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LAET Awarded Grant to Plan Health-Law Partnership for Knoxville Area

KNOXVILLE (June 2, 2016) – Legal Aid of East Tennessee (LAET) has received a 2016 Health Initiatives Phase I Grant from Trinity Health Foundation of East Tennessee. LAET’s grant will fund planning for “Doctors as Advocates, Lawyers as Healers,” a project to study the feasibility of establishing a Health-Law Partnership in the Knoxville area.

Low-income patients at local hospitals, clinics, and mental health facilities often face issues beyond their medical problems that negatively impact successful health outcomes. By addressing civil legal problems that impact mental and physical health, it is possible to dramatically improve outcomes for patients and eliminate recurring hospitalization.

A Health-Law Partnership (or HLP) places a legal aid attorney within a hospital or other clinical setting to represent patients referred by the facility’s medical team. The attorney is then able to work with the patient to address issues impacting that person’s health, including those related to domestic violence; safe housing; and benefits such as unemployment compensation, TennCare, private insurance, and food stamps that impact the patient’s ability to purchase prescription medicine. The legal aid attorney also can help obtain conservatorships so that patients who, due to their physical or mental condition, are unable to give informed consent and receive the treatment and placement they need.

“Since 2012, LAET has maintained a successful HLP with Erlanger Hospital in Chattanooga. Our goal is to develop a similar partnership in the Knoxville area,” said LAET Executive Director Sheri A. Fox. “We know from serving clients through our Knoxville and Maryville offices that extra-medical legal needs are just as great in this

area. The Trinity Health Foundation grant enables us to take the next important step. We can now explore with local medical and mental health providers the best way to work together to achieve the important common goals of improving health outcomes for patients and their families while simultaneously helping healthcare providers control costs so they can continue to provide the best possible care and treatment to our community.”

LAET is one of 22 area organizations awarded a Phase I grant. Planning and study of the HLP project will occur over the next three months. LAET will submit a Phase II project implementation proposal in September. If successful, work will begin to establish the Knoxville-area HLP in November.

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