

Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law & Economic Justice



What is LEJ?

- **2003:** Originally created as “Lawyers for Equal Justice,” a non-profit, 501 (c)(3) organization to advocate on behalf of low-income individuals, families, and communities in Hawai`i on civil legal and social justice issues of statewide importance
- **2011:** LEJ became the 17th Appleseed center, joining the Appleseed network of public interest centers in the United States and Mexico.
- Shifted focus from being primarily litigation-intensive to systemic administrative & legislative advocacy with a litigative component

LEJ's Approaches

- Legislative and administrative advocacy to ensure that the policies, laws and practices intended to address the problems of those living in poverty and other vulnerable individuals are well designed and are implemented legally, fairly and effectively
- Research and analysis of issues affecting low income communities, identifying strategies for improvement of conditions in those communities and disseminating findings through seminars, publications and news media coverage
- Legal education to inform low income individuals and groups of their rights and the options available to exercise those rights
- Legal advocacy, including class action litigation, to assist low income individuals and communities in the enforcement of their rights and obtaining assistance through legislation and administrative action
- Grassroots coalition building with community groups who share a common interest in seeking dynamic responses to social needs, supporting the work of other public interest advocates and social service organization.

Past Litigation Efforts

- Kuhio Park Terrace and Kuhio Homes
- Mayor Wright Housing
- Health Care for Micronesian Migrants
- Access to Education for Homeless Children
- Utility Subsidy Cases

Recent Publications

- “The State of Poverty in Hawai‘i: How to Restore Our Legacy of Fairness”
- “Addressing Homelessness: New Approaches to Affordable Housing in Hawai‘i”
- “Gambling with Paradise: Why Casinos and Lotteries are Bad Bets for Hawai‘i”
- “Broken Promises, Shattered Dreams: The Case for Justice for Micronesians living in Hawai‘i”
- “Is Hawai‘i a Good Parent? Systemic Failures in Providing Critical Services to Foster Youth in Hawai‘i”
- Policy papers can be found online at:
<http://hiappleseed.org/policy-research>

Current Social Justice Projects

- Veterans and Social Security Disability Benefits
- Immigrants Rights Manual
- Eviction Study
- Tenant Rent Rebates and Project Improvements

Social Justice Projects on Education

- School Discipline
- English Language Learner program
- School Breakfast

School Discipline

- Data shows that public schools with higher percentages of Native Hawaiians as well as low income and immigrant children tend to experience higher rates of school suspensions and expulsions. Many parents are not informed of the school's disciplinary process and therefore, lack the necessary tools to advocate for their child's welfare in conferences and disciplinary hearings. LEJ seeks to identify the best practices in other states for school discipline and identify areas of improvement for Hawai'i current school disciplinary protocols.

English Language Learner

- Hawai'i's 16,000 English language learners (ELL) face many challenges in Hawaii's public school system.
- LEJ is exploring the efficacy of the DOE's implementation of services for ELL students, particularly with respect to teacher qualifications, high teacher turnover, achievement gap metrics, and administration of ELL program at the local school level, and considering potential advocacy initiatives to ensure that these students receive a quality education.

School Breakfast

- The free and reduced price school meals program, jointly operated by the US Department of Agriculture and the Hawai'i Department of Education, provides a significant channel for low-income children to access nutritional diets.
- Unfortunately, only 40% of children currently participating in the school lunch program are also participating in school breakfast. Hawai'i ranks 44th in the nation in terms of student participation in school breakfast.
- LEJ is developing a pilot project aimed at maximizing participation in the school breakfast program through a "Breakfast in the Classroom" model that has been successful in several locations throughout the country.
- Partnering with Linapuni El, Ka'ala El, and Ka'ewai El

Next Steps for School Discipline

- Identify and Contact Public School Stakeholders
- Analyze Data from UIPA Request
- Obtaining Data Linking Suspensions to Student Ethnicity

Next Steps for ELL

- Waiting for data from UIPA request
- Identify HIDOE's Plan for ELL program
- Research Other States' Approaches
- Teacher Outreach Campaign

Next Steps for School Breakfast

- Secure Funding to Cover Costs of Breakfast Pilots
- Coordinate the service models with each principal tailored to each schools' needs
- Brainstorm activities to engage students who arrive to school prior to the start of class who would otherwise be eating breakfast during that time
- Collaborate with school administrators and community leaders to increase parent and student awareness through “guerilla” marketing strategies and outreach materials providing information on the importance of breakfast for student success (i.e., education trainings, once-a-month breakfast for parents, etc.)

LEJ Contact & Website

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