

# CHICAGO BAR FOUNDATION SUN-TIMES FELLOWSHIP AWARDED TO BETH JOHNSON

On October 19th five legal aid attorneys, including CGLA's director of criminal records, Beth Johnson, received Chicago Bar Foundation Sun-Times Public Interest Law Fellowships. Each Fellow will receive up to \$50,000 in loan repayment assistance over five years to help them continue their careers in legal aid.

"Each of our Fellows could have had their pick of top-paying law firm jobs upon graduation from law school. Instead, they chose to make the financial sacrifice it takes to ensure that those in need have access to our justice system. Each day these impressive lawyers are improving our community and making a difference in people's lives," said David Mann, Chair of the CBF Sun-Times Fellowship Selection Committee.



*Beth Johnson (center) with (L-R) David Mann, Chair of the CBF Sun-Times Fellowship Selection Committee and Bob Glaves, Executive Director, Chicago Bar Foundation.*

Each of the five fellowship recipients provides vital legal assistance to the most vulnerable members of our community. Jill Becker provides legal resources through three statewide website to the public and pro bono and legal aid attorneys; Kevin Patrick Curran helps victims of domestic violence secure safety from their abusers; Stephanie Hiebert assists elderly clients with a variety of legal problems, including elder abuse, financial exploitation and consumer fraud; Beth Johnson helps low-income people with a criminal background gain a second chance by helping them expunge and seal their records so they can obtain employment and housing; and Claudia Valenzuela ensures due process for her low-income immigrants clients.

Beth is the Director of Cabrini Green Legal Aid's (CGLA) statewide Criminal Records Program. In this position she has developed into the leading expert in Illinois on expungement and sealing of criminal records as well as the presentation of clemency petitions before the Illinois Prisoner Review Board. Additionally, Beth often is called on to testify in Springfield as well as to train on these topics.

Beth started her legal career at CGLA in 2003 as a summer intern. She returned in 2005 after she graduated from DePaul University College of Law and shortly after the Expungement Desk was opened at the Daley Center. The Help Desk assists thousands of individuals a year to properly file with the court to clear or seal a past criminal record, both of which give people a fresh start. She remains committed to her work despite significant educational debt because "[T]he Criminal Records Program is a unique combination of direct service representation, policy advocacy, community outreach and legal education - a combination that truly utilizes the law to serve the public interest." To give a sense of Beth's staunch commitment to her work and her clients, Beth became a new mother for the first time on September 27 and is scheduled to present at a CLE program on Criminal Records during next week's CBA/CBF Pro Bono Week.