

ABLE

ADVOCATES
FOR BASIC LEGAL
EQUALITY, INC.

2023

Annual Report

Dear Friends and Supporters,

This past year has been a period of significant growth and transition for Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc. (ABLE), marked by leadership changes, strategic initiatives, and impactful advocacy.

In April 2023, Heather Hall admirably stepped into the role of Interim Executive Director to supervise day-to-day operations while the Board undertook a nationwide search for new leadership. Through a thorough recruitment process, including insight and feedback from fellow Board of Trustees members, community partners, and staff members, the Board recently appointed Makiedah Messam as our new Executive Director, and Heather transitioned into her new role as Deputy Director. We are pleased to have strong and diverse leadership present across our entire 32-county service area, with Makiedah based in our Dayton office, and Heather working out of our Toledo office. Additional growth included hiring a full-time Human Resources Generalist in May 2023, with plans to welcome another HR Generalist in 2024. We also brought in a new Regional Director of Development in Dayton, who joined us in November 2023.

In the legal realm, we welcomed a new Supervising Attorney in our Toledo office in March 2024, focusing on Housing and Community Economic Development and Meaningful Access to Education practice areas. We implemented a comprehensive new compensation plan, incorporating DEI principles to ensure fairness and career growth for all our employees.

With these leadership changes and personnel growth, ABLE is committed to creating a new strategic plan to guide our litigation and policy advocacy for the next five years. We expect to have a new plan set in 2024, using our 2023 needs assessment as our primary guide through the process. The plan will help us refine our priorities so that we will continue to deliver exceptional legal services to all of our communities. Technology upgrades also remained a priority. We transitioned to the LegalServer case management system in November 2023 and plan to implement a new document management system, NetDocuments, and a new accounting software in 2024. These changes will help enhance our functionality as a firm and add protection against cyber security threats.

Over the last year, our community advocacy has yielded remarkable results. In Dayton, our support for the Dayton Tenant Union (DTU) led to the successful inclusion of affordable housing funding in Dayton's Issue 6 ballot initiative, approved in March 2024. This victory secured \$1.1 million annually for affordable housing, a testament to our collaborative efforts with local residents and DTU leaders. Our top-notch litigation efforts secured Fair Housing Act protections for a sexual assault survivor in Wood County, and systemic advocacy in education has resulted in improved transportation and speech-language therapy services for children with disabilities in Ohio.

Speaking on behalf of the Board, we are immensely proud of the accomplishments of our advocates and staff. Not only have they made these internal changes successfully throughout they year, they did so while continuing to provide exceptional legal services to our clients. I am especially grateful to you for your continued support of our efforts to make a difference in each community we serve. Please read more about our efforts in the following pages of our 2023 Annual Report.

With heartfelt thanks,

**Cassandra Rice
Board President
Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc. (ABLE)**

Next: Our Top Victories and Accomplishments in 2023



Empowering Dayton's Tenants

In the heart of Dayton,

low-income tenants were struggling with substandard housing conditions and unjust treatment from landlords. Recognizing the dire need for change, ABLE's dedicated community organizer took action, bringing together these tenants to form the Dayton Tenant Union (DTU). The DTU now stands as a powerful advocate for safe, affordable housing for Dayton's vulnerable residents.

ABLE's commitment to community lawyering played a crucial role in this grassroots movement. An ABLE staff attorney provided essential guidance on entity formation and the incorporation

process for DTU. Beyond organizational support, ABLE represented individual tenant union members in legal cases and offered expert advice on addressing systemic housing issues.

The DTU's efforts culminated in a remarkable achievement in late 2023. They mobilized to secure funding for housing in Dayton's 2024 tax levy renewal, successfully ensuring its inclusion in the Issue 6 ballot initiative. ABLE collaborated closely with residents and DTU leaders, orchestrating a comprehensive advocacy campaign. This campaign featured a strategic media plan, legislative advocacy, and the

identification of key allies, including two Dayton city commissioners.

In March 2024, voters approved Issue 6, resulting in the Dayton City Commission allocating \$1.1 million annually for affordable housing. This victory marked a significant step forward for Dayton's low-income tenants.

But ABLE and the DTU didn't stop there. They launched an additional campaign to secure tenant representation on the City's steering committee, which will decide how the \$1.1 million is spent. Their ongoing advocacy ensures that the voices of those most affected by housing issues are heard and considered in the decision-making process.

Pictured: The Dayton Tenant Union participates in a demonstration.

Championing Fair Housing for Survivors

In a powerful case

that underscores the importance of fair housing protections, ABLE recently represented a courageous sexual assault survivor in a dispute with a private landlord. The survivor, living in a property owned by a trust that manages over 50 units in Wood County, found herself in an untenable situation. Her assailant knew her address, making her feel profoundly unsafe. Desperate to move, she disclosed her trauma to the landlord and requested

to be released from her lease. The landlord responded that the tenant could only be released if she found a subtenant or paid substantial fees.

Enter ABLE's committed advocacy team. Recognizing the injustice, an ABLE attorney stepped in, informing the landlord that the tenant was protected under the Fair Housing Act. As a survivor of gender-based violence, she had the right to be released from her lease without penalty and could potentially seek monetary damages

and injunctive relief. This legal insight and advocacy made all the difference.

With ABLE's support and encouragement, the landlord agreed to release the tenant from the lease, but the impact went further. The landlord implemented a policy informing all current and future tenants in trust-owned properties of their rights under the Fair Housing Act. ABLE provided templates to aid in the policy's implementation, ensuring lasting change.

Uplifting Farmworker Stories and Experiences in Ohio

Thousands of agricultural workers

live in or migrate to Ohio to work in its number one industry—agriculture. These workers are often an afterthought, stuck in the background.

Through a new podcast, Farmworker Chronicles, ABLE and Legal Aid of Western Ohio, Inc. (LAWO) bring their stories to the forefront. The podcast interviews those who toil in the fields and harvest the food we eat, those who care for livestock and work in dairies. They share why they do this backbreaking work, how they got into the industry, and their hopes and dreams.

The podcast also explores the dangers of these occupations and the history of worker protections in agriculture, especially those of farmworkers and foreign agricultural workers. The Farmworker Chronicles tells a story of the human condition and how we collectively have the power and an obligation to advocate to improve it, for farmworkers' sake and ours. The project raises awareness to an audience who may never have considered their own connection to farmworkers in Ohio.

To learn more or listen to the podcast, visit:

www.wgte.org/radio/local-podcasts/farmworker-chronicles.





Community Development in Toledo

ABLE works to build up

and empower leaders in low-income communities throughout Toledo through a variety of initiatives.

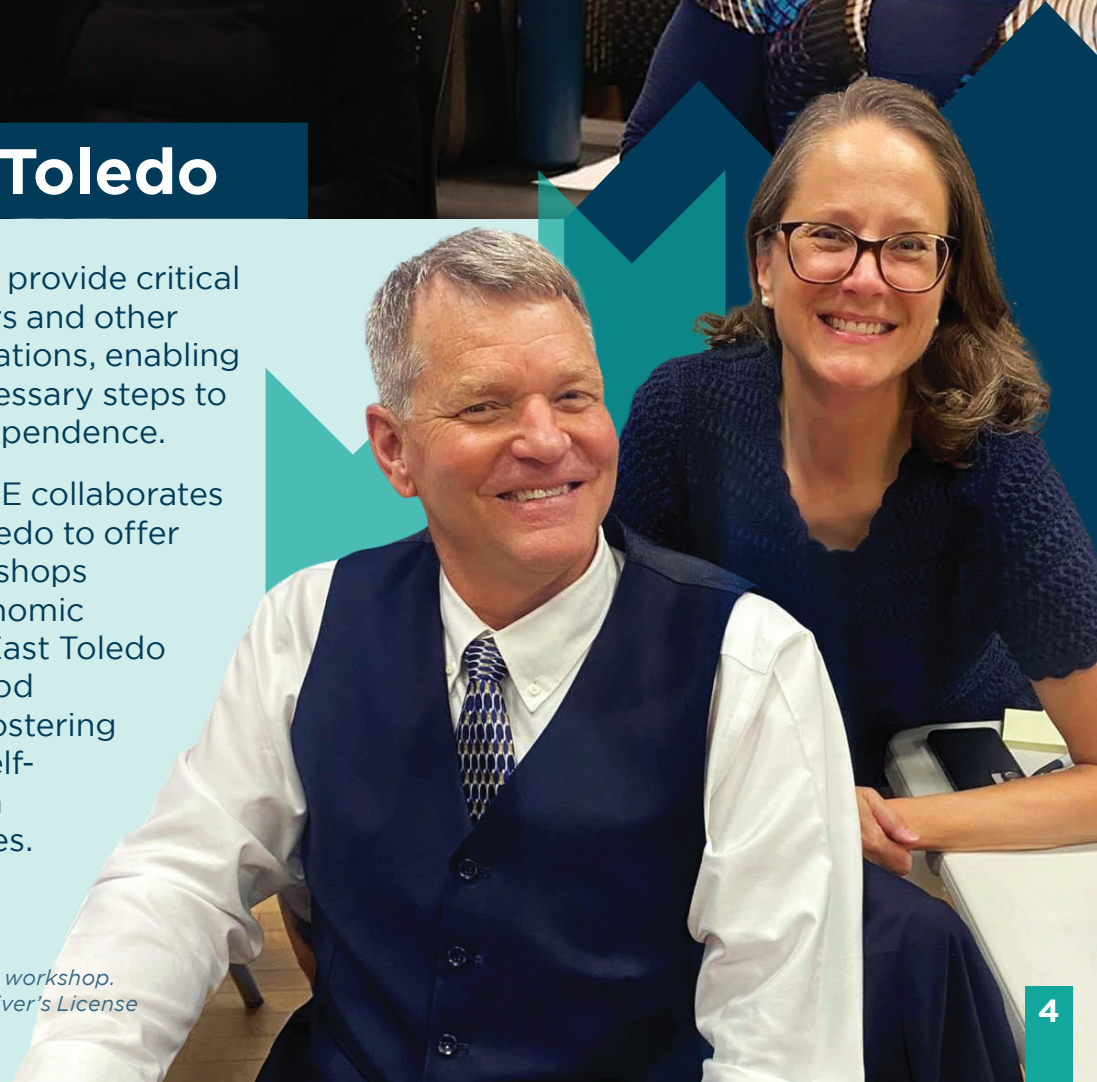
In the Junction Neighborhood, "Ask an Attorney" information clinics and Driver's License Reinstatement clinics play a crucial role in supporting people with some of their basic needs involving housing, benefits, and job security.

The driver's license clinics assist individuals, including those who are reentering the workforce after incarceration, by helping them regain their driving privileges, which is often a key step in securing employment.

These clinics also provide critical services to seniors and other vulnerable populations, enabling them to take necessary steps to reclaim their independence.

Additionally, ABLE collaborates with Reinvest Toledo to offer community workshops and support economic development in East Toledo and the Englewood Neighborhood, fostering leadership and self-sufficiency within these communities.

*Pictured above: Interim Director of Advocacy Kara Jennings attends a Reinvest Toledo workshop.
Right: The Hon. Judge Kuhlman and The Hon. Judge Wagner volunteer at the ABLE Driver's License Reinstatement Clinic, organized by Attorney Raina Dawson.*



Improving Education for Children with Disabilities

In Fall 2023,

ABLE achieved a transformative victory for children with disabilities in a large urban school district. It all started when ABLE discovered that a client's transportation accommodations—outlined in their Individualized Education Program (IEP)—were not being communicated to the Transportation Department. This oversight, rooted in systemic deficiencies, left the child without the necessary bus accommodations.

ABLE stepped in to negotiate new processes, ensuring that transportation needs are properly communicated and implemented. As a result, over 100 children with disabilities will now have their transportation needs met in a timely manner, making their daily commute safer and more supportive.



The same season,

ABLE took on a broader challenge by filing a systemic complaint with the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW). The issue? An area district's overly restrictive eligibility criteria for speech-language therapy, which limited access for children with disabilities. ABLE's investigation revealed that the district's criteria were more restrictive than those recommended by the American

Speech and Hearing Association, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and Ohio regulations for special education.

Hearing district employees insist that a child needed to exhibit a specific type of communication issue to qualify for services, ABLE delved into the rules of the speech-language profession and district records. Their thorough research and compelling briefings persuaded the DEW to investigate

the matter. Early in 2024, ABLE won the complaint, resulting in corrective actions to provide both ongoing and compensatory speech-language services to affected children.

“Over 100 children with disabilities will now have their transportation needs met.”

Capacity-Building in Immigrant Communities

ABLE assisted the Massalit Community Center of Dayton, a Sudanese community-based organization, with its 501(c)(3) incorporation. The organization achieved tax-exempt status in Q1 2023 and intends to apply for grants to build a community center to promote youth education and poverty reduction.

Independence for People with Disabilities

ABLE successfully

represented an 18-year-old man with quadriplegia at a hearing to obtain coverage of a “freedom bed,” a bed that would enable the client to be safely and automatically turned throughout the night without the assistance of caregivers. The bed had been denied by the client’s Medicaid Managed Care plan, despite the overwhelming evidence that the bed was medically necessary to keep him healthy and stable.

We also successfully represented that same client before the Richland County Board of Developmental Disabilities to obtain an Individual Options waiver. This benefit supports him to more easily navigate life with a disability and remain in a community setting. Our work on behalf of this client allowed him to attend his first year of college independently at Wright State University.



ABLE by the Numbers:

680
Closed Cases

1,044
Requests for Legal Assistance

5,808
Persons Helped

\$2,751,987+
Total Monetary Awards for Clients*

2023 Expenses

Compensation & Benefits	\$6,445,852
Operating Costs	\$3,348,968
Contracted Services	\$438,937
Travel, Support, & Training	\$177,766
Other	\$172,693
Total:	\$10,584,216

2023 Operating Support & Revenue

Grants & Contracts	\$4,315,515
Ohio Access to Justice Foundation	\$7,883,993
Fundraising & Special Events	\$376,322
Other Income	\$495,216
Subtotal	\$13,071,046
Transfer to Reserves	\$2,489,830
Total:	\$10,584,216

These numbers do not include the additional **thousands** of people who have benefited from materials and information on our website; pro bono legal assistance clinics; attendance at community legal education presentations and trainings; continuing legal education presentations for lawyers; and outreach visits to homeless and domestic violence shelters, senior centers, health clinics, nursing homes, and migrant labor camps.

*Obtained benefits and awards in areas of child support, spousal support, unemployment compensation, supplemental security income, debt write-off, disability assistance, food stamps, and damages.



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 Kailyn Gullatt
 Sarah Sahmarani
 Sara Sonnier
 Noah Woods

Interns & Volunteers:

Marwah Almuzoughi
 Sarah Gallo
 Mickey Hughes
 Ellis Jacobs
 Alexa Spoerle



Pictured: Summer Associates Nia Shuler, Sarah Sahmarani, and Allison Gilbert visit the Wood County Common Pleas Courthouse.

2023 Funding Partners



Area Agency on Aging (AAA) PSA3: Support for legal assistance for older adults in Allen, Auglaize, Hancock, Hardin, Putnam, and Van Wert counties.



Area Office on Aging (AoA) PSA4: Support for legal assistance for older adults in Defiance, Erie, Fulton, Henry, Lucas, Ottawa, Paulding, Sandusky, Williams, and Wood counties.

Board of Lucas County Commissioners: Support for immigration legal work for Lucas County community members.

Catholic Social Services of the Miami Valley (CSSMV): Support for legal services

for immigrant and refugee families in the Dayton Area.

City of Columbus Families Together Fund (CFTF): Support for legal services for immigrant and refugee families in the Columbus Area.

Clark County Combined Health District: Support for legal assistance in civil matters to help Haitian immigrants living in Clark County achieve self-reliance, equal justice, and optimum health outcomes.



Clark County Court of Common Pleas Domestic Relations Division Juvenile Court Section (CCJC), Supreme Court of Ohio: Support for the Legal Representation Pilot Project (LRPP), a multidisciplinary team focused on reducing barriers for chronically absent children.

Clement O. Miniger Foundation: Support for the Toledo Medical-Legal Partnership for Children.

Columbus Foundation Critical Need Alert: Our World Our Community: Support for immigration-focused legal services for individuals and families eligible for resettlement services in central Ohio.

Community Health Foundation (CHF) SUCCESS Project: Support to address high absenteeism of school children in Springfield in Clark County.

Community Legal Aid: Support for Employment Law Taskforce and Unemployment Equity matters.

Consulate of Mexico, Detroit: Support for legal assistance to Mexican nationals referred by the Consulate.

Consulate of Mexico, Indianapolis: Support for legal assistance to Mexican nationals referred by the Consulate.



Dayton Children's Hospital Foundation: Support for the Dayton Medical-Legal Partnership for Children.

Dayton Legal Heritage Foundation: Support for the Education Advocacy Program and community legal services.

Five Rivers Health Centers of Dayton: Support for the Dayton Medical-Legal Partnership for Children.

France Stone Foundation: Support for the Toledo Medical-Legal Partnership for Children.

Greater Toledo Community Foundation, ProMedica: Support for legal services in the Junction Neighborhood.

Greater Toledo Community Foundation, Sisters of St. Francis: Support for the Immigration Advocacy Project.

Iddings Foundation: Support for the Dayton Medical-Legal Partnership for Children.



Mental Health & Recovery Services Board of Lucas County (MHRSB): Support for legal advocacy for mental health services consumers.



Numi Foundation, Aloft Dayton: Advancing Racial Equity: Support to address racial inequities in Dayton Area.



Ohio Access to Justice Foundation (OAJF): Major source of funding to support our work addressing the unmet civil legal needs of low-income and underserved Ohioans.

Ohio Attorney General Victims Of Crime Act (VOCA): Support for advocacy for older adult survivors of crime.

Ohio Department of Aging: Support for Ombudsman Program for older adults in long-term care facilities.

Ohio Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services (OMHAS) SOS Faith-Based Projects: Support for legal advocacy and outreach to agricultural labor camps.



Housing Finance Agency

Ohio Housing Finance Agency: Support for homeowners' assistance.

PNC Foundation, Housing Opportunity Makes Everyone Stable (HOMES): Support for eviction legal work in Dayton.

PNC Foundation, MLPC Charitable Trust, Protecting Child Victims of the Opioid Crisis: Support for the Dayton Medical-Legal Partnership for Children.



ProMedica Foundation, The Russell J. Ebeid Children's Hospital Foundation: Support for the Toledo Medical-Legal Partnership for Children.

Retirement Research Foundation for Aging: Support for economic security, housing, and connectedness for older adults.

Shriver Center on Poverty Law: Support for housing and public health community initiatives.



Stranahan Foundation: Support for the purchase and implementation of a new case management system.

Toledo Law Library: Support for a Case Management System.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), RELIEF Grant: Support for eviction

prevention legal services in Allen, Auglaize, Champaign, Clark, Logan, Mercer, and Miami counties.



U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ): Support for the Dayton Medical-Legal Partnership for Children, victims of crime, and individuals affected by the opioid crisis.

United Way of Greater Toledo: Support for the Toledo Medical-Legal Partnership for Children.

VERA Institute: Support for the Unaccompanied Children's Program.

Wright-Patt Credit Union Sunshine Community Fund: Support for housing legal services in the WPCU area for Champaign, Clark, Darke, Greene, Miami, Montgomery, Preble, and Shelby counties.

2023 JUSTICE FOR ALL CAMPAIGN

We'd like to thank

the people and organizations who made our annual campaign a success, helping us raise awareness and funds for vital civil legal services to assist low-income people, including veterans, students, immigrants and agricultural workers, and everyday families and individuals trying to make ends meet in northwest Ohio. All funds raised through the Justice for All Campaign (JFAC) support the joint efforts of Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc. (ABLE), Legal Aid of Western Ohio, Inc. (LAWO), and the Toledo Bar Association (TBA).



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ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Awards

— DINNER & CEREMONY —

The 2023 Access to Justice Awards Dinner and Ceremony

welcomed 300 guests who attended the event, held on May 25, 2023, at The Pinnacle in Maumee. Each year, funds are raised to support ABLE, LAWO, and the Toledo Bar Association's Pro Bono Legal Services Program and our combined efforts to assist people who cannot afford civil legal services.

Keynote speaker Mónica Ramírez inspired the crowd of attorneys, advocates, and supporters with a message of hope and equality for female migrant workers in Ohio.

Additionally, we honored Eugenio Mollo, Jr. from the University of Toledo College of Law with the 2023 Public Interest Law Award; Ramón Pérez, a life-long activist in Toledo's Latinx community with the 2023 Community Advocacy Award; and the Honorable Myron C. Duhart of the Ohio Sixth District Court of Appeals with the 2023 Distinguished Service Award.



Pictured: Interim Executive Director Heather Hall with keynote speaker and activist Mónica Ramírez.

2023 Campaign for Equal Justice ★

2023 Campaign for Equal Justice Co-Chairs, Ambassadors, & Steering Committee

The annual Campaign for Equal Justice

generates funds to support low-income community members residing in the Miami Valley region. Benefiting ABLE, LAWO, and our pro bono community partner, the Greater Dayton Volunteer Lawyers Project (GDVLP), the campaign includes two annual events for the legal community and our supporters: The mixer event, Justice on Tap, and the more formal Access to Justice Awards.

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JUSTICE ON TAP!

ABLE ★ GDVLP ★ LAWO

Young professionals
and legal aid supporters
gathered at the Dayton
Beer Company on
September 20, 2023 to
learn more about the
Campaign for Equal
Justice, the combined
efforts of ABLE,
LAWO, and GDVLP,
and participate in fun
raffles and giveaways to
financially support free
civil legal services in the
Greater Dayton area.



ACCESS² JUSTICE AWARDS

2023

ABLE ★ GDVLP ★ LAWO

The 2023 Access to Justice Awards Celebration

welcomed approximately 200 guests to Sinclair Community College for an evening of community advocacy and camaraderie on November 3, 2023.

Funds raised during the event support the Campaign for Equal Justice and are distributed among ABLE, LAWO, and the GDVLP to assist with community legal needs. We assist people facing unstable housing conditions, work with individuals and families navigating the complex medical and education systems, and ensure immigrants and agricultural workers know their rights in their places of employment.

The event's guests of honor included 2023 Lloyd O'Hara Public Interest Law Award recipient Ericka Curran with the University of Dayton School of Law, and the 2023 Patricia Rousseau Community Advocacy Award recipient Laura Bucio with Tecumseh Local Schools.



Pictured: Regional Director of Development Carmen Vega-Pérez with awardee Laura Bucio.



2023 Immigration Advocacy Project Donors

ABLE is at the forefront of protecting the legal rights of low-income immigrants and refugees as they attempt to lead safe and productive lives in our communities. Our Immigration Advocacy Project serves all 88 counties in Ohio.

Compassionate donors give to ensure that we continue to provide this crucial legal assistance.

At ABLE, we address the root causes of poverty by seeking systemic solutions. We assist low-income individuals and families with meeting their basic needs for housing.

We help clients gain access to income and other financial supports, find

education opportunities for their children, and achieve family stability.

We defend those facing the loss of housing in eviction proceedings, protect the rights of agricultural workers and immigrant families, and develop community assets in areas that have suffered decades of neglect.

We also ensure all children have the opportunity to learn, regardless of race, poverty, disability, or immigrant background. We provide protection and stability for survivors of domestic violence, uphold the rights of older adults receiving long-term care, and increase opportunities for families living in poverty.

We are grateful to the following individuals who contributed to the ABLE Immigration Advocacy Project in 2023:

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ABLE has offices located in Toledo, Dayton, and Defiance, and serves 32 counties in northwest and west central Ohio. ABLE also serves agricultural workers, immigrants, and refugees throughout the state.

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Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc. (ABLE) is a non-profit regional law firm that provides high quality legal assistance in civil matters to help eligible low-income individuals and groups in western Ohio achieve self reliance, equal justice, and economic opportunity.



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