

2007 Annual Report

HALT

Simple • Affordable •
Accountable • Justice for All



1612 K Street, NW • Suite 510 • Washington, DC 20006
(202) 887-8255 • (202) 887-9699 fax • www.halt.org • halt@halt.org

From the Executive Director

As we celebrate our 30th Anniversary as the voice of America's legal consumers, all of us at HALT are rededicating ourselves to our core mission—working for simple, affordable and accountable justice for all.

But as every HALT member knows, instead of working for all of us, too often our legal system arbitrarily denies people access to our courts and unfairly shields unethical lawyers from answering for their misconduct. When this happens, it's not justice; it is legal tyranny.

It was the recognition of this sad reality in 1978 that led legal reformers Paul Hasse, Matt Valencic, Bob Tigner and Kathy Ekedahl to create a new public interest organization, HALT (Help Abolish Legal Tyranny).

For the next three decades HALT fought for three very basic American principles.

- We are entitled to a civil justice system that is fair, understandable and affordable.
- We deserve lawyers who are competent, honest and accountable.
- We should be able to control our own legal affairs as empowered consumers.

We proudly continue that fight today, deploying a sophisticated methodology that challenges the legal establishment on multiple fronts and empowers ordinary people. And we have a lot to show for it.

- HALT gets America's attention in the court of public opinion. We expose lawyer secrecy, outrageous costs and lack of accessibility. We lift the rock and shine a light on the legal establishment's most egregious policies and demand that lawyers meet basic ethical standards.

- HALT wins critical legislative reforms in statehouses across the country. Our small claims and probate bills increase access, affordability and effectiveness.

- HALT is not afraid to take on the lawyers on their turf—in court. HALT's *amicus curiae* briefs make sure that the voice of legal consumers is heard in key test cases across the country.

- HALT empowers consumers by arming them with the tools they need to take control of their personal legal affairs. Since 1978, we have distributed hundreds of thousands of self-help legal manuals and do-it-yourself legal guides that help ordinary people deal with the legal maze.

Here are a few highlights of our activities over the past year.

The *Lawyer Accountability Project* issued HALT's first *Fee Arbitration Report Card*, released a

Lawyer-Client Fee Dispute Resolution Best Practices Report, and persuaded California, Nevada and New Hampshire to implement critical reforms for victims of attorney malpractice.

The *Small Claims Reform Project* comprehensively updated consumer small claims information and resources on HALT's web site, and aggressively pushed to raise small claims dollar limits and enhance consumer protections in Hawaii, Massachusetts, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

The *Freedom of Legal Information Project* saw the District of Columbia adopt a HALT-endorsed reform with a new rule that narrowly defines the practice of law as requiring "a client relationship of trust or reliance." We also joined with the U.S. Justice Department, the Federal Trade Commission and other consumer advocates to force Hawaii and Wisconsin to shelve protectionist proposals for sweeping new definitions of the practice of law.

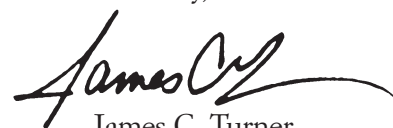
The *Judicial Integrity Project* issued the *Judicial Accountability Report Card*, the nation's first comprehensive study of the state and federal systems that remove dysfunctional and abusive judges, led judicial ethics experts in national symposia, and testified before the U.S. Judicial Conference supporting reform of the Judicial Code of Conduct and Rules of Disciplinary Procedure.

HALT's education program published a new **Citizens Legal Guide**, *Guardians & Guardianships*, unveiled a new web site on legal reform pioneer Fred Rodell, launched an online version of *Do-It-Yourself Law*, issued HALT's biweekly *eJournal* and quarterly newsletter, distributed more than 10,000 copies of self-help legal materials, and answered more than 1,000 individual requests for legal information.

It is with a very special sense of pride that HALT's dedicated members and staff look back on these accomplishments, but it is also with a realistic appreciation of the substantial reform work that still needs to be done.

All of us look forward to the next decade of legal reforms as we work to bring the promise carved on the U.S. Supreme Court building here in Washington — "Equal Justice Under Law" — closer to reality.

Sincerely,



James C. Turner
Executive Director
June 5, 2008

Advocacy

Since its founding in 1978, HALT has held steadfast in its mission of making the civil justice system more simple, affordable, and accountable for all Americans. Each component of HALT's advocacy program—the **Lawyer Accountability Project**, the **Small Claims Reform Project**, the **Freedom of Legal Information Project** and the **Judicial Integrity Project**—challenges the legal system to improve and each has enjoyed major successes over the past year.

Lawyer Accountability Project

The twin goals of HALT's lawyer accountability efforts are to make lawyers more responsive to legal consumers and to protect legal consumers from negligent, unscrupulous and incompetent attorneys. Through our Report Cards, white papers, legislative work, appellate litigation, media campaigns and grassroots organization, HALT has been on the forefront in fights to improve attorney discipline systems and to help victimized consumers.

Nationally—To shine a light on out-of-court systems designed to help clients conveniently settle fee disputes with attorneys, HALT issued the 2007 Fee Arbitration Report Card, grading lawyer-client fee arbitration forums in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The Report Card exposed an appalling pattern of biased procedures, insufficient resources and little enforcement across the country. Eight states, including some with large client populations like Illinois and Ohio, received Incompletes because they do not offer statewide systems to settle lawyer-client bill conflicts. The Report Card received national media coverage in dozens of newspapers, including the *Chicago Tribune*, *Baltimore Sun* and *Orlando Sentinel*. HALT also issued a Lawyer-Client Fee Dispute Resolution Best Practices Report, which highlights a dozen model procedures adopted by states across the country.

California—Through written testimony and an opinion editorial published in the Los Angeles and San Francisco *Daily Journal* on November 7, 2007, HALT persuaded the State Bar of California Board of Governors to require lawyers to disclose to clients in writing whether they are covered by professional liability insurance. The Board approved the final rule on May 16, 2008. Featured in a cover story in *San Francisco Weekly* on July 18, 2007, HALT also drew attention to the need for

more public participation in the California attorney discipline system.

Nevada—After HALT urged the President of the Nevada Bar to invest more resources into its bankrupt Clients' Security Fund, which reimburses clients whose former lawyers have stolen from them, the Bar increased members' annual dues to finance this critical fund in 2007. For the first time in several years, the fund had sufficient monies to pay all claims in full.

New Hampshire—HALT brought critical attention to the significant backlog and delay plaguing New Hampshire's lawyer discipline program in May 2007. After an *Associated Press* feature article covered our efforts on June 4, 2007, the state's Attorney Discipline Office revised its rules to create a more efficient system.

"The most pervasive complaint about lawyers is that their fees are too high for the work done. But in evaluating the programs established to settle these disputes between clients and lawyers, our report card found a system plagued by an appalling pattern of biased procedures, insufficient resources and little enforcement."

—HALT Senior Counsel Suzanne M. Blonder,
National Law Journal, September 19, 2007.

Small Claims Reform Project

HALT's campaign to educate consumers and policymakers about small claims court reforms continues to make great strides. HALT works not only to increase small claims jurisdiction (with a goal of \$20,000), but also to protect consumers by improving the process of collecting small claims judgments, granting small claims judges the power to issue court orders, expanding small claims dispute resolution programs and creating more user-friendly courts.

Nationally—HALT updated its Web site resources on small claims courts this year to include state-specific and up-to-date information on dollar limits, the types of mediation services offered, where

to sue, how to collect a judgment and court hours. Visitors can also download free forms and self-help guides for their states.

Hawaii—Senate Bill 2474, which aims to increase Hawaii’s small claims dollar limit from \$3,500 to \$5,000, passed the Senate and is under consideration in the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee. HALT is currently working with Representative John Mizuno’s office in support of this bill. Hawaii last increased its dollar limit in 1992.

Massachusetts—HALT is working with Representative Garrett Bradley’s office in support of House Bill 1328, which not only increases Massachusetts’ dollar limit from \$2,000 to \$5,000, but also implements a much-needed registered mail with receipt requirement for delivering summonses.

South Dakota—Representative Richard Engels introduced small claims House Bill 1122 to increase the small claims dollar limit from \$8,000 to \$12,000. The bill passed both the House of Representatives and the Senate quickly and was signed into law on February 19, 2008.

Wisconsin—HALT will continue to work with Representative Joan Ballweg’s office to reintro-

“Assembly Bill 579 is a real opportunity for Wisconsin to expand the availability of the small claims court to average citizens. Increasing the scope of Wisconsin’s small claims courts can make a real difference for Wisconsin citizens when they have to go to court.”

—Action Alert to Wisconsin HALT Members, September 14, 2007.

duce a small claims proposal to double the small claims dollar limit from \$5,000 to \$10,000. Despite a targeted Action Alert to HALT’s Wisconsin members and close work with Ballweg’s office this session on Assembly Bill 579 which would have raised the dollar limit to \$10,000, the bill was tabled until next session.

Freedom of Legal Information Project

Even though millions of low and moderate income Americans are priced out of the civil justice system, many states are eliminating inexpensive alternatives to hiring a lawyer, such as independent paralegals. The Freedom of Legal Information Project continues our longstanding efforts to defend the right of

citizens to have access to legal information and to inexpensive alternatives to hiring a lawyer.

Nationally—Several states, including California and Arizona have recognized the need to improve legal access by enacting legislation and adopting rules that authorize legal document preparers to help meet consumers’ legal needs. In recent years the U.S. Justice Department and the Federal Trade Commission have also supported nonlawyer practice as a way to create healthy competition in the marketplace. In 2007, HALT began analyzing, with help from researchers at the University of California Hastings College of the Law, which states are most receptive to the idea of nonlawyer practice. We will use our findings to develop a strategy for promoting model legislation that expands the availability of non-lawyer legal service providers.

District of Columbia—For years HALT has maintained that the defining characteristic of the practice of law is the establishment of an attorney-client relationship. A simple and accurate definition of the unauthorized practice of law, HALT maintains, is the act of falsely claiming to be a lawyer. Throwing its weight behind this idea, the District of Columbia Court of Appeals issued a new rule, effective February 1, 2007, that defines the practice of law as “the provision of professional legal services where there is a client relationship of trust or reliance.”

Hawaii—HALT urged the Hawaii Supreme Court to reject a state bar proposal that seeks to broaden the definition of its practice rule. As in Wisconsin, the state bar asked the Court to accept its assertion that most legal activities—including giving counsel; selecting, drafting or completing forms; and negotiating on someone’s behalf—should be considered the practice of law and therefore the exclusive domain of licensed Hawaii attorneys. HALT asked the Court on March 10, 2008, to expand access to its judicial system by encouraging innovations that provide consumers with affordable legal assistance.

Utah—HALT won an important victory for legal consumers when the Utah Supreme Court approved changes to its definition of the practice of law (Rule 18-402) that protect legal consumers access to a range of legal service providers including less expensive nonlawyers. Effective November 1, 2007, Utah’s rules now allow a “nonlawyer, who is not otherwise claiming to be a lawyer or to be able

“How do the lawyers defend their monopolistic proposal? They say it is really to protect the public from scam artists, particularly “notarios” who falsely claim to be attorneys and prey on the Latino community. But after two years of beating the bushes, the State Bar could produce only six complaints by consumers about non-lawyer legal service providers. During this same time frame, consumers filed over 2,000 complaints against Wisconsin attorneys.”

—James C. Turner: State Bar plan cuts access to affordable legal services, *Madison Capital Times*, March 13, 2008

to practice law,” to represent consumers in mediation hearings, provide legal information, complete court forms and, with court approval, represent people in small claims court, providing no fee is charged.

Wisconsin—HALT filed comments on November 20, 2007, with the Supreme Court of Wisconsin and published commentary in Wisconsin’s *Madison Capital Times* opposing a proposed definition of the practice of law that would prevent anyone but lawyers from providing legal services and create a new administrative agency to prosecute violators, such as independent paralegals or document preparers. HALT argued that the definition would make it all but impossible for consumers to get help when they can’t afford to hire a lawyer and was joined in its opposition to the new rule by many advocacy groups, businesses and the U.S. Department of Justice. The Court is expected to render its decision in 2008.

Judicial Integrity Project

Because Americans deserve a legal system with judges who are honest and publicly accountable, HALT promotes strict ethical standards for judges and works to empower litigants so they can ensure that their case is heard by an impartial judge.

Nationally—On the 50th anniversary of Law Day, May 1, 2008, HALT issued our 2008 Judicial Accountability Report Card, a scathing indictment of toothless judicial ethics standards and the closed-door systems charged with disciplining judges. Of the 51 state systems surveyed, more than half received marks below a C. Mississippi and Maine flunked outright. No state earned an A. Washington state

took top honors, but was only graded a B. HALT gave the systems overseeing federal judges a D+. HALT also issued a Judicial Accountability Best Practices report and a summary of findings. The Report Card has garnered a great deal of media attention, including coverage in the *Washington Post* and the *New Orleans Times Picayune*.

For the first time in nearly three decades, the discipline system for federal judges is being overhauled. In written testimony filed on October 15, 2007, HALT called on the United States Judicial Conference to replace closed-door sanctions with meaningful public discipline, to clarify that complainants and witnesses have the right to speak publicly about their written grievances, to provide complainants with the right to attend disciplinary proceedings, and to include non-judges and non-lawyers on the special committees that hear cases against abusive federal judges.

The Consumer Federation of America, the nation’s largest umbrella organization for consumers, adopted several critical policy resolutions introduced by HALT on February 3, 2007. The Federation supported efforts that will improve the state systems that remove unethical judges, reduce the vulnerability of debtors in small claims courts and expand resources for *pro se* litigants.

In September 2007, HALT surveyed judicial discipline Web sites in all 50 states and the District of Columbia and found that half a dozen states fail to provide any online resources related to filing an ethics complaint against a judge, and those that do host sites typically offer scant information. HALT also identified model states that maintain consumer-friendly, informative Web sites.

California—After HALT filed written comments urging greater judicial transparency in California on June 8, 2007, the state supreme court

“The Judicial Conference’s new proposals present an important opportunity to restructure a federal judicial discipline system that has been largely unchecked since Congress enacted the Judicial Conduct and Disability Act in 1980.”

—Suzanne M. Blonder, Comments to the United States Judicial Conference, October 15, 2007.

amended its Code of Judicial Conduct to provide that a judge must disclose information, including financial holdings, which a reasonable person might find relevant in determining whether there is a conflict of interest. The court also followed our recommendation to place stricter limitations on judicial gift receipt.

Colorado—After analyzing judicial performance evaluations distributed by courts across the country in November 2007, HALT identified Colorado as the only state that solicits feedback about judges from litigants. All other states rely solely on comments from fellow judges, lawyers and court clerks.

Idaho, Montana, Utah—In collaboration with the Center for Public Integrity on July 24, 2007, HALT shined a light on the fact that Idaho, Montana and Utah are the only states in the country that do not require their high court judges to report personal financial interests.

Public Education & Research

Through our series of books, guides and online publications, HALT educates the public about America's legal system and helps citizens become more self-reliant in handling their legal affairs. Over the last year, we produced several new Internet publications, responded to hundreds of individual inquiries about the law, and kept consumers informed about the latest legal reform news and developments through our Internet site, our newsletter and the HALT *eJournal*.

HALT launched a new educational initiative this year with the creation of a new Web site—www.fredrodell.com. Fred Rodell, the late author of *Woe Unto You Lawyers*, rocked the legal establishment as a young Yale law professor with his scathing indictment of the American civil justice system. Because his revolutionary thinking has not received the serious consideration it deserves, and his key writings have disappeared from print, HALT posted his book and other influential writings online with the goal of introducing a new generation to his visionary thinking.

“There are two things wrong with almost all legal writing. One is style. The other is substance.”

—Fred Rodell

HALT's new **Citizens Legal Guide** *Guardians & Guardianships: A Primer* explains how the guardianship system works and how consumers can best protect themselves (or their loved ones) when guardianship proceedings are initiated. Staff also produced a new **Issue Brief** *Guardianship Abuse*, to

call attention to serious problems within the system and suggest badly needed reforms—such as adopting standards for guardians, improving record keeping and establishing regulatory and disciplinary mechanisms.

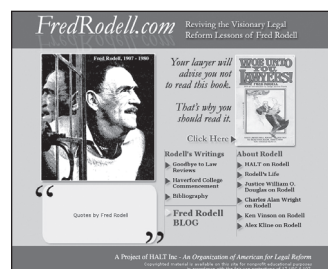
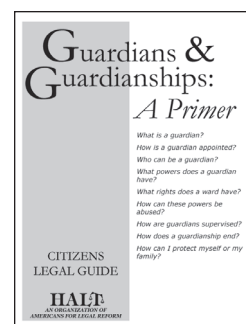
Our selection of **Everyday Law Series** articles grew this year with the addition of “College Kids and Credit,” “Lowering Legal Costs,” “Does Your Judge Have a Conflict of Interest?” and “Domestic Violence: Don't Be a Victim.” Several existing guides including “Changing Your Will” and “Living Wills & Power of Attorneys” received comprehensive updates and enhanced resource sections.

This year's online edition of *Do-It-Yourself Law*—which reviews the most popular self-help products on the market—adds helpful reviews of popular legal encyclopedias including Nolo's *101 Law Forms for Personal Use*, Broderbund's *Home and Business Lawyer Deluxe, 2008*, H&R Block's *Home and Business Attorney*, Bluecase's *Rocket Lawyer* and Broderbund's *Family Lawyer 2008*. *Do-It-Yourself Law* was featured in a piece by *MSN Money* entitled “Not rich? You still need a will.”

We also distributed news articles to the press on several of HALT's educational materials including “College Kids & Credit,” “Guardianships: What You Need to Know,” “Domestic Violence: Don't Be a Victim,” “How To Get Your Credit Report” and “Divorce Without a Court Battle.” Our story “How To Get Your Credit Report” ran in the October 18, 2007 edition of the Mississippi *Jackson Citizen Patriot* and the October 19, 2007 edition of the Utah *St. George Spectrum*.

Internships

HALT's internship program offers college and law students a unique opportunity to learn about the critical challenges of increasing access and improving accountability facing the legal profession, while at the same time providing invaluable research assistance and helping to train the next generation of public interest advocates. We host three to five



“Through my internship at HALT, I have learned so much about this country’s legal system and the obstacles it poses for thousands of consumers and I am grateful that I was able to work substantively on reforming the system. I feel lucky to have had an internship that challenged me to think in new ways.”

—Carson Baucher, University of California, Berkeley, '07 HALT Intern

interns each semester, who conduct research, track legislation, produce white papers, answer queries from users of the legal system and write articles for our quarterly newsletter, *The Legal Reformer*.

Legal Information Clearinghouse

HALT’s *Legal Information Clearinghouse* helps legal consumers navigate the civil justice system by providing a wealth of legal resources including downloadable living will forms and referrals to books, articles and law-related Web sites.

“Thank you for your reply. As a major ‘Watch Dog’ group of the judicial system, your reporting has definitely put the word accountability back on track. Bravo to the team at HALT.”

—Frank Kurland, HALT Member

Consumers also use the Clearinghouse for referrals to legal service providers such as legal malpractice lawyers, lawyer referral services and mediators. In 2007, HALT responded to more than 1,000 requests for legal information on topics such as attorney malpractice, going *pro se*, small claims courts and estate planning.

Outreach

Our Web site, www.halt.org, receives more than 7,000 visits each month and provides an unparalleled selection of informational brochures, our *Everyday Law Series* and *Citizens Legal Guides* and notices on current legal reform activities. Now in its fourth year, the HALT *eJournal* reaches more than 1,350 subscribers twice a month, providing timely updates to legal reform advocates across the country.

HALT focuses public attention on its current legal reform work throughout the year, with news articles and staff commentary featured in the *Washington Post*, *National Law Journal*, *ABA Journal*, *Associated Press*, *Chicago Tribune*, *MSN Money*, *Orlando Sentinel*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Los Angeles Daily Journal*, *New Jersey Star Ledger*, *Detroit News*, *Madison Capital Times*, *D.C. Examiner*, *WTOP News*, *Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly*, *Fort-Worth Star Telegram*, *Legal Assistant Today*, *New Orleans Times Picayune*, *Birmingham News*, *Albany Times Union* and the *North Platte Telegraph*.

“What a wonderful web-site.”

—Laura Fettig
by email

HALT Board of Directors

Conrad Martin, Chair

Fund for Constitutional Government

Danielle Brian

Project on Government Oversight

Katherine S. Broderick

Dean, UDC David A. Clarke School of Law

Louis A. Clark

Government Accountability Project

Sally Greenberg

National Consumers League

Catherine Elias-Jermany

National Self-Help Law Project

George A. Miller

George A. Miller Family Fund

HALT Staff

James C. Turner

Executive Director

Theresa Meehan Rudy

Program Director

Suzanne M. Blonder

Senior Counsel

Patricia Etzell

Development Director

Stacie Branham

Membership Coordinator

Rachel Decker

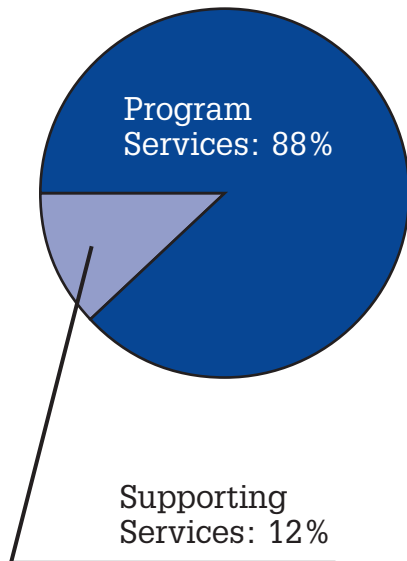
Program Staff

Emily Werth

Program Staff

2007 STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES For the Year Ended December 31, 2007



REVENUE AND SUPPORT	STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES For the Year Ended December 31, 2007	
	Contributions	\$136,805
	Membership Dues	618,522
	Investment Income	310,586
	Rental and Other Income	14,895
TOTAL REVENUE AND SUPPORT	\$1,080,808	

EXPENSES	PROGRAM SERVICES	
	Education	\$ 571,219
	Advocacy	373,690
	Research and Planning	227,908
	Total Program Services	\$1,172,817
	SUPPORTING SERVICES	
	Development	\$142,966
	General and Administrative	10,281
	Total Supporting Services	\$153,247
	TOTAL EXPENSES	\$1,326,064

Change in Unrestricted Net Assets	(504,734)
Unrestricted Net Assets, Beginning of Year	2,645,142
Unrestricted New Assets, End of Year	\$2,140,743

Excerpted from the financial audit completed by Handel and Associates, P.C., Certified Public Accountants

30 Years of Legal Reform

