

May 14, 2009

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Dear [REDACTED]:

On behalf of the Board of Directors, and especially the community we serve, thank you for the opportunity to present this letter of inquiry for your consideration. Because of the [REDACTED] Foundation's dedication to youth development, we respectfully request an opportunity to submit a grant for our Teen Legal Advocacy Project (Teen/LA).

The Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice (LACLJ) is a non-profit organization that provides free legal advice, representation, education and advocacy to low-income families, immigrants, youth, seniors, and disabled residents living in Los Angeles. **Our mission is to use the law to empower individuals, support families, and strengthen our communities.** LACLJ is the only organization providing specialized, full-service legal assistance to teens in Los Angeles County through our Teen/LA Project.

Established in East Los Angeles in 1973 and currently located in Boyle Heights, LACLJ serves the entire County of Los Angeles, with a focus on the underserved communities of the East and Northeast areas of the City of Los Angeles, unincorporated East Los Angeles, and the cities of Maywood, Bell, Bell Gardens, Commerce, Cudahy, Huntington Park, and Montebello. In 2008, LACLJ handled 1,017 cases with a diverse clientele: 70% Hispanic, 10% African-American, 5% Caucasian, 3% Asian or Pacific Islander, 1% Native American, and 13% other or non-disclosed. We operate on a \$1.1 million annual budget and because LACLJ does not receive congressional legal services monies, we are in the unique position of being able to serve undocumented persons. Our services focus on the areas of Housing Law, Family Law, and Government Benefits.

Young people historically have failed to access adult-centered legal services, so the Teen/LA Project maintains a separate intake and interview process exclusively for the unique needs of youth. The project's dynamic, bilingual and culturally sensitive advocates provide a full range of confidential family law services directly to the youth. Teen births are on the rise,<sup>1</sup> making our work all the more crucial.

LACLJ's Teen/LA Project assists young parents from the ages of 13 to 24 years old with custody issues, restraining orders, child support, and guardianship cases. We

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<sup>1</sup> A report issued in May, 2008 by the Public Health Institute concluded that teen births are on the rise in California for the first time in 15 years, with Los Angeles ranking in the top three.

also help undocumented immigrant youth who have been abused, abandoned, or neglected by their caretaker to remain in the United States lawfully. Nearly 90% of our Teen/LA clients are young mothers who have been abused by their child's father. Our Teen/LA Project served 63 teen clients between the ages of 15 and 24 years old from June of 2007 to June of 2008. Nearly all of the clients were Latino and approximately 95% were young women. Teen/LA also has a substantial education and outreach component utilizing presentations and training materials. Within the last year, we conducted 28 presentations at local high schools to 875 attendees comprising of pregnant and parent teens, immigrant teens, their parents, and their teachers. Presentations regarding teen parent rights and immigration were also made to 745 social workers, LAUSD teachers, and immigration attorneys.

Teen/LA's caring advocates are trained to focus on the special needs of teen parents in navigating the legal system and accessing social services for themselves and their children. Teen/LA stops violence in young relationships, helps young parents understand their legal rights and responsibilities, and stabilizes the lives of teens and their children by establishing custody and restraining orders. We perform these services for our teen clients to improve their living conditions, overall quality of life, and to empower them to achieve self-sufficiency. Knowing that they have the support and assistance they need during a legal crisis, our teen clients find positive solutions to their situations, such as staying in school, that allow them to succeed in life.

We respectfully invite that the [REDACTED] Foundation to join us in aiding these youth by allowing us to submit **a grant request in the amount of \$10,000 for the LACLJ Teen/LA Project so that vulnerable young people may receive fair and just legal representation.** Teen/LA operates on a budget of approximately \$170,000 per year. With your partnership we can continue to devote one full-time attorney to this project, develop additional outreach materials, and fund a Teen Advocate who will expand our outreach capacity.

The Teen/LA Project is unique in the region. Without our services, the underserved teens living in Los Angeles who find themselves in desperate legal situations might not have any place to turn for help. Teen/LA empowers young parents to advocate for themselves and their children creating stronger parents and families for our community. If the [REDACTED] Foundation joins LACLJ in prioritizing legal services for teen parents, the potential for the youth involved is limitless.

We applaud the [REDACTED] Foundation for its leadership and commitment to youth. We invite you to visit our offices at any time for a tour or to attend a Teen/LA outreach presentation. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [REDACTED]. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Hellen Y. Hong, Esq.  
Executive Director