



2025

LEGAL AID OF EAST TENNESSEE **Annual Report**

Ten offices

One coordinated regional legal safety net

LAET.ORG



LAET LEADERSHIP



Debra House, Esq.
Executive Director

Advancing Justice. Strengthening Communities.

These words continue to define LAET as we move from a milestone anniversary into Year 61 of service. Milestones matter, but justice doesn't stop at milestones.

Every single day, individuals, hard-working families, seniors, survivors, veterans, and children continue to face urgent legal challenges which threaten their housing, health, stability, and basic safety! And they are trying to do it alone!

It doesn't have to be that way, but the sheer volume of those in need of information, guidance, and representation is overwhelming.

This report reflects the impact made possible within our 26-county region through the dedication of our staff, board, volunteers, pro bono attorneys, community partners, funders, and supporters.

Behind every number is a real person in crisis who found guidance, protection, or a path forward during a difficult moment. That is the true measure of our work.

Much of what we do not only handles a crisis but also moves people toward lasting stability. Think about it...all across East Tennessee there could be thousands of families moving from crisis to stability to prosperity...entire communities, counties, and regions comprised of those who are THRIVING.

As we look ahead, the future includes real uncertainty, particularly in funding for civil legal aid. But LAET has never been powered by certainty alone. We are powered by people who believe justice should be available to everyone. Thank you for standing with us. Because of you, we enter Year 61 with purpose, momentum, and resolve.



LAET LEADERSHIP



Christina Magrans-Tillery, Esq.
President,
LAET Board of Directors

This time last year, I referenced my toddler and her desire to go to school dressed as her favorite superhero.

This year isn't much different, as, in my house and, frankly, all over the world, Wonder Woman continues to represent courage in the face of adversity, strength from an underestimated source, and the power to help others.

Like all parents, I hope to raise someone who carries those qualities into the world.

Looking at LAET doing all they can to help those who count on us, I see:

Courage in the clients who ask for help during some of the most frightening moments of their lives

Strength in the staff and volunteers who work tirelessly on their behalf

Empowerment, when someone emerges victorious over their abuser, achieves a stable income, or simply had the opportunity to obtain stable housing

Most of all, I consistently see the **power** of being seen, heard, and informed.

Isn't this what we all want? For ourselves? For our children?

Access to justice strengthens all of East Tennessee. Whether you support LAET's mission behind the scenes or on the front lines, you know these are your neighbors. These are my neighbors.

This is our shared community.

I invite you to become even more involved. Volunteer, attend an event, advocate, or invest financially in our mission.

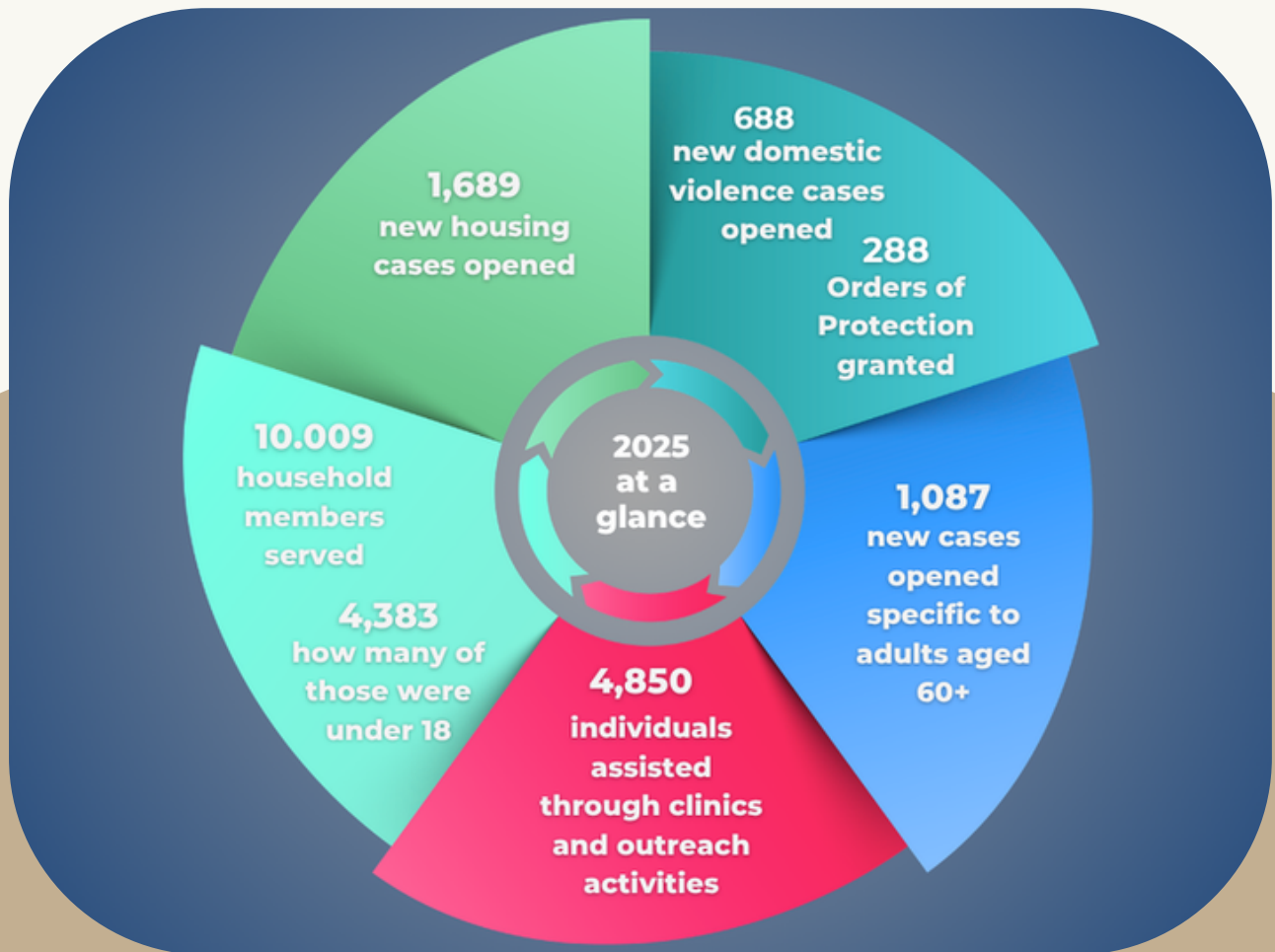
Join us as we build on decades of service and help carry LAET's work into the future.



IMPACT ANALYSIS



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WHO DOES LAET HELP?

LAET is funded through federal, state, and local sources and is charged with serving those who fall within a certain range of the federal income poverty guidelines.

LAET staff, pro bono volunteers, and local partners hold dozens of clinics throughout the year in the very communities we serve, thereby greatly reducing the barrier of transportation and access.

For those in domestic violence situations, income guidelines are waived by the federal government, allowing LAET to take action. LAET collaborates with area family justice centers to ensure help is immediate and takes place in a safe environment. In parts of our region, income guidelines are waived for older adults (60+), so matters such as wills, powers of attorney, and other end-of-life issues can be addressed. Issues surrounding scams and exploitation of older adults can also be addressed.



WHAT ARE WE DOING?

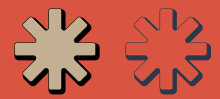
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CASES BY TYPE

- **2,082 Family:** Adoption, guardianship, conservatorship, custody, visitation, divorces, annulments, separation, domestic abuse, name change, and other supports
- **2,040 Housing:** Public housing, landlord/tenant, property rights, accessibility
- **941 Misc:** Advance directives, power of attorney, torts (harm or loss to another person or their property), wills, estate planning, and the like
- **705 Consumer Finance:** Bankruptcy, debtor relief, collections, contracts, warranties, predatory lending, benefits, unfair and deceptive sales and practices, etc.
- **269 Income:** Benefits, unemployment compensation, benefits for veterans
- **282 Individual Rights:** Civil, disability, and expungement
- **248 Juvenile:** Conservatorship, guardianship, abuse, and neglect
- **87 Health:** Home and community-based care, long-term healthcare facilities, Medicaid, Medicare, state and local health benefits
- **28 Employment:** Rights, discrimination, wage claims, and taxes
- **8 Education:** Accessibility, expulsion

SIGN UP FOR THE LAET EBLAST:





WHO IS REPRESENTED?

Below are the basic demographics for East Tennessee citizens served by the programs of LAET across 26 counties.

GENDER:
Female: 75%
Male: 24%
Unknown: 1%*

*some grants do not require the collection of gender information

RACE/ETHNICITY:

White: 59%
Black: 19%
Other: 18%
Hispanic: 3%
Native American: 0.6%
Asian/Pacific Islander: 0.4%

WHAT THEY ARE SAYING:

“A huge burden has been lifted, and I am now free to seek employment.”

“Your legal help changed my life.”

“As a renter, I didn’t know my rights. LAET stood by me when dealing with my accessibility issues.”

“I had been traumatized. Our family had to deal with our emotional rollercoaster, but now we are happier and able to live our lives.”

“Getting the Order of Protection eased the stress and anxiety for me and, most of all, my children. We can sleep at night now.”

“I was so anxious about end-of-life planning. LAET held my hand through it all.”



Justice comes in many forms, as does support and safety.

“Mary” was only 26 years old when she experienced a horrifying night.

After years in an abusive relationship with the father of her children, the violence escalated. During one brutal incident inside their home, with their children present, he assaulted and strangled her. He took her phone. When she tried to escape, he dragged her back inside.

She survived that night by doing something no one should ever have to do: she pretended everything was fine. She pretended to fall asleep. She acted normal the next morning. She calmly got ready for work. And the moment she could, she drove to meet a friend and asked for help.

At the Branch House in Blountville, Tennessee, while filling out paperwork for an Order of Protection, she was referred to LAET.

She was facing the trauma of the violence AND a complicated legal process, while criminal charges (aggravated domestic assault, false imprisonment, and interfering with emergency calls) were pending against her abuser.

That’s when her LAET attorney stepped in.

For nine long months, the LAET attorney stood beside Mary through repeated court appearances. The court would not finalize the Order of Protection while the criminal case was pending, which meant anxiety, and uncertainty. During that time, LAET prepared Mary for each hearing, helping her find her voice. Mary had to testify and relive the assault in open court. With her LAET attorney by her side, she spoke not only about what happened to her, but about the trauma her children witnessed. LAET made clear, forceful arguments the children also needed protection.

The judge granted the Order of Protection in full. The criminal charges were bound over to criminal court, where they remain pending. But LAET’s work didn’t stop there.

As the one-year Order of Protection neared expiration, Mary returned to LAET. There had been no violations, a sign that the order was working, but the criminal case was still unresolved. The Order of Protection covered her children; the criminal no-contact order did not. Without extension, that layer of safety would disappear.

Once again, her LAET attorney stepped in to represent her in a Motion to Extend the Order of Protection, ensuring continuity and stability for the family during an uncertain criminal process.

This was recently approved and covered Mary and the children!

They have also discussed the possibility of seeking a Lifetime Order of Protection, if a conviction occurs...a long-term safeguard for Mary and her children.

Because of LAET, Mary did not have to navigate this alone.

She had someone beside her in court...someone who prepared her...someone who advocated for her children...someone who ensured her safety was not temporary.

In moments of crisis, LAET provides more than legal representation. We provide stability. And from that stability, families have the chance to begin healing and move toward thriving.



DONATING TO LAET CHANGES LIVES.

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AND IT CHANGES COMMUNITIES.
HERE'S HOW:

**Every dollar donated to LAET creates
\$15.18 in local impact.**

Access to civil legal aid prevents costly downstream consequences that would otherwise be borne by taxpayers, local governments, nonprofit service providers, and community systems.

This number comes from a 2015 study titled, "The Economic Impact of Civil Legal Aid Organizations in Tennessee: Civil Justice for Low-Income People Produces Ripple Effects That Benefit Every Segment of the Community," which shows a return on investment of \$11.21. Adjusted for inflation, that new dollar amount is \$15.18.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Donations to LAET reduce the burden on local taxpayers. Intervention by LAET reduces the costs associated with:

- law enforcement
- court costs
- mental health facilities
- hospitals/ERs
- jails/prisons
- homeless shelters

The burden is lessened on these already strained systems, as well as the other nonprofits in the region associated with these entities.

PRO BONO PROJECT

Patrick Noel, CELA with Guyton, Frere & Noel

“

I appreciate the opportunity to partner with LAET in helping those who are disabled, along with their families, who otherwise could not afford counsel. This is especially true for their critical conservatorship work.

”



2025 Pro Bono Volunteers

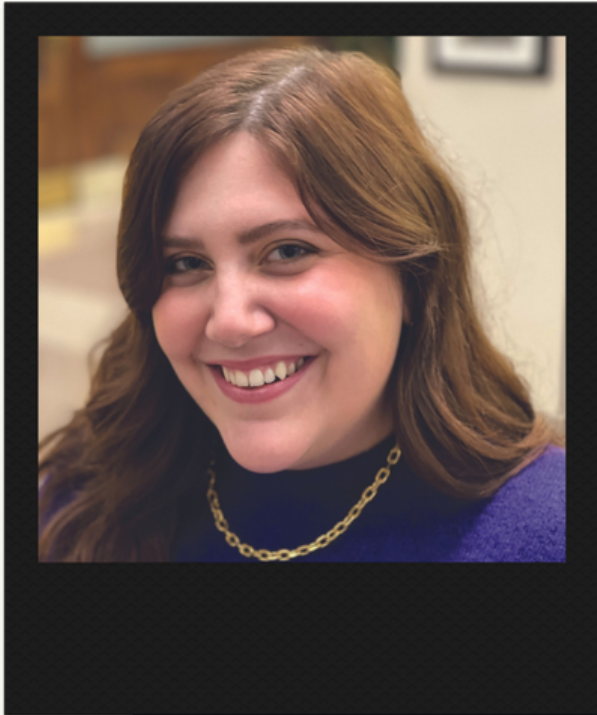
Claire Addlestone
Peter Alliman
Shrief Almesallmy
Heather Gunn
Anderson
Joshua Anderson
George Arrants
Greg Atwood
Tim Ballard
Dylan Banales
Heather Banks
Thomas Banks
Tom Bible
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Michael Crowder
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Whittney Good
Michael Green
Molly Green
Lydia Gregory
Maurice Guinn
Samuel Hall
Mandy Hancock
Jaclyn Hardin
Susan Harmon
Charles Harrison
Brad Harvey
Victoria Haynes
James Hickman
Laura Higbee
Bennett Hirshhorn
Kelli Holmes
Meredith Humbert
Richard Johnson
Alexandra Jones
Katlyn Jones

Courtney Keegan-Smith
Brittani Kendrick
Blair Kennedy
Camille Kennedy
Aaron Kimsey
Melissa Kirby
Alex Kirk
Jacqueline Kittrell
Carson Kovalic
Melanie Lamb
William Law
Gigi Lawless
Madeline Leonard-Phifer
Greg Logue
Samantha Lunn
William Maddox
Jessica McAfee
Heather McCoy
William McGreevey
Bryce McKenzie
Joseph McReynolds
Lee McVey
Laura Mickel
Rebecca Miller
Anna Mills
James Moore
Robert Morris
Ward Nelson
Peter Newman
Kevin Newton
Alex Nicoll
Patrick Noel

James Owen
Polly Peterson
Ted Raynor
Chelse Reed
Kelsey Reily
Ariel Resnick
John Rice
Robert Sain
Charles Sereebutra
Rhett Sexton
Caroline Shea
Melody Shekari
Patrick Shockey
Erin Shrum
Joseph Simpson
Nicholas Sisto
Frank Slaughter
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M. Aaron Spencer
Brad Sproles
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Cathy Warmbrod

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Alissa Watson
Jordan Waley
Cole Wheeler
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Katie Woodard
Patrick Woodside
Clint Wren
Colin Wyvil
Dave Yoder



Pro bono work strengthens communities, expands access to justice, and reminds us the law is at its best when it serves everyone.



Mary Frances DeVoe, Director of LAET's Pro Bono Project

Scan to subscribe to the Pro Bono Project's eblast:

The Volunteer Advocate

Visit the Pro Bono Project page at LAET.org for opportunities to review cases and volunteer!



**PRO BONO
PROJECT**
Continued



MENAL HEALTH LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS

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LAET'S MENTAL HEALTH LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS PAIR ATTORNEYS WITH MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS TO ADDRESS THE LEGAL ISSUES STANDING IN THE WAY OF ACHIEVING GOOD HEALTH OUTCOMES. OFTEN, THERE EXIST UNDERLYING LEGAL ISSUES WHICH MAY HAVE AN IMPACT ON A PATIENT'S HEALTH, ISSUES AN ATTORNEY IS BEST SUITED TO ADDRESS.



McNabb Center

WELL MIND, WELL BEING

BalladHealth™



Frontier Health®

Where People Are Important



MAJOR FUNDERS

PAGE 12

IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

- THE CITY OF CHATTANOOGA
- THE CITY OF KNOXVILLE
- THE LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION
- THE TENNESSEE ADMINISTRATIVE
OFFICE OF THE COURTS
- THE TENNESSEE BAR
FOUNDATION/INTEREST ON LAWYER
TRUST ACCOUNTS
- THE TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF
HUMAN SERVICES
- THE TENNESSEE OFFICE OF CRIMINAL
JUSTICE PROGRAMS
- THE TENNESSEE OPIOID ABATEMENT
COUNCIL/KNOX COUNTY OPIOID
SETTLEMENT FUNDS PROGRAM

UNITED WAY

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Living united.

United is the way.

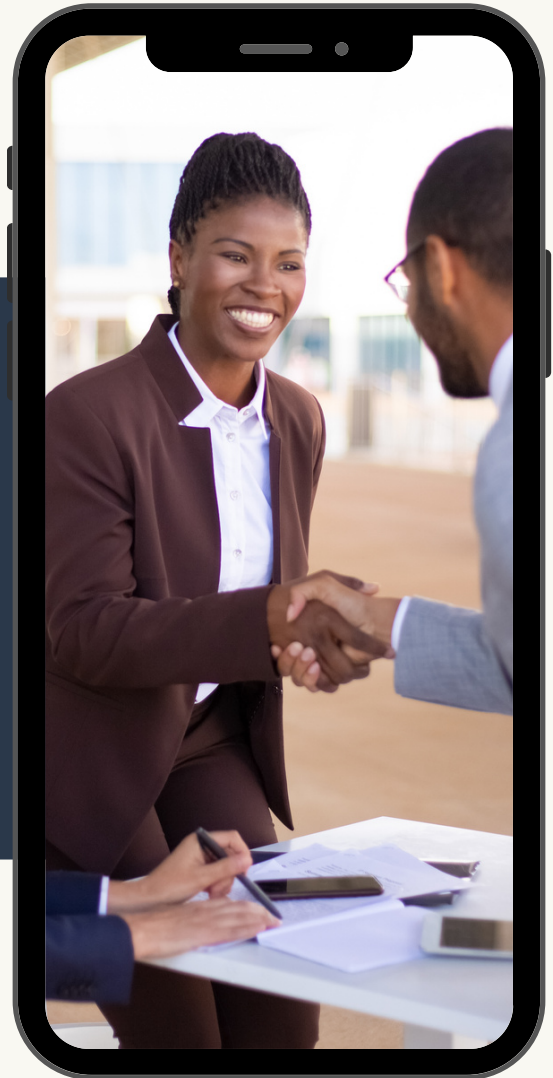
Stronger together.

Better together.

LAET has long depended upon the support, guidance, and partnership of the United Ways throughout our region. Their connection to the community is strong, and their insight into the needs of those they serve is critical.

Thank you to the following United Ways for allowing LAET to collaborate with them to truly meet the needs of people where they are.

The United Way of Blount County
The United Way of Greater Chattanooga
The United Way of Greater Kingsport
The United Way of Greater Knoxville
The United Way of Loudon County
The United Way of the Ocoee Region
The United Way of Sevier County



UNITED WAY



OUR DONORS

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Platinum Gavel: \$5,000+

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The Drowota Trust
Husch Blackwell LLP
Kramer Rayson LLP
Phillip Lawson
Georgio & Catherine Siracusa
Jerry Summers
Summers, Rufolo & Rodgers

Gold Gavel: \$2,500 - \$4,999

Heidi Barcus
McKee Foods Corporation
Miller & Martin, PLLC
Michael & Judy St. Charles
The Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts

Silver Gavel: \$1,000 - \$2,499

Robert Adamcik
William Aiken
Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC
Kyle & Faith Carpenter
Copeland, Stair, Valz & Lovell, LLP
Dreiser Law Group: Law Offices of Tony Farmer &
John Dreiser
First Horizon Bank
Geirheiser, Peters, Elliott & Cannon, PLLC
Hamilton County Herald, Inc.
Bennett Hirschhorn
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Hodges, Doughty & Carson, LLP
Home Federal Bank
Hollingsworth Alternative Dispute Resolution
The IT Company, LLC
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Mutual of America

Paine, Bickers, Elder, King & Williams LLP
Pritchard Injury Firm
William Reason
Tony Seaton
Suzanne Spell
Spears, Moore, Redman & Williams, PC
Wesley Stone
Norman Templeton

The Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts
The Trust Company
UT Federal Credit Union
UT Winston College of Law
Gary Wade
Woodbridge INOAC Technical Products
Woolf, McClane, Bright, Allen & Carpenter, PLLC

Bronze Gavel: \$500 - \$999

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Athens Distributing Company
Association of Corporate Counsel: Tennessee
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Attorneys Insurance Mutual of the South, Inc.
John Batson
Ted Banker
Wade & Judy Boswell
Chattanooga Bar Association
CBA: Young Lawyers Division
Chattanooga Whiskey & The Chattanooga Whiskey
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Cherokee Distributing Company, Inc.
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If we inadvertently left your name off our 2025 list of donors and/or tributes, please accept our apology. We hope you will notify us, so we can correct our error in a future publication.

Tributes:

Chris Berryman
Melissa Boyd
Billie Ann Brumfield
Mary & Nathan Ford
Brenda Joyce
The Staff of LAET
Don Mason
Alex McVeagh
Eric Miller
Douglas Nanney
Tom O'Neal
Guy Sparks

Monthly Donors:

Monthly donors provide something especially valuable to LAET:
stability

Their ongoing support allows us to plan ahead, respond to emerging needs, and ensure help is available, when families face a legal crisis.

These dedicated supporters become partners in our mission and help sustain access to justice across East Tennessee. We are deeply grateful for their commitment and generosity.

If you would like to learn more about monthly giving, gifts of stock, planned giving, workplace giving, or other ways to support LAET, please contact Chris Berryman, LAET's Director of Development & Communications at CBerryman@LAET.org



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WHERE ARE WE?

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LOCATIONS AND COVERAGE

Knoxville

607 West Summit Hill Drive, SW
Knoxville, TN 37902
(865) 637-0484
Knox, Loudon, and Sevier counties

The Knox County Eviction Prevention Program is located within the Knoxville office.

Chattanooga

100 West Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard
Suite 402
Chattanooga, TN 37402
(423) 756-4013
Bledsoe, Hamilton, Marion, Rhea, and
Sequatchie counties

The Chattanooga Eviction Prevention Initiative is located within the Chattanooga office.

Cleveland

270 North Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN 37311
(423) 303-2266
Bradley, Meigs, McMinn, Monroe,
and Polk counties

Maryville

307 Ellis Avenue
Maryville, TN 37804
(865) 981-1818
Blount County

Morristown

1001 West 2nd North Street
Morristown, TN 37814
(423) 587-4850
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Johnson City

207 East Main Street, Suite 3C
Johnson City, TN 37604
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SIGN UP FOR THE LAET EBLAST