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For Immediate Release:
Sister Legal Aid Programs Serving Southeast and Central Ohio Merge to form Legal Aid of Southeast and Central Ohio

The Legal Aid Society of Columbus (LASC) merged with Southeastern Ohio Legal Services (SEOLS) on January 1. The two programs have been connected since 2008 when LASC affiliated with Ohio State Legal Services Association (OSLSA), the parent company of SEOLS. The new entity is named Legal Aid of Southeast and Central Ohio and continues to serve 36 counties through eight offices. The mission of the merged entity remains the same: To provide civil legal aid and advocacy to overcome unfairness and injustice to reduce poverty and increase opportunity.

The decision to merge was the result of a needs assessment survey and strategic planning initiative that began in 2022. Feedback from those efforts indicated that the organization could operate more efficiently and effectively by merging, said Kathleen McGarvey, executive director of Legal Aid of Southeast and Central Ohio. “After talking with a wide range of stakeholders, it was clear that restructuring the organization made sense,” she said, noting that the organizations had maintained two boards and were two separate 501(c)(3) organizations, which created a number of redundancies related to accounting processes, communications and fundraising. “This organizational change will allow us to better serve our clients by creating more opportunities for staff collaboration, improving our ability to recruit staff and pro bono attorneys and increasing fundraising opportunities.”

The organizations, which have had one executive director since 2008, also have many shared staff members and programs. The merger did not result in any staffing changes or office closures. “We have been affiliated for more than a decade, so this legal merger is just the culmination of many years of collaboration and growing efficiencies between the programs,” McGarvey added.

The boards of both organizations voted unanimously to merge, said Sandra Anderson, who served as president of the OSLSA board and was chosen to lead the new board. “Both programs were financially stable, and the boards saw great value in fully combining the organizations,” she said. “We’re excited about what this newly formed organization can do to help meet the civil legal needs of lower income Ohioans in Southeast and Central Ohio.”

The merged program provides free civil legal aid in Adams, Athens, Belmont, Carroll, Coshocton, Delaware, Fairfield, Fayette, Franklin, Gallia, Guernsey, Harrison, Hocking, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Knox, Lawrence, Licking, Madison, Marion, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Morrow, Muskingum, Noble, Perry, Pickaway, Pike, Ross, Scioto, Tuscarawas, Union, Vinton, and Washington counties.

(Legal Aid of Southeast and Central Ohio is a nonprofit organization that provides civil legal aid to low-income Ohioans in 36 counties. The organization has offices in Athens, Chillicothe, Columbus, Marion, New Philadelphia, Newark, Portsmouth and Steubenville.)