Joining with low-income people to fight for fairness
From the CHAIR

I am pleased to report on the continued accomplishments of the National Center for Law and Economic Justice (NCLEJ) on behalf of low-income individuals, families, and communities in 2014 and 2015.

In 2015, NCLEJ celebrated its 50th anniversary. Honoring that legacy, NCLEJ has made gratifying progress on critical issues facing those in need across the country, including:

• preserving access to food stamps, Medicaid, and cash assistance;
• securing fair pay, safe working conditions, freedom from discrimination, access to workers compensation, and prevention of wage theft for low-wage workers;
• ensuring that low-income people who are blind or visually impaired have access to information about food stamps and Medicaid;
• ensuring that Americans with Disabilities Act protections are enforced meaningfully for residents of public housing suffering from asthma due to unaddressed moisture and mold;
• addressing abusive debt collection practices that target low-income people; and
• helping to preserve access to affordable health care and child care.

These efforts reflect NCLEJ’s unyielding commitment to its core mission – increasing hope, opportunity, and dignity for those at the bottom of the economic ladder. I take pride in NCLEJ’s successes in advancing economic justice through groundbreaking litigation, policy advocacy, and support for community organizing. At the same time, I know all too well that there is so much more to do.

Thank you to everyone who has made this vital work possible: an extraordinarily dedicated staff and volunteers, a committed Board of Directors, the law firms that have provided invaluable pro bono assistance, our fellow public interest and legal services advocates across the country, and of course generous financial supporters. Many are listed in this report, and I thank them all.

With gratitude,

Jennifer M. Selendy
Chair, Board of Directors
NCLEJ’s Mission

NCLEJ works to advance the cause of economic justice for low-income families, individuals, and communities across the country, using groundbreaking impact litigation, policy advocacy, and support for grassroots organizing. Because poverty disproportionately impacts communities of color and families headed by women, the Center applies this strategy to advance racial, immigrant, and gender justice. NCLEJ believes that this nation should ensure that all have access to the means to meet basic human needs—including adequate income, food, and health care—and that are people are treated fairly and guaranteed an equal opportunity to participate.

NCLEJ’s History

NCLEJ was founded in 1965, in the heyday of the civil rights movement. From the very start, NCLEJ staff joined with southern civil rights lawyers in landmark cases, worked with community-based organizations around the country, won ground-breaking victories in the courts, and achieved major reforms in legislation and agency policies and practices. Through these early successes, NCLEJ demonstrated that the law can be a powerful instrument for improving the lives of the most disadvantaged members of our society. NCLEJ has guaranteed access to benefits for hundreds of thousands of people providing a baseline of economic security to help stabilize low-income families and individuals, holding agencies accountable to comply with the law, and safeguarding important legal and constitutional rights.

NCLEJ’s Areas of Work

NCLEJ addresses a broad range of issues that impact low-income families. Our work focuses primarily, but not exclusively on:

1. Preserving and maintaining access to government benefits;
2. Protecting and securing the rights of low-wage workers;
3. Combatting unlawful debt collection; and

NCLEJ’s staff of award-winning experienced lawyers multiplies its impact by collaborating with major law firms and with civil rights, civil liberties, women’s rights, immigrants’ rights, and other legal advocacy organizations. For additional information about NCLEJ’s advocacy and successes go to www.nclej.org.
NCLEJ Fights to Preserve and Maintain Access to Government Benefits

Protecting access to public benefits – food stamps, Medicaid, cash assistance, child care - has been the cornerstone of NCLEJ’s existence for more than fifty years. This work reflects a core NCLEJ priority of ensuring that the lowest-income among us have a government safety net as a cushion and hand up in tough times. The communities we partner with include low-wage workers who need these supplements for their meager wages, those with extremely fragile or no connections to the work force, parents of young children, and people with disabilities. They are disproportionately women-headed families and often people of color. We have protected the rights of low-income persons to apply for critical assistance, have protected families from unlawful terminations, and have ensured fundamental fairness in the operation of cash assistance, food stamps, and Medicaid programs. We oppose and support current threats to undermine these programs.

- **NCLEJ Secures Timely Assistance for Hundreds of Thousands of Low-Income Families.**
  In the last two years, we have fought hard in federal and state courts across the country and have ensured that hundreds of thousands of low-income households receive food stamps, Medicaid, and cash assistance when they need it. In doing so, we have held government agencies accountable, mandated corrective action, developed reliable reporting systems, and secured tens of millions in benefits for eligible families.

- **NCLEJ Secures Wins in Two Cases Challenging Unlawful Food Stamps Terminations.**
  NCLEJ filed federal court class action lawsuits in Florida and New York challenging the termination of food stamps for hundreds of thousands of low-income individuals when they allegedly failed to comply with harsh new work requirements. The states’ flawed implementation improperly terminated many vulnerable people, including those dealing with mental health problems and homelessness. We argued that both Florida and New York failed to identify those exempt because they were unfit for work or to give individuals proper notice of how to challenge their termination. In Florida, our lawsuit led to significant improvements in how the agency identifies those exempt from the rules and notifies recipients of their rights. The agency also restored food stamps benefits for some 18,600 people. In New York, we scored an important victory when the Court agreed with NCLEJ that the State’s notices were not sufficient.

- **NCLEJ Obtained a Special Master to Oversee Rhode Island’s Delivery of Food Stamps.**
  NCLEJ won a court order requiring Rhode Island to provide timely food stamps to low-income families, after the massive failure of a new computer system left thousands of applicants hungry while they waited endlessly for the agency to approve their applications. Rhode Island failed to comply with the court order and more and more families suffered. We returned to federal court and the judge appointed a Special Master to find out why the state was not processing applications in accordance with the law and to identify and oversee the state’s implementation of corrective action.
NCLEJ Protects and Secures the Rights of Low-Wage Workers

NCLEJ has long protected the rights of public benefits recipients required to work for their assistance. We had a string of victories in the 1990s and into the 2000s litigating discrimination, sexual harassment, workplace safety, disability, and minimum wage cases, and have been a leading voice opposing workfare (work in exchange for benefits).

NCLEJ also recognizes that low-income workers live at the very edge of brutal poverty. Minimum wage and below minimum wage work provide barely subsistence level income and no benefits. These workers often suffer horrific working conditions and ongoing violations of basic worker rights.

NCLEJ firmly believes that all work has dignity and should be honored. That is why we are increasing our partnerships with non-traditional worker rights groups and applying our policy and litigation expertise and experience to fight with low-wage workers.

On the policy front, our advocacy for low-wage workers has led to our involvement in the Equal Pay Today! Campaign, a coalition of women’s rights organizations working to eliminate the gender wage gap. This effort has connected us to new colleagues and opportunities to expand out advocacy.

• **NCLEJ Partnered with Farm, Ranch, and Dairy Workers.** NCLEJ worked with farm, ranch, and dairy worker groups in Florida, New York, and Vermont to support their worker-driven social responsibility model of fighting for decent wages, safe working conditions, and a workplace free from harassment and discrimination.

• **NCLEJ Was Honored by NYCOSH at Its Annual Awards Gala.** NCLEJ, represented by Staff Attorneys Katie Deabler and Leah Lotto, was honored by the New York Committee for Occupational Safety & Health (NYCOSH) at its annual awards gala on May 4, 2017. NCLEJ was honored for the great work Katie and Leah did to expose the New York State Worker’s Compensation hearing system’s failure to accommodate workers with limited English proficiency. Their full report on this important issue can be found here.

• **NCLEJ Fought to Enforce the Rights of Pregnant Workers.** Pregnancy discrimination is rampant in low-wage industries, and it particularly impacts immigrant women and women of color. NCLEJ joined women’s rights groups to urge courts in the South to protect the rights of pregnant workers. We are seeking reasonable workplace accommodations for pregnant workers so that they can stay on the job and support their families. In New York City, we filed two pregnancy discrimination complaints with the Commission on Human Rights on behalf of low income women who lost their jobs due to pregnancy discrimination.
NCLEJ Combats Unlawful Debt Collection

NCLEJ’s work combatting unfair and abusive debt collection practices that rob low-income persons of critical income and economic security focuses on both the criminal and civil court systems. These practices have become widespread. Low-income persons in the court system are being targeted with fines and fees for misdemeanors, which is fueling the resurgence of modern-day debtors’ prisons.

Additionally, over the last decade, unscrupulous debt collectors have flooded state court systems with unjust collection lawsuits that are disproportionately concentrated in communities of color. In the criminal context, unfair government imposed debt leads to justifiable anger and resentment in largely minority communities. Indeed, for example, the unrest in Ferguson, Missouri was fueled, in part, by abusive debt municipal and court debt collection practices coupled with discriminatory policing.

The people sued are nearly all very low-income and without access to legal services. Many never get notice of the lawsuits at all. Armed with unjust judgments, debt collectors seize people’s bank accounts and garnish their wages—leaving low-income families without money for rent, food, and medical care.

Unfair and abusive debt collection practices plunge low-income people into even deeper economic crisis. NCLEJ is using litigation and policy advocacy to make a difference. We have made meaningful progress:

• **NCLEJ Wins a Groundbreaking Settlement in New York.** NCLEJ challenged an extensive network that fraudulently obtained and collected default judgments against low-income New Yorkers. After a hard fought court battle, we got a sweeping settlement. The settlement in this first-of-its-kind lawsuit created a $60 million restitution fund for victims and stopped all collections, helping some 390,000 people.

• **NCLEJ Protects Social Security Benefits From Fraudulent Collections.** NCLEJ won a landmark federal court decision that protects Social Security Retirement Income from attachment by predatory creditors. In this case, the client’s retirement income was seized even though he owed no money. Our win means that low-income retirees will not see their Social Security benefits garnished by unscrupulous creditors.

• **NCLEJ Fights against Unlawful Driver’s License Suspensions in Tennessee.** NCLEJ challenged two Tennessee laws that permit the State and local officials to suspend driver’s licenses for nonpayment of fines, court costs, and litigation taxes arising from driving offenses and traffic citations. These suspensions are not punishment for any traffic-related infraction and occur without regard to the driver’s ability to pay. Throughout Tennessee, county and municipal court clerks collect traffic debt without even asking about the debtor’s ability to pay. Since 2012, Tennessee has revoked or suspended the driver’s licenses of more than 250,000 Tennesseans too poor to pay. The ability to drive is essential to Tennessee workers: more than 90% drive to work.
NCLEJ Advocates for Persons with Disabilities

Fundamental fairness as well as numerous federal, state, and local laws require government agencies to provide accommodations so that persons with disabilities can participate equally in all aspects of our society, including work and education. An accommodation can be as simple as providing assistance to a person with a cognitive disability in completing complex paperwork. Persons with a disability are particularly hard hit by discrimination and, at worst, can be subject to unlawful institutionalization.

Consequently, NCLEJ has long focused on enforcing disability rights. NCLEJ did groundbreaking post-Katrina litigation against FEMA, established the right of persons with disabilities to accommodations in government benefit programs, published a highly praised training manual for advocates, provided technical assistance for advocates in many states, issued policy reports, and launched two major class action lawsuits challenging the failure of New York State and City public benefits agencies to provide accommodations for public benefits applicants and recipients who are visually impaired. Other advocacy includes:

- **NCLEJ challenges Georgia’s failure to provide accommodations to public benefits applicants and recipients with disabilities.** NCLEJ filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of three low-income Georgia residents with disabilities challenging Georgia’s food stamp and Medicaid agencies’ systematic violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). We seek system-wide procedures to ensure that people with disabilities do not fall through the cracks and that the agencies give people the help they need to apply for and maintain eligibility.

- **NCLEJ Challenges Budget Cuts that Hurt Michigan Adults with Developmental Disabilities.** NCLEJ joined in the appeal of a federal court case that challenges budget cuts that reduced medically necessary community living support services for adults with severe developmental disabilities in Michigan. The critical services allow these individuals to avoid institutionalization. We wrote the brief arguing that the cuts violate the Social Security Act and constitutional due process, and presented the oral argument to the court.

- **NCLEJ Fights for Persons Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired.** We enforced a court order that requires the State and City of New York to convert Medicaid and food stamps related documents into alternate formats, such as braille, for use by persons who are blind or visually impaired. Thousands of people are for the first time receiving publications and notices in alternate formats. As a result, these people can file applications, respond to notices, and maintain their eligibility without having to rely on someone else to read documents to them. This outcome increases independence and makes it less likely that people who are blind will wrongfully be deprived of critical financial help.

- **NCLEJ Obtains Appointment of a Special Master in Case Combatting Mold in Public Housing.** NCLEJ obtained a court order in a first-in-the-nation case combatting mold in public housing in New York City. When the New York City Housing Authority did not comply fast enough with the Order, NCLEJ returned to court and the Judge appointed a Special Master to develop and oversee a corrective action plan of compliance. With the assistance of the Special Master, we have worked with NYCHA, public health specialist, and environmental consultants to develop and implement a brand new mold eradication program.
2016 – 2017 ANNUAL REPORT

CALIFORNIA
ADA Technical Assistance

ARIZONA
ADA Advocacy

COLORADO
Davis v. Birch
SNAP and Medicaid Delays

UTAH
Medicaid Access

NEBRASKA
Leiting-Hall v. Phillips
SNAP Delays

TENNESSEE
New Mexico
ADA Advocacy

TEXAS
– Board advocate working in this state

HAWAII
Medicaid Issues

Booth v. McManaman
SNAP Delays

MISSO

WISCONSIN
ADA Technical Assistance

ILLINOIS
Racial Justice Training Institute

MISSOURI
Public Benefits Technical Assistance

IOWA
Technical Assistance

KENTUCKY
Technical Assistance

MICHIGAN
Waskul v. Washtenaw Cy
Comm Mental Health
ADA and Medicaid Access

OHIO
ADA Advocacy & Technical Assistance

WEST VIRGINIA
SNAP Advocacy

VERMONT
Workers’ Rights Advocacy

MAINE
ADA Technical Assistance

NEW HAMPSHIRE
ADA Advocacy
Access to Benefits Technical Assistance

CONNCTICUT
Briggs v. Bremby
SNAP Delays

RHODE ISLAND
Gemmell v. Beane
SNAP Delays

MARYLAND
ADA Advocacy

GEORGIA
Melanie K. v. Horton
SNAP Delays
ADA Advocacy

FLORIDA
Workers’ Rights Advocacy
MO. v. Carroll
SNAP Access

ALABAMA
Workers’ Rights Advocacy
SNAP Technical Assistance

SOUTH CAROLINA
ADA Advocacy

LOUISIANA
Romain v. Sonnier
SNAP Access Medicaid Access

TENNESSEE
Thomas v. Haslam
Racial Justice
Robinson v. Haslam
Unfair/Abusive Debt Collection

WASHINGTON, D.C.
National Advocacy, such as:
Equal Pay for Women
Consumer Protection
Health Care Access
Veterans’ Benefits

Local Advocacy:
Garrett v. Zeilinger
SNAP Delays

WASHINGTON, D.C.
National Advocacy, such as:
Equal Pay for Women
Consumer Protection
Health Care Access
Veterans’ Benefits

Local Advocacy:
Garrett v. Zeilinger
SNAP Delays

– Board advocate working in this state
Advocacy in New York

NEW YORK CITY LITIGATION:

Arias v. Gutman, Mintz, Baker and Sonnenfeldt P.C. – Debt Collection Abuses
Baez v. NYCHA – Mold and Moisture Problems in Public Housing
Carver v. State Department of New York – FLSA Protections for Workfare Workers (Amicus - Statewide)
Davila v. Eggleston – Failure to Approve Education and Training
Doe v. Doar – Underpayment of Assistance to People with HIV/AIDS
Fishman v. Davies – Medicaid Due Process (Amicus)
Juan v. Doar – Cash Assistance for Older Adults
Morel v. Giuliani – Failure to Continue Benefits Pending Fair Hearing
Piron v. Wing – Fair Hearing Decision and Compliance Delays
Rafferty, et al. v. Doar, et al – Accessible Formats for the Blind or Visually Impaired
Reynolds v. Giuliani – Deterrence of Benefit Applications
Sanders v. Housslanger Assoc. PLLC et al – Debt Collection Abuse
Sykes v. Mel S. Harris and Associates LLC – Debt Collection Abuses in New York State Courts (Statewide)
Williston v. Eggleston – Food Stamp Application Delays
ADVOCACY ON BEHALF OF:
Homeless Individuals and Families
Low-Income Immigrants
Low-Income People with Disabilities
Low-Wage Workers, including Pregnant Workers
Parents in Need of Child Care
People Harmed by Unfair Debt Collection Practices
People in Need of Public Benefits
Tenants of Public Housing
Workers’ Compensation Claimants
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Commissioner, New York City Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs

Steven M. Edwards
Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, LLP

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Brooke Richie-Babbage
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Hogan Lovells
Kirkland & Ellis LLP
Quinn Emanuel
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### Public Support and Revenue

<table>
<thead>
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<th>2017</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Public Support</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Contributions – unrestricted</td>
<td>$544,870</td>
<td>$464,218</td>
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<td>Paul M. Dodyk Fellowship Fund</td>
<td>1,375</td>
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<td>Freedman Fund</td>
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<td>Grants</td>
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<td>Special Events</td>
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<td>Donated Services</td>
<td>148,826</td>
<td>51,687</td>
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<td><strong>Total Public Support</strong></td>
<td>1,185,654</td>
<td>1,177,731</td>
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| **Revenue**          |            |            |
| Attorney Fees        | 842,190    | 923,115    |
| Interest and other   | 9,144      | 4,258      |
| **Total Revenue**    | 464,552    | 740,156    |

| **Total Public Support and Revenue** | 2,036,988 | 2,105,104 |

### Expenses

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<td>Program Services</td>
<td>1,610,988</td>
<td>1,447,172</td>
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<td>Management and General</td>
<td>272,869</td>
<td>299,209</td>
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<td><strong>Total Expenses</strong></td>
<td>2,270,638</td>
<td>2,114,171</td>
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### Increase (decrease) in net assets

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<tr>
<td><strong>Increase (decrease)</strong></td>
<td>(233,650)</td>
<td>(9,067)</td>
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### Net assets, beginning of year

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<th>2017</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Net assets, beginning of year</strong></td>
<td>2,274,247</td>
<td>2,283,314</td>
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### Net assets, end of year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>2017</th>
<th>2016</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net assets, end of year</strong></td>
<td>$2,040,597</td>
<td>$2,274,247</td>
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</table>

Full report may be viewed on NCLEJ’s website (www.nclej.org) or by request from the State of New York, Office of the Attorney General, Charities Bureau, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.
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Claudia Wilner
Senior Attorney
Edward P. Krugman
Volunteer Senior Attorney
Karl Eschelbach
Volunteer Attorney (2016)
Casey Lee
Volunteer Attorney (2016)
Rebecca Mackay
Volunteer Attorney
J. Kelley Nevling, Jr.
Volunteer Attorney
Fadi Mansour
Volunteer Law Graduate
Yakov Medinets
Volunteer Law Graduate
Emerie Snyder
Financial and Administrative Director
Peter Kendall
Systems Administrator
Michelle Peeples
Administrative Coordinator

2016 INTERNS & EXTERNS

Dylan Aluise
Harvard Law School
Sara Amri
Brooklyn Law School
Soo Rin Lim
Vanderbilt University Law School
Anna Luft
New York University School of Law

2017 INTERNS & EXTERNS

Jacob Olawale Onile-Ere
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law
Joshua Van Kirk
Brooklyn Law School

Woo Yong Chung
Yale Law School
Tim Nessim
McGill University, Faculty of Law
Alexandra Rockoff
CUNY School of Law
Megan Rue
University of Texas School of Law
Anne Thoma
Harvard Law School
Amy C. Torres
Fordham University School of Law
The National Center for Law and Economic Justice is one of the nation’s most prominent and respected nonprofits fighting for economic justice, powered by the unwavering belief that everyone deserves the opportunity to succeed. Since 1965, NCLEJ has worked with low-income families, individuals, communities, and a wide array of organizations to advance the cause of economic justice through ground-breaking litigation, policy work, and support of grassroots organizing around the country.

Because poverty disproportionately impacts communities of color and families headed by women, we apply our strategies to advance racial, immigrant, and gender justice.

This year we honor three extraordinary women who advocate with us and for us. We recognize their efforts in striving for fairness, equality, and the belief that our nation should be one where no one lives in poverty.