

**Passing the Torch:
The Closure of the East Palo Alto Community Law Project and
the Genesis of Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto, Inc.**

Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto, Inc., had its origins in a 12:20 a.m. telephone conversation on Tuesday, 14 May 2002, between two long-time East Palo Alto community housing activists over the decision of the East Palo Alto Community Law Project Board of Directors the previous evening to close down the Law Project, which had provided free legal services to the residents of East Palo Alto and Eastern Menlo Park for the past eighteen years. They convened a meeting of East Palo Alto residents on 31 May in the conference room of the original offices of EPA CAN DO, the site of meetings of the Housing Committee. The residents decided to form an Ad Hoc East Palo Alto Community Law Project Transition Committee to try to salvage the Law Project. Several had formerly been members of the Housing Working Group of One East Palo Alto, disbanded with all other working groups in March 2002. The Ad Hoc Transition Committee was committed to preserving and continuing free legal services for underserved individuals, families, and organizations. It was especially important to the Transition Committee to preserve legal services necessary to the effective functioning of the East Palo Alto Rent Stabilization Program. The intent of the Transition Committee was to retain the original Community Law Project with a new board committed to its preservation. It was a condition of the Community Law Project Board for permitting a community-based new board to replace the old board that lingering liability issues be satisfactorily resolved. When it was determined that they could not be, it was recommended that the proposed transition board form a new entity to provide legal services to the community. The transition board agreed to do so. The Transition Committee evolved into the first Board of Directors of Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto, Inc., committed to perpetuate the heritage of the former Law Project by expanding the programs beyond housing (e.g., eviction defense) to include a general civil practice under the Volunteer Attorney Program (VAP) as well as an immigration program. Eventually a juvenile justice program was added as well. Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto, Inc., commenced operations on Monday, 9 September 2002, with two employees from the former Law Project, Victor Ramirez, a paralegal, and ~~Jeanne Merino~~ as the supervising attorney in two offices at 1395 Bay Road, the site of the former Community Law Project, which ceased operations on 31 August 2002, prior to moving to the present location at 2117-B University Avenue several months later.

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