

ANNUAL REPORT

2024

Pennsylvania
Legal Aid Network



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

PLAN, INC.

2024 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 Colleagues & Friends

Equal access to justice is a cornerstone of our legal system, but for far too many Pennsylvanians, meaningful access to the justice system is limited or nonexistent.

People in need of support from civil legal aid are not distant or anonymous; they are the very fabric of our communities. They are workers trying to make ends meet, veterans who have served our country, seniors deserving of dignity, individuals living with disabilities, and survivors of domestic violence seeking safety. Without access to legal representation, many of these individuals would be left to navigate a complex judicial process alone.

The Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc. (PLAN, Inc.) bridges this gap, providing critical legal support to help people overcome challenges and reclaim stability in their lives. Since 1973, we have been committed to providing the highest quality civil legal aid to those who need it most.

Our mission is carried forward by hundreds of attorneys, paralegals, social workers, and other staff members who relentlessly seek justice, address inequality, and build pathways to opportunity and hope in communities across the Commonwealth. Every day, their work makes it possible for our clients to gain access to essential legal protections and life-changing support: protection for survivors of domestic violence, recovery of stolen wages, safe custody arrangements for children, preservation of housing, and more.

Yet, the need for civil legal aid continues to grow each year. As the new Executive Director of PLAN, Inc., I am incredibly honored to lead one of the nation's most robust legal aid networks, building upon more than a half-century legacy of service. The foundation of our success lies in the longstanding partnerships we have built and the collective impact of those who support our mission.



Civil legal aid clients are our families, neighbors, and friends. They are workers, veterans, seniors, individuals living with disabilities, and survivors of domestic violence.

We are especially grateful to our funders, including the Department of Human Services, Pennsylvania CLE Board, 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 generously give their time and expertise to our legal aid programs.

We also express our deep appreciation to our friends in the General Assembly, Governor's Office, local government officials, and the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania for their steadfast support of our work.

As we look to the future, we will continue to champion justice and equity, further strengthening our position as a vital resource for the legal aid organizations and clients we serve. I look forward to collaborating with all of you as we work toward our shared goals.

With gratitude and determination,

Meredith Rapkin

MEREDITH RAPKIN, ESQ.
PLAN, Inc. Executive Director

About our Network

The Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network is a statewide system made up of fourteen legal aid organizations that make free civil legal aid support, advice, and representation available to Pennsylvanians in need.

Our eight regional programs provide general civil legal aid services to low-income households and survivors of domestic violence in their communities. At our six specialized programs, attorneys operate statewide, focusing on specific issues such as housing, health, and employment.

Each program in our Network operates independently, allowing a tailored approach to addressing legal needs. This distinct structure sets us apart from other civil legal aid organizations in the Commonwealth, playing a crucial role in fulfilling our mission of making legal remedies and support available to low-income residents in all 67 counties of the state.

Last year, our Network provided free civil legal representation to 81,916 households, directly benefiting nearly 200,000 people. Over 90% of the households we assisted faced challenges in six key areas: family, housing, income support, consumer rights, employment, and health—with family and housing issues alone accounting for nearly two-thirds of the cases we handled.

As PLAN, Inc., our responsibilities include: administering grants to the programs within our Network, ensuring that their casework adheres to funding and performance standards; coordinating technology, creating initiatives, and developing resources to support our advocates' efforts; offering networking opportunities and training for the staff at our programs; and representing our Network's clients in matters before administrative agencies, as well as legislative and policy hearings.

IN FISCAL YEAR 2023-24

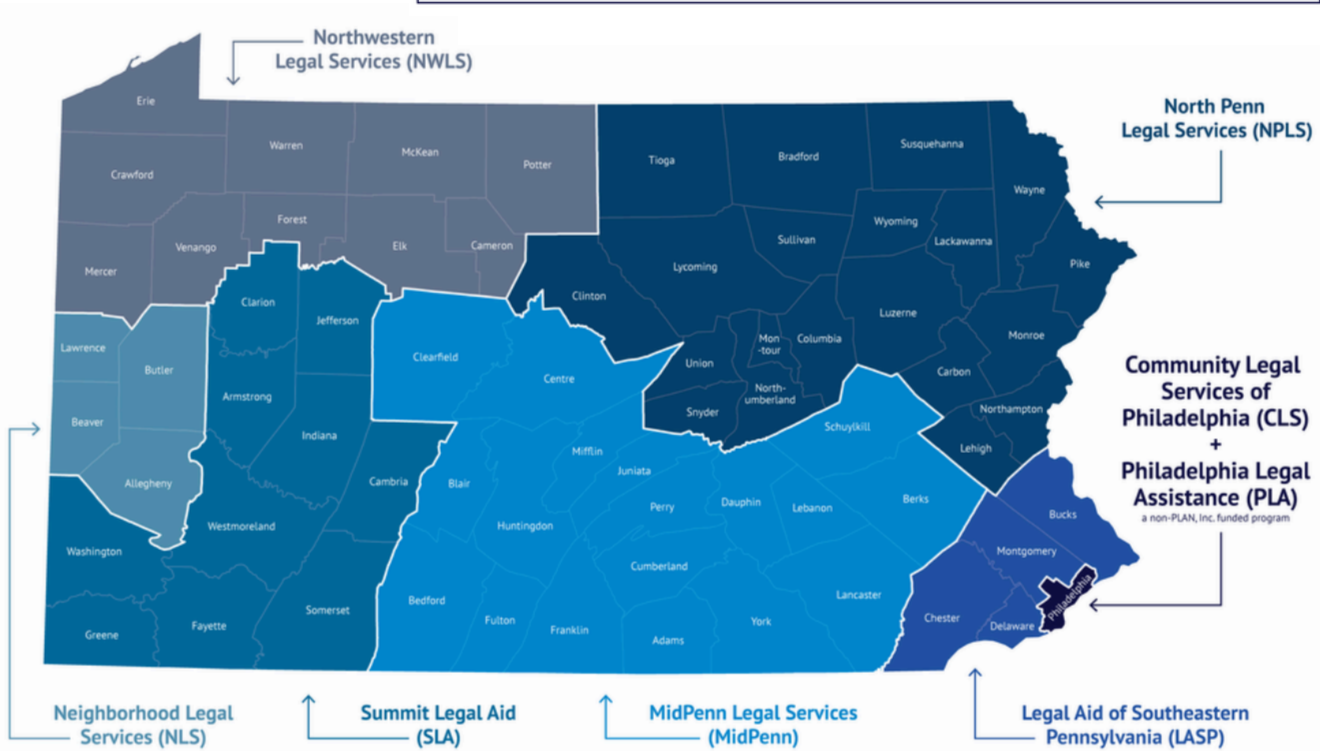
\$37.6 million

in grant funds were allocated among the legal aid organizations in our Network.

Financial Impact of Grants by Region

STATEWIDE SPECIALIZED PROGRAMS

- Community Justice Project (CJP)
- Justice at Work (JaW)
- Pennsylvania Health Law Project (PHLP)
- Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project (PILP)
- Pennsylvania Utility Law Project (PULP)
- Regional Housing Legal Services (RHLS)



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

NORTHEASTERN
\$5,068,736

PHILADELPHIA
\$12,563,396

SOUTHWESTERN
\$6,473,717

NORTHWESTERN
\$1,753,109

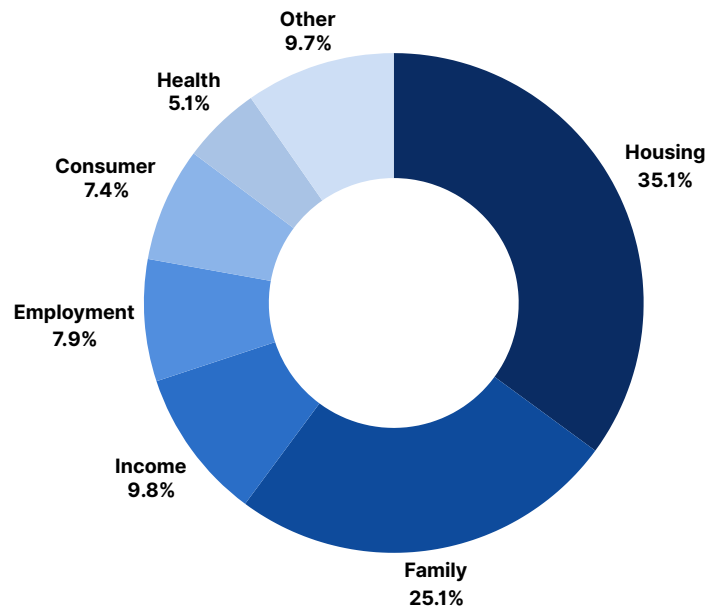
SOUTHEASTERN
\$6,090,134

STATEWIDE
\$5,664,940

Outcomes at a Glance

Last year, our Network provided free civil legal representation to 81,916 households, directly benefiting nearly 200,000 individuals. More than 90% of those we assisted faced challenges in family, housing, income support, employment, consumer rights, and health.

CASE TYPE	HOUSEHOLDS
HOUSING Mortgage foreclosure, unlawful eviction, and denial of access to public or government-subsidized housing	28,779
FAMILY Domestic violence, child support, child custody, parental rights, divorce, and guardianships	20,529
INCOME SUPPORT Termination of Social Security Disability, SSI, unemployment compensation, and public benefits	8,002
EMPLOYMENT Expungements, pardons, discrimination, wage claims, driver's licenses, and agricultural worker issues	6,463
CONSUMER Illegal taking of property, wage garnishment, denial of credit, predatory and fraudulent consumer practices	6,037
HEALTH Healthcare coverage, eligibility and coverage issues, and Medicare/Medicaid/CHIP-related issues	4,151
OTHER Education, elder, individual, and juvenile rights	7,955
TOTAL	81,916



ADDITIONAL BENEFITS OBTAINED

Last fiscal year, we helped clients recover over **\$13 million** in back awards and settlements.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

47,510 people attended community education presentations and participated in workshops and civil legal aid clinics hosted by our Network.

OTHER SERVICES PROVIDED

43,321 referrals were made to other legal services providers, private bar partners, social services providers, and other forms of assistance, underscoring our commitment to providing holistic legal aid services to our clients.

Civil Legal Aid Matters

Most people know that those facing criminal charges have the right to a lawyer, but many are surprised to learn that this right doesn't extend to civil cases. Yet, the stakes in civil cases are often just as high. Without legal help, families can lose their homes, custody of their children, access to healthcare, and financial stability. Everyone should have equal access to justice, no matter their income; civil legal aid is crucial to bridging that gap and protecting their most basic needs.

WHO CIVIL LEGAL AID HELPS

Civil legal aid helps Pennsylvania's most vulnerable residents overcome barriers to stability and understand and exercise their legal rights as homeowners, tenants, employees, spouses, and consumers. Legal aid clients are our low-income neighbors, including veterans, children, individuals living with disabilities, and others in our communities experiencing a civil legal crisis. Civil legal aid opens doors to employment, protects survivors of domestic violence, prevents foreclosures, and provides other vital support to help people overcome challenges and regain stability. Households with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty line—\$39,000 per year for a family of four in 2024—are eligible for our services.

HOW CIVIL LEGAL AID SAVES MONEY

When legal problems arise and are not handled in a timely manner, they can create additional crises that are far more costly to fix down the line. Civil legal aid saves money by helping to address legal issues before they can escalate, thus avoiding additional burden on the court system and lessening the need for taxpayer-funded public resources. For example, preventing a wrongful eviction can help stabilize a household, giving them the chance to remain self-sufficient and able to effectively participate in education, employment, and their community. In a recent study, economists at Franklin & Marshall College found a \$12 return for every \$1 invested in civil legal aid.



Comprehensive Support for a Grandmother and her Grandchild

Neighborhood Legal Services provided critical legal representation and social service advocacy for a grandmother seeking to protect her teenage granddaughter from abuse while establishing a stable home environment.

When Carmen sought help from Neighborhood Legal Services (NLS), she was facing an urgent situation involving her teenage granddaughter, Elizabeth, who had been physically assaulted by her biological mother in front of Carmen. Recognizing the immediate danger of the situation and that Elizabeth's safety required a multi-faceted approach, NLS took swift action, filing a Protection from Abuse (PFA) order on Elizabeth's behalf, and pursuing a custody petition that would provide Carmen with the legal authority needed to make decisions for Elizabeth's well-being.

However, as retired individuals living on fixed incomes, Carmen and her husband faced significant financial challenges in meeting Elizabeth's needs, especially her medical care. The situation was further complicated when their application for assistance from the Department of Human Services (DHS) was denied due to lack of formal guardianship documentation. Through coordinated legal advocacy and social services support, attorneys assisted Carmen with compiling documentation for a DHS appeal and helped her secure utility assistance, as well as SNAP benefits and health insurance for Elizabeth.

Building on this momentum, attorneys assisted Carmen with securing child support orders against both of Elizabeth's biological parents, adding much-needed financial resources for Elizabeth's care. Ultimately, the legal representation by NLS culminated in a successful resolution of the PFA case, establishing a civil order that ensured Elizabeth could continue living safely with her grandparents. In addition, attorneys negotiated compensation from Elizabeth's mother for possessions that she was not allowed to retrieve from her mother's home.

The attorneys working with Carmen helped transform a crisis situation into a stable environment where Elizabeth could thrive. This case highlights the vital role of civil legal aid organizations in providing comprehensive support to families. By addressing both immediate safety concerns and long-term stability needs, civil legal aid helps Pennsylvania families build safer, more secure futures while also preventing further trauma and reducing demands on emergency services and public resources.

Recovering Unpaid Wages for Home Healthcare Workers

Community Legal Services of Philadelphia recently championed the rights of home healthcare workers who were systematically deprived of their rightful wages due to deceptive employment practices.

The case began when Erica, a dedicated home healthcare worker, noticed troubling inconsistencies in her paycheck. Something didn't add up—her hourly rate appeared to decrease during weeks when she worked overtime. Unsure of her rights, Erica turned to Community Legal Services of Philadelphia (CLS) for assistance.

Upon investigation, attorneys discovered an alarming pattern: Erica's employer was intentionally lowering her hourly pay rate during busy weeks, paying below the time-and-a-half rate she was legally due for working overtime. Suspecting the practice affected more than just Erica, they broadened their inquiry to review three years' time and pay records for both current and former employees.

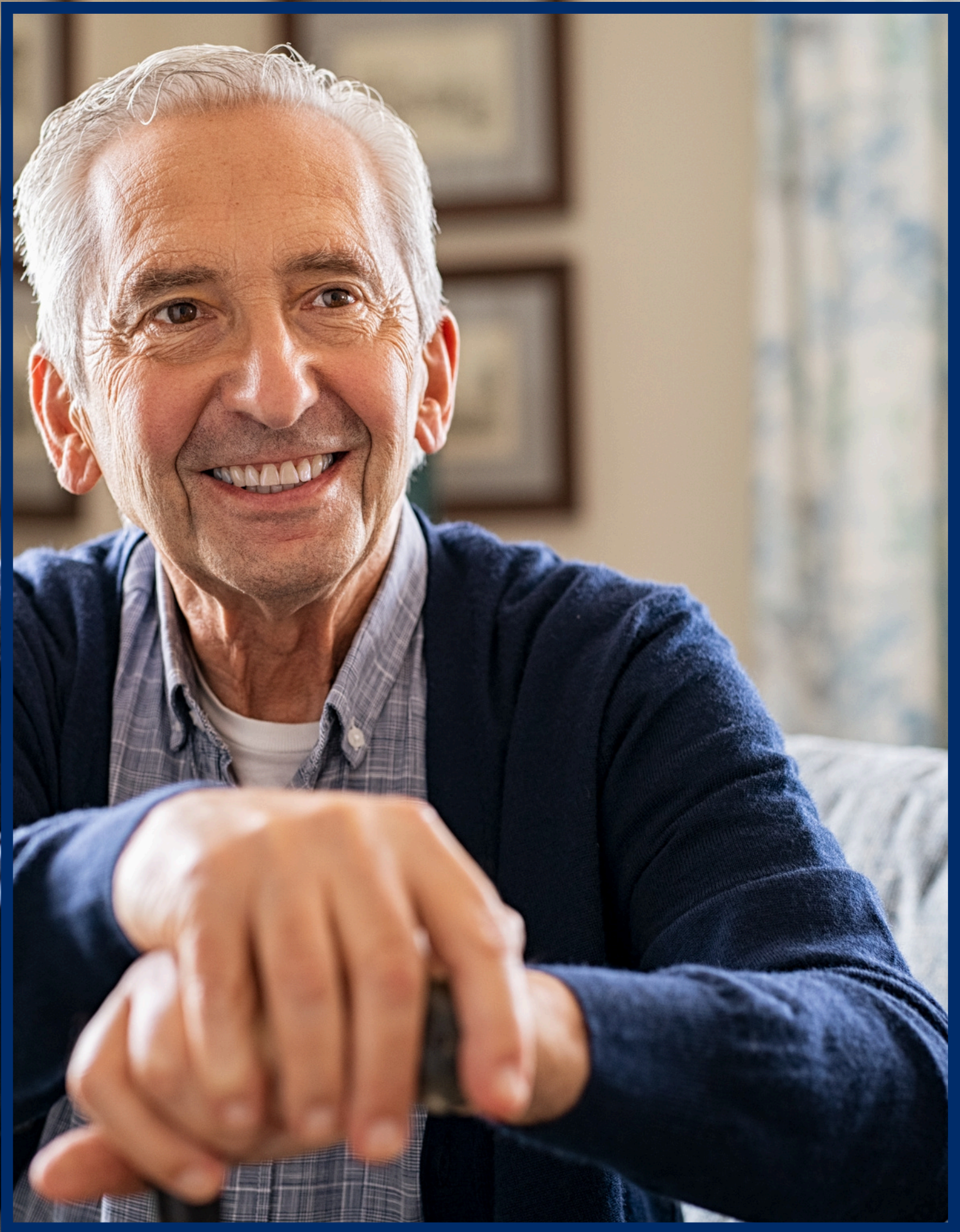
Their efforts revealed a pervasive and deliberate scheme to sidestep the legal requirement of paying time-and-a-half for overtime hours, which harmed a significant number of workers.

CLS responded by pursuing legal action on behalf of all affected employees. Through rigorous advocacy and meticulous documentation, they secured a significant settlement with the employer in October 2023.

For Erica, the resolution meant finally receiving all of the wages she was owed for the hours she had worked. The impact, however, reached far beyond her case, delivering justice to a total of 155 home healthcare workers who had been underpaid by the employer. The \$480,000 settlement provided an average recovery of more than \$3,000 per worker, with some individuals receiving over \$20,000 in back wages.

This case illustrates the critical role civil legal aid plays in protecting workers' rights and ensuring employers are following the law. Each year, thousands of workers across the Commonwealth face similar wage violations, underscoring the ongoing need for accessible legal advocacy to uphold justice and fairness in the workplace.





Maintaining Stability for Homeowners Like Frank

MidPenn Legal Services successfully advocated for a homeowner in rural Pennsylvania whose property was illegally sold at a tax sale.

Frank, a resident of Mifflin County, found himself at risk of losing his home due to unpaid property taxes. Taking proactive steps to address the situation, he applied for and was approved to receive assistance through the Pennsylvania Homeowners Assistance Fund (PAHAF), a program designed to help homeowners maintain stable housing.

When Frank presented his PAHAF grant award documentation to the local Tax Claim Bureau, however, they refused to accept it. Despite having proof that the funds would cover his tax debt completely, the Bureau proceeded to sell his home at a tax sale.

MidPenn Legal Services stepped in to protect Frank's rights, filing an objection to the sale. The trial court agreed with their position and set aside the tax sale. However, the case didn't end there—the property's purchaser intervened and appealed the decision to the Commonwealth Court. In what became a landmark decision, the Commonwealth Court affirmed the trial court's ruling.

The Court established that the PAHAF program creates an actual entitlement, and that homeowners with an approved grant of this type have an unqualified right to that benefit under the due process clause.

For Frank, this outcome was so much more than just a legal victory—it meant stability. With the sale overturned, he was allowed to use his PAHAF funds as intended: to pay his tax debt and remain in his home. Beyond his individual case, this first-of-its-kind ruling established vital protections for Pennsylvanian homeowners who find themselves in similar circumstances, establishing that approved housing assistance grants must be honored before a tax sale can proceed.

Civil legal aid attorneys work daily with clients like Frank to help resolve legal issues early, preventing cascading crises that become far more costly to fix later. In Frank's case, keeping his home not only saved public safety-net resources that might have been needed for emergency housing or social services, but also preserved his ability to remain in his home and in his community and maintain employment.



Martin Luther King, Jr. Summer Internship and Fellowship Program

PLAN, Inc. proudly offers the Martin Luther King, Jr. Summer Internship and Fellowship Programs, which provide law students and recent graduates with individualized guidance and valuable legal work experience, preparing them to become thoughtful, compassionate advocates for justice.

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.

Each year, 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, engage with clients directly, and if certified, take part in court and administrative hearings.

At the conclusion of the program, students memorialize their experiences in 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 with the opportunity to launch their career under a program that encourages self-reflection, personal growth, and personalized mentorship.

Like our internship program, this initiative partners with a regional or specialty program in our Network. Frequently, fellows are offered employment beyond the conclusion of their two-year term.

Digital Advocacy

ONLINE INTAKE TOOL

Our primary website, PALegalAid.net, now offers users a statewide online intake tool, fulfilling our ongoing commitment to providing access to justice to low-income Pennsylvanians. Launched last year in partnership with North Penn Legal Services and legal aid programs throughout the Commonwealth, the tool 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 impacts legal aid programs by streamlining operations at intake 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 support. It covers a wide range of civil legal issues, providing self-help resources, links to government agencies, court information, county law libraries, and local legal aid organizations. The website and its vast array of content is maintained by PLAN, Inc. alongside Neighborhood Legal Services and the other organizations in 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 volunteer opportunities. It also offers news and updates on pro bono developments in Pennsylvania, a calendar with trainings and events, and a members-only section with exclusive resources for advocates.

IN FISCAL YEAR 2023-24

670,000

first-time visitors turned to PALawHelp.org
for legal information and support.

Training Initiatives

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

IN-PERSON TRAINING SERIES

This year, we hosted three in-person trainings; combined, these trainings were attended by 169 participants and resulted in the earning of 250.5 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's training featured an impressive agenda offering 35 sessions as well as a pre-conference day for trial advocacy training. Some highlights include: 385 attendees in total, with 46 of those attendees earning CLE teaching credits. In addition, a total of 1,412.5 CLE credits were earned by those in attendance with 1,108 Substantive CLE credits and 304.5 Ethics 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 822 participants who earned 545 CLE credits.

VIRTUAL TRAINING SERIES

We also offer various virtual trainings for the advocates in our Network. Over this last year, these training sessions were attended by 2,262 participants who earned a total of 1,525 CLE credits.

During FY2023-24,
our trainings resulted in:

3,100
CLE CREDITS EARNED

2,800
TOTAL ATTENDEES

Schedule of Revenue, Expenses, and Change in Net Assets

2023-24 FISCAL YEAR

REVENUES

Contracts and Grants

PA Dept. of Human Services	13,768,998
PA IOLTA-IOLTA Program	9,948,201
PA IOLTA-AJA Program	14,100,640
Other Grants	2,551,050
Interest Income	90,992
Local Contributions	15,271
Other Income	65,219
Total Revenues	40,540,371

EXPENSES

Program Administration	1,333,404
Management & General	1,638,744
Fundraising	0
Grant Awards	37,614,032
Total Expenses	40,586,180

CHANGE IN NET ASSETS **-45,809**

Board of Directors

2023-24 FISCAL YEAR

President: Regina M. Foley, Esq.
President-Elect: Sonia Brookins
Secretary: Rochelle Jackson
Treasurer: Dana W. Chilson, Esq.
President Emeritus: Max W. Laun, Esq.

CLIENTS COUNCIL OF PENNSYLVANIA APPOINTMENTS

Rochelle Jackson
Carla Payne-Harrison

PENNSYLVANIA BAR ASSOCIATION APPOINTMENTS

Dana W. Chilson, Esq.
McNees Wallace & Nurick LLC
Regina M. Foley, Esq.
Raynes & Lawn
The Honorable Charity Grimm Krupa
Pennsylvania House of Representatives, 51st District
The Honorable Stephen P.B. Minor
Court of Common Pleas of Potter County
Jamie R. Schumacher, Esq.
MacDonald Illig

PENNSYLVANIA LEGAL AID NETWORK BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Honorable Ronald D. Castille
Chief Justice Emeritus
Allen Harberg, Esq.
Merck & Co.
Max W. Laun, Esq.

PENNSYLVANIA PROJECT DIRECTORS APPOINTMENT

Rhodia D. Thomas, Esq.
MidPenn Legal Services

PENNSYLVANIA WELFARE RIGHTS ORGANIZATION APPOINTMENTS

Sonia Brookins
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 we receive direct donations, we are able to provide civil legal aid to the Pennsylvanians 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 SERVICE

In Pennsylvania, attorneys can earn CLE credits for pro bono service when they partner with one of the civil legal aid programs in our Network.

SPONSORSHIPS

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



Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc.



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