



NLADA

NATIONAL LEGAL AID & DEFENDER ASSOCIATION

## 2017 IMPACT REPORT

*VISION TO VOICE*



**NLADA**  
National Legal Aid &  
Defender Association

# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

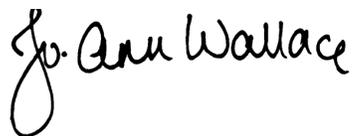
The many voices of the NLADA community are diverse, yet strikingly similar in their commitment to equal justice for all. Our members represent people from across the United States who seek legal assistance on many fronts, whether their need is related to defense, housing, health care, veteran's benefits or natural disasters. NLADA members represent and champion these voices day in and day out.

In 2017, numerous challenges united our community and strengthened our resolve. When the current administration proposed the elimination of the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), NLADA swiftly mobilized our supporters, in particular our corporate partners, in a significant and vocal effort. The power of our national community not only saved LSC from elimination, it moved Congress to increase funding by \$25 million from the past year. NLADA also partnered with defender organizations to help the justice system to embrace pre-trial reform. NLADA and the Contra Costa County, California Office of the Public Defender created a simple but effective new program in collaboration with local law enforcement. In order to reduce the instances that an individual fails to appear at their initial court date, police officers provide public defenders' contact information to all people receiving a misdemeanor citation.

This is NLADA's true strength - an action-oriented membership and community that hails from civil and defender organizations, as well as the private bar and shares a vision for fairness and equality for all. As President and CEO of NLADA, I am privileged to meet with our partners in their home states and learn about their operational challenges and the often dire situations facing their clients. The stories are powerful; some are shocking and disturbing. Others are mediated to a positive resolution. But overall, the people represented by our member organizations or through pro bono legal avenues, have a voice that is heard and protected.

On behalf of all of us at NLADA, I thank you for your continued support of our mission and especially for your commitment to fulfilling the promise of equal access to counsel for all. We cannot do it without you.

With hope and respect,



Jo-Ann Wallace  
President & CEO



# LETTER FROM ALEX GULOTTA, CHAIR

It is always bittersweet to look back over one's tenure at an organization as resilient as NLADA, with its storied history of more than 100 years and strong command of current and upcoming issues of relevance to our community. Since I attended my first NLADA conference in 1991, I have witnessed the organization tackle critical issues with substantial impact on the delivery of civil and defender legal services. Moreover, as Board Chair, it has been my privilege to be part of a team of professionals demonstrating consistent leadership in advocating for equal access to justice, giving voice to those in need of representation. NLADA is the place where vision actually becomes voice, as NLADA addresses issues affecting real people in challenging situations.

This is our NLADA - visionary, strong, impactful and highly motivated. In 2017, many challenges, some unforeseen, were met head on with resolve and integrity. NLADA provided resources and support to areas of our country devastated by natural disasters; protected the Legal Services

Corporation from eradication; and secured federal funding for the new AmeriCorps VISTA program that expands the capacity of public defender offices with volunteer placements. And again, we proved that NLADA, the only organization representing both the civil and defender communities, is responsive and effective.

In partnership with our members and supporters, NLADA provides not only technical and training support, but also inspiration and hope. And yes while 2017 was challenging, we persevered, our resolve ever stronger. Many thanks to the thousands of people across the country who supported us in so many ways. We are grateful for your commitment and look forward to your continued engagement.

Respectfully,



Alex Gulotta

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# IMPACT: CLIENT STORIES

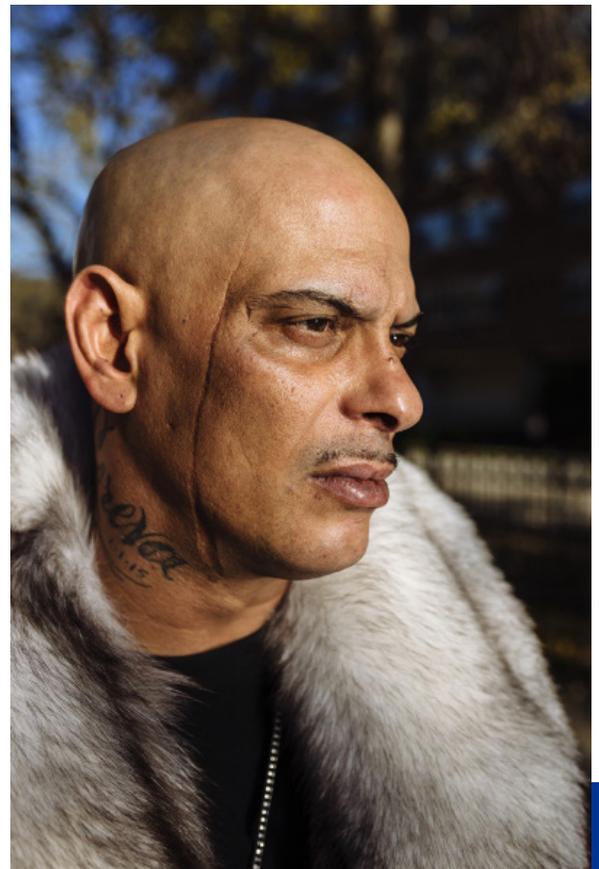
At NLADA, we know that not having access to counsel has devastating effects on individuals, families and communities. Low-income Americans are particularly vulnerable. The NLADA community strives to protect those in need by working to secure legal representation for all who otherwise cannot afford it. To expand access to counsel, NLADA empowers our members and partners through training, resources, technical assistance and advocating holistic legal services and system-wide changes in how we think about and employ our jails. With the support of our community, NLADA provides hope and justice for many thousands of people every day – people just like Carly G., Mark V. and the residents of Exit 19 Mobile Home Park.



+ After Carly G.'s family moved into their new home in rural Virginia, the neighbors told Carly that her landlord had a reputation for taking advantage of his tenants. However, Carly's family had no choice but to stay as this was the only place that would allow their beloved pets to stay in the home. Months later, and \$75 behind on rent, Carly asked the landlord for a week's extension on payment. Though the landlord initially agreed, only two days later he was at Carly's door demanding the rent and accusing the family of being in arrears. The landlord filed grievances with two courts in two different counties. One was dismissed and the other was put on hold because of a clerical error on the landlord's behalf. Then, without a proper judgement, the landlord had Carly arrested for trespassing. It was then that Carly was put in touch with NLADA member organization Southwest Virginia Legal Aid Society (SVLAS) which provided her with legal assistance. SVLAS subsequently had the trespassing charges dropped and continues to represent Carly in resolving the remaining issues.

+ In the summer of 2017 in New York City, Mark V. was pulled over for a traffic infraction and charged with operating a vehicle without a license and possession of a forged document. Mark's request for release was denied, and bail was set at \$4,000 cash or \$8,000 insurance bond. Due to a disability, Mark lives on a limited income and was unable to pay bail. Consequently, he remained in jail.

Incarcerated for three weeks, Mark worried about his three-year old daughter. Having spent his youth in the foster care system, bouncing between eight different foster and group homes, Mark knew how important having a stable, present parental figure is to children. Mark's lawyers, with NLADA partner Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES) challenged his bail until he was released. His case is still pending. While Mark waits, he is able to care for his daughter.



# IMPACT: CLIENT STORIES



+ Over the years, the Exit 19 Mobile Home Park fell into disrepair and maintenance issues were left untreated.

Finally, in the spring of 2017, worried residents appealed to Southwest Virginia Legal Aid Society (SVLAS) for assistance, feeling that their landlord was not meeting state standards. To make matters worse, when a new owner purchased the park and threatened to evict almost all the 18 tenants based on past due rent, it became clear that the former landlord had been pocketing their rent without addressing obvious maintenance. Most of the tenants owned their mobile home and had only been paying lot rent, with some having open titles. What is more, none of them had signed a formal lease, another violation of Virginia law. After passing out "Know Your Tenant' Rights" pamphlets and negotiating with the landlord, SVLAS attorneys succeeded in acquiring new leases. Since then, the park has been cleaned up, and the landlord is in the process of making necessary, overdue repairs. Had SVLAS not gotten involved, the park's residents would likely have all been evicted, with most having nowhere else to go.



These are just a few of the many stories about NLADA member organizations and the important real-life cases they take on. Sadly, stories like these are almost endless. But with assistance and support from the NLADA community, we all are working diligently to provide needed access to counsel for thousands of clients across the country. Thank you to our members for your diligence and to our many supporters and contributors for your generous donations, pro-bono hours and compassion.



# MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

NLADA is honored to represent our community of members working together to achieve a shared vision of equal justice excellence throughout the United States. Our members are civil legal aid attorneys, public defenders, program leaders, professional staff, community advocates, social workers, mitigation specialists and more. They represent the wide range of programs and institutions devoted to equal justice – from grant-funded state-wide institutions, to local pro bono programs, to public defender offices – and are the true advocates giving voice to those in need.

2017 was a dynamic year for NLADA membership. We are proud to have served and provided member benefits to:

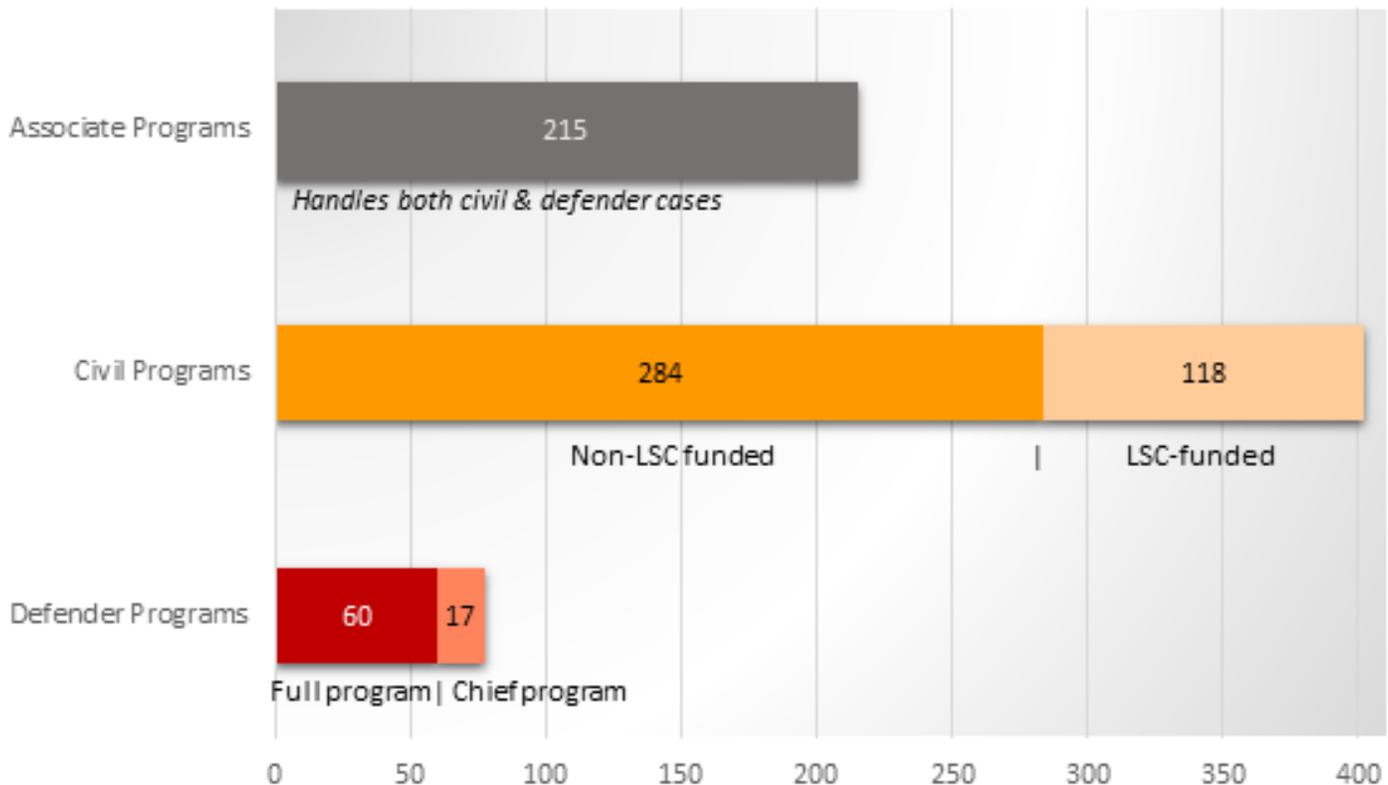
The program leaders and full staff of nearly 700 programs (and an additional 1,300 local branch offices) that provide services to low-income clients and communities, including:

- More than 85 percent of all Legal Services Corporation-funded programs throughout the country
- More than 40 new program members in our expanding member community
- More than 75 public defender offices

Nearly 900 additional individual community advocates and solo practitioners, including:

- Hundreds of program leaders and chief defenders leading their field
- More than 100 client members
- Nearly 250 non-attorney professionals devoted to holistic defense practices

## NLADA 2017 Program Members



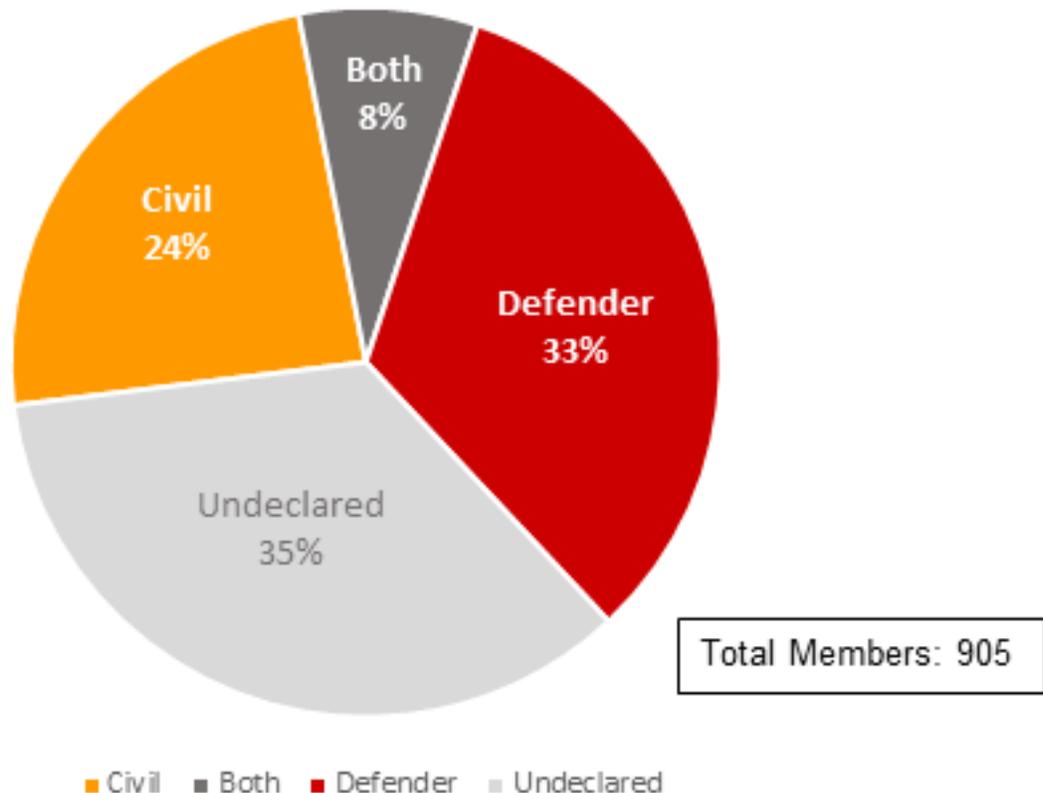
# MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

NLADA serves this diverse range of professionals through programming, advocacy, networking groups, trainings and resources that improve and support their work. In 2017, this included:

- Hosting the **Partnerships in Federal Funding webinar series**, which showcased successful federally-funded civil/defender collaborations
- Continuing our popular **Legal Aid Training Series** with events in New Orleans and Pittsburgh to teach successful funding application strategies
- Creating collaboration and education opportunities for chiefs, social workers and mitigation specialists at our **Holistic Defense and Leadership Conferences**
- Gathering more than 750 client community advocates, civil legal aid attorneys, and public defenders at our **Annual Conference** to learn, network and address cross-cutting issues in equal justice
- Creating numerous publications, reports, and webinars that addressed current equal justice challenges and promoted best practices in civil legal aid and public defense

For more information on NLADA memberships, please contact [membership@nlada.org](mailto:membership@nlada.org) or visit [NLADA.org/become-a-member](http://NLADA.org/become-a-member)

## 2017 NLADA Individual Members



# 2017 HIGHLIGHTS

For more than 100 years, NLADA has been impactful – we make a difference. The organization was created to scale access to justice and today, proudly, we continue to do exactly that, and beyond. As the national voice representing both the civil and defender communities, NLADA supports holistic solutions to complex problems. Our role, not just within the legal community, but in society writ large, is to eradicate the justice gap that discriminates against low-income people in particular. If not for NLADA, and our national membership and supporters, that gap would be much larger.

How do we make a difference? By being first to recognize need and opportunity. By developing research protocols and digging into challenges. By testing and implementing solutions that are scalable and replicable. Sometimes we make a difference by helping the legal community do their work creatively or with more resources; sometimes it is our work on policy issues that make things simpler. In short, we believe that the quality of justice in America should not depend on how much money a person has. This is our passion.

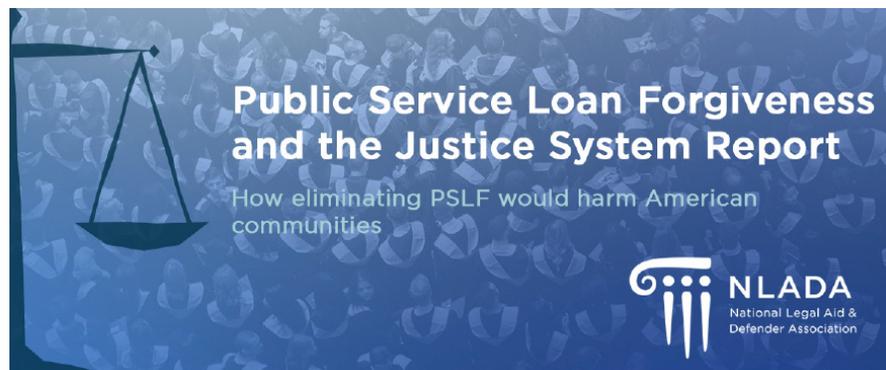
Whatever the circumstance or program, NLADA provides guidance and leadership with a national scope. In 2017, our key accomplishments included:

## ***Advancing changes in policies and practices that promoted systemic and holistic approaches to equal justice***

- Promoted holistic defense representation to address client needs and reduce recidivism through the Community Oriented Defender Network, and through training and tools such as “The Interdisciplinary Defense Team: What Defenders Need to Know” that expand the use of social workers in public defense programs.
- Coordinated a national response to problems related to court debt and municipal fines and fees that lead to over-incarceration, loss of civil rights and privileges and other problems of particular impact in communities of color.

## ***Improving the effectiveness of the delivery of legal service to those who cannot afford counsel***

- Distributed resources and cultivated support networks for equal justice advocates in communities devastated by natural disasters. Programing at the NLADA Annual Conference featured a panel of equal justice leaders from California, Florida, Puerto Rico, Texas and the U.S. Virgin Islands to discuss current needs, share lessons learned and celebrate local heroes. The conference also featured closed session working groups with advocates in communities affected by natural disasters in 2017 and advocates who had experience in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy.
- Expanded access to pretrial counsel, reduced unnecessary incarceration and increased the quality of services provided by applying data science to legal representation as the technical assistance provider for the U.S. Department of Justice Innovative Solutions in Public Defense. Six jurisdictions (Alameda County, California; Contra Costa County, California; Kentucky; New York City; Texas; and Wisconsin) are now implementing innovative, evidence-based improvements to their public defense systems.



# 2017 HIGHLIGHTS

## *Using innovative technology to empower clients*

- Partnering with DONAFY, a free smartphone app that connects those in need and their advocates with community based services. NLADA envisions that DONAFY will help to eliminate unnecessary incarceration, reduce homelessness, expand grassroots philanthropy and drive the efficient use of resources.
- Designed and implemented a new website to inform concerned citizens about current national policy proposals impacting the equal justice community and to connect individuals with their Congressional representative.

## *Increasing resources for legal service providers*

- Successfully mobilized unprecedented support to protect the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), the independent nonprofit established by Congress in 1974 to provide financial support for civil legal aid to low income Americans. This included expansive corporate engagement through the coordination of a letter of support for LSC signed by more than 200 general counsel and legal department leaders activated by Congress.
- Increased non-LSC federal funding for civil legal aid by \$32.3 million through NLADA's Civil Legal Aid Initiative by partnering with the U.S. Department of Justice Office for Access to Justice to expand legal aid's participation in grant programs related to housing, health care, reentry, veterans' affairs, victim services and other services.
- Advocated successfully for the implementation of relevant provisions of the Justice for All Act, requiring the U.S. Department of Justice to provide \$10 million annually for technical assistance to expand and improve public defense.
- Secured federal funding for the first ever AmeriCorps VISTA program placing volunteers directly in public defender offices. In order to expand public defender offices' capacity, VISTA members foster community partnerships and implement data systems to create capacity and sustainability.
- Expanded access to counsel during the pretrial stages of a criminal case, as a strategic ally of the MacArthur Foundation's Safety + Justice Challenge, a \$100 million initiative aimed at reducing unnecessary incarceration and reducing racial disparities. Resources developed to promote the underlying strategies included a defender communications toolkit: "Rethinking Jails, Reframing Public Defense: Making the Case for the System-Wide Benefits of Effective Defenders."
- Represented the legal services community in a cross-industry coalition of professionals advocating to maintain the Public Services Loan Forgiveness program.

The **NLADA Civil Legal Aid Initiative**, funded by the Kresge Foundation and Public Welfare Foundation, gives new urgency to advocating with federal agencies around the integration of civil legal aid into holistic human services. NLADA is facilitating partnerships to do so. Below are some highlights from our grant report:

- Featured federal representatives and national partners in 13 trainings, which reached 990 providers in the legal services community.
- Promoted 40 federal grant opportunities through LegalAidResearch.org and NLADA communication networks.
- Supported civil legal aid programs accessing \$2.27 million in both new and increased VOCA grants.
- Posted 27 new resources on LegalAidResearch.org
- Provided 586 people direct training and technical assistance on pursuing and implementing federal funding

# THANK YOU

The following contributors, sponsors and partners generously supported NLADA initiatives in 2017. We are grateful for their leadership and commitment to our mission.

## **Government & Foundations**

Bureau of Justice Assistance of the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs  
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation  
Open Society Foundations  
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The Kresge Foundation

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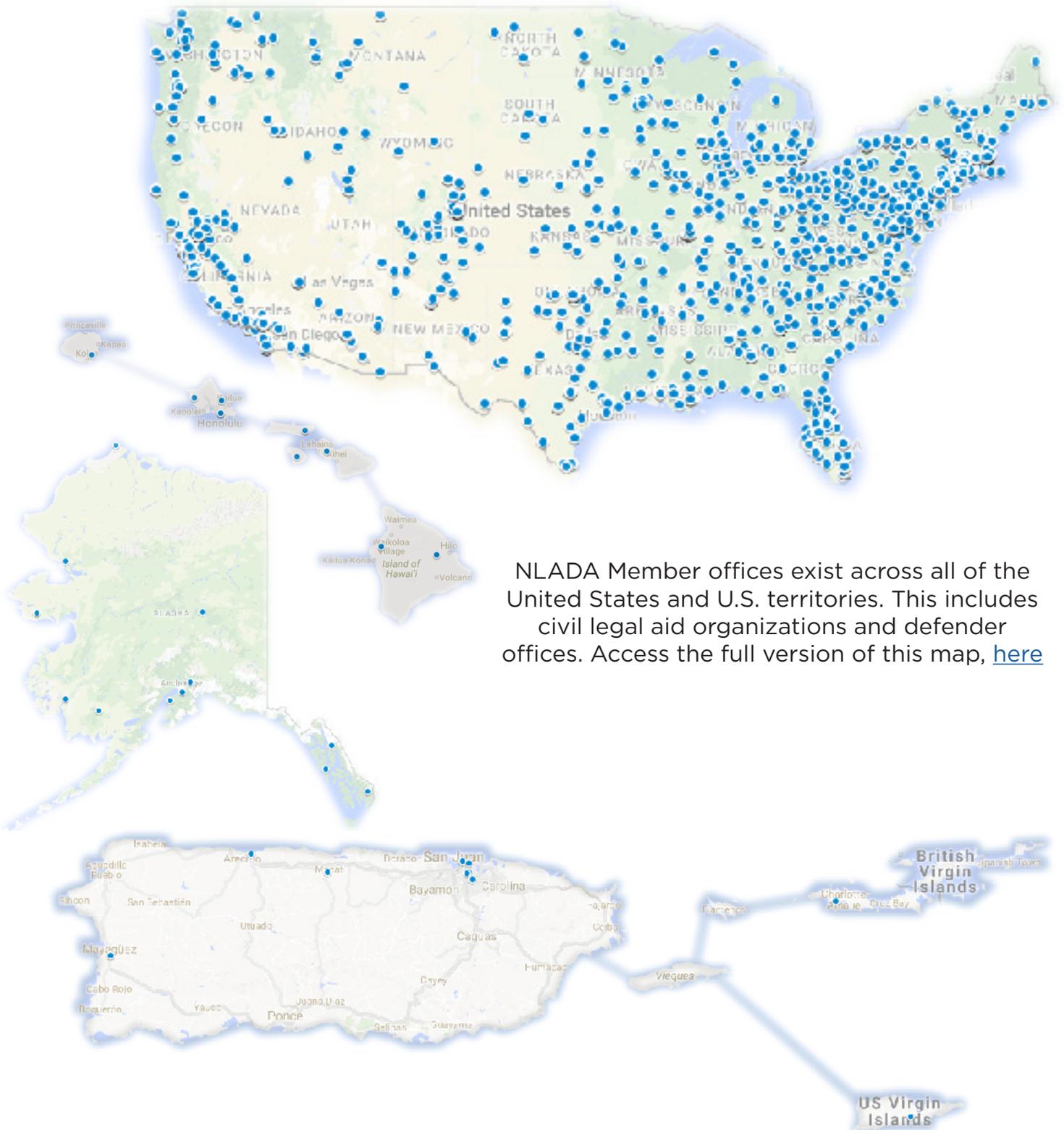
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# OUR MEMBER OFFICES



NLADA Member offices exist across all of the United States and U.S. territories. This includes civil legal aid organizations and defender offices. Access the full version of this map, [here](#)

### MISSION STATEMENT

Because the quality of justice in America should not depend on how much money a person has, NLADA leads a broad network of advocates on the front-lines to advance justice and expand opportunity for all by promoting excellence in the delivery of legal services for people who cannot afford counsel.



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