

Legal Aid Society

of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland

INFORMATION FOR RELEASE

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ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION CHAIR HIGHLIGHTS TENNESSEE'S CIVIL NEEDS CRISIS

Margaret Behm keynotes Legal Aid Society's 2011 campaign kickoff luncheon

NASHVILLE, Tenn. March 11, 2011 – The Legal Aid Society kicked off its annual Campaign For Equal Justice yesterday with an important message from the chair of the Tennessee Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission – there is a “civil needs crisis” in Tennessee.

Margaret L. Behm called on the crowd of lawyers, judges, elected officials and community supporters at the Nashville City Club to work together to attack the civil needs crisis. “Our biggest challenge is matching lawyers with clients in need,” she said.

Behm, a partner at Dodson, Parker, Behm & Capparella, PC, urged the community to provide the funding needed to overcome this challenge because “pro bono is not free.”

Gail Vaughn Ashworth, campaign chair and founding member of Wiseman Ashworth Law Group PLC, said she is confident that the Legal Aid Society would meet its 2011 fundraising goal. Last year, the Legal Aid Society raised \$709,810, exceeding their goal of \$700,000. This year's goal is \$720,000. Currently, more than half that amount has been raised.

As the state's largest nonprofit law firm, the Legal Aid Society provides free legal services to clients in 48 counties in Middle and East Tennessee.

Hiyam Abdulrazzaq, one such client who credits her good fortune to help provided by the Legal Aid Society, told her story to the crowd.

Abdulrazzaq is a native of Kurdistan. Ten years ago, she came to America with her family as refugees from Iraq. Her struggles to assimilate to her new life were compounded by an abusive husband who wouldn't allow her to learn English or make new friends. Despite these challenges, she thrived and eventually sought the help of the Legal Aid Society to get a divorce and become a U.S. citizen.

“Legal Aid was a lifeline for me,” she said.

The Legal Aid Society gives free civil legal aid to people who have nowhere else to turn. It has 34 attorneys working out of eight offices in Clarksville, Columbia, Cookeville, Gallatin, Murfreesboro, Nashville, Oak Ridge, and Tullahoma. The Legal Aid Society is funded in part by United Way. Those wishing to make a donation can visit www.las.org or contact Cindy Durham, director of development, at 615-780-7125.

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