WHEN FAKE NEWS IMPEDES ACCESS TO JUSTICE
The problem
"Law passed: All child support in the United States will end by beginning of 2018."

— tmzbreaking on Tuesday, September 20th, 2016 in a headline

FAKE NEWS TARGETS CHILD SUPPORT

Posted by Jamie Sparano on Oct 05, 2017 in Blog

One of Legal Aid’s very own practice areas has become the subject of a widespread “fake news” story. Last month, articles and posts began circulating on social media, informing readers that child support would be ending in 2018. One article – which has been shared over 50,000 times on Facebook – claimed that Congress and the current administration were working to pass a law which would prevent parents from being ordered to pay support. Another article included a purported quote from President Trump, and reported that custodial parents have been protesting outside the White House.
Attorneys from Legal Aid learned about this social media rumor recently, while spending some time speaking with residents at D.C. General Family Shelter and sharing information on how to access our services. One woman expressed concerns that she would stop receiving child support payments next year, based on what she had been reading online. Thankfully, we were there to inform her that this story was false.
The problem of fake news

Definition: news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers
- Includes satire that could be misunderstood as factual, especially when viewed in isolation on Twitter or Facebook feeds

Connection between fake news and information (il)literacy
Fake legal news

Definition: news articles that intentionally misstate or mischaracterize the law or legal process

- Includes misstatements about judicial rulings, pending and passed legislation, and executive orders

Information illiteracy + unfamiliarity with the law
News consumers may be more susceptible to believing and sharing fake legal news because of their unfamiliarity with the nuances of the law and legal processes.
What is access to justice?

“Access to justice includes affordable legal services; readily available legal information and forms; the ability to bring a case to trial without hiring an attorney; the unbundling of legal services; fair treatment and equality in the justice system regardless of social standing; and confidence that the outcome will be fair and just. It is all these things and more.”
What’s the connection?

Fake Legal News

Librarian

Access to Justice
Access to justice initiatives

- Provide reference assistance to unrepresented litigants
- Conduct workshops on legal research for public librarians
- Support court self-help center programs
- Publish research guides
Combatting fake news

- Infographics
- Libguides
- Webinars
- Presentations
- Gamification
Law librarians’ obligation

Information literacy + Access to justice → Combatting fake legal news
Now what?
1. Partnering opportunities

- Partner with legal service agencies and bar associations to teach information literacy and seek out fake news stories to debunk
- Academic, firm, government, court, public law librarians
2. Outreach

- Hold workshops on how to spot fake legal news
- Academic, court, public law librarians
3. Education

- Educate public patrons about debunking websites like Snopes, FactCheck.org, Transparency Project
- Academic, court, public law librarians
4. Go one step further

- Create a Snopes-like website for legal questions
- Academic, public law librarians
IT'S ON
THE
INTERNET
SO IT
MUST
BE
TRUE!

FAKE

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Credits

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