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NEW WEBSITE PUTS LAW WITHIN REACH FOR SPANISH SPEAKERS

***AyudaLegalIL.org empowers Illinois' booming Hispanic population
with free self-help legal resources***

CHICAGO, IL, January 23, 2012 – Hispanics in Illinois unable to afford an attorney now have an online Spanish-language resource to help them resolve their legal problems 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The new website, www.AyudaLegalIL.org, developed by Illinois Legal Aid Online and Legal Assistance Foundation (LAF), delivers easy-to-use, free legal information in more than two dozen areas of law.

[AyudaLegalIL.org](http://www.AyudaLegalIL.org), which is a mirrored version of the award-winning www.IllinoisLegalAid.org, provides zip code-based referrals to local legal services programs across the state and free, plain language legal information and resources for common legal problems. Interactive, Spanish-language legal guides contain frequently asked questions and answers, easy-to-understand definitions, step-by-step instructions, interactive forms, and videos on specific legal issues. The website makes navigating a confusing legal system easy and free to lower-income Spanish-speakers facing legal issues like domestic violence, mortgage foreclosure, immigration and more.

The rapid growth of Illinois' Hispanic population makes addressing the legal needs of Spanish-speakers more critical than ever before. According to 2010 Census data, Latinos have surpassed African Americans as the largest minority group in Illinois. Nearly 2.03 million residents, or 15.8 percent of the state population, are Hispanic. If current trends continue, the number of Latinos in Chicago could outnumber every other racial group by the year 2020.

"Illinois' population growth in the last ten years was fueled by the influx of Latinos into our state, many of whom are primarily Spanish speakers. As a result, the Illinois system of administration of justice must respond by educating this incoming population about their rights," said Salvador A. Cicero, President of the Hispanic Lawyers Association.

Cicero added: "The Hispanic Lawyers Association of Illinois supports the creation of Spanish language legal materials by Illinois Legal Aid Online. This is one of many crucial projects to

facilitate access to justice for Latinos, who – although growing in number – remain a highly marginalized demographic.”

While more Hispanics are using the Internet to find legal information, limited English proficiency remains a roadblock to them obtaining justice. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, 81 percent of Latino households in Illinois speak a language other than English. For those, finding meaningful legal answers in their native tongue is difficult, and the risk is great. Without the ability to understand the law, people can lose custody of children, continue to suffer abuse from a domestic partner, and fail to claim their rightful wages.

“The Latino community is in great need of information about how the court system works and what their options are,” said Adela Carlin, Director of Community Engagement at LAF. “A lot is lost in translation. If you receive information in your native language, it’s easier to understand and to ask questions. AyudaLegalIL.org is a great resource for Spanish speakers in Illinois.”

Illinois Legal Aid Online and LAF partnered with several organizations across the state to develop AyudaLegalIL.org’s rich library of resources. An Advisory Committee consisting of representatives from Prairie State Legal Services, Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation, Latinos Progresando, MALDEF, Catholic Charities Legal Assistance and National Immigrant Justice Center guided their efforts.

Development of this new website was funded by a two-year Technology Initiative Grant from the Legal Services Corporation to LAF.

About Illinois Legal Aid Online

Illinois Legal Aid Online is a nationally-recognized, groundbreaking statewide technology center for legal services. Since 2001, ILAO has put the law within reach for millions of lower-income, disabled, and vulnerable Illinois residents by developing technology and information to increase access to justice. For more information, please visit www.IllinoisLegalAidOnline.org.

About LAF

For over 40 years, the Legal Assistance Foundation (LAF) has provided free civil legal assistance to tens of thousands of low-income and elderly individuals in Chicago and suburban Cook County. LAF is dedicated to helping those who cannot afford legal counsel navigate the legal system and understand and safeguard their rights as a step toward achieving economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their families.

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