

Justice & Diversity Center Celebrates 40 Years of Serving the Community

January 2, 2017 -- San Francisco, CA -- During 2017, the Justice & Diversity Center of The Bar Association of San Francisco (JDC) will celebrate forty years of providing legal services to the community and working to diversify the legal profession.

Beginning forty years ago in 1977, JDC's predecessor, the Volunteer Legal Services Program (VLSP) was formed by members of The Bar Association of San Francisco (BASF) to provide pro bono services to underserved San Franciscans facing critical legal problems without access to legal representation.

Tanya Neiman, the late VLSP Executive Director, pioneered the holistic approach to legal services with her explanation that a program of this nature "analyzes and addresses the needs and situations of the client as a whole person with complex and interrelated issues and problems." Holistic advocacy combines the effort of both attorneys and social services professionals.

Over the years, VLSP expanded services focusing on matters involving basic human needs, such as family law, eviction defense, and domestic violence cases, and launched numerous innovative projects including its largest in 1988, the Homeless Advocacy Project (HAP). HAP provides legal services and supporting social services to individuals and families in San Francisco who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.

In January 2012, VLSP and The Bar Association of San Francisco's Foundation's Diversity Educational Programs merged into one 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization, with the resulting entity renamed the Justice & Diversity Center of The Bar Association of San Francisco (JDC).

JDC's legal services programs actively partner with the courts, social services organizations and health centers as a means of making its services more accessible to clients. In 2015, their use of pro bono representation of clients resulted in over 8,000 people being served by over 2,000 volunteers, who donated almost 43,000 hours, resulting in \$17.5 million in legal services. In terms of services provided by volunteer attorneys, JDC is the largest provider in San Francisco and Northern California and the second largest in the state.

JDC's diversity educational programs have served as a national leader in their efforts to diversify the legal profession. A winner of multiple national, state and local awards, the programs work to transform the lives of K-12 students, undergraduates considering law school, and law students. A pipeline to a career in law is made possible through generous donations from the legal community that provides college and state legislative field trips, college readiness counseling, mock trial programs, and scholarships for minority law students.



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In 2017, under the leadership of BASF/JDC President Merri Baldwin, Rogers Joseph O'Donnell, JDC's 40th anniversary will provide new and continuing opportunities for attorneys and volunteers to get involved with their community. Baldwin states, "While we face great uncertainty and change, we can take strength from the fact that in other moments where we have faced challenges, BASF and JDC have provided a forum for us to come together and work for positive change. Together we will continue to work for diversity, equity and fairness, to fight against injustice and intolerance, and to speak out whenever necessary."