

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

Statement on Martin Luther King Jr. Day 2021

Statement from Executive Director Steven McGarrity

On this day, Community Legal Aid stands proudly with our Black and Brown neighbors and celebrates a hero and civil rights leader's life and legacy.

The notion of protecting the ideals that Martin Luther King Jr. stood for has perhaps never been more important in our nation's history. Over the past few years, we've seen America grapple with a racial justice reckoning as blazen acts of white supremacy, and more passive acts of embedded structural racism, paved the way for the most recent violent attacks we've seen, including at our nation's capital just a few short days ago. Even the pandemic we are all in the midst of has shown the cracks in our system as people of color are disproportionately affected and dying at higher rates.

We in the civil justice community tout Dr. King's messages like they're slogans emblazoned on our favorite coffee mugs. In fact, they are. Each staff member here at Legal Aid has a mug paraphrasing Dr. King, "I bend the arc of the moral universe toward justice." His values are our values -- those of equality, diversity, leadership, and justice.

And yet, we all witness every day, either on the news or in the personal narratives of our clients, what NBC commentator Chris Hayes called the "backlash and backwards movement" away from this sentiment that Dr. King proclaimed.

We at Legal Aid are thankful that these issues are now being talked about openly. But we must get beyond words and, as individuals and a community, move to action to dismantle the systems that have long perpetuated inequity and justice.

We are the guardians of Dr. King's legacy, and each of us must do our part in making sure his words don't echo hollow in the ears of generations to come.

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