

President's Message

It's A Wrap

By 2020-21 President Harry J. (Skip) Philips, Jr.

It's really true — time does fly, especially when you are having fun! As I come to the end of my term as Louisiana Bar Foundation (LBF) president, I am reminded about the challenges we faced but will remember all of the successes we achieved as a Foundation. I was installed as president and held my first board meeting via Zoom, and I will end my year at what promises to be the virtual 2021 LBF Annual Fellows Gala in April. Thank goodness for technology that even I could figure out!

During this ever changing and challenging year, we were able to make great strides. In May, during lockdown, we awarded more than \$8.7 million in grants to a network of nonprofit, civil legal aid organizations who serve Louisiana's poorest citizens. The number of Louisiana citizens facing life-changing challenges is rapidly increasing every day. Through no fault of their own, more families find themselves qualifying for civil legal aid and more civil legal issues are surfacing. Civil legal aid is a vital component of our state's response to, and recovery from, the current public health crisis.

I am also pleased to announce the establishment of the Kendall Vick Public Law Fund. To provide a path for continuing its mission, specifically with respect to the Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP), the Kendall Vick Public Law Foundation transitioned to a restricted fund of the LBF in December 2020. LRAP provides direct financial assistance to public interest attorneys and helps retain committed lawyers who provide quality services to clients. The LBF is grateful for the opportunity to continue the mission of the Kendall Vick Foundation and to provide financial assistance to public interest attorneys committed to helping our communities.

The newly established Infinity Fund is designed to provide long-term support for the operation and administrative expenses of the LBF. Donations will help ensure

that the Foundation is able to meet staffing and other operational expenses, in good economic times and in bad. The Infinity Fund is a dedicated fund for the specific purpose of staff and operational expenses.

Be on the lookout for our brand-new project Speak Out for Justice! Focus on Civil Legal Aid. The LBF plans to simultaneously engage multiple content creators who will develop a public awareness-focused or a research-focused project for the LBF to increase understanding of the vital need for civil legal aid services for those who cannot afford them. This Education Committee project is accepting proposals until March 1. Complete RFPs are on our website.

If you didn't participate on one of the many virtual regional POP UP events, you missed free CLE, and some great information on civil legal aid and how the need is increasing. The POP UP WRAP UP networking event included a panel featuring local and national journalists, discussions on how the LBF operates, hot topics for grantees, and a legal community huddle.

Exciting progress is being made through technology to provide additional resources to our grantees. The Louisiana Civil Legal Navigator, an LBF-funded project of Lagniappe Law Lab, directs Louisiana's low-income and underserved communities to the most appropriate resources within the civil legal aid network. It is an intelligent technology platform that enables those falling within the "Justice Gap" to find actionable information and resources particular to their situation. The Navigator was launched in October and currently supports four areas of law — divorce, child custody, private landlord-tenant law, and unpaid wages. More content and site upgrades are on the way.



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The LBF engaged Community Services Analysis to update the Civil Legal Aid Economic Impact/Social Return on Investment report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2020. The updated information will be a critical component to future advocacy work including funding requests on behalf of the civil legal aid network.

We will host Regional Grantee Staff and Board Training sessions in late February. These training events are aimed at strengthening grantee leadership by reviewing board member responsibilities, setting program and administration priorities for the organization, identifying current client service trends and best practices, and evaluating mission goals and outcomes. Training topics will include governance, communications and diversity.

I want to extend a special thanks to our board and committee members, as well as to our Community Partnership Panels. The work you have done has moved us forward, helped the Foundation to achieve its strategic goals and made us a better organization.

And, as you all know, we would be lost without our stellar staff. Quietly, effectively, and often behind the scenes, they keep us focused on our mission, coordinating essential operations, maintaining relationships, prodding gently when necessary and always achieving results. We are grateful to them for their support and hard work, every day, to make us the best we can be.

I look forward to reporting on our strategic plan and the Foundation's 2023 vision very soon. For more information on everything included in this report, go to: www.raisingthebar.org. Or call the office at (504)561-1046. If you would like to donate, go to: <https://raisingthebar.org/ways-to-give/how-you-can-give>. Or mail directly to the LBF at Ste. 1000, 1615 Poydras St., New Orleans, LA 70112.

Thanks to all of you who contribute to the important work of the Bar Foundation. It has been my great privilege to be a part of this dynamic organization.