



Dear Friends,

Happy Black History Month from Bet Tzedek! Every month, but this month in particular, is a time to honor the rich cultural heritage and foundational contributions of African Americans to which our country is indebted. As legal advocates, it is an opportunity for us to focus on the African Americans who shaped American law and jurisprudence. Awareness of that history is paramount, as our constant vigilance of the law in the effort to promote justice cannot succeed without an understanding of how the law was constructed, oftentimes to create the very structural injustices which we are currently working to dismantle.

Last month, over two dozen fires tore through Southern California, cumulatively burning more than 57,000 acres; an area nearly equivalent to Washington, D.C. and Manhattan combined. In total, more than 16,000 homes and businesses were destroyed, according to CAL FIRE, and at least 29 people were killed. Our hearts go out to all those affected, and we especially acknowledge the destruction of the **Palisades and Eaton Fires**.



Altadena after the fires. Photo courtesy of Brian van der Brug/Los Angeles Times.

The Eaton Fire has devastated much of Altadena, a cherished neighborhood in Los Angeles rich in Black history. African Americans began settling there during the second phase of the Great Migration, the largest movement of people in U.S. history. During that period, approximately 6 million individuals left the South for the North to escape racial violence and pursue economic opportunity.

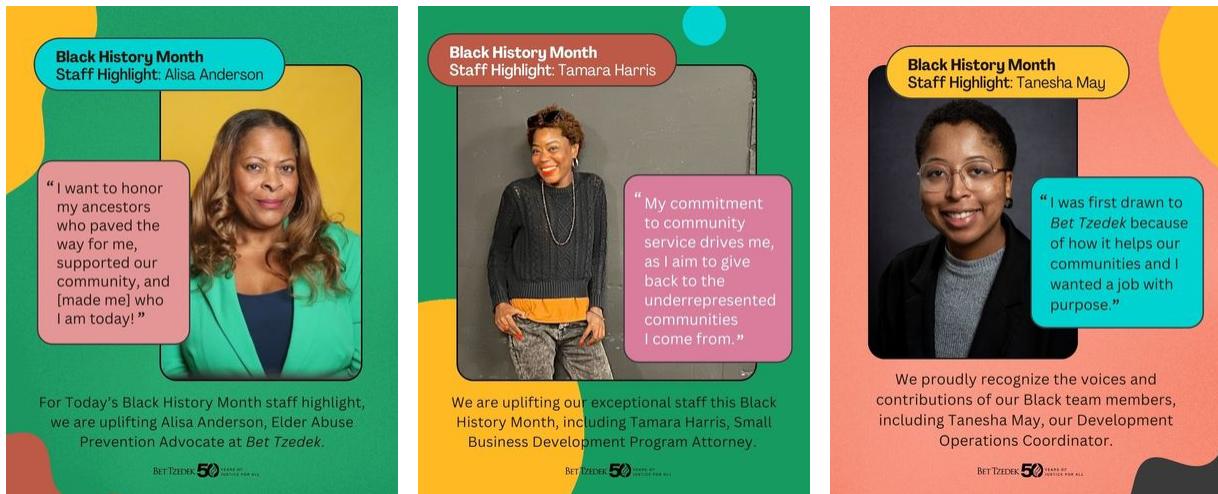
The Eaton Fire destroyed homes and displaced families, many of whom built this historic Black community with resilience after facing redlining — a practice that, throughout much of the 1900s, denied home loans to people of color, enforcing segregation through color-coded

maps. More than 80% of the Black residents in Altadena owned their homes, nearly double the national average. This community has now seen generations of wealth and legacy turned to ash.

Cleanup is underway, but rebuilding and recovery is overwhelming. Bet Tzedek is here to help.

FIRE RECOVERY RESOURCES

Celebrating our Exceptional Staff!



Alisa Anderson is Bet Tzedek's Elder Abuse Prevention Advocate. She is a retired State Investigator who helped update legislation for California disaster victims. At Bet Tzedek, she currently educates communities about elder abuse, fraud prevention, and intergenerational wealth preservation.

Tamara Harris is Bet Tzedek's Small Business Development Program Attorney. She is currently helping launch a new initiative within the program aimed at assisting eligible small business owners in Los Angeles County with pro bono trademark and copyright registrations. This effort is innovative and unprecedented in our region.

Tanesha May is Bet Tzedek's Development Operations Coordinator. They run the organization's donor database to support our overall fundraising strategies. They were drawn to Bet Tzedek because they wanted a job with purpose that serves the community.

Follow along on our **social media accounts**, found at the bottom of this news digest, as we highlight these dedicated members of our staff more in-depth, and share Black History Month content throughout February.

Disappointment in Children's Hospital L.A.'s Decision to Halt Transgender Care

From our Directing Attorney **Erikson Albrecht**, in response to this [L.A. Times article](#): "California recognizes and protects all individuals' rights to seek and receive healthcare, free of discrimination. The state law specifically protects transgender patients and their medical providers. Healthcare decisions are and should remain between medical professionals and patients; they should not be politicized to harm vulnerable communities."

News that Children's Hospital L.A. (CHLA), an invaluable resource and trusted provider in this space, has suspended transgender hormonal therapy for patients under the age of 19 in response to the executive order, is beyond disappointing. Vulnerable and oppressed communities need us to stand for justice and remain stalwart in the face of harmful, discriminatory policy. Trans rights are human rights, and everyone deserves the healthcare they need."

[READ THE L.A. TIMES ARTICLE](#)

VICTORY: Medi-Cal Now Allows Electronic Signatures for Accessibility

With Bet Tzedek as a catalyst for this change, Medi-Cal has implemented a new policy allowing electronic signatures on Medi-Cal forms, as outlined in All-County Welfare Directors Letter (ACWDL) 24-18. This is a significant milestone. Bet Tzedek advocated on behalf of several clients with disabilities who were unable to physically sign forms but could electronically sign. By highlighting the critical need for this accommodation, our efforts directly influenced this important policy change.

Previously, Medi-Cal required an original, physical signature on forms — even from clients who were paralyzed or otherwise unable to sign. During summer 2023, Bet Tzedek's law clerk **Justin Kaley** wrote an exceptional brief outlining the legal basis for accepting electronic signatures and arguing that it was a necessary disability accommodation.

This change is already having a profound impact, reducing barriers for applicants and enabling more efficient service delivery. It's rare to see California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) implement changes like this so quickly, but this time it happened — and it's making a tangible difference for our clients.

MEDIA ALERT: CEO Diego Cartagena on Federal Funding Freeze for Law.com

On the afternoon of January 28th, when Bet Tzedek's Luis Lainer President & CEO **Diego Cartagena** spoke with ALM's **Law.com**, the White House had accomplished its mission: there was chaos rained down upon the nonprofit sector that gave rise to fear. Would programs or entire organizations have to shutter their doors as a result of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) order, and who would be there to address the fears of the community members we serve and support?

While this freeze has been rescinded and temporarily blocked by judges, the White House is still withholding funds. We are keeping a close eye on developments and the status of federal grants. Bet Tzedek remains steadfast in its unwavering focus on serving those in need by ensuring meaningful access to justice. We will move forward with deliberateness, collaborating with our partners to secure clarity on this continuously evolving issue and supporting, as best we can, efforts to resolve. Above all, we continue working to support the health, safety, and wellbeing of our community members.

[READ THE LAW.COM ARTICLE](#)

Our Video Series: Immigration Lawyer Explains

Know Your Rights: Staying Protected from ICE



"Immigration Lawyer Explains" is a new social media video series in which our LAUSD Kinship Care Attorney, **Hannah Feldman**, explains important topics (in both English and Spanish) on immigrants and how they are impacted by the legal system. She discusses everything from birthright citizenship to what you should do if you are stopped by ICE as an immigrant.

You can view all of the videos on our [social media accounts](#), found at the bottom of this news digest.

Trump's second term began with a series of executive orders regarding immigration that could redefine America as a nation that excludes those who should be welcomed — from asylum seekers crossing the border to children who will be born to parents on temporary visas.

These directives target nearly every aspect of the immigration system, including detention, deportation, and protections.

As a result, vulnerable children and families are at increased risk of separation and deportation. Bet Tzedek is here to help secure Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), asylum, and other relief so they can remain in the U.S.

See our resources for immigrants (under Children & Families) [here](#). View our family separation preparedness toolkit via the buttons below.

TOOLKIT

TOOLKIT (SPANISH)

Join the Bet Tzedek Team!

Have a passion for helping underserved residents in the community? Please apply for a chance to take a leadership position with dedicated staff and volunteers who help over 60,000 people per year.

Here are some critical positions we need to fill:

[**ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT: JUSTICE FOR SENIORS AND DEPENDENT ADULTS**](#)

[**ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT: JUSTICE FOR TAXPAYERS, WORKERS, AND SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS**](#)

[**ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT: JUSTICE FOR TENANTS, HOMEOWNERS, AND UNHOUSED INDIVIDUALS**](#)

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

*See all job listings by clicking the button below

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