



HISCOCK LEGAL AID SOCIETY

PROMOTING JUSTICE FOR ALL SINCE 1949



The Hiscock Legal Aid Society promotes the fundamental right of every person to equal justice under the law by providing high quality legal assistance to individuals and families in need in Onondaga County and the surrounding region.

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I am proud that the Frank H. Hiscock Legal Aid Society has become such an important part of the Onondaga County and the Central New York communities for more than 67 years, providing free legal services and representation to lowincome individuals and their families.

We've served tens of thousands of people since 1949 – when we were created from a bequest left by the Honorable Frank H. Hiscock, Chief Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals (1916-1926).

I am proud to say I have been a part of Hiscock for almost half that time – 26 years in my current role, 32 years in all.

I came to Legal Aid because I believed in promoting justice for all. I've stayed because I'm an ardent believer in the valuable work we do for some of our community's most marginalized residents. The thousands of people we serve each year really are no different from you or me... just less fortunate. I am so proud of the work done every day by our skilled, dedicated staff to help our clients – people facing homelessness, domestic violence, unemployment, the loss of

their children or the loss of their liberty. I have learned that there are many different ways to change the world...at Hiscock Legal Aid Society we do it every day, one client at a time.

A lot has changed in three decades: the technology we use in the office, the programs we offer, and the people, too. What hasn't changed is our unwavering commitment to provide high quality legal representation to those we serve.

As you make your way through this report, you will have an opportunity to have a look at our past year: from client success stories to various fundraising events held, including some held for the very first time, like Jumping for Justice.

As you know, we do not do this work alone. Put simply, we've never done this work without you. We could not do this work without you.

Thank you for your support.

Awan R. Horn



SUZANNE O. GALBATO
Chair, Board of Directors

I've often thought that one of the most valuable, affirming things for anyone is to know that they are being heard.

At Hiscock Legal Aid, we often work with people who are at one of the most difficult, precarious points in their life. Oftentimes, before our attorneys can address a client's needs or make any inroads on a case, they must—like any human relationship—establish trust with the client. To gain trust, they must listen – not simply to respond, but to truly hear and understand the client's situation. Situations that bring people to Legal Aid are varied, and many times complex. Listening, understanding and walking with our clients through a challenging time is never easy. Then again, few things worth doing ever are.

Since joining the Board in 2010, I've seen firsthand the consistent hard work and dedication of the attorneys and staff who keep the client at the center of everything they do. I'm so proud now to serve as chair of the board of an organization that last year

handled nearly 4,600 cases. While this number is impressive, there's still more work to be done. There remains an overwhelming need for services. In fact, less than 1 in 5 of the needs of low income people are met by existing legal aid resources - a sobering reminder about the need of our work in this community we call home.

As you page through this annual report, you will learn more about what we do, meet some of our clients and see some of our new fundraising events introduced in 2015, like Justice Walk/Run.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we appreciate your support and commitment to promoting justice for all.

Syane O. Gallabo



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HISCOCK CASES OPENED 2015:

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Family Court				
Criminal and Family Court Appeals Extradition Defense Parole Defense				
			Civil Program	
			Emergency Solutions Grant (Landlord/Tenant)	263
Foreclosure Prevention	185			
T ((177' (D) (%	39			
International Victims Project*				

DIRECTORS

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Family Court

HISCOCK CASES CLOSED 2015:

railing Court	1,077
Criminal and Family Court Appeals	95
Extradition Defense	64
Parole Revocation Defense	608
Civil Program	1,378
ESG	263
FPP	207
IVP	39
CLASP	41

1 877



2015 EXPENSES	\$4,466,927	
Salaries	2,900,570.00	
Payroll Taxes & Benefits	973,689.00	
Occupancy	158,617.00	
Insurance, Office Supplies & Other Misc. Expenses	160,403.00	
Equipment Purchase, Lease & Maintenance	48,383.00	
Professional Fees & Contracted Services	106,253.00	
Publications & Dues	54,114.00	
Conferences/Seminars	35,416.00	
Public Relations & Fundraising	29,482.00	
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2015 REVENUES	\$4,493,963 	
Onondaga County	2,474,740.00	
New York State	1,052,697.00	
IOLA Fund of New York State	356,172.00	
Other Grants	208,407.00	
Fundraising	124,306.00	
City of Syracuse	108,807.00	
USDOJ - Office on Violence Against Women	103,134.00	
Foundations	15,700.00	
United Way of CNY	50,000.00	



JOE W. LAFAY, JR. *Tribute*



Joe was a Staff Attorney with the Society starting in May 1985 until resigning in May 2003, serving the Society for 18 years. Over his career at HLAS, Joe worked in our City Court, Appeals and Civil Programs.

Joe returned to the Society on a part time basis in January 2007 working in our Civil Program, specializing in Unemployment cases. He retired for the second time at the end of December 2013. He had a record number of wins.

Joe was a very strong advocate for our clients, devising creative arguments on behalf of his clients. Joe was a distinguished lawyer, winning many cases based on his eloquence, his tenacity and his zeal in the court room. He was very much feared by his opponents, always returning from court boasting of his court endeavors, maneuvers and usual victories. He had a wicked sense of humor that he wove into his interesting stories.

Joe would literally give his shirt off his back. He would slip money to clients to pay their rent, buy holiday gifts for their children and buy food for their tables. One of the most generous human beings we have ever met, his generosity, one would say, was to a fault – an example to us all with his generous heart.

Joe was a voracious reader and loved his collection of over 4,000 books. He especially enjoyed reading his collection of French literature. He had great admiration and affection for his hero, Benjamin Franklin, and would share many of his quotes and stories of great Ben. Joe loved the Opera. Oftentimes, you would enter his home with a soprano ringing in the background and he would want your acknowledgement and confirmation that this was music from heaven.

Joe, in these last years, was addicted to playing electronic scrabble with up to 10 games going at a time. He was so very proud of his winnings, reporting his scores in voice mail messages he would leave us. Due to his failing eye sight, unfortunately Joe was prevented from continuing to challenge his numerous opponents who were spread across the world in playing this game that he loved so much.

He will be remembered as ONE OF A KIND!

Joe passed away on February 22, 2016.

Joanne P. Sawmiller Chief Operating Officer



CHAMPION OF JUSTICE \$1.000 or more

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MEET ALEX

SYRACUSE, NY

Born in Russia to a Russian father and Ukrainian mother, our client Aleksandr Trunov – or Alex as he likes to be called – was brought to the United States at age three by his mom. They were joining his father, who was a professional boxer in the former Soviet Union and who had moved to the United States as a professional athlete. Alex's father eventually became a fitness instructor and he and Alex's mother had three more children.

While Alex's siblings were U.S. citizens, his parents and he were not. "Eventually the temporary legal status of our client and his parents came to an end," says Hiscock Legal Aid immigration attorney, James Patrick Tracy, Jr. ("Pat").

Our client grew up in Syracuse, learned English fluently, and graduated from high school here. Syracuse is the place he has called home for the majority of his life. Unfortunately things were not always good during his childhood as there was domestic violence in the household. Alex's father was a violent person with an alcohol abuse problem and subjected the entire family – his mom, his siblings, and him – to physical abuse. Our client's father eventually left the United States after criminal convictions,

removal proceedings, and several years in immigration custody.

"This is where things became murky," says Alex. "The immigration status for my mother and me ended, and we were placed in removal proceedings in the Immigration Court."

According to Attorney Tracy, his client's mother was able to qualify for a form of relief called cancellation of removal and was granted lawful permanent residence, receiving her green card. He stated that, "For technical reasons, Alex could not meet the requirements for such relief. The Court administratively closed his case and placed it on its inactive calendar." That was the situation when Alex came to us.

Hiscock's Immigration Project helped Alex to apply for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status as a person under the age of 21 (at the time of application) who could not be reunited with a parent due to abuse.

"This was possible once his mother obtained a guardianship order with special findings from the Onondaga County Family Court with our help. After his grant of Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, Alex was able to obtain his



own green card, also with our help. In addition, our Immigration Project helped Alex to have his removal proceeding terminated by the Immigration Court," explained Attorney Tracy.

"I was in limbo on my immigration status. I was stuck and it was scary, but I tried to move on with my life and was accepted to attend the Rochester Institute of Technology, in Rochester, New York," stated Alex. He further explained, "I was able to complete three semesters at R.I.T. by getting financing through private loans, which were necessary because I was not eligible for other loans or financial aid provided by the government because of my immigration status." Alex could not afford to continue with school as he could not continue to take private loans and, as he mentioned, he was ineligible for other funding - government-back student loans, Federal and State financial aid and various other types of scholarships - afforded to U.S. citizens and permanent residents. This is when Alex reached out to Hiscock Legal Aid.

"My goal was to remain in the United States with my family, where I grew up, and pursue higher education," explained Alex. "My attorney, Mr. Tracy, helped me navigate the confusing immigration system and courts and I was

granted my permanent residency (green card). If Hiscock were not here to handle cases like mine, I honestly have no idea if I'd still be in this country – the country I call home, the place where my family, who loves me and I them, live.

"I sleep easier at night knowing one day I am going to be a citizen of the United States and never have to worry about things like deportation. I am sharing my story in hopes of being an inspiration to others in a similar situation, to let them know that Hiscock is here to help them. I also want others who give to Hiscock to understand how grateful clients like myself are for their caring gestures through either volunteerism or financial donations," said Alex. "I am eternally grateful to Hiscock Legal Aid and my attorney, Pat Tracy."



2015

YEAR IN REVIEW



FAMILY COURT

During 2015, our Family Court Program represented hundreds of clients in need of legal assistance with domestic violence, child custody and visitation, child support, and child welfare cases in the Onondaga County Family Courts. Our dedicated team worked day and night to address the emergency needs of our clients with skill and compassion. For example, we regained custody of a mother's children after the father removed them from their school and refused to tell her of their whereabouts. In another case, we were able to prevent the incarceration of a man by proving that he had been diagnosed with cancer and couldn't keep up with his payments because of his illness. We were able to prevent traumatic foster care placements of a cognitively impaired woman's four children by locating relatives who could take custody while still giving her liberal parenting time.

Throughout 2015, the Family Court Program worked vigorously to uphold the fundamental rights of hundreds of parents by:

- 1. Securing and maintaining their rights to custody and parenting time
- 2. Obtaining orders of protection for victims of domestic violence;
- 3. Diverting costly and traumatic foster care placement of children to suitable relative placements or supported returns to home;
- 4. Avoiding counterproductive incarceration of those accused of support violations by securing the rehabilitative services they need to meet their obligations.

In addition, informed by the vigorous practice of the Family Court Program staff, Supervising Attorney Linda Gehron assisted with writing the New York State Office of Indigent Legal Services (OILS) Parent Representation Standards and provided training on parent

representation for the National Legal Aid and Defenders Association, the New York State Bar Association, the New York State Defenders Association (NYSDA) and the New York State Child Welfare Court Improvement Project (CIP) on behalf of Hiscock Legal Aid. She and Staff Attorney Nancy Farrell were also among the presenters seeking to raise standards of practice at the first statewide parent defender conference, "Families Matter", co-sponsored by the Office of Indigent Legal Services, the Court Improvement Project, and the NYS Defenders Association.



CIVIL

Hiscock Legal Aid's Civil Program handled nearly 1,300 cases in 2015, with a wide range of successes that benefitted our clients.

A man was away from his apartment for an extended period, but left his apartment secured and insured that his rent was paid in full for the time he was away. When he returned to his home, he found that his apartment was occupied by other tenants, and that all his furnishings and belongings were either missing or being used by new tenants. The gentlemen sought assistance from one of our attorneys who prepared pleadings to commence an action in Supreme Court. After extensive negotiation with the landlord's attorney, our attorney was able to see that our client was able to retrieve many of his personal belongings, and was also able to secure a cash settlement to allow him the ability to have a fresh start.

One of our clients was denied unemployment benefits when she was dismissed from her delivery job. The employer contested her right to receive benefits, not because she voluntarily quit or committed some act of misconduct, but because they asserted she was not an employee, but instead an independent contractor. Some employers seek to label workers independent contractors in order to avoid paying employee benefits and taxes. The client came to Hiscock Legal Aid in order to challenge the employer's position. Our attorneys represented the client vigorously from the Unemployment Insurance Benefits Hearing, to the Appeal Board, and the New York State Appellate Division, Third Department. The

client's petition was sustained, as her relationship with the employer was indeed employer-employee, not an independent contractor. She was granted benefits, and we were able to establish a precedent that will be of assistance to the many working people in her situation.

A vital middle-aged married woman suffered a brain injury, leaving her less independent and more vulnerable to the abusive behavior of her husband. With the assistance of Hiscock Legal Aid and the client's sister, she was able to relocate and file for divorce. After lengthy negotiations, we were able to secure a settlement that allowed our client to recover the personal property that has enormous sentimental value to her, and to provide her with long term financial security that will improve the quality of her life.



APPEALS

In 2015 the Hiscock Legal Aid Society (HLAS) Appeals Program continued to have success obtaining justice for our clients in New York's appellate courts and setting important legal precedents.

We achieved three significant victories before the Court of Appeals, New York's highest court. In one case, the Court agreed that a defendant's silence could not be used against him at trial, even if that silence was "selective". This decision expanded the protection of the right to remain silent in New York. In another, we convinced the Court that it should expand the circumstances when a trial court must consider whether a teenage defendant should be sentenced as a youthful offender, rather than an adult criminal. This decision gives young defendants the opportunity to convince trial judges that they should not be burdened with a criminal conviction for the rest of their lives. Finally, we successfully defended a trial court's decision to reduce a client's felony charge to a misdemeanor in a case involving the unintentional transmission of HIV. This decision may have sweeping implications by making it less likely that prosecutors will overcharge defendants based on societal misconceptions about HIV.

In the Appellate Division, we helped a mother and military veteran in her struggle to reclaim custody of her child. Although the Family Court dismissed her custody petition in a summary fashion, the appellate court agreed that a full hearing should have been held, and sent the case back to Family Court. Our Family Court program then successfully negotiated a settlement where our client obtained primary custody of her child.

We obtained new trials for several clients in cases involving the right to an impartial jury, the right to effective assistance of counsel, the right to represent oneself, and the fundamental right that the prosecution has the burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

We also successfully argued that a client who struggled with mental health and drug addiction issues, and had no prior felony convictions, should not have received a maximum 25-year sentence for a robbery conviction. The court reduced the sentence to 15 years. Additionally, we were able to convince a trial court that a client convicted of a non-violent drug crime was illegally sentenced under New York's three-strikes law to 25 years to life. The court reduced the sentence to 14 years.



PAROLE

In addition to successfully advocating favorable dispositions to hundreds of individuals at final hearings, our attorneys have a countless number of unique successes.

One client (Mr. A) was alleged to have used drugs and then drove a car with a child inside. After an intense investigation and considerable preparation, our attorneys not only proved the client did not use drugs, but established the sole purpose of the drive was to save the life of his girlfriend, who overdosed on drugs and would have died but-for Mr. A's efforts.

Another client (Mr. B) was the victim of a brutal attack that resulted in a life-altering traumatic brain injury. Parole attempted to revoke his parole because Mr. B refused to sign an acknowledgment that he received a copy of his conditions of parole. Due to his brain injury, he believed the parole officers were trying to have him confess to a crime he did not commit. With the assistance of the Center for Community Alternatives, Mr. B was restored to supervision and able to enter one of New York State's best traumatic brain injury rehabilitation centers.

In all, the the Parole and Revocation Program represented a record number of clients, and all signs point to the coming year to only increase. Despite the heavy caseload, the staff attorneys are up to the challenge!



MEET MELINDA

SYRACUSE, NY

Melinda Agnew met her husband 20 years ago. They were married for ten years and have three young children together. She is also a survivor of domestic violence.

When Melinda was asked why she stayed in such an abusive situation for so long, she said, "one of the main reasons was I did not have a stable childhood environment. I was raised by my father, and did not have a strong female role model in my life. Melinda's mother was not in her life. However, she says "I don't judge my mother's actions. I try to understand them and be tolerant that she did the best she could do."

Melinda's husband wanted to remain married, but she knew this would only lead once again to a toxic relationship. Since Hiscock Legal Aid had handled her domestic violence case, Melinda contacted us again – this time to help her obtain a divorce. Margaret Hart, Law Assistant, worked with Melinda to help her understand the legal process related to her

case. "Margaret not only gave me legal support, but emotional support as well," Melinda said. "I was frustrated, and she answered my questions, breaking down legal jargon to an understandable level. I had a choice to think positive or negative. My confusion slowly slipped away."

Now as the main bread winner, Melinda realized she needed to further her education. She had the support of her new church group, which made her feel valued, capable and confident that she could accomplish anything with her new found passion and commitment to succeed. Melinda enrolled at Onondaga Community College and not only earned an Associate's degree in Human Services, but also was the commencement speaker.

Melinda's life began to change, "I was fortunate to obtain employment with the Syracuse City School District as a teacher's assistant," said Melinda. "Because of my background, I saw



my life reflected in some of the children at the school, and I knew I could be a positive influence in their lives. This is the first time I had a job with an adequate salary to support my family.

Hiscock Legal Aid was instrumental in helping me transition from the person I was to the person I am today." Melinda was given all the necessary resources to build a bridge out of domestic abuse and into developing healthy, sustainable relationships with her family, including her mother. Melinda knows she cannot go back and change the past, but has the tools she needs to make a brand new start, with endless possibilities for the future.

"Hiscock Legal Aid was instrumental in helping me transition from the person I was to the person I am today."

- Melinda Agnew



HLAS + THE COMMUNITY





JUSTICE FOR ALL EVENT

Hiscock Legal Aid held its second annual community outreach/fundraising campaign called "Justice for All" (JFA) on December 8, 2015.

In its inaugural year, JFA was held at various law firms and businesses throughout Syracuse with more than 170 people coming through the program over the course of the year. "We wanted JFA to continue to serve as a compelling, fast-paced way to share the mission and vision of Hiscock Legal Aid Society," said Jason Torreano, Director of Development at Hiscock. "Our goals were to both friend, and fundraise, for the programs and services of HLAS."

While the speakers and presentations changed slightly in 2015, the core focus of providing a fast-paced virtual tour of the mission remains. JFA allows attendees an opportunity to meet various Hiscock staff, and board members, learn more about our mission and vision, meet former clients, and hear their compelling stories.

2015's event raised almost \$70,000 for Hiscock programs and services.

2015 VOICES

On October 8, 2015, Hiscock Legal Aid Society and the Everson Museum of Art held their fifth collaborative VOICES joint fundraiser event at the Everson's Rosamond Gifford Sculpture Court. Guests were treated to fine food, musical entertainment and full access to the Everson's exhibitions. VOICES provides guests the opportunity to support two organizations that encourage and promote self-expression, whether through art or legal advocacy.

Dr. Linda M. LeMura, the President of Le Moyne College, was the honorary chair for the event. The event raised more than \$17,000 for each organization.

Susan R. Horn, President/CEO, Hiscock Legal
Aid Society praised LeMura: "It is my pleasure to
recognize Dr. LeMura, a visionary and trailblazer in
higher education and the first female lay president of a
Jesuit institution in the world."

Dr. LeMura shared her sentiments as well: "It is my privilege to support two organizations that are so integral to this region," said LeMura. "As the president of a Jesuit institution that supports a more just society in a myriad of ways, the Hiscock Legal Aid Society was founded on the very principles that Le Moyne espouses.

I've also seen firsthand, through my volunteer involvement at the Everson Museum, the vital role it plays in ensuring the arts are accessible to all."



JUMPING FOR JUSTICE

In 2015 Hiscock Legal Aid Society introduced a new fundraising event called "Jumping for Justice" (J4J).

J4J was created with the young millennial crowd in mind, as well as for people young at heart.

J4J was the brain child of Hiscock Legal Aid's Director of Development, Jason Torreano.

"I wanted a fun, low-cost way to engage and attract millennials to our organization – to educate them about our mission and vision, and give them a way to support our work while also bonding with colleagues," said Torreano.

J4J was held at the Sky Zone Trampoline Park in Dewitt on March 30, 2015. Teams formed by friends, families and coworkers from law offices, CPA firms, grant-making institutions and other community-based organizations competed against each other in a friendly trampoline dodge ball competition. Those not fond of dodge ball could also participate in free-jumping on their very own trampoline.

First, second and third place trophies were awarded to the top three teams. Guests were treated to pizza and soda afterwards. The first inaugural event saw seventeen teams competing, raising \$4,500 for Hiscock programs and services.



JUSTICE WALK/RUN

In 2015 Hiscock Legal Aid and the Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County (OnVLP) joined forces to draw attention and support to the CNY Immigration Collaborative through the first annual Justice Walk/Run (JW/R). The 5K was held September 2, 2015 at Onondaga Lake Park.

"Bethanie Hemingway, Development Manager at ONVLP and I wanted to create an event where we could fundraise and friend-raise while doing something healthy," said Jason Torreano, Hiscock Legal Aid's Director of Development. "The Justice Walk/Run (JW/R) 5K was just the ticket."

The draw of this event is that it is a low-key, family friendly event. Hemingway added "the event is not timed by design so there's no competitive pressure."

The JW/R drew just over 60 participants and raised almost \$5,000.

COMMUNITY EVENTS



Hiscock Legal Aid Society continued its community outreach through participation in various community events over the summer such as CNY Pride and the Westcott Street Cultural Fair.

"Our presence at these events enables Hiscock to build awareness in the community and spread the message of our mission and vision," said Jason Torreano, the Director of Development at Hiscock Legal Aid Society. "Engaging in the community in this capacity helps us to reach people who may need our services."

Members of the Hiscock Board of Directors and Hiscock staff volunteered to be on hand to give out informational brochures, speak with members of the community, and answer questions.

Legal Aid also leveraged its social media platforms by making this interactive and asking people to have their picture taken with a sign where they completed this sentence, "I define justice as...".

More than 60 submissions were collected and shared on social media channels to further build awareness.

HISCOCK LEGAL AID

Hiscock Legal Aid Society was featured on a variety of local media programs, and in local publications throughout the year.

ON THE AIR



Susan Horn and Stacey Schliffer, Senior Attorney, Civil Program, appeared on 93Q with host Amy Robbins to discuss our programs and services, and answer questions about domestic violence. Susan also appeared on Bridge Street with host Jim Teske, and CNY Central with host Laura Hand to share information on the mission of HLAS, programming offered, eligibility requirements and on the new community engagement initiative "Justice for All."



Tara Trammell-Levi



Bryn Lovejoy-Grinnell

IN THE NEWS

Hiscock was featured in two issues of Syracuse Woman Magazine.

Hiscock's Cancer Legal Advocacy and Services Project (CLASP) was in the Special Feature section of its May issue. The article featured our CLASP project and former CLASP client Earnestine Williams and her story. Hiscock was also in the Special Feature section of its October issue. The article covered the subject of domestic violence and featured Hiscock domestic violence lawyers Tara Trammell-Levi and Bryn Lovejoy-Grinnell who discussed the challenges they face with domestic violence cases, but who also expressed how rewarding and fulfilling it is to them to do what they do – serving their clients.

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

We are grateful for the many collaborations we have around the community that allow us to provide holistic support for our clients. These collaborations include, but are not limited to: Home HeadQuarters (Foreclosure Prevention Project); Legal Services of Central New York (Cancer Legal Advocacy and Services Project); Vera House (International Victims Project); the Center for Community Alternatives and other human services providers; and the Legal Aid Society of Rochester and Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York and Albany (Upstate New York Immigration Law Project).





MEET CHRISTINE

SYRACUSE, NY

Why I Volunteer at HLAS

After responding to a request from Volunteermatch.com, Christine Gancarz was contacted by Jason Torreano, Director of Development at Hiscock Legal Aid Society.

All it took was that one interview with Jason and Joanne Sawmiller, C.O.O., and Christine was totally convinced that this was the place to which she wanted to donate her time and effort.

Jason explained that HLAS provides free legal assistance to those in need. "It made me think of all the things I take for granted, and gave me the opportunity to learn more about HLAS," says Christine.

HLAS is rich in history and has earned the right to boost about their many successes.

"The attorneys at HLAS have changed lives, not only for the client, but also for the entire family" Christine says.

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WE DEFEND. WE EMPOWER. WE COLLABORATE. WE PROMOTE JUSTICE FOR ALL.

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- https://www.youtube.com/user/HLASable
- 8+ "Hiscock Legal Aid" on Google+
- in www.linkedin.com/company/hiscock-legal-aid-society

The above links are also available on our web site at...



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