

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)?

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- 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. 5th 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

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

HALO Program

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- 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

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Bedbugs



Mice



Roaches



Bedbugs in a mattress



Example 2: Fire and Mold

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Example 3: Other Unsafe Conditions

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Leaking Ceiling



Non-functioning
sanitary facilities



Dangerous
Electrical Wiring

HALO Program: Outcomes & Goals

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- 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).

HELP and Housing Counseling

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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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!

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Thank you for your support and partnership!

