CALIFORNIA RURAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE, INC.

building bridges of justice

2016/17 PROSPECTUS FOR LAW FELLOWS
FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE, CHANGING LIVES
This prospectus provides sponsorship candidates with an overview of California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc.’s current program areas and instructions for submitting an application for sponsorship. You can learn more about our organization by visiting www.crla.org. If after reviewing the entire prospectus and our website, you still have questions about our work or the sponsorship, please email Mike Meuter at mmeuter@crla.org.

The mission of California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. is:

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

Thank you for your interest in becoming a part of California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc.
Overview and History

“We always felt that because we did not have money or other resources, we could never improve our lives. This experience has taught me that there are people out there who are willing to help you, no matter if you have money or not.”

Maria Guadalupe Pinedo, Client
Riverside, California

CRLA was established to represent farmworkers and other low-income families, communities and individuals in California. Fifty years later, we have seen many significant victories and improvements to the lives of those communities and families that we serve. Our work is the reason why we are and will continue to be the premiere legal aid provider on behalf of the California’s poor. The longstanding and loyal support that we have received has enabled us to reach over 43,000 Californians annually through offices throughout the state.

We continue to need motivated, intelligent and committed attorneys to help us address the challenges of persistent rural poverty in the 21st century. A recent study by the University of California, Davis found California’s Central Valley to have the highest concentration of extreme poverty in the United States, at the time, ranking 436 out of 436 districts nationwide. In California’s agricultural cities and towns, poverty has risen by double-digits in the past 20 years. California’s poorest counties are the rural counties. There is approximately one legal aid attorney for every 10,000 poor people in California and one for every 30,000 farmworkers in rural California. By this standard, we need to double if not triple the number of CRLA attorneys to represent the rural poor in a more equitable way.

If you join CRLA, you will be vital in making sure that those in California’s rural and low-income communities have access to justice. You will be doing this by helping maintain and strengthen CRLA’s capacity to conduct complex litigation and grassroots advocacy for our clients. Your work will be directly responsible for cultivating and nurturing justice throughout California.

José Padilla
Executive Director
Services and Current Programs

California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) provides free legal services to clients with a variety of needs, but focuses the majority of its litigation and advocacy on four areas: Labor and Employment, Education, Housing and Health. Below is brief description of CRLA work in each area, for a more extensive description of our services and our approach to legal service delivery, please visit our website.

**Labor and Employment**

CRLA represents hundreds of workers every year in administrative cases and workforce-wide lawsuits seeking unpaid wages. Over the course of the last year we have recovered more than $1 million in wages and penalties for workers subjected to unlawful working conditions in agriculture, landscaping, restaurants and other businesses that are part of California’s underground economy. CRLA has also successfully represented workers who have been subjected to termination and harassment because they complained about working conditions or were singled out due to their race, gender or sexual orientation. CRLA also monitors state and federal agencies charged with enforcing these important labor protections to ensure that low-wage workers, immigrants and non-English speakers have access to complaint procedures.

**Education**

CRLA provides legal assistance to children, youth and their parents/guardians in individual discipline cases, school assignment issues, special education and language access issues. CRLA has conducted community outreach and education to parent groups on their rights to receive services under the Local Control Funding Formula and California’s programs for limited English speaking children. CRLA has also filed litigation and administrative complaints challenging disciplinary actions based on gang profiling, school closures and reorganizations adopted without adequate notice to non-English speaking families, and the diversion of migrant education money to other programs.

**Housing**

CRLA works across the state to provide assistance to those who face unlawful evictions, unhealthy housing conditions, and emergency housing relocation. This work has included the evaluation of local housing elements and the coordination of litigation, advocacy and community education strategies that help ensure the provision of safe, accessible and affordable housing in a number of counties across California. Housing counseling is also offered to first-time home buyers to help them avoid predatory lending and to ensure that low-income community members invest in housing that is safe, secure and affordable.
Rural Health

CRLA provides direct legal services in areas that help to improve the health and well-being of low-income, working families. We view health broadly—considering the availability of direct health services and the impact of environmental factors on health outcomes for our client community. CRLA also represents clients at administrative hearings regarding social security, food stamps, Medi-Cal and other public benefits; and we provide litigation support and referrals to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

CRLA serves a diverse community across California, from Santa Rosa to the U.S./Mexico border. Throughout our twenty-three offices, every effort is made to provide services in a culturally competent and linguistically accessible manner. With 40 percent of Californians speaking a language other than English at home¹, bilingual and bicultural staff are an integral part of the CRLA strategy for serving the most hard to reach and in need.

In addition to direct legal services, the CRLA staff manages a number of state-wide programs and initiatives that address a wide range of issues. Below are a sample of these programs and initiatives.

Rural Health Disparities Program

CRLA’s Rural Health Disparities Program aims to increase meaningful access to quality health care for California's poor rural communities. The Program provides legal advocacy to those facing barriers to health coverage and/or necessary medical services. The Program's current focus is to increase culturally and linguistically appropriate community education on the Affordable Care Act.

A major component of this Program is providing health consumer assistance to Imperial County residents through Health Care Consumer Center of the Imperial Valley based out of CRLA’s El Centro office. CRLA’s El Centro office is part of the Health Consumer Alliance, a network of community-based organizations providing direct legal services to low-income clients to help them gain and/or maintain health insurance. The center also provides legal advocacy regarding accessing essential medical services.

¹ U.S. Census 2000
The Community Equity Initiative

Securing Safe Drinking Water and Basic Infrastructure by reversing Decades of Exclusion of Disadvantaged Communities from Public Decision-making.

Throughout California hundreds of thousands of people live in Disadvantaged, Unincorporated Communities (DUCs). DUCs range from urban pockets that are excluded from cities, to more remote, densely settled rural communities. Residents in these communities often live without the most basic features of a safe and healthy environment - potable drinking water, sewer systems, safe housing, public transportation, access to healthy food, sidewalks, streetlights and parks - due to decades of systematic neglect and exclusion from formal decision making by city, county and state governments.

The Community Equity Initiative (CEI) is an interdisciplinary effort designed to address and eliminate social, political and environmental factors that negatively impact DUCs. Through legal advocacy, policy advocacy and community education, the CEI fights alongside community leaders to advocate for equitable development, promote environmental justice, guarantee fair representation and build leadership capacity in DUCs, so that residents can engage meaningfully in decision-making processes to improve their neighborhoods and expand opportunities.

Fair Housing Initiative

CRLA operates a state-wide Fair Housing Initiative under the guidance of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). We work to assist people who believe they have been victims of housing discrimination. CRLA became a HUD-approved agency in 2001, and has worked on fair housing cases across the state with a particular focus on the needs of farm-worker communities and of those living in unincorporated areas. Through the delivery of housing education, community outreach and legal consultation, CRLA has reached over 6,000 clients to ensure that housing practices in rural California are fair, accessible and affordable.

LGBT Program

CRLA is dedicated to increasing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights in rural California by improving access to justice and expanding civic engagement opportunities for LGBT communities. Our innovative approach addresses the intersection of race, ethnicity and poverty within the advancement of rural LGBT rights. Our focus is safety, wellness and education equity. CRLA works with families, students, school districts, district attorney’s offices, housing authorities and local nonprofit organizations to achieve our goals. CRLA’s LGBT Program provides education and legal services through several targeted projects including: Proyecto Poderoso, which provides training, resources and advising to ensure rural legal service organizations are welcoming, respectful and
able to serve low-income LGBT clients; Rural Youth Summits which include are a series of LGBTQ Youth workshops where parents and youth can learn about their children’s rights at school and how to ensure those rights are being protected, and the Anti-violence Project, which works closely with District Attorney’s offices in rural counties so LGBT victims of hate crimes and domestic violence are treated with respect and care.

**Indigenous Program**

In 1993, CRLA launched the Indigenous Farmworker Project to meet the needs of California’s growing voiceless indigenous Mexican farmworker communities. Now known as the Indigenous Program, it provides legal advocacy and educational outreach and supports leadership development in California’s rural indigenous Mexican and Central American communities. Most of California’s indigenous populations are from rural areas in southern Mexico, and their population has drastically increased over the past two decades. (It is estimated that today, one in four California farmworkers are indigenous Mexicans.) Indigenous groups speak dozens of distinct languages; among the most widely spoken in California are Mixteco, Zapateco, Triqui and Purepecha. For more than twenty years, the Indigenous Program has partnered with indigenous clients, communities, and organizations throughout California in order to develop sustainable solutions to the challenges they face.
2016-17 Developing Projects

CRLA is particularly interested in matching fellows to a small number of hard-to-serve communities\(^2\) and to a limited number of ongoing initiatives within the organization. The descriptions below are offered as departure points for candidates to refine, broaden and develop in more detail. Candidates should only submit a project initiative that they are passionate about and genuinely interested in developing further.

**Access to Water and Water Quality** (Delano or Fresno)

In hundreds of rural communities throughout California, residents cannot count on clean, affordable water. Many communities have water contaminated by nitrates, arsenic, pesticides and other dangerous contaminants while at the same time paying in excess of 10% of their salary on undrinkable water and wastewater services. The same communities do not have and cannot afford sidewalks, streetlights, parks, or other elements of basic infrastructure. CRLA seeks to develop legal and community–based strategies for addressing the lack of basic infrastructure, including access to clean water for migrant farm workers and low-income, rural communities.

**Low-Wage Worker Project** (Santa Barbara or Watsonville)

In coastal California, the economy runs on tourism and the low-wage jobs that support it. Dishwashers, cooks, housekeepers, home caregivers, and maintenance people labor behind the scenes without adequate pay, meal or rest breaks, often in unsafe or unhealthy conditions with unreasonably high workloads. They are frequent victims of discrimination and harassment, particularly sexual harassment on the job. These working conditions are coupled with some of the highest housing costs in the nation, allowing employers to take advantage of workers’ needs to stay employed at one or more low-wage job to make ends meet. CRLA is working on the central coast in Santa Cruz, Monterey, and Santa Barbara to reach out to these workers through a targeted campaign of community legal education and direct representation, and to build alliances with workers and community organizations to bring the tourist industry into compliance with California labor law protections.

**Sexual Harassment Against Farmworker Women** (Fresno, Salinas, or Stockton)

Thousands of women work in the California agricultural industry, in fields, packing sheds and nurseries. About 80 percent of farmworker women experience different forms of sexual harassment. Farmworker women continue to be fearful of coming forward with their experiences, for different reasons including fear of losing their jobs and language barriers. When they do complain, they and their families are often retaliated against. CRLA is a leader in this fight and has represented farmworker women in enforcing their rights against sexual

\(^2\) These communities include Coachella, Delano, Fresno and Marysville
harassment. CRLA seeks to educate and empower farmworker women to prevent and stop sexual harassment in their workplace, through community education, advocacy and direct representation.

**Education Advocacy and Parental Rights** (Delano, El Centro, Modesto, Oxnard, Santa Rosa, or Stockton)

California has completely restructured its school finance system in a manner that will result in increased local control over programs for Limited English Proficient (LEP/ELL) students, and the supplemental funding provided for schools with high enrollment of economically disadvantaged students. It includes an accountability system that is less dependent on state oversight and relies mostly on effective monitoring by county officials and through parent driven complaints. The new school finance system includes a significant role for parent participation and involvement in the development at the local level of programs designed to supplement services in economically disadvantaged schools. CRLA is looking for a Fellow interested in participating in developing and helping implement CRLA’s statewide approach to ensuring that local districts meet their obligations to ensure equal access to LEP students and economically disadvantaged students. The project will require a community education and outreach strategy, local leadership development, monitoring of school districts and county offices of education, complaint processing, involvement in regulatory proceedings and possible litigation in districts that have failed to comply with the statutory and state constitutional mandates for equal educational opportunity.

**Education Advocacy and Involuntary Transfers to Alternative Education Programs** (Delano, El Centro, Madera, Modesto, Oxnard, Salinas Santa Rosa, or Stockton)

Alternative education programs are intended to serve students who are considered at risk of dropping out or are not successful in the traditional school environment. However, many of these programs fail to help these struggling students and have been described as “dumping grounds” for some of our highest needs students, including students of color who are low-income, limited English proficient, LGBT, have disabilities, and/or are court-involved youth. Alternative education placements such as continuation high schools, community schools and community day schools are places where many students exit the educational system. Up to 30% of California students do not graduate each year. CRLA seeks a Fellow interested in participating in developing community education and advocacy strategies designed to address the involuntary transfer of students to alternative education programs in rural school districts as well as to evaluate the quality of educational services provided to students in those programs. The project will require a community education and outreach strategy, Public Record Act requests, comparative analysis of model programs, data collection and analysis, work with education experts, direct representation of students facing school placement changes, and possible litigation in districts and counties that have denied students their right to due process in the involuntary transfer process and/or have denied students equal educational opportunity through substandard educational programs.
**Dairy Worker Project** (Fresno, Modesto, or Stockton)

Since 2003, CRLA began to aggressively represent dairy workers for a wide range of labor violations. The dairy industry is well organized and promotes a wholesome image. However, CRLA has shown the other side of the dairy industry, which profits by exploiting workers with industry-wide illegal practices, including failure to provide overtime, failure to provide rest and meal periods, failure to provide medical attention to injured workers, and retaliation against workers for exercising their rights, to name a few. CRLA represents and empowers dairy workers through administrative cases and workforce-wide lawsuits holding the dairy industry accountable for its illegal practices. CRLA also engages in outreach and education to dairy workers relating to labor laws, including health and safety laws.

**Improving Farm Worker Housing & Community Conditions** (Coachella, Marysville, or Modesto)

CRLA and a team of advocates, researchers and health practitioners are leading a comprehensive project to improve living conditions for farm workers, their families and communities by investigating and documenting the link between dangerous housing conditions, inequitable community conditions and poor health outcomes in low-income, rural, immigrant communities. CRLA seeks to enforce decent conditions in farm worker housing, have an impact on policy related to conditions, access to and affordability of farm worker housing, and to litigate significant cases where the legal analysis draws upon research related to the link between health and farm worker housing.

**Fighting Farmworker Age Discrimination** (Fresno or Stockton)

Age discrimination is a growing trend among the agricultural industry statewide. As farmworkers become older and more experienced, they are frequently replaced by younger workers, regardless of the fact that they can perform their duties effectively. However, these cases are difficult to prove as there is rarely any direct evidence. Many farmworkers are unaware of their rights against age discrimination. CRLA wants to develop outreach, advocacy and litigation strategies to address age discrimination against farmworkers.

**Temporary Foreign Worker Rights** (Santa Maria, San Luis Obispo, Oakland, Oxnard, or Salinas)

Currently California relies upon the recruitment and hiring of several thousand foreign temporary workers to work in agriculture and other low wage industries, including forestry, under the H-2A and H-2B programs. Those workers have been subjected to exploitation and abuse in prior years, being unlawfully charged recruitment fees, shorted wages, forced to perform work outside of the jobs they were hired for and unlawfully denied the benefits of their contract and protections under state laws.
The dramatic increase in H-2A workers has also raised a number of issues with respect to the mandatory housing required and has resulted in production standards and job requirements that are far beyond prevailing practices. Additionally, there have been documented incidents of employers displacing U.S. workers in order to hire the more vulnerable H-2A workers. CRLA is looking for a Fellow interested in participating in developing and helping implement CRLA’s statewide approach to either the temporary foreign worker program or the expanded use of H-2A workers. This would include development of a strategy for outreach, advocacy with state and federal agencies, individual representation and impact litigation.

**Language Access for Indigenous Communities** (Arvin, Coachella, Fresno, Oxnard, Salinas, Santa Maria, or Vista)

The population of indigenous Mexican immigrants living and working in California has increased drastically over the last two decades. However, indigenous community members remain largely invisible to many government agencies and service providers. Indigenous Mexicans speak dozens of different languages that are wholly unrelated to Spanish, and lack of access to culturally and linguistically appropriate services further marginalizes these historically exploited communities. CRLA seeks to enforce indigenous community members’ rights to language access in health care, schools, and public agencies, (including the courts, police departments, and local/county/state government) through strategic advocacy and community outreach.

**Enforcing Federal Minimum Wage for Farmworkers** (Fresno or Stockton)

Paying farmworkers piece rate wages is a common practice used by the agricultural industry in California. Although farmworkers can make above minimum wage under this system, a majority of farmworkers do not earn state or federal minimum wage. This is an industry-wide problem and allows growers and farm labor contractors to increase their profit while simultaneously exploiting workers. Employers frequently adjust the number of hours worked to a lower number to avoid paying minimum wages. Farmworkers are fearful of coming forward and often do not know they are entitled to state and federal minimum wage. CRLA hopes to educate farmworkers about their rights to minimum wage and further develop strategies to address this on a workforce and industry-wide basis.

**Rural Expansion of Managed Care Advocacy** (El Centro)

In 2012 the California Legislature authorized the mandatory expansion of Medi-Cal managed care into rural counties. The rural transition into managed care occurred in late 2013 for most populations and will continue in 2014 for some residual groups. The expansion of managed care is a cost-reducing measure for the Medi-Cal program. Advocates in rural counties are already seeing negative trends from this transition. Clients with special needs are struggling to receive
adequate specialty care. Further, there are emerging concerns about the fair hearing process against managed care plans. Rural populations, especially immigrants and the Latino community are often unaware of their rights under the managed care regime including the right to appeal decisions by the managed care plans. CRLA’s El Centro office is a member of the Health Consumer Alliance which provides legal assistance to low-income residents confronting barriers to health insurance and/or medical treatment. The prospective fellow would work out of the El Centro office to provide direct services to health clients while focusing on developing advocacy and litigation strategies to confront the unique problems facing rural communities in the managed care transition. The advocate would also work to develop community educational materials regarding managed care rights targeting immigrant populations and farmworkers.

Protecting Farmworkers, Their Families, and the Environment from Hazardous Pesticides (Salinas)

Over seventy-five million pounds of pesticides are applied to California farmlands each year. Some of these pesticides sicken farmworkers and poison farmworker communities and the environment. Recently, the California Department of Public Health issued a report showing that many school children in agricultural counties are at risk of exposure to pesticides from the high amounts of pesticides applied near the schools. Furthermore, Latino children are 91% more likely than Caucasian children to attend schools near the highest amounts of pesticide applications. Some of these pesticides have already been linked to developmental delays and illness, such as cancer. CRLA works to educate farmworkers of the risks posed by pesticides and represent farmworkers and farmworker families sickened by pesticides. We have successfully litigated cases in conjunction with major environmental organizations against pesticide producers and governmental agencies. We push for greater local enforcement of pesticide laws. As the number of studies linking pesticides to human illness increases, CRLA seeks to develop new strategies to protect farmworker communities from pesticides.

Preserve Affordable Housing in Rural California (Marysville and Salinas)

Many rural parts of California are experiencing an affordable housing crisis. Low-income residents dedicate more and more of their monthly income to afford rental housing. Low-wage workers in the profitable hospitality industry around the Monterey Bay and farmworkers working in the billion dollar agricultural industry of the Salinas Valley cannot afford to live in the communities they work. Yuba, Sutter, and Colusa counties suffer from significantly higher unemployment rates than most of the rest of California. As a result, families are forced to live in unsafe and overcrowded housing. CRLA seeks to ensure access to, development of, and the continued availability of decent, safe and sanitary affordable housing in the communities we serve. Advocates in this project will help individual tenants preserve their right to safe, affordable housing using tools such as California’s State Housing Law, fair housing and Housing Element Law, impact litigation, and outreach and education to help preserve and promote affordable housing in our region.
Becoming a CRLA Sponsored Fellow

CRLA seeks to sponsor law fellows who demonstrate a strong commitment to working with rural Californians and addressing the primary issues that affect their lives. CRLA offers sponsorship for application to law foundations and university fellowship programs, CRLA does not offer an independent fellowship.

CRLA has sponsored and hosted fellows from a wide range of foundations and universities including but not limited to:

- Berkeley Law Foundation
- Skadden
- Equal Justice Works
- Stanford Public Interest Law Foundation
- Ralph Abascal/ UC Hastings
- Tom H. Steele Fellowship Fund
- Loyola Law School Post-Graduate Public Interest Fellowship

The CRLA interview and selection process is completed prior to beginning the application process with the fellowship granting organization. CRLA selection involves the submission of an original cover letter, a description of the candidate’s proposed project, and a current resume. Materials are reviewed and discussed internally with primary consideration of the fit between the proposed project and current CRLA program areas and need.

The most promising candidates will be invited to participate in a phone interview with the CRLA Selection Committee before receiving a final sponsorship decision.

Once an offer for sponsorship is made, the candidate will have one week to accept or decline an offer before an alternate candidate is considered. Upon acceptance of an offer for sponsorship, the chosen candidate will work closely with a CRLA attorney or Program Director to finalize the project description and to assist with the completion of the official fellowship application.
Application Guidelines

Interested candidates should prepare and submit the following materials by email or FAX by July 27, 2016. Please do not mail hard copies unless requested.

☐ Cover Letter (1 page)
  o In your cover letter tell the committee why you are interested in working with CRLA.
  o Identify the fellowship/foundation you will be applying to, if selected.
  o Based on your knowledge of the organization, highlight the skills and experiences that you will bring to CRLA.
  o Describe what motivates you to work in public interest law.
  o Explain your motivation to work in a rural community. Describe any experiences you may have working or living in a rural community.
  o Identify any challenges you anticipate as part of working or living in rural California.
  o Briefly describe your project in one to two sentences.

☐ Project Description (1-2 pages)
  o In two or three paragraphs describe your area of interest and the parameters of your proposed project. Be sure to identify how your project is tied to the CRLA priorities and program areas listed beginning on page 3 of the prospectus.
  o In one or two paragraphs, describe the intended goals and outcomes of your project. The selection committee is looking for projects that will have concrete, measurable outcomes. One way to think about this is to ask what an outside observer would see one year of after the project is implemented.
  o Be specific as to the number of beneficiaries, location of beneficiaries and include some concrete measures of your success (e.g. local policy change, improved worker health, the establishment of a community training program, etc.)

☐ Current Resume

Email complete application packet to mmeuter@crla.org or FAX (831) 757-6212.