

2014

annual report



our mission

To create safe and stable homes and families by inspiring attorneys to fight for equal justice.

2014 annual report table of contents

From the Executive Director.....	5
By The Numbers: Program Accomplishments.....	6
Phone Calls.....	7
Our Programs.....	9
Safe and Stable Homes.....	10
Safe and Stable Families.....	19
Client Successes.....	25
Financial Report.....	31
Fundraisers.....	32
Outreach Events.....	36
Special Friends Donors.....	38
Celebrating Service Award Winners.....	39
Our People.....	40
Board of Directors.....	40
Junior Board of Directors.....	41
Staff.....	42
How You Can Help.....	43





from the
executive director

Friends of the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation,

Thank you for your interest in AVLF's 2014 Annual Report.

As you will read, in 2014 the Foundation flourished. Our pro bono programs coordinated free, high quality legal service to a near record number of clients, the Atlanta legal community gave freely of its time and talent on behalf of AVLF clients who could not have found competent legal support any other way, and financial gifts to the Foundation made it possible to begin to restore our reserve, which had been decimated by the economic downturn.

And equally obviously, the demands for the Foundation's free legal support have never been higher. As we and so many of the lawyers, law firms, and corporate legal departments in our community thrive, tens of thousands of low-income Atlantans struggle. Low-income individuals and families strive for housing that meets the barest requirements of the Code, they fight for safety from abusive intimate partners, they appeal for an understanding of how to interact with the justice system, and sometimes they literally scramble to survive. Even a cursory review of AVLF clients' circumstances makes it clear that the now widely discussed income equality gap is very real, and the consequences of economic fragility include the inability to access a lawyer unless that lawyer does not charge for her/his help.

All of this makes us deeply proud of the AVLF pro bono programs that offer legal representation, education, and advocacy to the poor and the legally unsophisticated. Thank you for drinking in this Annual Report, for sharing with us any response you wish to share, and especially for the support you and so many offer AVLF that allows such good work to be done in the name of equal access to justice.

Warm regards from the AVLF staff.

Sincerely,

Martin L. Ellin



by the numbers: program accomplishments

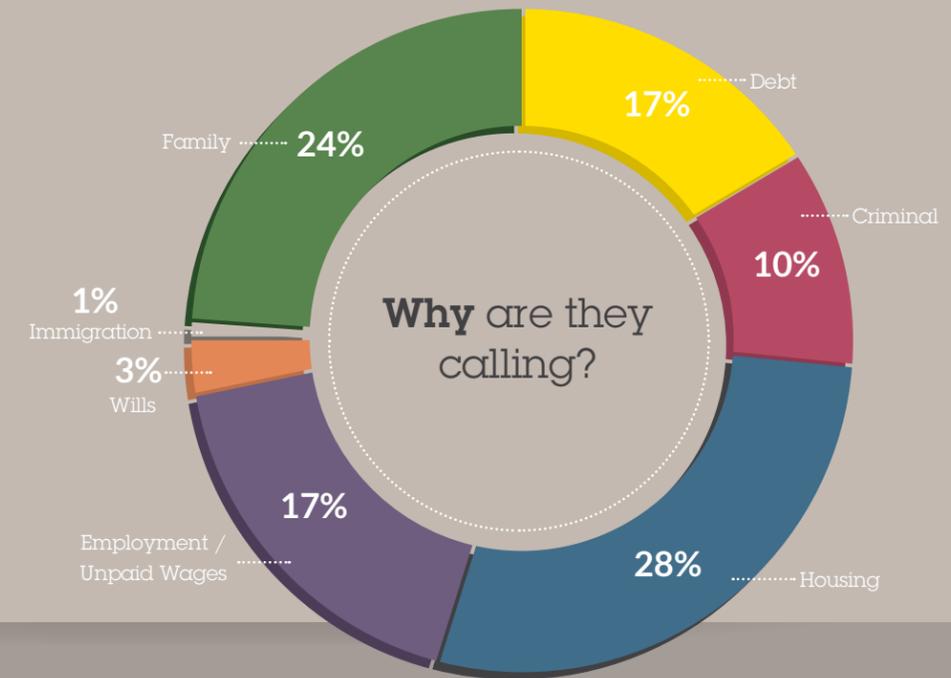
The best legal representation money can't buy. AVLF is the largest provider of pro bono legal services in Greater Atlanta. We directly serve almost 5,000 people each year and reach hundreds more through community outreach and workshops. For 35 years, we have promoted access to justice by inspiring attorneys to provide high-quality education, advocacy, and representation at no charge to low-income families with basic civil legal needs. AVLF's staff trains, mentors, and supports pro bono attorneys to assist low-income people at critical times in their lives. Our staff and our programs make it as easy as possible for lawyers to engage in meaningful pro bono work.

phone calls

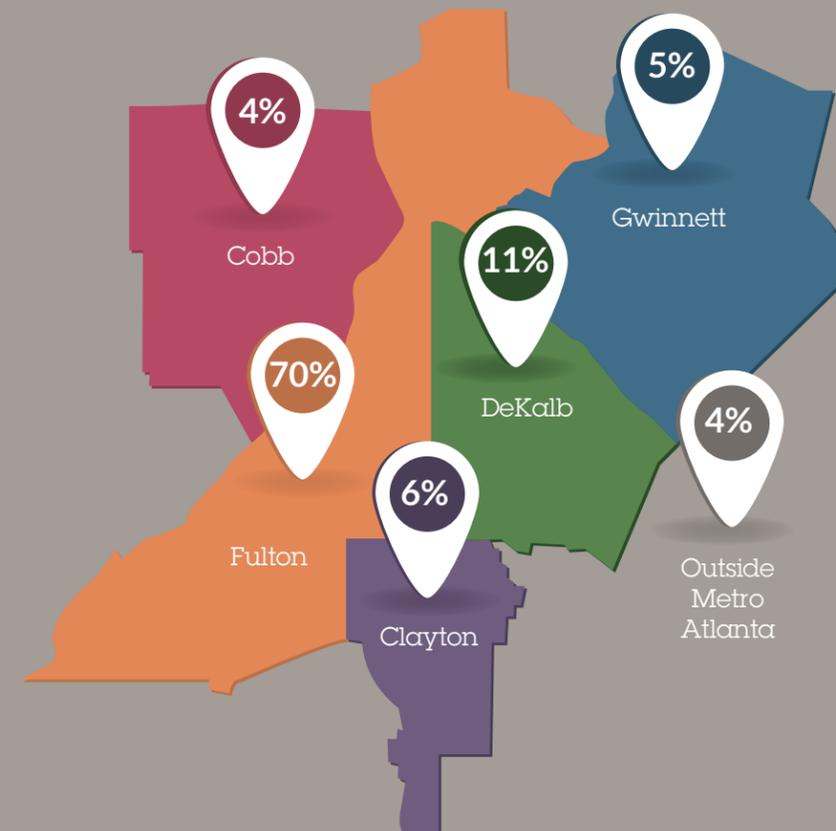


Number of calls to the AVLF main line in 2014:

7,500+

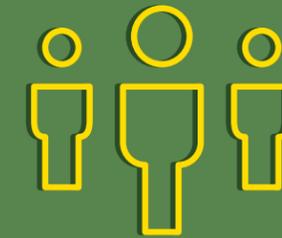


From **where** are people calling?



From **whom** are callers referred?

- Atlanta Bar Association
- Atlanta Legal Aid Society / Georgia Legal Services Program
- United Way
- DeKalb Volunteer Lawyers Foundation
- State Bar of Georgia
- Fulton County Courts and Law Library
- Georgia Law Center for the Homeless
- Word of mouth and avlf.org



our programs

safe and stable homes

- Saturday Lawyer Program (SLP)
- Eviction Defense Program
- Bankruptcy Program
- Dollars for Judgments Program (DFJ)
- Low-Income Creditor Assistance Project (LICAP)

safe and stable families

- Safe Families Office (SFO)
- Guardian ad Litem Program (GAL)
- Probate Information Center (PIC)

“ Without your help, it would have been impossible for us to get our money. You made justice for us. Please keep helping people – you are the voice for the voiceless. ”

– Dollars for Judgments Program Client

safe & stable homes

saturday lawyer program (SLP)

The Saturday Lawyer Program provides Fulton and Clayton Counties' working poor with access to high-quality legal assistance from trained volunteer attorneys in areas vital to economic security, including landlord/tenant disputes, unpaid wage claims, and debt collection.

Total number of Saturday Lawyer clinic interviews conducted:



Number of interviewed clients placed with an attorney for extended representation:



Number of interviewed clients who got valuable advice and counsel:



Value of attorney hours donated during Saturday clinics:



Number of volunteer attorney hours:



Value of donated attorney hours on the 254 cases accepted for full representation:



Number of family members helped:



including 393 children



Number of callers who are either screened for services or given issue-specific referrals to other service providers:



safe & stable homes

eviction defense program

The Eviction Defense Program provides low-income and unrepresented tenants facing eviction with attorneys to represent them in court in their time of critical need.



Number tenants given
valuable advice
and counsel:

31

Number of tenants
provided full
representation to defend
eviction on short notice:

22



Amount awarded
to tenants facing
eviction:

\$9,134.12



safe & stable homes

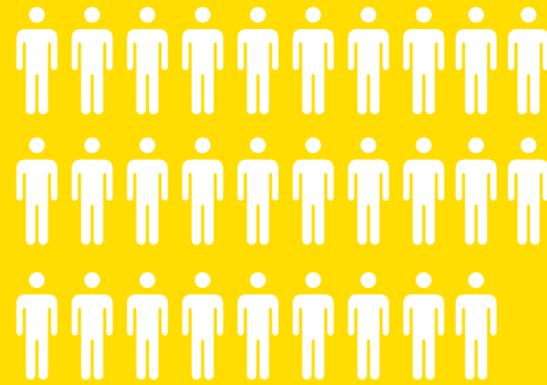
dollars for judgments program

The Dollars for Judgments Program places creditors' rights attorneys to work on behalf of low-income clients who have obtained a judgment as a result of an injustice done to them.

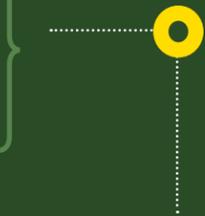


Number of clients assigned expert attorneys to collect on \$195,996 worth of judgments:

29



1 judgment (\$97,427) makes up 1/2 of the total amount referred in 2014



Amount collected:



\$19,340

safe & stable homes

low-income creditor assistance project

Launched in 2014 as extension of our work to collect on behalf of our clients, the LICAP program provides expert representation to low-income client-creditors when their employer or landlord files for bankruptcy instead of compensating our clients as ordered.

Number of cases referred through the LICAP program in its first year, with great successes so far:

5



safe & stable homes

bankruptcy program

The Bankruptcy Program was developed in 2004 as a cooperative effort between the law firm of Clark & Washington and AVL F to respond to the significant need among low-income individuals for counseling about and, when appropriate, assistance in filing Chapter 7 bankruptcy petitions.



safe & stable families

probate information center

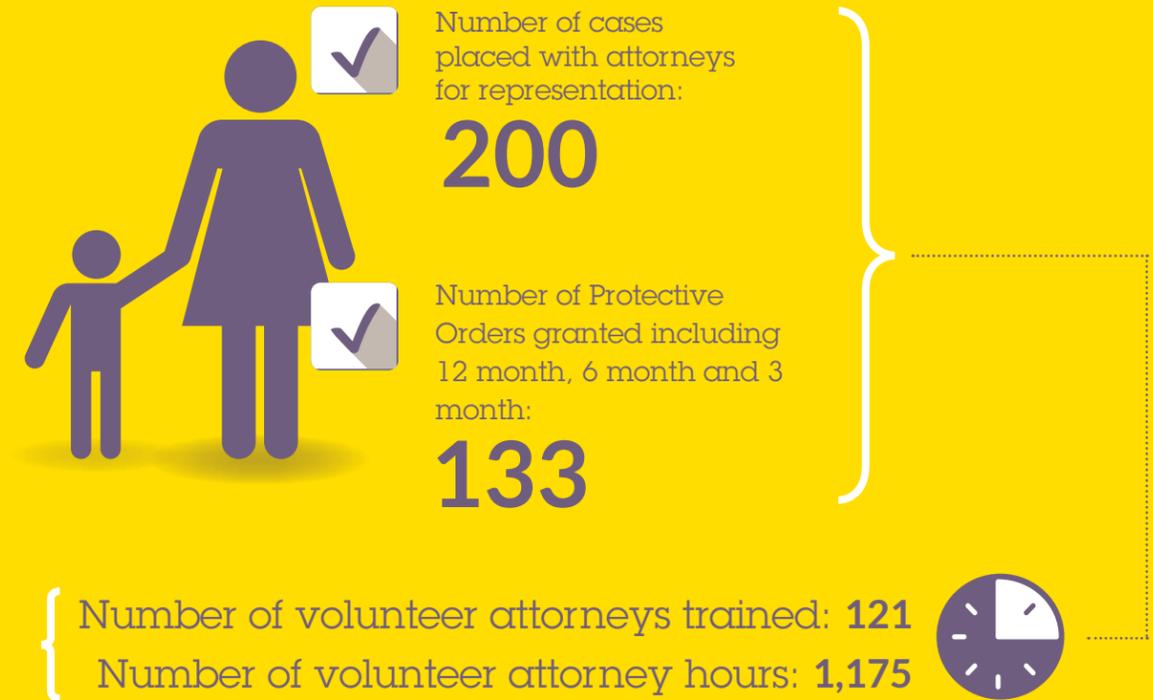
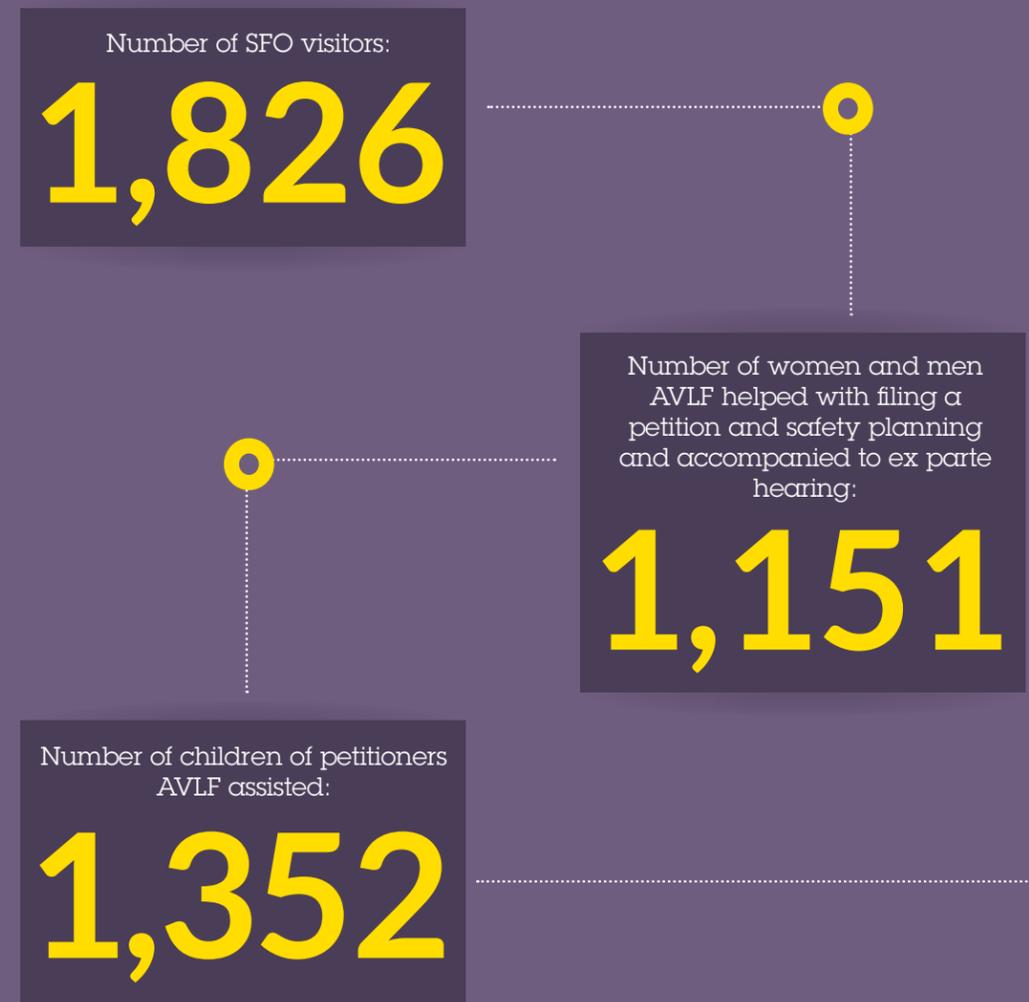
At the Fulton County Courthouse, volunteer attorneys working with AVL F provide free 30-minute appointments to individuals with questions about active probate issues surrounding a deceased loved one. Common areas of consultation include the probate of simple wills, the administration of estates, and poverty affidavits.



safe & stable families

safe families office

The Safe Families Office is Georgia's only lawyer-staffed, courthouse-based resource for victims of intimate partner abuse. Lawyers, paralegals and law students trained by AVLF in the law and psychology of domestic violence offer legal consultation, advice, direction, and when necessary direct representation in their effort to secure Protective Orders, the highest protection offered by the law for the victim and her family.



Value of donated attorney hours:

\$260,000

“ I can't express with words how grateful I am to have you work as a volunteer lawyer to represent me. You are a true blessing to society and a great person... When I hear the phrase 'one person can make a difference in the world,' I will always think of you. ”

- Domestic Violence Project Client

safe & stable families

guardian ad litem program

Divorcing parents often fight over custody of their children. Judges are responsible for deciding with whom and on what terms the children of a divorce will live and visit. To determine the children's best interests, especially in high conflict cases, judges frequently ask to have the help of a Guardian ad Litem.



Number of volunteer attorneys trained:

21

Number of volunteer attorney hours:

877



Value of donated attorney hours:

\$197,325



Number of new cases opened in 2014



Number of children helped



Number of open GAL matters



Number of children involved



Number of cases closed in 2014



Number of children in closed cases

client successes



Safe Families Office Success Story

In 2014, the AVLF Safe Families Office staff reunited with a special client. C first found herself at the Safe Families Office in 2013. Swathed in a scarf and oversized sunglasses, she attempted to mask the severe burns covering her face, chest, and arms.

C had been dating her boyfriend for a couple of years, but she felt their relationship was coming to an end. He could sense that a breakup was imminent, and the last weekend they spent together seemed charged with his anger and frustration that she might be leaving him. When he called to her from the bathroom, she was puzzled to find him standing there with a bowl in his hands. In a matter of seconds, he hurled the bowl's contents at her and she began to scream. As she later learned, the liquid he threw was industrial strength drain cleaner, and the acid began to eat her flesh. Her boyfriend called 911 and was connected to Poison Control. C was dousing herself with water in the sink, and he was shouting instructions. What the 911 tape would later reveal is that while Poison Control was directing her to flush the affected areas, he was telling her to stop flushing, that the water would further activate the chemicals. The last thing she remembered of the incident was sitting on the hall floor, watching bone begin to appear through the burns on her arm.

C woke up a month later in the hospital from a medically-induced coma. Her first thoughts were fearful – where was her boyfriend, and was he still in jail? She was shocked to discover that he'd never even been questioned, that it was classified as an accident. He had removed the cleaner, the remnants of her clothes, everything, from the house. He'd been contacting her family while she was unconscious, asking about her. He was free, and she was petrified that he'd return.

Without a criminal case in the works, C was desperate for a way to protect herself under the law. A temporary protective order was the only shield available to her at the time, and the Safe Families Office worked with her to secure the original 12-month order.

Eleven months flew by, and C didn't waste a moment of that time. Not only did she have 11 surgeries to restore her face, requiring out of town travel to the mid-Atlantic, but she turned to the media and hounded authorities until a criminal case was opened and charges were brought against her attacker. When C reappeared in the Safe Families Office in 2014 to pursue a permanent extension of her protective order, she was determined to keep him away from her, and SFO was determined to help. With the efforts of volunteer investigators and process servers, her abuser was tracked down after months of searching, despite his serious attempts to evade service. When she reappeared in court with an AVLF attorney, her courage and commitment secured her a permanent protective order.

No piece of paper can erase C's scars or banish the fears that keep her up at night. But an attorney who will not just listen but will speak up about the terrible things that happen makes the struggle possible to endure. A court that will act on the fear and injustice in front of it can help keep the wolves at bay. Together, they can give someone respite, and help pave the way to safety and peace of mind for a survivor and her family. To be even a small piece of that process is a privilege.



client successes



In Her Own Words – One Client's Story

At the age of 53, I graduated from college and moved to Georgia from New Jersey. Soon after I got here, I rented an apartment. The apartment complex took my down payment, but kept making excuses for why they wouldn't show me the unit that I was supposed to rent. Eventually, I found out there were major electrical problems in the unit, but they told me they were being repaired.

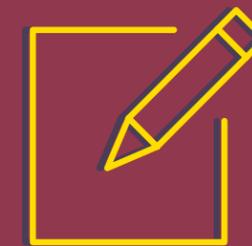
For the first month, I had nothing in the apartment but a bed and my sleep apnea machine. But my electric bill was so high I knew there was a problem. As the winter set in, my heat only worked occasionally. The apartment complex made a few attempts to repair the system, but the workers told me they didn't have the right parts or couldn't fix it. I was forced to wear layers of clothing and stay close to my space heater. I invited my family to Thanksgiving dinner at my place, but I had to cancel at the last minute because my heat broke again.

When my seven year old granddaughter visited, I pretended that dressing in layers was a game so she would not get scared. I stayed up all night, flipping the circuit breaker back on every half an hour when it would flip off, so my granddaughter wouldn't freeze. Cold and stress make my health problems worse, and I was in a lot of pain.

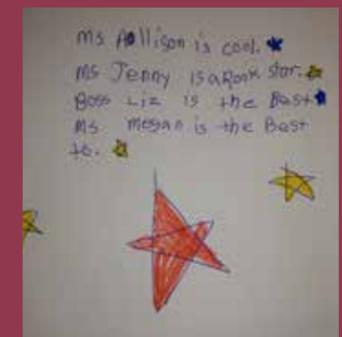
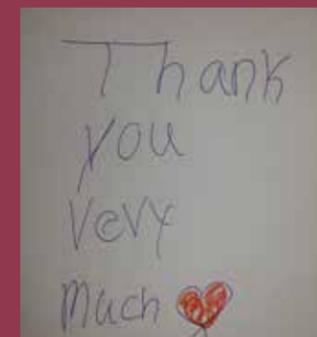
I still believed that management at the complex was going to rectify the situation. However, my Georgia Power bill was over \$400 per month. My only income is disability benefits. I could not continue to pay my electric bills and also pay rent. I need to use my sleep apnea machine to keep breathing at night, so letting the power get cut off would risk my life. I finally made an executive decision to pay my electric bill instead of my rent. That's when my landlord filed a dispossessory.

AVLF found an attorney to help me in court. The day before the hearing, he came to my house and went over everything that was needed for my case. My heart felt extreme relief and gratitude to watch him represent my case in court the next day. It became clear to the opposing lawyer that my lawyer was prepared and qualified to fight for my rights. Of course, we won. My landlord agreed to dismiss the dispossessory and waive all back rent and late fees. I moved out soon after and am now living in a much better home.

Without AVLF I would have been another victim of a seven day removal, the same as 90% of the cases that went before me that day. I will forever be grateful for AVLF.



Artwork Gallery – Thank You Notes





“ For the first time I truly felt someone had my interest at heart. It gave me hope when I was overwhelmed with stress. Thank you so much for understanding my situation. ”

– Saturday Lawyer Program Client



financial report

Occasionally, we are asked, “Why do you need any money to run what is essentially a volunteer organization?”

The volunteer lawyers who represent our clients are recruited, trained, and then mentored by AVLF staff. Staff members also speak with, counsel, advocate for, and otherwise support thousands of Atlantans who call but cannot qualify for services from pro bono attorneys.

More than 75% of AVLF’s budget pays for personnel salaries and benefits. Eighty percent of AVLF staff directly interact with volunteer attorneys and clients.

Most of the remaining budget pays for rent for the AVLF office and for the costs associated with our five annual fund- and friend-raisers. Our policy is never to spend more than 10% of an event’s gross on expenses.

In 2014, revenue to AVLF came from three sources:

- 1. 21%:** We receive a legislatively mandated **add-on to filing fees** in the State and Magistrate courts of Fulton County.
- 2. 23%:** AVLF received **grants** from a variety of sources, including the Atlanta Foundation, the Ida Alice Ryan Charitable Trust, the Mary Allen Lindsey Branan Foundation, and the UPS Foundation.
- 3. 56%:** Generous individual lawyers, law firms, corporate legal departments, and Bar sections donated almost all the remainder of the AVLF’s revenue as **unrestricted gifts** and/or in support of one of the Foundation’s **fundraising events**. Our primary and largest fundraiser, the Winetasting, raised almost 2/3 of the total contributions we received from the legal community.

our events ■ fundraisers



23rd Annual Winetasting

On the first Thursday each November, the Atlanta legal community kicks off the holiday season with the AVLF Winetasting. On November 6, more than 900 guests joined AVLF at The World of Coca-Cola for the annual celebration of the outstanding pro bono legal work performed throughout the Atlanta legal community. United Distributors coordinated the donation of red and white wine and Tennessee and Japanese whiskies, while A Divine Event catered the party with an unusual flair. The fundraising campaign for the evening raised over \$500,000, nearly 45% of AVLF's 2014 income.



2nd Annual Beer Tasting and BBQ Battle



The Beer Tasting & Celebrity BBQ Battle is a collaborative effort of the Atlanta Legal Aid Society and Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation to raise funds – and awareness – to support critical programs administered by each organization in the Atlanta area. This event, presented by Alston & Bird, was held in the beautiful Greystone at Piedmont Park on Thursday, June 5. Celebrity chefs Kevin Rathbun, Kevin Gillespie of Gunshow, Howard Hsu of Sweet Auburn BBQ, and the team from Farm Burger duelled it out in an extremely competitive BBQ cook-off, with Rathbun as the victor. Attendees enjoyed 15 craft beers courtesy of United Distributors, with Smokebelly and Carole Parks Catering providing delicious side dishes and desserts. More than 500 friends of AVLF and Atlanta Legal Aid attended, raising over \$50,000 to support equal access to justice in our community.

our events ■ fundraisers



3rd Annual Warner, Bates, McGough, McGinnis & Portnoy Guardian ad Litem Benefit

Each August, the metropolitan area's largest family law firm hosts a party at its law office to raise funds for AVLF's Guardian ad Litem Program. On August 21, the beautiful penthouse offices of Warner, Bates, McGough, McGinnis & Portnoy provided the perfect backdrop for sushi and socializing at the 3rd annual fundraiser, which was sponsored by IAG Forensics, Signature FD, and Paragon Legal Technology Support. The event is the primary pillar of support sustaining a program that has proven invaluable to the Fulton County Superior Court's Family Division, and as usual, judges, attorneys and other family law professionals gave generously (and celebrated convivially) at the event, which raised \$15,000 for the Guardian ad Litem Program.



1st Annual PurSHOEing Justice

PurSHOEing Justice, a fundraiser designed to recognize the legal issues facing women in poverty and those volunteers and programs who help them, supports the Domestic Violence Project's Safe Families Office. AVLF Board members Elizabeth Finn Johnson and Jennifer Jackson led an amazing team of women who made the First Annual PSJ a resounding success. King & Spalding hosted 100 of our friends on March 13 and provided hors d'oeuvres and decorations - including the room's giant balloon stiletto centerpiece. We are also grateful to Veritext for contributing goodie bags and to United Distributors for providing beverages, including the event's signature cocktail, the Red Stiletto. The evening raised \$5,000 to benefit the SFO.





Lawyer in the Library

Started in 2012, the AVLF Lawyer in the Library Series brings legal experts out into the community to conduct “know your rights” workshops on issues ranging from the expungement of criminal records to consumer and credit card debt and landlord-tenant disputes. Held in Atlanta-Fulton County public libraries in communities where the need is greatest, this series was responsible for 28 clinics – reaching hundreds of our neighbors – in 2014.



AVLF Monday Night at the Movies: *American Winter*

On September 15, nearly 300 friends new and old joined us for a one-time screening of the documentary film *American Winter* at Landmark Midtown Art Cinema. Admission included a Q&A after the screening with guest speakers Harry Gantz, Co-Director of *American Winter*; Bill Bolling, Executive Director of the Atlanta Community Food Bank; Melissa Johnson, Policy Analyst at Georgia Budget & Policy Institute; and Cole Thaler, Director of Housing and Consumer Programs at AVLF. This film was the first in an annual series. Our goal is to raise awareness and promote a deeper understanding of poverty and the challenges our clients face – and overcome.





special friends: donors

We are so grateful to the following donors who supported AVLF with gifts of \$10,000 and greater:

Alston & Bird LLP
Arnall Golden Gregory LLP
John Chandler & Elizabeth Tanis
The Coca-Cola Company Legal Division
Daily Report
Chuck & Jamie Gabriel
Elizabeth Finn Johnson & Stuart Johnson
Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton LLP
King & Spalding LLP
Sutherland Asbill & Brennan LLP
Warner, Bates, McGough, McGinnis & Portnoy
McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP
Gia M. Partain & Paul J. Murphy
PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP
Smith, Gambrell & Russell LLP
Taylor English Duma LLP
Troutman Sanders LLP



award winners: celebrating service luncheon

On Friday, October 17, AVLF honored our 2014 award winners at the Atlanta Bar Association's Celebrating Service Luncheon. As always, it was an incredible experience to spend time with some of the people who work so hard to better the Atlanta community. Experiences such as these reaffirm why we do the work that we do.

Congratulations to the 2014 award winners:

S. Phillip Heiner Award

Mark VanderBroek

AVLF Firm of the Year

Parker, Hudson, Rainer & Dobbs LLP

AVLF Difference Makers

Lazega & Johanson LLC and Bodker, Ramsey, Andrews, Winograd & Wildstein, P.C.

AVLF Domestic Violence Project Volunteer of the Year

Kenneth B. Franklin

AVLF Hero Award

Kristyne Seidenberg

AVLF Safe Families Champion of the Year

Nilufar Abdi-Tabari

our people



board of directors

“Without AVLF, over 5,000 of our neighbors would continue to feel powerless and voiceless in our legal system. I encourage all lawyers in our community to come see what AVLF is all about and see what you can do to make a difference. I promise you, you will get far more than you give.”

– Elizabeth Finn Johnson, 2014 Board of Directors President

Elizabeth Finn Johnson, *The Coca-Cola Company*, AVLF Board President

Steve Allen, *SunTrust Bank*, AVLF Board Vice President

Dena R. Hong, *United Parcel Service*, AVLF Board Treasurer

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Gabe Mendel, *United States Attorney's Office*

Sherida Mabon, *Thomas Kennedy Sampson & Tompkins*

Amelia Medina, *King & Spalding LLP*

Kristen Rajagopal, *Hall Booth Smith PC*

our people

avlf staff

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Michael Lucas
Deputy Director

Cole Thaler
Director, Housing and Consumer Programs

Elizabeth Ann Whipple
Director, Domestic Violence & Guardian ad Litem Programs

Julia Black
Program Coordinator, Domestic Violence Program

Carey Kersten
Development Director

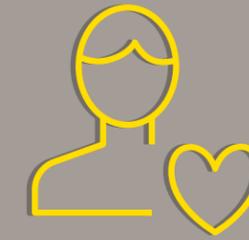
Dionne Hines Morse
Senior Paralegal/Program Coordinator

Kenisha Wade
Paralegal

Jon Reading
Office Manager

Caroline Charlton
Administrative Assistant

Lilli Crowe
Program Assistant



how you can help

Through AVLF alone, lawyers in Atlanta give more than \$2,000,000 of high quality, free legal services to low-income residents of our city every year. By standing up for a victim of intimate partner violence, protecting a tenant whose landlord refuses to honor contracts and housing codes, representing an employee denied wages or advising a young woman in the wake of her mother's death, lawyers give 5,000 or more Atlantans each year an entry to an otherwise inaccessible legal system.

Atlanta is not just a series of streets we navigate to get to our work or our homes. This is our community, and the people who make up our community are our neighbors, our friends, and our responsibility. There is a direct link between your generosity and our ability to deliver worthy pro bono programs that save homes, save lives, and promote safe and stable families.

Stand up with us. Visit avlf.org today to sign up as a volunteer or to donate.





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