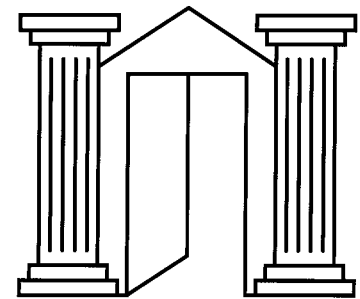


THE WOMEN'S LAW CENTER  
OF MARYLAND, INC

*Annual Report*  
*2005*



Dear Women's Law Center Supporter:

The Women's Law Center has a long and proud history of promoting and protecting the legal rights of women. Each year, as we reflect on our accomplishments, our challenges, and our future plans, we evaluate whether we remain true to our vision of a fair and just legal system. This process helps ensure that the services we provide address an unmet need and that we are making a real difference for women. This year we have successfully launched several important new initiatives that further our evolution and continue our commitment to individual and systemic advocacy for women.

For individual clients we have instituted a Reduced Fee Child Custody Representation Project, expanded the Protection Order and Advocacy Project (POARP) to Carroll County, and started to provide Legal Forms Helpline services to Spanish speaking Marylanders. The new Reduced Fee Child Custody Representation Project provides lawyers to low income citizens in contested child custody cases. The POARP Projects provide representation to victims of domestic violence at protective order hearings. Without both these services, litigants must undertake the daunting task of fighting critical legal battles without an attorney. The Legal Forms Helpline, which assists pro se litigants, is now staffed by a bi-lingual attorney, helping us to better meet the needs of Spanish-speaking citizens.

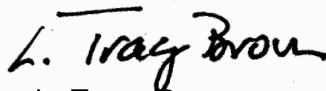
Through another new initiative, Justice in Divorce, the Women's Law Center is working toward systemic change that will impact women. This project will undertake cutting edge policy analysis and legal reform that will help insure more equitable distribution of financial resources and positive outcomes for women and children following divorce.

It is a pleasure and an honor to participate in the Women's Law Center's activities and to contribute to its mission. The work of the organization is carried out by a dedicated Board and competent and professional staff. Our efforts are supported by contributions of time and energy from our volunteers and financial donations from our members and friends. Without all of these resources, our achievements would not be possible. We know you share our commitment to women's legal rights and deeply appreciate your continued support.

Sincerely,



Francine Krumholz  
President



L. Tracy Brown  
Executive Director

# Table of Contents

Board of Directors and Staff	2
Vision, Mission and Strategic Plan	3
Direct Legal Services	4
Education	6
Research and Policy	8
Legislative Advocacy	9
Judicial Selections	10
Students Supporting the Women's Law Center	11
Justice Fund	12
Professional Alliances and Activities	13
Justice Fund Donors	14
Women's Law Center Supporters	15
Financial Statement	18
Join the Justice Fund	19



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## Vision

*A legal system that provides justice and fairness for women.*

## Mission

*To serve as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women by advocating for the 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.*

## Strategic Plan

The Women's Law Center's Board and staff efforts continue to be guided by the Strategic Plan we adopted in 2003. Recognizing that the Strategic Plan is a living document, annually we review the plan itself and committee work plans through a Board evaluation process. The direction and clarity that has resulted from the strategic planning process helps the Women's Law Center more effectively direct resources toward achieving our goals.

- 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.

*On the day a woman's domestic violence Protective Order against her child's father expired, the father picked the child up from school and refused to let the mother see her child. Through the Reduced Fee Custody Project, the mother was represented by an attorney who helped her obtain sole legal and physical custody of the child and child support. Successful resolution of this case protected the safety of the mother and child.*

4

## Direct Legal Services

### Reduced Fee Child Custody Representation Project

The Women's Law Center added a new direct service component to its legal services program. Through funding from the Maryland Legal Services Corporation, the Law Center operates the Reduced Fee Child Custody Project in Baltimore County. As part of a state-wide initiative, this project provides low income citizens with access to an attorney in contested custody cases. Attorneys who volunteer to take qualifying contested custody cases are compensated \$50 per hour with a cap of \$1,000 for each case taken. The Women's Law Center screens the cases and places them with experienced attorneys. The attorneys agree to continue to represent the client even after they exceed the payment cap. The Women's Law Center received funding to place 40 cases per year.

While providing a much needed service for low-income citizens, the Reduced Fee Child Custody Project also gives attorneys the opportunity to provide a crucial public service while still receiving payment for their professional services. Many attorneys find this contribution meaningful and rewarding. To date, 34 attorneys have taken cases through the reduced fee program. Several lawyers have taken multiple cases. The Women's Law Center works closely with the Baltimore County Bar Association and the Pro Bono Resource Center to identify interested attorneys. The Baltimore County Legal Aid Bureau office is also a partner in this project.

### Protection Order Advocacy and Representation Projects

The Women's Law Center opened a new Protection Order Advocacy and Representation Project (POARP) office to serve Carroll County. The POARP office is physically located in the Family Law Administration offices in the Circuit Court and assists victims who are seeking protection from domestic violence through the Circuit and District Courts. This busy office is staffed by an attorney and a legal advocate.

The Women's Law Center continues to operate POARP offices in the Circuit Courts for Baltimore City and Baltimore County. POARP attorneys are located in the courthouses, making the services accessible to victims. The POARPs provide representation at domestic violence hearings to victims of intimate partner abuse. In addition to representation, other supportive services include: legal consultation, assistance completing the forms, referrals, advocacy and safety planning. All the POARP offices continue to be operated in partnership with the House of Ruth Maryland. The POARP staff work actively within their local jurisdictions to improve services for victims.

In FY 2005, the Baltimore City POARP served 223 victims. Carroll County POARP served 206 victims and Baltimore County served 318 victims. The Baltimore City and Baltimore County POARP offices are funded by the Administrative Office of the Courts. The Carroll County POARP office was funded jointly through a VAWA grant from the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention and the Administrative Office of the Courts.

### **Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence Project**

The Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence (MEDOVI) Project addresses the special legal needs of foreign-born victims of domestic violence. The project provides information, referrals and legal representation in immigration hearings. A multi-lingual hotline and funding for interpreters allow non-English speakers to access services. The Project Director provides technical assistance to other service providers regarding immigration issues facing their clients. Last year MEDOVI served 44 clients. MEDOVI is funded by a Victims of Crime Assistance Project grant from the Department of Human Resources Office of Victim Services. A new grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Baltimore Direct Services Grant Program will allow the project's hours to expand during the upcoming year.

*“I was frustrated seeking help from anybody in this new to me country. After talking with the MEDOVI attorney I started feeling not so alone with my problems. It is so important that the Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence Project exists and such wonderful women put their effort to help abused women from foreign countries.”*

*Thank you letter to MEDOVI from a Ukrainian woman.*

*A 61 year old women from Cecil County called the Family Law Hotline because her husband of over 20 years had become verbally abusive. She wanted to leave the state to escape an increasingly dangerous situation but she thought she could not leave until she had a separation agreement. The volunteer attorney provided the caller with basic information about her legal rights, which allowed her to make an informed and independent decision to protect her safety.*

6

## Education

### Family Law Hotline

In its 17<sup>th</sup> year, the Family Law Hotline continues to provide valuable information and advice regarding family law issues. In FY05, the Women's Law Center answered almost 2,200 calls to the Hotline. Seventy-four percent of the callers were women. Thirty-five percent of the calls involved custody and another 37 percent involved divorce or separation.

Women's Law Center volunteer attorneys staff the Hotline two days a week. During FY05, 159 attorneys served on our panel and 40 worked more than one shift. These attorneys provided 357 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. The Hotline is funded by the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC) and is operated in partnership with the Legal Aid Bureau, whose attorneys answer calls three days a week.

New technology provided through the Maryland Legal Assistance Network (MLAN) allows the Legal Aid Bureau to handle overflow calls that cannot be answered by the volunteer. With this change, more low income citizens are served.

### 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 achieve service. Helpline attorneys also help callers evaluate whether it is appropriate to proceed pro se and make referrals for community-based social and legal services.

This year the Legal Forms Helpline expanded to include one shift staffed by a bi-lingual attorney in order to meet the needs of Spanish speaking citizens. The Administrative Office of the Courts translated the Domestic Relations Forms and corresponding web pages into Spanish and added this complementary service.

The Legal Forms Helpline operates 24 hours per week. In FY05 the Helpline responded to over 2,300 calls. Almost half of these callers had an income of under \$30,000. The Helpline is funded by the Administrative Office of the Courts.



## **Employment Law Hotline**

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. The Women's Law Center will establish a new Employment Law Hotline as a method to address this need. During this year the Employment Committee refined the concept for the project, set goals and developed plans for operation of the Hotline. We identified a part-time Project Director and, in collaboration with the Maryland Employment Lawyers Association, connected with lawyers willing to volunteer for the Hotline. The Women's Law Center is actively seeking funding for this new initiative.

## **Publications**

Access to reliable information is a potent source of equality for women. The Women's Law Center's many publications provide accurate information to women about their legal rights and continue to be popular. These publications include:

*Legal Rights in Marriage and Divorce* (also available in Spanish)

*Legal Rights of Unmarried Cohabitants*

*Sex Discrimination in Employment* (also available in Spanish)

*Your Money Matters: A Guide to Financial Independence for Women*

*Battered – What Can I Do?* (Through the MEDOVI project, this publication is also available in Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Korean and Vietnamese)

Approximately 500 copies of the publications were distributed during the year. An additional 500 copies of the Women's Law Center's newest publication, *Your Money Matters: A Guide to Financial Independence for Women*, was distributed at a conference sponsored by the Baltimore County Commission for Women titled, "The Money Conference for Women."

## Research and Policy

### **Justice in Divorce Project**

The purpose of the Women's Law Center's new Justice in Divorce Project is to reform Maryland's divorce and custody laws. The impetus for this project was the Women's Law Center's comprehensive Custody and Financial Distribution in Divorce research project which produced the first empirical data about family law decisions in Maryland. The research findings resulted in several key policy recommendations: to expand the purpose of spousal support; to develop spousal support formulas; to oppose legislation creating a presumption for joint custody; to increase the use of alternative dispute resolution techniques in divorce cases; and, to create a broad coalition to analyze and implement policy changes.

Through Justice in Divorce, which was formally launched in July 2005, the Women's Law Center will take the lead in conceptualizing and implementing legislative, policy and practice reforms critical to implementing the research project's recommendations. We will advocate for legislative changes that support an equitable distribution of financial resources at divorce. During the 2006 General Assembly Session, our priority will be legislation that would allow a judge to transfer title to real property from one spouse to the other. We will also work to develop a formula for spousal support guidelines to be used voluntarily by judges. These efforts will establish the groundwork for systemic reforms that change the concept of alimony in ways that result in more equitable results for women and children. During the initial phase of the Project, we will research appellate decisions that have an impact on alimony and financial distribution issues. We will participate in appellate cases as resources permit. Justice in Divorce Project is funded through a generous challenge grant from the Lyn P. Meyerhoff Foundation, contributions to the Women's Law Center's Justice Fund and from individual contributions directed toward this project.

### **Custody and Financial Distribution in Divorce Research Replication**

The Women's Law Center also continues its research on family law decisions. Because the original research findings were so useful, the Administrative Office of the Courts provided funding to replicate the research by collecting updated data. Using the same methodology and research instrument, we are collecting and evaluating data from case filings from Fiscal Year 2003. These data will be compared to the prior research, which analyzed cases filed in Fiscal Year 1999. The comparison will allow us to identify changes and trends in family law decisions and changes in the usage of services provided by the Circuit Court family divisions. Replication research results are expected in early 2006.

## Legislative Advocacy

Recognizing that 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 2005 General Assembly Session, the Law Center followed over 50 bills. We submitted written testimony on 35 bills and oral testimony on 17 bills. The Law Center also issued over 45 action alerts to encourage members to take an active role in the process by contacting their legislators.

Several important bills were considered during the legislative session. The Women's Law Center supported a package of bills to strengthen the Protective Order statute, including extending the length of the protective order and changing the standard of evidence necessary to obtain protection. In the family law area, the Law Center supported bills to allow a judge to transfer title to the family home and to extend the period of use and possession of the family home. We opposed bills that would have required a judge to consider joint legal custody and that created criminal penalties for interference with visitation rights. The Women's Law Center also took positions on bills relating to reproductive rights, hate crimes, sexual assault and same sex-marriage.

The Women's Law Center was a founding member of the Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women (MLAW). MLAW is a new statewide group of activist organizations and individuals working to provide an independent, non-partisan voice advocating for critical legislation for women and their families. The Law Center provides administrative staff support for the MLAW Board and its activities to develop a legislative agenda for women.

## Judicial Selections

This year the Judicial Selections Committee continued to reach out to judicial candidates by informing them that the Women's Law Center conducts judicial selections interviews. During FY 2005, the Committee interviewed 40 judicial candidates for vacancies in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Howard County and Worcester County.

The Judicial Selections Committee is one of the most active of the Women's Law Center's committees. It 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, utilizing specific selection criteria, including judicial demeanor, integrity, experience, 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.

The Law Center is deeply committed to ensuring a judiciary that reflects integrity and professionalism, because these qualities will help insure justice and fairness for women. The Judicial Selections Committee offers an excellent opportunity for members to become involved in accomplishing these important goals.

## Students Supporting the Women's Law Center

This year saw the formation and formalization of student groups at the University of Maryland School of Law and the University of Baltimore School of Law. Called Students Supporting the Women's Law Center (SSWLC), both groups have gained official status as student organizations, have elected officers and have active members. The President of each group was elected to join the Women's Law Center's Board. Both SSWLC groups work closely with the Women's Bar Association's Student Chapter and co-sponsor events with other student groups.

The SSWLC organizations are very enthusiastic and very motivated to address women's issues. The University of Maryland SSWLC sponsored a 2005 Spring Symposium titled "Financial Inequality: Devastating Costs of Custody and Divorce." This group also co-sponsored a crab feast fundraiser and will participate in a Heart Walk to raise awareness about heart disease. Upcoming education events include a panel about gender disparities in health law and a 2006 Spring Symposium. The University of Baltimore SSWLC sponsored numerous educational forums: modern feminism; human trafficking and sexual slavery; the current status of reproductive rights; the impact of Supreme Court appointments on women's legal rights; and, the relationship between domestic violence and animal cruelty. The University of Baltimore SSWLC also sponsored a fundraiser to benefit the Women's Law Center.

## Justice Fund

Recognizing that stable and adequate funding is essential for the continued success of the Women's Law Center, we created a new way for contributors to support our mission and services. The Justice Fund, an annual giving campaign, was launched during 2005. Contributions support unfunded and under-funded activities in research, education, direct services and advocacy. Women's Law Center supporters gave generously to the new Fund.

Using a grant from the Lyn P. Meyerhoff Foundation and generous contributions from two committed Board members, the Women's Law Center engaged a development consultant to enhance development planning and activities.

## Professional Alliances and Activities

The Women's Law Center is working closely with other professional organizations to improve access to and administration of justice. The Women's Law Center is represented on the Maryland State Bar Association's Section Council on the Delivery of Legal Services, the Board of Directors of the Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women and the Advisory Committee for the Maryland Legal Assistance Network. We also participate in an annual meeting of Local and Specialty Bar Associations that is sponsored by the Maryland State Bar Association. The Women's Law Center supported two significant changes to the Maryland Lawyers' Rules of Professional Conduct - Rule 8.4 Misconduct and Rule 6.5 Nonprofit and Court-Annexed Limited Legal Services Programs - because these changes validate our mission and facilitate achievement of programmatic goals. Finally, we seek to provide opportunities for our members and supporters to be involved in our work as a professional organization. Volunteers participate on the Family Law Committee, Employment Law Committee, Judicial Selections Committee and the newly formed Awards Nomination Committee.

## Justice Fund Donors

*We recognize and thank the following donors who supported the newly established Justice Fund*

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Judith Hamilton  
P. Gregory Hilton

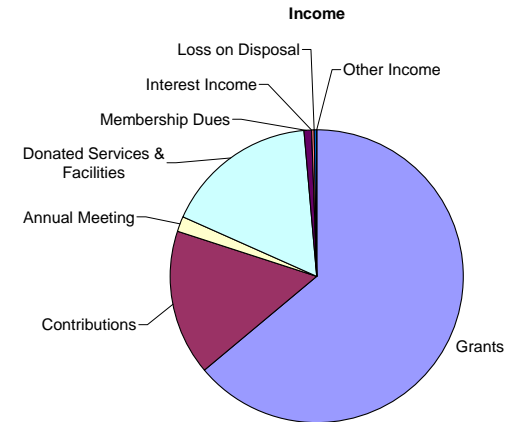
*We regret any omissions or inaccuracies that may appear in the list above and welcome hearing from you regarding any corrections.*

# Financial Statement

## Fiscal Year 2005

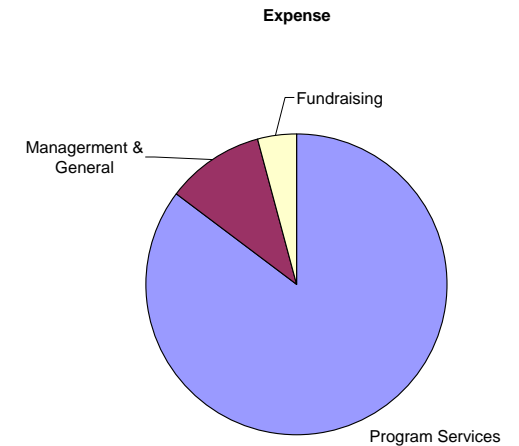
### Income

Grants	\$613,367
Contributions	\$154,172
Annual Meeting	\$15,900
Donated Services & Facilities	\$162,390
Membership Dues	\$8,560
Interest Income	\$2,595
Loss on disposal of property	(\$1,196)
Other Income	\$881
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$956,669</b>

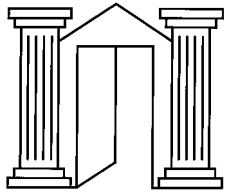


### Expenses

Program Services	\$731,320
Management & General	\$92,133
Fundraising	\$34,604
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$858,057</b>



Change in Unrestricted Net Assets	\$98,612
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	\$232,015
Net Assets at End of Year	\$330,627



# THE WOMEN'S LAW CENTER OF MARYLAND, INC.

YES! I want to support justice for women in Maryland. I accept your invitation to support the Justice Fund by joining the:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Equity Club \$100         | <input type="checkbox"/> Liberty Club \$250        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy Circle \$500     | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor Circle \$1,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visionary Society \$2,500 | <input type="checkbox"/> Legacy Circle \$5,000     |

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

- Check made payable to *The Women's Law Center of Maryland, Inc.* is enclosed.  
 Please charge my  VISA  MasterCard

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name on Card \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to spread my gift throughout the year (Benefactor Circle members and higher):

Total amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Bill me monthly: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Bill me quarterly: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Mail this form to: Women's Law Center of Maryland, 305 W. Chesapeake Avenue, Suite 201, Towson, MD 21204*

*A copy of our current financial statement is available upon request by contacting the Women's Law Center.  
Documents and information submitted to the State of Maryland under the Maryland Charitable Solicitations Act are available from the Office of the Secretary of State for the cost of copying and postage.*