dear Friends,

We are pleased to release to you the 2016 Impact Report for the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project. For 34 years, MVLP has stayed true to its core mission – to provide high quality legal assistance to deserving residents in the state of Mississippi. An estimated 696,000 residents live in poverty in Mississippi. Many of these residents have legal matters requiring the expertise of skilled attorneys. A large majority of them are crippled with making daily decisions about how they are going to pay mortgage/rent, eat or get to work without reliable transportation. Thus, when it comes to paying for the services of an attorney to tackle their legal challenges, the legal issues are often left unresolved. Enter MVLP.

This report is intended to provide to you a snapshot of the number of individuals this program has assisted in 2016; the financial supporters who have helped to fund this program; and our high quality volunteer attorneys who help to sustain the program. By the end of 2016, MVLP accomplished the following:

- Set record-breaking numbers at our 2016 clinics. In 2016, MVLP assisted over 270 individuals at clinics across the state of Mississippi, the largest number of individuals assisted at clinics in the last five (5) years.
- Implemented a new intake phase for clients which shortened the time a case made it to a volunteer attorney.
- Launched MS.freelegalanswers.org in collaboration with the Mississippi Access to Justice Commission, making Mississippi one of the first 13 states to make this program available to its residents.

As we enter a new year, MVLP promises to continue its services to the residents of Mississippi while remaining vigilant of future budget cuts. We know the value of our services. More importantly, our clients know the value of our services. So, with our sleeves rolled up, we press forward into 2017 standing tall on our 2016 accomplishments with great supporters like you. Thank you for your impact!

Sincerely,

Gayla Carpenter-Sanders
Executive Director/General Counsel

Mary Clay Morgan
Board Chair

MISSISSIPPI VOLUNTEER LAWYERS PROJECT: *An Organizational Overview*

The Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project, or "MVLP," is a 501(c) (3) non-profit legal aid organization. Formed in 1982, MVLP is the nation's first formal association of a state bar association, the Mississippi Bar Association, and the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). MVLP's long-standing relationship with the Mississippi Bar and the LSC has resulted in a professional and productive partnership, with attorneys unselfishly offering their time and talents to serve Mississippi's poor and less fortunate.

Even before completing its first year of operation, the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project was cited by the American Bar Association and the National Legal Aid and Defender Association as the country's single most outstanding program among state bar associations.

Since 1982, MVLP has helped thousands of clients with a wide array of legal matters. More recently, the organization has narrowed its services to assisting clients with domestic matters exclusively. MVLP is grateful to its volunteers for the sacrifices they make to change the lives of those in need. Without the contributions and support of volunteers and partners, MVLP could not have reached out to so many Mississippians in the broader effort to ensure equal access to justice for all.

In addition to offering direct legal assistance to clients through our volunteer attorneys, MVLP hosts legal clinics throughout the year. The clinics, which include training seminars for the volunteer attorneys who assist, are designed to help the public meet directly with attorneys to discuss their legal matters.

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Union County Bar Association
University of Mississippi: *School of
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Washington County Chancery Court
Washington County Bar Association

MVLP encourages attorneys to partner with us to bring *pro se* legal clinics to their communities. Individuals who participate in these clinics can have documents drafted in the following areas: child custody, child support, divorce, visitation, guardianships, adoptions and other domestic matters. MVLP will help recruit local attorneys, ensure CLE credit to the attorneys who attend, provide malpractice liability coverage for the attorneys and provide form pleadings to the volunteer attorneys.

Thank You to Our Donors!

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2016 MVLP SNAPSHOTS

Total number of individuals and their families impacted by MVLP's assistance in 2016: **5,723**

Total number of legal clinics hosted by MVLP in 2016: **28**

Total number of individuals assisted at 2016 legal clinics: **274**

Total number of CLE trainings offered by MVLP in 2016: **29**

Total number of judges, attorneys and law students who attended 2016 CLEs: **314**

Total number of new attorneys who enrolled with MVLP in 2016: **158**

MVLP's 2016 Clients:

68% Minorities

18% Seniors

75% Females

35% Affected Children

RULE 6.1 VOLUNTARY PRO BONO PUBLIC SERVICE

(a) Professional Responsibility. Each member of the Mississippi Bar in good standing and not exempt hereunder, as part of the member's professional responsibility, should

- (1) render *pro bono* legal services to the poor and
- (2) participate, to the extent 102 possible, in other *pro bono* service activities that directly relate to the legal needs of the poor.

(b) Discharge of the Professional Responsibility to Provide *Pro Bono* Legal Services to the Poor. The professional responsibility to provide *pro bono* legal services to the poor may be discharged by:

- (1) annually providing at least 20 hours of *pro bono* legal services to the poor, or
- (2) annually providing at least 20 hours of *pro bono* legal services to charitable, religious, civic, community, governmental or educational organizations for the purpose of providing legal counsel and representation to the poor, or (3) making an annual contribution of at least \$200 to the Mississippi Bar, which will be used by the Bar to provide legal services to the poor through legal aid organizations.

2016 Honorees

The Pro Bono Awards

The 2016 Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project (MVLP) *Pro Bono* Awards recognized individual lawyers, law firms, law students, law schools and other institutions in the legal profession throughout Mississippi that were involved in significant *pro bono* efforts from June 1, 2015 through June 1, 2016.

Susan Culpepper, Esq.
Culpepper Law Firm
Oxford, MS

Jennie Eichelberger, Esq.
The Eichelberger Law Firm, PLLC
Jackson, MS

Leonard Curtis, Esq.
Curtis Law Firm, PLLC
Clinton, MS

Bradley Rath, Esq.
Bradley W. Rath, PLLC
Biloxi, MS

The Beacon of Justice Award

The Beacon of Justice Award recognizes an individual who has exhibited outstanding leadership in promoting and supporting equal access to justice, particularly as it relates to *pro bono* services in Mississippi.

Honorable Marie Wilson
Chancellor for the Ninth Chancery District
Greenville, MS

Curtis E. Coker Access to Justice Award

The Curtis E. Coker Access to Justice Award is presented to an individual, law firm or other organization that has provided or helped to provide outstanding *pro bono* legal services during the previous year. The main purpose of this Award is to foster awareness of the need for involvement of the private bar in delivering legal services to the poor, particularly through MVLP. The Award was originally established as the *Pro Bono* Project's President Award. However, in 2002 after the death of former Mississippi Bar President Curtis E. Coker, the name was changed in his honor. Mr. Coker was a leading advocate in the cause of making legal services available to all without regard to need. MVLP was established during Mr. Coker's term as Bar President.

Lawyers in Parish Hall Legal Advice Clinic
All Saints' Episcopal Church's
Tupelo, MS

Constance Jones, Esq.
Constance L. Jones Law Offices
Brandon, MS

Chairman of the Board's Torchbearer Award

Honors firms and individuals who have financially contributed to MVLP's mission throughout the years.

Joy Lambert Phillips, Esq.
Hancock Bank
Gulfport, MS

Wise Carter Child & Caraway, P.A.
Jackson, MS

Services Provided by MVLP

Irreconcilable Differences Divorce: Both parties must want to be divorced and agree to all terms of the divorce. The waiting period before the divorce can be final is sixty (60) days.

Desertion Divorce: To obtain this type of divorce, a spouse must have left the marital home, been gone for one continuous year and not tried to return to the marriage. A witness is required to support claims of desertion.

Sentenced to Penitentiary Divorce: To obtain this type of divorce, a spouse must be or have been incarcerated in a state or federal prison.

Visitation: A noncustodial parent may seek visitation with a minor child if he/ she is paying child support or has a desire to do so.

Child Support Modification: Child support awards may be modified, either upwards or downwards, if there has been a substantial and material change in circumstances after a child support order has been entered that affects one's ability to pay.

Child Support Contempt: When a person obligated to pay child support is not doing so, he/ she may be sued for child support contempt. He/ she may then be ordered to pay back child support, along with the regular child support obligation.

Guardianship: A guardian other than the parents may be appointed over a minor child where either of the child's parents is deceased and/ or the minor's parents or a surviving parent is unable to fulfill the obligations of a parent.

Conservatorship: Conservatorships are granted when a person, by reason of advanced age, physical incapacity or mental weakness, is no longer able to properly care for his or herself.

Adoption: A person may be adopted regardless of age. If the natural parents of the person to be adopted are still living, then the parents must either consent to the adoption or their parental rights must be terminated.

Emancipation: The age of majority in Mississippi is twenty-one (21). To become emancipated before twenty-one (21), a minor must file a petition in writing and join a "next friend" - typically a biological parent or next of kin.

Birth Certificate Correction/Name Change: For the procurement of benefits, identification documents or other needs, Mississippi allows changes/alterations to birth certificates at the discretion of courts and the state's vital records agency.

Wills: A will is a legal document that states one's desires concerning what will happen to assets after death. A will also contains other specific directions concerning who is to follow the instructions of the will and who will care for minor children that may be left behind.

2016 SUMMARIZED FINANCIAL INFORMATION

REVENUE & OTHER SUPPORT:

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Civil Legal Assistance Fund | \$221,670 |
| Mississippi Bar Foundation (IOLTA) | \$32,350 |
| Legal Services Corporation | \$112,050 |
| Other Support | \$102,845 |
| In-kind Hours from Volunteer Attorneys | \$119,450 |

TOTAL REVENUE: \$588,365

EXPENSES:

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Program Services | \$367,845 |
| Administration | \$49,954 |
| Fundraising | \$36,330 |
| In-kind Hours from Volunteer Attorneys | \$119,450 |

TOTAL EXPENSES: \$573,579

INCREASE IN NET ASSETS: \$14,786

The numbers above are unaudited. There will be a 2016 audit completed mid-year. A copy of the audit will be available upon request.

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