

LEGAL ACTION CENTER

OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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The Legal Action Center is a public interest law firm funded by foundation and government grants which commenced operations in July of 1973.

Sponsored initially by the Vera Institute of Justice, the Center is now an independent entity with its own board of directors and separate funding. However it maintains a close working relationship with Vera, and shares Vera's concern with furthering the diversion of drug abusers and other offenders from the traditional criminal justice process, and with increasing their opportunities for rehabilitation. Unlike Vera, it has a capacity for litigation.

The Center began with a commitment to devote a substantial part of its resources to the inter-related problems faced by offenders and drug abusers in their attempts at rehabilitation. Accordingly, the Center is prepared to offer legal advice and assistance, without charge, to persons suffering discrimination as a result of licensing laws and regulations, private and public employment policies, union membership practices, and bonding company policies that serve to bar ex-offenders and ex-addicts from gainful activity.

The Center is also interested in prison reform and improving the administration of justice, including cases involving rehabilitation programs in prisons, speedy trial, right to effective counsel, judicial selection and discipline, court administration, drug laws, and victimless crimes.

The Center's litigation program reflects its commitment to effect actual change in the areas of its concern. No attempt is made to duplicate the functions of existing legal services agencies which provide representation on a large scale in individual cases. The Center's litigation consists primarily of cases designed

to change laws and practices affecting large numbers of persons. The goal is not simply to obtain favorable judicial opinions: efforts are made to hammer out workable relief, to follow through on cases to determine what if any changes they actually effect, and to pursue non-litigative approaches where appropriate.

To ensure the Center's effectiveness and maximize the potential of its limited resources, its Board of Directors is comprised of representatives from a number of major law schools and law firms, as well as various segments of the community who have indicated an interest in participating in its program on an ongoing basis. The Board's chairman is Arthur L. Liman, a litigation partner in the firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison. It is anticipated that law firms represented on the Board will continue to cooperate with the Center in some of its litigation projects.

The Center has also developed cooperative relationships with a number of clinical legal education programs. This both provides the Center with additional manpower, and enables it to train young lawyers in the areas of its expertise. The co-director of the Columbia Law School's Clinical Legal Assistance Resource seminar acts as a regular consultant to the Center; students enrolled in his seminar and in clinical legal education programs at several other law schools have worked with and been supervised by staff attorneys from the Center's beginning.

The Center is prepared to serve as a legal resource for community organizations and public and private agencies concerned with the areas of its practice. It is chartered as a not-for-profit corporation by the State of New York, has been ruled to be a private operating foundation by the Internal Revenue Service, and operates with the approval and under the supervision of the Appellate Division of the New York Supreme Court.