



RURAL JUSTICE

FALL 2025

magazine

CALIFORNIA RURAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE, INC.

2024 Annual Report

CLIENT STORIES:
Central Coast

CENTRAL VALLEY
Mobile Home Park Wins

DONOR SPOTLIGHT:
Donna & Joe Lovretovich

2025 - 2027
Strategic Plan



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LETTER FROM THE

President and CEO



Dear Friends,

As federal actions impact California, CRLA advocates in our 17 locations statewide are working hard to continue direct legal services that keep families and communities stable.

With access to CRLA, families have more options to protect themselves from loss of income, housing, healthcare, or education when a loved one is detained or deported or safety net programs close.

But we can't make up for the loss of opportunities or all the small acts of care and belonging that build mutually supportive relationships families and communities need to thrive.

That's why our community lawyering approach has always addressed urgent legal issues and pursued systemic advocacy to create higher-level change.

For almost 60 years, rural communities have worked with CRLA to imagine and insist on new possibilities for justice, from banning the short-handled hoe and DDT, to identifying and tackling environmental racism, to innovating solutions like cooperative community ownership of mobile home parks.

The future is not yet determined. But it is hard work to care for each other and create something new. Especially now, as more of the tools used for past civil rights victories disappear.

You'll see on page 10 that we've launched an ambitious 2025-2027 strategic plan. One of our most important goals is to ensure all clients have access to all our services in every county where we work, and to keep those services free of charge.

To do this, we need more people power and diversified funding as federal funding for civil legal services comes under attack.

Your support matters now more than ever. I invite you to find your place in the CRLA ecosystem:

- **Donate!** Use the attached envelope or visit crla.org.
- **Volunteer** with us.
- Nominate CRLA for a **cy pres award**.
- Recommend us for your **firm or company giving**.

Your generosity will join with that of many others to not only fight back against what is happening now but insist on and create new possibilities. Thank you!

In solidarity,

Jessica M. Jewell
President and CEO

CRLA Events

At CRLA, we say “justice starts with community.” It’s a motto that reflects our community lawyering approach with clients, but it also applies to you, our wider community of supporters and allies.

COACHELLA MEET AND GREET



SACRAMENTO MEET AND GREET



STOCKTON GROUNDBREAKING



SF PRIDE PARADE



BAY AREA MEET AND GREET



LOS ANGELES TARDEADA 2024



EL CORTITO 50TH ANNIVERSARY



MODESTO GROUNDBREAKING





DONOR SPOTLIGHT:

Joe and Donna Lovretovich

TARDEADA SPONSORS

Joe Lovretovich, Signature Resolution, Neutral
Donna Lloyd Lovretovich, former director of intake and legal investigations

HOW DID YOU FIRST LEARN ABOUT CRLA?

Joe: CRLA really hit my radar about 15 years ago.

I went to a seminar and one of the speakers was a CRLA attorney. He told his story, how he was from a farmworker family, got a scholarship and went to Berkeley Law School. He became an attorney, and, you know, people who went to Berkeley Law in those days always went to white shoe law firms. He didn't do that. He went back and went to work for CRLA. I was impressed with that, so I wanted to know more about CRLA.

I also knew [late Los Angeles Tardeada host] Tomás Olmos, and I think his education and career experience was similar.

So I was really very impressed with CRLA, because these were people who could've gone anywhere to work and they chose to work for the cause. And so I started donating. I only wish I'd known about CRLA earlier in my career, I might have gone to work for them.

WHY DO YOU DONATE TO CRLA?

Donna: I grew up in Waco, TX. We didn't have a lot. My dad did some farming, and I remember when the workers would come across the border to help him get the hay in and all of those things. Without them, I don't know how he would have done what he did.

I also had the example of my grandmother, who sewed for the Methodist Children's Home. She always volunteered and was a champion for the underdog.

I always said when I grew up, I was going to remember where my roots were from.

Joe: I connected with the farmworker movement in the 60s, as a student at a predominantly Hispanic high school. Cesar Chavez was everyone's idol.

Both Donna and I always followed Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. In my career as an attorney in private practice, my firm for 30 plus years did nothing but plaintiff employment law. Over 40% of our clients were Hispanic and many lived in the Central Valley, we helped with a lot of wage claims. I learned a lot from my

relationships with them. The more effort we can make to humanize people, to not make "others."

Donna: As kids growing up in central Texas, we knew there were hay farmers and this and that, but we didn't know where our onions came from. In adulthood, now I know: someone toiled this land, someone planted this. And once you see it, you can't unsee it.

We also have a close relationship with our grandkids and son-in-law, his mother was a migrant worker and he at 14 years old was working with her in the fields. He eventually went on to serve three tours in the military. But his experience growing up is still with him, it's so different from what our grandkids' lives are like.

Joe: We started taking our grandkids to CRLA events with us, mostly the Tardeada. We wanted them to know about the work and hear the speakers, because this is part of their heritage, too.

HOW DO YOU DONATE TO CRLA?

Joe: As I started doing well in my career, it was easier for me to make larger donations. We started going to the Tardeada, and we've been staunch supporters ever since.

We donate every year to the Tardeada. We always bring guests, too. One attorney I brought to the last one, he said, "This is really great, I wish I'd known about this earlier." I said, "Well now you know about it, so next year, I want to see you here." He asked how I got the extra tickets and I said, "We do a sponsorship." "But isn't that expensive?" I said, "It's worth it. I expect to see you."

Donna: Write that check! Buy the artwork! When Art Carrillo, the creator of "Untitled Beauty" told the story about how he took the piece to parks and invited kids to add to it, I loved that. Kids had their hands on this piece. What really got me is what's written on the side of it: "Be who you are." In a kid's handwriting. It was sitting on the easel and I saw that and thought, "oh that's coming home with us."

Joe: I was determined I was going to get that. I would've kept bidding.

DO YOU TELL OTHERS ABOUT YOUR SUPPORT OF CRLA?

Joe: When people ask where they should donate, I tell them CRLA. That's the best value for your donation, it hits the ground almost immediately.

I've always thought that CRLA probably more than any other legal aid group does more on the ground for the communities they serve. CRLA are trailblazers in the law, they are a powerful force to be reckoned with. You can look all the way back to the days of the [farmworker movement] strikes when CRLA first started, and what an integral part they played. That's always been meaningful to me.

Donna: I love the fact that CRLA represents people who need a strong arm to lean on. I know that each case that Joe had at his firm, that we had our hands on, that left a mark on our lives, their lives.

I'm the kind of person who, when it comes my time and they close the lid on me, I'm going to say, "wait, wait, but who's going to do this?" Pretty much my heart on my sleeve. If not me, who? If not you, who? If not us, who? You have to do it. We have to do it.

Celebrate CRLA's 60th Anniversary as a 2026 event sponsor!
Contact events@crla.org for details.

Pitfalls and Possibilities in Mobile Home Laws

California's rural communities deserve to be heard in our courts, in public agencies, and in every decision-making space. Your support has helped amplify their voices, and the incredible victories of Comunidad Nuevo Lago and Lazy Wheels Mobile Home Park prove the power of community lawyering as we practice it at CRLA.

Both stories demonstrate the critical importance of removing mobile home parks—one of the last bastions of affordable home ownership in the United States—from the speculative investment market and into the hands of residents and non-profits that will ensure long-term affordability.



NUEVO LAGO: FROM UNINHABITABLE TO RESIDENT-OWNED

Nuevo Lago, as it is now known, is a mobile home park and the home of a tight-knit community of agricultural workers, mostly immigrants from the same small Indigenous community, San Miguel Cuevas, in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Residents worked with our Fresno office to challenge unlawful practices by a new corporate landlord who had recently acquired the park they had lived in peacefully for decades.

Upon acquiring the park, the new owner stopped maintaining the onsite sewer system, causing an unbearable odor to fill the park. In addition, the new owners drastically increased rent and water rates to unsustainable levels and issued eviction notices demanding compliance with unreasonable new park rules.

CRLA assisted residents in forming a resident association, Grupo Comunitario de San Miguel Cuevas ("Grupo Comunitario"), that included nearly every family in the park. Grupo Comunitario, represented by CRLA and our co-counsel partners Morrison Foerester and the Western Center on Law and Poverty, filed litigation against the owners for failure to maintain the park, and violation of civil rights and mobile home laws.

LANGUAGE JUSTICE KEY TO COMMUNITY LAWYERING SUCCESS

During the ensuing years-long legal battle, CRLA included Grupo Comunitario in all aspects of case decision making; this was made possible by CRLA's Language Justice Initiative and IT department's active and ongoing role in the case, which allowed CRLA to conduct client meetings with over 50 families, in three languages: Spanish, English, and Mixteco de San Miguel Cuevas.

CRLA also fought tirelessly for the language justice rights of our clients in the litigation process, including taking opposing counsel to court to fight back against their attempts to force our clients to testify under oath using an interpreter who did not speak the same variant of the Indigenous Mixteco language as our client community.

During the years of litigation, CRLA's community workers provided everyday support to families—building trust, supporting leadership development, and helping the community stay organized through worsening conditions. Despite constant pressure and hostility from the park owners, not one of CRLA's client families was evicted from their homes.

CRLA CLIENTS LEAD ON RESIDENT OWNERSHIP OF MOBILE HOME PARKS

The community group became even more united and vocal about their struggles. Residents began engaging with their local representatives and vocalizing their experiences to the media, all while participating in the legal fight.

As the community stepped into their power, it became clear that the Nuevo Lago community had a much bigger vision for how their community could thrive. To become affordable again, the park needed to be owned and operated not by corporate investment companies dedicated to maximizing profits, but by an entity committed to preventing displacement of its long-time residents.

When an opportunity arose for residents to potentially buy the park from its owner, residents rose to the challenge and the next chapter of the fight.

To pursue residents’ goals of community ownership, CRLA joined forces with the California Center for Cooperative Development, and the Community and Economic Development Clinic at UC Irvine Law.

With their help, after almost half of a decade of fighting, the residents of Comunidad Nuevo Lago achieved an historic victory and purchased their mobile home park as a cooperative in 2024, securing permanent affordable housing and keeping their community intact.

ADVOCATES NATIONWIDE LOOK TO INDIGENOUS FARMWORKERS’ EXAMPLE

What began as a request for help with basic habitability issues evolved into a powerful vision for the community’s self-prosperity.

Today, the cooperative owns and runs their own mobile home park and has elected a board, hired property managers, and maintained affordability requirements—ensuring long-term housing stability and a future for their children.

Comunidad Nuevo Lago was one of the first resident-owned mobile home communities in California, and the first owned by a primarily farmworker and Indigenous community.

As Mariah Thompson, one of CRLA’s senior litigators said, “We have never seen anything of this kind before.”

Other communities and advocates around the nation are now looking to Nuevo Lago’s success as a creative solution to preserve mobile homes, one of the last remaining affordable housing options for so many U.S. residents.

LANGUAGE JUSTICE AT CRLA

Language justice has always been part of how we work, starting with pairing attorneys with community workers who could communicate with clients in their preferred languages.

We continue to advance equity for people who use non-dominant spoken and signed language, from inclusive services for CRLA’s immigrant, Deaf, and Indigenous clients to systemic advocacy for language rights.

Together with key collaborators in legal aid and language justice, we are also building a network of skilled community legal interpreters across California.

Our Engaged Interpreting Training has become one of our most requested offerings and an important way we are expanding community-led justice. Learn more at crla.org/interpret.

LAZY WHEELS: A POWERFUL PRECEDENT FOR RURAL HOUSING JUSTICE

After enduring years of inhumane and dangerous living conditions, including garbage accumulation, sewage backups, extended power outages, fires, and the horrifying discovery of a decomposing body in a park-owned structure, residents of Lazy Wheels Mobile Home Park in Ceres took action.

In 2022, more than 20 park residents, represented by CRLA and co-counsel Michael Bracamontes, brought habitability litigation against the park’s notorious slumlord who defied repeated court orders, injunctions, and state enforcement actions mandating that the park be restored to livable condition.

The landlord retaliated, intentionally refusing to pay the park’s electrical and gas bills so that electric service was disconnected for more than six months, and gas was turned off to the park.

The landlord’s refusal to reconnect power led to tens of thousands of dollars in court sanctions against the park.

When the landlord still refused to comply, residents formed Lazy Wheels Unidos, a resident association, and filed new litigation seeking a receiver be appointed to take control of the park away from the owner and place it in the hands of a professional that would bring it up to code.

The judge, outraged by the landlord’s behavior, immediately indicated that he intended to impose a receivership. This new victory was the final push necessary to reach settlement in the case.

RESIDENTS OBTAIN \$880K SETTLEMENT AGAINST SLUMLORD PARK OWNER

Weeks before trial, residents obtained an \$880,000 settlement that will provide each family tens of thousands of dollars in relocation costs, waive all back rent and future rental payments, prohibit any family’s eviction, and provide the residents half a year to find safe, secure housing outside the park, which had been operating without a permit for years due to the unlivable conditions. Due to the residents’ efforts, power and gas service were also immediately restored to the park.

This win is more than a legal victory—it is a powerful precedent for housing justice in rural communities. It also reflects the resilience and courage of residents and the strength of holistic, community-centered legal work.

Our fight to preserve mobile home communities as vital anchors of affordability continues. The Nuevo Lago and Lazy Wheels Mobile Home Park victories add critical momentum to this growing area of advocacy, but the work is just beginning. Thanks to the leadership of these residents—and your support—we’re building a more just future for all Californians.

Rural Roots, Justice for All

2025-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN

Justice is a multigenerational legacy built over decades. Embracing our community-led work, CRLA engaged numerous stakeholders to create a three-year strategic plan that will focus our near-term efforts and set us up for long-term impact.

Our four plan pillars aim to amplify our local and national reputation, codify our model of community lawyering, and grow and sustain our work to dismantle unjust systems.

Over the next three years, CRLA will:

GROW TO CREATE SYSTEMIC CHANGE, INFORMED BY COMMUNITY GOALS

While our direct service work makes a significant incremental impact, our systemic advocacy can shorten the timeline to dismantle unjust systems and positively impact entire communities. Our community lawyering model integrates both approaches as equally necessary to meet our mission. As we work alongside and learn from rural communities, their insights will guide a phased organizational growth plan.

ENSURE ALL CLIENTS HAVE ACCESS TO ALL SERVICES REGARDLESS OF LOCATION

We will continue to operate as a statewide organization, leaning into our community lawyering model, while creating a streamlined organizational structure that ensures staff have what they need to deliver high-quality services in a sustainable and consistent way. This will include rebranding our field offices to Rural Justice Centers, focusing on building trust and relationships with the communities we serve.

DEVELOP OUR PEOPLE TO ACHIEVE OUR MISSION

The communities we serve, our staff, and board members are the heartbeat of CRLA's mission. We will promote a healthy organizational culture to reduce turnover, increase collaboration, and boost engagement of our staff and board.

CREATE THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR GROWTH AND MORE IMPACT

We will update, upgrade, and align our facilities, resource development, and technology systems to support advocacy, data gathering, and outcomes measurement. Our goal is to better understand our impact and continue to improve stewardship of resources and relationships.



What happens in our legal system shapes our shared future.

For nearly 60 years, CRLA's community lawyering has ensured that future includes all of us.

Supporters like you have kept CRLA's civil legal services free and accessible to generations of rural Californians.

Now more than ever, your generosity can shape our future for the better.

BUILD A LEGACY OF JUSTICE WITH YOUR GIFT TO CRLA TODAY.



IMPACT SPOTLIGHT

U.S. Army Veteran Prevents Homelessness

OXNARD

Thanks to our donors and partners, in 2024 we reached 86,000 people priced out of private legal services, and litigated cases that benefited thousands more. Read on to meet two of them.

Willa, a U.S. Army veteran, has lived in Oxnard for over 50 years. Thanks to a Housing Choice Voucher, she has been able to stay housed despite rising costs.

When a calculation error by the local housing authority led to a rent increase she couldn't afford, she worried about losing the stable home she'd created for herself and her grandson.

Willa challenged the rent increase, first preparing a written statement and then requesting a hearing. Still, the housing authority insisted the increase was correct.

She refused to give up. With legal services from CRLA, Willa succeeded in getting her rent back to an affordable level. Her case also increased efficiency and transparency for all of the housing authority's Section 8 recipients.



IMPACT SPOTLIGHT

H-2A Agricultural Worker Fights Labor Trafficking

SANTA MARIA

Rosaura came to California as an H-2A worker for a better economic future. But the job was not what she expected based on the employment contract.

The employer-provided housing was extremely overcrowded. Supervisors compelled her to work long hours with little sleep and insufficient food. She was not allowed to leave or have visits from friends or family.

When supervisors tried to take Rosaura's passport, her brother told her that was illegal. Still, she was unsure what to do until an acquaintance connected her with CRLA.

At CRLA, Rosaura was able to get legal services and support to obtain a U-Visa. Everything changed for her—she was free to find a new home and job where she felt safe. Now, she tells others about human trafficking and CRLA's services.



LAW FELLOW SPOTLIGHT:

David Cremins (HE/HIM)

Equal Justice Works Fellow, sponsored by The Vertex Foundation

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO PURSUE A FELLOWSHIP WITH CRLA?

Throughout law school, I was interested in the intersection of labor rights and climate change, especially the impacts of heat on workers. I thought CRLA would be a good fit for this project and they agreed. Thanks to funding from Equal Justice Works, The Vertex Foundation, and the Jose Padilla Fellowship Fund, I am currently working with the Agricultural Worker Program in Fresno, making my dream of working on these issues a reality.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR YOUR FELLOWSHIP?

My goals are to help enforce and strengthen heat protections for workers in California and around the country while expanding CRLA's work on agricultural health and safety. Into 2025 and beyond, I'm excited to take on more cases and projects which will, hopefully, help us move towards a world in which no one becomes ill, gets injured, or dies because of workplace hazards and environmental conditions.

WHAT DO YOU WISH PEOPLE IN OTHER AREAS OF CALIFORNIA OR THE U.S. KNEW ABOUT FRESNO?

Before moving to Fresno, I mainly lived in coastal cities, so being here has been eye-opening in many ways. Although often passed over, the Central Valley has so much to offer. I love sharing with friends and family what I'm learning about the rich history, diversity, and cultures of California's agricultural communities.

WHAT IMPACT DO YOU THINK YOUR FELLOWSHIP WILL HAVE ON YOUR CAREER?

No matter where my career takes me, I will be grateful to have begun it with a fellowship at CRLA. Every day at work, I have the opportunity to learn how to better represent clients and help combat the broader economic and legal forces that prevent low-income, rural Californians from accessing justice.

Support the next generation of justice lawyers – make a gift to the Jose Padilla Fellowship Fund

When you support fellowships at CRLA, you bring more early-career attorneys to rural California and increase access to justice for people priced out of private legal services.

Visit crla.org/PadillaFellowships to make your gift today!

Alternatively, call our Development Department at (510) 267-0762. Thank you for your support!

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Elizabeth Barricelli

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Ted & Julie Chandler

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CY PRES
NOMINATORS

We thank the following firms for nominating CRLA for cy pres awards that can advance the interests of class members when complete dispersal of award or settlement funds is not feasible.

Advocates for Worker Rights LLP
Blumenthal Nordrehaug Bhowmik De Blouw LLP
Capstone Law APC (5 nominations)
Clayeo C. Arnold, PC
Fitzpatrick & Swanston Justice Law Corporation (2 nominations)
Law Office of Louis H. Kreuzer II
Law Offices of Mark Yablonovich
Law Office of Santos Gomez (2 nominations)

Lawyers for Justice, PC (3 nominations)
Mallison & Martinez; Paul Strauss
McDowall Cotter Sutton Hague Law Corporation
The Markham Law Firm
Wilshire Law Firm, PLC

Tax-wise Giving

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

Tax law changes set to go into effect January 1, 2026 will affect deductibility of charitable contributions for many donors.

Accelerating giving in 2025 may help some donors maximize tax deductions for contributions and ensure as much of your giving as possible can support CRLA’s work.

For more information, we encourage you to reach out to your tax advisor or contact Monica Yu, CRLA’s Vice President of Resource Development, at myu@crla.org.

2024 FINANCIALS

California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc.
Statement of Activities
For the Year Ended December 31, 2024

SUPPORT, REVENUE & OTHER INCOME	WITHOUT DONOR RESTRICTIONS	WITH DONOR RESTRICTIONS	TOTAL
Grant Revenue	\$ 348,949	\$ 29,419,908	\$ 29,768,857
Contributions	\$ 270,361	\$ 122,001	\$ 392,362.00
In-Kind Contributions	\$ 1,605,607	--	\$ 1,605,607
Attorneys Fees & Cost Recovery	--	\$ 283,704	\$ 283,704
Cy Pres Awards	\$ 1,704,267	--	\$ 1,704,267
Other Revenue	\$ 143,954	--	\$ 143,954
Fundraising Events	\$ 112,041	--	\$ 112,041
Investment income, net	\$ 1,381,109	--	\$ 1,381,109
Net assets released from restrictions	\$ 30,630,057	\$ (30,630,057)	--
Total Support, Revenue, and Other Income, and Fundraising Events	\$ 36,196,345	\$ (804,444)	\$ 35,391,901
EXPENSES			
Program Services	\$ 25,112,131	--	\$ 25,112,131
Management & General	\$ 6,875,794	--	\$ 6,875,794
Fundraising	\$ 956,145	--	\$ 956,145
Total Expenses	\$ 32,944,070	--	\$ 32,944,070
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	\$ 3,252,275	\$ (804,444)	\$ 2,447,831
NET ASSETS - START OF YEAR	\$ 12,614,781	\$ 1,442,819	\$ 14,057,600
NET ASSETS - END OF YEAR	\$ 15,867,056	\$ 638,375	\$ 16,505,431

CRLA is funded in part by the Legal Services Corporation. As a condition of the funding it receives from LSC, it is restricted from engaging in certain activities in all of its legal work, including work supported by other funding sources. CRLA may not expend any funds for any activity prohibited by the Legal Services Corporation Act, 42 U.S.C. 2996 et seq, or by Public Law 104-134. Public Law 104-134 504(d) requires that notice of these restrictions be given to all funders of programs funded by LSC. For a copy of these laws or any other information, please contact Monica Yu, Vice President of Resource Development, at (510)267-0762.

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



CALIFORNIA RURAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE, INC.

Our Vision A just and equitable world where all communities prosper.

Our Mission To dismantle unjust systems through community lawyering.

Our Values **Radical**
We creatively and courageously challenge the status quo to transform things once viewed as radical into the expectation.

Compassionate
We foster a mutually supportive, caring environment for our clients, colleagues, and ourselves, so together, we can make a positive impact.

Community-led
We listen to, respect, and partner with our neighbors to shape our work, amplify their voices, and unlock our community power.

Committed to Justice
We advance justice and honor dignity by fighting for fairness, empowerment, and meaningful systemic change alongside our clients, colleagues, and community members

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



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