

# ED Update: The next era of Legal Aid: Empathy, dignity, justice for all

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.*

With these words, our founding fathers set a course in history that established a nation built on a foundation of tolerance and acceptance of our fellow men and women - dignity. It's a sentiment we've continuously come back to as something to strive for. And it's no secret that we've had our share of setbacks in striving to achieve it.

Slavery. Suffrage. Civil rights. Marriage equality. To name a few. These words have guided us through all these - and countless other - struggles to live up to our potential as a nation.

But throughout our history, there is one group continuously marginalized, and it's our country's poor.

Those who live in poverty face the same challenges any of us face in life - finding and building trusting relationships; raising families; searching for meaningful work; struggling to give our children better than we had growing up.

But they face many added challenges that most of us can only try to understand - the impossible choice between paying for medicine and paying for your home; the struggle of finding time for your kids while working multiple part-time jobs just to put food on the table; the challenges that come with finding meaningful and gainful employment with only a high school degree or less; the constant, daily, life-threatening struggle of addiction and mental illness that run rampant in economically depressed communities.

And on top of all of that, they are unfailingly and unapologetically misunderstood.

Perhaps it comes from our nation's history, rooted in a scrappy group of underdogs achieving the impossible. Or maybe it stems from our economy, one of the most formidable in the world, driven by the concept of the American dream. But whatever the reason, we - as a nation, a collective - look down on those who happen to be less

fortunate than ourselves.

Sometimes, it comes through as a glaring negative perception, thinking of those on public benefits as leeches living off our hard work. Other times, it's much more subtle, like pretending not to see the man on the corner of the exit ramp holding a cardboard sign. We have all been guilty at some point in our lives.

It's bad enough that we assign worth to each other based on our socioeconomic status. But what's worse is that this worth carries real implications throughout life - from our ability to get a job, to how people (teachers, peers, potential partners) view us, to our access of basic human needs, rights, and justice.

Next month, at our 66th Anniversary Celebration, Legal Aid will unveil our new strategic vision: that all individuals, including those who are impoverished, deserve the same basics of human dignity - the opportunity to control, improve, and enrich their lives and community. An ode to our founding fathers, this new vision will serve as a guiding beacon for all we do and as a first step in taking a public stand for our neighbors who are struggling.

I hope you'll join us on Sept. 6th at Greystone Hall in Akron to learn more about this exciting next era in our organization's future. It's a lofty vision, and one we can't achieve without the help of you - our colleagues, partners, volunteers, supporters, and friends. For more information or to RSVP, visit [www.communitylegalaid.org/events](http://www.communitylegalaid.org/events).

I look forward to seeing you there.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SMG', written in a cursive style.

Steven McGarrity, Esq.  
Executive Director, Community Legal Aid  
Last updated on August 13, 2018.

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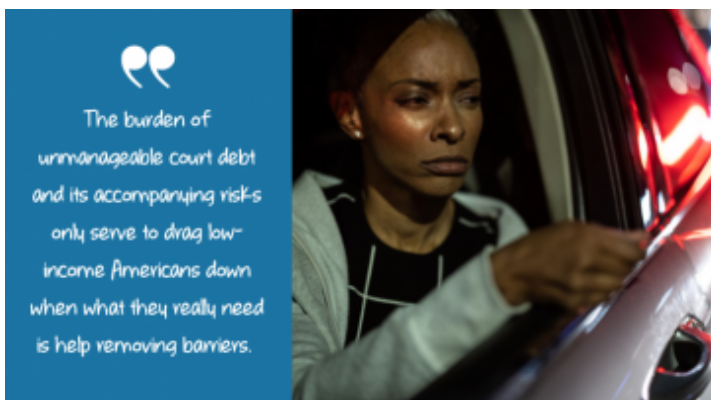


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The courts handle few matters more sacred than child custody. Learn more about how House Bill 14 could change the way child custody decisions are made by courts in this week's Big Idea: → <https://t.co/i9dpfA9Wfk> <https://t.co/yt3cbsLyiv>

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Our Employee Spotlight today is Jeff Lilly, Staff Attorney at Community Legal Aid for 15 years! Some of Jeff's hobbies include gaming, reading, cooking, and listening to music. Thank you, Jeff, for all you do for Community Legal Aid.  
<https://t.co/LjFCL5z1pz>

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