

# THE PUBLIC INTEREST LAW CENTER

Action. Access. Progress.



**2014 Annual Report  
& 2015 Strategy**



## OUR MISSION

We use high-impact legal strategies to improve the well-being and life prospects of the region's most vulnerable populations by assuring that they have access to the resources and services that we all need to lead our lives. We take **ACTION** to secure **ACCESS** to five deeply intertwined resources that are essential to escaping the cycle of poverty and achieving **PROGRESS**:

**A High-Quality Public Education | A Safe and Healthy Home and Neighborhood Healthcare | Employment | The Unencumbered Right to Vote**

### ACTION in 2014

- Filed 22 new cases, continued 15 cases and ran 6 comprehensive projects

“The group is really effective at getting a lot done with little resources.”

— *Survey response*

- Launched a new project to support people with disabilities in employment discrimination matters (page 12)

“They take on cases that matter. This is the stuff that really impacts people who need it and changes lives.”

— *Survey response*

- Engaged more than 3,100 people through trainings, community education events, and presentations
- Leveraged the talent of 102 pro bono attorneys and 80 volunteers who donated 9,500+ hours of their time
- Filed 2 lawsuits against state officials for failing to fund public schools and for failing to investigate complaints filed by Philadelphia parents about curriculum deficiencies (pages 4 - 5)

### ACCESS & PROGRESS in 2014

- More than 1.9 million children in Florida are closer to having access to medical and dental care (page 8)
- More than 500,000 voters in Pennsylvania still have access to the polls (page 9)
- The Philadelphia Land Bank's first strategic plan recognizes existing community gardens, urban agriculture, and meaningful public engagement, thanks to our input and our organizing to ensure gardeners and farmers had a voice in the process (page 10)
- More than 1,800 students with autism in Philadelphia are no longer at risk of being abruptly moved between schools without parental input (page 6)

“The organization is truly for ‘the people.’ They are motivated and committed to make things right when they see a wrong.” — *Survey response*



Action. Access. Progress.



## EDUCATION

**We work to ensure all students, regardless of their zip code or the color of their skin, have access to a high-quality public education.**

### School Funding Lawsuit

Pennsylvania's legislature does not provide enough state funding for children attending public schools, forcing school districts to rely heavily on local property taxes. The result: children in low-wealth districts who need the most support get the least. And without access to needed resources, children simply are not receiving the quality public education necessary to prepare them for life as productive members of the Commonwealth. In November 2014, together with the Education

Law Center and O'Melveny & Myers LLP, we filed a lawsuit on behalf of six school districts, seven parents, the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools, and the NAACP Pennsylvania State Conference, against state officials for violating the state constitution by failing to provide a "thorough and efficient system of public education." State officials have adopted a system that "turns the caliber of public education into an accident of geography," and leaves hundreds of thousands of children without the resources they need to meet the academic standards state officials have established. This case is now moving through the courts.



*Lawyers and clients gather after lawsuit filing in 2014.*

“My child is in classes with too many other students and she has no access to tutoring services or support from paraprofessionals, but our elected officials still expect and require her to pass standardized tests. How are kids supposed to pass the tests required to graduate high school, find a job and contribute to our economy if their schools are starving for resources?” — *Jamella Miller, parent of an 11-year-old student in the William Penn School District, named petitioner in lawsuit*



*The Miller family, petitioners in the lawsuit.*



## The Campaign for Fair Education Funding

Last year we helped found this statewide, non-partisan effort of more than 50 organizations working to secure a legislative solution to the school funding crisis by 2016.

Learn more: [FairFundingPA.org](http://FairFundingPA.org)

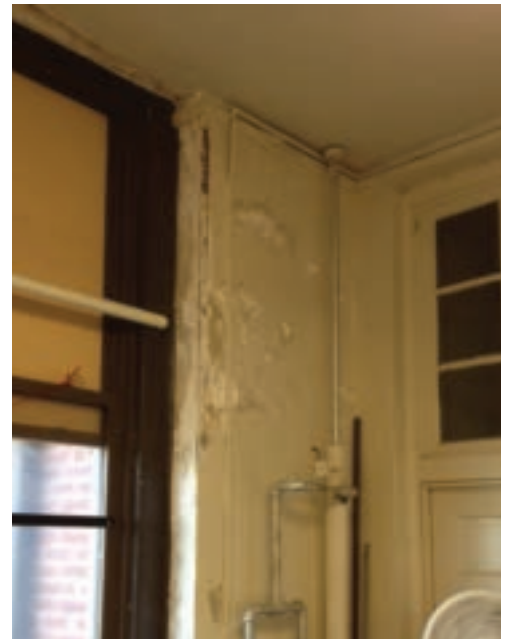
Twitter: [@FairFundingPA](https://twitter.com/FairFundingPA)



*Coalition members attend 2014 launch event in Harrisburg.*

## Holding State Officials Accountable for Philadelphia Schools

For the last several years, faced with drastic cuts in state funding, Philadelphia schools have operated on “doomsday” budgets. Classrooms are overcrowded. Bathrooms are closed or unsanitary. Nurses are nowhere to be found in many schools on many days. After collecting 825 complaints documenting curriculum deficiencies during the 2013-2014 school year, we filed suit against the Pennsylvania Department of Education for failing to assume responsibility for these conditions by refusing to meaningfully investigate or respond to these complaints.



*Philly parents document curriculum deficiencies and deteriorating school conditions.*

“The work of the Public Interest Law Center is invaluable to give parents a voice and action for their children. Their work calls much needed attention to the deficits which are rampant from local schools to the Pennsylvania Department of Education.” — *Robin Roberts, plaintiff in complaints lawsuit, speaking at our 2014 annual event*

**2015 STRATEGY:** Vigorously advance our school funding lawsuit and support related litigation and public pressure to secure a full, fair funding formula for public education in Pennsylvania.



## SPECIAL EDUCATION

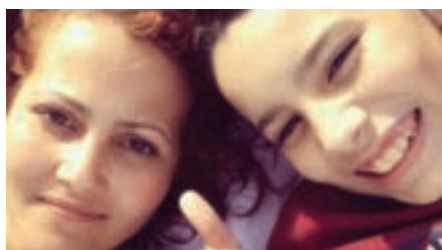
We are fierce advocates on behalf of students with disabilities, particularly children from Philadelphia's low-wealth, minority, and limited English proficiency communities, to help them access services they need to benefit from their education and thrive as adults.

### Supporting Preschoolers with Autism

Young children with autism benefit greatly from receiving special education services at an early age. More than 7,000 preschool-aged students with autism in Philadelphia annually enroll with Elwyn, a state-contracted agency, for critical speech, language, and behavioral therapies. When we learned that too many kids attending Elwyn experienced significant delays or lapses in services, we confronted Elwyn and the state and reached settlement agreements on behalf of five families. Along with partners at McCarter & English LLP, we continue to meet with Elwyn to ensure services for thousands more.

### Stopping the Autism Shuffle

Along with partners at Dechert LLP, we concluded a favorable class settlement agreement with the School District of Philadelphia to stop its policy of arbitrarily transferring students with autism between schools without input or consent from parents. This settlement benefits more than 1,800 students.



*Sharon Romero and her son who has autism.*

“ I am looking forward to the future with a little more hope than I had before. Every parent is entitled to know the placement of their child and should have enough time to plan for any transitions, especially for students with autism. I want to thank the Public Interest Law Center for their advocacy and all of the support they have given to me and to the parents that once thought this was the norm.”  
— Sharon Romero, parent of student in lawsuit

*Clients, pro bono attorneys and staff celebrate after autism shuffle settlement approval.*



## Reforming Extended School Year Services

In October 2014 we filed a class action lawsuit against the School District of Philadelphia for unilaterally assigning Extended School Year (ESY) services for students with disabilities without making individualized determinations. Under federal law, students with disabilities may be eligible to receive ESY services during a holiday break or over the summer. School districts are required to work with parents to individually determine the appropriate ESY program for each student. Instead, the district has been issuing form letters offering a single program for all students with disabilities. This case is now moving through the court.



*Sonja Kerr trains City Council staffers on the rights of children with disabilities.*

## One Client's Story

Christopher\* is an eleventh-grade student who loves drawing and taking art classes. He also has autism and a severe language disorder. We represented Christopher after we learned the School District of Philadelphia was not providing him appropriate speech and language services. The district also failed to provide him with a one-to-one aide, without whom he was unable to attend his beloved art classes. His art is one of the few ways Christopher expresses himself. Our advocacy was successful: hearing officers ordered the district to remedy the program by providing Christopher with more therapy, training his teachers, providing an aide, and paying for compensatory education.

*\*Name changed for client privacy*

“The Public Interest Law Center serves as a beacon for many parents like myself who often find themselves stuck in a cyclical loop of special education red tape that school districts use as band aids to provide bare minimal supports for our children's needs. I am eternally grateful for Sonja Kerr and the Public Interest Law Center team for helping me continually cut through every strip of that tape.”

— Christopher's mother



*Christopher*

**2015 STRATEGY: Challenge the School District of Philadelphia's failure to provide interpretation and translation for 12,000 families of special education students who have limited English proficiency. Take up the crucial challenge of what happens when children with disabilities graduate: too many end up in segregated sheltered workshops, earning a fraction of the minimum wage.**





## HEALTHCARE

We use the law to eliminate systemic barriers to medical and dental care so that marginalized populations can access the prompt, high-quality care they need to thrive.

### Kids in Florida One Step Closer to Medical and Dental Care

On New Year's Eve 2014, after 90 days of trial and more than ten years, a federal judge found that Florida's children who depend on the Medicaid program for their medical and dental care are not receiving the care required by federal law, including routine checkups, lead screening, and dental care. Judge Adalberto Jordan ruled that the state's Medicaid system leads to life-threatening delays. Together with Boies, Schiller & Flexner LLP, we brought this case back in 2005 on behalf of Florida children eligible for Medicaid, along with the Florida Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Florida Academy of Pediatric Dentistry.



*The Gorenflo family, whose two sons are plaintiffs in the case.*



*Stuart Singer*

“ We have worked closely with the Public Interest Law Center's experienced lawyers, including Jim Eiseman and Ben Geffen, in preparing and trying this case, resulting in a sweeping favorable decision by the federal court. This would not have been possible without the Public Interest Law Center's dedication to litigating cases that would otherwise not be brought and which defend and advance the public interest.” — *Stuart Singer, partner at Boies, Schiller & Flexner LLP, pro bono attorney*

“ They are passionate and deliberate, even if cases can take years.” — *Survey response*

### Taking on the Insurance Industry to Open Medicaid Payment Records to the Public

In October 2014, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania agreed to hear our appeal in a pair of Right-to-Know Law cases related to how the Department of Human Services uses taxpayer dollars to provide dental care to the 1 million children enrolled in Medicaid, as well as a growing number of adults. Medicaid provides medical and dental care to 1 in 6 Pennsylvanians, and it accounts for some 30% of the Commonwealth's General Fund budget, yet the private insurance companies that manage the program say we cannot know how public, taxpayer money is disbursed from the Department, to private insurance companies, subcontractors, and eventually to dentists. We do know from our experience in other states that when Medicaid payment rates are too low, kids lose access to care.

*Staff and interns prepare to deliver PA Supreme Court briefs for filing.*





## National Provider Groups Request Our Help in U.S. Supreme Court Case

The American Medical Association, the American Dental Association, and five other major physician and provider associations called on us and Boies, Schiller & Flexner LLP to file a “friend of the court” brief in *Richard Armstrong, et al., v. Exceptional Child Center, Inc., et al.*, a case before the country’s highest court, which alleged Idaho’s Medicaid program violated equal access requirements and failed to provide access to services for low-income people.

**2015 STRATEGY:** Work with Florida counsel in court proceedings to determine a remedy for that state’s violation of federal law. Continue investigation of rates paid to dentists participating in Pennsylvania’s Medicaid program to determine the effect of those rates on access to dental care for low-income children and people with disabilities.



## VOTING

We use legal strategies that enhance the integrity of elections by protecting every citizen’s right to vote, promoting a more engaged and informed electorate, and ensuring that every vote is counted as cast.

## Pennsylvania’s Voter ID Law Found Unconstitutional

Early in 2014, the Commonwealth Court permanently enjoined Pennsylvania’s photo identification law because it violates the state constitution. The state decided not to appeal. Just two years after we began this case, in partnership with the ACLU of Pennsylvania, Advancement Project, and Arnold & Porter LLP, we secured permanent protection for more than 500,000 voters who would not have had appropriate identification to vote.

“ They take cases that provide access for all, not just individuals. It’s high-impact litigation aimed at systemic change. Applewhite was amazing and made such a big difference.”  
— Survey response

*Legal team with named plaintiff Viviette Applewhite at start of two-year lawsuit.*



**2015 STRATEGY:** Provide sustained legal support to the election reform movement in Pennsylvania to secure updates to election laws such as online voter registration, no-excuse absentee ballots, and early voting.



## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

We advance environmental justice by assisting communities to have an equitable and meaningful voice in ensuring the development of sustainable and healthy places to live, work, and play.

### Organizing to Ensure Equity in Philadelphia's New Land Bank

Building on our successful collaboration and organizing to help pass the land bank law in 2013, we organized gardeners, farmers, and residents throughout 2014 to provide their critical input into the five-year Strategic Plan Policies for the land bank. Our efforts were successful in making sure the land bank's process is equitable and transparent and the goals of the strategic plan prioritize the preservation and creation of gardens, farms and open space.

“Citywide, the Land Bank will help preserve existing gardens that have community support and a track record of maintenance.” — *Philadelphia Land Bank Strategic Plan & Land Disposition Policies, Executive Summary*

### Providing Legal Support to Community Gardens & Urban Farms

Through our Garden Justice Legal Initiative we provide direct legal services, community education, organizing, and policy advocacy to support residents in creating and preserving gardens and green space.

“My husband Andrew is a horticulturist and at the time of finding an apartment in 2008 in our neighborhood in Southwest Philadelphia, the two lots adjacent to the property were vacant. Over the course of the next six years he's gradually cleared the lots by hand, hauling out trash, weapons and drug paraphernalia. Farm 51 has since been a guerilla operation, but to us in the community it's a place for neighbors to come enjoy a safe green space where you can buy fresh, low-cost produce, eggs, honey, and flowers. Currently we are trying to become the sole caretakers and owners of the land, though this process would not have been possible without the help of the Public Interest Law Center. Amy Laura Cahn and her team are actively helping us navigate the city's protocol of acquiring vacant land in Philadelphia.”

— *Neal Santos, Farm 51*

*Farm 51, photo by Neal Santos*







“ I work with a group of Bhutanese refugees in Northeast Philly who dreamed of starting a community garden in their neighborhood. Due to the difficulties of accessing vacant land in Philadelphia, they struggled to find a site for the garden for nearly two years. With the help of the Public Interest Law Center, HIAS Pennsylvania was finally able to connect the Bhutanese with a wonderful piece of land, and seven families began planting there in April! After nearly two decades in refugee camps and several years in Philadelphia, these refugees are finally able to return to their agricultural heritage and incorporate it into their new lives here in America.” — *Annie Reading, former Philly Fellow at HIAS Pennsylvania*



*Bhutanese gardeners and HIAS staff celebrate their new garden.*

## Supporting Residents in Eastwick

In 2014 we celebrated an important milestone with residents in Eastwick: two years of staving off unwanted development of a 128-acre parcel of land in their neighborhood in Southwest Philadelphia. Along with pro bono partners at Dechert LLP, we continue to work with the Eastwick Friends and Neighbors Coalition to organize and educate residents, build relationships with city agencies and elected officials, and ultimately secure a shared neighborhood planning process.

**2015 GOAL: Continue to organize gardeners and farmers to oversee implementation of Philadelphia’s Land Bank and advocate for improved city urban agricultural policies, procedures, and programs. Expand our legal and policy advocacy support for communities facing environmental and public-health threats.**

*Amy Laure Cabn receives award from HIAS Pennsylvania for work with Bhutanese gardeners.*







## EMPLOYMENT

**We work to eliminate employment discrimination faced by individuals with criminal records or disabilities so that they can thrive in our local community.**

### Disability Employment Discrimination Project

Only 22% of individuals with disabilities in Philadelphia are employed. Independence Foundation Fellow Julie Foster launched this project in the fall of 2014 to help individuals with disabilities access and remain in the workforce. So far Ms. Foster has engaged 11 clients and provided community education to more than 330 people.

“Employment is particularly important for people with disabilities. Employment is a key tool to gain independence, dignity, and to fully participate as a member of the community.”

— Julie Foster, testifying before Philadelphia City Council in 2015

### Fair Employment Opportunities Project

In Pennsylvania, minorities are frequently turned away from jobs due to disproportionate criminal history rates and employers' increased screening of those histories in the hiring processes. In partnership with Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and private lawyer Dana Bazelon, we litigate under state and federal law to stop employers from automatically disqualifying people from jobs, and support employers in complying with state law. In 2014 we settled our first case in this project on behalf of Stephanie Settles, a veteran customer service employee who was turned away from a job with Sunoco. When we reached out to Sunoco, we learned they had independently improved their hiring practices.

*Stephanie Settles*

“Not being able to get a job and being told that I couldn't work was really devastating to me and my family. Everything in my life just went downhill. With help from the Public Interest Law Center and Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity, I was able to overcome my obstacles and life is looking much better.”

— Stephanie Settles

**2015 GOAL: Represent individuals and build employment case law to help people with disabilities or criminal records get and keep jobs.**





## 2014 Annual Gala: A Celebration of Civil Rights

At our sold-out annual event, more than 280 people gathered to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and celebrate our work with a lively program that included awards and live music from The Enon Tabernacle Fresh Anointing Choir.

*We honored:*

NAACP – Pennsylvania State Conference

Kessler Topaz Meltzer & Check LLP

William H. Ewing

“The staff and attorneys at the Law Center have devoted their working lives to taking on important issues and helping people in need. The reality is that without their dedication, creativity and hard work and the incredible results they are able to achieve, there would be no reason for any of us to be here tonight.”

— Marc Topaz,  
Kessler Topaz Meltzer  
& Check LLP

Photos from 2014 Annual Gala  
(top-bottom): NAACP members,  
Board members, Enon Tabernacle  
Fresh Anointing Choir



TOP OF MIND associations as identified  
by survey respondents



OUR CORE STRENGTHS as  
identified by survey respondents

## Thank you to our 2014 Volunteers, Interns, and Pro Bono Partners!

The Law Center's programs are uniquely designed using a multi-disciplinary partnership model that brings together individuals, community groups, law firms, elected officials, and key stakeholders to advance equality. We never do our work alone. We engage volunteers, pro bono partners and peer organizations from across the state to move our work forward.

### Pro Bono Attorneys and Partners

#### ACLU of Pennsylvania

Andy Hoover  
Sara Mullen  
Jaime Pauls  
Witold "Vic" Walczak

#### Advancement Project

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Denise Lieberman  
Marian Schneider

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*formerly with*  
*DLA Piper US LLP*

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Michael Lee

#### Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis LLP

Joyce Sun

#### Shepherd, Finkelman, Miller & Shah, LLP

Lawrence D. Berger

#### Willig, Williams and Davidson

Ryan Hancock

#### Solo Practitioners and Others

Dana Bazelon  
Benjamin Hinerfeld  
Howard Levinson

“Working with the Law Center has been an amazing experience. We were able to develop and litigate a winning strategy for parents of students with autism in Philadelphia in a federal class action. With the Law Center's expertise behind me, I had the opportunity to participate in all major phases of the case. Our clients needed and truly appreciated our help. My experience has been gratifying, both professionally and personally. I would recommend working with the Law Center to new and seasoned attorneys alike.” — *David Stanoch, Golomb & Honik LLP, formerly Dechert LLP*



2014 Summer Interns

If you're interested in pro bono or volunteer opportunities contact Jennifer Clarke at 215-627-7100 x 222.



# Thank you, 2014 Donors!

Our work would not be possible without the following financial supporters.

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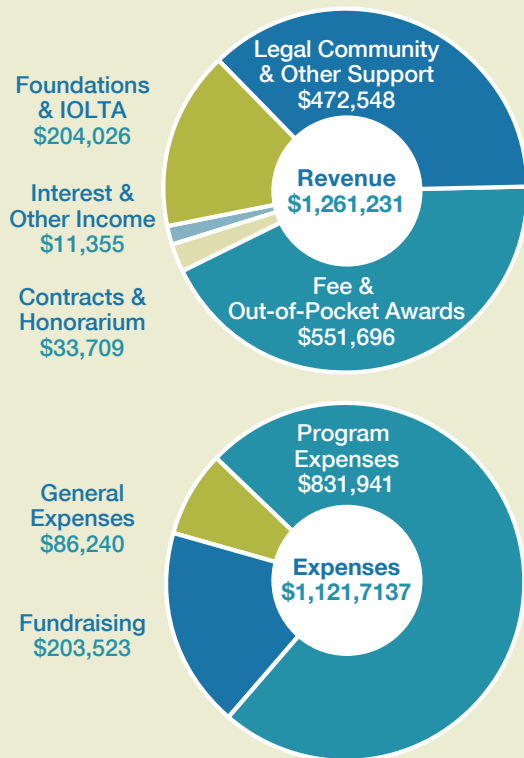
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*Continued on next page...*

# 2014 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

January 1, 2014 – December 31, 2014

## SUMMARY OF REVENUE & EXPENSES



## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

December 31, 2014

Current Assets	\$555,051
Fixed Assets (net of depreciation)	35,975
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$591,026</b>
Current Liabilities	\$86,965
Prior Year Net Assets	364,540
Current Year Change	139,518
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b>\$591,026</b>
Unrestricted Net Assets	348,533
Temporarily Restricted Net Assets	54,516
Permanently Restricted Net Assets	101,011

## Five-Year Financial Plan

In 2012, the board adopted a plan to raise \$1 million in new dollars over five years to repay debt and build a reserve. The board has since raised more than \$393,000 in new dollars and repaid a significant portion of the organization's debt.

Elias Kohn	Joseph Ronan
Isador and Myra Kranzel	Barbara Rosenberg
<i>In honor of Flora Barth Wolf</i>	Ezra Rosenberg and
Seth F. Kreimer	Betsy Doverman
Kenneth Kulak and	Bruce Rosenfield
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## Planned Giving: The Ned Wolf Society

We invite you to consider how a charitable gift annuity, charitable trust, bequest or other planned gift to the Public Interest Law Center might help you meet your retirement goals while also leaving a legacy of commitment to social justice that will be meaningful to you and your family. We applaud the inaugural member of The Ned Wolf Society, Fred Brenner, for designating a significant bequest.

*If you are interested in planned giving please contact Jennifer Clarke at 215-627-7100 x 222.*





## Save the Date! 2015 Annual Event

### In Pursuit of the Promise: Public Education for All

*Honoring clients in our school  
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**Tuesday  
September 29, 2015**

6:00 – 8:30 pm  
Fringe Arts  
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Purchase tickets and sponsorships:  
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“They are bold with great lawyers that are willing to take high stakes risks where others are afraid to go and chase work with high upside potential.” — *Survey response*

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*Staff at retreat in 2015*

## Housing Plan Coming Soon!

In 2015 we began convening a “policy circle” of advocates, academics and stakeholders to help us compile the most pressing legal issues pertaining to housing in the region, and identify what other organizations are doing and where our expertise can be most helpful. Howard M. Levinson, of counsel at Rosenn Jenkins & Greenwald LLP, is chairing the group.



## In the News

In 2014 the press mentioned the Public Interest Law Center more than 145 times, a 68% increase over 2013.

## Giving Tuesday

You helped us raise more than \$15,000 on Giving Tuesday this year. More than 1/3 of donations made that day were given by brand-new donors.

Save the date for Giving Tuesday 2015 on December 1!



## Supporting **ACCESS** to Justice for All

Three years ago bar leaders, legal services organizations and others formed the Civil Legal Justice Coalition to advocate for increased resources for civil legal aid. More than 1.9 million Pennsylvanians qualify for legal aid, but an estimated 80% of civil legal needs go unmet due to limited funding. The coalition organized public hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee and issued a report recommending increased support of civil legal aid. In May 2014 the Pennsylvania Bar Association presented Jennifer Clarke with a special achievement award for her work as one of three co-chairs of this coalition.

## Speaking Engagements & Community Education

Last year Law Center staff presented at more than 65 trainings, conferences and community events. We reached more than 3,100 people through this outreach. Notably, we testified before and briefed Philadelphia's City Council five times on issues like language access, the new land bank law, sustainability issues, and education.

*80 gardeners attend a Vacant Land 201 training.*





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