CORE PILLARS
OF OUR WORK

HOLISTIC DIRECT SERVICES
- DIRECT REPRESENTATION
- SOCIAL WORK

SYSTEMIC CIVIL RIGHTS LITIGATION

MEDIA & POLICY ADVOCACY

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION
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It is hard to believe that another year has passed since we last updated you, our friends and supporters, on our work at ArchCity Defenders (ACD). Like many, we have come to make regular use of the phrase “COVID time,” not only in reference to the temporal distortions of lockdowns and isolation, social separation and virtual connection; but also to describe a heightened recognition of how truly precious our time together is. In this sense, an opportunity to reflect on such time, and to share those reflections with others who care, is itself a gift. As we reflect on the past year at ACD, it becomes clear that it has been a year of transition, growth, and community building.

One element of transition came in late fall of 2021 when, after nearly 20 months of remote work following the emergence of COVID-19, our team shifted to a new hybrid work environment. This hybrid structure, which seeks to balance the collaborative potential of shared in-person work time with the flexibility of remote work, has allowed our team to reconnect and support one another in ways that the pandemic had previously made difficult, if not impossible. Perhaps most exciting of all has been the partial return of clients and partners to the space, and we are eager for the full office reopening in the coming weeks for the client walk-ins and drop-by visits that have helped to create the kind of community atmosphere that makes ACD so special.

This transition is taking place amid continued growth for ACD, both in terms of our team and its work. As in previous years, we saw a number of talented new staff members join ACD – stepping into new roles such as Special Litigation Counsel, Director of Partnerships, and Communications Fellow. These new team members join an incredibly skilled and dedicated group of multidisciplinary advocates that is redefining what holistic legal advocacy can look like in the St. Louis region and beyond. This includes new programs, projects and initiatives that either began or grew to new heights over the past year: the RESTART Expungement Program, Fatal State Violence program, Social Work pilot, and a newly constituted volunteer program, to name a few. We are excited for the continued evolution of this work in the year ahead.

Finally, ACD remains a place that is rooted in building community. We are proud to be part of a growing movement for housing justice in St. Louis, with ACD helping to anchor monthly renters’ meetings with Action St. Louis built around a vision of housing as a human right. The Workhouse is again empty(!) and the Close the Workhouse campaign is eager to begin a community-led process of re-envisioning and repurposing the land and building where the Workhouse has long sat. The Defund.Re-envision. Transform. campaign engaged hundreds of people in a community effort to rethink how we can create public safety for all, and redirect much-needed funds from the bloated police budget. And we continue to organize around a People’s Plan for St. Louis endorsed by 50 local and regional organizations, including by leading a coalition that launched a proposal for reparations in the City of St. Louis earlier this year. We have seen everyday people building power across these campaigns in remarkable ways, and believe that this is what will ultimately transform this place that we call home.

There is much more to read about the past year of transition, growth, and community building at ACD in the pages of this report. We hope that you find value in these sharings, that it strengthens your connection to our work, and, most importantly, that it deepens your own commitment to remain part of the fearless, dedicated, and caring community that is ArchCity Defenders.

In love and solidarity,

Blake Strode
Executive Director

Stephanie Grise
Board Chair
WHAT WE BELIEVE

OUR MISSION

ArchCity Defenders (ACD) is a holistic legal advocacy organization that combats the criminalization of poverty, especially in communities of color. ACD’s foundation in civil and criminal legal representation, social services, impact litigation, policy and media advocacy, and community collaboration achieves and inspires justice and equitable outcomes for people throughout the St. Louis region and beyond.

OUR VISION

ArchCity Defenders envisions a society liberated from systems of oppression where the promise of justice and racial equity is realized; communities where our approach to public safety prioritizes investment in well-being, health, and transformation without relying on criminalization and incarceration; and people living freely in their communities, thriving regardless of their race or income.

OUR VALUES

ArchCity Defenders is an anti-racist organization committed to revolutionary justice, people- and community-centered advocacy, abolition of the prison-industrial complex, and the self-determination of our clients and the communities we represent.
**ACD AT A GLANCE**

An overview of what ACD has accomplished with our clients and partners over the past year.

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<td>Since July 2021, ACD has worked with struggling households to facilitate over $115K+ in emergency assistance with utility, rental, and debt payments.</td>
<td>ACD filed and briefed 3 appeals in state and federal court, and argued one of them in the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals.</td>
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<td>Obtained 90+ case dismissals and represented 300+ clients in municipal and state court appearances on direct representation matters including municipal, criminal, housing, consumer, and family law.</td>
<td>Made over 50 in-person jail visits and filed 40 declarations on behalf of those who suffered abusive treatment while jailed at the City of St. Louis Justice Center.</td>
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<td>ACD won a class action lawsuit which wrote off $300K in rent as permanently uncollectable debt on behalf of 250 tenants in Ferguson, Missouri.</td>
<td>Obtained class certification in 3 separate class-action lawsuits, which means thousands of individuals in the region could potentially be awarded monetary damages stemming from debtors’ prison practices and inhumane jail conditions.</td>
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<td>Participated in 70+ coalition calls, community meetings, legal assistance clinics, and site-based support meetings for landlord-tenant issues and expungements.</td>
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**ANNUAL REPORT 2021–2022**
MEDIA & POLICY ADVOCACY

Worked closely with clients and community members to publish multimedia content that shared their personal experiences, exposed injustice, and sparked dialogue.

Placed 66 news stories locally and 26 stories nationally.

Held our first ever “Media Days” with creatives Nyara Williams and Tyler Small. We interviewed clients, staff, and board members, collected additional footage and released new video content.

Wrapped up the third season of “Under the Arch,” our collaborative podcast with Action St. Louis. With 10 episodes, this season features dynamic conversations with St. Louisans working to change the issues facing our community.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Through a joint effort by the Defund. Re-envision. Transform. (DRT) and the Close the Workhouse (CTW) campaigns, we knocked on 400+ doors, did three literature drops, and spoke with hundreds of people about what would make their neighborhoods and families better able to thrive.

Hosted 9 Monthly Movement meetings to get impacted people and communities politically educated and civically engaged around social justice, racial equity, and abolition.

Collected approximately 400 survey responses to determine how residents wanted to re-envision the use of the Workhouse as a space that brings community healing.

DRT and CTW campaigns hosted a “Re-envisioning Public Safety Town Hall” attended by St. Louis Mayor Tishaura Jones.
HOLISTIC DIRECT SERVICES: DIRECT REPRESENTATION

We mitigate the harm caused by systemic criminalization of marginalized groups by providing holistic representation to individuals.

RESTART EXPUNGEMENT PROGRAM

Our RESTART Expungement Program assists individuals seeking to remove past convictions or arrests. The records are the result of an overwhelmingly punitive and anti-Black legal system, and make it near impossible for someone to obtain housing, employment, and overall stability. By undergoing the long, tedious process of expungement, clients have a chance at a fresh start. See David Jackson’s story for an inside look.

DEFENDING OUR CLIENTS

As courts in the region continued to reopen over the past year, our attorneys have been among the first to appear in person to resolve outstanding cases. We also assisted a number of clients with reinstating their driver’s licenses and in the vast majority of cases have been able to prevent points from accruing on their licenses. We continue to defend protesters charged with criminal or municipal offenses related to the lawful exercise of their First Amendment rights.

WHAT WE DO

• Municipal/traffic court representation
• Tenants’ rights
• Family law
• Housing/eviction defense
• Advocate for the unhoused community
• Criminal defense
• Expungement

CLIENT PROFILE:

DAVID JACKSON

“I feel that ACD did a fantastic job. They took total concern about the situation I was in. Of course, it hit right during the coronavirus, so nothing could be done in person. Everything had to be done on video or over the phone. On all my court dates, I was met by my attorney, all my paperwork was filed properly, and in the end, I received my expungement signed by a district court judge here in St. Louis City, so I was very grateful for it. I thank ACD tremendously for everything that they did to help me out.”

Mr. Jackson, a 66-year-old retired electrician, reached out to ACD in 2020 with one request: to put his past behind him. An almost 30-year-old felony conviction made it difficult for Mr. Jackson to find housing. ACD’s attorneys began working with Mr. Jackson to expunge the conviction and remove it from his records. A hearing date was set for August 2021, and his attorney traveled to Mr. Jackson’s home to help set up the internet and laptop needed for a virtual court appearance. The judge granted the expungement and Mr. Jackson is now able to enjoy his retirement with housing security.
HOUSING
We continue to provide legal representation to tenants throughout the St. Louis region. We’ve focused heavily on site-based representation at specific apartment complexes to combat out-of-state investors whose business practices have been particularly abusive of local renters. As part of this work, we provide direct eviction defense to families and affirmatively litigate and advocate for renters enduring uninhabitable living conditions.

Our housing affirmative litigation led to a significant achievement in March 2022, when a St. Louis County judge ruled on behalf of a class of tenants, our clients and 250 of their neighbors at an apartment complex in Ferguson, Missouri. After years of litigation, the court erased over $300,000 in rent owed by tenants who lived in uninhabitable conditions at the complex between October 2019 and January 2021.

Our housing work continues to grow beyond legal advocacy. We facilitate a weekly meeting of housing attorneys, community stakeholders, and public officials focused on identifying issues renters face in the St. Louis area. Along with community partners, in Fall 2021, we began anchoring a monthly renters’ meeting with Action St. Louis that has been attended by over 200 tenants. Through these meetings, tenants have started organizing to gain political power and level the imbalanced power dynamic between landlords and tenants.

CLIENT PROFILE: CYNTHIA SMITH
In 2018, ACD began defending Ms. Smith against traffic violations in four different St. Louis-area municipalities. But when the pandemic hit in 2020, she lost her job, struggled to apply for unemployment insurance, and was at immediate threat of becoming homeless when her landlord filed an eviction lawsuit against her. ACD began representing Ms. Smith through an almost two-year eviction case. While we litigated the case, we also helped Ms. Smith secure rental assistance and temporary COVID-19 protections that allowed her to remain in her home. With the help of these services, Ms. Smith successfully avoided becoming unhoused and resolved all four of her traffic cases in early 2022. Ms. Smith is now stably housed, employed full-time, and has no outstanding legal issues facing her and her family.
HOLISTIC DIRECT SERVICES:
SOCIAL WORK

Taking a client-led approach, we support their self-determination while helping to counter the setbacks caused by discrimination, exploitation, and criminalization.

WHAT WE DO

- Trauma-informed case management
- Access to technology
- Public benefits assistance
- Transportation
- Outside referrals
- Jobs, housing, and education support

CLIENT SUPPORT

Our clients face a multitude of challenges, from low wages — exacerbated by rising inflation — to increased housing costs, unreliable public transit, difficulty accessing public benefits, and ongoing state violence. Our team locates and connects them with the resources they need to regain stability. For example, we provide clients with rental/utility assistance, access to PPE materials, household, and personal hygiene items, as well as bus passes and staple foods. In addition to dispensing those immediate forms of support, our team also engages in long term struggles — assisting our clients to obtain public benefits, forms of identification, and safe, affordable housing.

HOME SWEET HOME

We continue to partner with Home Sweet Home, a local nonprofit which provides clients with donated household items. Moving can be incredibly stressful and this partnership helps to alleviate some of the financial burden on our clients and ensure a smooth transition into housing stability. Together, we have been able to support 21 client households in fully furnishing or obtaining necessary items for their homes. We have witnessed how impactful this service has been to our clients’ long-term housing security.
SOCIAL WORK PILOT PROGRAM

The Social Work Pilot Program has been years in development and officially launched as a three-year program to connect individuals with legal-system involvement to resources, care, opportunities, power, and voice while helping to build their future; improve social determinants of health for these individuals; bolster their capacity to be change agents by creating avenues for organizing and community engagement, political education, and other forms of people-centered advocacy; and transform our region’s public safety paradigms, policies, and practices.

We began accepting referrals for individuals from the St. Louis City Public Defender’s Office in October 2021 and opened to referrals from the St. Louis County Public Defender’s Office in June 2022.

CLIENT PROFILE: FELISSE RASHEED

When we met Felisse Rasheed, she had been jailed pretrial at the City Justice Center for several months. She owed nearly $7,000 in back rent, and was carrying the additional stress from outstanding guardianship and muni cases. While she was grateful to be able to fight her case from home, life was overwhelming. She was struggling to make it, despite working six to seven days a week. Since starting our work with Ms. Rasheed, we have been able to assist her with obtaining identification, covering transportation costs, and accessing rental assistance.
SYSTEMIC CIVIL RIGHTS LITIGATION

We challenge the systemic harms (i.e. criminalization of poverty and state violence) caused by policing, courts, and jails that deny our clients’ rights to self-determination.

DEBTORS’ PRISON LITIGATION

We have been litigating debtors’ prison class action cases against six different St. Louis County municipalities since our landmark report on the predatory municipal court system in 2014. In the past year, the federal court ruled that not only our clients but thousands and thousands of people’s rights were violated by Maplewood, Ferguson, Normandy, and Edmundson. In Normandy and Edmundson, courts approved preliminary settlements with the municipalities, awarding more than $1.5 million to those who were jailed by or paid fines to these municipalities. While celebrating our progress, we continue to work toward successful resolutions in all of these important cases.

CLIENT PROFILE:
QUINTON THOMAS

When we met Quinton Thomas, he had stopped counting the number of times his basic rights had been violated by local police, courts, and jails. As a result of their unlawful and exploitative practices, Mr. Thomas had nearly a dozen warrants out for his arrest and had spent the better part of seven years unlawfully jailed in modern day debtors’ prisons. Over time, we managed to clear all of his warrants and help him regain his drivers license for the first time in many years.

But it didn’t end there for Mr. Thomas. He knew these injustices were widespread, and took a stand as a plaintiff in three separate debtors’ prison lawsuits against the cities of St. Ann, Normandy, and Edmundson. While no amount of money could make up for the harm Mr. Thomas and others have suffered, he says, “it is good to know that we have been able to get money back for people who were abused by the system.”

Finally relieved of the ceaseless exploitation of the court system, Mr. Thomas keeps a busy schedule with his full-time job and his studies to obtain a trucking driver’s license.
JAIL CONDITIONS

After nearly five years of court battles, a federal judge granted a motion for class certification status in James Cody, et al vs. St. Louis City, et al. James Cody and five other named plaintiffs filed suit on November 13, 2017 alleging they and thousands of other people were forced to endure inhumane conditions such as flooding, sewage, insect and rodent infestation, and excessive heat while detained at the Workhouse. This certification ruling means that individuals detained from approximately 2012 to 2018 could be eligible to receive monetary damages after a successful trial or if settlement is reached.

CLIENT PROFILE:
DON CLARK, JR.

“I don’t want anyone to have to stand before their peers, stand before the rest of the world, and have to plead and beg for someone that was taken from the world unjustly.”

Don Clark, Jr.’s father, Don Clark, Sr., was a grandfather and veteran who suffered from limited mobility and several health conditions. On February 21, 2017, an SLMPD SWAT team executed a no-knock search warrant at his home, shot and killed him. On June 30, 2021, ArchCity Defenders and attorney Jerryl Christmas filed a complaint on behalf of Clark, Jr. and his family. Since his father's death, Don Clark, Jr. has been a powerful advocate to end no-knock warrants, no-knock raids, and quick-knock raids. He is actively involved in ACD’s Fatal State Violence (FSV) Response Program and plans to continue working with other impacted families to advocate and organize.

STATE VIOLENCE

On October 25, 2021, ArchCity Defenders filed a lawsuit in federal court on behalf of our client, Tranell Stewart, against the Maryland Heights Police Department, alleging officers used excessive force against Mr. Stewart and unlawfully searched his home. We continue to litigate this case, as well as other lawsuits relating to fatal state violence—i.e. Don Clark, Jr., vs. St. Louis City, and Janice Payton vs. St. Louis City.

APPELLATE REPRESENTATION

In the past year, we took on the challenge of not only litigating multiple cases in state and federal court, but we argued, survived, and gained significant wins in cases that were appealed to the higher courts. Despite multiple attempts by the City of St. Louis to dismiss the claims of Michael Faulk, a journalist who was arrested and brutalized in the post-Stockley verdict kettle, we were able to protect his claim before the Eighth Circuit and keep his case moving forward. We were also able to fight back against the City’s attempt to get the Missouri Court of Appeals to levy unjust court fees against our client, Kris Hendrix. We have now resolved this years-long case, where Ms. Hendrix was able to secure a rare verdict for assault against a St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department officer. Finally, we prevailed on an appeal brought against Ali Qandah, our client who was assaulted at the hands of a St. Charles County jail corrections officer. That officer and St. Charles County will now have to face liability for their actions.
MEDIA & POLICY ADVOCACY

We actively work to counter inaccurate and unjust media narratives, and we center our clients’ voices to be more representative of their experiences and the issues impacting our region.

POWER AND PLAGUE OF PROTEST

In Fall 2021, we published “The Power and Plight of Protest” an original graphic series curated by ACD highlighting the recent history and impact of social movements through the stories of St. Louis activists and community members. For years, we’ve seen how the state and mainstream media routinely criminalize, vilify, and traumatize protesters. We created this series to center and amplify the untold stories of people who valiantly took to the streets and demanded transformation.

“UNDER THE ARCH” SEASON 3

Our collaborative podcast with Action St. Louis has wrapped its third season with 10 episodes covering topics from anti-Black racial history to how education shapes conversations about voting rights. Listen and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.
MEDIA DAYS
Spoke with 30+ clients, staff, and board members and began releasing a series of new video content. To view, visit ACD’s YouTube channel and subscribe to keep up with new content.

ACD’S DEBUT ON TIKTOK
ArchCity Defenders has expanded its social media presence to TikTok! We plan to release a new series of educative content, stories from impacted people, and interviews with staff members to get a behind-the-scenes look at ACD’s work. Follow us on TikTok @archcitydefenders

FATAL STATE VIOLENCE: PODCAST EPISODE FEATURED IN BROKEN DOORS
In April 2022, The Washington Post published an investigative reporting article on no-knock warrants and raids, accompanied by a six-part podcast series called Broken Doors. The article and a podcast episode featured our clients, the family of Don Clark, Sr., who was killed by SLMP in a no-knock raid in 2017, and highlighted ACD’s work in fatal state violence in this case. We spent nearly 10 months working with reporters and collecting media content with the Clark family to bring their story to light on a national platform while ensuring our clients’ voices and experiences were

HLK PARTNERSHIP
Over the past year, we’ve continued to collaborate with HughesLeanyKarlovic (HLK), a St. Louis based advertising and digital marketing agency. In 2021, a dedicated team from HLK provided 1,100 hours of pro-bono expertise to our communications and media work.

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR E-NEWSLETTER
Would you like to receive our monthly e-newsletter?
To subscribe, visit archcitydefenders.org and enter your email at the bottom of the webpage.
COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

We address the profound history of systemic injustice by partnering with organizations, activists, and community members on events, campaigns, and initiatives in order to build community power.

CLOSE THE WORKHOUSE (CTW)
After years of advocacy and organizing, not only has the population of people detained dropped significantly, the City now operates one jail. By the end of May 2022, the City transferred people detained at the Workhouse to the City Justice Center, thereby emptying the Workhouse.

We received 400 responses to the “Re-Envisioning the Workhouse” survey, and one theme was clear: in place of the Workhouse, community members wanted a place that brought healing and transformation.

In 2022, a local team applied and was contracted by the City to carry out the “Re-envisioning of the Workhouse,” a project and vision of what happens to the facility guided by people who were caged and harmed by the Workhouse.

PROSECUTOR ORGANIZING TABLE
This coalition of local and national organizations focuses on holding prosecutors accountable to the progressive visions and platforms they campaigned on.

WHAT WE DO
• Housing/tenant rights organizing
• Expungement clinic
• Close the Workhouse
• Defund. Re-envision. Transform.
• Prosecutorial organizing

CLIENT PROFILE:
JOCelyn GARNER
“ArchCity Defenders restored my belief that there are actually people out there that genuinely want to help you, and it’s not just a job. All I had to do was get in and go. And I’ve been going ever since, because I can’t let them down... and I haven’t stopped yet.”

We met Jocelyn Garner at a CTW meeting in 2018 after she survived inhumane conditions at the Workhouse – rodent infestations, inedible food, black mold, and more. Ms. Garner soon became an ACD client after her landlord illegally evicted her from a boarding house. Our attorneys were able to help Ms. Garner with housing and municipal court matters. Our social work team worked with community partners to locate short and long-term housing for Ms. Garner, link her with a security deposit, rental assistance, and utility assistance. Removing the barriers to housing stability enabled Ms. Garner invest more time in advocating for the changes she wants to see in St. Louis.
DEFUND. RE-ENVISION. TRANSFORM. (DRT)

In Spring 2022, DRT created a budget toolkit and held workshops designed to increase community understanding of how their tax dollars are being spent, how those dollars could be better allocated, and how to advocate for those changes. DRT also created the People’s Budgeting Tool, an interactive tool that allows the community to create their own budget reflecting their priorities for investing in people and community instead of the carceral system. Once people created their own budget, the tool allowed them to send it to their local elected officials. Before the budget season ended, DRT took copies of the budget toolkit to City Hall and urged local representatives to hear constituents’ calls for divesting from police and reinvesting in resources that actually keep people safe. DRT is anchored by: Action St. Louis, ArchCity Defenders, Forward through Ferguson, and the Coalition Against Police Crimes & Repression (CAPCR). Keep up with DRT by following on social media and online at www.drt-stl.org

THE PEOPLE’S PLAN

The People’s Plan is a comprehensive policy agenda backed by over forty local organizations, designed to help us build power and redistribute resources in the City of St. Louis. As a follow-up to one of the many calls to action from the People’s Plan – in December 2021, a coalition of over 25 local community organizations came together to encourage the Jones’ administration to develop a process and plan for reparations in the City of St. Louis. Read the report online at: bit.ly/STLReparations and follow #STLReparations for more content.

FSV COMMUNITY OF SURVIVORS

In September 2021, we began working with Faith for Justice to launch the Community of Survivors program. FSV Community of Survivors dedicated monthly meeting spaces for families focused on creating spaces for healing and community building, and opportunities for political education, training, and ways to build collective power to effect change.

FSV RAPID RESPONSE

The primary goal of the FSV Response team is to provide 24/7, 365 days a year trauma-informed referrals in response to a caller’s need. The FSV Community of Survivors has dedicated monthly meetings for families focused on healing and community building, political education, and building collective power. Volunteer teams are trained to connect with families in the immediate aftermath of a killing by police or death in jail custody. FSV Responders ensure families receive in-person support including how to get information on the circumstances of a loved one’s death, engage with the media or government agencies, access resources and legal services, acquire funding for funeral arrangements, or receive mental health support.

CLIENT PROFILE:
QUITA HILL

“We need some more people who aren’t afraid to speak up and do something right to help people, that’s the type of people my lawyers – ArchCity Defenders are.”

We met Quita Hill in 2019 when the new owner of her long-time home accused her of damaging the property in an attempt to force her out and raise the rent. Working with an ACD attorney, not only was Ms. Hill able to successfully fight her eviction and keep her housing voucher, the landlord paid her to settle the case. Since then, Ms. Hill joined our community collaborations work by advocating with the Defund. Re-envision. Transform. campaign and the housing rights organizing. Ms. Hill’s life experiences fuel her community advocacy and impact.
REVENUE & EXPENSES

A snapshot of income and expenditures for ACD's Fiscal Year 2022.

ANNUAL REVENUE

PRIVATE FOUNDATIONS

CONTRIBUTIONS¹
(INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES)

49%

49%

2%

ATTORNEY FEES

TOTAL: $3,062,506

ANNUAL EXPENSES

PROGRAM & LITIGATION EXPENSES

FUNDRAISING & COMMUNICATION

PAYROLL, TAX, & BENEFITS

GENERAL & ADMINISTRATIVE

TOTAL: $3,111,586

¹ In addition to individual and family donations, contributions also include event sponsorships.
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Thank you to the dedicated members of our Board of Directors, who continue to provide critical governance and leadership to ArchCity Defenders.

STEPHANIE GRISE, CHAIR
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT & ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL, U.S. BANCORP

WENDY L. WERNER, VICE CHAIR
FOUNDER, WERNER ASSOCIATES LLC

CARL GREINER, TREASURER, RETIRED

LISA HOPPENJANS, SECRETARY, DIRECTOR, FIRST AMENDMENT CLINIC, WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

ANNE H. JUMP, MEMBER, ASSOCIATE, BRYAN CAVE LEIGHTON PAISNER

ASHLEY KEMPER, MEMBER, ATTORNEY, COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER

KENNETH POWELL, MEMBER, ATTORNEY, POWELL LAW FIRM

KAYLA REED, MEMBER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ACTION STL

JAYME A.B. RIESTER, MEMBER, VICE PRESIDENT HUMAN RESOURCES, ST. LOUIS CARDINALS, LLC

JOHN N. ROBINSON III, MEMBER, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

BLAKE STRODE, NON-VOTING MEMBER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ARCHCITY DEFENDERS, INC.
Summer 2022 marked the launch of ArchCity Defenders’ Wendy Werner Internship Program, named in honor of ACD’s founding board chair, longtime career coach, mentor, and cherished friend, who passed away in January 2022 after a long battle with cancer.

It’s often said that there would be no ACD without Wendy Werner, and the saying holds true. In 2009, Wendy met ACD’s co-founders Thomas Harvey, Michael-John Voss, and John McAnnar, and heard them speak of the overcriminalization of poor people and people of color, and their idea to do something about it by providing free holistic, legal services. Wendy mentored the three recent law grads and went on to provide tremendous support to ACD for over a decade. She was an ambassador for ACD, and frequently talked about our work in social circles and in front of groups who requested a speaker. In 2018 when we moved into our office on Fourth Street, Wendy made a contribution and sponsored the “Wendy Werner Communications Office.” In 2019, during our #ACDTurns10 celebration, she presided over the opening ceremony.

To this day, Wendy’s influence still reverberates throughout our office, our work, and the positive impact we create in the lives of our clients and communities. In her spirit, we will continue to facilitate a place at ArchCity Defenders dedicated to the development of future leaders, thinkers, lawyers, and activists who will make the world better. Our internship program – now justly named the Wendy Werner Internship Program – is one such place.

“She worked so many years in career counseling, with law students, in law schools, and just mentoring so many people along their journey. Commemorating our summer internship program in her honor only seems right,” said Blake Strode, Executive Director of ACD.

Since 2010, hundreds of students from St. Louis and across the country have been drawn to, and supported ACD’s holistic legal advocacy as interns. Whether that is working with attorneys on direct representation or civil litigation, assisting our social work staff in providing critical services to clients, advancing our organizing and campaign efforts, or contributing to our media and policy advocacy, interns have had a meaningful impact with our clients and within this region we call home.

ACD interns not only contribute during their internships; they sometimes become part of the dynamic staff at ACD and other law firms and organizations, go on to federal judicial clerkships, or earn prestigious fellowship positions.

Year round, our interns leave big shoes to fill.

In May 2022, we onboarded 18 students from across the country to spend the summer working with our legal, communication, social work, and organizing teams. While we are still navigating the ongoing concerns of the pandemic, we are grateful to return to working together at the office (masked up!), after a two year hiatus.

Another feature that distinguishes this summer’s intern class is that, through the generosity of Wendy Werner and other special donors, we are able to offer stipends to interns not receiving financial support from their schools or other programs so that all ACD interns receive the equivalent of a living wage during their time with us. (For any previous interns who advocated for paid positions, please know that we heard you, and have been collaborating with our supporters to address this feedback and cultivate this resource.)

“Wendy was invested in the future and development of ACD, so by supporting the internship program in this way, it is continuing her legacy,” said Jacki Langum, Deputy Executive Director of ArchCity Defenders.

As we reflect on the past year, we give a special thanks to Wendy, the generous donors who enable our organization to continue to grow, and everyone who is part of this community. Without your support, ArchCity Defenders would be just a law firm. Together, we are more.
ArchCity Defenders’ founding board chair Wendy Werner selflessly served and supported us from the beginning and for over 12 years until her passing in January 2022.
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