



LEGAL AID CHICAGO

EQUAL JUSTICE STARTS HERE

APRIL 2026 NEWSLETTER

JUSTICE UP CLOSE

HOUSING
EDITION

8 Questions With Legal
Aid Chicago's Housing
Staff Attorney, Danielle
Harris



"I wish people understood both how necessary legal aid is, and how critical funding is. Without proper representation, it is extremely difficult for our clients to obtain any sort of justice in our court system. In eviction court, cases move quickly and the stakes are high. Without legal representation, many tenants are forced to make decisions without fully understanding their rights."

April is Fair Housing Month, a time to recognize the passage of the **Fair Housing Act** and its core promise to prevent discrimination in housing based on race, disability, family status, and other protected characteristics. It is also a moment to reflect on the ongoing work needed to ensure everyone has equal access to safe and stable housing.

At Legal Aid Chicago, our **Housing Practice Group (HPG)** works every day to protect tenants' rights and challenge discrimination that limits housing opportunity.

In this edition of **Justice Up Close**, we spoke with **Danielle Harris** of our Housing Practice Group. Danielle represents clients facing fair housing violations and supports survivors through the Comprehensive Legal Assistance for Survivors Project (CLASP), which provides free, confidential civil legal services to survivors of sexual assault. Through this work, she helps clients secure safe housing, assert their rights, and maintain stability during and after crisis.

1. What inspired you to work in legal aid?

The more I learned about the legal system, the more I realized how difficult it was for unrepresented individuals to obtain any semblance of "justice" in our courts. For clients who cannot afford to pay for an attorney, they are left to navigate a confusion and hostile system with no guidance and unimaginably high stakes.

I wanted to work in legal aid not only to represent individuals who need an attorney to exercise their rights, but also to ensure they understand the process, feel comfortable asking questions, and are treated with basic respect.

Legal aid work is also unique as, unlike many litigation jobs (especially for younger attorneys), we are able to work directly with clients and get actual in-court experience. We get to have a direct impact on our community, even on a client-to-client basis.

2. What does a typical day look like for you at Legal Aid Chicago?

One of my favorite parts about working at Legal Aid Chicago is that every day looks different. Some days, I spend most of my time in court.

Other days, I'll be conducting intakes with potential clients, identifying potential legal defenses/claims in their cases, and strategizing potential approaches to resolve their legal issue. Some days are spent conducting legal research and drafting legal documents ranging from Motions to Dismiss to demand letters to property managers regarding unlawful discriminatory conduct.

3. What is one moment with a client that has stayed with you?

One of my favorite moments came not from a courtroom victory alone, but from the work of our Client Support Services team. After my client secured housing, the team connected her with a furniture nonprofit, making it possible for her to move into a fully furnished apartment and begin rebuilding her life with dignity.

My client had previously been unsheltered, and when her family vacated their former unit, they were forced to get rid of nearly all of her belongings. She has a disability that made it impossible to meet certain voucher program requirements, which led the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) to seek termination of her voucher. We successfully challenged that termination, and CHA ultimately granted her a reasonable accommodation.

What made this case especially meaningful was seeing the impact of that support once she was settled into her new home. Surrounded by furniture and belongings she did not have to worry about replacing, our client finally experienced a sense of safety, pride, and stability that had been absent for a long time.

5. How does your work impact clients' lives outside the courtroom?

HPG's work helps secure basic safety for our clients. Housing stability is the bedrock for a family's security. Without housing, it is exceedingly difficult for parents to hold steady employment, for children to go to school, or for public benefit recipients to fulfill their obligations to continue receiving benefits they need to survive.

So many of our clients with housing subsidies would be unable to afford market rent. Avoiding evictions or preventing the termination of a client's housing subsidy helps keep families from facing homelessness.

And for clients in subsidized housing who are survivors of sexual assault or domestic violence, our assistance with transfers under the Violence Against Women Act ("VAWA") are particularly impactful. These transfers help ensure that the client can vacate a unit where they remain at risk of harm from further violence or abuse without having to give up their housing subsidy.

6. What keeps you going in this work?

What keeps me going in this work is the people – both my clients and my colleagues.

This work can be extremely difficult. We are working against systems that perpetuate discrimination, instability, and harm. Getting wins for our clients is a reminder that while the work can be an uphill battle and at times feel impossible, we can be successful in obtaining significant wins for members of our community.

My colleagues also help keep me going in this work. They are incredibly intelligent people who are also deeply funny. We all need to share the ability to make each other smile to continue on in this difficult work.

7. What do you wish more people understood about legal aid?

I wish people understood both how necessary legal aid is, and how more funding is needed so we can provide services for the low-income families who need it.

According to Legal Services Corporation (LSC), about 3 in 4 low-income households in the United States experienced at least one civil legal problem. An overwhelming majority of those households are unable to obtain legal representation due to a combination of their inability to afford an attorney and the limited capacity of civil legal services organizations. Per the National Center for Justice Access, there is only 1 legal aid attorney for every 10,000 lower-income resident in Illinois.

Without proper representation, it is extremely difficult for our clients to obtain any sort of justice in our court system. In eviction court specifically, tenants are facing “expedited proceedings,” meaning that the process moves faster than most other court cases due to the time-sensitive nature of the conflict. Even with legal representation it can be difficult for clients to obtain what many assume are basic rights in court – the right to review the evidence against them, the right to understand the process, or the right to present their defense to the court. Far too often, tenants facing eviction do not even continue to trial and are instead pressured into settlement agreements with terms they do not fully understand.

8. What’s something about your job that might surprise people?

I think people would be surprised to learn the size of our caseloads, and how much experience we gain as young attorneys.

We are constantly juggling a caseload of dozens of cases, and we get to gain in-court experience within our first few months of being licensed attorneys. I didn’t realize that reality was unheard of for attorneys who go into larger, for-profit practices.

People may also be surprised to know how difficult it is for tenants to assert their rights without an attorney’s assistance. They face barriers in even getting a response from their housing provider or housing provider’s attorney until a legal aid lawyer steps in and gets involved.

The work you just read about is happening every day. Your support helps make sure Legal Aid Chicago’s attorneys and advocates can keep showing up for clients when they need it most.



LEGAL AID CHICAGO UPDATES

University of Chicago
Medicine Trauma
Center team named
Champion of Justice



Legal Aid Chicago is proud to honor the **University of Chicago Medicine Trauma Center** team with the *Champion of Justice Award*. The team will be honored at our upcoming Annual Luncheon, read more below.

TUNE IN ALERT

Regina Hernandez goes
live on WVON radio.



Tune into **WVON 1690 AM's Morning Show** on Monday, April 20, as host **Rufus Williams** welcomes Legal Aid Chicago's Pro Bono & Community Partnerships Associate Director, **Regina Hernandez**, and New Leaf's Program Manager, **Beth Johnson**, for a special takeover from 8:00–9:00 a.m. They'll be discussing New Leaf's support of Legal Aid Chicago's cannabis record expungement work and what it means for our communities. Don't miss it!

SAVE THE DATE!

Justice is Served
October 9, 2026



Legal Aid Chicago's Ambassadors Board invites you to **Justice is Served** at the **Chicago History Museum**! Save the date for Friday, October 9th, and stay tuned for more info.

JUST ANNOUNCED

CHAMPION OF JUSTICE

University of Chicago Medicine
Trauma Center Team
MLP | Recovery Legal Care

We are proud to announce that this year's **Champion of Justice Award** will be presented to the team at the **University of Chicago Medicine Trauma Center** in recognition of their collaboration with Legal Aid Chicago through our renowned Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP), **Recovery Legal Care**.

CHAMPIONS OF JUSTICE AWARD HONOREES



Franklin N. Cosey-Gay, PhD, MPH
*Executive Director, Urban Health Initiative's
Community and External Affairs*



Selwyn O. Rogers, Jr. MD, MPH
*Section Chief of Trauma and
Acute Care Surgery*



Elizabeth Tung, MD, MS
*Social Epidemiologist and Practicing
Internist*



Tanya Zakrison, MD, MPH
*Trauma Surgeon and Director of
Critical Trauma Research*

Through this groundbreaking professional partnership, Legal Aid Chicago attorneys work alongside trauma providers to address legal and social barriers that directly impact patient health—such as unsafe housing, access to public benefits, and personal safety—helping stabilize patients beyond the hospital setting.

ANNUAL LUNCHEON

Thursday, June 11, 2026
Palmer House
11 AM-1:30 PM

Please join us on June 11th as we honor the work of this incredible team!

We look forward to welcoming you!

Single tickets for Legal Aid Chicago's Annual Luncheon are on sale now!

[Register Here](#) and support all of the work that we do all year long!

Interested in the benefits of event sponsorship?

Click [here](#) to learn more