



Dismantling Injustice

**Pursuing
Lasting
Change**



WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE
FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND URBAN AFFAIRS

**The Washington
Lawyers'
Committee
envisions
an equitable
society in which
the legacy of
discrimination
has been
overcome
and there is
an equitable
application of
law and access
to justice.**

Photos throughout this publication feature clients who the Washington Lawyers' Committee has been privileged to work with over the years. We commend these individuals for their courage and personal commitment to equal justice for all.

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The Civil Rights Work of Our Time

FOR THE PAST 50 YEARS, the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs has been at the center of civil rights progress in this region and our nation — providing high quality legal representation to people and movements. Throughout our history, we have taken on challenging cases and turned them into new precedent.

TODAY, we act with renewed focus to dismantle injustice based on racial discrimination and to repair the damage of historical racial inequity.



FIFTY YEARS AGO, President Lyndon Johnson created the Kerner Commission following a long hot summer of rebellion in dozens of U.S. cities. The Commission's report concluded, "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white — separate and unequal."

At that time, African Americans were routinely denied jobs, housing, and public accommodation. Women, immigrants, people in poverty, and people with disabilities also faced widespread and blatant

discrimination. The Washington Lawyers' Committee was born in response to the conditions described in that report. Working together with other civil rights groups, we have made remarkable progress.

And yet today the effects of historical and ongoing oppression are rampant in our city and our region. Discrimination may be less explicit, but an equitable and just society remains a distant dream — and the damage done from decades of bias remains.

TODAY IN WASHINGTON, DC

**On average,
white
families are
80
times
wealthier
than African
American
families¹**

**17%
of African
American
students
are proficient
in math and
English**

[COMPARED TO NEARLY 80%
OF WHITE STUDENTS]

**70%
of people who
are blind are
unemployed²**

[AND JOBLESSNESS IS EVEN
HIGHER AMONG OTHER PEOPLE
WITH DISABILITIES]

**1 in 3
children live
in poverty³**

[ABOUT DOUBLE
THE NATIONAL AVERAGE]

**94%
of the
prison
population
is African
American
or Latinx⁴**

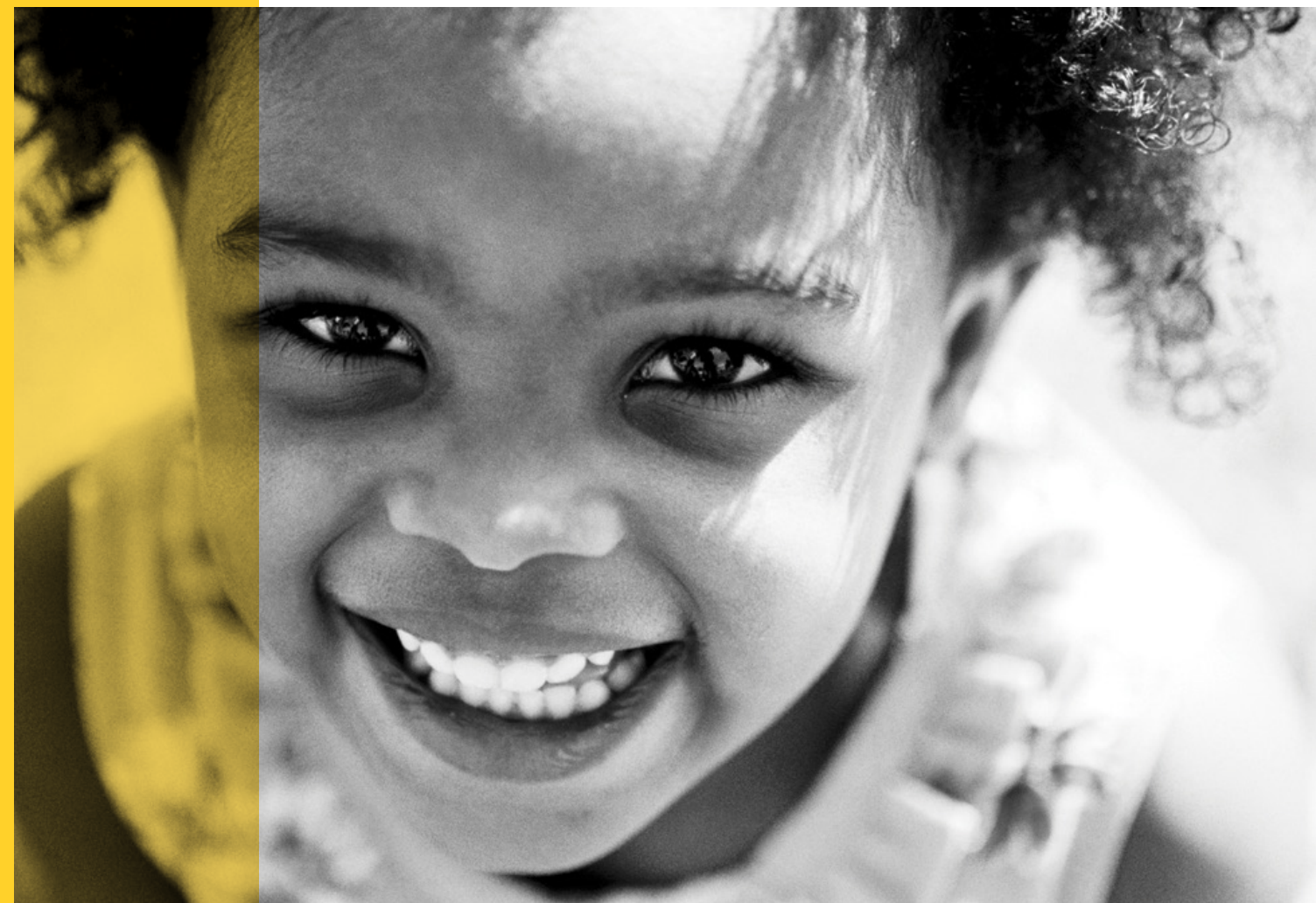
[EVEN THOUGH THE CITY
IS CLOSE TO 50% WHITE]

THIS IS A HISTORIC MOMENT.

As a society, our consciousness about these inequities has grown. Demand for change is increasing. A new era of activism is gaining momentum. Black Lives Matter and the immigrants rights and #MeToo movements have spurred a new civil rights era in our nation. People are building alliances to fight the many connected forms of discrimination based on race, gender, LGBT status, disability and more. Unprecedented numbers of people are taking to the streets to protest unjust policies and advocate for civil rights.

At the Washington Lawyers' Committee, we know we must not waste this momentum. The voices of millions are sounding and the conscience of our nation is raised. Although progress is facing severe headwinds, this is not the time to be deterred. This is a time for action, and we have an ambitious plan to make the most of this historic moment.

This is the civil rights work of our time and there is no room for any of us to remain on the sidelines. **We have an urgent role for you to play.**

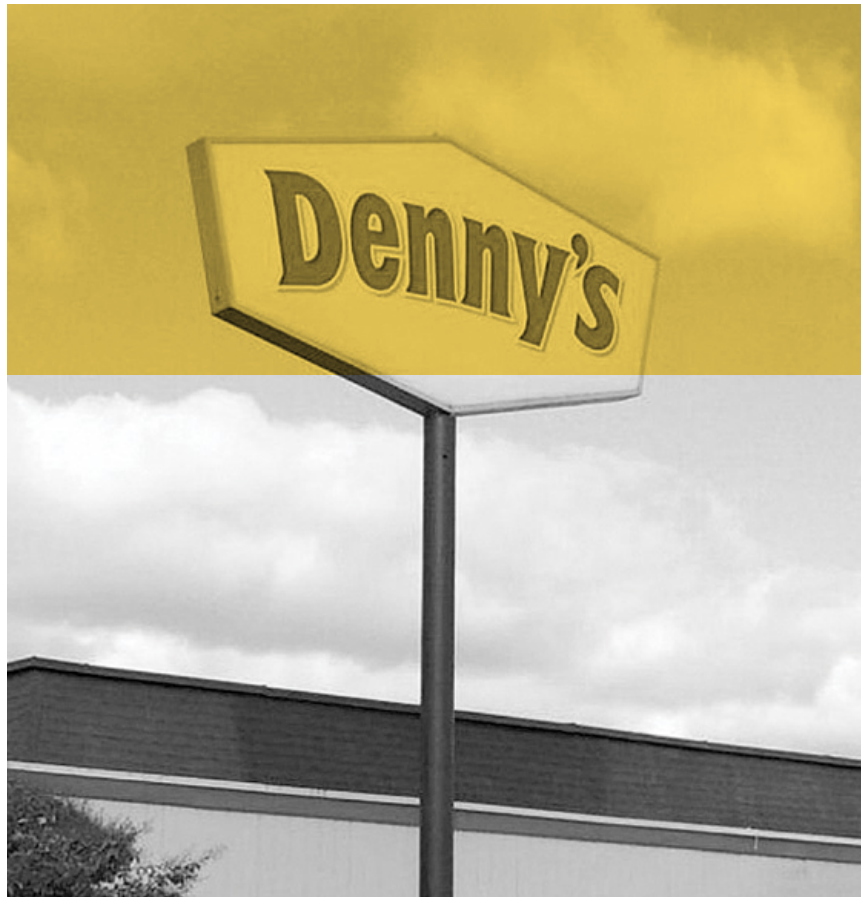




African American Secret Service agents were denied service at an Annapolis Denny's restaurant while on duty. The Washington Lawyer's Committee exposed – and ended – widespread discrimination in the chain's restaurants nationwide.

“To do civil rights work today is not just to eliminate the barriers to success, but to **repair the damage** done by discrimination in the past.”
–Jonathan Smith

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE



HOW WE MAKE EVERY DOLLAR ACCOMPLISH MORE

Every dollar donated to the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs is leveraged several times to create more social impact. When you invest in the Washington Lawyers' Committee, we use your dollars to sustain a robust civil rights litigation docket fueled by thousands of hours of pro bono legal help. We like to think of it as your social impact dividend — and that's smart philanthropy.



LANDMARK CASE

Ending Systemic Discrimination at Denny's

The Secret Service officers who walked into an Annapolis Denny's the morning of April 1, 1993, weren't trying to make a point. They were just trying to get breakfast.

The 18 agents were in full uniform securing the perimeter for President Clinton. Once at the restaurant, the six African American officers happened to all sit at one table while their 12 white colleagues sat at two other tables. While the white agents ate their meals — and seconds and thirds — the African American agents could not get served.

The agents came to the Washington Lawyers' Committee. We put scores of lawyers and paralegals to work and talked to hundreds

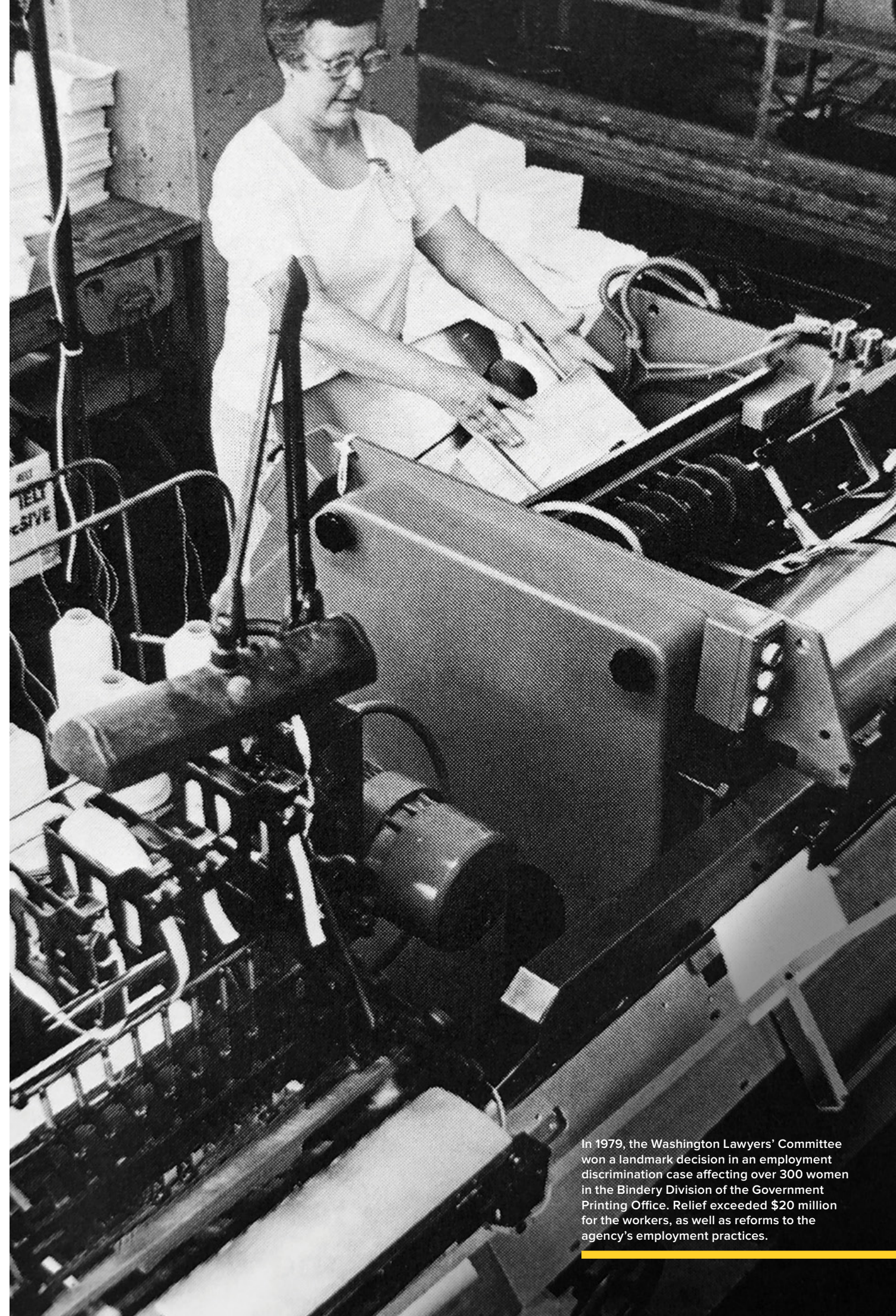
of customers and former employees, exposing rampant discrimination against African American patrons at Denny's restaurants across the nation. Our research found that general managers from Denny's 1,700 restaurants had gone to trainings where they were taught African American customers are bad customers. Black patrons were denied seating, required to pay first, or made to sit in the back of restaurants.

The Washington Lawyers' Committee established a large class-action lawsuit against the company. In 1994, Denny's agreed to pay \$17 million and implement significant changes in their business practices. It was, at the time, the largest public accommodations class-action settlement in history.

2

Our Strong History Inspires Bold Goals

LOCATED IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL, the Washington Lawyers' Committee plays a unique role. The Washington, D.C., region is host to the federal government, serves as a laboratory for federal policy, and acts in the spotlight of the national media. In this town, "local issues" take on national significance. Our region, and the nation, are more just today because of the courage of our clients, the skill of our co-counsel, and the dedication of our staff.



In 1979, the Washington Lawyers' Committee won a landmark decision in an employment discrimination case affecting over 300 women in the Bindery Division of the Government Printing Office. Relief exceeded \$20 million for the workers, as well as reforms to the agency's employment practices.

THE WASHINGTON LAWYERS’ COMMITTEE has taken on some of the most important and most difficult cases and causes and continues to bring cases to ensure that the highest ideals of our constitutional democracy are met. We have been instrumental in establishing legal precedents to reduce discrimination in the federal workforce, increase access to public services, and break down barriers to opportunity for all.

- When the federal government denied promotions to African Americans, we fought back and won. And when they excluded women and persons with disabilities from higher paying jobs, we took them to court, and again, we won.
- When the Barbri bar review prep course failed to make its materials accessible to the blind, thus creating a barrier to the legal profession for blind law graduates, we sued and forced them to change.
- When the Federal Bureau of Prisons risked the lives of prisoners with mental illness with dangerously long periods of solitary confinement, we fought back and won.
- When DC schools failed to be kept up to fire code, we sued, forcing the city to make repairs in long neglected schools in low-income neighborhoods.
- When restaurants, hotels, and housing providers denied services to people of color and persons with disabilities, we sued again and again, establishing historic anti-discrimination precedents.

The Washington Lawyers’ Committee recognizes and celebrates the civil rights progress made in our first 50 years, while keeping our eyes wide open to the continued discrimination that still plagues our institutions and communities. Today, we continue to create change by partnering with individuals and community groups to express their own power and connecting them with the highest quality lawyers in town.

Our bold goal is to dismantle the mosaic of intersecting injustices created over time by the racial bias enshrined in our laws and institutions; to fight all forms of ongoing discrimination; and to promote justice in reality, not just form.



LANDMARK CASE

Holding Metro Accountable for 50 Years

Erick Little was a teenager in 1987 when he was convicted for a drug offense. In 2013, he applied for a bus driver position at the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). Little got the job, pending a background check. Having disclosed the 26-year-old conviction, he was assured it would not be a problem. The offer was rescinded nonetheless.

The Washington Lawyers’ Committee has been holding WMATA accountable since the very beginning of the District’s Metro system. Back in 1971, Congress was set to enact major new legislation providing federal, state, and local workers with their first meaningful protections against employment discrimination. In the Washington, D.C., region, construction of the Metro system was just beginning. The Washington Lawyers’ Committee sued federal and local governments for racially discriminating

in hiring and contract assignments and won precedent-setting victories that opened important employment opportunities for African Americans.

Fifty years later, we are carrying on that legacy. In Little’s case, we alleged that WMATA’s over-broad criminal background check policy violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964 because it disqualified a disproportionate number of African American applicants. In 2017, with the help of the Washington Lawyers’ Committee, a group of African American applicants and employees received a groundbreaking \$6.5 million settlement from WMATA.

Now a youth football coach, Little says he hopes the lawsuit shows his young players that “past mistakes can be overcome if you are willing to work hard to turn your life around.” We’re proud to have helped him and other D.C.-area residents win justice.

**“Dr. King said,
‘the moral
arc of the
universe
bends
toward
justice.’
But only
when
people pull
it toward
justice.**

**The
Washington
Lawyers’
Committee
is doing the
pulling, and
our city and
the nation
are better
for it.”**

**—Eric
Holder**

FORMER U.S. ATTORNEY GENERAL

3

Why Focus on Race?

IN A CITY WHERE ONE OF EVERY TWO RESIDENTS IS BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN,⁵ we are constantly reminded of how the ideals expressed in our civil rights laws fall short. We drive by a U.S. Capitol building built by slaves. We send our children to schools that remain separate and unequal. We witness income gaps as extreme as anywhere in our nation.⁶

This inequity is the legacy of slavery: of the criminalization of poor people and people of color, of housing and employment discrimination based on race and economic status — including deliberate and explicit governmental policies.

The Washington Lawyers' Committee fights discrimination against all people, but we put special focus on the central role that current and historical racial prejudice plays in sustaining inequity. As we dismantle the systems that sustain racial inequity, we also work to repair the damage caused by past generations of discrimination.



AMANDA VOISARD/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Washington Lawyers' Committee client Allan Sergeant filed a federal lawsuit accusing a Laurel City, MD, police officer of violating his civil rights by publicly strip-searching him during a traffic stop.

WE KNOW THAT ACHIEVING
LASTING CHANGE REQUIRES
MUCH MORE THAN “LEVELING
THE PLAYING FIELD.”

We seek schools that give every child a chance to succeed

and programs to repair the harm done to communities of color that have lived with ineffective schools for many decades.

We seek freedom of choice to live in all neighborhoods

and policies that invest in traditionally segregated neighborhoods without displacing low-income and working families and families of color.

We seek workplaces free from racial discrimination

and programs to address the historical legacy of over-criminalization based on race that still limits work opportunities for black and brown people.

We seek police who co-produce public safety and build community trust

in our neighborhoods, and action to undo decades of harm caused by mass incarceration of black and brown residents.



Even if we ended racial discrimination today, the consequences of historical inequality persist in our communities and our institutions.

Today, all people have the right to own a home in any neighborhood or pursue a job in any company, but the legacy of decades of discrimination in education, employment, and public services continues to lock some people out.

The Washington Lawyers' Committee is working to pry open doors long shuttered to people of color.

**“Discrimination
and segregation
have long
permeated
much of
American
life; they now
threaten the
future of every
American.**

**This deepening
racial division
is not inevitable.
The movement
apart can be
reversed.
Choice is still
possible.”**

**–Kerner
Commission
Report, 1968**

4

Our Plan to Achieve Justice

WE ARE YOUR COMMUNITY'S CIVIL RIGHTS LAWYERS.

For 50 years, we've brought high quality legal services and principled advocacy to bear in pursuit of a more equitable society in which the legacy of racial discrimination has been overcome.



777 PORTRAITS, MYRTLE BEACH, SC

Each year, the Washington Lawyers' Committee partners with community members and organizations on scores of cases to combat discrimination based on race, gender, disability, family size, history of criminal conviction, and more. We are strategic in pursuing cases that move the law in a positive direction and establish new precedents in order to have the most powerful and lasting impact. And we work with a network of pro bono lawyers including the best civil rights attorneys in the world.

Each year, it costs nearly \$5 million to support our existing docket of cases and the related research and advocacy work needed to win. And we must also remain agile enough to respond to urgent challenges as they arise. From police violence to anti-immigrant persecution and assaults on workers' rights, the Washington Lawyers' Committee must have the resources to assist the movements that emerge in response to any threats to civil rights.

Washington Lawyers' Committee client Jacqueline Cote, right, with her wife, Diana Smithson, sued Walmart for refusing health benefits for same-sex spouses, resulting in a \$7.5 million class-action settlement.



MATT MCCLAIN/THE WASHINGTON POST

The Washington Lawyers' Committee represented Officers Lynell Green, left, and Franklin L. Savage, right, and police chief Kelvin Sewell in their suit against the Pocomoke City Police Department for pervasive racial harassment.

To be both steadfast and nimble at this critical moment in history, it is imperative that the Washington Lawyers' Committee increase our bandwidth and strengthen our capacity for change. **We are seeking significant philanthropic gifts to grow our leadership for the next 50 years of civil rights advocacy here in the Washington, D.C. region.** Additional investment today will allow us to advance these three civil rights priorities:

1. **Grow** Our Capacity for Civil Rights Litigation and Advocacy

- Building on the foundation of the legendary lawyers who defined the field, nurture the next generation of racial justice and civil rights litigators
- Expand our impact by recruiting and retaining staff lawyers and paralegals and investing in law firm partnerships
- Increase our staff capacity to advocate before local and federal executive branch agencies and legislative bodies

2. **Partner** with Community Organizations to Create Change

- Sustain and grow community partnerships and expand our capacity to work with community organizers
- Expand our physical presence in highly segregated communities and communities of concentrated poverty

3. **Increase** Our Organizational Capacity for Change

- Improve organizational effectiveness and sustainability by strengthening capacity in research, communications, development and technology
- Establish the Innovation Fund to enable the Committee to seize unexpected opportunities and to respond to new emerging threats

5

Ready for This Moment

AT THE WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE,
you can see what we believe by the actions we take.

YOU CAN TRUST
IN OUR EFFECTIVENESS
BECAUSE OF OUR
WINNING TRACK RECORD.



The Washington Lawyers' Committee represented female workers at the Washington, D.C. Department of Corrections in their lawsuit over endemic sexual harassment.

When the 1972 Civil Rights Act became law, the Washington Lawyers' Committee brought many of the first class-action claims — securing millions of dollars in back pay and damages, and injunctive relief for thousands of women and people of color.

When the Federal Bindery Division denied women opportunities for better paying jobs, we took them to court — winning back pay and damages of \$20 million for 375 women and radically changing federal employment practices.

When Denny's restaurants denied service to people of color, we invested in testing projects that exposed — and ended — widespread discrimination in the chain's restaurants nationwide.

When the General Services Administration failed to make its website, sam.gov, accessible to blind users, we reached a landmark settlement on behalf of blind federal contractors and the American Council of the Blind.

When the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law, we jumped into action and brought some of the earliest impact cases under the statute and continue to use it in innovative ways.

And, when federal prison authorities in Lewisburg, Pa., kept prisoners with mental illness in prolonged solitary confinement and failed to provide psychiatric treatment, we took them to court and continue to fight to ensure that the basic humanity of these prisoners is respected.

Time and time again, when the rights of people in the Washington, D.C. region are threatened, the Washington Lawyers' Committee leads the charge for justice. We have secured a relentless stream of civil rights victories over the past 50 years.

AND WE ARE NOT DONE YET.



EVELYN HOCKSTEIN/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Washington Lawyers' Committee client Tiffany Jolliff, who is blind, sued Uber after drivers refused to pick her up with her service dog, Railey.

It's not just about winning a particular case. We are creating a new way of thinking about litigation for social good and creating new pathways for change.

THESE ARE THE CORNERSTONES OF WLC'S WINNING APPROACH:

We have deep roots in the civil rights movement and have adapted to remain relevant in modern day civil rights battles.

We recognize the wisdom and power of all people; we don't fight for communities in struggle, we fight *with* them.

Our talented staff attorneys work with local community activists and the best lawyers in town to form unique and effective partnerships.

We leverage every dollar you give to generate seven dollars of legal services from the private bar.

OUR WIN-WIN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NATION'S BEST LAW FIRMS

Each year, the Washington Lawyers' Committee benefits from approximately 43,000 hours of pro bono legal assistance. This partnership provides many benefits to the firms as well. When lawyers get involved with the work of the Committee, they gain significant litigation experience early in their careers. They then apply those skills on matters with the firm's corporate clients. These professional development opportunities, high-profile cases, and meaningful experiences give partner firms a leg up when recruiting new talent.

LANDMARK CASE

Increasing Racial Equity In Housing

Washington, D.C.'s Housing Choice Voucher Program is designed to enable low-income individuals and families to rent housing outside of areas of concentrated poverty and give them greater access to quality economic and educational opportunities.

Unfortunately, illegal discrimination against renters who pay a part of their rent with a Housing Choice Voucher — known as “source of income discrimination” — is widespread. And because African Americans make up the vast majority of Voucher holders in the District, a refusal to rent to Voucher holders is 71 times more likely to exclude African-American renters than white renters.

In April 2017, with representation from the Washington Lawyers' Committee and

WilmerHale, the Equal Rights Center (ERC) sued The Lenkin Company Management/Residential, Inc. The ERC's testing had confirmed the company's refusal to rent to recipients of Housing Choice Vouchers. In a November 2018 consent agreement, Lenkin agreed to affirmatively market units to Voucher holders; train two employees to serve as Housing Choice Voucher liaisons; undergo extensive fair housing training and civil rights testing to ensure compliance with the agreement and the law; and make a payment to cover damages, attorneys' fees, and costs.

The Lenkin agreement represents a critical step toward breaking down the arbitrary barriers that Voucher holders face when seeking housing — barriers that perpetuate racial and economic segregation.

“I didn't go to law school to only defend one company suing another company. I went to law school to try and make a difference in other people's lives. Washington Lawyers' Committee allows me to have that kind of impact.”

—John Freedman

WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE
BOARD CO-CHAIR



6

Your Investment in an Equitable Society

OUR CITY, OUR REGION, AND OUR NATION ARE FACING A CRITICAL TURNING POINT.

Will we confront the legacy of racism that continues to leave countless people behind? Will we turn further toward a region of haves and have-nots? Will we stress our differences or embrace our common humanity?



Tyler Elementary School Principal Terry Dade at the site of a major school capital project made possible by the Washington Lawyers' Committee School Partnership program.

Each of us has a role to play in answering these questions. One of the best ways to create the change you wish to see in our region is to invest in the work of the Washington Lawyers' Committee. As an experienced convener and determined change agent, the Committee has a vital role to play at this unique moment in our nation's history.

We have a 50-year track record of winning meaningful change through the law. We leverage your gift to deploy thousands of hours of pro bono legal service, and partner with community organizations on the front lines of civil rights. When you invest in us, you don't just invest in one organization. You invest in an entire network of community

members, activists, and attorneys working collaboratively to drive the change we seek.

Our clients are Davids facing Goliaths: up against forces so much bigger than them, whether government agencies or large corporations. When you stand with the Washington Lawyers' Committee, you give them the strength to defeat those Goliaths. Plus, the cases we win set important precedents that make our city and our nation stronger.

We begin each day knowing we stand in the shadows of countless heroes who sacrificed their lives in pursuit of justice and equity. We cannot afford to squander the opportunity they have placed in our generation's hands.



The Committee represents hundreds of local day laborers in lawsuits challenging denials of minimum wages and overtime payments.

If you believe all people deserve the chance to realize their potential free from discrimination, invest in the Washington Lawyers' Committee.

If you want to make your mark on history and join the civil rights movement of our time, invest in the Washington Lawyers' Committee.

If you want to make the world more just by beginning right here at home, invest in the Washington Lawyers' Committee.

Your philanthropic investment will allow us to bring strategic cases that challenge longstanding systems of oppression and continue our work to build an equitable society for all.

**“The proof
that one
really
believes is
in action.”
—Bayard
Rustin**

CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST

CITATIONS

¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/11/racial-wealth-gap-dc/508631/>

² Deepa interview

³ <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/our-challenge-focus-reducing-poverty-in-washington-dc>

⁴ https://doc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/doc/publication/attachments/DC_Department_of_Corrections_Facts_and_Figures_January_2018.pdf

⁵ U.S. Census <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/DC/PST045217>

⁶ <https://www.dcfpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/3-13-14-Income-Inequality-in-DC.pdf>

**“We are each
other’s harvest;
we are each
other’s business;
we are each
other’s magnitude
and bond.”
–Gwendolyn
Brooks**

POET, AUTHOR, AND TEACHER

Our community is a better place to live and our society is stronger when we embrace the gifts of all people. The Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs is supporting people to express their own power to build a more equitable society every day.

We invite you to join us.



WASHINGTON LAWYERS’ COMMITTEE
FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND URBAN AFFAIRS

washlaw.org



@WashLaw4CR