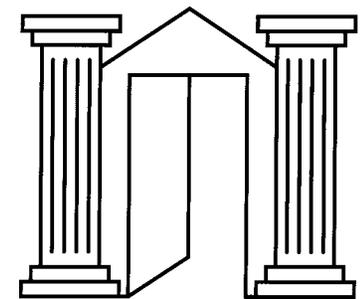


THE WOMEN'S LAW CENTER  
OF MARYLAND, INC

*Annual Report*  
*2003*



## Table of Contents

Women's Law Center Board of Directors and Staff	2
Strategic Planning	3
New Committees Formed	4
Celebrating and Honoring Our Legacy	5
Joint Research Project: Custody and Financial Distribution in Divorce	6
Publications and Education	7
Hotlines	8
Services to Domestic Violence Victims	9
Legislative Efforts	10
Judicial Selections	11
Amicus Activity	12
Statistics at a Glance	13
Financial Statement	14



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Elizabeth Morris  
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# Strategic Planning

The Women's Law Center Board and staff completed an ambitious strategic planning process that resulted in a vision statement, mission statement and five key areas of focus that will guide the priorities and direct the resources of the organization for the next three to five years. Specific goals, strategies and tasks were also developed. These action steps constitute the immediate work plan for the Board and staff. The direction and clarity that resulted from this rigorous process will help the Women's Law Center achieve its vision of a legal system that provides justice and fairness for women.

## STRATEGIC PLAN

I. LEADERSHIP: The Women's Law Center is a leading voice and community resource to address issues affecting women by utilizing legal analysis and remedies.

II. MEMBERSHIP: The Women's Law Center is a membership organization that offers opportunities for its members to support and participate in advocacy on behalf of women and families.

III. DIRECT SERVICES: The Women's Law Center provides selected direct legal services that address unmet and critical legal needs for women with the goal of identifying and implementing systemic changes to improve the response of the legal system to women.

IV. RESEARCH AND POLICY: The Women's Law Center conducts research and policy analysis and develops and implements policy recommendations on issues affecting women and families.

V. ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: The Women's Law Center maintains and enhances the organization's infrastructure to adequately support the implementation of the mission of the organization.

## Mission:

To serve as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women by advocating for the legal rights of women through policy analysis, advocacy, litigation, education, research, judicial selection, legislative advocacy and direct services. The Women's Law Center is a membership organization that offers opportunities for its members to support and participate in advocacy on behalf of women and families.

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## New Committees Formed

### Issues Committee:

As a result of the strategic planning process, an Issues Committee was formed to identify and evaluate new issues, policy areas or direct services that have an impact on women and, where appropriate, to develop an action plan for response. The Committee developed a specific list of criteria to be used to evaluate a new area of interest and a process to address issues or events that require an immediate response. The Committee's plans for the upcoming year include involving Women's Law Center members in the identification of emerging or critical issues for women.

### Employment Committee:

As the Board and the Issues Committee examined the legal issues that most dramatically affect women, workplace issues emerged as the area most in need of attention. Therefore, the Women's Law Center Board endorsed the formation of an Employment Law Committee. The Committee will address issues that may include equal pay, family and medical leave, sexual harassment, unemployment insurance and others. The Employment Law Committee offers another opportunity for member involvement to affect policy and potentially implement new services that benefit women.

## Celebrating and Honoring Our Legacy

The Women's Law Center has a proud legacy of advocacy and assertive efforts to protect women's legal rights. The organization's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary was celebrated during the Annual Dinner and Awards Ceremony. The highlight of the evening was a presentation of the Law Center's history, including vignettes shared by the leaders of various eras. These personal presentations helped the audience remember the challenges faced by women 30 years ago and appreciate the role the Women's Law Center has played in improving the legal rights of women. In preparation for the event, many of the early leaders were brought together to reminisce. Background information about the organization was compiled and archives were organized. A timeline of the organization's accomplishments was developed and displayed at the event.

The annual event also celebrated the legal community's current leaders and their contributions to women's legal rights. Dean Karen Rothenberg received the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Dorothy Beatty Memorial Award and Judge Louise Scrivener received the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Rosalyn B. Bell Award.

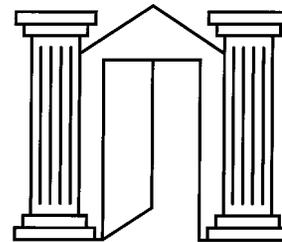
In honor of the 30 years of advocacy, the organization initiated an ambitious fundraising campaign to raise 30 contributions of \$1,000. Contributors to the 30 for 30 Campaign each "purchased" a year that was significant to them. The campaign has been extremely successful due to the many generous donors who chose to honor the legacy and support the future of the organization by participating in the campaign.



1972



1983



1996

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5

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6

## Joint Research Project: Custody and Financial Distribution In Divorce

The Women's Law Center is engaged in an ambitious research project to analyze custody decisions and financial distribution in divorce in Maryland. The Lyn P. Meyerhoff Fund, the Blaustein Foundation and the Administrative Office of the Courts fund the Custody and Financial Distribution in Divorce research project. A random 10% sample of divorce and custody filings was selected from Fiscal Year 1999 cases. Researchers collected and recorded data from 2,573 cases. An active Advisory Committee oversees the initiative and will be instrumental in the final analysis of the data and formulation of recommendations.

The Custody and Financial Distribution in Divorce Research Project will provide previously unavailable empirical data about process and outcomes in family law cases. The data will provide information about issues such as: who is asking for and getting custody; what type of custody is being awarded; awards of alimony, monetary distributions and share of pensions and factors influencing the awards; interrelation between custody awards and financial distributions; types of outcomes which most often result in subsequent litigation; use of court services (mediation and court evaluators); stages in the process when various outcomes are reached; frequency of allegations of domestic violence; and, frequency of legal representation.

Data results and recommendations will be released during the upcoming year. This objective information will help practitioners and policy-makers understand the current status of the implementation of family law. It will also inform decision-makers regarding appropriate policy changes, necessary operational adjustments and the most effective allocation of resources that will improve outcomes for families. During the upcoming year, the Women's Law Center will seek additional resources to implement the recommendations suggested by the research, to educate decision-makers about the research findings and to advocate for policy changes.

## Publications and Education

The Women's Law Center recognizes that access to reliable information is a potent source of equality for women. With accurate information, women are able to make informed and competent choices based on facts and understanding. The Women's Law Center provides information and improves access to the legal system through hotlines, information and referral efforts and educational publications.

The Women's Law Center developed and printed its newest publication, *Your Money Matters: A Guide to Financial Independence for Women*. Funded by the Lyn P. Meyerhoff Fund, the publication is designed to educate women about the importance of achieving and maintaining financial independence at all stages of life. The publication provides straightforward information and practical tips about topics such as assessing your financial situation, dealing with divorce, and budgeting. Tear-out planning worksheets are included in the booklet.

The Women's Law Center's other publications provide accurate information to women about their legal rights and continue to be popular. These publications include: *Legal Rights in Marriage and Divorce* (available in Spanish); *Legal Rights of Unmarried Cohabitants*, *Sex Discrimination in Employment*, and *Battered – What Can I Do?*. Through the MEDOVI project, the Law Center's publication, *Battered - What Can I Do?*, is available in Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Korean and Vietnamese. Approximately 500 copies of the publications were distributed during the year.

The Women's Law Center also worked with other organizations to support educational materials and opportunities. The Law Center's Legal Projects Manager and volunteer attorneys assisted the Montgomery County Commission for Women to update and revise their publication *Easing the Financial and Emotional Costs of Divorce*. The Women's Law Center also co-sponsored a Law Day presentation to high school students with the Alliance of Black Women Attorneys, the Monumental City Bar Association and the Baltimore City Solicitor's Office.

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## Hotlines

### Family Law Hotline

In its 15<sup>th</sup> year, the Family Law Hotline continues to provide valuable information and advice regarding family law issues. Last year, the Women's Law Center answered almost 2,400 calls to the Hotline. In 2003, 73% of the callers were women. Thirty two percent of the calls involved custody and another 25% involved divorce or separation. The attorneys also provided referrals to community-based legal and social services.

Two days a week, over 100 Women's Law Center volunteer attorneys staff Hotline. During FY 03, these attorneys provided 728 hours of pro bono services. The Family Law Hotline provides an excellent opportunity for Women's Law Center members and supporters to contribute to the community and to fulfill their pro bono obligation.

During this year the Women's Law Center undertook a major effort to identify new volunteers. As a result, 24 attorneys were added to the volunteer roster. Over 7,000 brochures were mailed to various referral sources throughout the state.

The Family Law Hotline is operated in partnership with the Legal Aid Bureau which handles the calls three days per week. The Hotline is funded by the Maryland Legal Services Corporation.

### Legal Forms Helpline

The Legal Forms Helpline assists pro se litigants in completing the standard Domestic Relations Forms. In addition, callers are provided information about choosing which form to use, how to file forms and how to execute service. Helpline attorneys also help callers to evaluate whether it is appropriate to proceed pro se and they make referrals to community-based social and legal services. The Legal Forms Helpline operates 20 hours per week. In FY 03 the Helpline responded to over 2,700 calls. Almost half of these callers had an income of under \$30,000. The Legal Forms Helpline is funded by the Administrative Office of the Courts.

## Services to Domestic Violence Victims

The Women's Law Center provides direct legal services to victims of domestic violence in the Circuit Courts for Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Montgomery County. These Protection Order Advocacy and Representation Projects (POARP) are operated in partnership with the House of Ruth Maryland. The POARP attorneys are located in the courthouses and all petitioners requesting protection from abuse are referred to the POARP office. Therefore, the services are extremely accessible to victims. All appropriate victims of intimate partner abuse are provided with representation at hearings. In addition to representation, other services include: initial consultation, explanation of the protective order statute, assistance completing the forms, answering divorce and custody questions, referrals, advocacy and safety planning.

In FY 2003, the Montgomery County Domestic Violence Assistance Program served 814 victims, Baltimore City POARP served 438 victims and Baltimore County POARP served 169 victims.\* The Baltimore County POARP is funded through a VAWA grant from the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention. The Administrative Office of the Courts funds the Baltimore City and Montgomery County POARP offices.

The Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence (MEDOVI) Project provides outreach and direct legal services to foreign-born victims of domestic violence. The project sponsors a multi-lingual hotline and can provide interpreters when needed. Legal services include representation at Protective Order hearings and assistance with battered spouse waivers and self-petitions. The MEDOVI project maintains close ties within the immigrant community to insure that individuals and service providers are aware of the MEDOVI project. MEDOVI is funded by a Victims of Crime Assistance Project grant from the Department of Human Resources Office of Victim Services.

\* *The Baltimore County and Montgomery County offices are operated jointly with the House of Ruth. Therefore, some services were provided by House of Ruth staff.*

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10

## Legislative Efforts

Recognizing that new legislative action can have a profound impact on the legal rights of women, the Women's Law Center is committed to legislative advocacy. During the 2003 General Assembly Session, the Law Center submitted written and/or oral testimony on 20 pieces of legislation. The Law Center also issued action alerts to encourage members to take an active role in the process by contacting their legislators.

The Women's Law Center's legislative priority was the Short Term Disability for Working Families Act. This bill would have established a new temporary disability program within the Worker's Compensation Commission to provide up to 12 weeks of paid family leave. The Women's Law Center played a leadership role with a broad coalition that supported the legislation. The Center's support included helping to develop a cost estimate and benefit analysis, working with legislators to address drafting issues and garnering grass roots support for the bill. Although this bill did not pass this year, the process was an excellent opportunity to educate legislators about the importance of work and family issues. The Women's Law Center will continue to work with the coalition to improve and refine the legislation for submission in future sessions.

Other issues addressed by the Women's Law Center during the 2003 Session included funding for legal services, domestic violence, pay equity, a bill to expand the grounds for an absolute divorce to include child abuse, and bills relating to choice and reproductive rights.

## Judicial Selections

The Judicial Selections Committee is one of the most active of the Women's Law Center's committees. The Law Center is deeply committed to insuring a judiciary that reflects integrity and professionalism because these qualities will help insure justice and fairness for women. The organization also seeks to increase the number of women seeking and obtaining judicial appointments. The Judicial Selections Committee offers an excellent opportunity for members to become involved in accomplishing these important goals.

The Judicial Selections Committee is comprised of attorneys who are Women's Law Center members and who have a wide range of legal experience. The Committee's process is deliberate and rigorous. During the past year, the process was formalized and refined. Each candidate is evaluated according to specific criteria, including judicial demeanor, integrity, experience, responsiveness to positive change and commitment to a judicial system free of gender bias. The Committee ranks each candidate and communicates its ranking and observations to the Judicial Nominating Commission and the Governor.

During 2002 and 2003, the Committee interviewed over twenty-five judicial candidates. The candidates were applying for vacancies in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Cecil County, Anne Arundel County, Wicomico County, Howard County and the Court of Appeals. During the upcoming year, the Committee plans to proactively notify applicants for judicial vacancies about the availability of the organization's judicial selections process.

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12

## Amicus Activity

The Women's Law Center recognizes that significant legal change often occurs through impact litigation. This year the Law Center participated as amici in two very significant cases.

The Women's Law Center joined other legal advocates in the case of *Frase v. Barnhart* which was argued before the Court of Special Appeals in September 2003. This case raised the issue of whether, as an indigent mother fighting for the fundamental right to retain custody of her child against the intrusion of a third party, Ms. Frase had a right to appointed counsel under the Maryland Declaration of Rights. The Women's Law Center signed on to two separate "friend of the court" briefs: one by the Legal Aid Bureau addressing the unmet need for legal assistance for low-income litigants in civil matters and one by the University of Baltimore School of Law regarding whether a parent can be forced to continue to litigate a custody dispute with an unrelated third party after the court has found the parent to be fit.

In *Ocheltree v. Scollon Productions, Inc.*, the Women's Law Center joined the Public Justice Center and others on an amicus brief. The issue involved sexual harassment, including the interpretation of the "because of sex" requirement in establishing a sexually hostile work environment claim. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4<sup>th</sup> Circuit ruled in favor of Ms. Ocheltree. Scollon Productions has petitioned the United States Supreme Court for review of that decision.

## Women's Law Center Statistics at a Glance

Clients Served	
Baltimore City POARP:	438
Baltimore County POARP:	169*
Montgomery County DVA:	814*
MEDOVI:	78
Family Law Hotline:	2,432
Legal Forms Helpline:	2,712
Publications Distributed:	500
Information and Referrals by Administrative Office:	2,432

## Joint Research Project Numbers at a Glance

Number of cases reviewed:	2,573
Number of cases analyzed:	1,847
In Baltimore Metropolitan area	983
With children	1,022
Divorce	1,687
Woman as plaintiff	1,127
Man as plaintiff	720

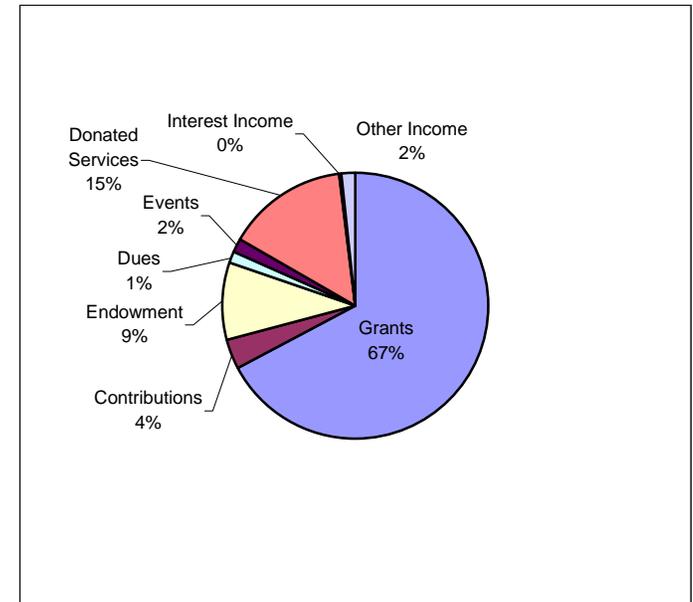
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## Financial Statement Fiscal Year 2003

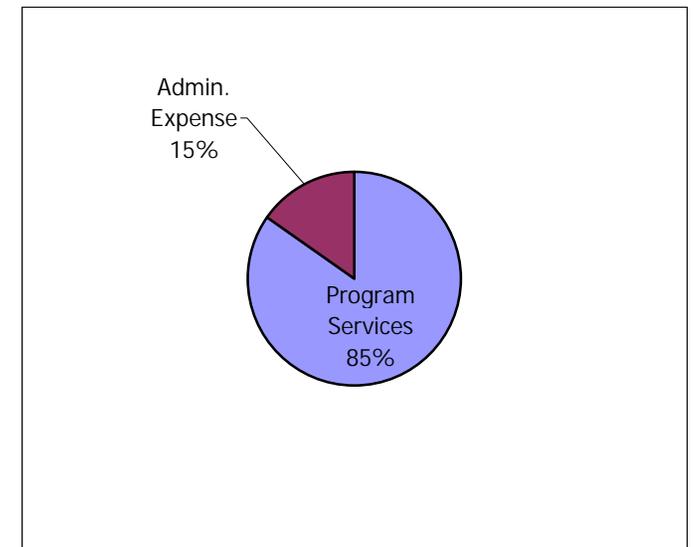
### Income

Grants	\$502,192
Contributions	\$27,831
Endowment	\$70,000
Dues	\$9,620
Events	\$13,629
Donated Services	\$109,200
Interest Income	\$2,374
Other Income	\$12,602
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$747,448</b>



### Expenses

Program Services	\$617,872
Administrative	\$110,348
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$728,220</b>



Change in Net Assets	\$19,228
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	\$282,606
Net Assets at End of Year	\$301,834