

# Four Decades of Service: Memphis Area Legal Services

Over 40 years ago in the wake of the tragedy of Dr. Martin Luther King's death, that beset Memphis and indeed the world, 30 members of the legal profession created the Neighborhood Legal Service Project (NLSP) in Shelby County. Two years later, in 1970, the NLSP gave way to the chartering of **Memphis Area Legal Services, Inc.** (MALS).

The leadership of MALS' first two executive directors, Retired Circuit Judge George Brown and City of Memphis Mayor A C Wharton, were essential to developing the solid footing that MALS needed to become the principal Shelby County law firm serving the civil legal needs of low income and other disadvantaged individuals. With more than 200,000 of the most vulnerable residents in the service area eligible for assistance, MALS dedicated itself to helping those who could not afford legal counsel navigate the legal system in order to safeguard their rights under the law.

Throughout those formative years through today, the organizational characteristics upon which MALS was created persist. A highly skilled, capable and dedicated staff that provides high quality and effective legal assistance to their clients is still the bedrock of MALS. Whether it's a woman or elderly person facing domestic violence or abuse; an individual whose sole asset – his or her home – is subject to foreclosure, because of a predatory loan; a consumer defrauded in the execution of an installment loan; or a veteran who is wrongfully denied benefits to which he or she is entitled, the MALS' staff is there to help. MALS has never lost sight of their vision, "Justice for Those in Need."

MALS is now the principal provider of civil legal assistance to low-income individuals and the elderly in Southwestern Tennessee, anchored by Memphis, Shelby County, with three other counties, Tipton, Fayette, and Lauderdale, comprising its four-county service area. MALS has two offices – one in downtown Memphis, which serves Shelby County, and the Covington office that serves the three smaller rural counties.

View the MALS website for more information about their services and how attorneys can volunteer to support their work on behalf of those who otherwise would have no voice.

The Tennessee Alliance for legal services is proud to support the work of civil legal service providers such as MALS who have honorably served their communities for generations, through providing training opportunities, advocate support, and legislative activities.

Source: Memphis Area Legal Services website

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[Print](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

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