

JUSTICE MATTERS

A PUBLICATION OF NEIGHBORHOOD LEGAL SERVICES



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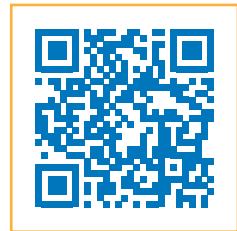
FALL 2023

SUPPORTING RESIDENTS OF ALLEGHENY, BEAVER, BUTLER AND LAWRENCE COUNTIES

Everyone Deserves Legal Help in Our Civil Justice System

Civil legal aid provided by Neighborhood Legal Services is often the only path to justice for our most vulnerable neighbors facing a civil legal problem impacting life's most basic needs: personal safety, family, health, shelter and warmth.

It's a fact: People who can afford to hire a private attorney are statistically more likely to win or settle a legal case in their favor. This income-based inequality is called the "justice gap." With your continued support we can narrow this gap and help individuals and families with low-incomes get attorneys dedicated to their success.



Give Today!



A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Every organization that goes through a strategic planning process knows it can be a labor intensive and sometimes painful exercise. But at its conclusion, you learn new things about your organization, where you need to go, and strategies for how you'll get there. During our recent strategic plan discussions, we identified several priorities that we believe will put us on the road to a productive future, including strengthening our organizational structure and improving efficiencies to better serve an ever-growing number of clients (just this past year, we opened a record 8,000 new cases). In addition, we recognize the importance of offering

more development opportunities for newer staff attorneys so they are valued in their profession and compensation. To read the full plan, please visit our website at nlsa.us or scan the QR code for a direct link to NLS's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan. We look forward to hearing your thoughts on our forward-facing goals, and as always, we thank you for your support.



Sincerely,
Kris Bergstrom
Executive Director

2023 Pro Bono Achievement Award Winners



From Left: Judy Hale, NLS Pro Bono Manager; Daniel G. Vitek, Staff Attorney with Community Justice Project; Eileen Yacknin, Litigation Coordinator at NLS; Kyle C. Webster, Vice President of Housing & General Counsel with Action Housing

Several NLS staff and volunteer attorneys were recognized by the Allegheny County Bar Foundation (ACBA) for their tireless dedication to pro bono service. The Allegheny County Bar Foundation (ACBF) Pro Bono Center helps attorneys fulfill their professional responsibility to provide public interest legal services by creating, managing, and supporting programs that match volunteer attorneys with individuals with low incomes facing legal issues that threaten their basic human needs. Congratulations to the following attorneys and organizations on their well-deserved honors:

Michael DiSantis, Esq., a partner at Tressler LLP, received the Jane F. Hepting Individual Attorney Award, given to an attorney who has shown an exemplary commitment to or made substantial achievements in pro bono legal services.

Eileen Yacknin, Esq., an NLS staff attorney, received the ACBA Edward G. O'Connor Fellows Award in honor of her outstanding public service work.

Nicklaus Oliver, Esq., long-time NLS supporter and volunteer, earned the Kathryn M. Kenyon Leadership Award, given to an attorney who demonstrates exceptional leadership and commitment to pro bono efforts that benefit the region's most vulnerable citizens.

Meghan Tighe, Esq., an NLS staff attorney, was recognized with a Lorraine M. Bittner Public Interest Attorney Award, given to an outstanding and dedicated attorney who is employed by an entity or program whose primary function is the delivery of civil legal services to individuals with low incomes or organizations that serve the poor or disadvantaged.

Carol Mills McCarthy, Esq., long-time NLS volunteer and former board president received the ACBA Presidential Merit Award in recognition of her extraordinary commitment to legal aid and pro bono volunteerism.

In addition to individual award recipients, **Neighborhood Legal Services and the University of Pittsburgh School of Law Rural Legal Clinic** received a **Special Service Award**, a significant acknowledgement of the collaboration between the two organizations and their mission to expand resources to individuals with low incomes in legally underserved areas.

NLS Leads the way on Eviction Prevention Effort

Judy Hale, Esq., MPA, Pro Bono Manager at NLS, is leading a unique eviction prevention effort aimed at helping low-income tenants prepare for community-based mediation with their landlords. The Landlord/Tenant Mediation Advice Project began last August and is a collaboration between JustMediationPGH, RentHelp Pittsburgh, the Pittsburgh Hispanic Development Corporation, and other community partners. "Our goal with this collaborative effort is to give clients the best counsel possible as they head into mediation with their landlords," said Hale. "We know this kind of innovative approach helps keep people in their homes, and cases out of the courts."

If you are interested in volunteering or want more information about the Landlord/Tenant Mediation Advice Project, or any other eviction-related project, please contact Judy Hale, NLS Pro Bono Manager, at halej@nlsa.us or 724-371-3888.

VOLUNTEERS WELCOME!

Whether you're an attorney, law student, Paralegal, or someone who wants to help but isn't sure how, NLS has a spot for you. To learn more, visit nlsa.us/volunteer.

Jayla's Story: Justice Achieved with Your Help

Babies should never face eviction.

Thanks to you, many won't. Jayla* was an expecting mother who was suddenly facing the threat of eviction. She suddenly owed three month's rent at a higher rate after needing to take maternity leave, due to a miscommunication of income to the housing authority. Can you imagine having to juggle the stress of dealing with government agencies while raising a newborn?

Our kids pay the price of eviction.

Evictions during infancy have been linked to late cognitive development. Children who have been evicted are **4 times more likely to quit school** before graduating. Jayla felt pinned, worried about disrupting her child's support network, until she reached out to NLS. Jayla had gotten a new job, but her employer wouldn't approve time off for the court hearings. **NLS attorney Nick Brady**, "...stepped in like a fairy godmother," Jayla said, going to court in her stead. Jayla's debt was paid, and the



housing authority adjusted her assistance to its proper level.

Thanks to people like you, Jayla's baby can grow up in safe and stable housing and have the best chance of staying in school.



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

Eviction Rates are Rising Causing Surge in Demand for Legal Help

Evictions are not episodic life events. Their impact often lingers far beyond a court date and can trigger a chain of adverse consequences, altering the course of people's lives for many years to come. Eviction filing rates are quickly returning to, if not exceeding, pre-pandemic filing rates just as the many state and local eviction diversion programs put in place due to COVID-19 are winding down. Because of support from justice-minded individuals like you, NLS was able to assist 4,975 individuals and their families with legal problems involving housing instability – a 31% increase! Your support continues to help us respond to the growing demand for legal help. NLS is so grateful to have your support and because of you, we can greet people facing eviction with open doors.



Vulnerable Tenants Displaced by Fire, Helped by NLS

Last December, the Roosevelt Building in Downtown Pittsburgh suffered a fire that displaced some 100 residents, many of them elderly and low-income. The building's owner said extensive repairs were needed and that tenants had to vacate the building within three weeks. Days before that deadline, legal aid attorneys from Neighborhood Legal Services and other housing advocacy organizations, took the building owner **to court** to delay the move-outs, and to allow the residents time to find other housing. In all, NLS attorneys represented 70 tenants in the matter. According to NLS Managing Attorney for Housing **Adam DiBuo**, "Fires are traumatic events and for the vulnerable residents of the Roosevelt Building, finding another place to live was going to take longer than a few weeks. We were gratified our organization was there to help."



This holiday season, consider a donation to NLS. There are several ways to give:



- ◆ Mail Your Donation to **Neighborhood Legal Services, 928 Penn Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15222**
- ◆ Donate online at nlsa.us/donate
- ◆ Text **Giving** to **44321**
- ◆ Donate **via United Way** (Contributor Choice #2701 or #534)

Any way you choose, you will be helping provide access to equal justice for those in desperate need.







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

Follow us on social media!    

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for Equal Justice
LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION



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.