

# Tennessee Senior Law Alliance Expands Legal Help for Seniors



## **\$5.5 Million Dollar Grant Makes Free Legal Help Available to More of Tennessee's Vulnerable Senior Citizens**

NASHVILLE (June 14, 2018) – The situation is not new: There is a staggering increase in the number of Tennesseans age 60 and older living in poverty and facing homelessness, hunger, abuse and exploitation, lack of access to benefits and healthcare at a time when they should be living out their “golden years” safely, securely, and with dignity.

What is new, though, is the way Tennessee’s civil legal aid providers are responding to this reality. A court settlement providing \$5.5 million dollars over three years paved the way for the creation of a coordinated approach to assist Tennessee seniors facing legal problems. In a first-of-its kind network, known as the Tennessee Senior Law Alliance (TSLA), the state’s four legal aid providers and the Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services are partnering to deliver free legal help to Tennessee’s elderly. TSLA attorneys will reach into all 95 Tennessee counties to help seniors identify and resolve core legal issues that often lead to and sustain poverty:

wrongfully reduced or denied access to benefits and healthcare; illegal barriers to obtaining and maintaining safe and secure housing; physical, emotional, and financial abuse and exploitation; and a lack of help with basic estate planning such as creating wills, advance directives, and powers of attorney.

## **The Problem and the Legal Solution**

Many low-income senior citizens in Tennessee are facing civil legal issues and do not know where to turn for help. With limited resources and support systems, these issues often threaten to drive Tennessee's vulnerable elderly population further into poverty and diminish their quality of life.

In the coming years, this problem is only expected to increase. According to the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability, Tennessee's elderly population is growing at a rate of 63% and is expected to represent roughly one-fifth of the state's population by the year 2030. The question of how to support our elderly population in their civil legal matters is becoming increasingly urgent and resources are greatly needed. "That's why we are so excited about this historic opportunity to join forces with the regional legal aid law firms to create a network of attorneys dedicated to addressing the pressing needs of seniors in all 95 counties," explained Ann Pruitt, Executive Director of Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services.

Partners in forming the Tennessee Senior Law Alliance are:

- Legal Aid of East Tennessee, [www.LAET.org](http://www.LAET.org), led by Executive Director Sheri Fox;
- Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland, [www.LAS.org](http://www.LAS.org), led by Executive Director DarKenya W. Waller;
- Memphis Area Legal Services, [www.MALSI.org](http://www.MALSI.org), led by CEO Harrison D. McIver, III;
- West Tennessee Legal Services, [www.WTLS.org](http://www.WTLS.org), led by Executive Director Catherine Clayton and
- Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services, [www.tals.org](http://www.tals.org), led by Executive Director, Ann Pruitt.

Seniors can access the TSLA's free legal services in several simple ways, including by calling the Tennessee Alliance for Legal Service's toll-free helpline 1 844 HELP4TN (**1 844-435-7486**) or by contacting the TSLA legal aid law firm in their area.

## **How the Tennessee Senior Law Alliance Will Change Lives**

TSLA will focus its efforts on the thousands of low-income Tennesseans age 60 and over who are facing problems relating to their basic human needs, especially in rural areas of the state where resources have been less available.

TSLA will also increase referrals, education, and sustainability of legal services by partnering with agencies, government entities, community organizations, senior centers, and faith-based groups. Through these partnerships, TSLA will raise awareness of legal aid services while also training agency staff and clients on pressing senior legal issues.

The result will be a long-term solution to a pressing and growing problem- using legal solutions to sustain and improve the quality of life of our elderly by increasing their financial security, removing barriers to positive health outcomes, and otherwise using the law to help Tennesseans avoid or escape poverty.

## **Funded by the Settlement of Two Davidson County Chancery Court Lawsuits**

The settlement of two related Chancery Court cases in Davidson County, Tennessee, resulted in the availability of approximately \$36 million in funding for the purposes of implementing statewide initiatives designed to make life better for older Tennesseans. Through the efforts of the Court and a group of five philanthropic organizations who provided their expertise, a process was developed to accept and then carefully vet statewide proposals in four specific areas for innovation, ability to implement, and sustainability. The four areas include housing, transportation, dental and legal assistance.

## **Oversight of the Grants**

The Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability ("TCAD") is overseeing the administration of the grants. Because of the importance of this effort for older Tennesseans, TCAD and the philanthropic organizations involved in the distribution of the grants all committed to continuing to work (for no compensation) and oversee these grants so that they achieve their overall purpose.

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Last updated on June 27, 2018.

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