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Community Leaders and Elected Officials Welcome New Reentry Clinic in San Francisco's Western Addition

Free Legal Assistance Program Gives Former Offenders a Second Chance

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – San Francisco residents navigating legal barriers following contact with the criminal justice system now have a resource in the Second Chance Reentry Clinic. A program of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area and Mo'MAGIC, a community organization located in San Francisco's Fillmore, the clinic provides free legal advice to people with past arrests and convictions.

San Francisco Public Defender Jeff Adachi, and San Francisco Supervisors Ross Mirkarimi and Jane Kim, as well as numerous community members and partners, helped kick off the clinic on March 3.

"Lawyers' Committee has played a key role in breaking down barriers and promoting that people have representation," said Supervisor Mirkarimi. "We rely on organizations in the nonprofit community to fill that void for us."

Supervisor Kim stated, "Everyday, our constituents ask for legal help. Now we know we can direct them to Lawyers' Committee."

A 2010 report by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation found that San Francisco has one of the highest recidivism rates in the state, with 78.3% of ex-offenders returning to prison within three years of their original release, compared to the statewide average of 67.5%. The Clinic aims to stem high recidivism rates by matching clients with free *pro bono* representation from Bay Area firms to remove legal barriers that prevent individuals from reintegrating back into society and leading productive lives. Key topics addressed include employment, housing, driver's license suspensions, and occupational licensing.

Lawyers' Committee Executive Director Lateefah Simon stated, "At its core, the barriers that formerly incarcerated individuals face are civil rights issues. The goal of the clinic is to assist individuals in overcoming these obstacles, regardless of whether they were released yesterday or 20 years ago."

A client of the program stated, "It has always been hard for me to get employment because of my record and criminal background. This program has made me more confident. My attorney really helped me, and I know I have a better chance of getting a good job now."

Reentry support services are being offered at two community-based locations. The Second Chance Reentry Clinic is held on the fourth Tuesday of each month at Mo'MAGIC, where volunteer attorneys work with walk-in clients. On the first and third Tuesdays of each month, volunteer attorneys are matched with clients who are enrolled in the Intensive Job Readiness Program at Goodwill Industries in SOMA.

About the Lawyers' Committee:

For more than 40 years, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area has worked to advance, protect and promote the legal rights of communities of color, immigrants and refugees -- with a specific focus on low-income communities and a long-standing commitment to African Americans. Lawyers' Committee staff, working with hundreds of pro bono attorneys, provides free legal assistance and representation to individuals on civil legal matters through direct services, impact litigation and policy advocacy. In 2009, the Lawyers' Committee mobilized nearly 1,000 pro bono attorneys who contributed more than 42,000 hours of free legal assistance, services valued at almost \$17 million. For more information, visit www.lccr.com.