



Legal Voice™

Women's rights. Nothing less.



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Dear Friends of justice, equality AND Legal Voice

The salutation alone makes clear that 2008 was a year of change and progress. Although the Northwest Women's Law Center did not officially become Legal Voice until March 2009, it was last year that we laid the groundwork for this transition, engaging many members of our community to decide if, how, and when to select a new name and a new way to present ourselves. It was a thorough and deliberative process, involving conversations with stakeholders and supporters, research, and analysis of our strengths and weaknesses. We ultimately concluded that the best way to move forward and carry on the legacy of our founders and long-time supporters was to recommit to our work and mission, and to do that with a more distinctive, active name and identity. We remain the same organization, the same advocates for women throughout the Northwest, the same formidable champions of justice for all.

At the same time, 2008 was about continuity: battling familiar foes and forging ahead on important work begun in prior years. That work advanced the Women's Bill of Rights we adopted last year: the right to equal treatment and to be free from discrimination; to decide when and how to form and maintain families; to be safe; to economic equality and independence; and to be healthy and active.

One of our key efforts to combat discrimination and ensure that patients receive medication to which they are entitled – including women who need emergency contraception without delay – remains *Stormans v. Selecky*. We began that fight more than four years ago, when we successfully helped secure the adoption by the Washington Board of Pharmacy of a rule requiring that prescriptions and medications are dispensed on site in a timely manner. That rule was challenged in federal court, where unfortunately the district court judge agreed to temporarily bar implementation of the rule, though only as it applies to emergency contraception. Of course, we appealed to the Ninth Circuit, and now await its decision. In the meantime, we're fighting a vigorous battle against aggressive and excessive litigation tactics

by our opponents, which appear designed to deter our and our allies' work. Be assured: we will not let that happen.

Another legal victory involves economic security. We're helping Norma Owens, who was with her partner for more than 30 years, and who stayed home caring for their children while he worked. When the couple separated, the court awarded her part of her former partner's pension – a decision that the pension fund refused to comply with. Ms. Owens appealed to the Ninth Circuit, which agreed that she is entitled to her portion of his pension. Although the pension fund has asked the appeals court to rehear the case, we're ready to defend Ms. Owens – and the economic rights of all women.

Following is more information about highlights from 2008: some of our other cases and legislative efforts, and the vital community services we provided through our Self Help Program's Information & Referral (I & R) telephone line. *Thank you* for all that you do to make this work possible. We look forward to hearing from you in 2009 as we continue to fight for justice as Legal Voice.

2008 LEGAL VOICE HIGHLIGHTS

What a difference a year makes!! The national, regional and local landscapes have changed, and Legal Voice keeps pace with those changes. Through it all, however, some things are constant: a great community of supporters, the need to keep up the fight for women's rights, and our determination to eliminate injustice wherever we find it.



OUR WORK LAST YEAR REFLECTED THOSE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS.

While **the right to equal treatment and to be free from discrimination** is so fundamental as to be obvious, it remains unsecured for many people in the Northwest. Our decades-long fight to gain equal treatment for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and families continued in 2008, with the expansion of the Domestic Partner law to include more than 170 of the rights, responsibilities and obligations afforded to married couples.

The right to decide when and how to form and maintain one's family encompasses many areas of law: reproductive health and rights, including the right to become a parent or not; the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people; and marriage equality – the right to marry for all who want to, and to have one's family recognized and protected whether or not one is married.

In 2008 we continued working with a diverse group of organizations and individuals through our Northwest Reproductive Justice Collaborative, an innovative effort to re-envision reproductive freedom, health and justice to reflect the unique character of the Northwest and the people who live here. With our partners in the Collaborative, we worked to identify shared values honoring the lives and rights of all people in our region. Those values will guide Legal Voice in developing a new legal approach – new laws and policies that further true reproductive justice.

We also continue to work for patients' rights to obtain the medications they need, both through our pharmacy refusal case, and by working with allies in Montana to improve low-income women's access to contraception. It has not been easy, and we're not there yet, but we know that the ability to choose when to have a family is key to personal and economic freedom and justice.

WOMEN'S BILL OF RIGHTS

In 2008 we celebrated our 30th anniversary – toasting our visionary founders for realizing that the law, one of the most powerful forces in our society, must be used for good, to improve women's legal, social, financial status. As part of that celebration we unveiled our Women's Bill of Rights, those five fundamental rights to which all women are entitled:

- The right to equal treatment and to be free from discrimination
- The right to decide when and how to form and maintain their families
- The right to be safe wherever they are
- The right to economic equality and independence
- The right to be healthy and active

In this difficult economy, **the right to economic equality and independence** is critical, and we continue to pursue that right for all people in the region. Our employment laws and systems must protect *all* families, and we helped make that more clear in our work representing Dean Lake, who had to leave his job to care for his dying partner, but was denied unemployment because his partner was not "immediate family". We won that case and others, gaining unemployment benefits for Mr. Lake and for two women who had to leave their jobs because their husbands were transferred.

Economic equality sometimes seems to be ever further away as we all navigate the current financial turmoil. Women still are paid less for the same jobs men do, and they are generally in lower-paying jobs and professions. We're getting more and more calls on our Self Help Legal Information and Referral (I & R) telephone line from women and men facing economic challenges: sadly, it's no surprise that the percentage of people who call us who live in poverty has increased, and we can't help wishing they had more places to turn. We're doing our part, both by adding economic issues to our materials, and resource lists, and by instituting a Language Line service on the phone line, so people who have Limited English Proficiency can also obtain help with their legal problems.

It's not enough to be able to form our families – we and our families need to **be safe wherever we are**. Anyone who works in the area of domestic violence will tell you that a significant barrier to escaping violence is keeping one's job. Our client Ramona Danny

and many others like her were fired just because they wanted to get safe – to get a protection order, to move to safety, to cooperate with the police and prosecutors in bringing criminal charges. Thanks in part to Ramona's testimony, the Washington Legislature passed a law that protects the jobs of survivors who take steps toward safety. It's the strongest such law in the country. And finally, more than four years after Ramona's case was filed, our state Supreme Court ruled that Ramona and women like her had the right to take those steps and still have their jobs protected.

And, of course, **there is the right to be healthy and active** – the one we started with when we sued Washington State University 30 years ago. If you can believe it, girls and women still have fewer athletic opportunities than men do, and exceptional female athletes still suffer discrimination. That's why we're proud of having helped Jaime Nared, the 12-year old basketball superstar from Beaverton, Oregon, who was banned from playing on a boys team – the team she, her parents, her coach and her teammates agreed was the most appropriate for her skills and personal development. We resolved that one without a lawsuit, and now Jaime is back with her team, showing up the opposing boys, and attracting college scouts from around the country.

All in all, 2008 was a terrific year: because of our 30th anniversary, because we added some great staff members and board members and because we continue to be in the vanguard of organizations advancing women's legal rights. On to 2009 and beyond!



Legal Voice secures and protects women's legal rights. Our drive for justice improves the lives of mothers, daughters, aunts, sisters, nieces & grandmothers in our region. A vital, active force in the community, we make substantive, lasting changes through legislation, self-help resources and litigation with a far-reaching public impact.

**NORTHWEST
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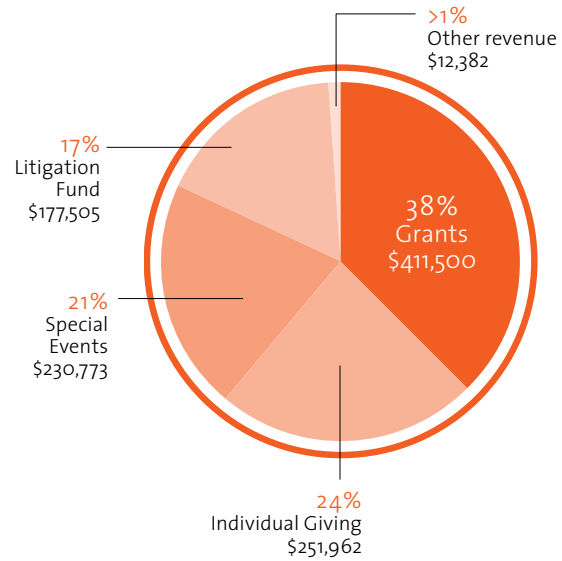
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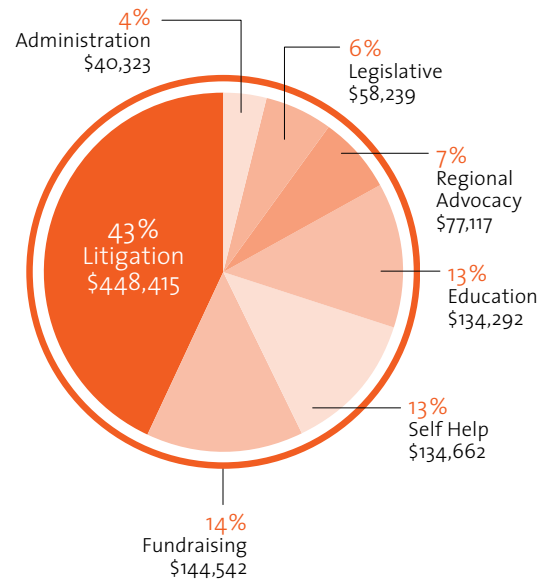
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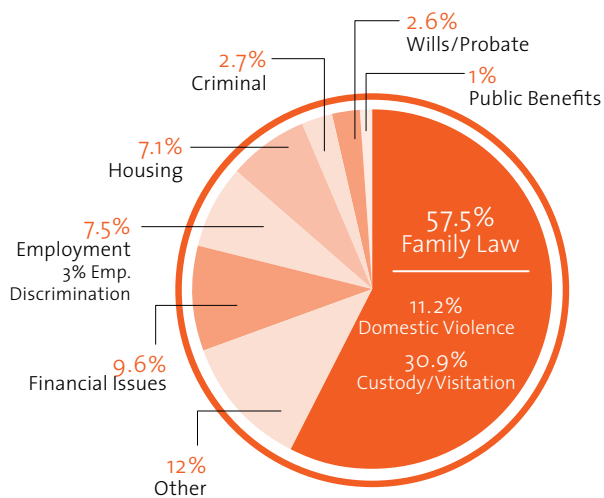


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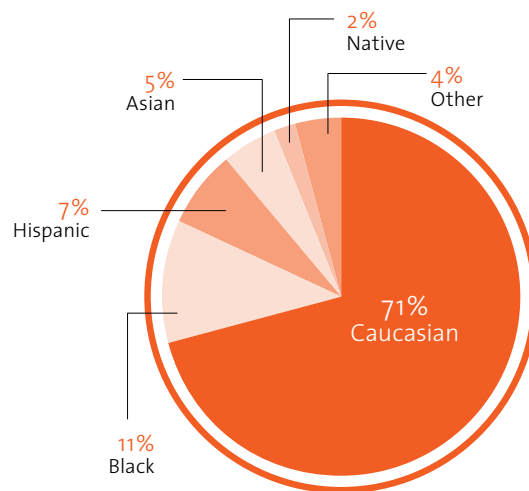
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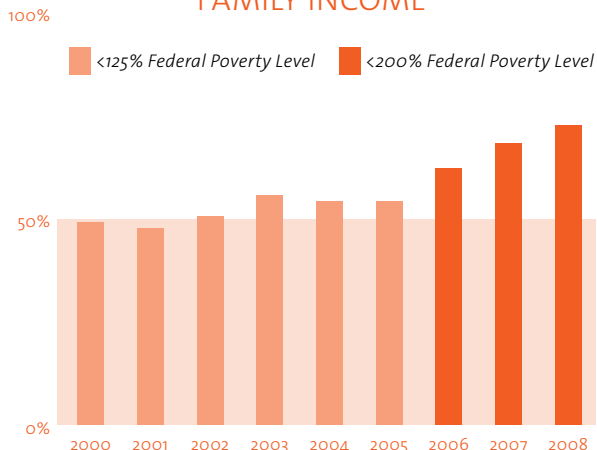
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