

# *A Note of Thanks from Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation!*

*We couldn't do the work we do without friends like you!*

December 30, 2011

Dear Friend of the Foundation:

Amazingly, we are but days from the end of the year. It has been a very difficult year for so many organizations that serve those in need of free civil legal services, and this note could speak to how the poor and working poor of our community- and those that seek to promote equal access to justice for them- continue to struggle. And the sadness and frustration of so many is an ongoing story that should be told, and in bleak, real terms.

But forgive me, fellow lawyers, if in the middle of the pain and strain I instead recount how well the pro bono programs of AVLF continue to serve those desperate for your and our help. I write of the success, rather than of the distress, because no matter the difficulty the AVLF staff and the Atlanta legal community have not backed down or looked away, so I am able to write from pride and from hope.



Although our funding from traditional grant sources has all but disappeared, we have managed to sustain and in some instances even improved every pro bono program. **The Saturday Lawyer Program** is revitalized, and in 2011 an average of 240 volunteer attorneys have met with and served an average of 320 clients with an array of housing, consumer and other civil legal concerns. Supporting the Saturday Program, in 2011 the new **Dollars for Judgments Program**, through which State Bar of Georgia Creditor's Rights Section members collect judgments secured by AVLF clients or their volunteer attorneys, became a reality: we believe that this is the first such project in the country. AVLF's **Eviction Defense Program** continued to borrow on the talents of volunteer attorneys primarily from King & Spalding, Troutman Sanders, Seyfarth Shaw and Carlton Fields to represent individuals in imminent danger of losing their homes. The value of this program becomes more evident every year, as more Fulton County residents now rent their homes than own them, and as foreclosures continue to overwhelm home owners and their frequently unsuspecting tenants.

In a development that had an impact in 2011 and holds even more promise in 2012 and beyond, the State Court of Fulton County opened a courthouse-based Self-Help Center that provides information to courthouse visitors about the judicial process: importantly, an AVLF attorney staffs that office 4 days a week to provide specific information and direction to tenants involved in landlord-tenant conflict. In the future, and especially when the State bar of Georgia passes Model Rule 6.5, we expect to have a volunteer attorney available to answer questions from Courthouse visitors every hour that the building is open.

With special help in 2011 from Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton, Sutherland, DLA Piper and Arnall Golden Gregory, the **Domestic Violence Project's Safe Families Office** again saw over 2100 visitors. Through this Office, dozens of volunteer lawyers, paralegals and other supporters helped hundreds of victims of intimate partner violence secure Protective Orders, collect lost wages and medical costs and otherwise secure rulings to the benefit of the victims and their children. AVLF's **Children Law Programs** continued their excellent work in the Fulton County Juvenile Court and Fulton's Superior Court, promoting the best interests of children whose parents are in drug treatment programs and caught in custody disputes respectively. Members of the Estate Planning & Probate Section of the Atlanta Bar Association again staffed **The Probate Information Center**, giving free legal advice to individuals who have questions about the legal affairs of recently departed family members. AVLF's **Wills Program** trained lawyers to draft wills and advanced directives, and those volunteers served dozens of seniors and emergency services personnel.

Lawyers in Atlanta served and supported AVLF in other ways as well. Our signature fundraising event, the AVLF Winetasting, hosted in 2011 by King & Spalding at the firm's Atlanta office, set a fundraising record for the Foundation by raising over \$400,000. Over 500 individuals and nearly seventy law firms, accounting firms and related entities made generous donations to the this 20<sup>th</sup> annual event, which this year also featured an exciting Silent Auction. Please mark November 1, 2012 on your calendar now for the 21st Annual Winetasting!

Perhaps the most significant evolution in the manner in which AVLF interacts with our lawyer constituency was the establishment of a Junior Board, headed by Brian Smith of Arnall Golden Gregory. This 16 member Board offered insight and energy to our volunteer work and fundraising in 2011, and promises to do much more of the same in 2012, tailoring its pro bono contributions to take real ownership of specific substantive issues.

We were significantly more effective in 2011 in reaching our friends in the Atlanta legal community with news, requests for volunteer assistance, requests for money and general information about the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers foundation. Our database was expanded to add the names of over 13,000 lawyers living in metropolitan Atlanta, and our monthly Newsletter to that group was instrumental in sharing information and securing legal help for our clients. We were active on Facebook, produced a video about the work of the Foundation and its volunteers, shared a Dine-Out for AVLF at La Tavola for 100 guests and improved our web

site so that anyone interested in working with AVLF, or being represented by it, can access critical information about our pro bono programs.

But back to the malaise that engulfs us. There is uncertainty everywhere. Federal and local governments are beset by dysfunction. The economy is moribund. The Braves lost an insurmountable lead. Yet AVLF stayed the course, demonstrating commitment and responsive, effective public interest leadership to assure quality volunteer counsel for those with no other access to free lawyers when facing dire civil legal problems. For that, we thank our volunteers, our friends and our funders and ask you to stand with us again in 2012 as well. Best wishes to all through the holidays and the new year!

Warm regards,

Marty Ellin, Executive Director  
Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation

***Visit our [website](#) to learn more about AVLF's programs and services and/or to make an end of the year donation to our organization. Thank you for your support!***

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\*\*\*We've almost reached our end-of-the-year- goal of \$5,000. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to AVLF's Domestic Violence Project by midnight on December 31st by [clicking here](#). Any amount helps!!!