Legal Aid Society Helps Nurse Wrongfully Terminated for Alleged Patient Neglect

"Dotty" has been a nurse for over 20 years. She loves what she does. She is caring and attentive and has great relationships with her patients. Before her termination in December 2015, Dotty had never been fired from a job. In the months leading up to her termination, she received positive performance reviews from her employer. At her job, she provided in-home care to patients with developmental and intellectual disabilities. In addition to providing her patients with medical care, Dotty would assist them with virtually all activities of daily living, such as eating and getting dressed. Dotty also helped her patients interact and engage with their community so they could live as close to normal lives as possible.

Late last year, Dotty was fired after being accused of patient neglect, based on misinformation and a misunderstanding of her job duties. Specifically, Dotty's employer accused her of leaving her patients unattended. In reality, Dotty left her patients in the care of another health care professional while she went to pick up one of her patient's medically necessary prescriptions. Dotty was away from the patients' house for only a short period of time.

Soon after her termination, Dotty filed for unemployment benefits and was denied because her former employer objected. Her former employer alleged Dotty was fired for "misconduct". She came to Legal Aid Society for help and explained that she was not able to adequately present her side of the story prior to her termination. She believed that without legal representation, she would
once again be unable to explain her side of the story before the Appeals Tribunal of the TN Dept of Labor and Workforce Development.

Legal Aid Society assisted Dotty in appealing the unemployment benefits denial. After a hearing, the Appeals Tribunal held that Dotty was eligible for unemployment benefits because she simply was not guilty of misconduct. In fact, the Appeals Tribunal specifically found that Dotty left the home to “primarily support” her patients. While the unemployment benefits Dotty is now receiving are helping her pay bills, she is even more pleased to have been vindicated. Dotty prides herself on her nursing abilities and how well she treats her patients. Prior to receiving the Appeals Tribunal decision, Dotty had begun to doubt her nursing skills despite an exemplary work history. Dotty is now confident she will be able to find a new job where she can once again help those in need.

Belmont University School of Law Hosts Barristers' Ball Benefitting Legal Aid Society

On Sat. April 9 law school students, alumni and faculty of Belmont University as well as friends of the school gathered together to support Legal Aid Society. Over 180 tickets were sold for the event and a presentation of a $1,000 donation to Legal Aid Society was made by Caitlin Patenaude, President of the Student Bar Association, and Alberto Gonzales, Dean of the Belmont College of Law.

Legal Aid Society Staff Educate Public on Important Issues

Thousands of Tennesseans rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to feed their families each month. But, sun-setting laws that were enacted during the Great Recession have recently created changes for SNAP recipients. Theresa-Vay Smith, an attorney in our Oak Ridge office, explained changes to Tennessee’s SNAP program and how to remain eligible for the program in a recent article (see page 2) in The Pulaski Citizen.
As a result of recent developments, people may soon begin receiving calls from private tax collectors who are calling on behalf of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). At the same time, the IRS has warned that phone scams are still a threat to people. In a recent Tennessean article, Bob Nadler, a Tennessee Taxpayer Project attorney in our Nashville office, described how to tell the difference between a legitimate call regarding involvement with the IRS and a scam.

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**Legal Aid Society Receives More Diversified Funding**

*United Way of Anderson County* has awarded our Oak Ridge office $18,000 over the next 3 years to provide services to at-risk children in Anderson County through our Education-Legal Partnership. The Education-Legal Partnership was created to address the needs of at-risk, low income students and their families to identify and eradicate legal barriers to the student’s ability to succeed in school. It is a collaboration between Legal Aid Society, the Oak Ridge City Schools Family Resource Center and the Oak Ridge Preschool.

Our Volunteer Lawyers Program (“VLP”) is the recipient of a $10,000 grant from the *Nashville Bar Foundation* to provide legal outreach to Nashville’s immigrant community. Through a partnership with Metro Nashville Public Schools, the VLP hosts a monthly clinic at MNPS’ English Learning Center to give legal assistance to students and their families, especially immigrants. Interpreter services are provided by students at Vanderbilt University and Belmont University. The grant will also allow the VLP to continue its partnerships with Casa Azafrán, Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition, Conexión Américas, The Center for Refugees and Immigrants, the Nashville International Center for Empowerment and Catholic Charities, thereby increasing the direct referrals from the immigrant and refugee communities.

*The Joe C. Davis Foundation* has awarded Legal Aid Society $2,500 to support operations. We are pleased to work with the Foundation whose mission is to help people help themselves, while encouraging and maintaining individual initiative and responsibility.

We are happy to be a partner agency of the *Smoky Mountain Combined Federal Campaign (CFC)* once again. The mission of the CFC is to promote and support philanthropy through a program that is employee focused, cost-efficient, and effective in providing all federal employees the opportunity to improve the quality of life for all. Our CFC number is 16796.
Mark Your Calendar for The Big Payback

We’re counting down to Middle Tennessee’s largest online giving day, The Big Payback, on May 3! The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee challenges you to donate to area non-profits that raise awareness and aid for various causes in our community. Last year, more than $2.65 million was raised in just 24 hours, and we hope to see the same charity this year.

For more information, go to The Big Payback’s website.

We hope you will consider making a donation to Legal Aid Society on May 3 through this link (there will be a donation form on that day). Thank you in advance for your generosity!

Staff Updates

Valerie Hansen, HR administrator, is the co-coordinator for the 15th Annual Big Ed’s Memorial Golf Tournament to benefit Community Mediation Services in Oak Ridge on April 29.

David Kozlowski, Director of Advocacy and managing attorney of our Columbia office, has been appointed by the Tennessee Supreme Court to serve as a Hearing Committee member for the Board of Professional Responsibility for a 3-year term.

Campaign Update

As of April 29, we have raised $573,673 towards our $827,000 goal for the 2016 campaign. To make YOUR tax-deductible donation to Legal Aid Society, you can go online to www.las.org or send a check payable to Legal Aid Society to 300 Deaderick Street, Nashville, TN 37201. If you would like to make a pledge to be paid later this year or have questions, please contact Cindy Durham, director of development, at 615-780-7125 or cdurham@las.org.

Upcoming Clinics
We are pleased to host many clinics across Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland Plateau. These clinics are staffed by both Legal Aid Society and pro bono attorneys. If you would like to volunteer at one of the clinics, please contact Jarod Word at jword@las.org (or 615-780-7131) or call your local Legal Aid Society office.

You can see the list of upcoming clinics, hosted by Legal Aid Society and offered by partners, here.

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**Shop With Amazon or Kroger? Support Legal Aid Society!**

Looking for an easy way to support our work? When you shop at Amazon or Kroger, a portion of your purchases can go to support Legal Aid Society. To participate, sign up for Amazon Smile or Kroger Rewards (NPO # 98149), select Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberlands as your charity of choice and start shopping. A percentage of your eligible purchases will be donated to the organization at no extra cost to you!

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**Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberlands**

1-800-238-1443 | 300 Deaderick Street | Nashville, TN 37201

Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberlands advocates for fairness and justice under the law. The non-profit law firm offers free civil legal representation and educational programs to help people in its region receive justice, protect their well-being and support opportunities to overcome poverty. We serve 48 Tennessee counties from offices in Clarksville, Columbia, Cookeville, Gallatin, Nashville, Murfreesboro, Oak Ridge and Tullahoma. We are funded by Legal Services Corporation, the Tennessee Bar Foundation, United Way in 16 counties, the State of Tennessee, foundations and donors. For more information about our services or how to donate and to download information about common legal issues, visit us online at www.las.org.

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