

# JUSTICE MATTERS

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NEIGHBORHOOD  
LEGAL SERVICES

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SUPPORTING RESIDENTS OF ALLEGHENY, BEAVER, BUTLER AND LAWRENCE COUNTIES

## Finally Free From Abuse and Fear

After suffering numerous physical injuries, Jill\* tried to remove her abusive boyfriend from her family's life. As a young mother, she followed the rules and filed for a Protection from Abuse (PFA) order to legally force him to stay away. But he didn't. And when COVID-19 struck, he got even more violent. Again, Jill followed the rules and prepared to go to court to ask the PFA to be enforced but everything was shut down and courts were operating under an emergency order so most hearings were postponed or conducted remotely. She called the police but was told they weren't aware her abuser had been served with a PFA or that the county had extended PFAs so she received little to no help. Fortunately, Jill became aware of NLS and made a call that would save her life. A NLS social worker collaborated with local housing agencies to move Jill to a safe place to live and secured rental assistance. Jill's NLS attorney then got the district attorney involved who made sure the police department was aware of the PFA and was enforcing it. Another NLS attorney stepped in to secure a permanent PFA. Eighteen months have now passed and Jill and her family have been free of their abuser. Thanks to your support of legal aid, Jill and her children will experience life free from threats, harassment, and abuse.

To ensure justice is served for others like Jill, please consider supporting NLS training, education and services that give everyone an [equitable opportunity for justice](#).



*Many NLS clients are safe at home this holiday season because of your generous support of legal aid and the advocacy of their NLS attorneys.*

*\*Names have been changed to protect client's safety and privacy.*

## Urgent Need for Reduced Fee Attorney Help in NLS Offices

The NLS offices in Beaver, Butler and Lawrence Counties are in urgent need of dedicated attorneys willing to work at reduced fees to help clients with divorce, support, and custody referral issues.

According to Nikki Christopher, Managing Attorney of NLS's offices in Beaver, Butler and Lawrence Counties, "We're only able to help a limited number of clients with our staff attorneys. That's why

[Story continued on inside](#)

# Urgent Need for Reduced Fee Attorney Help in NLS Satellite Offices

*(continued)*



engaging attorneys who are willing to work at reduced fees is so critical to helping us meet the needs of those in our communities,” said Christopher.

NLS’s Reduced Fee Referral Program was developed in collaboration with local bar associations where participating attorneys agree to represent low-income clients for a reduced fee in specific (certain) types of cases expanding our capacity to help people with a legal crisis.

In addition to looking for attorneys able to assist clients at reduced fees, NLS is also looking for Clients’ Council board members. The role of the **Clients’ Council** member is to act as a liaison between the community in which they are located and Neighborhood Legal Services. Clients’ Council members are the voice for the community\*. They also bring information about NLS back into the community so that members are aware of the assistance NLS can provide.

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***To find out more about working as a reduced fee attorney or becoming a Clients’ Council member, visit [nlsa.us](https://nlsa.us)***

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*\*Clients’ council members must be client-eligible for legal aid with incomes below 125% of the federal poverty guidelines at the time of appointment.*

## Help Support Equal Access to Justice

Friends like you have been a source of hope and justice for all of us at Neighborhood Legal Services. Thanks to your support, 18,483 individuals experiencing a legal crisis last year received access to justice. With your continued support, NLS will continue to deliver on the promise of equal justice for all, not for just those who can afford legal counsel.

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***Please consider making a special holiday or year-end gift in the enclosed envelope today or give online at [nlsa.us/donate](https://nlsa.us/donate).***

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# Doreen Mitchell – 2022 PLAN Excellence Award Recipient



Doreen Mitchell, Special Projects Coordinator for NLS, has been selected to receive the 2022 Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN) Excellence Award. Each year, the PLAN Excellence Awards recognize the outstanding achievements of friends, members, and partners of the legal aid community who have gone above and beyond in their work on behalf of marginalized and vulnerable

populations. The Excellence Award recipients are chosen based on their commitment, dedication, and effort to improving the availability and quality of civil legal services in Pennsylvania.

In addition to her PLAN Excellence Award, Doreen is celebrating a forty-year career at Neighborhood Legal Services. Doreen started at NLS as a Receptionist and then gradually moved onto more responsibility including the roles of Protection from Abuse Coordinator and Expungement Coordinator. In her current position as Special Projects Coordinator, Mitchell serves as the point-of-contact expediting referral processes amongst project partners for referrals from housing eviction/foreclosure prevention program operators which include City/County ESG programs, URA, RentHelpPGH, and Just Mediation Pittsburgh. She triages and determines the kind of help needed, then connects cases to attorneys for legal help and gives case updates to housing program partners. She also accepts referrals and coordinates help for clients with tangled

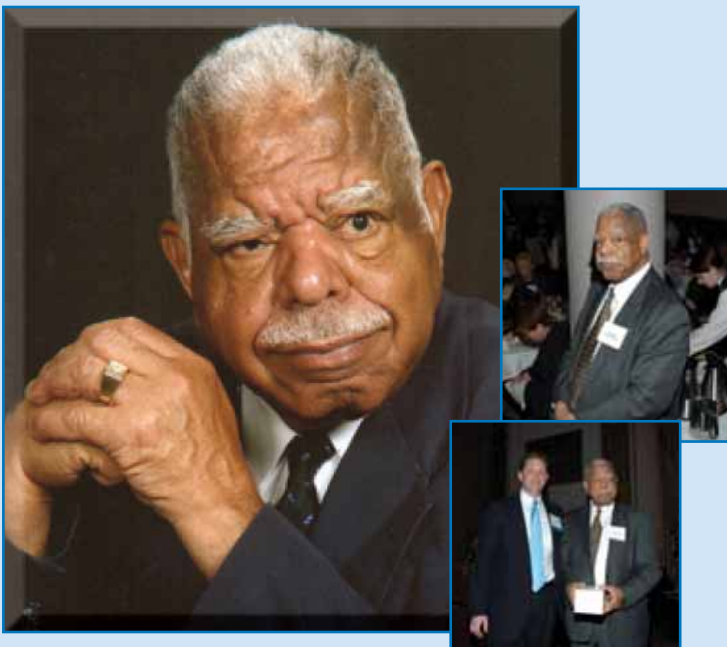
titles issues; tangled titles refer to individuals living in a family home where the original owner has passed away and did not leave a will, leaving the property with a clouded title and obscure ownership. The tangled title program helps prevent displacement of individuals that do not officially own their property.

“I do whatever is necessary to help my clients and meet them where they are,” explained Mitchell. In her time at NLS, that has included meeting clients at gas stations, in parks or wherever else necessary to do her job.

Doreen will be honored at the Excellence Awards Banquet with an award and video tribute highlighting her advocacy securing justice for people who turned to legal aid for help.

“I love what I do. It’s not a job, it’s my life,” she said.

## In Tribute: Justin M. Johnson



The Honorable Justin M. Johnson, former Judge of the Superior Court of Pennsylvania, NLS incorporator and former Board President, passed away in November at the age of 88. Judge Johnson was a strong advocate of NLS and a beloved mentor of many. He was a Vietnam War veteran and the second African American to serve on the state appellate court. “Judge Johnson was a trailblazer in his efforts to expand and diversify opportunities for minorities in the legal profession and to improve access to legal aid for vulnerable people,” said Kimberly Motley-Phillips, a staff attorney with NLS.

“He was always there for young lawyers, and his office was the first one I headed to when I came home to Pittsburgh after law school. He welcomed me and others with open arms. He was way more than a judge. He was a father figure and a friend,” said Motley-Phillips.

# Adam DiBuo: Housing Managing Attorney at NLS

Adam DiBuo knew he had found the right place at NLS when he became a staff attorney working on housing cases, most recently under the Project SHAPE: Stabilizing Housing and Preventing Evictions. Project SHAPE addresses housing insecurity in areas of the City and County with higher eviction such as Homewood, Wilksburg, and the Hill District. Project SHAPE is funded by the United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency.

“ There is an inherent power imbalance between tenants and landlords, which manifests itself in negotiation and in the court system. Our goal at NLS is to level the playing field so everyone has a fair chance to stay in their home,” said DiBuo.

DiBuo was recently promoted to Managing Attorney. He will lead NLS’s housing advocacy and the community engagement activities with housing advocates, among them Community Justice Project (CJP), JustMediationPGH (JMP), RentHelpPGH, Pittsburgh Hispanic Development Corporation (PHDC), with guidance from Anne Wright through CMU’s

CREATE Lab, and with generous financial support from the Pittsburgh Foundation and the City of Pittsburgh’s Urban Redevelopment Authority’s Housing Opportunity Fund.

Another organization Adam works closely with is Community Engagement Center through the University of Pittsburgh. The Community Engagement Center is in Homewood and acts as a hub for community residents to meet, have access to technology and resources, and attend community-based events. “Being located in the same community where people often need the most help is invaluable. When you’re in a vulnerable situation, like possibly losing your home, face-to-face help can be a lifeline,” he said.



## CONTACT US

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

Call toll-free: **1-866-761-6572**

Visit us online: **[www.nlsa.us](http://www.nlsa.us)**

**Sign up** for more information via email!



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



Funded, in part, by the Commonwealth and through a contract with the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). The official registration and financial information of the Neighborhood Legal Services may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free within Pennsylvania 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement. Federal regulations applying to NLS require that we notify all donors that no funds can be expended by NLS for any activity prohibited under P.L. 104-134 or otherwise prohibited by 45 C.F.R. § 1600 et seq.