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LEGAL AID

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For Immediate Release

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Maryland Legal Aid's Equal Justice Council kicks off 20th Annual Law Firm Campaign

BALTIMORE, Md., (October 2, 2017) – Maryland Legal Aid's Equal Justice Council (EJC) kicked off its 20th annual law firm campaign on October 1. The campaign, which runs until December 31, 2017, solicits Maryland law firms for their support of Maryland Legal Aid's mission to provide equal access to justice for low-income individuals and families. The theme of this year's campaign is "Now, more than ever."

"We want to convey a sense of urgency," said EJC co-chair Martin Himeles, Jr. (Zuckerman Spaeder LLP). "Calls to end federal funding for civil legal services to the poor are a special concern to the EJC. Defunding would harm the most vulnerable in our community."

Since 1997, volunteer members of the EJC have served as enthusiastic fundraisers, advocates and supporters of Maryland Legal Aid's work to provide life-changing civil legal services to low-income individuals and families across the state. Composed of highly respected lawyers from Maryland's top law firms and other leaders of the state's legal and business communities, the EJC has the primary goal of improving access to justice for low-income Marylanders by increasing and diversifying Maryland Legal Aid's resources, financial and otherwise, and serving as ambassadors of Maryland Legal Aid. Pro bono legal counsel and procurement services provided by EJC members have enabled Maryland Legal Aid to significantly expand the scope and reach of its programs to meet the changing needs of its clients.

"Access to the legal system is the safety net of low-income people, and Maryland Legal Aid makes that access possible," said EJC co-chair Lee Ogburn (Kramon & Graham P.A.). "The EJC believes that, as lawyers, we are in a unique position to respond to barriers to equality and justice." The EJC's efforts have helped families save their homes, protected abused and neglected children and victims of domestic violence, and secured critical benefits for veterans and seniors.

Decatur "Deke" Miller, one of the founding members and past co-chairs of the EJC believed that support of legal services of the poor is not an act of charity, but a lawyer's professional responsibility. "The EJC continues to be guided by this belief and has always fought to ensure that the rights, dignities and freedoms of all our citizens are fully respected," said Himeles. "Maryland Legal Aid deserves the full support of every attorney."

In its first 20 years, the EJC has supported Maryland Legal Aid with \$5 million in cash contributions from lawyers and law firms, \$2.5 million in *cy pres* awards, and another \$3 million in pro bono legal services provided to Maryland Legal Aid. This year, the Equal Justice Council's campaign goal is to increase support from the private bar so that each Maryland lawyer contributes the value of one billable hour to support legal services for the disadvantaged. Himeles said, "We're asking law firms to increase their contributions by 20% from last year to mark the 20 years that the EJC has been actively promoting equal access to justice for Maryland's most economically disadvantaged."

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About Maryland Legal Aid

Maryland Legal Aid is a private, non-profit law firm that provides free, civil legal services to people who are in Baltimore City and Maryland's 23 counties from 12 offices. The firm handles cases involving a wide range of issues, including family, housing, government benefits, healthcare, education, employment, and consumer law. Maryland Legal Aid also represents children in CINA (Child in Need of Assistance) proceedings in 12 Maryland jurisdictions. Other vulnerable populations, such as homeowners facing foreclosure, migrant and seasonal farm workers, nursing home and assisted living residents, and veterans seeking benefits and assistance with related legal issues, also receive representation through special projects. In addition, Maryland Legal Aid assists with expunging criminal records to remove barriers to obtaining housing, employment, and child custody.

For more information, visit www.mdlab.org and follow Maryland Legal Aid on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).