

Laurie Lambrix

Ms. Lambrix began her legal services career at [DNA-People's Legal Services](#) in Shiprock, New Mexico, in the late 1980s. She joined the Monroe County Legal Assistance Center in western New York in 1990 and there has worked primarily on housing. Since 1998 she has served as supervising attorney for the Fair Housing Enforcement Project and, in that capacity, has litigated dozens of housing discrimination cases. With Louis Prieto she wrote [How to Use the Fair Housing Laws to Achieve Your Community Development Goals](#) for the September–October 1998 Clearinghouse Review.

In 2005, in recognition of Laurie's civil rights work, the New York State Bar Association honored her with its Haywood Burns Memorial Award.

What's a case or client or piece of advocacy that comes to mind as giving you particular personal satisfaction? Why?

I'm most proud of a race discrimination case I brought on behalf of two young African American men. They were denied housing they really wanted after a white tenant who lived in the building saw the agent showing them the apartment and called the management to complain about the apartment being shown to "two black hoodlums." We sued both the management company and the owners of the building. The owners moved to be dismissed from the lawsuit, and the district court granted their motion. I appealed the case to the Second Circuit Court of Appeals, which reversed the trial court and wrote a favorable published opinion ([Cleveland v. Caplaw Enterprises](#), 448 F.3d 518 (2d Cir. 2006)) concerning vicarious liability under the Fair Housing Act.

What's a case or client or piece of advocacy that comes to mind as causing you particular anxiety? Why?

Impact litigation helps clients, and it helps attorneys who want to gain litigation or appellate experience as part of their career development.

In several cases over the years I've filed motions requesting a temporary restraining order (TRO) for a client. Those situations are always stressful because of the amount of work that has to be done in a short time and because, by definition, something

important is hanging in the balance for the client. Most recently I moved for a TRO on behalf of three women who were living in a rural trailer park and were experiencing sexual harassment from the owner of the park. The court granted our motion and ordered the defendant to stay away from our clients. The defendant immediately violated the order and was arrested and jailed. This case is still pending and it is definitely an ongoing source of anxiety for me.

If you were in charge, what's one way (other than having more funding!) that public interest legal work would be different?

If I were in charge, there would be more emphasis on career development for public interest attorneys. When I first started working at my office many years ago, all attorneys were expected and given the chance to work on impact litigation, such as class action lawsuits. Then, in the mid-1990s, came Legal Services Corporation restrictions that were pretty crippling. In my program we want to be sure that we are doing as much impact work as much as possible within those constraints. For instance, although we can't bring class action lawsuits, often lawsuits brought on behalf of individual clients can result in positive policy changes that affect large groups of people. Impact litigation helps clients, and it helps attorneys who want to gain litigation or appellate experience as part of their career development.

During your time as a legal services attorney, have clients' problems and concerns—or clients themselves—changed? If so, how?

In the realm of fair housing cases, race is still a prevalent issue, disability cases have skyrocketed, and post 9/11 ethnic and religious profiling affects Muslims and people of Middle Eastern origin in housing, just as in other areas. I represented a young married Muslim couple: not only were they run out of their housing because of their religion and ethnicity, but also their landlady contacted the local police department to report the clients as probable terrorists.

What's one of your guilty pleasures?

My guilty pleasure is reading fashion magazines like Vogue and Elle. The images depict the rarefied lifestyles of people of fabulous wealth, who belong to a different world from any legal services attorney, much less any of our clients. It's somewhat ironic as I am one of the least stylish people I know and rarely wear makeup of any kind.