



RURAL JUSTICE

FALL 2023

magazine

CALIFORNIA RURAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE, INC.

DONOR PROFILE

Doug Grijalva

ADVOCACY UPDATE

Wage Theft

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Lisa Barrow

*New Executive Director
Meet & Greet*

*2022 Annual
Report*





TABLE OF *contents*

1	<i>Letter from Executive Director Jessica M. Jewell</i>
2	<i>Alumni Spotlight: Lisa Barrow</i>
4	<i>2023 Event Photos: Fresno, Bakersfield, San Diego, L.A. Tardeada, El Centro</i>
6	<i>2022 Impact</i>
8	<i>Rural Workers Stand Up to Employers' Wage Theft</i>
11	<i>More 2023 Highlights: Madera, Stockton, Salinas</i>
12	<i>Donor Profile: Doug Grijalva</i>
13	<i>Support the Next Generation of Justice Lawyers</i>
14	<i>2022 Donors</i>
20	<i>2022 Financials</i>



LETTER FROM THE

Executive Director



Dear Friends,

At CRLA, we fight for community-led justice. We value the agency and power of the rural communities we live in and serve. Clients dictate how they want us to work their cases and what goals they're trying to accomplish, former clients serve on our board of directors, and clients join local comités that advise our field offices.

When I work with our comité members, they remind me of the person who inspired my personal commitment to community-led justice: my grandfather.

My grandfather came to this country through the Bracero Program. After working many harvests up and down the West Coast, he had an opportunity to move his family here (including my 11-year-old dad) but without really knowing where they were going to stay. Miraculously, when they got to Riverbank, the town where I grew up, a family from their rancho back in Mexico was able to give them a place to stay until they found a home of their own.

I have no idea who that family was, but their choice to house a family in need made an incredible impact on my future. Now, 50 years later, I am executive director of CRLA. It's my privilege to advance legal services and advocacy that enable thousands of rural California residents to find and stay in safe housing each year.

You are creating the same kind of impact on someone else's future as a CRLA supporter. Your choice to give your money, time, and other resources to support our work amplifies the power and agency of rural communities. Thank you for being part of this ecosystem of change.

One of the best parts of my first year as executive director has been connecting with many of you at our meet and greet events in Fresno, Bakersfield, San Diego, El Centro, and at our LA Tardeada. (Check out some photos on pages 4-5.) I look forward to more events around the state next year!

In community,



Jessica M. Jewell

Jessica M. Jewell
Executive Director



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT:

Lisa Barrow

Oakland / Executive Counsel / Kaiser Foundation Health Plan

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO JOIN CRLA?

When I was in school at UC Davis, I did a lot of legislative advocacy for English Language Learners, including work with California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation.

I joined California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. (CRLA) because I wanted to focus on advancing educational opportunities for English Language Learners and other underserved public school students and CRLA had a history of doing that work.

I started working as a staff attorney at CRLA's Stockton office in 1993 and stayed until 1998. At the time, the Stockton office was the only office with an opening, but it turned out to be one of the best fits for me because Stockton is a very diverse city. I liked that aspect of the work.

WHAT ARE YOUR PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENTS FROM YOUR TIME AT CRLA?

I worked on some really good litigation at CRLA, even as a baby lawyer. I worked on the first Gateway litigation that obtained over \$100 million in affordable housing units in Stockton. I worked on educational challenges to Proposition 187 after it passed in 1994. I remember spending hours at Morrison Foerster because back then we still did paper discovery.

I'm incredibly proud to have worked with Richard Oliver on a school desegregation case in Stockton. We did an enormous amount of work to ensure that budget cuts did not shortchange South Stockton schools that were under a court-ordered desegregation program. We also advocated for funds to be spent in ways that reflected the needs of the diverse school community of Hmong, Black, and Spanish-speaking parents.

On another note, when I first got to the Stockton office, I don't think the furniture had been changed for a good 20 years. I talked to a friend of mine who was on the Kaiser Permanente board of directors and got a furniture donation to update the office. It was important to me that our clients had a more welcoming and comfortable environment.

HOW HAS WORKING AT CRLA IMPACTED YOUR CAREER?

Even after I left Stockton to do plaintiff's employment law at Minami Tamaki in San Francisco, I continued to work with CRLA and familiar partners like the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission—co-counseling on some wage and hour cases for farmworkers, for example.

Working at CRLA, I learned to see the human side of a problem. And there were always way more opportunities to solve problems than we had resources for, so I learned how to be strategic about what I focus on to make the biggest impact. It's a skill that carries forward in everything I do, even now.

WHAT CHALLENGES FACING RURAL CALIFORNIA DO YOU THINK CRLA COULD MOST IMPACT?

The multidisciplinary approach CRLA has historically taken to legal services—focusing on labor and employment, education, housing, health—continues to be important as opposed to focusing on just one issue. Most of our clients in Stockton had multiple issues; they all dovetail into each other.

The experience I had in Stockton, serving all parts of the community, is something CRLA does well and should continue to do. Because there are some areas where CRLA is the only game in town.

HOW DO YOU STAY CONNECTED WITH CRLA?

I'm on the fundraising board and I enjoy attending CRLA events: I go to the Tardeada and I went to former Executive Director Jose Padilla's retirement party last year. I also brought people together for a program honoring Rich Oliver's work.

Another way I stay connected is by designating CRLA for cy pres awards. Because of the work CRLA does and the geographic reach, it's a good recipient for unclaimed class-action settlement funds. And cy pres awards over the last few years have added up to multiple millions.

Whenever I talk about CRLA with others, I let them know there are a lot of different ways to contribute.

Want to suggest a CRLA alum for a future Alumni Spotlight feature? Email us at development@crla.org.

2023 EVENTS:

Fresno, Bakersfield, San Diego, L.A. Tardeada, El Centro

Thank you to all the longtime supporters and new allies who welcomed CRLA's new Executive Director Jessica M. Jewell at our 2023 events. We look forward to more events in 2024!

FRESNO



BAKERSFIELD

SAN DIEGO



EL CENTRO



2022

Impact

FIGHTING FOR COMMUNITY-LED JUSTICE

Equality before the law is a foundational principle of United States democracy. But equality before the law crumbles when only some people have meaningful access to the legal system.

Unlike criminal cases, people aren't guaranteed the right to an attorney in civil legal matters. That means low-income people unable to pay an attorney are at a huge disadvantage when facing a landlord or employer who can afford strong legal counsel and representation.

CRLA provides expert legal services at no cost to low-income people in California's rural areas and smaller cities. We also pursue impact litigation that benefits even more people.

Through 16 field offices and six specialized programs, we work with rural residents to achieve their goals in five priority areas: employment, housing, education, health, and leadership development.

We value the agency and power of the rural communities we live in and serve. Clients dictate how they want us to work their cases, former clients serve on our board of directors, and community members can join local comités that advise our field offices. It's a unique approach to legal work and an important strategy to uphold equality before the law and protect democracy.

When you support CRLA with your time, expertise, and financial resources, you are part of a wider network of people closing the justice gap and ensuring California is a more just and democratic place.

6,000 cases closed, impacting 17,000 household members

40% cases resolved to benefit of client

\$7.5 MILLION saved or recovered for clients

20,000 RESIDENTS reached through workshops and other outreach



Rural Workers Stand Up to Employers' Wage Theft

The COVID-19 pandemic showed how essential low-wage workers are. From harvesting and producing the food we eat to caring for our children and elders to packing and delivering our online orders, the labor of low-wage workers is critical for our wellbeing.

Yet many low-wage workers are not being paid for their hard work. According to a 2020 Legislative Analyst's Office report, about 30,000 California workers file unpaid wage claims each year. In 2017, claims totaled \$320 million but workers recovered about \$40 million—only an eighth of what they were owed.¹ And the total amount of wages stolen by employers is undoubtedly much higher as many workers face obstacles in filing claims, including fear of retaliation.

As COVID-19 supports end and families continue to see higher prices on food, rent, and other necessities, challenging wage theft is an important way to protect low-wage workers' rights and prevent worsening poverty in California communities.

HOW CRLA CHALLENGES WAGE THEFT

CRLA offices educate workers on their rights regarding wage theft and how to file a claim with the Labor Commissioner's Office (LCO). But because of staffing vacancies and case backlog at the LCO, it may take years before an individual worker sees payment for their claim. In addition, many workers fear losing their jobs if they report wage theft at all.

¹ Legislative Analyst's Office. (2020, February 19). The 2020-21 Budget: Improving the State's Unpaid Wage Claim Process. <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/4165>

CRLA can also support workers in ways that leverage their power as a collective. The Labor Code Private Attorneys General Act (PAGA) authorizes aggrieved employees to file lawsuits to recover civil penalties on behalf of themselves, other employees, and the State of California for Labor Code violations.² Partnering with CRLA to file a PAGA suit can give workers who felt they had to put up with unfair treatment an opportunity to create broader change.

As a civil legal aid organization, CRLA plays an important role in enforcement of labor law. Our staff have strong relationships with communities, clients, and regulatory agencies in addition to deep knowledge of local industries and applicable laws. They are well-positioned to tailor their advocacy to take on employers who repeatedly violate the law or where large numbers of workers are involved.

CRLA FRESNO ADVOCACY LEADS TO \$1.9 MILLION CITATION OF GROWERS

In September 2019, CRLA Fresno staff referred a wage claim to the Labor Commissioner's office, prompting an investigation into farm labor contractor (FLC) M.G. Luna, Inc. of Parlier and growers Madera Persimmon Growers Inc. of Madera and Willems Farms, Inc. of Kingsburg. Our client and other workers had filed claims against the FLC and the growers for nonpayment of wages, receiving checks with insufficient funds, or both.

In August 2023, the Labor Commissioner's office concluded the investigation and cited the FLC and growers \$1.9 million for wage theft affecting 356 workers who harvested persimmons and blueberries. Besides being a victory for workers, the citation serves as an important reminder for employers.

Labor Commissioner Lilia García-Brower noted, "The agricultural industry has up-the-chain liability laws holding client companies responsible for unpaid wages when their contractor fails to pay their workers... To avoid liability as client employers, growers have an obligation to ensure that the FLCs they hire are licensed, in good standing, and paying legal wages."³

WORKERS WHO PICKED DRISCOLL'S STRAWBERRIES FILE PAGA SUIT

Corporations' use of multiple layers of contractors to avoid labor laws is not unique to the agricultural industry. However, agricultural workers experience high rates of wage theft as corporations, growers, and farm labor contractors exploit their precarious circumstances, including immigration status and limited employment options in rural areas.

In April 2023, seventeen farmworkers represented by CRLA's Oxnard office and Legal Aid at Work filed a lawsuit in the Ventura County Superior Court alleging they were not fully paid for picking Driscoll's strawberries during the 2022 harvesting season.

Seventeen workers may seem like a small group relative to the total number of agricultural workers in California, but the suit also seeks penalties under PAGA and to stop the employers' illegal activities for other aggrieved employees.

² State of California Department of Industrial Relations. (2020, December). Private Attorneys General Act (PAGA) – Filing. <https://www.dir.ca.gov/Private-Attorneys-General-Act/Private-Attorneys-General-Act.html>

³ State of California Department of Industrial Relations. (2023, August 29). California Labor Commissioner Cites Fresno Area Farm Labor Contractor and Two Growers \$1.9 Million for Wage Theft Violations. <https://www.dir.ca.gov/DIRNews/2023/2023-64.html>

Seventh Tree Farm, Inc., a farm labor contractor and corporation based in Oxnard, CA hired workers to pick Driscoll's strawberries and promised to pay workers \$2.10 for each box of strawberries they picked. Our clients picked berries and packed them directly into boxes labeled with the Driscoll's name. However, the complaint alleges the employers systematically undercounted the number of boxes workers picked, resulting in widespread wage theft.

Driscoll's represents itself as the "global market leader for fresh strawberries" and controls approximately one-third of the U.S. berry market. Driscoll's, Inc. is named as a joint and client employer in the complaint.

According to the lawsuit, Seventh Tree Farm, Inc. also frequently required many workers to work overtime on weekends, paying them in cash or personal check but failing to pay overtime premiums required by law. In many cases, workers were paid below the minimum wage for the hours they spent performing harvesting work. The workers lodged complaints with managers about the failure to pay accurately, but managers refused to address the issues.

Fidel, one of the plaintiffs in the case who picked strawberries, explained: "When we saw the list of picked boxes, we realized that the number in the list was not the number that we had picked. We reported to the supervisors that there were boxes missing, but they never fixed the problem, and up until today, we still have not received wages for those boxes."

CLIENT COURAGE KEY TO LEGAL VICTORIES

Throughout CRLA history, workers' courage to speak up about unfair treatment—even in the face of employer retaliation and intimidation—has been key to important victories that have shaped labor law.

Maria, a plaintiff in the Oxnard case, pointed out, "I complained to my supervisors about the theft of the boxes. I was fired without being paid my last check. When my employer steals wages, my family and the families of others suffer. These injustices shouldn't happen but when one keeps quiet, they will only continue."

Fellow plaintiff Leonardo added, "I want workers who have suffered violations like me to know that raising our voice creates change. That is why we are doing this together. Let's stop being afraid and start using our voice."

As Angelica Preciado, Directing Attorney for CRLA's Agricultural Worker Program in the Oxnard office, said, "It is unacceptable that farmworkers whose labor is so essential and contributes so much to the infrastructure and wellbeing of our nation should have to put up with stolen wages."

Together with our clients we will continue to challenge the exploitative actions of corporations in our legal system and insist that no one is above the law.



2023

More Highlights

CRLA provides free civil legal services that can keep people and communities safer and more stable. Here are three examples from this year.

(MADERA) KEPT A SINGLE MOTHER AND HER FAMILY IN THEIR HOME

Mirella C. was on Paid Family Leave after giving birth, but the partial income did not fully cover her expenses as a single mother navigating her own disability. Unable to make her mortgage payments, she was soon in default on her loan. She returned to work early only to lose her job a few weeks later when the Madera Community Hospital closed due to financial shortfall caused by increased demand from the on-going pandemic. She reached out to CRLA's Madera office for help to keep her family in their home. With the legal assistance of CRLA staff, she was able to secure \$10,165.25 from California's Homeowner Assistance Fund, authorized by the American Rescue Plan Act.

(STOCKTON) ENSURED PROPER ENFORCEMENT OF EVICTION PROTECTIONS

In late 2022, CRLA's statewide Tenant Justice Project (TJP) discovered that some landlords were incorrectly arguing that a City of Stockton ordinance only applied if a tenant met all the protected characteristics—for example, a tenant had to be both over 65 years of age and COVID-affected to be protected from eviction. The TJP team took legal action to push back on the unlawful evictions in Stockton and won, keeping our clients in their homes. The TJP team heard from judges that they had their research attorneys confirm the Stockton ordinance does indeed specify that tenants need only be in one of the classes (e.g. over 65 or COVID-affected) to be protected from eviction. CRLA was there to represent Stockton tenants' rights and ensure more judges and lawyers properly applied the local ordinance.

(SALINAS) EXPANDED PESTICIDE EXPOSURE PROTECTIONS

CRLA's Medical Legal Partnership team won a victory in a lawsuit against the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) and Dow Agrosiences in March 2023 when an Alameda Co Superior Court justice ruled that the California Department of Pesticide Regulation must revise its rules to provide greater protection to farmworkers exposed to a cancer-causing pesticide 1,3-dichloropropene, or 1,3-D, manufactured by Dow Chemical under the brand name Telone. DPR's previous rules were designed to protect only "non-occupational/residential bystanders" but left out "occupational bystanders," including farmworkers, from protections. Telone is a soil fumigant that is the third-most heavily applied pesticide in California's fields, though it is banned in 34 countries. CRLA will continue to monitor DPR to ensure it complies with the Court's order.



DONOR PROFILE:

Doug Grijalva

Retired attorney, Texas

WHY DO YOU DONATE TO CRLA?

We have few heroes in life and Ralph Abascal is mine. I met Ralph in 1971 when he was head of litigation at San Francisco Neighborhood Legal Assistance Foundation (SFNLAF). I started working at SFNLAF to fulfill my two-year alternative service requirement as a conscientious objector.

At that time Ralph was advising then State Senator George Moscone on California's 1971 Welfare Reform Act (WRA). Moscone knew the WRA would pass and his intent was to set up lawsuits Ralph could file against the legislation. And he did—Ralph filed 29 class action suits against the WRA in federal and state courts and won all but two.

I worked at SFNLAF as a paralegal representing welfare recipients who had grant terminations. I watched how Ralph approached his work. He had such compassion for his clients. He had a strong sense of right and wrong and always represented the little guy.

Ralph would ask me for my comments and edits on the briefs he was writing. He showed me an immense amount of respect and was an incredible mentor. In his view, everyone had something to contribute. He didn't care what your background or degree status was, he cared if you were thoughtful, intelligent, and cared about other people.

Ralph was the one who encouraged me to go back and finish my BA and then get my JD. I went to Berkeley Law School with a recommendation from Ralph. As I continued in my career in litigation, I constantly found myself thinking of things I learned from him.

When he died, I thought, the world needs to remember this guy. Donating to CRLA—an organization that he believed in and where he worked most of his career—seemed like a fitting way to honor his memory.

HOW DID YOU FIRST LEARN ABOUT CRLA?

I first learned about CRLA once I started working with Ralph at SFNLAF. He was very connected to CRLA, he had worked at the [Salinas and] Marysville office after finishing law school and worked with attorneys from CRLA on some of the WRA class actions. After his tenure at SFNLAF, he chose to return to CRLA as General Counsel for most of his legal career. He was brilliant, a giant legal mind. I admired and respected Ralph and his commitment to CRLA and the important work it was doing and continues to do.

HOW DO YOU DONATE TO CRLA?

I make an annual gift in memory of Ralph. Last year, I also gave to the Jose Padilla Fellowship Fund. Jose and I overlapped at Berkeley Law, but only connected through my donations in Ralph's name; beyond that personal connection, supporting law fellows is a way to pay forward and allow others to follow Ralph's example.

DO YOU TELL OTHERS ABOUT YOUR SUPPORT OF CRLA?

CRLA isn't widely known here in Texas where I live, but I will always take the opportunity to tell people about Ralph and I mention that I support CRLA as a way to honor him and the important work CRLA does. It's a tremendous organization.

Join Doug by making a tribute gift to honor a loved one, mentor, or even a current CRLA staff member. You can make your gift online at crla.org or contact our Individual Giving Director Susana Rodriguez at srodriguez@crla.org or (510) 267-0762 ext. 1028.

Support the Next Generation of Justice Lawyers

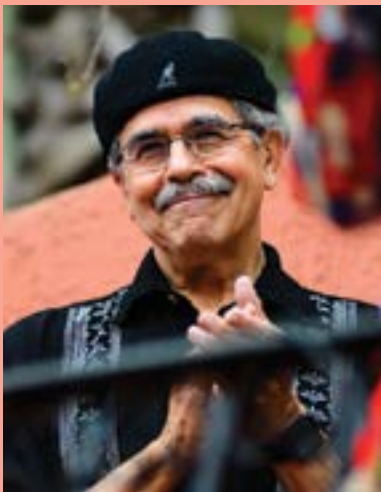
A recent California Bar study found that “experience interning at a public interest organization is the strongest predictor of a student maintaining plans to pursue a public interest career after graduation.”

More interns and fellows becoming public interest lawyers means more access to justice for people who can't afford private legal services.

You can ensure students and graduates connect with CRLA! Promote us for fellowships offered by your firm, foundation, or alma mater or donate to the José Padilla Fellowship Fund.

“Through the Shartsis Friese LLP Public Interest Fellowship, our firm has been proud to support CRLA's impactful work providing direct legal services to low-income residents of Sonoma and Napa counties, including farmworkers.”

-Cristina Rubke, Of Counsel at Shartsis Friese LLP and administrator of the Shartsis Friese LLP Public Interest Fellowship



JOSÉ PADILLA FELLOWSHIP FUND

When you make a gift to the José Padilla Fellowship Fund, you can shape careers and change lives by bringing more early-career attorneys to rural California.

Launched upon his retirement in 2022, the José Padilla Fellowship Fund honors José's leadership by enabling more law students and recent graduates to work at CRLA and benefit from the unique opportunities and mentoring we offer.

To donate to the José Padilla Fellowship Fund, please visit crla.org/PadillaFellowships. Alternatively, call our Development Department at (510) 267-0762 ext. 1005. Thank you for your support!

California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization, Federal Tax I.D. Number 95-2428657.

2022 Annual Report

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2022 FINANCIALS

California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc.
Statement of Activities
For the Year Ended December 31, 2022

SUPPORT, REVENUE & OTHER INCOME	WITHOUT DONOR RESTRICTIONS	WITH DONOR RESTRICTIONS	TOTAL
Grant Revenue	\$ 774,080.00	\$ 19,991,066.00	\$ 20,765,146.00
Contributions	\$ 287,570.00	\$ 106,491.00	\$ 394,061.00
In-Kind Contributions	\$ 104,700.00	--	\$ 104,700.00
Attorneys Fees and Cost Recovery	\$ 184,662.00	\$ 81,938.00	\$ 266,600.00
Fundraising Events	\$ 124,639.00	--	\$ 124,639.00
Other Revenue	\$ 151,646.00	\$ 77,128.00	\$ 228,774.00
Net Assets Released From Restrictions	\$ 21,096,042.00	\$ (21,096,042.00)	\$ --
Total Support, Revenue, Other Income & Fundraising Events	\$ 22,723,339.00	\$ (839,419.00)	\$ --
EXPENSES			
Program Services	\$ 18,479,322.00	--	\$ 18,479,322.00
Management & General	\$ 3,561,219.00	--	\$ 3,561,219.00
Fundraising	\$ 783,822.00	--	\$ 783,822.00
Total Expenses	\$ 22,824,363.00		\$ 22,824,363.00
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	\$ (101,024.00)	\$ (839,419.00)	\$ (940,443.00)
NET ASSETS - START OF YEAR	\$ 5,136,233.00	\$ 2,737,528.00	\$ 7,873,761.00
NET ASSETS - END OF YEAR	\$ 5,035,209.00	\$ 1,898,109.00	\$ 6,933,318.00

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For complete financial statements, please visit www.crla.org/financials



CALIFORNIA RURAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE, INC.

Mission Statement

To fight for justice and individual rights alongside the most exploited communities of our society.

Our Vision of Justice

A rural California where all people are treated with dignity and respect and guaranteed their fundamental rights.

Theory of Change

The legal system can either protect the rights of marginalized people or maintain and deepen control of the powerful. CRLA works with low-income communities in varying ways that utilize our legal system to create a more just society. We fight together to protect and expand rights, ensure access to resources, and create opportunities in rural California.

To learn more about our work, please visit www.crla.org.



