



## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Legal Aid presents virtual event with speaker Matthew Desmond and Equal Justice Awards**

(Omaha, NE) – The financial impact of COVID-19 has drastically affected the lives of thousands of Nebraskans. Legal Aid of Nebraska's virtual Friends of Legal Aid Luncheon on October 8 will focus on those hit hardest, from the low-wage essential worker fighting to stay in his home to the frontline worker fighting to keep her patient alive. Prior [registration](#) is required to view the event, but is free to all who register.

The free Oct. 8 virtual event will feature a speech by renowned Pulitzer Prize winner Matthew Desmond, author of "Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City," which was named a Best Book of 2016 by nearly three dozen outlets including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Praised as "an extraordinary feat of reporting and ethnography" by *The Washington Post*, "Evicted" transforms our understanding of extreme poverty and economic exploitation while providing fresh ideas for solving a uniquely American problem. Desmond will connect today's surging eviction crisis facing low-wage essential workers and others "on the margins" to the need for increased free legal assistance, including from Legal Aid, as well as the long-term challenge of ensuring safe and affordable housing for all.

While Legal Aid has been at the forefront of the battle, providing free legal assistance to those affected by COVID-19, our staff has seen just how hard low-income Nebraskans have been hit and would like to highlight the contributions of those who support and protect the interests of low-wage essential workers during this time of crisis. The Equal Justice Awards will be given to community partners, law firms, and attorneys for their work to achieve greater and more equal justice for all, especially for low-wage essential workers during today's COVID-19 public health crisis.

More information and registration information can be found at [www.legalaidofnebraska.org/fola2020](http://www.legalaidofnebraska.org/fola2020).

If you are interested in sponsoring the Friends of Legal Aid Luncheon, please contact Megan Moslander at [mmoslander@legalaidofnebraska.org](mailto:mmoslander@legalaidofnebraska.org) or fill out the sponsor form at [www.legalaidofnebraska.org/fola2020](http://www.legalaidofnebraska.org/fola2020).

Equal Justice Awardees include:

**Attorney Partner Equal Justice Award – Tenant Assistance Project volunteer private attorneys (Lincoln)**

Legal Aid works collaboratively with the NSBA's Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP) and the Nebraska Law Civil Clinic to provide legal services to low income tenants in Lancaster County through the "Tenant Assistance Project" (TAP), a multi-organization effort to provide free legal advice and representation to tenant defendants in Lancaster County Court. The goal of TAP has been to provide legal assistance for every tenant facing eviction proceedings in Lancaster County Court through 2020. Nearly 40 private attorneys, working through the VLP, have volunteered to provide these legal services to tenants.

TAP and its volunteers are a model for other eviction defense efforts across Nebraska, in both large urban centers and rural parts of the state. Legal Aid is honored to provide an Equal Justice Award to TAP's volunteer attorneys who have stepped forward to directly help the most vulnerable people today facing the economic hardships arising from the pandemic.

**Community Partner Equal Justice Award: OneWorld Community Health Center; Charles Drew Health Center; Nebraska Medicine (Omaha)**

These local community health centers and providers stepped forward during an uncertain and unprecedented time to provide testing, education, and direct health services to low-wage essential workers and others struggling with vast and disproportionate impacts on their communities. Without these health care providers, these workers would have gone with little direct health care assistance and these services remain key to responding to the pandemic as it continues.

Legal Aid is honored to provide the Community Partner Equal Justice Award to each of these community health partners, recognizing the profound moral leadership and tremendously valuable day-to-day health care services provided to low-wage essential workers and their families in the face of today's COVID-19 public health crisis.

**Community Partner Equal Justice Award: Children of Smithfield (Crete)**

Early in the pandemic, as meatpacking plants in Nebraska became "hot spots" for coronavirus transmission and put thousands of workers at risk, there arose voices on behalf of these largely Latino low-wage essential meatpacking workers who were experiencing the deadly effects of the virus. One in particular was the group "Children of Smithfield," composed of children and relatives of pork plant workers in the Smithfield Foods pork slaughter and production plant in Crete.

In the face of this harsh situation for meatpacking workers, the “Children of Smithfield” led efforts to bring greater public attention to the plight of these workers, and to get public officials to insist upon changes and improvements in the packing plants to lower the risk of spreading the coronavirus. These efforts included sponsoring weekly rallies in Crete and Lincoln to insist that the welfare of these meatpacking workers be recognized and addressed, and demanding government leaders meet with workers and their families.

Legal Aid is honored to provide the Community Partner Equal Justice Award to “Children of Smithfield” for their selfless, humane, and remarkable public advocacy to insist upon equal justice for all essential meatpacking workers shouldering such a burden and facing such a disproportionate risk during this public health crisis.

### **Law Firm Partner Equal Justice Award – Husch Blackwell (Omaha)**

Husch Blackwell’s Omaha office has been a deep and loyal friend and supporter of Legal Aid of Nebraska for many years, including through significant pro bono assistance on a wide variety of projects and initiatives. This support includes hundreds of hours of legal services in on-site clinics, taking individual cases, and advising on complex matters.

Legal Aid is honored to provide the Law Firm Partner Equal Justice Award to Husch Blackwell of Omaha, for its contributions to building a fairer and better legal profession and, through its many efforts and initiatives, being a model of private law firm commitment to equal justice for all.

### **About Legal Aid of Nebraska**

[Legal Aid of Nebraska](http://www.legalaidofnebraska.org) was established in 1963 and is the only statewide non-profit civil legal aid provider in Nebraska, providing free, high quality services to low-income Nebraskans in all 93 counties. Legal Aid’s mission is *“to promote justice, dignity, hope and self-sufficiency through quality civil legal aid for those who have nowhere else to turn.”* Legal Aid’s administrative offices are in Omaha, Nebraska.

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[www.legalaidofnebraska.org](http://www.legalaidofnebraska.org)

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