



Dear Friends,

Happy August from Bet Tzedek! We hope that you have been enjoying your summer and have some time to unwind and relax. We are pleased to learn that **Bet Tzedek President and CEO, Diego Cartagena**, will be awarded the first-ever **2023 Equal Justice Works Distinguished Alumni Award** at the organization's [Scales of Justice](#) event on October 24, 2023.



“Diego is an exceptional example of the difference that one person can make in a public interest law career,” said Verna Williams, CEO of Equal Justice Works. “We are thrilled to celebrate his contributions through his career of service at the 2023 Scales of Justice event.”

The Equal Justice Works Distinguished Alumni Award recognizes an Equal Justice Works alum who has made outstanding contributions as a leader in public interest law; has distinguished themselves through creating lasting impact in the communities they serve; embodies the organizational values of passion, community, service, opportunity, and equal access to justice; and reflects the transformative power of an Equal Justice Works Fellowship.

“I am incredibly humbled and honored to be receiving the 2023 Equal Justice Works Distinguished Alumni Award,” said Diego. “More than anything, I hope it serves as a reflection of, and inspiration for, the change we can each accomplish when we come together as a community and profession under the vision of an organization like Equal Justice Works.” [Read more here.](#)



Art by [Judy Chicago](#)

## See Transformative Art on Our Social Media

Great art is visually stimulating and provocative; it has the power to educate and inform on social issues, bring about positive change, and empower individuals and communities. Bet Tzedek's theme for our social media accounts this August is **#ArtForJustice**. We feature the work of a wide range of visual and performing artists — including folks who are BIPOC, women, LGBTQ+, disabled, and older — with unique stories and perspectives to share, such as [Maliha Abidi](#), [Yinka Shonibare](#), and [Judy Chicago](#).

The timely article "[Transforming Local Communities Through Artistic Leadership](#)" notes, "Some of the most powerful tools for challenging established norms and for raising awareness about social problems are cultural artifacts like art, music, and film. However, artists and artistic projects have the power to do much more. Indeed, they can play a vital role in community change. Given the right support and strategy, artist-led efforts can empower communities to craft desirable futures, make social issues visible beyond the community, and promote long-term investments in local transformations."

You can follow our **social media accounts at the bottom of the news digest** and see the powerful works of the artists we're featuring.

## Help a Low-Income Senior Who Was Exploited By a Predatory Contractor

**Case Description:** Ms. K is a low-income senior who lives alone. Her sole income is social security retirement and disability benefits. In March 2022, Ms. K signed a contract with a remodeling company for \$55,000 to have her kitchen remodeled. The company told Ms. K this work would be discounted as part of a special government program to benefit seniors. Once they demolished the kitchen, the company changed its story, telling Ms. K that the "program" required them to install solar panels as well as remodel the exterior of her home. The company refused to move forward with the kitchen until she agreed to the installation of solar panels.

In June 2022, Ms. K received bills from another company alleging she owed \$155,000 for the remodeling work. The company essentially held her kitchen hostage, refusing to complete the work until she signed a contract for solar for \$155,000. Ms. K was caught in this scheme for many more months and paid even more money, even though the company never finished the work and refused to provide an itemized receipt.

Despite Ms. K's timely payments, the company filed a lien against Ms. K's property in November 2022. The legal notices were replete with gross misrepresentations. The time to enforce the lien has run, but the knowledge of its presence, the continued payments for solar panels that do not function, in addition to the cost of fixing all the incomplete work, weigh heavy on Ms. K.

**If interested, contact Director of Pro Bono Programs, Sara Levine, at [slevine@betzdedek.org](mailto:slevine@betzdedek.org).**



## 2 in 5 LGBTQ+ Californians Cannot Afford Household Expenses

California is ahead of other states when it comes to protecting and preserving the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. However, LGBTQ+ Californians — who make up 1 in 10 adults in California — face economic insecurity more than any other group. Around 2 in 5 LGBTQ+ adults in the state had difficulty paying for usual household expenses, according to recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey. According to a [report](#), this is because many people in the community face barriers to economic stability, including employment and housing discrimination, lack family support, and have mental health concerns. [Read more here.](#)

Bet Tzedek has assisted countless members of the LGBTQ+ community throughout our nearly 50-year history. Our advocacy has included representing LGBTQ+ community members facing unlawful evictions, helping gay and lesbian couples draft advanced health care directives to ensure loved ones can care for each other, seeking reparations owed to them by the German government, and assisting transgender immigrant youth seeking refuge in the U.S.

Seven years ago, Bet Tzedek established its Trans Advocacy Project after witnessing an overwhelming and increased need to provide representation on behalf of transgender community members facing employment, housing, public accommodations, and health care access discrimination. Establishing this program — and serving as allies to, and members of, the LGBTQ+ community — has been one of tremendous pride and perpetual growth. Learn more about Bet Tzedek's services for the LGBTQ+ community [here](#) and [here](#).

## Join the Bet Tzedek Team!

Have a passion for helping underserved residents in the community? Want to work alongside dedicated staff and volunteers who help upwards of 100,000 people per year?

**Here are some critical positions we need to fill, plus more (see button below):**

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