

Pro Bono

BCLP PRO BONO HOUSING PROJECT BRINGS NATIONAL RECOGNITION

NEIGHBORHOOD VACANCY INITIATIVE NAMED HONORABLE MENTION RECIPIENT OF PRESTIGIOUS 2022 COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP AWARD

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A long-running neighborhood stabilization effort that has involved numerous Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner (BCLP) lawyers has been named an award recipient of Mutual of America Financial Group's 2022 Community Partnership Award.

The award annually honors the outstanding contributions that nonprofit organizations from across the U.S. make to society in partnership with public, private and other social sector organizations. Since 1996, the Community Partnership Award has recognized 256 partnerships from cities and towns across the country.

Legal Services of Eastern Missouri and its Neighborhood Vacancy Initiative were named an Honorable Mention recipient of the prestigious award. Legal Services launched the Neighborhood Vacancy Initiative in 2018 in collaboration with BCLP and several other of St. Louis' largest, best-resourced law firms to provide free legal assistance to help community organizations in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods tackle the impact of neglected, vacant and abandoned properties.

BCLP Associates Tim O'Connell and Suzanne Hart have taken the lead in coordinating the firm's efforts for the initiative. The history of de jure and de facto segregation in certain St. Louis neighborhoods, followed by decades of disinvestment, makes the firm's partnership with LSEM and community organizations and residents especially relevant.

To date, the firm's lawyers have contributed over 1,000 hours to the project. Much of the work entails bringing lawsuits on behalf of neighborhood organizations to get control of abandoned and derelict properties so they can be rehabilitated and once again occupied. Lawyers have volunteered their time helping low-income residents fix title issues, helping older homeowners transfer homes through beneficiary deeds to neighborhood residents, and helping the neighborhood group establish a special taxing district. The entire Neighborhood Vacancy Initiative has been responsible for \$2.3 million in new permitted construction work in previously vacant or abandoned homes.

“By addressing the issue of blighted properties within these communities, the Neighborhood Vacancy Initiative is helping residents of St. Louis' urban core to take control of their communities,” said Daniel Glazier, Executive Director and General Counsel of Legal Services of Eastern Missouri. “Resolving the legal issues around homeownership opens the door to the economic development, neighborhood revitalization and business activity expansion that is needed to improve the safety and quality of life for everyone in the community. The award from Mutual of America will enable us to extend our reach to even more of St. Louis' most vulnerable neighborhoods.”

Representatives from Legal Services of Eastern Missouri’s Neighborhood Vacancy Initiative and BCLP will attend the awards ceremony in New York on April 26.

MEET THE TEAM



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