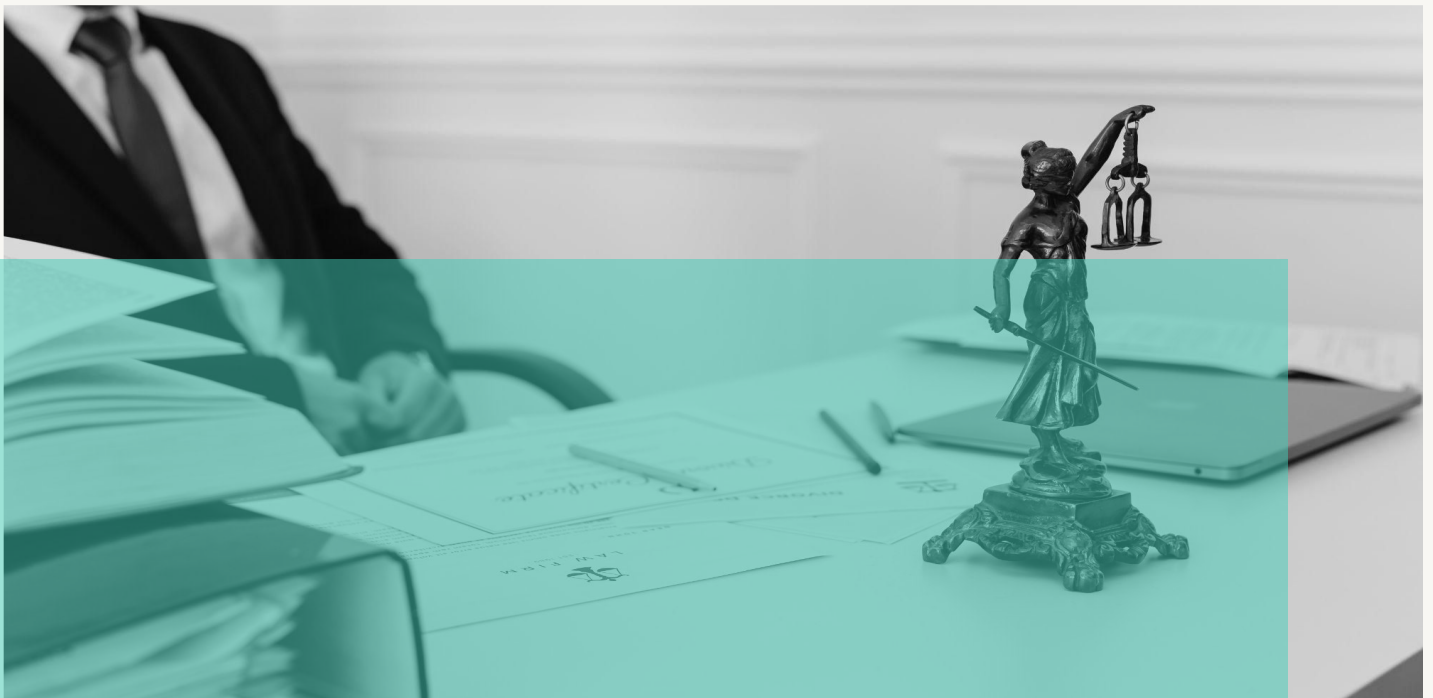


The Commons Law Center



Annual Report
2023

A Letter from the Director

I am so excited for what is to come in 2024 as I enter my tenth month as Executive Director and almost two years as part of The Commons' team. I am in awe of the energy and commitment our staff brings every day to help fill the civil legal needs service gap and how they do their work with empathy, professionalism, and integrity.

Like so many attorneys, my goal was always to help people – to protect people's rights, to help them stay in their homes, to help keep their families safe, to help protect their assets for the future. I found that one way I could reach my goal was to provide leadership for an organization dedicated to the same. It is an honor that our board of directors and staff trust me in this role and I will do nothing short of keeping us focused and mission driven.

I came to the law after almost 20 years of working in social services. Serving people who were unhoused, who had mental health and addiction issues, who were elderly and were abused or neglected, who faced battles many of us would never understand. It is from these experiences that I know how a law degree can be used for a greater good. Part of being a lawyer, part of my code, is to make sure rights are protected even when people don't know they have them, and to speak up for those who cannot do so themselves.

We can unite around a shared goal of access to justice. Many people do not know what their rights are. They don't know when they need a lawyer. They don't know how to access (or pay for) a lawyer. That is where The Commons comes in. We educate those around us, we make our services more accessible, and we provide services that protect people's rights.

The Commons relies on us continuing to show up for each other and that includes donors and foundations that help keep us funded. We had a banner year of support and hope you will refer to our webpage to see a complete list of those who support our mission.

I am deeply committed to this organization's mission, vision, and values. I am inspired every day by our team. With that, I am thrilled to share our 2023 Annual Report highlighting The Commons' accomplishments and our goals for 2024. I know this will be the best year yet.

Thank you!

P.S. If you have questions about The Commons or a possible opportunity or collaboration, please feel free to reach out.

Who We Serve

The Commons Law Center is an Oregon 501(c)(3) social enterprise that provides stabilizing civil legal services to low-income people who fall below 400% of the federal poverty level. Our focus is on people who are ineligible for legal aid services but cannot afford a private bar attorney. Whether clients receive a flat fee or hourly help, services are available on a sliding scale across six income tiers. The hourly rate for program directors is 50% of the median hourly rate for all Oregon lawyers in private practice, adjusted for inflation. The Commons' fee-for-service model supports 70% of the operating budget while expanding access to legal help.



2023 Client Impact

- Received 10,256 phone calls from people looking for legal help;
- Saw web traffic increase by 45%, including 97,000 visits from over 69,000 unique users;
- Provided 3,509 legal service hours;
- Provided direct legal services to 931 people, including 789 tenants facing eviction.



2023 Recognition

The Commons is proud to have received recognition for our team's ongoing work and accomplishments in 2023:

- ★ The Commons was named as one of Portland Business Journal's "Best Places to Work"
- ★ Ekua Hackman, Staff Attorney – Planning & Probate, won the prestigious Skidmore Prize and the Portland Business Journal's 40 Under 40 award
- ★ Amanda Caffall, Tenant Law & Deputy Director, named Treasurer for Community Alliance of Tenants (CAT) Board
- ★ Kamron Graham, Executive Director of the Commons, recognized as a 2023 Super Lawyer
- ★ Lucas Angell-Atchison, a 2023 intern, graduated Portland Community College Paralegal program with all "A's"
- ★ Amanda Caffall appointed chair of the Consumer Law Section
- ★ Kamron Graham appointed to Oregon State Bar's Professionalism Committee and Advisory Committee to Diversity and Inclusion (ACDI)

Planning & Probate

In 2023, the Homeownership Asset Preservation Program (HAPP) continued its partnership project with the African American Alliance for Homeownership (AAAH) to combat displacement in N/NE Portland. Supported by a renewed contract with the City of Portland Housing Bureau, the HAPP team has delivered a total of 29 targeted webinars to over 300 people; provided 64 families with estate plans; and is working with 8 families currently. In 2022, a significant milestone was the closure of the first HAPP-related probate, securing \$821,000 in assets for a Black family's wealth. HAPP remains committed to preserving community assets and fostering intergenerational prosperity.



*"I have only consulted once with the attorney there, but Riley is obviously an expert, and was not put off in the least by the nuances of my case. I spoke with 3 probate attorneys, and he was the **most knowledgeable**. Looking forward to working with him in the near future."*

- Ana (client)

*"The team was patient, very courteous, and had **excellent communication** with me and my 90-year-old mother. There were some things that I thought would be difficult, but they made it so easy. Thank you so much."*

- Anonymous client

Tenant Law

In 2023, the Tenant Eviction Defense (TED), with assistance from the Modest Means Program, expanded its services to assist individuals facing eviction for non-payment of rent at the Multnomah County Courthouse, an area The Commons has identified as the greatest unmet need through data analysis and experimentation. Partnering with Bienestar, TED offers on-site legal aid and rental assistance to eligible individuals. Our program's focus is for the rights of renters to be protected, evictions prevented and mitigated, and appropriate settlement agreements reached.



The Commons taught the first Tenant Defense Skills class at a unique combined class with Oregon's three law schools, a groundbreaking collaborative initiative. This simulation-based course provides practical skills in tenant eviction defense and client interaction, culminating in a simulated client project. The inaugural class in January 2023 received high demand, with diverse student representation and waitlists across all three schools.

Relative to 2019, average monthly eviction filings have increased 43% in Oregon.

*"When I first got here I thought I was going to throw up, I was so anxious. And now I feel way supported and like I can breathe and like **everything's going to be okay**. I just didn't know what to expect, I was afraid of the unknown. I had so many questions coming into this I didn't have answers for and then you all were right here."*

- Amanda (client)

*"This was a great surprise. I was not in a mental state to handle a lawyer. And this service **saved me from having this eviction on my record**."*

- Anonymous client



Family Law

In 2023, we welcomed our new family law attorney, Marguerite Stewart. Marguerite joined us from Louisiana where she was an attorney for Southeast Louisiana Legal Services and Acadiana Legal Services Corporation focused on family law and access to justice issues. She served as the Chair of the Louisiana State Bar Association's Family Law Task Force. Needless to say, we are lucky to have Marguerite on our team.



Our Family Law team remains focused on expanding access to our services through the use of efficiencies and technology. This includes a self-scheduling option for appointments, making it easier for clients to schedule or re-schedule with their attorneys. The team also developed educational and engaging blog posts to provide basic information about common family law issues, including those arising during the holiday season.



(It was) really nice to have someone to help walk me through this THANK YOU!
- Anonymous client



2024 Goals

As we enter 2024, The Commons is:

- ★ Developing a multi-year **strategic plan**;
- ★ Preparing to embrace law school **graduates seeking licensure** through SPPE as well as paralegal licensure;
- ★ Building **new collaborations** with community partners;
- ★ Scaling our **tenant defense** program at the Multnomah County Courthouse;
- ★ Expanding our **Trusts & Estates** team;
- ★ Teaching **Tenant Defense Skills** Court to the three law schools;
- ★ Growing our **Family Law team** and its programs.



Thank you to Our Supporters

Major Donors and Awards (\$1,000+)

- ★ Bridge City PI Law
- ★ Business Litigation Section of the OSB
- ★ Gaylord-Eyerman Family Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation
- ★ Murphy Gary Family Fund
- ★ Nonprofit Org Law Section of the OSB
- ★ Rounds Law Office
- ★ Securities Regulations Section of the OSB
- ★ Albies, Stark, & Guerriero
- ★ Wyse Kadish LLP
- ★ Oregon Academy of Family Law Practitioners
- ★ JES Attorney LLC
- ★ Oregon Community Foundation
- ★ Hoover Family Foundation
- ★ Oregon Chapter, American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers
- ★ Marie Lamfrom Charitable Foundation
- ★ Franklin Conklin Foundation
- ★ ACTEC Foundation
- ★ Melanie Nelson
- ★ David Wade
- ★ John Grant
- ★ NW Natural
- ★ Goran Matijasevic
- ★ Toni Blair Garrett
- ★ Tom Brim
- ★ Steven Goebel
- ★ Neil Kimmelfield
- ★ Alison Lackey
- ★ Lewis Landerholm
- ★ Daniel Margolin
- ★ Bonnie Serkin

Donors (\$999 and below)

- ★ American Online Giving Foundation
- ★ Consortium For Access to Justice
- ★ Diversity Law Section of the OSB
- ★ Elder Law Section of the OSB
- ★ Oregon State Bar, Work Comp
- ★ Sustainable Future Section of the OSB
- ★ Technology Law Section of the OSB
- ★ Wool Landon
- ★ David Bean
- ★ Amy Blumenberg
- ★ Lori Bonnevier
- ★ Chris Costantino
- ★ Rick Delhommer
- ★ Alexandra Devendra
- ★ Sarah Einowski
- ★ Ayla Ercin
- ★ Sonya Fischer
- ★ William Funk
- ★ Jordan Furlong
- ★ Wendy Gerlach
- ★ Steven Goldberg
- ★ Tory Hines
- ★ Theresa Hollis
- ★ Jay Hull
- ★ Robert Kusel
- ★ Ann Ledgerwood
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- ★ K.R. Olsen
- ★ Joshua Ottosen
- ★ John Parry
- ★ Elizabeth Savage
- ★ Linda Scher
- ★ Trevor Schorey
- ★ Robert Seibel
- ★ Charles Smith
- ★ Robin Smith
- ★ Lauren Wallace
- ★ Judson Wesnousky
- ★ Steve Yates

Oregon's legal system can and should be a force for good in the lives of Oregon families. The Commons Law Center is making justice a reality for modest means Oregonians.

To help provide sliding scale legal services for those most in need, please make a charitable gift at:

thecommonslawcenter.org/donate

The Commons 2024 Team

Lucas Angell-Atchison (he/him)
Paralegal | Tenant Law

Amanda Caffall (she/her)
Tenant Law & Deputy Director

Craig Colby
Senior Advisor | Tenant Law

Tyler Dill (he/him)
Senior Paralegal

Kirin Gay (he/they)
Attorney Fellow | Tenant Law

Amy Gombart (she/her)
Paralegal Fellow | Tenant Law

Riley Gombart (he/him)
Planning & Probate Director

Emma Grace Fox (she/they)
Education & Outreach Coordinator

Kamron Graham (she/her)
Executive Director

Ekua Hackman (she/her)
Staff Attorney | Planning & Probate

Eman Haj Alkhdair (she/her)
Law Clerk | Family Law

Kristina Ray (she/her)
Operations Manager

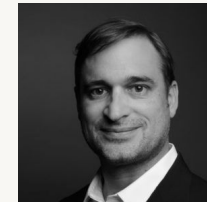
Marguerite Stewart (she/her)
Staff Attorney | Family Law

Julia Winett (she/her)
Attorney Fellow | Tenant Law

Simon Thornton (he/him)
Volunteer | Tenant Law

Auden Friedman (he/him)
Volunteer | Tenant Law

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Board President



Lewis Landerholm (he/him)
Board Treasurer



Fallon Niedrist-Guzman (she/her)
Board Member



Kristie Gibson (she/her)
Board Member



Kimberly Pray (she/her)
Board Secretary



Jim Dwyer (he/him)
Board Member



Jered Brown (he/him)
Board Member



Megan Harney (she/they)
Board Member

**Thank you to the following students for joining
The Commons Law Center in 2023:**

Tristan Kelly (he/him)
Willamette Law

Brian Eno (he/him)
Willamette Law

Ruben McGill (she/her)
Seattle University Law

Melanie Rivas (she/her)
Willamette Law

Jordin Lewis-Martinez (she/her)
Lewis & Clark

Ramatoulaye 'Rama' Thioub (she/her)
University of Oregon

Esther Jee Hyun Kim (she/her)
Seattle University

Auden Friedman (he/him)
Reed College

Lucas Angell-Atchison (he/him)
Portland Community College

Email kamron@thecommonslawcenter.org if you'd like to join the board or learn how to support The Commons' mission.

Contact

Us



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