

# Community Legal Aid Welcomes New Board Members, President



Community Legal Aid Services, a nonprofit law firm serving the legal needs of low-income residents in Northeast and Central Ohio, named Joseph Ferrise, Athena Gough, and Erin Palmer to its Board of Trustees this week. The Board also named Dionne Dowdy as its incoming president, beginning January 2019.

“I want to be able ... to help the community through barriers they face in accessing legal support,” says Dowdy, executive director of United Returning Citizens of Youngstown. Dowdy, who also serves Youngstown’s Taft Promise Neighborhood as an Americorps VISTA member, has been a Legal Aid Board member for the past year.

Ferrise, of Akron, is a staff attorney and operations manager for the Office of the Chapter 13 Trusteeship in Akron. In addition, he serves as an assistant lecturer for the University of Akron’s College of Business Administration. As a practicing attorney, Ferrise represents individuals and business clients in the areas of employment law, business planning, family law, real estate law, estate planning, criminal law, landlord-tenant law and contract preparation.

“Legal Aid does what a lot of us went to law school for. For me, working with Legal Aid can help refresh my perspective on what the legal field can do. I’m excited about Legal Aid’s strategic initiatives and being part of that and watching it grow,” says Ferrise, a native of Cuyahoga Falls, who has served Legal Aid as a volunteer attorney for the past 10 years.

Gough, of Akron, is a business development professional with expertise in sales strategy, customer acquisition and relationship management. An advocate for Legal Aid clients, Gough, herself, is a former Legal Aid client. She studied business administration at The University of Akron.

Erin Palmer, of Hudson, is the Chief Financial Officer and in-house legal counsel for the Leppo Group, Inc. in Kent. Early in her career as an attorney, Palmer, who grew up in Stow, acted as a court-appointed guardian ad litem in child and elder abuse cases.

“The most gracious and grateful are often those with the greatest need for help,” Palmer says. “I’m very excited for the opportunity to help fill a community need we have here.”

“As we get ready to launch our three-year strategic plan – ultimately, to transform the lives of those who are impoverished through legal advocacy – we cannot imagine a finer and more capable group of leaders to help see us to that end,” says Legal Aid Executive Director Steven McGarrity.

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