

FREE STATE LEGAL PROJECT

Annual Report 2012



EXECUTIVE UPDATE



A little over a year ago, FreeState Legal Project (“FreeState”) opened its doors and began advocating on behalf of Maryland’s most disadvantaged lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) citizens. FreeState is now fully operational and is **one of a select few comprehensive LGBT legal services organizations in the United States**. Now, as we develop into a national model for LGBT low-income advocacy, all of us at FreeState pause to reflect on the past year and to plan for the year ahead.

As the economy has continued its sluggish recovery and individuals and families have continued to suffer across the United States, low-income LGBT citizens have faced unique barriers to achieving economic stability during these trying times. FreeState has confronted multiple issues stemming from our clients’ sexual orientation and gender identity including discrimination in housing, employment, public schools, and other institutions and agencies, various forms of harassment and domestic violence, and many family law matters including same-sex divorces and related child custody issues. In addition, there is a great need for assistance with legal name and gender changes and simple estate planning. By addressing these issues, FreeState’s goal is to achieve **greater equity between Maryland’s most disadvantaged LGBT citizens and the rest of society**. Since opening, FreeState has assisted approximately 150 clients with issues stemming from their LGBT status by partnering with outside counsel or representing them in house. Numerous others have been referred to other capable nonprofits and agencies.

FreeState has also partnered with dozens of organizations. FreeState is leading a coalition that includes the Baltimore State’s Attorney’s office and is focused on outreach to transgender sex workers, aimed at connecting them with housing,

employment and other resources and diverting arrests and incarceration. In addition, **FreeState is beginning to lay the foundation for more systemic change through impact litigation focused on the rights of low-income LGBT persons**. For example, FreeState is collecting data on the heightened risk of rape faced by incarcerated LGBT individuals and plans to monitor the implementation of the Prison Rape Elimination Act in Maryland’s correctional facilities. FreeState is also working to partner with local school systems to implement **anti-bullying programs**, which will both benefit students and ensure that schools are in compliance with federal and state laws, including Title IX.

Over the coming 1-2 years, **FreeState is seeking to greatly expand its services and outreach in the Greater Baltimore region and throughout Maryland**. FreeState seeks to recruit and train at least 100 additional attorneys for its pro bono panel; to expand its services to surrounding counties and jurisdictions outside Baltimore City and engage in new community and client outreach initiatives within Baltimore to at least double the number of clients served; to partner with key agencies (such as Baltimore City Public Schools) and organizations, both within Maryland and nationally, to better meet the legal and other needs of low-income LGBT persons; to begin developing resource manuals and databases focused on specific subject areas (for example, legal gender changes) that can be accessed by attorneys seeking to serve LGBT clients; and to expand FreeState’s staff in order to better serve its constituents.

Thank you for your support over the past year. We could not be more excited, and we look forward to partnering with you as we develop FreeState into a national model for low-income LGBT advocacy.

Shannon Avery
President, Board of Directors

Aaron S. Merki, Esq.
Executive Director

A NEW PHASE FOR FREESTATE

Hiring of New Executive Director

In July 2012 Aaron Merki was hired as the Executive Director of FreeState Legal Project after spending several years practicing in the area of corporate litigation. Having helped to found FreeState several years ago, while in law school, Aaron is excited to take FreeState to the next level. Aaron is working with the Board of Directors and networking with other leaders in Baltimore and across the United States with the goal of developing FreeState into a national model for low-income LGBT legal services and advocacy.

Strategic Growth and Community Outreach

FreeState has created a Strategic Growth committee charged with overseeing FreeState’s public communications and messaging, media exposure, and technology and software development. In FY 2013 FreeState will undertake a comprehensive outreach and publicity campaign, aimed at connecting with potential clients, volunteers, and supporters.

Partnership with University of Maryland and University of Baltimore Schools of Law

FreeState is working to build strong relationships with the two local law schools. Many student interns are able to receive academic credit for work performed on behalf of FreeState’s clients. This provides FreeState with a solid stream of capable volunteers as it expands its services and provides exciting learning opportunities for law students committed to LGBT justice and equality.



CASES AT A GLANCE

- When a high school boy was harassed by his classmates with taunts of “faggot, sissy, you deserve what you get,” the assistant principal took the harassment further: “if you believed in God, you could avoid all this.” FreeState stepped in to advocate on behalf of the student and negotiated with Baltimore City Public Schools. The principal is no longer at that school and cultural competency training is being instituted at the high school so that no further harassment is tolerated.

“I finally feel like the person I say that I am...You don’t know how good that makes me feel...”

following the legal process by emptying

Transgender person kicked out of apartment

A landlord in Baltimore City finds out that Elizabeth is transitioning from male to female when he receives a check in her name with the last name of a tenant he knew as “Justin.” The landlord evicts her without

her belongings outside while she is at work and refuses to return her security deposit.

LGBT youth kicked out of the house

Michael is a 17 year-old African-American high school student with a steady part-time

job. He comes out to his family and his mother kicks him out of the house. Michael wants to finish high school, needs to find a place to live, and needs financial stability. He is afraid that his mother might attempt to take control of his banking accounts. A friend mentions the possibility of obtaining an emancipation so that he can control his finances and sign a lease.

Discrimination in the workplace— Creating a hostile work environment

Kevin is a gay man who filed a sexual harassment claim against a supervisor. He is subsequently fired, presumably in retaliation for filing the claim. He files a complaint with the Maryland EEOC, which is found to be valid. Kevin is

now faced with decisions about what to do next and needs the advice of an attorney.

Medical decisions, access to significant other

Adrienne and Janice have been in a committed relationship for 10 years. Because Maryland does not allow same-sex marriage, five years ago they had an attorney friend prepare durable powers of attorney, health care powers of attorney, and wills. Adrienne is in a serious accident and hospitalized in a small hospital on the Eastern Shore. Although it is blatantly illegal, the hospital staff is refusing to allow Janice to visit Adrienne or make health care decisions for her.



- When a transgender man decided that living with his birth name (a woman’s name) on his papers was causing him to be constantly harassed and embarrassed, he turned to FreeState for assistance with changing his name. Upon achieving his new name, he stated “I finally feel like the person I say that I am...You don’t know how good that makes me feel...” Transgender individuals are routinely discriminated against by homeless shelters, law enforcement and social service agencies because the name and gender listed on their official identification do not match their presented name and gender.

- When a low-income lesbian woman was denied access to the child that she and her partner had raised together, she turned to FreeState for assistance in obtaining visitation rights. Low-income LGBT families often do not have the resources necessary to create proper legal protections and rights typically associated with marriage and parentage.

Other hypothetical, but routine scenarios involving low-income LGBT persons include:

**Contact
FreeState**

410-625-LGBT

**executivedirector@
freestatelegal.org**

www.freestatelegal.org

FINANCIALS & CASE REPORT

BOARD & STAFF

FY2012 FINANCIALS

REVENUE	FY 2012 Budget	FY 2012 Actual
Individual Donations	20,000	13,680
Foundations	65,000	82,000
Board Member Donations		10,600
Law Firm Campaign	20,000	8,500
Corporate Donations		750
Events	10,000	590
Total Revenue	115,000	116,120
EXPENSES		
Personnel		
Salaries & Taxes	72,000	66,372
Employee Benefits	9,970	9,174
Hourly/Consultants	3,600	720
Total Personnel	85,570	76,266
Non-Personnel		
Audit/Accounting	750	1,133
Bank Fees		738
Development - Marketing	3,000	1,093
Development - Events	1,000	697
Educational Materials	600	35
Insurance	2,000	1,800
Hospitality, Food, Board Dev.	3,500	
Office Supplies	1,200	1,172
Postage	440	435
Professional Costs	1,525	789
Rent	1,200	1,200
Technology	1,700	625
Telephone & Fax	1,320	1,752
Travel	1,500	1,573
Training/Conferences	700	1,660
Website	1,250	
Other		1,582
Total Non-Personnel	21,685	16,284
TOTAL EXPENSES	107,255	92,550
RESERVES	7,745	23,570
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY		86,360
as of June 30, 2012		

Recent Program Results

The end of FY 2011 through FY 2012 saw the commencement of services to low-income LGBT clients. Through FY 2012 demand for legal services steadily increased, with eight cases opened in July 2011 and 18 cases opened in June 2012. That trend has continued into FY 2013. Demand is expected to increase even more dramatically once FreeState undertakes a comprehensive outreach and publicity campaign (currently in planning phase) and as FreeState expands its offering of services throughout the state.

Cases Opened FY 2012

Family (includes name/gender changes)	44
Small Estates (wills/POAs, Adv. Directives)	39
Civil Rights / Discrimination	21
Assault / Hate Crimes	14
Housing (includes bankruptcy/foreclosure)	10
Brief Misc. Advice	9
Immigration	3
Youth / Education	2
TOTAL:	142

Number of attorneys serving on FreeState's pro bono referral panel: 60

STAFF

Aaron Merki, Executive Director

LAW CLERKS

Janice Shih
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Alex Garnick

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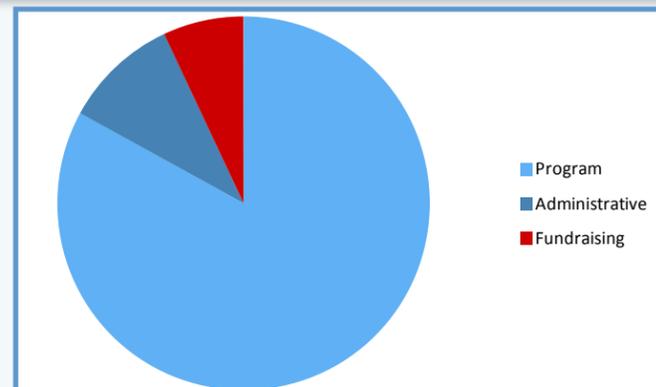
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