

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

June 14, 2017

**For More Information, Please Contact:**

Samuel W. Milkes, Executive Director  
Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc.  
(717) 236-9486 ext. 208  
(800) 322-7572 ext. 208

**NEW NATIONAL REPORT, “MEASURING THE UNMET CIVIL LEGAL  
NEEDS OF LOW-INCOME AMERICANS” FINDS WIDENING JUSTICE GAP;  
PENNSYLVANIA STUDY ALSO REVEALS THAT ACCESS TO JUSTICE  
FOR LOW INCOME PENNSYLVANIANS FALLS FAR  
SHORT OF THE NEED.**

**HARRISBURG, PA** – The United States of America is a nation built upon the concept of equal justice for all. We pledge allegiance to our flag “with liberty and justice for all.” The words “Equal Justice Under Law” are etched on the U.S. Supreme Court building. But the poor often do not have the resources to hire a lawyer when they need to solve a pressing legal problem and they are turning to legal aid programs funded by the Legal Services Corporation, the Pennsylvania IOLTA Board, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and/or the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc. because they have no other place to go for legal help.

Today, the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) presented its new report: “The Justice Gap: Measuring the Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-Income Americans” during a congressional briefing at the Russell Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C. The report updates and expands LSC's 2009 study of the “justice gap” in the United States -- the difference between the civil legal needs of low-income Americans and the resources available to help them. LSC’s study provides fresh data and insights into how many low-income Americans are unable to secure adequate civil legal assistance in the range of crucial legal problems they confront, and how insufficient resources affect veterans, persons with disabilities, residents of rural areas, parents and guardians, and victims of domestic violence. The full report is available on the [LSC website](#).

**The newly updated study reports in the past year, a staggering 71 percent of low-income households experienced at least one civil legal problem, such as an eviction**

-more-

Louise Brookins Building  
118 Locust Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17101-1414  
800.322.7572  
717.236.9486  
717.233.4088 Fax

Samuel W. Milkes, Esq.  
*Executive Director*

James P. DeAngelo, Esq.  
*President*

Jay W. Alberstadt, Jr., Esq.  
*President-Elect*

Marsha White-Mathis  
*Secretary*

James K. Grasty, Esq.  
*Treasurer*

Wesley R. Payne, IV, Esq.  
*President Emeritus*

**notice, wrongly denied benefits, or a family court suit resulting from domestic violence. Of the Americans facing such problems, 86 percent received inadequate or no legal help because they couldn't afford it.**

LSC President Jim Sandman remarked that the study showed that the lack of legal services has alarming effects. This especially affects veterans, and people with legal urgent legal problems involving employment, rental housing, and family. Seventy-one percent of veterans, for example, experience at least one legal problem annually that requires legal help and 75 percent of people living in rural areas experience at least one legal problem annually.

Speaking on the extent our nation falls short of providing access to justice for those with nowhere else to turn were Rep. Susan W. Brooks (R-IN), Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy III (D-MA), LSC Leaders Council Co-Chair and former White House Counsel Harriet Miers, LSC Leaders Council Co-Chair and CEO of Merck & Co. Ken Frazier, LSC Leaders Council Member and Head Football Coach of the University of Michigan Jim Harbaugh, and American Bar Association President Linda Klein.

At the same time of the LSC study, the Pennsylvania IOLTA Board and the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN) conducted an updated study on the extent to which people seeking civil legal aid have to be turned away in the Commonwealth. **The Pennsylvania justice gap study found for every person represented by a Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network program, at least two people asked for help and were eligible for services, but received inadequate or no assistance.**

“We are releasing some key data from a survey that tracked what happened to each person who contacted a Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network program for help with a civil legal problem,” announced Samuel W. Milkes, Esq., Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc. Milkes continued, “We are pleased to report that 29 percent of the people contacting our programs were provided with representation that fully resolved their case. But that means that 71 percent of people contacting a legal aid program, eligible for services and asking for help, were not able to have their case resolved. As a nation that believes in justice and fairness, we have to do better for those facing urgent legal problems involving basic human needs, and who have nowhere else to turn.”

During the six week time period in which data were collected, 14,224 people applied for services at a PLAN affiliated program and received a case acceptance decision. Of the 14,224 applicants that had a case acceptance decision at the time of the data

analysis, 8,160, or 57.4 percent, were turned away. Of the 8,160 applicants that were turned away, 1,911, or 23.4 percent, were ineligible for various reasons including their legal problem being a criminal matter or their income exceeded the program's guidelines which are typically capped at 125 percent of poverty or below \$30,450 in annual income for a family of four.

**An additional finding revealed that of the 12,313 people who applied for services and were eligible, only 3,612, or 29 percent, were provided with representation to fully address their legal problem.** Of the 6,064 applicants that received services, 2,452, or 40.4 percent were provided only limited services or *pro se* resources that could not fully resolve their case due to insufficient resources. Of the 6,064 applicants that received services, 3,612, or 59.6 percent were provided with representation that fully resolved the applicant's case.

For many low-income individuals and families, civil legal aid is the difference between keeping their homes or being forced out onto the street. A case in point is the story of Gabriele, a Philadelphia woman who was cognitively impaired with a brain injury and was facing eviction who sought help through Philadelphia's Landlord/Tenant Legal Help Center where attorney Michele Cohen reviewed Gabriele's records and found that Gabriele was actually owed \$500. Cohen sent a spreadsheet to the landlord's attorney to show this and she cautioned the attorney as to the client's impairments. Because resources did not exist for full-representation, the client went to the hearing unrepresented and walked out owing \$4,000 which likely led to Gabriele becoming homeless.

Advocating for additional support for civil legal aid, Harrisburg attorney and President of the PLAN, Inc. Board of Directors, James P. DeAngelo adds, "As a Commonwealth, we should commit the necessary resources to provide access to justice for all Pennsylvanians struggling under the burden of poverty."

Civil legal aid provided by PLAN programs helps assure fairness for all in Pennsylvania's justice system. It provides access to legal help for people to protect their livelihoods, their health, their homes, and their families.

###

**About Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network** -- The Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network is a client-centered organization that provides leadership, funding, and support to improve the availability and quality of civil legal aid and direct legal services for low income

people and victims of domestic violence in Pennsylvania. PLAN works to ensure equal access to justice so that Pennsylvanians can have representation, when facing important civil legal concerns affecting their safety, family, health, shelter, and personal income. Last fiscal year (July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016) 73,917 individuals and their families benefited from direct legal representation. Using an average household size of 2.49 persons per household, PLAN directly helped an estimated 184,053 individuals addressing legal problems across six major categories including family, housing, income maintenance, consumer, health, and employment/education.

**About the Pennsylvania IOLTA Board** -- The mission of the Pennsylvania Interest on Lawyers Trust Account (IOLTA) Board is to support the provision of civil legal services to the Commonwealth's poor and disadvantaged. The IOLTA Board is a not-for-profit organization and operates under the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

