



PUBLIC INTEREST LAW  
CENTER OF PHILADELPHIA



Civil  
Rights  
**50** Years  
Later  
Still fighting  
for equality.



2013 Annual Report





## A message from the Law Center's leadership

This year, we pause to celebrate some of the most important social justice advances in American history. It has been fifty years since the passage of the first great piece of civil rights legislation, the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Fifty years ago, organizers traveled south to register voters as part of Mississippi Freedom Summer. Sixty years ago the Supreme Court decided *Brown v. Board of Education*, banning official segregation in public schools. The anniversaries of the Freedom March from Selma to Montgomery and the other great civil rights laws—housing, voting—are right around the corner.

At the same time we celebrate these historic achievements and honor the men and women whose persistence and courage brought them to fruition, we must renew the intensity of our focus on the civil rights that we have not yet achieved: a quality public education for all children, the unencumbered right to vote, and the freedom from want all of us need to live our lives. **These are the civil rights issues of our time.**

In 2013, with the support of our dedicated Board of Directors, pro bono lawyers, and volunteers, we made powerful strides toward remedying these modern injustices. We began to lay the groundwork for litigation against Pennsylvania's elected officials to address their unconstitutional failure to provide a quality public education for all students. We continued our successful legal battle against Pennsylvania's voter identification law that threatened to disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of people. And we toppled barriers that kept people from accessing education, vacant land and local food, and employment.

**We cannot sit still.** As the torrent of time streams on, new and equally insidious barriers keep our fellow citizens in need and prevent them from achieving true equality. Please help us keep the spirit of the civil rights movement alive by supporting those who continue to be left behind.

Jennifer R. Clarke  
Executive Director

Eric Rothschild  
Chair, Board of Directors



## OUR MISSION

The Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia uses high-impact legal strategies to improve the well-being and life prospects of our region's most vulnerable populations by assuring that they have access to the resources and services that all of us need to lead our lives.

We focus on securing access to six such resources—all deeply intertwined—that are essential to escaping a cycle of poverty and realizing the promise of equality:

A High-Quality Public Education | Health Care | Employment  
Housing | Healthy Neighborhoods | The Right to Vote

## 2013 BY THE NUMBERS



### Education

*Securing a high-quality public education for all.*

**826:** Number of administrative complaints we helped parents from 92 schools file with the state documenting the horrifying shortage of nurses, guidance counselors and education services in Philadelphia schools. *See more on page 4.*



### Health Care

*Eliminating systemic barriers that keep low-income individuals from accessing medical care.*

**500,000:** Number of low-income, non-disabled adults who would be covered if Pennsylvania expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. *See more on page 10.*



### Employment

*Addressing the pernicious use of background checks to disqualify people from employment.*

**\$30,000:** Multi-year grant received from the Patricia Kind Family Foundation to start the Fair Employment Opportunities Project, which will support the rights of the approximately 20% of the Philadelphia population that has a criminal history. *See more on page 7.*



### Housing

*Helping people live in integrated community settings with the services they need.*

**\$70,000:** Amount we secured in damages for our client with development disabilities after he was tricked into selling his childhood home for just \$25. *See more on page 11.*



### Neighborhood Health and Justice

*Ensuring access to healthy and safe environments and an equitable voice in neighborhood planning.*

**7,700+:** Number of unique visitors to [www.groundedinphilly.org](http://www.groundedinphilly.org) in the first seven months since the June 2013 launch of the vacant land mapping and organizing tool. *See more on page 8.*



### Voting Rights

*Enhancing the integrity of elections and protecting each citizen's right to vote.*

**511,000:** Number of voters who would be disenfranchised by Pennsylvania's photo ID law according to Plaintiff's expert witness, Dr. Bernard Siskin. *See more on page 6.*





## EDUCATION

Ensuring a high-quality public education for all students is a civil rights issue of our time. Sixty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, Pennsylvania's children are segregated anew, with the quality of the curriculum and services they receive dependent upon their zip code because of the state's failure to equitably and adequately fund districts.

### School Complaints Process

At the start of the 2013-2014 school year, the Law Center was approached by parents, religious groups, and elected officials looking for a solution to a massive school funding shortage that all but eliminated counselors, nurses, and other related services from Philadelphia's schools. We jumped into action, analyzed state regulations, and developed a process by which parents and educators could file administrative complaints with the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The process channeled the frustration and energy of more than 800 parents and educators, providing them a means to organize and to document how funding shortages affect students. We expanded access to this service then by partnering with Parents United for Public Education, the Media Mobilizing Project, and City Council members to create the MyPhillySchools.com online complaints portal.

### Snapshot of Underfunding

A seven-year-old student at C.W. Henry School has asthma and uses an inhaler after he receives routine evaluations from a medical professional. Since he is only seven, he cannot yet evaluate himself and determine how often he should be using his inhaler. Because of severe funding shortages, no nurse is regularly available at his school to evaluate him and as his mother points out, "asthma attacks cannot be scheduled to occur when a nurse is on site."

*Michael Churchill speaking at a Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign press conference in Harrisburg, PA in 2013.*



*Helen Gym and Sabra Townsend of Parents United for Public Education speaking about the school complaints process at the 2014 Social Justice Gala. Photo Credit: Jonathan Yu Photography*

### Statewide Systemic Litigation

The Law Center is now moving beyond the complaints process to address the lack of equitable funding at a systemic level by partnering with the Education Law Center and a private national firm to file a law suit seeking relief for the state's failure to uphold its constitutional mandate to provide a "thorough and efficient system of public education."

### Education of Students with Disabilities

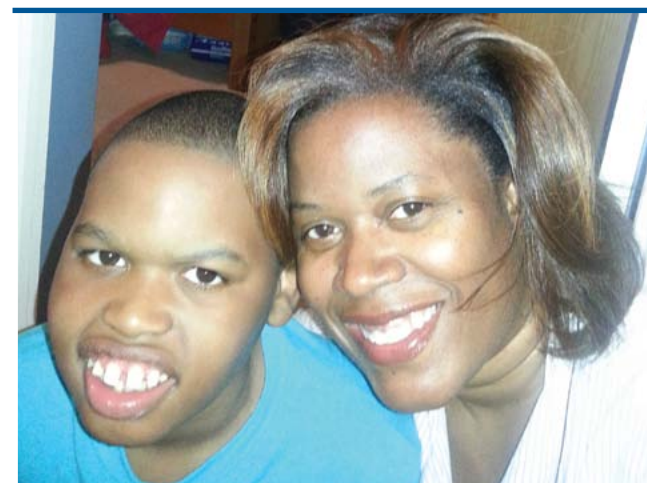
In Philadelphia, an estimated 20% of students have disabilities. 2013 was a banner year for the Law Center in securing appropriate services for a number of these students.

- ▶ Through our innovative partnership with Dechert LLP, McCarter English LLP and other law firms known as **The Philadelphia Project**, we halted the School District of Philadelphia's policy of shuffling students with autism between schools because of their disability and without parental consent or input. The families of more than **1,600 students** with autism in the district will now have an opportunity to participate in the decision and the needs of each child will be considered.
- ▶ We secured more than **39,000 hours** of compensatory education for students with special needs in the Chester Upland School District following our 2012 litigation to keep that district open when the state failed to provide enough funding.
- ▶ We trained more than **300 pro bono attorneys, parents, advocates and educators** through our Know Your Child's Rights training program.
- ▶ We represented 12 students with special needs in individual cases, including RJ:

For years RJ, a 10-year-old boy whose learning is impacted by cerebral palsy and has difficulty communicating, was segregated from his peers in a special education classroom and provided no opportunities to build his social skills. He was literally sitting in an isolated classroom, not learning anything, when he and his parents came to the Law Center seeking help. Law Center attorneys, together with pro bono counsel from Dechert LLP, represented RJ and his parents through the due process hearing and an appeal, and successfully settled the case to provide RJ an appropriate educational placement that finally gives him a chance to learn.



*Plaintiffs in the autism shuffle case.*



*RJ and his mother.*

“A big **THANK YOU** to you and your team for all of your efforts. Unbeknownst to you, your support helped put me in a mindset where I am better able to help my children beyond their educational placement and I am forever grateful for that. —RJ's mother





## VOTING RIGHTS

In 1964, civil rights activists gathered in Mississippi to register black voters and conduct education campaigns to counteract years of suppression and intimidation. Fifty years later, we work to fend off new threats to every eligible citizen's right to vote.

### Pennsylvania's Photo Identification Law

**Marian Baker** is a former Republican committeewoman in her early seventies who believes, "...if you want a say in your government, you should be voting. You should let them know what you want and how you feel about things."

She votes just three blocks from her house. But in May of 2013 she did not cast a ballot in an election for the first time in her life. A poll worker had told her the previous fall (incorrectly as it turned out) that she would not be able to vote in future elections unless she obtained one of the narrowly defined types of identification required by the new photo ID law. Ms. Baker cannot drive and has no relatives who can take off work to drive her to one of the very few Driver's License Centers in Pennsylvania where she could get an I.D. So Ms. Baker lost what she so treasured: her voice in the political process.

On behalf of voters like Ms. Baker, the Law Center continues to lead the charge against Pennsylvania's photo ID law, with partners Arnold & Porter LLP, the ACLU of Pennsylvania, and Advancement Project. During a three-week trial in 2013, we presented evidence to support our application for a permanent injunction, using analyses from all corners, including Commonwealth officials, showing that hundreds of thousands of voters would face disenfranchisement.

*Voter ID Co-Counsel Team (L-R):  
Michael Rubin, Arnold & Porter LLP  
Marian Schneider, Advancement Project  
Jennifer Clarke, Law Center  
Witold "Vic" Walczak, ACLU of Pennsylvania*



*Law Center staff attended the Day of Action for PA Voters at the state capitol to encourage legislators to modernize election regulations.*

**In early 2014, the court held the law unconstitutional, citing the state's inability to implement the law as written, and protecting the rights of voters across the state.**

“Kudos and congratulations to you. But moreover my gratitude to you for fighting for me and all the others hurt by the photo ID law. You people are keeping our democracy alive.”  
—Tia Sutter, trial witness

“Keep up the great work. We need you.”  
—Stephen G. Harvey,  
Steve Harvey Law LLC

“Thank you for a job well done on behalf of all of us, and our democracy.”  
—Irv Ackelsberg, Esq.,  
Langer, Grogan & Diver P.C.



## EMPLOYMENT

A new form of segregation threatens the region's work force. In Pennsylvania, minorities, particularly men, are frequently turned away from jobs due to employers' increasing use of criminal background checks. This trend, combined with a disproportionate rate of arrest and prosecution of minority men, leads to a nearly insurmountable barrier for large numbers of people in obtaining the employment they need to lead stable lives.



*Stephanie Settles is the Law Center's first client of the Fair Employment Opportunities Project*

### Fair Employment Opportunities Project

In 2013 the Law Center launched the Fair Employment Opportunities Project to respond to this crisis by working with local companies to implement and showcase best practices for hiring, collaborating with non-profits, and pro bono attorneys to represent prospective employees, and educating the public to increase knowledge of this issue. Our first case in this project was successfully completed in 2014.

The Fair Employment Opportunities Project is a partnership effort with the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equality.



*Thomas B. Schmidt, III was honored at the Gala.*

### 2013 Social Justice Gala

Each year the Law Center presents the Thaddeus Sevens Award to individuals or organizations whose actions best illustrate the Law Center's mission. This year we honored Thomas B. Schmidt, III of Pepper Hamilton LLP for his work to reverse unlawful and excessive truancy fines for parents in Lebanon, PA. We also honored lawyers at DLA Piper US LLP for their committed and creative representation of students in the Lower Merion School District who alleged they were misidentified and misplaced in special education because of their race.

*Board Chair Eric Rothschild celebrates at the 2013 Gala.*



*Board member Monique Myatt-Galloway leads the live auction at the 2013 Gala.*







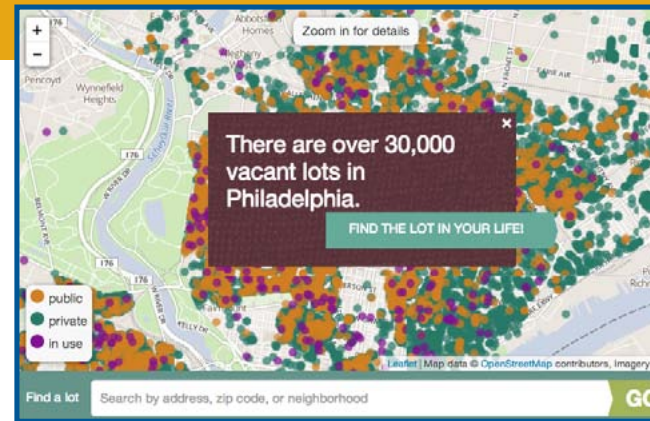
## NEIGHBORHOOD HEALTH AND JUSTICE

For decades, residents have been stewarding vacant land across the city of Philadelphia by planting gardens and building neighborhood projects that turn unsightly, trash-strewn lots into community spaces. Through the **Garden Justice Legal Initiative**, the Law Center dynamically facilitates city-wide advocacy efforts, builds new tools for residents, and provides legal representation to current and emerging community projects.

### Democratizing Data through Grounded in Philly

If you walk by a vacant parcel in your neighborhood and want to know more about it, you may have to navigate the bureaucratic mazes of several different city agencies before you fully understand ownership and lien information, as well as any of the valuable data that might allow you to consider putting that land to good use. Now, through [www.groundedinphilly.org](http://www.groundedinphilly.org), a collaboration between the Law Center and New York City's 596 Acres, you can access data on the more than 40,000 parcels of vacant land in Philadelphia, find suggested pathways for securing long-term access to that land, and connect with your neighbors to build a community project and revitalize the health of your block.

 [Twitter @Grounded215](https://twitter.com/Grounded215)



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

### Building a City-wide Constituency through Healthy Foods Green Spaces

In 2013 we formally launched the Healthy Foods Green Spaces coalition: a network of gardeners, market farmers, nonprofit organizations, community leaders, and allies that builds a collective, constituent-led voice to advocate for policies that foster community-based agriculture and encourage the growth of land-based projects.

 [Like on Facebook: Healthy Foods Green Spaces](#)

*Neighbors from across the city gather at the June launch event for the Healthy Foods Green Spaces coalition*



*Law Center attorney Amy Laura Cahn testifies before City Council to urge passage of the land bank law. Photo Credit: Garret O'Dwyer PACDC*

### Advocating for Enhanced City Policies: Philadelphia's New Land Bank Law

Law Center attorney Amy Laura Cahn, as a member of diverse city-wide coalitions, played a major role in securing passage of Philadelphia's monumental land bank law in December of 2013. Philadelphia is now the largest city in the United States to turn to a land bank model to streamline the process for holding and distributing vacant land. The law mandates public involvement in strategic planning and policy making and provides a rare opportunity to shift major city policies to favor urban agriculture and neighborhood-based development.



### Supporting Gardens through Direct Representation

In 2012 we learned the Pulaski Zeralda Garden in northwest Philadelphia was actively being offered for sale by the city. The gardeners who had been stewarding the land for years had no idea until we alerted them. In 2013 the Law Center connected the gardeners to the Neighborhood Gardens Trust, which has agreed to preserve the garden for years to come.

“Our garden is more than 25 years old and the only spot of green on our block of row houses. When we learned that it was up for possible sale, we were anxious and did not know what to do. Amy Laura Cahn and the Garden Justice Legal Initiative helped us unravel the maze of city threads and talked us through options which will lead toward keeping this valuable neighborhood resource vital and strong for decades to come. All of us who live in older, industrialized sections of the city know that gardens, living plants, and fresh, organic produce shared with our neighborhood pantries are invaluable neighborhood assets. Thank you for doing the work to keep such miracles alive.”  
—Dee Dee Risher and the gardeners of the Pulaski-Zeralda garden

*Pulaski-Zeralda Garden (top image)*

*Neighborhood Centers' Teens 4 Good Farm*

*Photo credits, Atiya Walker-Dykes & Dee Dee Risher*





The Affordable Care Act was designed to require states to provide health care to all adults with incomes of 138% or less of the federal poverty level through the federal Medicaid program. Unfortunately, the United States Supreme Court left it to each state to decide whether to cover these adults. In Pennsylvania, more than 500,000 non-disabled, low-income adults would have access to health insurance if the state decided to expand Medicaid, but the state has thus far not done so. Through advocacy and policy support we are working to ensure these adults have access to much-needed health care.

## Expansion of PA Medicaid

In the fall of 2013 Governor Corbett released his “Healthy PA” proposal which would fail to fully expand Medicaid, create barriers to enrollment, and deeply limit services for people currently on Medicaid. We sent a letter to the Department of Public Welfare denouncing the proposal, have joined the Cover the Commonwealth advocacy campaign, provided testimony at a public hearing and are carrying this battle through 2014 by organizing public comments and building partnerships to advocate for full Medicaid expansion.

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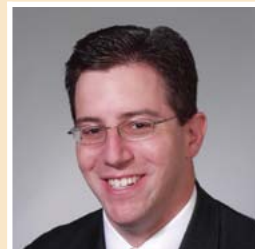
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## Building Capacity

We expanded our network by electing eight new directors to our governing board in 2013.



The Law Center's legacy protecting the civil rights of individuals with disabilities lives on today.

## Protecting Community Residences

We were approached by a gentleman seeking help for his friend, MW, an individual with developmental disabilities. MW was living in his childhood home after his parents died. A stranger approached MW and asked if he would be interested in selling the house, claiming to have been friends with MW's parents and promising to “take care of” MW after the sale. When MW agreed to sell and signed over the papers, the man gave MW just \$25, renovated the home and sold it for \$160,000, none of which went to MW.

In April we took this case to court and proved the neighbor had been unjustly enriched. The court ordered the defendant to pay \$70,000 to MW.

## 2013 YEAR IN REVIEW

### Awards

- ▶ The NAACP State Conference presented the Law Center with the Award of Excellence in recognition of our work representing the NAACP in cases involving voting rights, excessive truancy fees and the threatened closure of an entire school system for lack of funding.
- ▶ Amy Laura Cahn, director of the Garden Justice Legal Initiative, was appointed to the Mayor's Food Policy Advisory Council. Amy Laura was also selected as a fellow for the 2013 Human Rights Institute in New York City.

### Speaking Engagements

In 2013 Law Center staff took part in more than 35 speaking engagements, community events and trainings that reached more than 2,500 people.

### Press Roundup

The Law Center was acknowledged or featured in the press more than 90 times!

## Symposium

This year's Symposium on Equality brought together 120 thought-leaders and community activists to discuss “Privatization – Looking Out for the Public Good” in health care, land use and education.



*Top:  
Attendees  
enjoyed panels  
and discussions.  
Center:  
Land Use & Economic  
Development panel.  
Bottom:  
Healthcare panel  
Photo credits:  
Atiya Walker-Dykes*

“I really enjoyed the entire program, and it raised a lot of things for me to consider. You all did a wonderful job with the symposium. Thank you for all the work it took to put it together.”  
– Marla K. Conley, Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis LLP



Thank you to our 2013 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. Annually we engage volunteers, pro bono partners and peer organizations, from across the state to move our work forward.

In 2013, more than 80 volunteers dedicated in excess of 4,800 hours of service to the Law Center’s mission. — **Thank you!**

Pro Bono Attorneys and Partners

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Witold “Vic” Walczak

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If you’re interested in pro bono or volunteer opportunities at the Law Center, please visit [www.pilcop.org/opportunities](http://www.pilcop.org/opportunities).



Why I support the Law Center: Pro Bono Spotlight

“It was a pleasure standing with the Law Center to defend the most fundamental and foundational of rights: the right to vote. Together, we formed a seamless trial team with our co-counsel at other organizations to develop an overwhelming factual and legal record establishing that the Pennsylvania Photo ID Law is unconstitutional. Our clients and truly all Pennsylvania citizens are better off because of the work of the Law Center. Personally and professionally, my work with the Law Center team has been a career highlight. I encourage both veteran and up-and-coming attorneys to partner with the Law Center in the defense of the rights of our citizenry.

—Michael Rubin, Arnold & Porter LLP

Thank you, 2013 Donors!

All this work would not be possible without the following financial supporters.

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SUMMARY OF  
REVENUE & EXPENSES\*

January 1, 2013 – December 31, 2013

Revenue

Foundations & IOLTA	\$143,447
Legal Community & Other Support	486,019
Fee & Out of Pocket Awards	415,687
Contracts & Honorarium	33,709
Interest & Other Income	53,570
Total Revenue	\$1,132,432

Expenses

Program Expenses	\$742,223
Fundraising Expenses	125,902
General Expenses	72,462
Total Expenses	940,587

Total	\$191,845
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STATEMENT OF  
FINANCIAL POSITION

December 31, 2013

Current Assets	\$567,376
Fixed Assets (net of depreciation)	56,509

Total Assets	\$623,885
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Current Liabilities	\$196,451
Prior Year Net Assets	235,589
Current Year Change	191,845

Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$623,885
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Unrestricted Net Assets	178,894
Temporarily Restricted Net Assets	147,527
Permanently Restricted Net Assets	101,011

Unaudited. Audited financial reports will be available on our website after June 30, 2014. Not included are recognized contributions in professional services.

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