

## President's Message

# Civil Legal Aid is a Good Investment

By 2021-22 President Christopher K. Ralston

Civil legal aid is free legal assistance provided to help people facing non-criminal, civil legal challenges. Civil legal aid helps people with a range of issues, including assistance for veterans and military families, domestic violence, senior and elderly services, child welfare services, housing and employment. While every American has a constitutional right to an attorney in criminal matters, when it comes to civil matters, access to an attorney is not a fundamental right.

Louisiana's poverty rates are among the nation's highest. A staggering 40% of Louisiana's citizens earn incomes below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. As the fourth most impoverished state in the nation, Louisiana has nearly 8 million people potentially eligible for free civil legal aid.

I am proud to serve as the president of the Louisiana Bar Foundation (LBF), which, for more than 30 years, has been a trusted authority and the state's largest funder of civil legal aid. Our decades of experience as a responsible steward of funds, along with our well-established partnerships across all 64 parishes, allow us to help

hundreds of thousands of Louisiana residents gain access to the legal system.

We know that during and after a disaster, whether a pandemic or a storm, civil legal aid needs dramatically increase. Displaced families and individuals experience a variety of legal needs. Many need help with successions and title clearing to access federal recovery dollars. Missed rent payments lead to eviction notices. Domestic violence centers are impacted with increased residents. Vulnerable children need protection due to family instability and separation. For many Louisiana citizens facing these crises, an effective and powerful response must include civil legal aid.

The LBF recently conducted an Economic Impact and Social Return on Investment Analysis for fiscal year 2020 that included data from 45 civil legal aid providers. Social return on investment



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(SROI) is an internationally standardized and accepted process for measuring and understanding the financial impact of social services organizations.

The findings show that dollars spent on Louisiana's civil legal aid providers are well spent and deliver unmistakable economic returns to the state.

► For every \$1 invested in Louisiana's civil legal aid services, these programs deliver \$9.18 in immediate and long-term consequential financial benefits, including reduced reliance on government aid and the judiciary system.

► The net economic impact value resulting from Louisiana civil legal aid activities during the year totaled \$64,823,000.

► The total net social return on investment for Louisiana's civil legal aid programs during fiscal year 2020 was 918%.

It is our hope that the analysis will help us better educate the public on the value of civil legal aid and will lead to continued funding of civil legal services. For the full analysis, go to: [www.raisingthebar.org](http://www.raisingthebar.org).

Civil legal aid is a good investment because our society improves when people understand the law and have equal access to justice. When we help our citizens better their situations and their futures, that also benefits our economy, our communities and our state. Stronger and more stable communities are better for all of us in Louisiana.



Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice John L. Weimer swore in the 2021-22 Louisiana Bar Foundation officers, from left, Immediate Past President Harry J. (Skip) Philips, Jr., President Christopher K. Ralston, Vice President Alan G. Brackett, Treasurer Deidre D. Robert and Secretary Hon. John C. Davidson. Photo by Matthew Hinton Photography.

## LBF Welcomes New 2021 Fellows

The Louisiana Bar Foundation welcomed the following new Fellows:

- Taylor B. Ashworth ..... Lafayette
- Miles C. Hesterly ..... Lafayette
- Corrine M. Blache ..... Baton Rouge
- Hansel M. Harlan ..... Baton Rouge