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Texas Access to Justice Foundation Announces 2010-11 Grant Awards

Funds will support four El Paso nonprofits that provide civil legal services and a program to help veterans

AUSTIN, Texas – The Texas Access to Justice Foundation (TAJF) has announced its 2010-11 grants that will help fund 39 nonprofit civil legal aid organizations throughout Texas, including four nonprofit legal aid providers in the El Paso area.

This year's grant awards represent a cut of nearly 12 percent for grantees due to a lack of available funds, including historically low interest rates which affect the Interest on Lawyers' Trust Account (IOLTA) program, a primary funding source for legal aid in Texas. The 2010-11 grant awards include approximately \$10 million allocated by the Texas Legislature in 2009 to help offset a dramatic drop in funding due to historically low interest rates.

With the help of grants from the Texas Access to Justice Foundation, public interest and pro bono lawyers provide legal representation to low-income Texans with basic civil legal problems, such as landlord-tenant issues, family law matters, employment law, access to earned benefits and consumer issues. Each year, TAJF grantees help more than 100,000 low-income individuals and families with their civil legal needs.

The El Paso-area nonprofits receiving grant awards include:

- Advocacy, Inc., a statewide organization with an office in El Paso - \$444,281
- Diocesan Migrant & Refugee Services - \$305,671
- Texas Civil Rights Project, based in San Juan with an office in El Paso - \$205,476
- Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, based in Weslaco and covers 68 counties in South and West Texas - \$8,396,825

Additionally, a special one-time grant was awarded to the El Paso Bar Foundation to provide legal services for veterans. Funding for this grant was raised by the Texas Access to Justice Commission's 2010 Gala specifically to help low-income veterans obtain the civil legal services they need.

"Many times, access to a lawyer can be a lifesaver to low-income families," Betty Balli Torres, executive director of the Texas Access to Justice Foundation, said. "As the number of poor

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Texans continues to increase, it is imperative that we provide them the civil legal representation they need and deserve.”

TAJF has awarded nearly \$285 million in its 26 years of existence. TAJF collects and administers several funds, including IOLTA, Basic Civil Legal Services (filing fees, fees assessed to out-of-state attorneys practicing in Texas, and other public funding), crime victims’ funds and private donations.

To qualify for legal help from a program funded by TAJF, an individual normally cannot earn more than \$13,538 per year. A family of four must earn less than \$27,563 per year.

TAJF was created by the Supreme Court of Texas and is the largest Texas funder for legal services to the poor. The board of directors is appointed by the Supreme Court of Texas and the State Bar of Texas.

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*The **Texas Access to Justice Foundation**, created by the Supreme Court of Texas in 1984, is the largest state-based funding source for the provision of civil legal aid in Texas. The organization is committed to the vision that all Texans will have equal access to justice, regardless of their income. The Foundation administers a variety of funding sources, which are earmarked to assist nonprofit organizations in providing legal aid to approximately 100,000 Texans each year.*