

2022

ANNUAL REPORT

Pennsylvania
Legal Aid Network



Throughout our report, we use pseudonyms and stock photos to protect client confidentiality.

PLAN, INC.

2022 Annual Report

Our mission is to provide leadership, funding, and support to improve the availability and quality of civil legal aid and legal services for low-income people and victims of domestic violence in Pennsylvania.

Dear Friends & Colleagues

For households with insufficient income, poverty is often the hidden adversary in civil legal proceedings, especially for those without an attorney by their side. While there is no single solution to this crisis, we know through our work that being able to access legal representation has significant and positive outcomes for Pennsylvanians.

At the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, we are committed to fighting the broken systems that perpetuate inequality and undermine the health and stability of our communities by providing free legal advice, education, and representation to underserved families across the state.

Since our start in 1973, we have played a critical role in supporting direct legal services for Pennsylvanians by providing funding, leadership, training, and support to our Network.

As a result of the advocacy of more than 700 legal aid attorneys, paralegals, and staff who work at the fifteen legal aid organizations that make up our Network, each year we help thousands of low-income and marginalized Pennsylvanians, including the elderly, veterans, victims of abuse and domestic violence, and people with disabilities.

My goal as PLAN, Inc.'s new Executive Director is to enhance civil legal services for underrepresented populations in Pennsylvania. I look forward to carrying out this objective through a range of creative methods, including leveraging technology to expand training opportunities and resources across our Network, promoting equality and justice through our legal work and community partnerships, and continuing to support the efforts of our strategic planning and our new diversity, equality, inclusion, and belonging program.



At the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, we are committed to fighting the broken systems that perpetuate inequality and undermine the health and stability of our communities by providing free legal advice, education, and representation to underserved families across the state.

None of this work would be possible without the support of our core funders and allies who continue to champion our efforts and support our mission. Among those partners, we are especially thankful to our funders, including the Department of Human Services and the Pennsylvania IOLTA Board, as well as the Pennsylvania Bar Association, local bar associations, pro bono attorneys, and the many volunteers who donate their time to our legal aid programs.

Thank you as well to our friends in the General Assembly and local government legislators, as well as the Governor's Office, and the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania, for their support of civil legal aid.

Finally, thank you to our Board of Directors for their steadfast leadership and continued commitment to our shared goal of equal justice for all under the law.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jayme Cassidy".

JAYME CASSIDY, ESQ.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

About Our Network

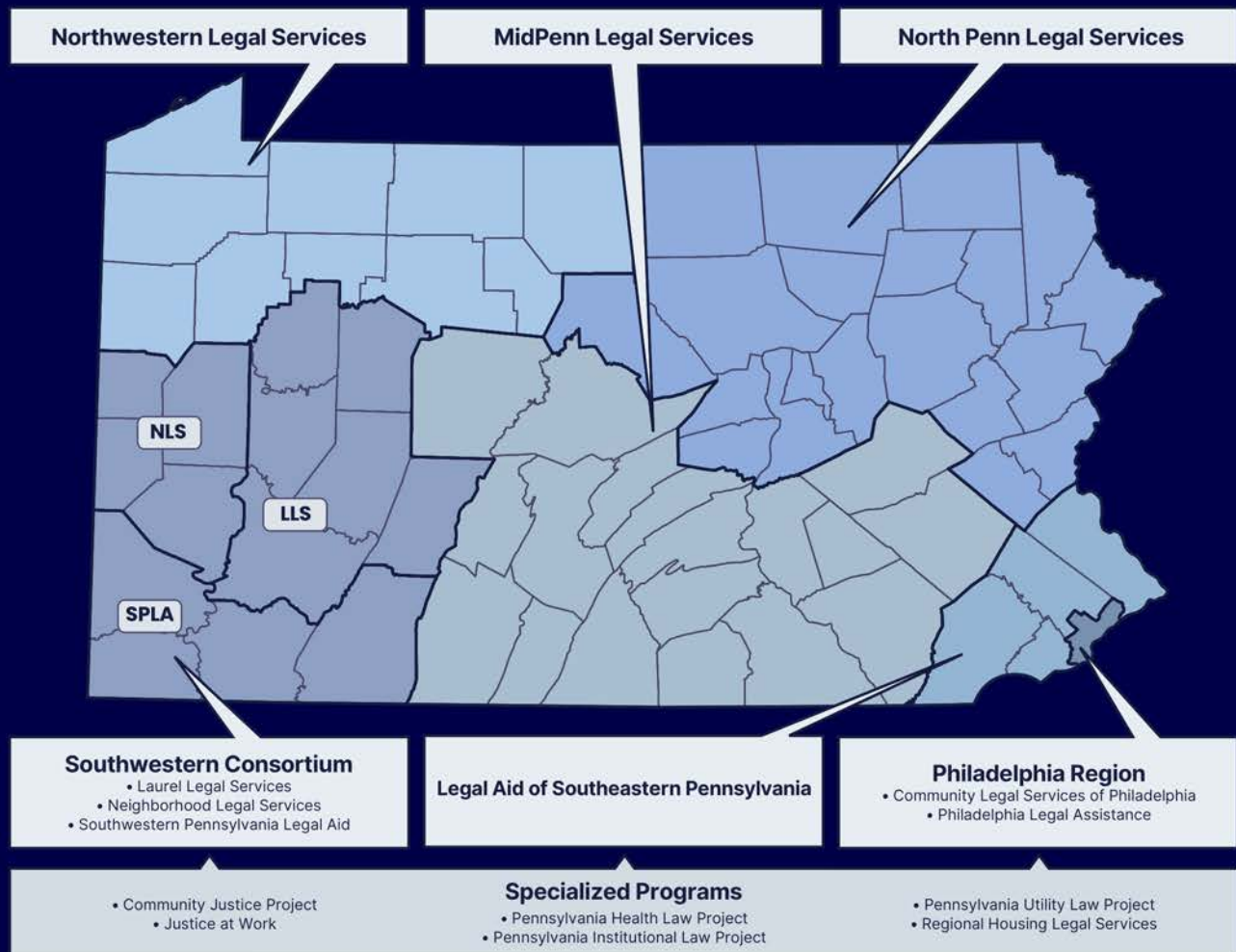
The Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network is a statewide system of fifteen legal aid organizations that provide free legal advice, advocacy, education, and representation to underserved families across Pennsylvania.

Our coordinated approach sets us apart from other civil legal providers in Pennsylvania — and allows us to carry out our mission of providing low-income residents in every county of the state with access to legal remedies and support.

Our role at PLAN, Inc. is to administer grants to the legal aid organizations in our Network and to monitor their casework to ensure they are compliant with funding and performance standards. We also coordinate training and technology for the staff in our Network, help develop new programs and resources, and at times, appear before administrative agencies or legislators to speak on issues relating to our Network's clients.

Advocates working at our nine regional legal aid programs provide general legal assistance to low-income families and victims of domestic violence. At our six specialty legal aid programs, attorneys work throughout the state and address specific legal issues like housing, health, utilities, workers' rights, and the rights of institutionalized individuals.

MORE THAN
\$33 million
in grant funds in fiscal year 2021-22
were utilized throughout our Network's
legal aid organizations.



Funds are distributed to the legal services organizations in our Network based on a formula that accounts for the geographical proportion of people living in poverty throughout Pennsylvania.

NORTHEASTERN
\$4,245,296

PHILADELPHIA
\$11,260,253

SOUTHWESTERN
\$5,724,012

NORTHWESTERN
\$1,593,179

SOUTHEASTERN
\$5,462,943

STATEWIDE
\$5,337,119

Outcomes

Last year, our Network provided 76,194 households—an estimated 175,000 individuals—with direct legal representation.



2,956

Access to Healthcare



5,392

Consumer/Taxes



4,831

Employment



23,385

Family Law &
Domestic Violence



24,698

Housing &
Community Development



8,579

Public Benefits &
Income Maintenance

3,258 households received help with other civil legal aid issues, including elder, juvenile, education, and individual rights.

38k

Community
education/
outreach events

48k

Referrals to
other social
service providers

124k

Legal self-help
information
distributed

We also helped an additional 209,345 clients understand and exercise their legal rights as homeowners, tenants, parents, employees, spouses, and consumers.

SYSTEMIC IMPACT WORK

Since 2018, advocates at Laurel Legal Services, Inc. have been working with a client on an ongoing case, *K.N.B. v M.D.*, regarding the Protection of Victims of Sexual Violence or Intimidation Act.

The case was eventually appealed to the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania in 2021. An Opinion was issued that September, holding that six years rather than two years, applies in cases involving a petition seeking a protective order under the Act. Further, it set a standard for the level of proof required, which will improve outcomes for future victims in similar cases.

Having reached the end of a very long process, the client was ecstatic about the outcome of the case, as well as for the considerable impact it has for those seeking justice under the Act.

**90,285 impact cases or projects were
active in fiscal year 2021-22.**

ABOUT CIVIL LEGAL AID

Most people are aware that those facing criminal charges have a right to counsel, but many are surprised to learn that people do not have that right in civil cases. The consequences of these cases can be severe: without legal representation, families can lose their children, homes, healthcare, and financial stability.

The goal of civil legal aid is to help people navigate these pressing legal issues. That is why our Network provides free information, advice, and representation to Pennsylvanians who lack the financial means to hire an attorney. Households with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty line—\$34,688 per year for a family of four in 2022—are eligible for civil legal aid.



Defending Domestic Violence Victims' Rights

Community Justice Project filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of a survivor of domestic violence and the Fair Housing Partnership of Greater Pittsburgh. The suit involved claims under the Fair Housing Act, Unfair Trade Practices and Consumer Protection Law, Fair Credit Extension Uniformity Act, and the Landlord Tenant Act.

The claims were based on the landlord's refusal to allow the tenant to terminate her lease early after she informed the landlord that she was afraid to stay in the home due to the continued threat of domestic violence and stalking by her abuser. Her advocates attested that the Landlord's conduct and practices violated the Fair Housing Act because they had a disparate impact on victims of domestic violence.

In his Opinion denying the Defendant's Motion to Dismiss, the Judge found that survivors of domestic violence are members of a protected class under the Fair Housing Act, and that a facially neutral policy of refusing early lease terminations and of accelerating rent when tenants vacate early has a disparate impact on survivors of domestic violence. As a result of this decision, the parties agreed to a settlement that included both monetary and equitable relief.

This decision was the first in the Third Circuit to find that domestic violence survivors are protected under the Act and the first in the nation to find that early lease terminations constitute disparate impact discrimination. As a result, Community Justice Project has continued this work through legislative advocacy with the state legislature and Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission.

Maintaining Necessary Medical Benefits & Supports for Willa

Willa is a young adult who was a recipient of an organ transplant years earlier.

She received notice that her social security disability benefits had been terminated. She discovered her medical assistance coverage had also ceased as a result of losing these benefits, which resulted in her being denied her anti-rejection medication from the pharmacy.

Willa called North Penn Legal Services and spoke with a public benefits specialist, who immediately accepted the case knowing it was a life-or-death situation for the client. As a result of her advocates intervention with the County Assistance Office, hospital transplant team, and pharmacy, Willa was able to receive her medication during the coverage gap.

Ultimately, and with the help of the public benefits advocate, her medical assistance coverage documentation was corrected, and her social security benefits were restored. Willa can now access her medication moving forward and has the necessary medical benefits and coverage she requires to maintain her health and wellbeing.

Every year, many Pennsylvanians like Willa face serious medical repercussions due to the complexity of healthcare coverage and the inability of different systems to sync up in time. Civil legal aid organizations like North Penn Legal Services are often critical to helping people navigate these situations.





Utility Advocacy at Work

In 2021, a large regional housing and social services provider in Pennsylvania noticed that one of its properties—an 80-bed homeless shelter in one of the lowest income municipalities in the state—had been switched to an alternative electric supplier. After reviewing their bills more closely, the shelter staff noticed that the new supplier had been charging them a substantially inflated rate for electricity since June 2018. Over that three-year period, the shelter was charged over \$43,000 more than what they would have paid with their original supplier.

The shelter staff immediately cancelled the service, explaining that they did not authorize the switch. After the electric supplier refused to refund any of the money paid during this period, the shelter contacted Pennsylvania Utility Law Project for help. Advocates accepted the case and advised the shelter that Pennsylvania's competitive electric suppliers are required by law to keep records of where, when, and by whom, switches are made.

As a result, the supplier was ordered to release the records for investigation. They revealed that the person who signed the authorization form was not a representative for the provider nor were they a resident of the homeless shelter.

This practice, known as "slamming", is illegal. Moreover, the investigation uncovered numerous violations by the supplier under Pennsylvania law.

Their advocacy resulted in a successful negotiation with the energy supplier, where the parties ultimately reached a settlement that required the supplier to pay back the full difference of the amount overpaid during the period of the unauthorized switch. The supplier also agreed to reimburse the shelter for the expenses incurred by its employees to research and rectify the overcharges. In the end, the shelter received a check for \$51,761.45 – fully remediating the shelter for the losses it incurred and helping to ensure that the homeless shelter can continue to serve its community.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Summer Internship & Fellowship Program

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Program honors Dr. King's legacy by championing diversity and inclusion in legal aid work. It was conceived at a time when today's discussions of racial equity and justice were—as Dr. King may have put it—merely a dream.

The program was made possible by the efforts of five Black women: Edie Benson, Carolyn Johnson, Debi Johnson, Linda Renick, and Phyllis Stevens. Fondly known as the “Founding Mothers,” these women recognized the need for diversity in our Network and the importance of attorneys reflecting the diverse client population they serve.

Working with members of our Network and the Pennsylvania Legal Services Black Caucus, they secured funding for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Summer Internship Program in 1991.



Each summer, our MLK, Jr. Internship Program concludes with a commencement ceremony in Harrisburg. Last year we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the program.

About Our Internship Program

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Internship Program places law students at paid summer internship positions at the legal aid programs throughout our Network. In addition to promoting diversity, the goal of our program is to instill in new attorneys a lifelong commitment of providing access to justice for all individuals, regardless of their ability to pay.

This year, we celebrated the 30th anniversary of our program. Since it began, we have mentored more than 400 law students.

Over a ten-week period, first- and second-year students engage in legal services work and gain a better understanding of the specific legal issues facing low-income communities. In turn, they provide valuable legal services to clients.

Students begin the program with a two-day training in poverty law at our office in Harrisburg, where they have the opportunity to meet and connect with one another. After they begin their respective placements at their legal aid organization, students are assigned case work under the guidance of experienced attorneys, engage with clients directly, and if certified, take part in court and administrative hearings.

At the conclusion of the program, the students write essays memorializing their internship experiences and gather once again in Harrisburg for a commencement ceremony. Each year, the essays are published in an anthology known as the Drum Major Essay Collection.

MORE THAN

400

law students have received mentorship through our program since its inception.

About Our Fellowship Program

In 2003, an evaluation of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Internship Program concluded that despite the positive impact of the internship program for students and our legal aid clients, we were still falling short of our goal of increasing diversity and representation within our Network.

In response, we created the Martin Luther King, Jr. Fellowship Program to provide long term support to diverse attorneys interested in public interest careers. The following year, we hired law school graduates and new attorneys for a two-year placement at a legal aid program in our Network.

During the program, fellows receive guidance and mentorship from experienced attorneys. Loan repayment assistance is also available to fellows as part of the program.

Meet Our Current Fellows



Amy Chin-Arroyo, Esq.
Justice at Work



Devyne Byrd, Esq.
Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania



Dominique Wiggins, Esq.
Community Legal Services of Philadelphia



Richardo Brown-Whitt, Esq.
Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project

Training

We are grateful for the generous funding that supports our CLE-based activities. Our trainings are offered across the state to legal aid program attorneys and pro bono lawyers.

DIVERSITY TRAINING

In spring 2019, we entered into a partnership with the PA CLE Board to increase diversity in legal aid as well as among lawyers in Pennsylvania. The partnership has resulted in the sponsorship of two MLK, Jr. Fellows, Queenette Echefu, Esq. and Devyne Byrd, Esq., as well as funding for us to provide an interactive educational training experience on diversity and bias in the legal profession for private bar associations, known as, "Objection! Diversity CLE."

STATEWIDE TRAINING CONFERENCE

Our annual Statewide Training Conference was held virtually this past fiscal year due to the pandemic. 53 sessions were held on various topics: Communications, Consumer Rights, Education, Elder Law, Employment, Family Law, Health Law, Housing & Landlord/Tenant Law, Public Benefits, Racial Justice, Trial Advocacy Skills, and Utility Law. In total, 518 people attended the conference, and 2,786 CLE credits were earned.

VICTIMS OF CRIME ACT TRAINING

Since 2017, we have offered an annual VOCA Grantee Training. This training fulfills the ten mandatory training hours for VOCA grantees, and also offers CLE credits for attorneys who participate. The primary audience for this series of trainings were the Legal Services, Domestic Violence, and Sexual Assault communities in Pennsylvania. This last fiscal year, a total of 125 participants attended the two-day training with 55 attorneys earning 592 CLE credits.

WEBINAR TRAININGS

We also offer various webinar-based trainings for the advocates in our Network each year. Cumulatively, these sessions were attended by 1,600 people and 3,850 CLE credits were earned this past fiscal year.

Statewide Training Conference

2,786

CLE CREDITS EARNED

Victims of Crime Act Training

592

CLE CREDITS EARNED

Webinar Trainings

3,850

CLE CREDITS EARNED

Board of Directors

2021-22 Fiscal Year

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Fifth Judicial District of Pennsylvania

Treasurer: Regina M. Foley, Esq.

Raynes Lawn Hehmeyer

Secretary: Sonia Brookins

Pennsylvania Welfare Rights Organization

President Emeritus: J. W. Alberstadt, Jr., Esq.

MacDonald Illig

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Rochelle Jackson (Alternate)

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Dana W. Chilson, Esq.

McNees Wallace Nurick, LLC

Honorable Bryan Cutler

Pennsylvania House of Representatives

PENNSYLVANIA LEGAL AID NETWORK BOARD APPOINTMENTS

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Merck & Co.

PENNSYLVANIA PROJECT DIRECTORS APPOINTMENT

Brian V. Gorman, Esq.

Southwestern Pennsylvania Legal Aid

PENNSYLVANIA WELFARE RIGHTS ORGANIZATION APPOINTMENT

Bruce Perry

Schedule of Revenue, Expenses, and Change in Net Assets

2021-22 Fiscal Year

REVENUES

Contracts and Grants

PA Dept. of Human Services	13,787,150
PA IOLTA-IOLTA Program	2,943,576
PA IOLTA-AJA Program	17,630,563
Other Grants	1,195,113

Interest Income	3,205
Local Contributions	22,229
Other Income	68,434

Total Revenues	35,650,270
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EXPENSES

Program Administration	1,244,666
Management & General	780,644
Fundraising	0
Grant Awards	33,575,342

Total Expenses	35,600,652
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CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	49,618
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Support Our Work

There are many ways to be part of increasing meaningful access to the justice system for those living at or below the poverty level.

CY PRES AWARDS

Judges, lawyers, mediators, and those in a position to influence cy pres awards can direct residual or unclaimed funds to our Network. We make an excellent recipient for these funds, because we offer a structured system and are experienced in providing direct legal aid in Pennsylvania.

DONATIONS

Direct financial support is an easy way to support our work and allows us to provide services wherever they are needed the most.

IOLTA ACCOUNTS

Having an IOLTA account with one of Pennsylvania's Platinum Leader Banks helps to increase the amount of funding available for civil legal aid because these banks pay a premium interest rate on IOLTA accounts.

PRO BONO WORK

Attorneys can volunteer as a pro bono advocate to use their legal skills to help families in need across Pennsylvania.

SPONSORSHIPS

Sponsor our fellowship or internship program or choose us as a beneficiary at your next charity event.



Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc.



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