

Why I Give To Legal Aid



According to something called the World Giving Index, Americans are the most generous people in the world. No surprise to most, since everywhere you turn these days you hear of examples of philanthropy – whether its Bill Gates, Warren Buffet or just the rest of us who find our own charities and support them year after year. I read where 10,000 GoFundMe campaigns are created every day.

At a time where the news feed varies between scary, sad, or downright depressing, the one thing that brings us joy? Giving back. And in the universe of giving, nothing moves the needle more works of time talents or treasures that impact our own community and neighborhoods.

Legal Aid is one of those charities. Having an attorney represent you in your civil matter should not be a privilege. Equal justice under the law is one of the most basic principles on which our democracy was founded. Even the pledge allegiance state that “I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

Yet equal justice, at times, remains elusive. The National Center for State Courts estimates that in almost 75 percent of civil cases in state courts, one or both parties are unrepresented. The numbers are even higher in eviction and divorce cases. But the gap is shrinking.

Like you, my financial support for legal aid attorneys who represent the most needy men, women, teens, and toddlers who intersect with our civil justice system helps to give those clients dignity and respect they deserve. They come in crisis and leave with assistance, information and hope.

Matthew Keenan, a partner at Shook, Hardy & Bacon LLP based in Kansas City is a board member to the Legal Services Corporation.

Mr. Keenan, a partner at Shook, Hardy & Bacon LLP based in Kansas City previously served as chair of the firm's Pro Bono Committee for eight years and on the board of Legal Aid of Western Missouri. He was a columnist for the Kansas City Star for seventeen years.

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Table of Contents

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