

SOUTHERN MINNESOTA  
REGIONAL LEGAL SERVICES  
CITY OF ST PAUL COMMUNITY  
ORGANIZATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM  
(COPP)  
PRESENTATION



Saint Paul City Council, February 14, 2018

# What is Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS)?

2

- We provide free, high-quality legal help to low-income people in critical civil matters. Since 1909, we've helped individuals and families secure and protect their basic needs, maintaining freedom from hunger, homelessness, sickness, and abuse.
- Our main office is located at 55 E. 5<sup>th</sup> Street in downtown Saint Paul, with over 50 employees working in Saint Paul. We also have staffed offices throughout Southern Minnesota.

# COPP Funds Support Our Work

3

- 1) Housing Alliance Law Office (HALO) Program
- 2) Housing Equality Law Project (HELP)
- 3) Housing Counseling Program

# HALO Program

4

- We help low-income Saint Paul residents living in distressed/substandard housing facing displacement or homelessness due to serious maintenance issues or lack of essential tenant services from landlords.
- We take legal action on behalf of tenants after the Department of Inspection has ordered repairs and landlords do not act, and when landlords disconnect a tenant's utilities.
- We receive direct client referrals from Saint Paul City Inspectors because we offer a wide array of services.
- We help keep St. Paul rental up to code so tenants and their families enjoy a safe place to live.

# Example 1: Infestations

5

Bedbugs



Mice



Roaches



Bedbugs in a mattress



# Example 2: Fire and Mold

6



# Example 3: Other Unsafe Conditions

7



Leaking Ceiling



Non-functioning  
sanitary facilities



Dangerous  
Electrical Wiring



# HALO Program: Outcomes & Goals

8

- In 2017 we served 112 Saint Paul residents in these cases.
- We also leveraged City funds to obtain HUD funding for similar work.
- In 2018, we hope to serve the same number of clients as we did in 2017 due to flat levels of funding and increased program costs.
- We also plan to work on the Frogtown Rondo Home Fund to make vacant buildings habitable and affordable.
- According to a recent study about the economic impact of legal aid in Minnesota, every dollar invested in legal aid yields a return of \$3.94 to the community. (*Legal Aid's Impact*, Minnesota Legal Services Coalition, [www.mnlegalservices.org](http://www.mnlegalservices.org)).



# HELP and Housing Counseling

9

- HELP provides fair housing education and legal advocacy to St. Paul residents to combat discriminatory practices in St. Paul.
- We help enforce fair housing laws on behalf of low-income St. Paul Residents when tenants encounter refusal to rent, discrimination in terms and conditions of housing, and refusal to make reasonable accommodations when residents are in a protected class.
- Legal work varies from counseling to legal actions in a variety of state, local, and federal courts.

# HELP and Housing Counseling

10

- We provide legal counseling and representation to St. Paul tenants and homeowners in “critical need” housing cases.
- We help tenants with landlord disputes like evictions, illegal lockouts, and illegal denials and termination from Section 8 and Public Housing programs.
- We help homeowners who are delinquent on mortgages and face foreclosure.

# HELP and Housing Counseling Examples

11

- Discrimination against tenants based on: race, ethnic background, sexual harassment, disability status, domestic abuse victim status.
- Recent trends include:
  - Residents with disabilities cannot comply with lease conditions and risk eviction.
  - Residents with limited English proficiency and cultural barriers risk eviction without adequate assistance navigating lease conditions and other legal requirements.

# HELP and Housing Counseling: Outcomes and Goals

12

- In 2016/17 fiscal year, we helped 213 St. Paul residents in these cases and leveraged funding for a HUD grant to provide similar services.
- In 2018, we hope to serve at least the same number of clients as we did in 2017 due to flat levels of funding and increased program costs.
- We hope to increase that number through leveraging volunteer attorneys at an ongoing Rondo Library housing eviction expungement clinic.

# In Conclusion

13

SMRLS uses COPP funds to keep low-income Saint Paul residents:

- Safe
- Stable
- Housed in healthy environments
- Free from discriminatory and abusive landlord practices

# Thank You!

14

## Thank you for your support and partnership!

