



# Chicago Volunteer Legal Services

Because equal access to justice is everyone's fight.

## Upcoming Events

**December 24-25** - CVLS Closed

**January 1** - CVLS Closed

**January 8** - GAL for Minors Training - 12:00 p.m.

**January 9** - New Volunteer Orientation - 12:15 p.m.

**January 10** - GAL for Adults Training - 12:00 p.m.



Ehsan Eftekhari, Eftekhari Law Offices

## SOCIAL SECURITY SUCCESS

### Senior's Benefits Safe Once Again

You know that sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach? The visceral feeling you get when something has gone horribly wrong? That's the feeling Mohammed got when he received a letter from the Social Security Administration (SSA) telling him that he owed them about \$6,000.

Mohammed has been receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) as his only source of income since 2012. Low-income clients like Mohammed have to follow certain rules to receive SSI. Most importantly, they have to make sure they do not own money or assets valued over a certain limit.

married, the SSA kept track of all of the couple's assets. When they separated in 2015, Mohammed's wife took her bank account with her and Mohammed had no control over it. Regardless, in its calculations, the SSA combined both his and his wife's bank accounts, concluding that Mohammed had excess resources, that he had been overpaid, and that he had to pay back the full amount of his overpaid benefits.

At 84 years old, Mohammed has limited English-speaking ability and the equivalent of an eighth grade education. He came to CVLS to rid himself of that sinking feeling. With a hearing date

While Mohammed and his wife were

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## HOLIDAY GIVING

Don't forget your friendly neighborhood CVLS this holiday season! Thanks to the support of friends like you, hundreds of families and thousands of people have their lives changed for the better each and every year. No matter your ability, every gift helps and is a wonderful investment in the city of Chicago.

Give today at  
[cvls.org/donate](http://cvls.org/donate)

# THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

KIRKLAND & ELLIS LLP

Schiff  
Hardin

SIDLEY

## New FREE CLE seminars available online!

### Adoption

*Phil Mohr, CVLS Deputy Director*  
*Tiffany Horstein, Family Forward Law, LLC*  
1.25 hours CLE credit  
<https://goo.gl/8NXjbB>

### General Foreclosure Loss Mitigation Overview

*Matthew Hulstein, Supervisor, Chancery  
Court Access to Justice Program*  
*Gabriel Borges, CVLS Staff Attorney*  
1.50 hours CLE credit  
<https://goo.gl/ETm5Vb>

### Post I-601A: Helping your Clients Navigate Consular Processing to Become Residents

*Alix Strunk, Minsky McCormick &  
Hallagan, P.C.*  
1.00 hours CLE credit  
<https://goo.gl/9WXGsP>

More available at  
[www.cvl.org/onlinecle](http://www.cvl.org/onlinecle)



*Christina George, CVLS Volunteer*

## THERE'S A FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING!

(Including Pro Bono)

Meet Christina George. Christina is an associate at Greenberg Traurig, LLP whose work focuses on financial and commercial real estate transactions. Up until this year, she had little to no experience with low-income clients or adult guardianship cases.

Meet Griselda and Jose. They are the parents of an adult son with severe mental health disabilities. Although they had sought guardianship of their son before, they were unable to proceed because of their limited English-speaking abilities.

CVLS was confident that Christina, Griselda, and Jose were a perfect match. Even without prior experience, Christina handled their case beautifully with help and guidance from supervising attorney, Deepa Arora. The match-making would not have been complete without our intake specialist, Jennifer Guadarrama, interpreting in and out of court.

Our pro bono attorneys don't always have a wealth of experience in a specific practice area. However, with our support, they provide expert representation to those that need it the most.

As for Christina, she's not done yet. She has her eyes set on a future adoption case. We're pretty confident that she will be a perfect match for that client too.

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quickly approaching, our staff attorneys were able to continue the case and assign it to attorney Ehsan Eftekhari.

Ehsan represented Mohammed at the hearing. He argued that the overpayment was not Mohammed's fault and that he should not be expected to pay it back. The Administrative Law Judge agreed and issued a fully favorable decision! Thanks to Ehsan, Mohammed's sole source of income is safe and that sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach is no more.



*Ruth Ann Schmitt*

## CONGRATULATIONS!

Former CVLS Executive Director, Ruth Ann Schmitt, was honored today at the Illinois Bar Foundation Fellows Breakfast!

Ruth received the Distinguished Service for Law & Society Award. Among other accomplishments, she was the first executive director of the Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois (LTF).

Under her leadership, LTF became the largest Illinois-based source of funding for legal aid, distributing over \$135 million in grants since 1984!

Congratulations, Ruth! And thank you for your commitments to both CVLS and pro bono!

## DEAL OR NO DEAL

### Volunteer Secures Security Deposit!

When needed, our volunteers can be masters of both litigation and negotiation.

Carlena recently moved out of her apartment, expecting the return of her \$1,500 security deposit. On a fixed income of just over \$700 per month, she was relying on the deposit to pay for some upcoming expenses. Despite calling, texting, and sending letters, Carlena could not get her landlord to cooperate.

CVLS interviewed Carlena and asked volunteer attorney, Mark Liston to take her case. Mark got to work immediately, contacting the landlord and requesting the return of Carlena's security deposit. The landlord responded that Carlena had damaged the unit, and threatened to countersue for the costs of repair.

Mark refused to back down, pointing out that the landlord had failed to provide an itemization of the damages to the unit, as required by law. He warned the landlord that Carlena was entitled to double her security deposit and attorneys' fees!

After more back and forth, the landlord and Carlena settled their dispute with Mark's help. Carlena received the full amount of her security deposit, and both sides were satisfied.

Although Mark felt this was a good deal for Carlena, some attorneys would have pushed harder and tried to get more—for their own egos. Mark understood that his duty is to his client. He negotiated the settlement that Carlena wanted.



*Paul Dengel, Schiff Hardin*

## BIG HELP WITHOUT THE BIG BILL

### Single Mother Gets Support She Deserves

Good, affordable lawyers are hard to come by. At Chicago Volunteer Legal Services, we pride ourselves on connecting low-income clients to skilled attorneys at no cost to the client.

T.'s case started as a simple modification of child support. Unable to work full-time, she needed additional support from her child's father. In 2014, the father's child support obligation had been reduced to zero because of alleged critical health problems that prevented him from working.

When T. found out that the child's father had returned to work last year, she wanted to modify the child support order to reflect his current income. Paul Dengel, a partner at Schiff Hardin and a trusted, experienced volunteer with CVLS, agreed to take T.'s case.

Litigation quickly became heated. The father challenged T.'s ability to work and reasserted his rights to parenting time that he had not exercised for years. Soon, all aspects of the of the parenting relationship were subject to dispute.

Without representation, T. would have likely been overwhelmed and defeated.

It took nine months, an extensive pretrial conference with the Court and multiple sessions with a court-appointed Child Representative, before the parties were able to resolve their issues in a comprehensive parenting plan and child support order.

Paul spent more than 300 hours on this case. At his regular billing rate, T. would have been charged over \$250,000. Instead she was able to positively resolve her legal issues at no cost to her.

That is the power of pro bono.

## VINO + VAN GOGH

### Junior Board hosts 9th Annual Fundraiser

On November 30 the Junior Board of Chicago Volunteer Legal Services showed once again that they can throw one heck of a party. Nearly 350 people attended the event at Ovation Chicago on Friday night raising almost \$50,000 for legal aid. We are truly grateful to be supported by so many people every single year we have held this event. It is amazing to see all of your faces at the party and be surrounded by people who are touched and encouraged by our mission of providing equal access to justice to Chicago.

Thank you to all of our sponsors, attendees, donors, and local artists who helped make this year's event so successful. We wish you all a happy holiday season and look forward to seeing everyone for the 10th annual Vino + Van Gogh!



# THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT IN 2018

Justice is only justice if it's equal

Being poor in Chicago is a struggle as federal, state and local safety nets erode. Even our legal system tilts toward people with money--it is virtually impossible for anyone to fight a bank, an insurance company, a landlord or an abusive spouse without an attorney. People who can't afford attorneys have to fight their courtroom battles alone. But CVLS changes the odds against the poor by providing skilled, caring, supported pro bono attorneys to counsel and represent thousands of low-income clients, for free, in civil cases that make a difference in their lives.

Please make an investment in your community this holiday season by making a donation to Chicago Volunteer Legal Services. All gifts to CVLS are entirely tax deductible. Thank you all for your generous support over the years and we wish your family a wonderful holiday season.

We look forward to continuing the fight for equal access to justice in 2019!

## In 2018

### Your generosity makes a difference.

*Last year's donations provided life changing support to thousands of families.*

## Look how much good a gift to Chicago Volunteer Legal Services can do!



### Closed 3,128 Cases

In 2018 alone, CVLS changed thousands of lives



### 26 Community Legal Clinics

Hosted evenings and weekends in Chicago's community organizations and Churches



### Appointed in 753 Cases

As Chicago's trusted legal aid provider, CVLS was appointed by the courts in hundreds of litigation cases



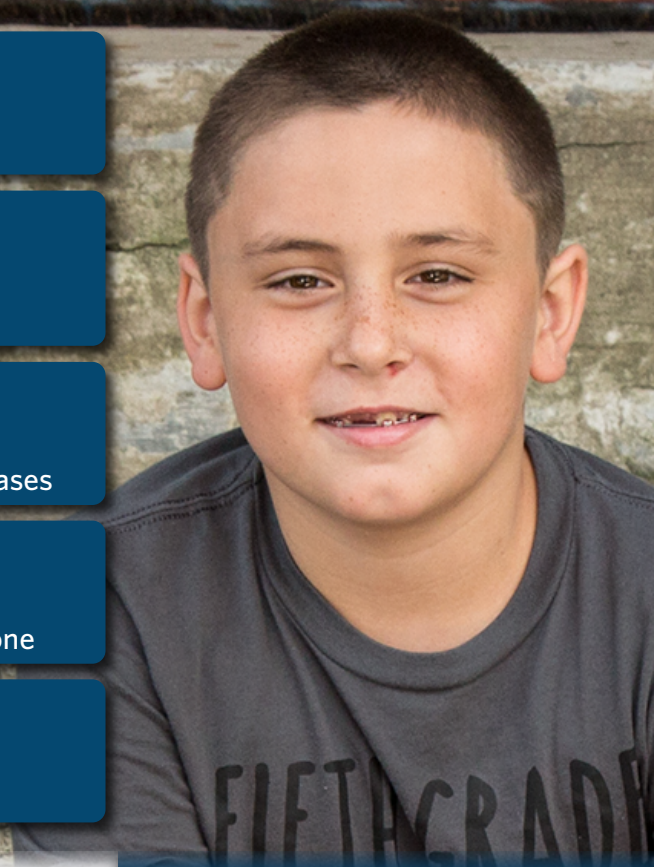
### 2,483 Active Volunteers

Using volunteers helps to keep our cost-per-case extremely low with 421 new volunteers in 2018 alone



### 5,511 CLE Seminars Hours

We provide constant training and support to our volunteers, giving them the skills they need to win



# HAVE A WONDERFUL HOLIDAY SEASON!

PLEASE CONTINUE YOUR SUPPORT

[cvls.org/donate](http://cvls.org/donate)

The logo for Chicago Volunteer Legal Services is a black, angular shape with a white rectangular cutout on the right side. The text "CHICAGO VOLUNTEER LEGAL SERVICES" is written in white, bold, uppercase letters inside the black shape.

**CHICAGO  
VOLUNTEER  
LEGAL  
SERVICES**

33 North Dearborn Street, Suite 400  
Chicago, IL 60602