

## LANDMARK CASES

### 1979

NLSLA sued the City of Los Angeles in an effort to change the way police officers responded to domestic violence calls. The lead plaintiff in the lawsuit, Lula Mae Thomas, had called the police each of the 15 times her husband assaulted her between 1972 and 1979, but was largely ignored. Instead of protecting women from their attackers, police officers routinely discouraged them from pressing charges, told them it was a family matter, and encouraged them to 'reconcile' with their abuser. The case forced the LAPD to implement new policies and accept its responsibility to protect victims. It also mandated extensive training for officers that the department has since embraced and institutionalized in its LAPD Training Academy Curriculum.

### 1985

NLSLA challenged the Los Angeles City and County Authorities' practice of unilaterally terminating families' housing subsidies without due process, forcing families to move out of safe housing, disrupting children's education, and often leaving people homeless. NLSLA's successful lawsuit, *Blackwell v. Lund*, led to a change in federal regulations that stopped Housing Authorities from terminating, denying or delaying Section 8 rent subsidy benefits without good cause, notice and a hearing.

### 1994

After the Northridge earthquake, NLSLA mobilized a local response that would become a model for legal services programs across the country. NLSLA sent teams of advocates to disaster recovery centers and worked with local, state and federal officials to address systemic issues. The organization built considerable expertise in disaster legal services, and was called upon to help when Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast. Today, the organization is one of just eleven legal aid groups across the country to receive federal funding for legal services in the aftermath of disaster, and it has focused those efforts on helping the low-income victims of the Southern California fires.

### 2000

In order to significantly widen its impact, NLSLA partnered with County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky to launch a pilot Self Help Center - the first of its kind in the country - which provided free legal assistance to thousands of Angelenos who otherwise could not afford to get legal help. That model center in Van Nuys is now one of eight NLSLA Self Help Centers - the largest network of Self Help Centers legal access centers in the U.S. - which have assisted more than one million people to stand up and have their voices heard in county courts. Each month, thousands of Angelenos receive help escaping abusive relationships, gaining custody of their children, and fighting to hold onto their home.

### 2000s

The 2000's also marked NLSLA's efforts to significantly expand healthcare access, in part by launching the Health Consumer Center with support from The California Endowment. The center provides assistance for any resident of Los Angeles, free of charge, who has an issue with their health care coverage. It has allowed NLSLA to build valuable knowledge of health delivery systems, addressing individual issues while identifying and correcting policies to improve the process for everyone. This expertise put the organization at the forefront of health advocacy efforts in the state, and made it an integral part of the national efforts that ultimately resulted in the Affordable Care Act. Issues arising from the health consumer center have more recently led to several successful lawsuits that ensure Medi-Cal is working for the most vulnerable people in Los Angeles County.

## **2008**

NLSLA partnered with St. John's Well Child & Family Center to open the first Medical-Legal Community Partnership (MLSP) in South Los Angeles, where poverty, substandard housing, unemployment, and an alarming lack of access to care have led to astoundingly high rates of cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. NLSLA attorneys work with St. John's clinic staff to address health disparities, helping people fight slum housing conditions and ensuring access to critical benefits. In 2018, the MLCP model became a permanent part of the Los Angeles County health delivery system through a partnership - led by NLSLA - with the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, Bet Tzedek Legal Services, and Mental Health Advocacy Services, all of whom work with staff from the County's Whole Person Care program to provide assistance to the most vulnerable Medi-Cal recipients in Los Angeles.

## **2011**

Los Angeles' most prominent legal services programs - led by NLSLA - launched the Shriver Housing Project, a collaborative effort to expand legal representation to people facing eviction in Los Angeles' poorest neighborhoods. The program is the largest of seven pilot projects approved by the state Judicial Council to ensure representation for the poor when critical civil rights are at stake. As part of the Shriver Project, NLSLA and its partners launched the Eviction Legal Assistance Center at the downtown Stanley Mosk Courthouse, where more than 25 percent of the County's eviction cases are filed each year, and where poor families facing eviction have no legal representation and are facing landlords represented by attorneys. As a result of this work, NLSLA is at the forefront of policy efforts to expand a "right to counsel" in housing cases in response to Los Angeles' escalating homelessness crisis.

## **2011**

As part of the effort to preserve access to safe and affordable housing, NLSLA and its partners sued the cities of Lancaster and Palmdale for discriminating against Black and Latino families participating in the Section 8 program. The successful lawsuit secured unprecedented protections for Section 8 participants, preventing individual municipalities from targeting black and Latino families using the federal housing subsidies and effectively ending years of discrimination for black and Latino Section 8 participants living in the Antelope Valley area. The lawsuit also led to a Justice Department civil rights investigation that resulted in additional protections for Antelope Valley residents as well as \$2.6 million in damages for African American families in the Section 8 program who experienced discrimination.

## **2016**

NLSLA sued the County of Los Angeles for the unlawful practice of terminating Medi-Cal recipients from critical coverage after failing to process their annual renewal forms. The successful lawsuit accused the county's Department of Public Social Services of failing to timely process renewal applications and then terminating Medi-Cal—leaving people without the health care they need and lawfully deserve—in clear violation of state law. NLSLA's clients demonstrated the harm suffered by sick and disabled Medi-Cal recipients who were unexpectedly cut from life-sustaining medications and care. A 2018 ruling halted the unlawful practice, protecting the more than three million L.A. County residents who depend on Medi-Cal to access medical care.

## **2019**

NLSLA secured a groundbreaking settlement requiring the Los Angeles City Housing Authority to increase voucher amounts for renters when it approves landlord rent hikes. More than 45,000 families who depend on Section 8 rental subsidies are now protected from sudden, illegal rent hikes that threatened to push them into homelessness. NLSLA has created a roadmap detailing the legal arguments and providing strategies for legal services groups on working with their local housing authorities to implement a similar solution.