

2023

**ANNUAL
REPORT**

Pennsylvania
Legal Aid | **50**
YEARS
Network



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

PLAN, INC.

2023 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

In the complex terrain of civil legal proceedings, where the challenges of poverty cast long shadows over households with insufficient income, the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc. stands as a beacon of hope.

Since our start in 1973, we have played a critical role in combatting the broken systems that perpetuate inequality and compromise the health and stability of our communities by providing funding, leadership, training, and support to our Network.

Our work, championed by more than 700 legal aid attorneys, paralegals, and staff, has been instrumental in bringing positive outcomes to the lives of thousands of low-income and marginalized Pennsylvanians, including the elderly, veterans, victims of abuse and domestic violence, and people with disabilities.

As we mark the 50th anniversary of PLAN, Inc., we reflect on our incredible journey that began more than five decades ago with a groundbreaking piece of legislation, the Pennsylvania Legal Services and Community Legal Services Act, which set the stage for enhancing access to legal aid for low-income individuals and allowed us to become a model for other states across the nation.

In honoring this historic occasion, we pay tribute to the visionaries—Amanda Coleman, J. Richard Gray, Laurence M. Lavin, William R. Klaus, and Fred Speaker—whose signatures as our first Board of Directors marked the birth of the Pennsylvania Legal Services Center, now PLAN, Inc., on March 5, 1973.

Today, PLAN, Inc. stands proudly as one of the most robust legal aid networks in the country—a testament to the collective power of those who support our mission.



For the past fifty years, our work has been driven by the fundamental principle that access to civil legal aid is essential for the creation of a fair and just society.

Among those partners, we are especially thankful to our funders, including the Department of Human Services, the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency, 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.

We also want to express our appreciation to our friends in the General Assembly, local government legislators, the Governor's Office, and the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania for their steadfast support of civil legal aid. Your ongoing support has been instrumental in our ability to make a difference in the lives of those who need it most.

Thank you all for being an integral part of PLAN, Inc.'s 50-year journey. The resilience and strength of the communities we support, along with the triumphs we have achieved together, inspire us to continue the important work that lies ahead.

JAMES P. DEANGELO
Interim Executive Director

Civil Legal Aid Matters

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. Civil legal aid is essential because it helps ensure that everyone has equal access to justice, regardless of their economic circumstances.

WHO CIVIL LEGAL AID HELPS

The goal of civil legal aid is to help vulnerable people navigate these pressing legal issues. It protects groups like seniors, domestic violence survivors, and individuals with disabilities. It also allows low-income families to access legal representation and navigate complex legal issues. Households with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty line—\$37,500 per year for a family of four in 2023—are eligible for our services.

HOW CIVIL LEGAL AID SAVES MONEY

Providing those in need with free civil legal aid services can prevent legal problems from escalating, which ultimately saves the Commonwealth money in the long run. For instance, assisting families in resolving housing or healthcare disputes can avert more severe crises from occurring later on, thereby saving taxpayers money. This is why our Network extends free legal aid services to Pennsylvanians who are financially unable to hire an attorney.

\$1 = \$12

WHEN YOU DONATE \$1 TO A LEGAL AID ORGANIZATION,
\$12 IS GENERATED FOR PENNSYLVANIA AS A WHOLE.

About our Network

The Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network is a statewide system made up of fourteen legal aid organizations that provide free civil legal services, advice, and representation to underserved families across Pennsylvania.

Our eight regional legal aid programs provide general legal assistance to low-income families and domestic violence survivors. At our six specialized legal aid programs, attorneys operate statewide, addressing specific issues such as housing, health, utilities, workers' rights, and the rights of institutionalized individuals. While integral to our Network, each organization operates independently, ensuring a tailored approach to addressing legal needs.

Our distinctive coordinated approach sets us apart from other civil legal providers in Pennsylvania, playing a crucial role in fulfilling our mission of providing access to legal remedies and support for low-income residents in every county of the state.

As PLAN, Inc., our responsibilities include administering grants to the legal aid organizations within our Network, ensuring that their casework adheres to funding and performance standards. We also coordinate technology, develop programs, and create resources to support our advocates' efforts. Additionally, we offer training and networking opportunities for the staff at our programs, and advocate on behalf of our Network's clients before administrative agencies and legislators.

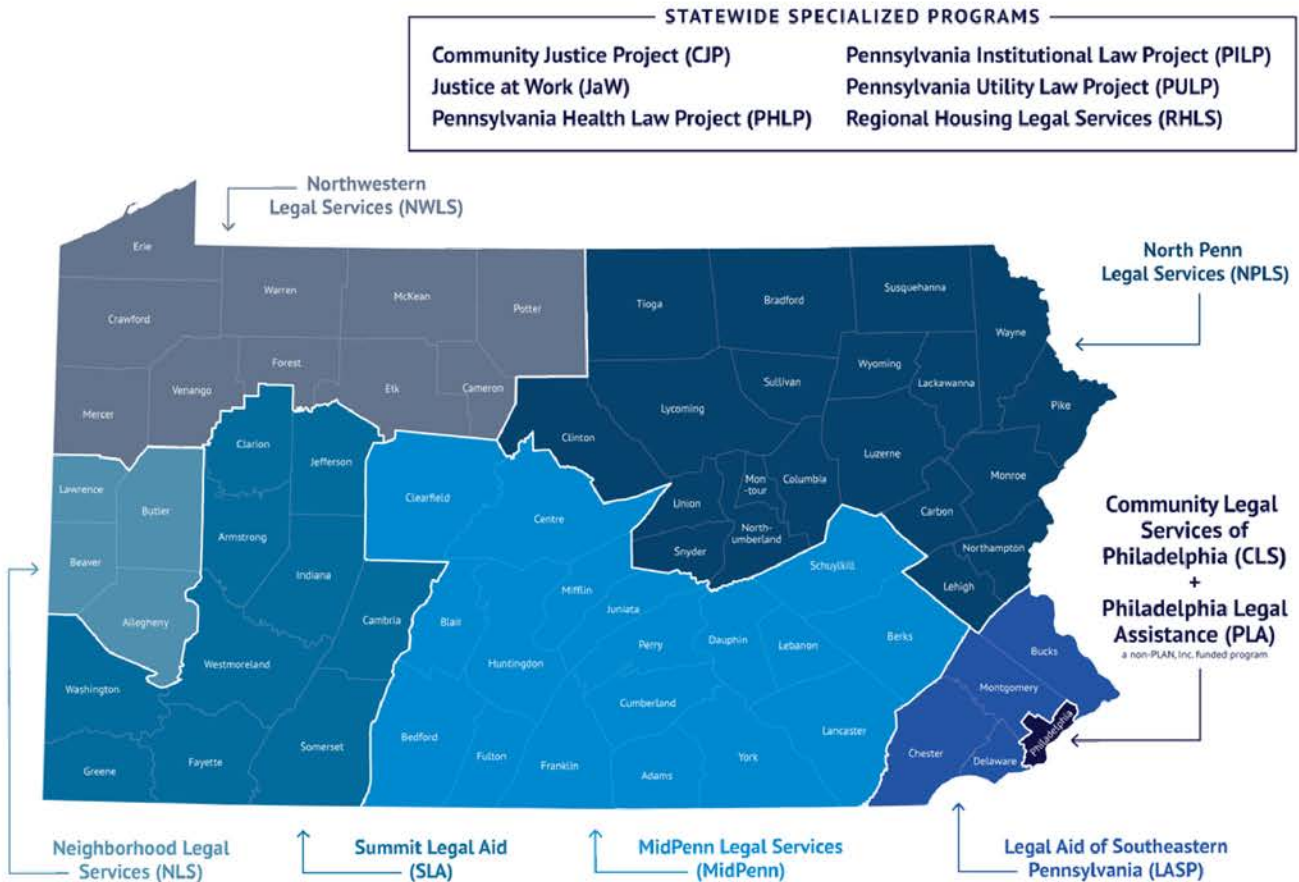
This year, we celebrated our 50th anniversary—a testament to the steadfast commitment of our organization to promoting equality and fairness in the legal system.

IN FISCAL YEAR 2022-23

\$37 million

in grant funds were utilized throughout our Network's legal aid organizations.

Financial Impact of Grants by Region



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
\$4,680,603

PHILADELPHIA
\$12,638,468

SOUTHWESTERN
\$6,231,048

NORTHWESTERN
\$1,767,900

SOUTHEASTERN
\$6,156,451

STATEWIDE
\$5,469,796

Outcomes at a Glance

Last year, our Network delivered free civil legal representation to 80,575 households, directly aiding over 196,000 individuals. Furthermore, we helped an additional 199,973 clients understand and exercise their legal rights as homeowners, tenants, parents, employees, spouses, and consumers.



2,867

Access to Healthcare



5,837

Consumer/Taxes



29,974

Employment



21,260

Family Law &
Domestic Violence



29,974

Housing & Community
Development



7,888

Public Benefits &
Income Maintenance

Creating a Brighter Future for Russell

Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania's Pardon Project recently assisted Russell, who had a misdemeanor drug offense and a summary offense from over ten years ago.

Since that time, Russell had been working full time and gone back to school, graduating with honors and earning a bachelor's degree in psychology. Despite being hindered by his criminal record, Russell aspired to leverage his psychology degree to help others in his community and support his first child.

Attorneys stepped in to help Russell during the early days of the expedited review pardon program, assisting him with navigating the application process. Remarkably, his application garnered unanimous votes, propelling him past the hearing stage. Eventually, his case was recommended to the Governor, who ultimately granted his pardon.

Still, Russell faced the challenge of having the conviction on his record, so his attorneys continued their support by aiding him with the expungement process. After review, there were no objections. Russell now boasts a clear background and no longer faces any impediments to his pursuit of meaningful employment.

Granting pardons to qualified former offenders enables them to qualify for jobs, housing, and educational opportunities that allow them to become successful, contributing members of their communities. This story highlights the transformative impact of civil legal aid in empowering individuals to overcome past obstacles and build brighter futures.





Safeguarding Medically Necessary Services

Noah is a young boy with autism who relies on home health aide services to help him access the benefits of community living, to achieve learning and development goals, and to remain in his home with his family.

Due to the direct care workforce shortage and a lack of available providers last year, Noah's mother was granted approval as his home health aide. Everything seemed to be going well for the family – Noah was thriving, and the family was grateful to be able to count on the income she earned as his caregiver since his care prevented her from working outside of the home.

However, their situation abruptly changed when they received a complete denial of home health aide services from Noah's Medicaid insurer, along with a letter from the state announcing a plan to cease payments to parents serving as caregivers for children with disabilities. In need of assistance, Noah's mother contacted the advocates at the Pennsylvania Health Law Project.

The legal team collaborated with Noah's mother and his home health agency to provide legal advice and support throughout the appeal. During the process, the state, under pressure from advocates and families, decided to allow parents to be paid caregivers, issuing new guidance on May 15, 2023, confirming the decision.

At Noah's fair hearing, the attorneys presented clinical documentation and the new state guidance, demonstrating the medical necessity of his home health aide services. The overwhelming evidence led the Medicaid insurer to agree to continue Noah's services.

After the case was closed, Noah's mother sent a heartfelt thank you note to the advocates who helped represent them at the hearing. An excerpt from the note says, "Thank you so much from the bottom of my heart for helping us fight the good fight and win. You have given me the gift of time with my special boy to help nurture him and give him the best possible life he deserves in his own home and in his familiar surroundings."



Maintaining Safe and Stable Housing for Jennifer and Her Family

Attorneys at Summit Legal Aid recently represented Jennifer, a resilient domestic violence survivor and single mother navigating the tumultuous aftermath of abuse.

As a result of the violence she suffered, Jennifer went into a coma, during which her abuser intentionally destroyed all her legal identity documents. When she recovered, Jennifer applied for and was granted Section 8 housing, safely away from her abuser.

The local housing authority, recognizing her situation, granted her the necessary time to obtain crucial documents like her birth certificate, driver's license, and new social security card. However, complications arose in securing the social security card, leading to an eviction notice and the added challenge of a three-year ban on Section 8 reapplication.

Summit Legal Aid intervened, and their attorney negotiated with the Indiana County Housing Authority. Through successful negotiations, an agreement was reached: the housing authority agreed to wait for Jennifer's social security card and refrain from evicting her and her children. This intervention allowed Jennifer the time she needed to secure her social security card, ensuring the safety and stability of her home and family.

Jennifer's case brings attention to the nuanced challenges encountered by thousands of survivors annually in Pennsylvania. It also underscores the vital role of civil legal aid in achieving positive outcomes for survivors and their families, contributing to the establishment of a more compassionate and just society.



MLK

Martin Luther King, Jr. Summer Internship and Fellowship Program

PLAN, Inc. proudly offers the Martin Luther King, Jr. Summer Internship and Fellowship Programs, embodying our commitment to fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging within our Network.

Since its inception in 1991, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Summer Internship Program has supported more than 400 law students, enhancing our ability to effectively represent the client communities we serve. The program was made possible through the efforts of the Pennsylvania Legal Services Black Caucus and the programs in our Network.

Ten first- and second-year law students are offered paid summer internship positions at the legal aid programs throughout our Network. 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, students pen essays memorializing their experiences, which are compiled into a volume known as the Drum Major Essay Collection. Each summer, these essays are presented by students and made available to guests at our annual reception. The collection serves as a testament to their journey and the transformative impact of their work.

In 2004, we introduced the Martin Luther King, Jr. Fellowship Program as a way of providing law school graduates and newly licensed attorneys interested in long-term public interest positions with invaluable mentorship and support. Like our internship program, this initiative partners with a regional or specialty program in our Network.

Frequently, fellows are offered employment beyond the two-year term, fulfilling our program's mission of helping diverse law students build a solid foundation for their careers.

Digital Advocacy

ONLINE INTAKE TOOL

This year, a new statewide online intake tool was launched as part of our ongoing commitment to advancing access to justice for low-income Pennsylvanians. In partnership with North Penn Legal Services and legal aid providers throughout the state, the platform provides individuals with an online application where they can receive legal information and legal referrals tailored to their county and specific legal concerns. This groundbreaking initiative allows potential clients to apply for service online at any time and from any location. Additionally, the system positively impacted Pennsylvania's legal aid community by streamlining operations at legal aid call centers and reducing the volume of data entry into case management systems. Ultimately, this enables our providers to allocate their budgets more strategically, thereby bolstering their capacity to serve low-income clients.

PALAWHELP.ORG

PALawHelp.org, offers comprehensive legal information and resources for Pennsylvanians seeking legal assistance. It covers a wide range of civil legal issues and provides links to government agencies and other legal aid providers. The site also features an array of self-help resources and information on the operation of Pennsylvania Courts and county law libraries. This guide is a free service which was made possible initially through a grant from the Legal Services Corporation. The website development was created by Pro Bono Net and the site, and its vast array of content, is currently maintained by PLAN, Inc., in conjunction with Neighborhood Legal Services and the other members of our Network.

PAPROBONO.NET

PAProbono.net is our website that supports the provision of pro bono legal aid in Pennsylvania. It features a comprehensive Pro Bono Program Directory that connects advocates with organizations where they can volunteer their services. It also offers news and updates on pro bono developments in Pennsylvania, an event calendar showcasing relevant training and other events, and a members-only section with exclusive resources for advocates.

MORE THAN
2,000

resources providing legal information and self-help instruction on handling common legal problems are featured on PALawHelp.

Training Initiatives

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.

IN-PERSON TRAINING SERIES

This year, we hosted two in-person law group trainings and celebrated the long-awaited return of our Leadership Conference. Following a hiatus since 2018, we were thrilled to facilitate the gathering of our Network's communication, fiscal, management, and technology staff for two days in State College. In total, these trainings were attended by 239 individuals and resulted in the earning of 579.5 CLE credits.

STATEWIDE TRAINING CONFERENCE

Our annual Statewide Training Conference is the pinnacle of our training initiatives, underscoring our commitment to investing in every individual in our Network and ensuring they have the tools and knowledge to excel. This year featured an impressive agenda offering 53 sessions as well as a pre-conference day for trial advocacy and compliance training. Setting a new benchmark for success, this year's conference was attended by nearly 400 in-person and virtual participants who earned 1,639.5 CLE credits.

VICTIMS OF CRIME ACT TRAINING

Since 2017, we have offered VOCA Grantee Training. Held each year in May, the series fulfills the ten mandatory training hours required of VOCA grantees and offers attorneys who participate with an opportunity to earn CLE credits. The trainings are primarily attended by legal services, domestic violence, and sexual assault advocates in Pennsylvania. This past fiscal year, ten training sessions were offered during the week-long virtual series. The sessions drew a total attendance of 765 participants who earned 590.5 CLE credits.

WEBINAR TRAINING SERIES

We also offer various webinar-based trainings for the advocates in our Network. Over this last year, these training sessions were attended by 2,138 participants who earned a total of 1,738 CLE credits.

In-Person Training Series and Conferences

2,219

CLE CREDITS EARNED

Victims of Crime Act Training

590.5

CLE CREDITS EARNED

Webinar Training Series

1,738

CLE CREDITS EARNED

Schedule of Revenue, Expenses, and Change in Net Assets

2022-23 FISCAL YEAR

REVENUES

Contracts and Grants	
PA Dept. of Human Services	13,786,700
PA IOLTA-IOLTA Program	1,507,687
PA IOLTA-AJA Program	21,166,462
Other Grants	2,761,167
Interest Income	64,869
Local Contributions	26,292
Other Income	68,077
Total Revenues	39,381,254

EXPENSES

Program Administration	1,143,628
Management & General	1,202,114
Fundraising	0
Grant Awards	36,944,266
Total Expenses	39,290,008

CHANGE IN NET ASSETS **91,246**

Board of Directors

2022-23 FISCAL YEAR

President: Max W. Laun, Esq.

President-Elect: Regina M. Foley, Esq.

Raynes Lawn

Treasurer: Dana W. Chilson, Esq.

McNees Wallace Nurick, LLC

Secretary: Sonia Brookins

Pennsylvania Welfare Rights Organization

President Emeritus: The Honorable Kim Berkeley Clark

Fifth Judicial District of Pennsylvania

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Rochelle Jackson

Carla Payne-Harrison

PENNSYLVANIA BAR ASSOCIATION APPOINTMENTS

The Honorable Bryan Cutler

Pennsylvania House of Representatives

Jamie R. Schumacher, Esq.

MacDonald Illig

PENNSYLVANIA LEGAL AID NETWORK BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Honorable Ronald D. Castille

Chief Justice Emeritus

Allen Harberg, Esq.

Merck & Co.

PENNSYLVANIA PROJECT DIRECTORS APPOINTMENT

Rhodia D. Thomas, Esq.

MidPenn Legal Services

PENNSYLVANIA WELFARE RIGHTS ORGANIZATION APPOINTMENT

Marsha White-Mathis

Support Our Work

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

CY PRES AWARDS

Judges, lawyers, and those in a position to influence cy pres awards are encouraged to direct residual and unclaimed funds to our Network. We make an excellent recipient for funds because we offer an accountable and structured system that has experience providing direct civil legal aid.

DONATIONS

When you donate to us directly, you help us provide civil legal services to the families that need it 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

You can sponsor our Martin Luther King, Jr. Fellowship or Internship Programs or choose us as a beneficiary at your next charity event.



Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc.



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