




**WHEN FAKE NEWS IMPEDES  
ACCESS TO JUSTICE**



**The problem**

# CHILD SUPPORT SAID TO END BY BEGINNING OF 2018

Monday 04 February  94137 Shares

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"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.



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*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

# Combating fake news

Infographics

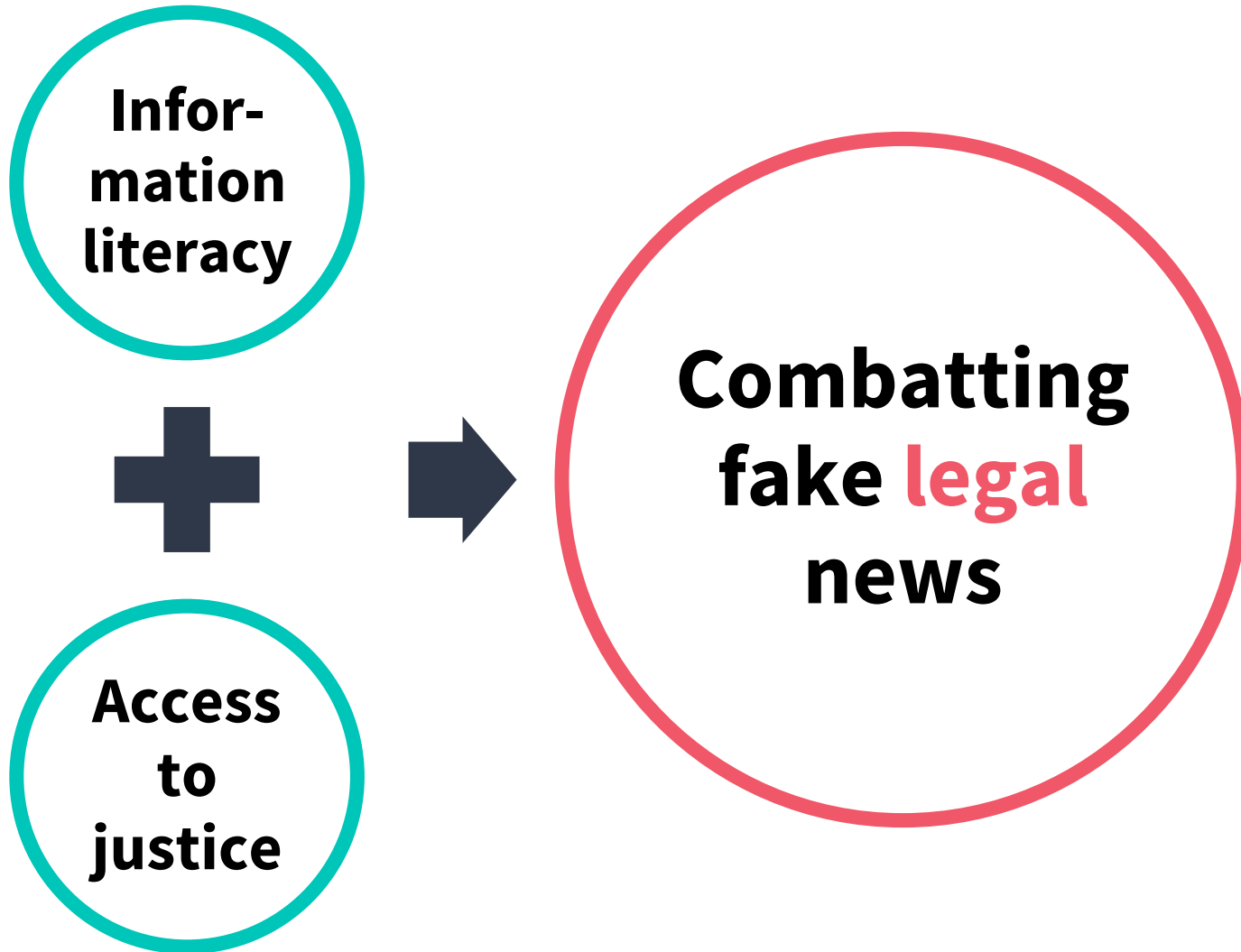
Libguides

Webinars

Presentations

Gamification

# Law librarians' obligation





**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

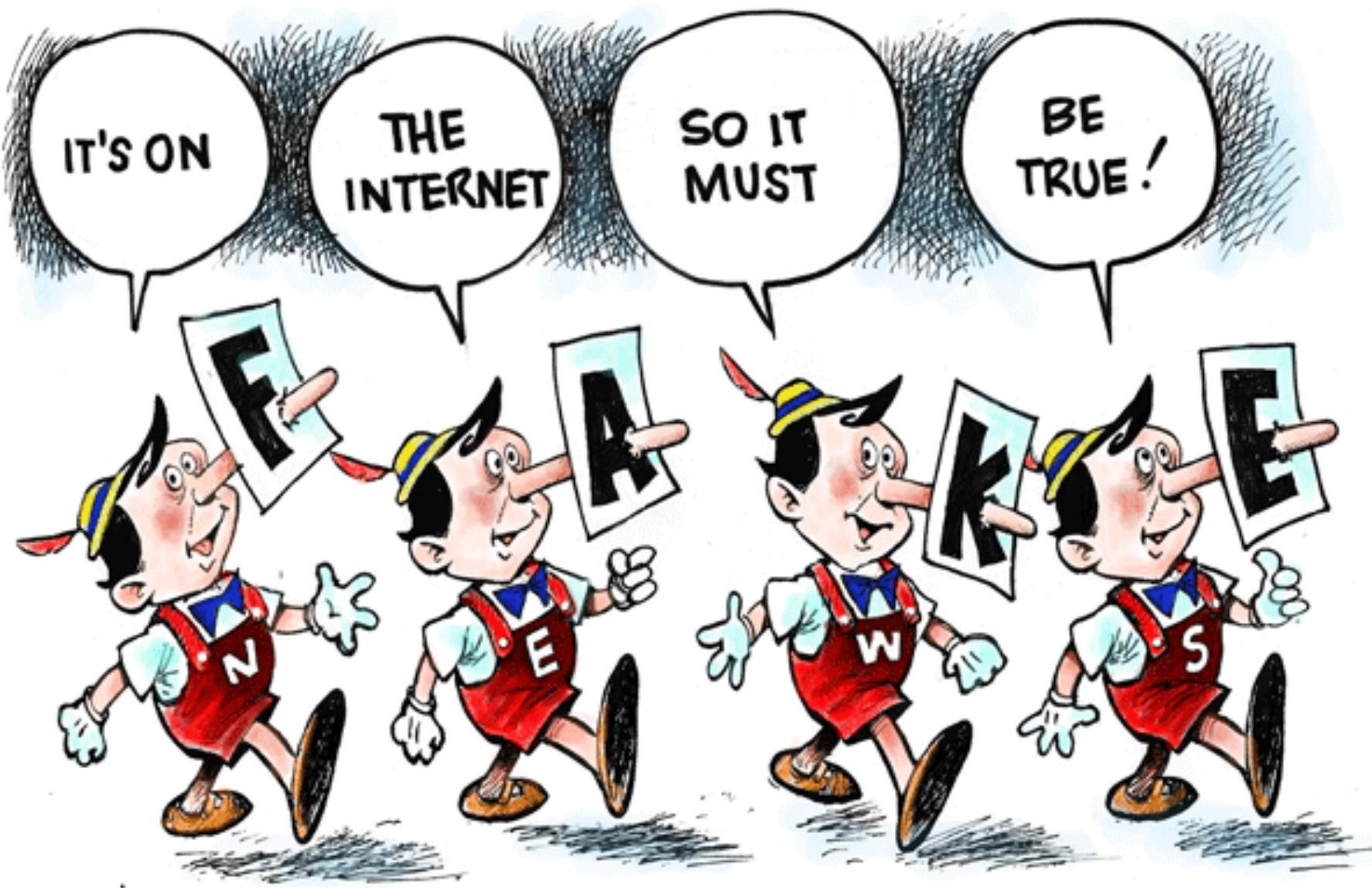
### 3. Education

- 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



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