

 THE
PUBLIC
INTEREST
LAW CENTER



STANDING UP FOR CHANGE

Welcome to the 2019 annual report for the Public Interest Law Center! Yes, **2019**. It isn't a typo. As with everything else in our lives, everything in our new at-home "office" turned upside down during the *annus horribilis* that was 2020.

So in this report, you won't be reading about the incredible and successful efforts of our team to vindicate the voices of voters in the courts. You won't read about how our organizer and lawyers confronted the terrifying prospect of illegal evictions during a global pandemic with advocacy, organizing and lawsuits on behalf of people who were literally locked out of their houses. You won't read about how we helped thousands of small business owners with criminal records--who were initially locked out of job-saving Paycheck Protection Program loans--by successfully suing the Small Business Administration, forcing it to change its blanket ban on people with criminal histories.

You won't read about new litigation to reduce firearm violence, our work representing parents in Chester who faced the prospect that every school in the district could be turned into a charter through a secretive process, or relentless advocacy to make sure that children with disabilities continue to receive a free and appropriate education. And you won't yet read about the final days of our \$2 million capital campaign, *In Pursuit of Justice: A Campaign for the Public Interest Law Center*, a campaign that is now nearly complete with less than \$200,000 yet to raise.

That will be the next report--coming soon.

Instead, here, we take you back to the comparably simpler days before the pandemic surfaced. We wistfully recall the 400 people gathered at the Cherry Street Pier in October 2019 to celebrate 50 years of impact, and the simple pleasures of being together in the office.



Staff in October 2019, when we moved from the United Way Building to our new space at Two Penn Center.

But as this chronicle of 2019 reminds us, the injustices of now are not new. The gross inequality among school districts, in which some students have all the modern advantages and others learn in crumbling buildings, is a longstanding reality for Pennsylvania's schoolchildren. Firearm violence already was raging through our community before the surge in 2020, disparately killing and maiming young Black men. Brown and Black renters have faced the worst of Philadelphia's eviction crisis for many years, while too many unscrupulous landlords in our city fail to provide basic needs, like working heat and water.

That is the point of what we do-- we the entire community of the Public Interest Law Center, past and present. We are here for the long term, because the evils that we see now are deeply entrenched, having lurked among us for years, if not centuries.

Thanks to all of you, we will be here fighting, not just during this *annus horribilis*, but even during what will hope will be many *anni mirabiles* to come. If we've learned anything from these months, it is that our human condition of mutual dependence compels us to seek justice. As Martin Luther King Jr. wrote from a Birmingham jail, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

May you remain safe and healthy until we can see you again.

Sincerely,

Jennifer R. Clarke



2019

BY THE NUMBERS

5 decades of work celebrated as we marked our 50th anniversary

51 volunteers and interns

702 individual donors

6,109 people attended our community education programs

35 cases serving 321,726 people

105 pro bono attorneys

5,500 miles traveled across Pennsylvania to take depositions, gather evidence in discovery, and give public presentations for our case challenging our state's broken school funding system

75 Wynnefield and Overbrook residents who will receive workforce development education and training from PECO every year as part of a Community Benefit Agreement we helped residents negotiate

8,162 completed absentee ballots rejected in 2018 because they were received after Pennsylvania's old absentee ballot deadline, which was the earliest in the country. We represented voters in a case to change that deadline, and in October 2019, Pennsylvania extended the deadline to 8 p.m. on Election Day

1 new organization launched. Renters United / Inquilinx en la Lucha Philadelphia organizes and educates renters to fight for their rights to quality housing in the streets, in the courts, and in City Hall.

The Public Interest Law Center uses high-impact legal strategies to advance the civil, social, and economic rights of communities in the Philadelphia region facing discrimination, inequality, and poverty. We use litigation, community education, advocacy, and organizing to secure access to fundamental resources and services.

Homes Without Discrimination and Exploitation

Corinne Morris and her partner, Charles Hagood, are two young parents who began renting a rowhouse in East Germantown in June 2017. Like all families, they wanted a safe, healthy place in which to raise their children. But those hopes were dashed by unsafe housing.

Soon after moving in, they discovered a broken water pipe in the basement, which prevented water from reaching the rest of the apartment. Ms. Morris was four months pregnant and could only cook, flush the toilet, and bathe her child by carrying water buckets up from the basement. The Department of Licenses & Inspections (L&I) found ten code violations after surveying the property, and in September 2017, four months after Ms. Morris moved in, the Water Department shut off the water for good, forcing the couple to vacate the property.

To spur their landlord to make needed, basic repairs, the couple began withholding \$950 per month in rent, in addition to water bills and other expenses stemming from unrepaired code violations. In response, their landlord, Brooklyn-based company Home 4 Rent, served them with an eviction notice and demanded \$3,951 for the rent and fees that they withheld. The Law Center represented Ms. Morris and Mr. Hagood in an affirmative case to hold their landlord accountable to Philadelphia laws and the rights of low-income tenants. The suit, filed in March 2018, settled in April 2019. Ms. Morris and her partner now live in a new, safe home.

Ms. Morris also served as a named plaintiff in our class action Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (FDCPA) lawsuit. This suit was targeted at a landlords' collection lawyer and his law firm, who used misleading debt collection practices while attempting to evict and collect rent from numerous tenants in uninhabitable living situations.

Philadelphia law mandates that landlords can only collect rent from a tenant or request their eviction after presenting a Certificate of Rental Suitability affirming that the house is safe. This requirement was often ignored in practice—especially when tenants were unrepresented in court—leaving landlords unaccountable for failing to maintain safe housing. Our class action case settled in 2019. Our advocacy, including this case, helped lead to changes in eviction court procedures that require landlords to prove that they had a certificate of rental suitability and other required steps to ensure basic housing safety, drastically cutting down on unlawful and misleading eviction filings.

"Through the Public Interest Law Center, I learned not only my rights as a tenant but also that the issues I was facing were more common in my community than I ever thought," said Ms. Morris at our 2019 annual event.

Corinne Morris



Former Law Center client and current board member Curtis Shiver testifies in support of a Right to Counsel



Staff attorney Mary Beth Schluckebier, tenant organizer Ariel Morales, and staff attorney George Donnelly following a City Council hearing supporting a Right to Counsel for low-income tenants in Philadelphia.



Renters United Philadelphia: Building Tenant Power

Renters United / Inquilinx en la Lucha Philadelphia (RUP) is an organization that the Law Center launched in 2019 to organize and educate renters to fight for their rights to quality housing in the streets, the courts, and City Hall. Two Law Center staff members, Ariel Morales and Mary Beth Schluckebier, serve as a tenant organizer and a community lawyer, respectively. RUP is a citywide organization comprising organized renters who share a building, a landlord, or a neighborhood.

RUP is currently organizing tenants who share a large corporate landlord that owns 34 buildings across the City. These renters have faced habitability problems including pest infestations, security problems, structural issues, and arbitrary rent increases and fees. They have held multiple marches and rallies, organized call-in drives, sent letters, and

lobbied local government officials to force the landlord to the bargaining table. Across all these activities, RUP seeks to build tenants' capacity to identify collective housing quality problems, develop effective strategies to solve them, and assert and expand their legal rights. To this end, RUP hosts monthly Renters' Rights Clinics and Know Your Rights workshops, invests in leadership development, and meets regularly with the Organizing Committee members to develop and advance the organization. This work is made possible by support from the Oak Foundation, the Samuel S. Fels Foundation and the Pennsylvania IOLTA Board.



Students and Parents Standing for Equal Education



Ian Linn is a former client and currently advocates to provide adequate educational services to students with disabilities. On June 3rd 2019, Ian graduated from Masterman High School in Philadelphia, and he now attends Oberlin College. Last May, he shadowed staff attorney Darlene Hemerka as part of his senior project, during which he helped with policy research and other tasks.

"I chose the Public Interest Law Center because I was interested in advocacy, specifically for people like myself with disabilities," Ian said. "I thought that the Law Center would be a great example of what advocacy can do."

Ian has Moebius Syndrome, a disorder that causes facial paralysis. When Ian was in preschool and kindergarten, former Law Center attorneys Thomas Gilhool and Barbara Ransom represented Ian and his parents in getting early intervention services, such as speech therapy and occupational therapy.

In 2018, Ian served on the School District of Philadelphia student advisory board. Even though about 14.5 percent of students in the district have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), "disability was not being talked about a lot," Ian said. In the presentation for his senior project, Ian discussed how the District manages services for students with disabilities, and what they could be doing better.

Our longstanding work fighting for students with disabilities continues, guided and spurred by a community of advocates like Ian. Federal and state law requires schools to provide transition services to help students with disabilities prepare for work, higher education, and independent living starting at age 14. Unfortunately, many parents, educators and students do not know about this right and do not receive these services. We are working to change that, holding educational trainings that reached more than 378 people last year.

We also analyzed data from Pennsylvania's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), the state agency charged with helping people with disabilities prepare for, obtain and maintain employment. Our analysis found that too few Pennsylvania students with disabilities are getting the help they need preparing for the workforce, and we've worked with advocates to push OVR to provide more complete data and connect with more families.

A Victory for Racial Equity in Upper Dublin

Our clients are persistent and dedicated to achieving justice. Five years ago, African-American parents in Upper Dublin School District were frustrated after years of attempting to get the District to change its disciplinary and academic practices. At the time, nearly 45% of out-of-school suspensions in the District were issued to Black students, who made up only 7.3% of the student body. In addition, the District operated at least three academic tracks, and Black students were disproportionately placed in the lowest academic track. This made it more difficult for those students to access college preparatory classes, even if they performed well. In November 2015, we filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) on behalf of a group of parents in the District who organized as Concerned African American Parents (CAAP). The complaint documented these disparities and OCR agreed to investigate.

In October 2019, after an intensive mediation process, CAAP settled with the District. As part of the settlement, the District—which had begun phasing out routine use of out-of-school suspensions—agreed to train all staff on equitable disciplinary practices. The settlement also reformed the academic tracking system to make honors and AP classes more available to all interested students and to reduce the number of academic tracks for most courses. "This is a great achievement for justice and equality for students of color in the district," said Tina Lawson, President of CAAP, of the settlement.





The Case for Fair School Funding

The Pennsylvania Constitution requires the legislature to provide for a “thorough and efficient system of public education.” Instead, we have a system that leaves students behind based on where they live. Across Pennsylvania, schools face a funding shortfall estimated to be at least \$4.6 billion, and 277 districts—urban, suburban, and rural—need more than \$2,000 in additional funding per student to reach the funding level they need to give students a shot to achieve state standards.

NOVEMBER 2014

We file our case in Commonwealth Court, representing the William Penn, Wilkes-Barre, Shenandoah Valley, Panther Valley, Lancaster, and Johnstown School Districts, along with families, the NAACP of Pennsylvania, and the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools, challenging decades of underfunding that had left students in low-wealth districts without the resources they need to succeed.



Attorneys, clients and supporters at a Harrisburg press conference announcing the launch of the case in 2014

MAY 2016

The Pennsylvania Legislature establishes a formula for distributing state school funding which would increase funds to schools with more students in poverty and less local wealth. But the formula only applies to yearly funding increases, which constitutes a small percentage of total state funds allocated to education. In the 2018-19 school year, only 8.84 percent of state school funding was distributed through the formula.

Students protest at our 2015 rally preceding oral argument in the case.



APRIL 2015

The Commonwealth Court initially dismisses the case, holding that courts cannot get involved in school funding cases. We appeal to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.



Supporters line up to attend oral argument at City Hall in 2015

SEPTEMBER 2017

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court rules in our favor and returns the case to Commonwealth Court for further proceedings.

AUGUST 2018

Commonwealth Court denies Senator Scarnati's mootness motion.

Attorneys, clients and supporters following a 2018 oral argument



JULY 2018

Senator Scarnati again seeks to dismiss the case, claiming that the new funding formula renders the case moot. We respond by demonstrating that, since the case was filed, classroom spending has decreased and inequality between school districts has increased.

Our response included affidavits prepared by superintendents of the districts involved in the case, describing painful cuts. “We know a number of programs that are proven to work for our children,” wrote Greater Johnstown Superintendent Amy Arcurio. “But we don’t provide them, for one reason only: a lack of funding.”

DECEMBER 2018--JULY 2020

We complete discovery in the case, producing more than 100,000 pages of documents, taking or defending more than 70 depositions, arguing motions before the Court, and submitting 10 expert reports.

SPRING/ SUMMER 2021, ESTIMATED

Pennsylvania students will finally have their day in court.



Fourth graders at William Penn School District, one of the plaintiffs in the case

AUGUST 2020

Our expert reports begin to make waves. For example, since 2008, Pennsylvania state law has included a formula for calculating the resources that schools need so that their students have a shot at reaching state academic standards. The law says that the state should calculate how much school districts need to reach this target each year—but they have not done so.

We ran the numbers. In an expert report from Penn State Professor Matthew Kelly, we found that, according to this formula, 86% of Pennsylvania students attend schools that don’t receive adequate resources for education, and schools are underfunded by \$4.6 billion

The students who need the most get the least. Low-wealth Pennsylvania school districts have \$4,800 less to spend per pupil on students than wealthy school districts—and this gap, one of the widest in the country, is growing. This wide gap reflects the deep legacy of segregation in Pennsylvania, which has some of the starkest resource disparities across school district borders in the country. More than 50 percent of Black students and 40 percent of Hispanic students attend districts in the bottom 20 percent of local wealth.

Pennsylvania is more reliant on local wealth to fund schools than all but six other states, with only 38 percent of funding coming from the state level. This leaves districts reliant on local taxes to fend for themselves. Property taxpayers in lower-wealth districts are trying: they actually pay higher tax rates than those in wealthy districts. But it’s not enough, and every year, districts struggle to meet the needs of their students, who are more likely to live in poverty, or speak English as a second language.

This means that students, because of where they are born, go without the basics: small class sizes, reading specialists and other remedial help, up-to-date materials, counselors, librarians, art, music, and much more.

Along with the Education Law Center and O’Melveny & Myers LLP, we filed a lawsuit in 2014 to change this system, suing legislative leaders, state education officials, and the Governor. We are asking for a court order that will force the legislature to comply with the state constitution, pay its fair share for public schools, and ensure all students receive the resources they need for an education that prepares them for life after graduation. Trial is coming in 2021. See how we got here with this timeline of the case.



Jobs Without Discrimination and Bias

In 2018, Kara Gannon, a 56-year-old mother from Malvern, was looking for a new job. She is an experienced social service professional with a strong work history and a B.A. in Psychology. Like one-in-three adults in America, Ms. Gannon also has a criminal history: two misdemeanors that occurred 9 and 11 years ago. Job applicants with records face widespread discrimination: one 2002 survey found that more than 60 percent of employers probably would not hire an applicant with any criminal background.

Ms. Gannon applied for two caseworker positions with different Montgomery County departments and was turned away both times, after the County learned of her record. At one department, she received a job offer and start date—but was then told that the position was “not required at this time.” Rather than just accept this, Ms. Gannon decided to fight back.

We represented Ms. Gannon in a 2019 lawsuit alleging that Montgomery County violated state law protecting applicants from bias—the Criminal History Records Information Act (CHRIA). CHRIA prohibits employers from considering criminal convictions in hiring decisions unless they relate to the applicants’ ability to perform the job. Under CHRIA, employers are also required to provide written notice to job applicants when they do decide to deny employment on the basis of their record.

Her case settled in November. As part of her settlement, Montgomery County, which employs nearly 2,400 people, adopted a new hiring policy, affirming that they will follow CHRIA and only consider criminal history when it is relevant to the position. By standing up for her legal rights, Ms. Gannon paved the way for a fairer process for other applicants and helped create an example for other large employers to follow.

“I hope that all employers will treat potential candidates with criminal records with fairness, respect and kindness, like they would any other applicant,” Ms. Gannon said. “They should refrain from harsh judgement and bias and see the qualified person in front of them, not just a mistake they have already paid for.”

Our client
Kara Gannon



WEST OAK LANE

is one of three neighborhoods served by the Community Redevelopment Legal Assistance project, which is organized by Regional Housing Legal Services.

SERVING NORTHWEST PHILADELPHIA AFTER THE FORECLOSURE CRISIS

Between 2008 and 2014, nearly 10 percent of owner-occupied homes in Philadelphia went into foreclosure. In the wake of this housing crisis, Bank of America settled a fraud claim brought by the U.S. Department of Justice, agreeing to a large monetary payment to be used to repair the damage to communities caused by the crisis. Some of the settlement funds now support the Community Redevelopment Legal Assistance program, which brings together legal organizations—the Law Center, Community Legal Services, and Philadelphia Legal Assistance—to provide free legal services which help residents of East Oak Lane, West Oak Lane, and Germantown stay in their homes. As part of this project, we help increase access to living wage employment by providing Know Your Rights training to job seekers with criminal records and reaching out to employers in Northwest Philadelphia, raising awareness of legal protections for job seekers that are too-often unknown or ignored.

Staff Attorney
Claudia De Palma
speaks at an event on
Pennsylvania's new
Clean Slate law



Philadelphia Can't Afford the Price of Hiring Bias.

Philadelphia Inquirer, March 25, 2019

Staff Attorney Claudia De Palma

“This bias is reflected in the staggering 27 percent national unemployment rate among returning citizens, a rate, as one recent study remarked, that is “substantially higher than even the worst years of the Great Depression.” The economic impact of this unemployment is especially stark for black and Latino workers. African Americans are 5.9 times more likely to be incarcerated than whites, and Hispanics are 3.1 times more likely.

In Philadelphia, the barriers faced by job-seekers with a criminal history are also barriers for communities, especially black and Latino ones, as they strive to move from poverty to shared prosperity. We owe it to our city’s future to give all Philadelphians a fair chance.”

Caption: On March 25, 2019, Staff Attorney Claudia De Palma published an op-ed in the Philadelphia Inquirer, “Philadelphia Can't Afford the Price of Hiring Bias.”



Philadelphians Standing Up for Healthier Communities

On January 14th, 2020, after filing an action to quiet title with our help, Iris Santa finally received legal title to the garden she has cared for and paid taxes on for over 23 years. Before that, the lot was legally owned by its previous occupants, who had abandoned the property in 1990.

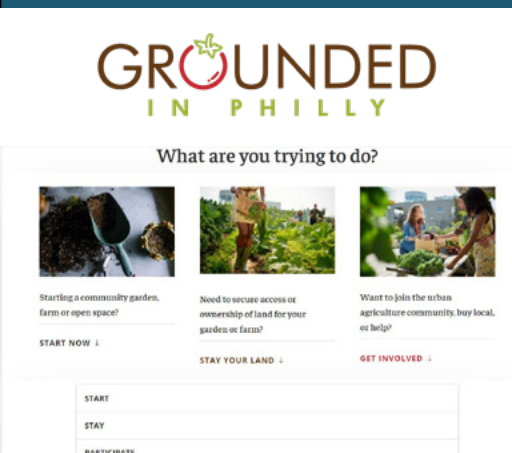
To help Ms. Santa, we used the legal concept of “adverse possession:” under Pennsylvania law, a person can gain legal title to private property if they can demonstrate continuous possession for more than 21 years and the previous owner has not tried to control the property during that time. In Ms. Santa’s case, the previous owners had not returned to the property in the thirty years since they abandoned it, and did not respond to Santa’s suit. That led the court to enter a default judgement and award Ms. Santa the deed to the lot. We are now working with Ms. Santa to gain legal ownership of other parcels in her garden, which are owned by the City of Philadelphia.

Philadelphia contains more than 40,000 vacant lots, hundreds of which are stewarded by individuals like Ms. Santa. In many cases, the people with the deeds to the lots have long since stopped paying taxes and are essentially unknown to the

community. After moving into her current residence in 1996, Ms. Santa noted the abundance of debris that the previous occupants left in the vacant lot behind her house. With some of her neighbors, Ms. Santa cleaned up and improved the lot for years, including growing a fruit and vegetable garden.

Community gardens like Ms. Santa’s are an invaluable resource for low-income communities, serving as everything from safe gathering spaces to sources of nourishment for those who are food-insecure. Ultimately, Ms. Santa saw a glaring gap in her community and began to fill it with a beneficial green space – after first cleaning up the trash, of course. “This has been my home since I was very young, and I don’t plan on going anywhere,” Ms Santa said. “I give back everything I can give – and that includes sharing this beautiful space with everyone.”

Iris Santa



Attendees at the launch party for the new Grounded in Philly site in April 2019

A Community Benefit Agreement for Wynnefield

Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) are contracts between community-based organizations and developers that establish developers’ commitment to providing a range of benefits with their proposed projects. Meaningful CBAs—with substantive goals, transparent negotiation, and measures of accountability—can be valuable tools for addressing pressing issues like environmental impacts in historically disinvested communities of color.

In April 2018, we began representing the Wynnefield Residents Association (WRA) in negotiations with PECO in connection with the utility’s plan to construct a new electric substation in the neighborhood. We worked with WRA and PECO to negotiate a CBA and, on November 19,

2019, WRA ratified an agreement that provides annual grants for community organizations, job-training programs for residents, continued landscaping and maintenance of the area surrounding the substation, and a commitment to update residents on developments at the substation. This work is supported by the Lea and Claude Knight Community Organizing Initiative, which advances our commitment to using organizing to address discrimination and other systemic barriers.

The Lea & Claude Knight Community Organizing Initiative

The Lea & Claude Knight Community Organizing Initiative advances our commitment to build the power of communities to take collective action.



Workers at an electrical substation. The CBA we helped negotiate included a jobs program for neighborhood residents.

Of the People, by the People, for the People

Until recently, Pennsylvania made it harder to vote by absentee ballot than almost any other state. With stringent deadlines to obtain and send back absentee ballots, many who were unable to reach their polling place on Election Day could not fully participate in our democracy. Those who sent their absentee ballot applications on time often received their ballots with little time to complete and return them to election officials before the deadline.

Until recently, Pennsylvania made it harder to vote by absentee ballot than almost any other state. With stringent deadlines to obtain and send back absentee ballots, people who could not go to their polling place on Election Day could not fully participate in our democracy. Even voters who mailed in an application for an absentee ballot on time often received the ballot too late to complete and return it before the deadline, the Friday before Election Day. In the 2018 General Election, over 4,500 absentee ballots were not counted in Southeastern Pennsylvania because they arrived at election offices after the Friday deadline.

Edward Ream, an emergency medical technician in Perry County, works 24-hour shifts. When he received his schedule, he learned that one of his shifts would fall on Election Day, November 6, preventing him from voting at his polling place. After timely mailing in an application for an absentee ballot, Mr. Ream received it only two days before the deadline for him to fill it out and mail it back to the Perry County Board of Elections. He was not able to do that, and so he was unable to cast his vote.

Edward Ream was not alone: many other Pennsylvanians faced his predicament. So Mr. Ream and eight others filed suit in November 2018, to challenge the deadline. We were joined as co-counsel with the ACLU of Pennsylvania, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law, and pro bono counsel from Simpson, Thatcher & Barlett LLP.

After we filed the case, in 2019, the Pennsylvania General Assembly passed, and Governor Tom Wolf signed, a 21st-Century voting reform plan addressing many of the issues faced by Mr. Ream and other voters. The reform plan modernizes many aspects of absentee voting, including by extending the unreasonably early deadline that led so many voters to be disenfranchised. The new law also allowed Pennsylvania voters to vote by mail, whether or not they had one of a small number of reasons for not appearing at the polls. With the safety of in-person voting affected by COVID-19, having a more robust mail-in voting system was more important than ever.

The
Jeffrey Golan &
Frances Vilella-Vélez
Voting Rights Project

This work is part of the Jeffrey
Golan & Frances Vilella-Vélez
Voting Justice Project.



Mayor Kenney
introducing Take
Action Philly's
panel on the 2020
U.S. Census.



Take Action Philly's U.S. Census panel

TAKING ON PRISON GERRYMANDERING

Prison gerrymandering--counting inmates in their cells as opposed to their hometowns when voting districts are drawn--shifts political power from inmates' home cities to predominantly white, rural areas where prisons are located. This distorts state legislative districts and effectively reduces the political power of minority communities. For years, we have advocated for a change in this process.

In Pennsylvania, prison gerrymandering results in an unwarranted population boost for some rural districts. For example, more than 8% of "residents" living in Pennsylvania's 123rd House District are disenfranchised inmates in state or federal prison, the majority of whom are people of color from outside the district. Over 90% of the voters in the same district are white, a very large disparity.

Pennsylvania will redraw its district lines in 2021. We have been advocating for Pennsylvania officials to take specific steps so that, when the Legislative Reapportionment Committee meets in 2021 to redraw Pennsylvania's legislative districts, the Commission will have the data that it needs to count inmates in their hometowns, keeping political representation where it belongs. And once the Commission is appointed and begins its work in Spring 2021, we will be watching to ensure that this principle is upheld. If necessary, we will be prepared to file litigation.

Supporting an Accurate Count in the 2020 US Census

The United States Census is crucial to ensuring that every community receives the resources it needs, and it plays a major role in the process of redistricting, which occurs every ten years based on the population count from the Census. The 2020 Census presented several unique challenges. A failed push by the Trump Administration to include a citizenship question had sown distrust in many communities, and the 2020 Census was the first to include an online form--a change which proved invaluable, though potentially insufficient, when COVID-19 hit.

In 2019, Take Action Philly came together to help ensure the success of the 2020 Census by hosting a convening engaging the Philadelphia legal community and connecting them with ways they could assist, in partnership with the City of Philadelphia's Philly Counts initiative. More than 40 people attended, and many signed on to advise community groups on the laws governing the census, monitor social media for misinformation, and other tasks. We helped found the Take Action Philly coalition in 2017 along with lawyers from the City of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Bar Association, ACLU-PA, HIAS, Community Legal Services, and the Mazonni Center as a space for lawyers to gather and develop avenues to fight new threats from a new federal administration.

#TakeActionPhilly



Using the Law to Advance Public Health

In 2009, Philadelphian Kim Burrell's 18-year-old son, Darryl Pray, was shot and killed by a man armed with an illegally obtained gun following an argument. In retaliation, another man was shot and killed that same day with another illegally obtained gun.

Since then, Ms. Burrell has worked to stop gun violence and stem the flow of illegal handguns onto Philadelphia streets. In January 2019, she testified in favor of a City ordinance, on the books since 2008 but unenforced, requiring gun owners to report when guns are lost or stolen.

"Imagine how many other mothers came after me," Ms. Burrell said. "[This law] might not have saved my son's life. But the issue is that these illegal guns kill. It's heartbreaking to know that this ordinance was in place for so long and not enforced."

Lost and stolen gun ordinances have been shown to reduce gun violence in other municipalities because they deter straw purchases--when an individual legally buys guns in order to resell them to individuals who are not legally allowed to own them. Often, when a gun used in a crime is traced back to the initial purchaser, that individual claims the gun was lost or stolen. An ordinance that requires reporting lost and stolen firearms takes that convenient excuse away from straw purchasers and makes it more likely that they will face consequences when guns they sell are used in a crime.

The City of Philadelphia delayed in enforcing its lost and stolen ordinance because of a state law which prohibits municipalities, like Philadelphia, from adopting certain gun

regulations. But in 2019, the City determined that the lost and stolen ordinance was not covered by the state law and began to enforce it. In response, the first defendant asked the court block the City from enforcing the ordinance against him or anyone else.

We wanted to make sure the court saw and heard the human tragedy as it considered this legal question. So, in January 2020, we filed a successful petition to intervene on behalf of Ms. Burrell; Freda Hall, a Lancaster mother who lost her son in a shooting committed using a gun from Philadelphia; CeaseFirePA; the Philadelphia Anti-Drug/Anti-Violence Network; and Mothers in Charge. We are joined by pro bono co-counsel Ned Rahn and Kevin Levy from Saul Ewing Arnstein & Lehr LLP.

"I had a young man tell me that he doesn't see himself in five years," Ms. Burrell said in an interview for our 2020 annual event. "That broke my heart. It's a reality for many young African American men. That is why I get involved, because I don't want to see another life lost, and because I want African American men to know that they have someone in their corner who wants them to survive. That their life doesn't end at 25--or 18."

The case continues.



Kim Burrell



Attorneys and clients in the lost and stolen gun case confer after a March 5, 2020 oral argument.



Clients and attorneys following oral argument. Left to right: staff attorney Ben Geffen; Rhona Gerber and Christian Soltysiak of CeaseFirePA; legal director Mimi McKenzie; and pro bono co-counsel Ned Rahn and Kevin Levy of Saul Ewing Arnstein & Lehr LLP

The
Richard Berkman & Toni Seidl
Health Care Justice Project

This work is part of the Richard Berkman & Toni Seidl Health Care Justice Project.

GUN VIOLENCE IN PHILADELPHIA

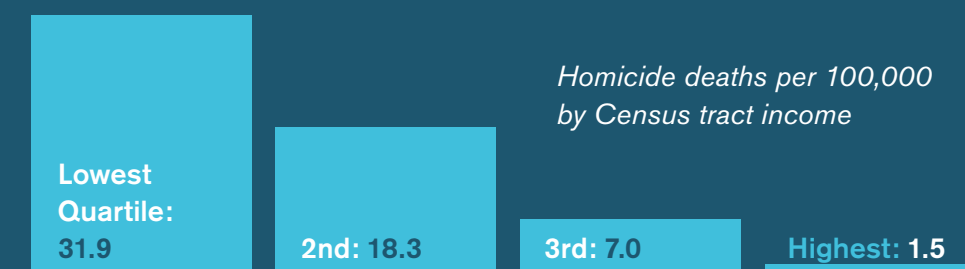


Firearm homicide is the leading cause of death for Black men and youth in Philadelphia between the ages of 15-34.

59% of all deaths of young Black men

Source: 2015 National Vital Statistics System

Shootings are concentrated in low income neighborhoods



Homicide deaths per 100,000 by Census tract income

Source: Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Medical Examiner's Office; Census Bureau's 2014 American Community Survey

In 2019, there were 1,169 nonfatal shootings and 303 fatal shootings

119 children were shot, 14 were killed



84% of homicide victims were Black



61% of homicide victims were younger than 30

Source: Philadelphia Controller's Office <https://controller.phila.gov/philadelphia-audits/mapping-gun-violence/#/>

"Gun violence is not only a public health crisis, it is a civil rights issue. The easy availability of black-market guns helps turn everyday disputes into murders, and it fuels the violence that disrupts the lives of thousands of Philadelphians every single day."

- Staff Attorney Ben Geffen



At our April 11 launch of the new Grounded in Philly



At our May 16 presentation on our work with tenants.



At our June 13 networking event.



At our August 15 CLE on gun safety



At our November 6 celebration of voting right.



Our 50th Anniversary Celebration at Cherry Street Pier



Celebrating History & Looking to the Future

The Public Interest Law Center was established in 1969 as a Philadelphia affiliate of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law. Since our founding, we have successfully challenged policies and practices responsible for perpetuating racism and poverty. Throughout 2019, we honored the Law Center's distinguished history with a series of 50th anniversary events that highlighted all areas of our work and innovative ideas for the future.

In April, we hosted a launch party at One Art Community Center for the new and improved version of Grounded in Philly, our one-stop online resource ecosystem for urban agriculture and open space. We followed this event in May with a school funding briefing in Upper Darby and a presentation on our work representing tenants in claims against landlords who failed to provide safe housing. And in June, we hosted a networking event for Philadelphia young professionals interested in learning about our work combating employment discrimination.

In August, we helped host a Continuing Legal Education session on legal approaches to gun safety. In November, we looked back on our proud history of upholding and strengthening the right to vote at a cocktail party hosted by Barbara Jaffe and Law Center board member Howard Langer.

To top off a year of celebration, we hosted 400 people at the Cherry Street Pier for our 50th Anniversary Celebration, In Pursuit of Justice, honoring all of the Law Center's past board chairs as well as our long-time client and partner, the ARC of Pennsylvania.

In Pursuit of Justice:

A CAMPAIGN FOR THE PUBLIC INTEREST LAW CENTER

Our 50th anniversary was a time for looking back, but also for building the resources to continue for another fifty years. We used the occasion of our anniversary party to launch a \$2 million, two-year campaign, *In Pursuit of Justice: A Campaign for the Public Interest Law Center*. The campaign has the twin goals of building our bench today so that we have more capacity to tackle poverty and discrimination, and building our endowment and the financial strength to sustain the fight for social justice tomorrow.

To learn more, visit pubintlaw.org/in-pursuit-of-justice/



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<i>Christine Macholz</i>	<i>Christine Macholz</i>	<i>In memory of The</i>	Eleanor Myers	Thomson Previdi	Rothschild	Bradley Bridge	Department	Sheilah Vance, Esq	<i>Grimaldi</i>
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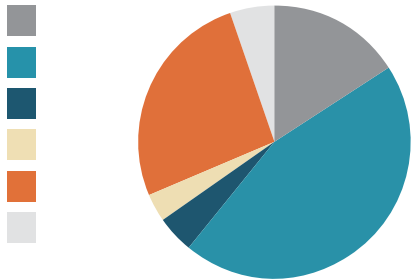
FINANCIALS

January 1, 2019–December 31, 2019

SUMMARY OF REVENUE & EXPENSES*

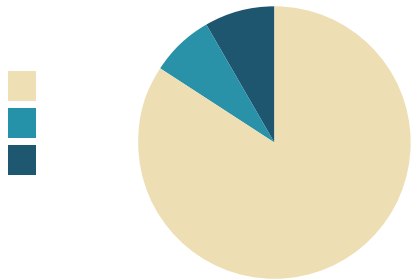
REVENUE

Grants & Contributions	\$624,531
Legal Community & Other Support	\$1,785,015
Fee Awards	\$170,091
Contracts & Honorarium	\$127,444
In-Kind Legal Services	\$1,035,595
Investment Income	\$201,370
Total Revenue	\$3,944,046



EXPENSES

Program Services	\$2,380,589
General & Administrative	\$209,223
Fundraising	\$229,567
Total Expenses	\$2,819,379



STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

Current Assets	\$1,747,018
Other Assets	\$2,411,279
Property & equipment (net of depreciation)	\$45,152
Total Assets	\$4,158,297
Current Liabilities	\$273,423
Prior Year Net Assets	\$2,760,207
Current Year Change	\$1,124,667
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$4,158,297
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$2,949,915

*Audited financial reports are available on our website at pubintl.org/corporate-documents



Tom Gilhool at our 50th Anniversary Celebration



Tom Gilhool and Michael Churchill



Tom Gilhool at a symposium and celebration marking his retirement from the Law Center.



Tom Gilhool visiting a classroom.

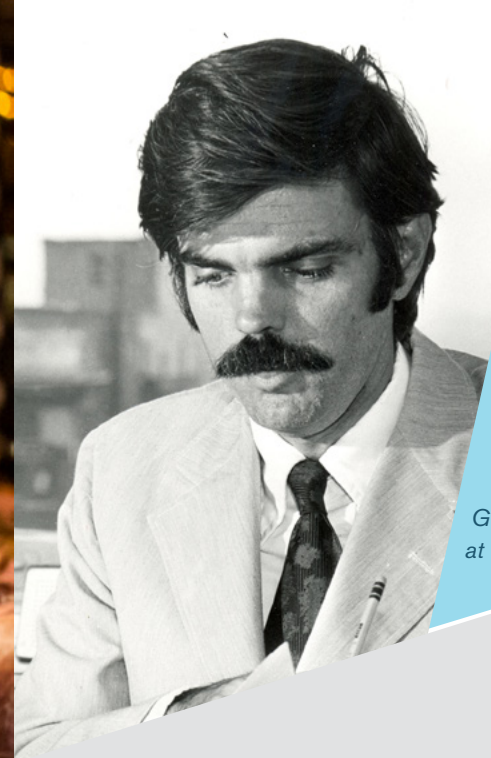
REMEMBERING Thomas K. Gilhool 1938-2020

On August 22, 2020, Thomas K. Gilhool, an inspiration and dear friend throughout our history, died at the age of 81. Tom used the law throughout his life to give voice to all those who are underrepresented and ignored in public policy, and he was a leading champion of the rights of people with disabilities nationwide. His contributions and his example are extraordinary, and we will miss him deeply.

Those who knew Tom recall his creativity, passionate spirit, perseverance, driving energy, and leadership. He was a force of nature. When he found a path forward for advancing justice, he inspired others to follow and gave them the tools and knowledge to do so. He understood that the law did not exist in a silo, but advanced rights in concert with social movements of people demanding recognition and dignity.

As a young attorney, Tom was part of the first generation of legal service lawyers, helping support the founding of Community Legal Services. He was active in supporting social movements, helping found the Northern Students Movement as a student at Yale Law School, joining litigation to desegregate Girard College, and representing the Welfare Rights Organizations in the city during the war on poverty.

Tom worked with the Law Center from its beginnings and became our Chief Counsel in 1975. Along with Michael Churchill, he led the organization until 2006, and remained as a valued advisor until his retirement in 2008. He took time away in 1986 to serve as Pennsylvania Secretary of Education for Governor Robert Casey for three years and to spend a year as a schoolteacher at Philadelphia's Roberts Vaux Middle School.



Tom
Gilhool
at work.

"Tom was a gift, and by his person and influence shared his gifts with so many in a way that improved all of our lives."

– DENNIS B. DOWNEY, PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, MILLERSVILLE UNIVERSITY

When Tom began his work alongside the disability rights movement in the early 1970s, children with developmental disabilities were legally and routinely turned away from public schools. Instead, thousands of people with disabilities were warehoused in segregated institutions, where they were frequently denied educational services and subject to abuse and neglect. In his concurring opinion *Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Ctr*, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall described this system, rooted in a history of eugenics and prejudice, as "a regime of state-mandated segregation and degradation...that, in its virulence and bigotry, rivaled, and indeed paralleled, the worst excesses of Jim Crow."

"We may wrongly take for granted the right to education and the right to live in the community. Those rights did not exist until they were fought for and won. Many people were part of this grand social movement. However, Tom Gilhool and his PILCOP partners were the ones who understood how to realize legal rights and enforce laws to protect and help people."

– BOB NELKIN, ADVOCATE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

"There is no greater happiness than participating in struggles to rearrange things."

– TOM GILHOOL

As Fred Pelka wrote in his authoritative history of the disability rights movement, Tom was the attorney most responsible for changing this system and supporting the rise of services integrated in the community. In 1972, Tom successfully litigated *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, which established that Pennsylvania was responsible for providing a free public education to all children, regardless of disability. It was the first case of its kind, and it helped spark a nationwide movement of similar cases across the country. Congress responded in 1975 by passing the law now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), establishing a nationwide right for students with disabilities to receive a free appropriate public education.

Tom next represented the disability rights and advocacy organization PARC, now known as the Arc of Pennsylvania, in a class-action complaint, *Halderman v. Pennhurst*, filed by residents challenging the horrendous conditions at Pennhurst State School and Hospital. At Pennhurst, developmentally disabled residents were often needlessly restrained, denied educational services, and abused by staff. In 1977, U.S. District Court Judge Raymond Broderick ruled that the segregation of Pennhurst residents and the conditions that they experienced violated their constitutional rights, issuing an order requiring the state provide residents with homes in the community that provided appropriate services

Pennhurst was a watershed moment in the movement for community-based services. Tom went on to file and support class action cases supporting community-based services in states across the country over a period of more than 30 years.

In 1990, Tom led a coalition of legal services organizations to enforce a new provision of the Social Security Act, which required states to provide comprehensive healthcare to children enrolled in Medicaid. The ensuing litigation led to the additional enrollment of 300,000 children in Pennsylvania and sparked similar cases in several other states.

In 2003, Tom received a Senior Fulbright Fellowship in Japan, where he brought together advocates for disability rights from both countries. This work led him to contribute the drafting of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was adopted in 2006 and has been ratified by 181 nations.

Tom's papers and records are preserved in the Temple University Urban Archives for those who wish to learn from his remarkable work.

"No single lawyer did more than Tom to open the way for my son who had a disability, or to set an example for other advocates. I was in awe of him."

– RUD TURNBULL, FORMER PRESIDENT OF AMERICAN ASSOCIATION ON INTELLECTUAL & DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES



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