



2017
SMRLS Annual Report

A Letter From Us

CEO and Board President

It is with great pleasure that we present to you the 2017 Annual Report of Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS).

In 2017, SMRLS attorneys proudly closed 9,125 cases. These cases affected 23,445 people in households in our service area, giving many of our clients access to safe housing, healthcare and freedom from abuse and hunger. We served more than 800 people with Limited English Proficiency across our service area, including at our Healthcare Legal Partnerships in Saint Paul and Mankato. We do this because, justice matters.

Our Volunteer Attorney Program (VAP) continued to be very busy in 2017. 350 active volunteer attorneys reported more than the 4,300 hours of pro bono services for our clients. These volunteer attorneys closed 822 cases in 2017, an increase of 2.45% than the previous year. In 2017, SMRLS organized more than 100 pro bono clinics ranging from Divorce, Wills for Seniors, Wills for Single Parents and Caregivers, Criminal Record Expungement and Eviction Expungement clinics, and more.

In May 2017, SMRLS received the Interfaith Action of Greater St. Paul's Progress Award for our "Power Up" walk-in legal clinics. These free clinics are hosted by Morning Star Baptist Church and are co-sponsored with Interfaith Action and the Cardozo Society. Community members speak to attorneys and receive free legal advice and resources at these clinics.

SMRLS became a statewide leader with our healthcare-legal partnerships (HLPs) in 2017. We now operate two HLPs in Saint Paul, including Bethesda Family Medicine Clinic in the Frogtown neighborhood and Children's Minnesota Hospital, and one in Mankato at Open Door Health Center. SMRLS attorneys are embedded at the clinics to help patients suffering from health harming legal needs, ranging from unsafe housing conditions to domestic abuse. With the help from an attorney and clinic staff, patients receive a holistic approach for the care they need.

SMRLS made significant efforts in 2017 to combat racism and prejudice in our communities. Thanks to a grant from the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation, SMRLS co-sponsored the "Know Your Rights – Responding to Offensive Speech and Behavior" community series in Greater Minnesota to educate people about responding to offensive speech and behavior at home, work, out in public or at school. SMRLS held events in Mankato and Rochester, with additional events planned in Greater Minnesota.

As part of our 2016 Strategic Plan, SMRLS continued to revamp its business and leadership structure, took steps to improve its technology infrastructure and management, and streamlined the client intake system to enhance the client-eligible experience. SMRLS reorganized the oversight structure of our law practice, including adding a new Volunteer Attorney Program supervisor, Carol Bros, and adding John Joachim as the new Human Resources Manager.

As we continue to make strides in 2018, we look forward to strengthening our relationships with our community partners, widening our client intake and outreach, and furthering our mission to secure and protect the basic needs of individuals and families in our communities.

Thank you for your continued support and strong commitment to the mission of Equal Justice.



Jessie Nicholson
CEO



Matt Benda
Board of Directors, President

SMRLS About Us

About SMRLS

Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS) provides free, high-quality legal services to low-income people in critical civil matters. Approaching each client with respect and compassion, we help individuals and families maintain freedom from hunger, homelessness, sickness, and abuse. Because, Justice Matters®.

Mission Statement

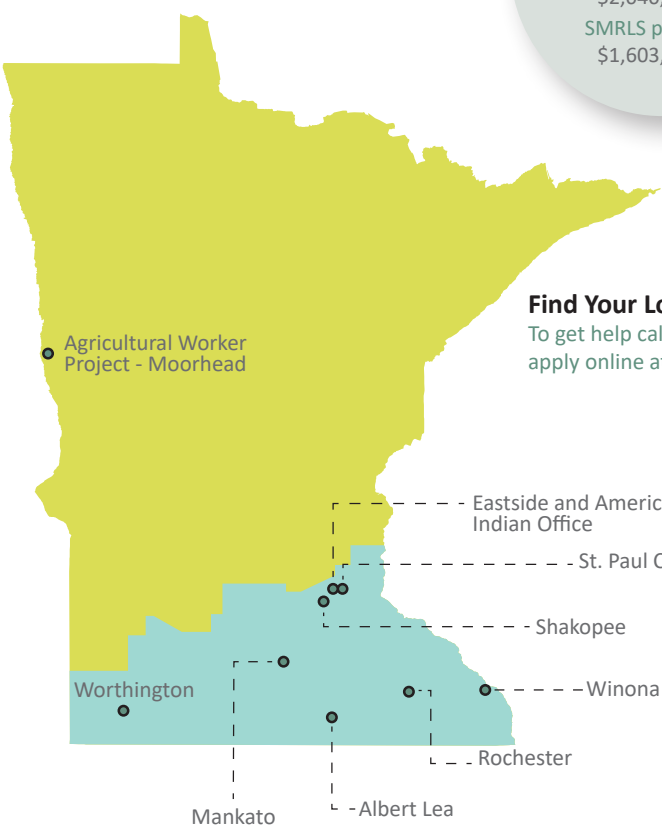
SMRLS mission is: To provide a full range of high quality legal services to low-income persons and eligible client groups in civil matters, in a respectful manner which enables clients to (1) enforce their legal rights; (2) obtain effective access to the courts, administrative agencies and forums which constitute our system of justice; (3) maintain freedom from hunger, homelessness, sickness and abuse; (4) empower persons and assure equal opportunity, thus, helping people to help themselves and become economically self-reliant, to the extent their individual abilities and circumstances permit. SMRLS, through a diverse, respectful and fair working environment, and legal assistance and community education activities, promotes and respects the dignity of low-income persons and seeks new and effective solutions to the critical and common legal problems of low-income persons which arise in a broad community context.

What We Do

Through our expert staff and a network of committed volunteer attorneys, we offer free legal help to low-income and senior citizen (60+) clients in a full range of civil matters in 33 counties of southern Minnesota, including the east and south metro, along with agricultural workers throughout North Dakota and Minnesota. Our talented and diverse staff is dedicated to helping members of our community preserve and maintain life essentials— income, health, safety, and shelter.

Critical Income and Benefits protected for our clients in 2017:

- SMRLS protected \$2,040,243.05
- SMRLS protected \$1,603,050.93



Find Your Location
To get help call 1-888-575-2954 or apply online at www.smrls.org.

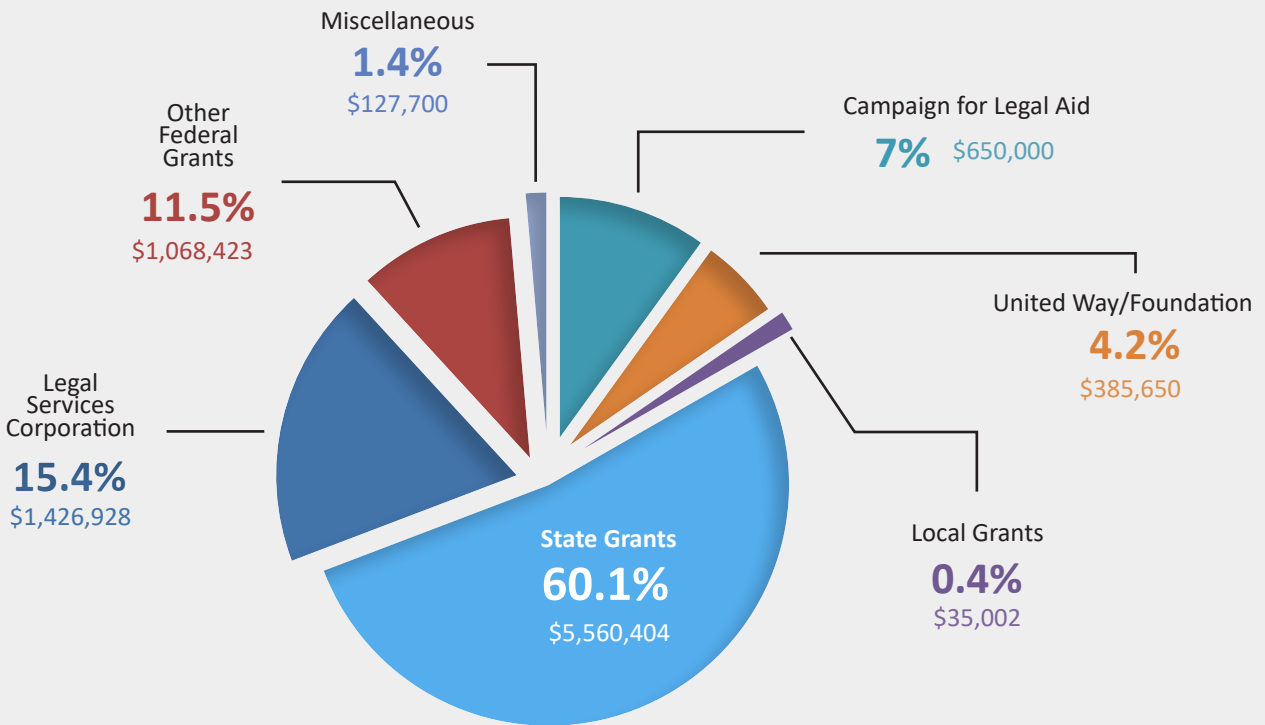
Contact Us

Administrative Office	Client Intake
1000 Alliance Bank Center 55 East 5th Street St. Paul, MN 55101 (651) 228-9823 (651) 228-9450 FAX cla@smrls.org	1-888-575-2954 Hotline Hours: Friday 9:00 a.m.- 11:45 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.- 3:00 p.m. CST Justice4mn.org

At a Glance:
SMRLS In 2017



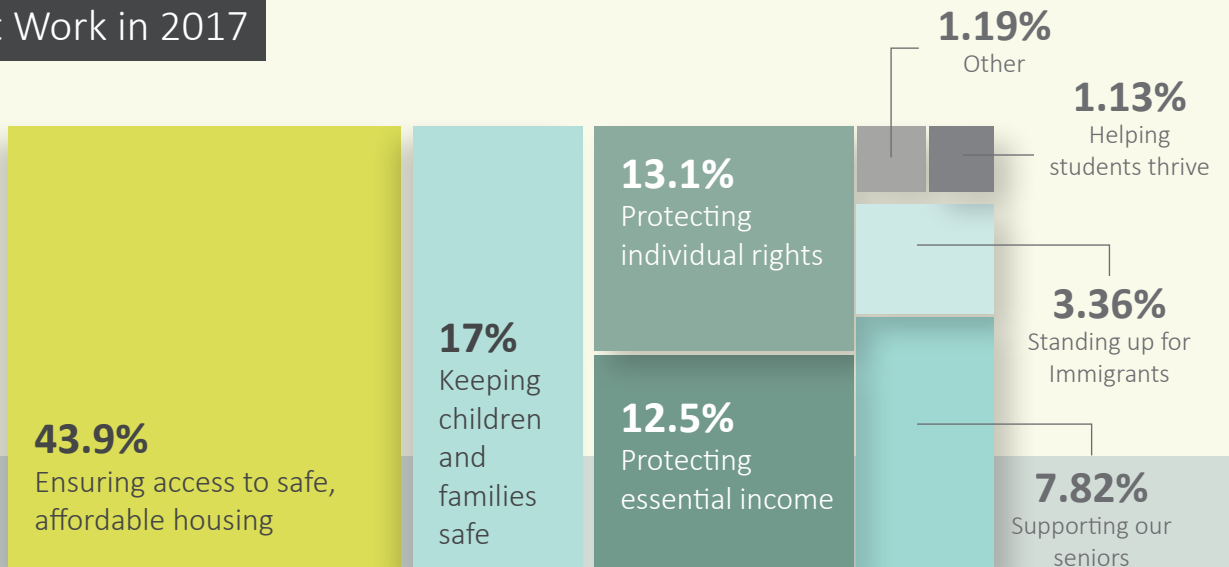
2017
TOTAL FUNDING SOURCES \$10,017,617



Our Client Work in 2017

9,125

Cases closed by SMRLS staff and volunteer attorneys



How to Help

Supporting SMRLS

Ways to Support SMRLS

The need for legal services remains great. However, by working together we can inspire real change. Each and every donation has a direct, positive impact on the lives of those we serve. To learn more about making a gift that works for you, please contact cla@smrls.org or (651) 228-9823.

Direct Donation

Your donation – of any amount – will be counted to our Annual Campaign. Funds will be used to support direct client services, providing critical legal assistance and ensuring that justice is not based on what one can afford. Gifts can be mailed to our Administrative Office or made online at smrls.org/donate.

Volunteer

The need for legal help is ever great. If you are an attorney looking to make a donation of time and service, please consider SMRLS and our low-income client community. To learn more or to volunteer, please contact Carol Bros, VAP Supervisor, at carol.bros@smrls.org or 651-222-5863.

Planned Giving

SMRLS has provided equal access to justice for over 100 years. To ensure that the same service is available to coming generations, please consider making a planned gift, either as part of your estate or to commemorate a cornerstone event: a birth, a graduation, a retirement, or other joyous occasion.

Ways to Support SMRLS

- Personal Gift
- Corporate or Firm Support
- Class Action Residual Awards
- Planned Giving
- Volunteer as a Pro Bono Attorney

Full Range of
Legal Services

LEGAL AID

ROI

For every
\$1.00
invested in
civil legal aid



\$3.94

in economic benefits
are returned to
individuals and
community

Contact Us

Administrative
Office

Client Intake

1000 Alliance Bank
Center
55 East 5th Street
St. Paul, MN 55101
(651) 228-9823
(651) 228-9450 FAX
cla@smrls.org

1-888-575-2954
Hotline Hours:
Friday 9:00 a.m.-
11:45 a.m. and 1:00
p.m.- 3:00 p.m. CST
Justice4mn.org



@smrlsmn

#JusticeMatters

SMRLS

Holistic Approach to Healthcare

Following the ongoing successful partnership with the Open Door Health Center in Mankato, SMRLS has partnered with two new healthcare providers. In 2017, SMRLS joined the Bethesda Family Medicine Clinic and Children’s Minnesota to establish two new Healthcare-Legal Partnerships (HLPs) in Saint Paul. HLPs address the health-harming legal needs of low-income patients.

SMRLS attorneys work with clients at each partnership to resolve a variety of legal issues that affect a patient’s health. By having attorneys located onsite at these clinics, patients receive increased access to protections and resources that allow them to meet their basic needs, leading to improved health and overall well-being.

Common legal issues such as unsafe living conditions, domestic abuse, and a lack of affordable healthcare have negative impacts on the health of an individual and their family. By integrating legal assistance into a healthcare setting, patients are given a voice to advocate for legal solutions affecting their health.

These partnerships also afford educational opportunities between attorneys and healthcare professionals. Attorneys educate healthcare staff about how to recognize common health-harming legal needs and in return, healthcare staff educate SMRLS attorneys about health issues specific to their patient populations. This method aims to help a new generation of attorneys and healthcare providers to better evaluate the needs of patient and clients to provide a holistic approach to legal services and healthcare.

Maria Christu, Children’s Chief Legal Officer, is optimistic about the benefits of HLPs.

“Being able to connect our patients to a trusted partner like the HLP is a great step toward breaking down those barriers,” Ms. Christu says. “This partnership brings tremendous value to our patients and their families and therefore, to our communities as well.”

Stay tuned in 2018 for more information about the success of our Healthcare Legal Partnerships and goals for the future.

2017

Agricultural Worker Project (AWP)



2017 was a year of change and innovation for SMRLS’ Agricultural Worker Project (AWP), formerly named Migrant Legal Services. At the end of 2016, AWP’s case priorities changed to better address the legal needs of agricultural workers based on their employment status – including wage theft, workplace health and safety conditions, employment discrimination and retaliation, contract violations, and labor trafficking. In an effort to increase client services within these priorities, AWP overhauled its legal rights education materials, creating an English-Spanish legal rights calendar highlighting a different legal topic for each calendar month.

AWP also revised its outreach strategies to its client base – agricultural workers throughout Minnesota and North Dakota – by visiting workers in the evening at their homes to provide legal rights education and to offer AWP’s services. Between April and November 2017, AWP staff in its Moorhead and St. Paul offices distributed a total of 2,500 legal rights calendars, visited over 680 locations where agricultural workers live, contacted over 110 community partners, and spoke directly with over 1,000 agricultural workers in North Dakota and Minnesota. As a result, AWP experienced a noticeable increase in agricultural workers served, including its handling of cases related to wage theft, contract violations, and labor trafficking. AWP anticipates that this pattern will continue in 2018 and beyond as it further implements innovative legal education and outreach strategies.

Sponsor Funding

McKnight Funds SMRLS Housing Project in Ramsey County



Andrea Palumbo
Volunteer Attorney Program Coordinator

In October 2017, the McKnight Foundation awarded SMRLS a \$136,000 grant to fund a two-year pilot project in Ramsey County to ameliorate the harmful effects of evictions on tenants' rental records. Eviction records frequently prevent individuals from obtaining affordable housing, often leading to homelessness or unsafe living conditions. In collaboration with the Second Judicial District, SMRLS hopes to eliminate systemic barriers many individuals face when finding housing, including the negative impacts of eviction records for low income renters and people of color.

SMRLS staff attorney, Sheena Thompson, is collaborating with Ramsey County to conduct community education, strengthen access to legal representation and Emergency Assistance, and expand the availability of pre-filing mediation. Ms. Thompson conducts a monthly clinic to help tenants expunge eviction records already in the court system. By expunging their eviction records, tenants are more likely to secure safe housing. SMRLS is hoping to take expungements one step further by having court records marked as "confidential" upon filing, preventing landlords from viewing the records until and if a judgment is entered against the tenant.

If a tenant agrees to move out of the unit in a settlement agreement, the court will often consider, upon the party's request, marking the court file as "confidential." This means that prospective landlords cannot see the court's record of this case, and tenant screening companies must not report this case on their reports. This greatly assists tenants with finding new housing, which they usually must do in seven or fewer days. If the tenant does not comply with the settlement agreement, the case will be made public again.

Currently, eviction cases are publicly available upon filing. This creates a negative impression about a tenant, even if the tenant has a proper defense, the case is dismissed, or the tenant wins the case. Landlords assume that if an eviction action is filed, the tenant did something wrong, and they do not want to risk renting to him or her. SMRLS is hoping that soon, the court will start marking eviction actions as "confidential" upon filing, preventing them from being made publicly available to landlords. If the case is dismissed, the tenant wins the case, or the case is settled and the tenant complies with the settlement agreement, the case should automatically be expunged. If the tenant loses the case or does not comply with a settlement agreement, then the case will be made public. SMRLS anticipates that marking these court records as "confidential" will aid tenants in their housing search. The eviction record, which is always viewed as negative toward a tenant, should only be public if a judgment is entered against the tenant.

SMRLS has proposed that marking eviction records as "confidential" upon filing will begin as a two-year pilot project in the Second Judicial District. After the benefits and any possible negative consequences are assessed, hopefully marking eviction records as "confidential" will become statewide practice.

Know Your Rights

Responding to Offensive Speech and Behavior

Increasingly, members of the communities served by Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS) are being confronted with offensive speech, threats, and even physical violence due to their race, refugee or immigrant status, gender or other protected status. Our client community has become frightened and alienated and needs to know their legal rights. This is particularly true in rural southern Minnesota where refugees, immigrants and people of color are relatively new to the communities.

Thanks to a \$25,000 grant awarded in 2017 by the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation, SMRLS partnered with local community organizations to educate 500 people who have been or might be confronted with offensive speech and behavior about their legal rights. There will be 20 community legal education events across southern Minnesota.

The first event in October 2017, organized with the Mankato Area Cross Cultural Connections group, was attended by 150 people. Many of those attending were in tears as they described their own experiences with racism. Other events have been held with the Mankato Islamic Center, Salvation Army in Austin, Communities United for Rochester, the Winona Human Rights Commission and other community groups. At each event, participants receive a refrigerator magnet with a list of helpful resources.

More events are being planned and offered in St. Peter, Sleepy Eye, Worthington, Faribault, Redwing, and more.



SMRLS attorneys
**Larry Nicol and
Nicole Mourgos**
leading a
community
education event

2017 VAP

Volunteer Attorney Program

Our Volunteer Attorney Program (VAP) was busier than ever in 2017. More than 4,300 hours of pro bono services were reported by our 350 active volunteer attorneys, 195 of whom represented clients in 2017. Twenty-five SMRLS volunteer attorneys reported more than 50 hours of service, seven reported more than 100 hours, and one volunteer attorney exceeded 200 hours. Many of these hours were served in the more than 100 brief services clinics SMRLS held last year. These free clinics range from Criminal Record and Eviction Expungement clinics, Wills of Seniors and Single Parents clinics, and Uncontested Divorce clinics.

In October 2017, the VAP created a new supervisor position and added half-time administrative support. All VAP coordinators now report to this supervisor, with a goal of better coordinating activities to grow the program. VAP now has 5 coordinators plus a halftime support staff.

We are also happy to announce that longtime Metro volunteer Mark Genereux received the 2017 Second Judicial District Pro Bono Award. He was honored with this award at the Ramsey County Bar Foundation Bench and Bar Benefit on November 4, 2017.



Volunteer Attorney Profile: Stuart Alger



Stuart Alger, partner at Malkerson Gunn Martin LLP, began volunteering for SMRLS in 2013. In addition to serving as a volunteer attorney, Mr. Alger also is a member of SMRLS' Campaign for Legal Aid fundraising committee.

As a volunteer attorney, Alger has contributed more than 377 hours and handled 14 cases, mostly related to landlords and tenants and real estate. In five eviction cases, he was able to negotiate a favorable settlement for each of his clients, and completed his service by getting those clients' evictions expunged. Altogether, Mr. Alger has helped 42 people in need keep and find housing.

"People need stable housing to do well. Not only does stable housing benefit the people you're helping, but also to everyone in the community," Mr. Alger says.

In his private practice, Mr. Alger's focus includes cases related to land use, property tax, and real estate litigation. Mr. Alger's interest in housing has also carried over into this work as a volunteer.

2017

Events in Review

Lawyers on Ice

Sixty players competed for the traveling trophy at the 12th annual *Lawyers on Ice* hockey tournament on February 6, 2017 at the Xcel Energy Center. The tournament featured four teams sponsored by Robins Kaplan; Western National Insurance; Martin & Squires; Stinson Leonard Street; Ogletree Deakins; Meagher Geer; Morrison Sund; Larson•King; Briggs & Morgan; and James Ysebaert of Merrill Lynch. Announcers Bruce Beneke (SMRLS) and Paul Peterson (Harper & Peterson) provided entertainment as they narrated the games. Special thanks to Event Chair, Michael O'Neill, Esq. (Martin & Squires) for his efforts in making this event a success.



2017 Annual Fall Appreciation Luncheon



More than 400 people attended the Fall Appreciation Luncheon on November 21, 2017 at the InterContinental Saint Paul Riverfront Hotel. Former Campaign for Legal Aid Committee member and retired Supreme Court Justice Esther Tomljanovich and former SMRLS Director of Development Kathie Battle Sayles each received Lifetime Leadership Awards. SMRLS paralegal Mary Vrieze also received the 3M Charlton H. Dietz & Bruce Beneke Outstanding Advocate Award. Kelly Olmstead, President of the Ramsey County Bar Foundation, presented SMRLS CEO Jessie Nicholson a check of \$19,772.35 from proceeds of the RCBA Bench and Bar Benefit. The Honorable Mark Kappelhoff, Minnesota's Fourth District, captivated the audience with his presentation about the investigations he led in Ferguson, Missouri when he served as Assistant Attorney General at the United States Department of Justice.

Social Justice Uncorked

The 10th annual Social Justice Uncorked fundraiser was held on September 22, 2017 at the Loews Minneapolis Hotel. More than 300 guests enjoyed fabulous wine, craft brew, and non-alcoholic beverage tastings and heavy appetizers. Honorary Chair Keith Ross, Chief Legal Officer of the Minnesota Super Bowl Host Committee, paid tribute to the SMRLS superheroes who provide their expertise to those in need of legal services in our community. Thanks to our guests and sponsors, we raised \$131,000 to support legal aid in southern Minnesota.



December 31, 2017
(With Comparative Totals for 2016)

SMRLS Statement of Financial Position

	<u>2017</u>	<u>2016</u>
ASSETS		
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 1,936,103	\$ 1,662,324
Certificates of deposit	2,100,000	2,100,000
Client escrow funds	31,167	1,167
Grants and contracts receivable	992,324	1,169,261
Pledges receivable	2,089,930	1,921,208
Prepaid expenses	101,539	100,307
Investments	11,932	10,248
	<u>7,262,995</u>	<u>6,964,515</u>
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		
PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT, at cost		
Furniture, fixtures and equipment	275,255	365,371
Leasehold improvements	223,695	223,695
Law library	382,385	382,385
	881,335	971,451
Less: accumulated depreciation	<u>(804,803)</u>	<u>(885,851)</u>
	<u>76,532</u>	<u>85,600</u>
TOTAL PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT, net		
	<u>\$ 7,339,527</u>	<u>\$ 7,050,115</u>
TOTAL ASSETS		
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Accounts payable	\$ 168,102	\$ 240,543
Client trust deposits	31,167	1,167
Accrued expenses	576,205	617,378
Deferred revenue	115,725	68,615
	<u>891,199</u>	<u>927,703</u>
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		
NET ASSETS		
Unrestricted		
Undesignated	615,631	433,880
Board designated	3,483,867	3,483,867
Total unrestricted	4,099,498	3,917,747
Temporarily restricted	2,348,830	2,204,665
	<u>6,448,328</u>	<u>6,122,412</u>
TOTAL NET ASSETS		
	<u>\$ 7,339,527</u>	<u>\$ 7,050,115</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		

SMRLS

Statement of Activities

SOUTHERN MINNESOTA REGIONAL LEGAL SERVICES, INC.
STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES
For the Year Ended December 31, 2017
(With Comparative Totals for 2016)

	<u>Unrestricted</u>	<u>Temporarily Restricted</u>	<u>Total 2017</u>	<u>Total 2016</u>
SUPPORT AND REVENUE				
Grants and contracts	\$ 6,231,237	\$ 2,238,941	\$ 8,470,178	\$ 8,131,939
Other support	1,241,249	-	1,241,249	1,124,147
In kind contributions	740,115	-	740,115	753,222
Program fees	44,900	-	44,900	30,250
Miscellaneous	8,960	-	8,960	7,155
Investment income	18,081	-	18,081	17,544
Net assets released from restrictions	2,094,776	(2,094,776)	-	-
TOTAL SUPPORT AND REVENUE	<u>10,379,318</u>	<u>144,165</u>	<u>10,523,483</u>	<u>10,064,257</u>
EXPENSES				
Program services	8,941,771	-	8,941,771	8,530,554
Supporting services				
Management and general	927,838	-	927,838	1,045,647
Fundraising	327,958	-	327,958	370,663
TOTAL EXPENSES	<u>10,197,567</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>10,197,567</u>	<u>9,946,864</u>
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	181,751	144,165	325,916	117,393
NET ASSETS, BEGINNING	<u>3,917,747</u>	<u>2,204,665</u>	<u>6,122,412</u>	<u>6,005,019</u>
NET ASSETS, ENDING	<u>\$ 4,099,498</u>	<u>\$ 2,348,830</u>	<u>\$ 6,448,328</u>	<u>\$ 6,122,412</u>

Thank You
Sponsors

The following firms, organizations and individuals generously provided sponsorship support to one or more of the events in 2017

3M	Martin & Squires
Alliance Bank	Maslon
Aon	Meagher & Geer
Barnes & Thornburg	Medica
Briggs and Morgan	Minnesota Continuing Legal Education
Carolyn Chalmers	Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
Ciresi Conlin	Minnesota State Bar Association
The Corneille Family	Minnesota Lawyer Mutual
Cousineau, Van Bergen, McNee & Malone	Morrison Sund
Dorsey & Whitney	Ogletree Deakins
Faegre Baker Daniels	Robins Kaplan
Felhaber, Larson, Fenlon & Voght	Schwebel, Goetz & Sieben
Foley & Mansfield	Sieben Carey
Fox Rothschild	Sieben Polk
Fredrikson & Byron	Stinson Leonard Street
Greene Espel	Thompson Reuters
Gustafson Gluek	UnitedHealth Group
Harper & Peterson	Walsh & Gaertner
Henson & Efron	Western National Insurance Company
Eric Janus	Winthrop & Weinstine
Larson • King	Xcel Energy
Mairs & Power	

2017

SMRLS Leadership

2017 Board of Directors

Gail Olson (President)

Matt Benda (First Vice President)

Brenda Devlin
(Second Vice President)

Thomas Hatch (Treasurer)

Kari Valley (Secretary)

Ali Abdullahi

Andrew Baese

Kathy Bartz

Judge Timothy Connell (Retired)

Mark Delehanty

Emma Hilliard

Sonja Miller

Suyapa Miranda

Terrance C. S. Newby

Brett Olander

Abdi Sabrie

Brett Strand

Elizabeth Webster

Campaign for Legal Aid: Urban Leadership Committee

Steve Kirsch (Chair)

Stuart J. Alger

Thomas H. Boyd

Angela B. Brandt

Stacy A. Broman

John M. Degnan

Richard A. Duncan

Bernie M. Dusich

Kevin P. Goodno

Beverly Jones Heydinger

Timothy Hughes

Ann Huntrods

Thomas G. Lovett

Kevin Magnuson

Robert W. Mairs

Joseph T. O'Neill

Michael D. O'Neill

Paul D. Peterson

Katie Pfeifer

Eric Rucker

Peter A. Schmit

Val Schmitz

Daniel L. Scott

Christopher M. Scotti

Kyle M. Thomas

William L. Tilton

Trisha Volpe

Campaign for Legal Aid: Southwest Campaign Committee

Jill K. Baker

Amber D. Donley

Kent Gernander

Nicholas J. Maxwell

William S. Partridge

Steven R. Sunde

Andrew A. Willaert

Ken White