

# JUSTICE MATTERS

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NEIGHBORHOOD  
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SUPPORTING RESIDENTS OF ALLEGHENY, BEAVER, BUTLER AND LAWRENCE COUNTIES



## KRIS'S CORNER

Hello! Thank you for the warm welcome and outpouring of support I have received since becoming NLS executive director last January. In return, I wanted to write to give you an update—and to say thank you.

Last month I was lucky enough to attend the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) Executive Director Conference in Washington, D.C.. This conference marked the first in over ten years that all the LSC Directors have gathered. I met people who had been on the job for less than a week and other people who had over forty years leading their program. It was a lovely reminder that NLS is but one part of a community dedicated to fighting for justice on behalf of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

The theme of this year's conference was "Leadership in a Time of Transition." Legal aid programs across the country have faced a series of rapid changes as the COVID-19 pandemic pressured us to adapt to new technologies, transition to new ways to reach communities, and help clients with new hardships.

NLS is also transitioning. As the new Executive Director, I am working closely with our board, attorneys, volunteers, and staff to strengthen our work in key areas, including:

- strengthening community partnerships,
- expanding client services through technology,
- increasing the public's knowledge of legal aid, and
- implementing our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, which includes creating opportunities for a broader range of attorneys to join us in pro bono service.

You'll be hearing more about these initiatives in upcoming newsletters and email communications. In the meantime, I am sincerely grateful for your good wishes, ideas and even the occasional, "How's it going, Kris?" I have enjoyed hearing from so many of you.

Free civil legal aid is the only way to ensure access to justice for everybody. Thank you for working toward this goal with us.

Sincerely,  
Kris Bergstrom  
Executive Director



*NLS Executive Director Kris Bergstrom attended the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) Executive Director Conference in Washington, D.C. on Sept. 12-15. Pennsylvania Legal Aid Project Directors whose programs receive federal funding from LSC were in attendance (from left): Anita Santos-Singh, Philadelphia Legal Assistance; Kris Bergstrom, Neighborhood Legal Services; Shawn Boehringer, Legal Aid Southeastern Pennsylvania; Lori Molloy, North Penn Legal Services; Brian Gorman, Southwestern PA Legal Aid; Jackie Lager, Northwestern Legal Services; and Rhodia Thomas, MidPenn Legal Services.*

*Photo credit: Legal Aid of Southeastern PA*



# Shielding Children from Abuse with Help from NLS

Emily\* decided her kids weren't going to become a statistic for a child-abuse report. Then the cost of legal counsel threatened to rob her of that choice – and leave her son in the hands of the man who had abused them both.

When they all shared a home, the man had assaulted Emily and left their young son and daughter bruised and bleeding too many times to count. No one was safe from his vicious anger. When Emily ended the relationship, she unknowingly agreed to a plan for shared custody that left her and the children vulnerable. He assaulted her every time they met to exchange the children ... and she feared he was still abusing their kids. She filed a Protection from Abuse order to keep him away from her but felt powerless to protect her son and daughter.

Then, Emily's already chaotic world exploded. On a day when both children had spent the weekend at their father's house, only her daughter came home. Daddy was keeping her brother, the little girl said. Frantic, Emily called to plead for the boy's return. Her ex wouldn't budge and refused to let her speak to her son or even bring over his schoolwork.

Emily knew she needed legal help but couldn't afford an attorney, especially after



all they'd been through. Fortunately, NLS was here to help ... not just with paperwork but also with much-needed mental and emotional support.

Custody battles can be traumatic. NLS connected Emily with a social worker on our staff who immediately put Emily and her children into the care of a nearby family therapist. Meanwhile, her legal aid attorney stepped in to guide Emily through the custody proceedings.

The NLS attorney, working with Emily, evaluated a custody plan proposed by the father and submitted a counterproposal based on what was best for the children, not

him. Emily's legal aid lawyer led her through court procedures, legal forms, and the negotiation process ... and he ensured her safety by acting as her liaison to the father.

In the end, Emily and her son and daughter received both the emotional and legal support they absolutely had to have to be mentally and physically safe because of your generosity.

More than 70 children died from child abuse in Pennsylvania in 2020 and another 115 nearly did so. To support NLS and its efforts to save families like Emily's, donate here at [www.nlsa.us/donate](http://www.nlsa.us/donate).

*\*Name changed to protect privacy.*

## TABLE Magazine Profiles the Work of NLS

NLS was recently profiled in *TABLE* magazine as a part of a series of articles entitled "Forging Forward 2022" about organizations "helping our region make progress on the significant issues challenging our friends and neighbors." The article, supported by the Pittsburgh Foundation, previewed the [#ONEDAY Critical Needs Campaign](#), which took place on August 9 and raised \$1.75 million for non-profit organizations throughout the region.

**Read the full article in *TABLE* at:**  
[TableMagazine.com/blog/2021/6/29/justice-for-all](http://TableMagazine.com/blog/2021/6/29/justice-for-all)



# NLS Welcomes New Staff

NLS welcomes new staff in the areas of housing, and family law as well as advocates to staff our medical-legal partnership in 2021 and 2022. Please join us in welcoming the following legal aid staff:

## Attorneys:

Nick Brady            Luke Palmer  
Melissa Evans        Shannon Scabora  
Hannah Fortini     Kyle Semroc  
Danielle Harrington Sarah Steimer  
Robert Karlavage    Charles Terwilliger  
Peter Lewis           Alex Thomas  
Melanie Morgret     Russell Turner

## Professional Staff:

Bethany Bray,  
Community Engagement Coordinator  
Denise McKeown,  
Human Resources Manager  
Ronna Mineo, Accounting Manager

## Support Staff:

Janet Iannerelli, Secretary  
Chase Napier, Intake Specialist  
Erica Pennington, Receptionist

The organization is embarking on a strategic planning session, assessing its technology, ways of engaging with the communities it serves and evaluating ways to improve access and better connect with clients. Read more about this in upcoming issues of [Equal Justice Matters](#) and [Equal Justice Update](#).

***We are also hiring, please help us spread the word about these public interest legal positions: [nlsa.us/job-opportunities](https://nlsa.us/job-opportunities)***

## Schedule a NLS Community Presentation

NLS's new community engagement initiative is gearing up this fall with some exciting legal literacy sessions, tabling events, and presentations to community partners. A series of legal literacy sessions will be hosted by both the Butler Area Public Library as well as different Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh branches. We're partnering with PULP, MVI, the new EmployHer initiative, and the National Council of Jewish women to provide legal education directly to the community, while working with UPMC through the Medical-Legal Partnership, the Mon Valley Providers Council, and the JFCS Squirrel Hill Food pantry to get information directly to service providers. For questions on upcoming community engagement sessions or to schedule an event, contact Bethany Bray at [brayb@nlsa.us](mailto:brayb@nlsa.us).

***Stay up to date with events and community seminars follow NLS on social media and visit our website: [nlsa.us/about-us/events](https://nlsa.us/about-us/events)***



## 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!



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.



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