



LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION OF METROPOLITAN CHICAGO

OFFICE OF
PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

111 West Jackson Boulevard
Suite 300
Chicago, Illinois 60604-4136
312.341.1070 Phone
312.341.1041 Fax

2011 OCT 11 AM 8:26

LEGAL SERVICES CORP
RECEIVED

Diana C. White
Executive Director

Alan Alop
Jack L. Block
Deputy Directors

Service Offices
Client Screening Unit
Tel.# (312) 341-1070

LOOP SERVICE OFFICE
111 West Jackson Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60604
FAX: (312) 341-1041

NORTH SUBURBAN SERVICE OFFICE
828 Davis Street, Rm. 201
Evanston, IL 60201-4489
FAX: (847) 475-3033

NORTHWEST SERVICE OFFICE
1279 N. Milwaukee Ave., #407
Chicago, IL 60622-9388
FAX: (773) 572-3201

SOUTH SUBURBAN SERVICE OFFICE
900 East 162nd Street, Suite 101
South Holland, IL 60473-2471
FAX: (708) 596-4108

Special Projects

Bankruptcy Project
Chicago Seniors Project
Children's Law
Consumer Law
Crime Victims Assistance
Disability Law
Employment Law
Family Law/Domestic Violence
(312) 431-2255
Federal District Court Assistance
For Pro Se Litigants
Federal Court Bankruptcy Help Desk
Health Law Project
HIV/AIDS Project
(312) 347-8309
Home Ownership Preservation
(312) 431-2204
Housing Project
Illinois Migrant Legal Assistance
(800) 445-9025
Legal Center for Immigrants
(312) 341-9617
Long Term Care Ombudsman for
Suburban Cook and Lake Counties
(888) 401-8200 (toll-free)
Medical Debt Relief
(312) 431-2118
Private Attorney Involvement
Pro Se Divorce Clinic
(312) 431-2101
Public Benefits Hotline
(888) 893-5327
Veterans' Law Project

October 4, 2011

Janet LaBella
Director
Office of Program Performance
Legal Services Corporation
333 K. Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007-3522

Dear Ms. LaBella:

LAF owes a great debt of thanks to the team from the Office of Program Performance that visited us here in Chicago in May 2011. In the first place, getting ready for the visit forced us to take the time to look at LAF as a whole and to assess our own strengths and weaknesses. Second, the members of the team were a pleasure to work with – engaging, interested, patient, and encouraging. The team members talked to almost everybody on our large staff, going from office to office and from the northern edge of Cook County to the extreme southern boundary. Over and over again, as the week went on, I heard how much our employees enjoyed and valued these conversations. Third, the draft report the team sent us is thorough and fair. It gives us credit for some of the things we are proudest of – and it's always nice to get credit from knowledgeable outsiders. But it also tells us candidly where we need to improve. All the recommendations are on target, and we will address them as quickly as we can.

There were only a few places where we thought the team had missed something, or where we did a poor job of explaining ourselves. I note these below, but only for the sake of completeness. They do not affect the quality of the report, or detract in any way from great job the team did.

Program Overview: LAF provides services to immigrants, as well as migrant workers, throughout the state. The immigration court is located in Chicago. If a qualified immigrant resides outside our service area, we handle the case with non-LSC funds.

Program Overview: Just a point to note: LAF's Board has authorized us to represent people at up to 150% of poverty, and we do.

Finding 4: A word of explanation here about our reorganization. The Director of Client and Community Services oversees the Community Engagement Unit, the Client Screening Unit, and the Task Forces. The Director of Advocacy oversees the five new Practice Groups and our Director of Training. The theory is that the Director of Client and Community Services will make sure that we are visible in our clients' communities, that people have reasonable and fair access to LAF, and that we are providing outreach, education, and pro se help to people who do not receive actual representation. The Director of Advocacy is in charge of our legal representation of clients, and he is responsible for increasing our extended representation and impact work. The theory is that the two Directors, between them, will ensure that we allocate our resources wisely to provide a good mix of services throughout the County in an era of declining resources.

Finding 5. At the time of the OPP visit, we didn't have a formal policy for handling walk-ins. Sometimes the receptionist would call the Client Screening Unit and an intake specialist would call the client back. Other times, the client would be told to call CSU.

Since the OPP visit, we have developed a policy. We have a screening sheet for walk-ins to fill out, which covers what we consider emergencies and lets the walk-ins tell us whether they do or do not have a telephone. Walk-ins with an emergency or with no phone are registered by a CSU intake specialist on the spot. Walk-ins with phones and no emergency are told to call CSU and given a flyer about how to call (call early, listen to the menu, be patient, etc.)

In our new space at 120 S. LaSalle, the policy will be the same, except that walk-ins will be offered the option of calling CSU from a private cubicle off the waiting room.

Recommendation II.1.5.2: Centralization presents many challenges, and some people are surely worried about how it will impact their day-to-day work. While everyone will have an office or a workstation in our new space, no one will be required to report to the downtown office just for the sake of checking in. If employees

have work that will keep them in the field all day, that's fine. If they have work that will keep them in the field for part of the day and want to work the rest of the day remotely, that's also fine. People will be required to be on site if they have work that needs to be done there, such as a client appointment, a court date, an important meeting, or a training.

Finding 15: The staff cuts we have made over the past three years have come largely from administrative and support staff rather than from case handlers (paralegals or attorneys). We recognize that these cuts have created some inefficiency. To alleviate the problem, we have not only asked one of our administrative staff to be available for court filings, we have also hired an outside Docketing Service to file papers, check records, and copy files for us.

Finding 17: The text notes that LAF is working with the Chicago Bar Foundation and ILAO to develop pro bono training for which CLE credit can be given. I would add that LAF is already a certified CLE provider in Illinois, and its trainings are routinely posted on the ILAO website, where they can be viewed (for CLE credit) by LAF attorneys, other legal aid attorneys, and pro bono attorneys.

Finding 20: It is true that the Budget and Compensation Committee of the Board does not meet before every Board meeting. But it does receive monthly financial reports. And our COO reports on LAF's finances at each of our five Board meetings, going over materials that he has sent to the individual Board members a week or so beforehand.

Finding 22: All the changes that we have made have in fact opened new leadership opportunities for staff, but the description of those opportunities is a little confusing. First, we reorganized upper management. We added a Chief Operating Officer. We eliminated the two Deputy Director positions (one for neighborhood offices, one for special projects), and replaced them with a Director of Client and Community Services and a Director of Advocacy. The Director of Client and Community Services oversees a Community Engagement Unit and a Client Screening Unit, each with its own Director. The Director of Advocacy oversees five Practice Groups, each with its own Director. We added a new Director of Training and Pro Bono. Three other positions got new titles, to reflect the

additional responsibilities they assumed. Our Comptroller became our Chief Financial Officer; our Development Director became our Director of External Relations (handling fundraising and marketing); and our IT Director became the Director of Technology for Advocates (reflecting that we needed our technology to be more focused on the users). In all of these changes, we hired or promoted strong candidates from the inside LAF, rather than look outside.

The positions that report directly to me are the COO, the CFO, the Director of Client and Community Services, the Director of Advocacy, and the Director of External Relations.

We also created a Steering Committee, which is charged with moving our Strategic Planning process forward. That Committee meets with me on a weekly basis, and deals with a broad variety of issues. Its members are the Director of Client and Community Services, the Director of Advocacy, the Director of External Relations, the Director of Training, and the Director of Technology for Advocates. Their work on the Steering Committee exposes them to a number of managerial challenges.

Finding 25: It is certainly true that we need a professional to handle our human resources needs. But our hiring procedure is a little more streamlined than the narrative makes it sound. For any position, the group that screens applicants, conducts interviews, and makes hiring recommendations to me consists of one member of the hiring committee, the person to whom the position reports, and one other person. The HR person we do have (who also is my executive assistant) posts all positions, collects resumes, schedules interviews, and sends out letters to the candidates who were interviewed but not selected. I send the offer letter to the successful candidate.

Finding M-2: We intend to clarify the Migrant Project's priorities. But there must have been a misunderstanding about worker's compensation cases. LAF doesn't handle them, for migrant workers or for any other clients. We refer clients with possible worker's compensation claims to private attorneys.

In conclusion, let me reiterate the points I began with. Having an OPP visit was a productive and heartening experience for everyone

at LAF, and we are very grateful for the work the team put in, both in interviewing us and in preparing its report.

Sincerely,

Diana C. White

Diana C. White
Executive Director