
Oakland, California – April 19, 2010 – Centro Legal de la Raza (Centro Legal) announced today that it is the recipient of the Shartsis Friese LLP Public Interest Fellowship. The three-year fellowship provided by the San Francisco law firm of Shartsis Friese will allow Oakland-based Centro Legal to add the equivalent of a full-time housing and employment attorney to its staff.

Centro Legal's core legal services provide counsel and advice, referral, brief services, and representation to 9,000 individuals and families each year in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. Services are provided through regular clinics and with the support of four staff attorneys, over 25 pro bono attorneys and numerous volunteer law students and college students. Centro Legal's services focus on issues of housing, immigration, employment, family law, and consumer protection.

"The fellowship will expand Centro Legal's housing and employment law practices at a time of intense community need," said Centro Legal's executive director Bianca Sierra. "During the economic and foreclosure crises, the demand for our services has significantly increased, as displaced workers seek unemployment benefits and unpaid wages and tenants fight eviction from foreclosed properties."

Fellows will provide direct legal services to people with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty level, especially immigrants and monolingual Spanish speakers. They will represent clients in court and administrative hearings, prepare court documents, and conduct research in preparation for hearings. Fellows will help operate the Tenants' Rights and Workers' Rights clinics by conducting individual consultations, drafting letters, preparing wage claims, negotiating with landlords and employers, drafting settlement agreements, and supervising volunteer law students.

"In evaluating the many worthy applicants to the Fellowship program, we were very impressed with the high-impact work that Centro Legal is doing in the local Latino community," said Geoffrey Haynes, Shartsis Friese partner and chair of the firm's Fellowship Committee. "We're very pleased to be able to support the work of such an effective legal services organization."

"The three-year term of this fellowship will help Centro Legal build the financial capacity to permanently maintain the new staff attorney position," said Sierra. "This fellowship will have a lasting impact on low-income Bay Area communities by expanding our services and preparing a cohort of attorneys to provide legal aid at the grassroots level."

About Centro Legal de la Raza

Founded in 1969 by Latino law students and located in Oakland's Fruitvale neighborhood, Centro Legal de la Raza is a comprehensive legal services agency protecting and advancing the rights of immigrant, low-income and Latino communities through bilingual legal representation, education, and advocacy. By combining quality legal services with know-your-rights education, Centro Legal promotes access to justice for thousands of individuals and families each year throughout the East Bay region of Northern California.

About the Shartsis Friese Fellowship

Established by the firm in 2004, the Shartsis Friese LLP Public Interest Fellowship was founded to help serve those members of the Bay Area community who cannot afford needed legal services. The Fellowship funds a staff attorney position at a local legal services organization each year for a three-year term. Each staff attorney, or Shartsis Friese Fellow, provides direct legal services to Bay Area residents in need of legal assistance. Previous recipients include the East Bay Community Law Center (2004 to 2006) and Bay Area Legal Aid (2007 to 2009). Founded in San Francisco in 1975, Shartsis Friese LLP has over 50 lawyers. The firm has extensive trial and business litigation experience and a complex transactional practice.