

JUSTICE MATTERS

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NEIGHBORHOOD
LEGAL SERVICES

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SUPPORTING RESIDENTS OF ALLEGHENY, BEAVER, BUTLER AND LAWRENCE COUNTIES

Bob Racunas Announces Retirement: Served NLS for Five Decades

After five decades of service to Neighborhood Legal Services, Robert V. Racunas is retiring in January 2021. Bob began his career as a summer intern from the [University of Pittsburgh School of Law](#) and was named executive director of Neighborhood Legal Services in 1980. Among Bob's many achievements was spearheading the organization's 50th anniversary celebration in June of 2015 with the Gridiron Gold reception and dinner. The event honored six Hall of Fame quarterbacks from the Pittsburgh region— George Blanda, Jim Kelly, Dan Marino, Joe Montana, Joe Namath and Johnny Unitas – and raised substantial funds for NLS and the quarterbacks' chosen charities. The event also brought attention to the importance of the organization's work beyond the legal community. "Bob's decades of service and dedication to the NLS is unprecedented and rare these days," said Stephanie R. Reiss, Esquire, president of the [NLS Board of Directors](#). "I'm privileged to have had the opportunity to work with him and know that replacing him will be no easy feat for us."



Despite the pandemic, NLS helped thousands

During a time when many businesses, corporations, and non-profits laid-off or furloughed employees, Neighborhood Legal Services staffed up during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the generosity of its supporters. Additional attorneys were needed to respond to requests for legal aid involving housing, protection from abuse, child custody and job loss.

"We recognized that the pandemic was not the time to pull back and streamline staff," said Christine Kirby, Director of Development. Leveraging funding from grants, private donations, and stimulus funding, NLS added to its advocacy staff, utilized the services of temporary attorneys, and piloted a Judicare program in Beaver, Butler and Lawrence counties.

As communities emerge from the pandemic and get back to normal, the demand for legal aid will continue to skyrocket. "The economic costs of COVID-19 created hardships only the legal aid and civil justice systems can resolve," said Kirby.

[Story continued on inside](#)

Despite the pandemic, NLS helped thousands

(continued)

Due to the generosity of donors and other supporters, NLS helped 14,907 people resolve pandemic-related legal problems thanks to your generous support. By the numbers, here's how NLS responded over the past 17 months:

4,956 CASES FOR SAFETY

Domestic abuse and family strife soared during isolation. We handled 4,956 cases of domestic abuse or child custody/visitation disputes.

2,201 CASES FOR SHELTER

Despite moratoria on evictions, mortgage foreclosure and utility shutoffs families faced housing insecurity. Evictions reached record highs during COVID. We handled 2,201 cases of eviction or utilities disconnection.

578 CASES FOR INCOME

Unfair job loss, withheld unemployment benefits, loss of food stamps/SNAP payments or missing stimulus checks could push a family into eviction and extreme poverty. We handled 578 cases to secure deserved funds.

You Can Help People Get the Justice They Deserve

Please give at nlsa.us/donate.



**NEIGHBORHOOD
LEGAL SERVICES**

Are you an attorney who wants to help?

*Call Mary Ann Troper-Malley
(412) 586-6134. We need you!*



We're Hiring!

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – NLS is seeking a visionary, strategic, and collaborative individual to serve as its next Executive Director. Applications due September 17, 2021.

MANAGING ATTORNEY – Focusing on Housing/Eviction Prevention matters

STAFF ATTORNEYS – Three open positions for Family Law, one each in our Allegheny, Beaver, and Butler offices.

For more information,
visit nlsa.us/job-opportunities

THE WAY FORWARD

EVOLVING TO BETTER
SERVE OUR COMMUNITY



The United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania's Workplace Giving Campaign kicks off on September 1 and runs through April 30, 2022. NLS' United Way Contributor Choice number is #2761 and our Equal Justice Campaign Contributor Choice number is #534. Please support NLS through the United Way!

Words of Thanks

"I would like to tell you how absolutely wonderful you are. You are such an amazing rock for me. You are so kind and patient. You are understanding. You remind me what I do know, but what I may forget sometimes. You are an absolute hero! I am so thankful that you are helping me and are by my side. You remind me that I don't want to fight for just me and my kids; I am fighting for so many people who aren't able to fight like I can. But without you, my fight would be so [very] hard. So, thank you for being the wonderful you that you are!" — Recent NLS Client



New Attorney Spotlight: Q&A with Melissa Ruggiero

Melissa Ruggiero joined NLS in June of 2020, working in the areas of Social Security Disability and the Elder Law Project.

HOW DO YOU COLLABORATE WITH OTHERS AT NLS?

NLS has many experienced attorneys and I appreciate being able to ask for help resolving an issue, especially when it's something I may not have come across before. We also have the support of social workers, paralegals, administrative assistants, and law school interns, so it's a team effort.

WHAT SURPRISED YOU MOST ABOUT WORKING WITH NLS CLIENTS?

Folks who've worked hard and paid their bills and taxes all their lives are struggling to do the same in retirement. They live modestly but still can't make ends meet. Some are losing homes they've rented for decades because the owner decided to sell and new owners can make more money renovating and renting at higher prices. It's happening all over and it's displacing older residents from homes and communities they've lived in for years.

BESIDES PROVIDING LEGAL HELP, WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT ABOUT YOUR WORK?

We try to relieve our clients stress by demonstrating that we are in their corner, fighting and advocating for them. Sometimes just having someone by their side helps people get through a trying situation. Much of my job is about being a good listener and asking the right questions to get to the heart of the problem.



Valued Colleague Moves from Staff Attorney to Volunteer

NLS senior attorney Dan Haller is retiring from NLS to become a part-time volunteer attorney. A valued colleague and friend, Haller has been with NLS since 1974 when he was hired by then director, Judge R. Stanton Wettick as an attorney in the organization's newly opened Beaver County office. During his tenure with legal aid, Haller has practiced in various civil areas including domestic law, consumer law, bankruptcy, and landlord tenant law. He has also argued several cases in the appellate courts of Pennsylvania.

Speaking of her long-time friend Dan Haller, Cathy Martin, Director of Advocacy for NLS, said

“You can always count on Dan to do the right thing. He is calm, has great judgment and perspective and he cares about being a good lawyer. At the same time, he's quirky, funny and adds so much to NLS.”

Martin recalled a day when she was leaving court after a “nightmarish hearing.” She ran into Haller who was on his way to lunch with friends. “I looked stricken and Dan asked me what was going on. When I told him, he cancelled with his friends and took me out to lunch to cheer me up.”

In his volunteer attorney role at NLS, Haller will continue to focus on housing and specifically tangled title cases. “Dan has always liked landlord-tenant law because it gets him into court, which he loves, and more importantly, makes a positive impact on his clients' lives. As a devoted family man, helping people stay in their homes is very important to him,” said Martin.



CONTACT US

NLS provides service to residents in Allegheny, Beaver, Butler and Lawrence counties.

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Visit us online: **www.nlsa.us**

Sign up for more information via email!

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NLS' United Way Contributor Choice number is #2761 and our Equal Justice Campaign Contributor Choice number is #534.

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