

BRINGING JUSTICE HOME

PRESS KIT BASICS

COMPONENTS

Reporters, like attorneys, work on very tight schedules, so it is very important to provide them with the essential details about your organization in a concise and easy-to-read format. A press kit is used to provide a reporter with a more complete picture of your organization and to amend/support facts a reporter collects from interviews or other research. As a general rule, press kits should be provided to a reporter only after initial contact with him/her or upon their request for more information. A designated spokesperson from your office (e.g., a board chair, executive director, or director of communications when applicable) should be the intermediary for all materials sent to reporters and for arranging all subsequent interviews with attorneys and clients.

A typical press kit contains the following components:

- A two-pocket folder with your organization's logo or name on the cover
- A brief fact sheet on your organization/**fact sheet** on Legal Aid in general
- One-page **biography** of your organization's principals and/or attorneys relevant to the case that is being publicized
- A one or two-page **press release** which details the case and how your organization was instrumental in helping a client or clients
- **Photographs** to illustrate a case. For example, **headshot** photos of the attorney(s) and clients relevant to a case, if available
- A **business card** of those attorneys interviewed and of the chief attorney or media spokesperson in the regional office
- If necessary, an attorney's **statement** on an ongoing case, which should not exceed 1-2 paragraphs

PRESS RELEASE

The fundamental questions a press release should answer are “**who?**”, “**what?**”, “**when?**”, “**why?**”, and “**where?**” As the enclosed sample press release in this toolkit illustrates, a release should have contact information and a release date at the top. A compelling headline capturing the central conflict or obstacle overcome for a client should precede a description of the client's problem and how civil legal aid assisted them. Language in a press release should be concise yet sufficiently persuasive that a reporter will still want to get the whole story from the sender.

A press release should also contain a quote from a litigating attorney or key spokesperson in the given case. The quote should be no more than three sentences in natural language, with a formal mention of how civil

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legal aid assists citizens in preserving equity and fairness, and how this particular case illustrates these principles.

In some cases, a short quote from a client may also be a compelling addition to the release. Similar to the attorney's quote, it should mention how civil legal aid helped preserve the client's rights when there was no other alternative.

Finally, a press release should conclude with what is commonly called a boilerplate, a one-paragraph mission statement from the organization. To indicate the end of a release, either type "30" or place three asterisks ("***") after the final boilerplate paragraph. For releases that are two pages long, "more" or "over" should be typed at the bottom of the first page.

FACT SHEET

A one-page fact sheet should briefly describe the history of the local civil legal aid office, highlight some well-known recent cases the office has won, and list the principals at the office. As is true in the press release, emphasis should be placed on how clients have been helped, more so than the actual process of litigation. The fact sheet should serve as a statement about the essential role that the local civil legal aid office plays in assuring fairness and equity to members of the local community.

BIO

Unlike a résumé or a curriculum vitae, a biography (or "bio") for media purposes encapsulates these sometimes-lengthy career and professional histories in a few paragraphs. Career highlights, including university and professional degrees, participation and leadership in national or regional organizations and landmark cases an individual has won, should be included in an attorney's bio. A bio may be tailored to fit the reporter to whom it is being sent, depending on that reporter's regular area of coverage.

STATEMENT

In certain circumstances—a particularly controversial case where reporters are demanding comment, for example—issuing a one-to-two paragraph attorney's statement can be an effective means of addressing a case while it is ongoing. Statements should only be released after careful consideration of the pros and cons, as they may impact ongoing litigation and their wording should be carefully chosen. Statements are typically issued in lieu of a press release and further comment is rarely provided at the time they are issued.