



Dear Friends,

Happy 2024! This year marks a huge milestone for Bet Tzedek: our 50th anniversary!

For half a century, we have provided free legal services to Los Angeles residents. It began with a housing crisis, as Bet Tzedek helped elderly Holocaust survivors threatened with evictions. Services have since expanded across all communities to support tenants, homeowners, and the unhoused; workers, taxpayers, and small business owners; dependent adults and caregivers; immigrant children; the LGBTQ+ community; children and their families; and many more.

Of course, our work is made possible by five decades of amazing Bet Tzedek attorneys and staff, our generous donors and volunteers, and our community of partner organizations and advocates who are all deeply dedicated to creating equitable access to justice for all. We thank you and are excited to celebrate with you!

Throughout this year marking our historic milestone, we'll take you on a journey through BT's 50 years of service. We will reflect on the evolution of L.A.'s culture and our many accomplishments that have led to individual success stories and countywide progress. You can follow along each month through "BT Now," as well as via our social media platforms, found at the bottom of this news digest. **#50YearsOfJusticeForAll**

The Housing Crisis on Fairfax Avenue that Created the "House of Justice"



Starting in the late 19th century, racially restrictive covenants were enforced in neighborhoods across L.A., keeping people of color, and Jewish community members, from purchasing or leasing homes. The Beverly Fairfax district was free of such a covenant and became a refuge for Jewish Americans. However, with the CBS Studios complex opening in 1952 and the growing appeal of the area, the neighborhood started to see an influx of money and new home buyers. As prices rose, Holocaust survivors and other low-income seniors in the area began being forced out of their residences in the early 70s.

In 1974, Rabbi Stanley Levy became aware of a pressing need for legal assistance faced by these Holocaust survivors and low-income seniors. The gentrification they had witnessed had led to an increase in illegal evictions even as they faced other issues, including mounting debt as a result of fraudulent acts perpetrated against them by wrongdoers and being denied access to government benefits.

Stan knew he could help those in need, but that he couldn't do it by himself. He called upon his long-time friend, Luis Lainer, who held a similar passion for assisting those in need. Together as co-founders, they assembled a group of friends — attorneys, rabbis, social workers, law students, and legal secretaries — each of whom declared, "I am here to help." Each person pledged five dollars a month to rent a storefront office on Fairfax Avenue, and to give one night a week to improve the lives of the low-income and disadvantaged. They decided to call their new undertaking "Bet Tzedek," meaning the "House of Justice" in Hebrew.

From "In Search of Fairfax" by Max Baumgarten, "During its early years, Bet Tzedek operated out of a storefront at 163 Fairfax Avenue with a handful of professional staffers and a core of volunteer attorneys. Largely representing low-income Jews who lived in and around the Beverly-Fairfax neighborhood, much of Bet Tzedek's casework during the 1970s entailed writing wills and helping clients receive unemployment benefits. A significant percentage of their early funding came from the Jewish Federation Council and a grant by the federal Legal Services Corporation; they also received financial support through private donations." [Read more here.](#)

Continue to Support Our Work Today

On the Frontlines of Aiding Survivors of Labor Exploitation



Bet Tzedek's Employment Rights Project (ERP) team provided direct services to more than 100 predominantly Guatemalan workers who were exploited at two L.A. poultry processing plants in La Puente and City of Industry owned by Tony Bran. A settlement was reached in November of last year on behalf of workers for nearly \$3.8 million. Federal authorities alleged kids as young as 14 were illegally working dangerous jobs instead of attending school.

From the L.A. Times, "In late October [of 2023], a month after the early-morning raid at the poultry plants, the Thai Community Development Center helped organize another event for workers, this time at a Latter-day Saints church in El Monte, where many of [the exploited workers] live. They got legal aid, help signing up for public assistance, personal protective equipment, food boxes from Labor Community Services, and attended a workshop on labor rights by Bet Tzedek Legal Services." [Read more here.](#)

Thank you to our amazing and hardworking ERP team for their constant efforts assisting exploited workers!

Media Watch: CEO Diego Cartagena on Fox 11 "In-Depth"



Watch our CEO Diego Cartagena on **Fox 11 “In Depth”** with **Hal Eisner** talking about Bet Tzedek, our services, and the Angelenos we have helped throughout our 50 years of providing justice for all.

Battling the Lasting Effects of Redlining through the Innovative “Leaving a Legacy” Initiative

"[I]n 2021, African Americans had 62 cents to the white household's dollar. At that rate, it would take Black people 513 years to achieve the white median household income." – From the *Inequality.org* article, [“How Redlining’s Legacies Demand New Policy Action”](#)

The impact of redlining is one of the reasons Bet Tzedek works to protect homeowners by combating title fraud, foreclosures, and consumer fraud targeting low-income homeowners. It's also why we are rolling out a major new program to promote estate planning in communities of color. The [“Leaving a Legacy” program](#) will help ensure that properties in the hands of low-income clients are passed down to younger generations in an effort to help build intergenerational wealth.

It connects community members to trustworthy legal and estate planning tools and services, including financial tools, estate planning tools, decision-making tools, and more, like help with title transfers, assistance with resolving problems with legal title, legal advice and information, and self-help services.

[LEARN MORE HERE](#)

Empowering Immigrant Workers: A Year of Progress

The National Immigration Law Center (NILC) issued a [report](#) on labor-based deferred action commemorating the one-year anniversary of the policy. Bet Tzedek's Employment Rights Project (ERP) team contributed to the report, providing a quote from our client:

"I have always wanted to come out of the shadows because I've always felt excluded from American society — despite paying taxes, living here, and working here. I want to be a part of this country. When I heard about this opportunity, it gave me the strength to apply and feel a part of this country. It was difficult to make the decision to apply. The process was a very serious process, but I am glad I did it." -ADOLFO, Janitor in California

In January of 2021, Adolfo informed his employer that he was not feeling well after receiving his COVID-19 vaccine and would be taking a sick day. When his paycheck arrived, it did not include sick pay. When Adolfo asked his employer why he did not receive sick pay, his employer said, "those benefits don't exist for people like you." Five days later, Adolfo was terminated and was told "I told you this would affect your job — asking for payment on top of asking for a day off." Bet Tzedek filed a retaliation and wage claim on behalf of Adolfo and also obtained a Statement of Interest, which allowed Adolfo to obtain a work permit.

We are proud of success stories like these that show how we — through the use of the law — protect low-wage workers, including immigrants, who are prone to exploitation!

Help a Widower Avoid Homelessness by Determining His Right to a Life Estate in His Marital Home

Case Description: Bob married his wife Ellie in 1992. Ellie owned a home that was secured by a trust. The trust was amended many times over the years; one revision named Bob as successor Trustee and provided him with a life estate in the home, provided that he and Ellie were "still legally married to each other and living together at the time of [her] death". The trust also named Ellie's son Chris as successor trustee and devised the property to him, subject to Bob's conditional life estate.

In November 2021, Ellie collapsed at a medical appointment, was hospitalized, and was diagnosed with dementia. After discharge, she collapsed again at home and was rushed to the hospital. During this second hospitalization, Chris convinced Bob to resign his position as Trustee, Power of Attorney, and Health Care Agent for Ellie so that Chris could make arrangements to move Ellie into a nursing facility. Chris instructed Bob to move out of the home so that it could be rented out to pay for Ellie's care, promising that when she no longer needed care, Bob could return to the home.

After Bob complied with these requests, Chris — without notice — changed the locks on the home and removed client's belongings. When Ellie passed away in March 2022, Chris refused to allow Bob to return to his home. In the meantime, Bob has been living with a caregiver in an apartment he cannot afford. He was served with a pay-or-quit notice in December 2023 and expects to receive an unlawful detainer (UD/eviction) summons any day.

Next Steps: Review Trust, amendments, will, and codicils; research options for enforceability of the life estate; and provide guidance based on outcome. If a UD action is commenced, review notice to quit and related documents to determine potential defenses and plan of action

If interested, contact Director of Pro Bono Programs, Sara Levine, at slevine@bettzedek.org.

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 up to 100,000 people per year?

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

[DIRECTING ATTORNEY: GENERALIST SERVICES FOR SPECIALTY POPULATION](#)

[DIRECTING ATTORNEY: SELF-HELP CLINICS](#)

[DIRECTING ATTORNEY: EVICTION DEFENSE PROJECT](#)

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