

# **Community Legal Aid**

A non-profit law firm serving the legal needs of low-income individuals and families in central northeast Ohio



[www.communitylegalaid.org](http://www.communitylegalaid.org)

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## **Legal Aid focuses priority cases amid Coronavirus**

### ***Nonprofit law firm prioritizing client safety, health, and housing***

Community Legal Aid is still open for business and is taking precautions in the midst of the Coronavirus, including suspending walk-in applications, cancelling or postponing all public events, and prioritizing the types of cases it's accepting.

Steven McGarrity, Legal Aid's executive director, said the nonprofit law firm is following recommendations by the Governor's office and public health officials.

"The situation is changing daily, even hourly," he explained. "We're staying flexible in order to respond appropriately."

McGarrity said his team has been taking measures since last week to implement social distancing policies and allow staff members to work remotely.

"We fully expect that our low-income neighbors are going to suffer the consequences of this public health crisis far into the future," he said. "The time to start helping them respond to that is now, and we're taking every measure to make sure our staff is equipped to do that."

Some issues Legal Aid is starting to see include employment problems, such as employees being illegally fired for using personal or vacation days to stay home during this crisis.

"We're also really concerned about those suffering from domestic violence, especially during a period of quarantine," he said. "We're in constant communication with our partners, the courts, local shelters, to try to get information out there about what resources are available and how people should be planning for their safety."

Another area of concern for the group is making sure people have stable housing.

"Many of our courts haven't put forward policies yet to stop evictions and foreclosures from moving forward, so we're obviously concerned about that," McGarrity shared, citing the current

recommendations of people sheltering in place.

“But we’re also worried about landlords potentially taking the law into their own hands, and just locking people out,” he said. “This happens during times of non-crisis, so during a pandemic like this, we get concerned that we could see an uptick in this type of illegal behavior.”

McGarrity explained that while Legal Aid is concerned with protecting people’s due process rights, the focus really is on keeping people safe and secure, especially during a public health crisis.

“It’s easy, in the midst of a crisis, to get caught up in policies, procedures, numbers, stats,” he said. “But we can’t forget that behind all that, there are real people being affected, and they deserve to be treated with dignity. We can’t forget our humanity.”

Community members interested in learning more about Legal Aid’s most recent procedures and case priorities can visit [www.communitylegalaid.org/covid19](http://www.communitylegalaid.org/covid19).

Anyone needing legal help can apply 24/7 online at [www.communitylegalaid.org/apply](http://www.communitylegalaid.org/apply) or can call Legal Aid’s HelpLine during operational hours at (800) 998-9454. Residents can also follow them on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/CommLegalAid](http://www.facebook.com/CommLegalAid) or follow on Twitter and Instagram at @CommLegalAid.

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