



NEIGHBORHOOD LEGAL SERVICES' VOLUNTEER SERVICES AND PRIVATE ATTORNEY INVOLVEMENT (PAI) PLAN 2025

Neighborhood Legal Services (NLS) plans to continue to operate a variety of Volunteer and Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) programs in 2024. Through PAI, private attorneys agree to represent indigent clients for free or at low cost. During FY 23-24, approximately 12.7 per cent of NLS's clients were assisted through PAI pro bono programs. NLS also operates reduced fee referral programs, through which private attorneys agree to represent indigent clients for a reduced fee (which cannot exceed 50 per cent of the average local fee). Attorney, paralegal, support staff, law student interns, and student volunteers play a vital role in the delivery of legal services to NLS's clients. All of the planned programs are dependent upon a sufficient level of volunteer participation. NLS believes that recruitment efforts in all four (4) counties of the NLS program would be facilitated through the addition of dedicated staff to assist in pro bono recruitment. As a result, NLS received and implemented a second LSC *Pro Bono Innovation* grant from the Legal Services Corporation to strengthen and extend the new centralized and sustainable infrastructure for expanded pro bono services. Using this grant and other funding sources during 2025, we will:

- Continue to operate traditional and innovative pro bono projects and activities
- Enhance existing NLS pro bono projects to make improvements for staff efficiency and quality of legal services provided to clients, based on good practices developed in pilot pro bono activities
- Continue to build resources to improve how we support pro bono volunteers
- Continue coalition building activities
- Continue to test implementation theories and gather feedback
- Continue to develop practice aids and build resources to support pro bono volunteers
- Pilot new recognition activities for pro bono volunteers
- Continue efforts to increase staff attorney involvement in PAI activities, including testing a mentoring program, educating NLS staff attorneys about PAI recruitment opportunities, and increasing staff attorney involvement in offering CLEs to recruit and support PAI involvement in CLEs.

NLS will continue to use its newsletter, its website, sponsoring events recognizing the work of volunteers, and existing staff to recruit attorneys. The proposed programs for the year 2025 are summarized below by county.

Please share this plan with any income eligible clients or community members with whom you may come in contact and who may wish to make comments.

ALLEGHENY COUNTY

- A. Continue pro bono programs for the following types of cases: domestic violence; custody advice; unemployment compensation; expungements and criminal record clearing; bankruptcy; public housing and Section 8 denials; private landlord tenant advice; eviction diversion advice; adult/child guardianship; tangled title issues, and the settlement of estates with limited assets for the elderly.
- B. Continue updating the list of pro bono or reduced fee attorneys willing to handle cases, and update the fee schedule for reduced fee referrals.
- C. Continue the reduced fee referrals to private attorneys for bankruptcy, support, divorce, and custody.
- D. Continue to work with the *Pittsburgh Pro Bono Partnership* to encourage its efforts to provide pro bono assistance, especially by participation in the Partnership's development of Signature Projects, providing training for CLEs for these projects, and through the identification of needs for which projects may be developed.
- E. Increase recruitment efforts through the use of the newsletter and the website.
- F. Continue to utilize our local law schools and their students to provide advice on family law, expungements, landlord tenant, and bankruptcy matters.
- G. Continue to utilize law students throughout the academic year to provide representation on issues involving Protection from Abuse and expungements.
- H. Work with the Director of the Pro Bono Center of the Allegheny County Bar Foundation to develop new pro bono projects.
- I. Work on the recruitment of retired attorneys for Emeritus status pro bono work, involve other sections of the ACBA in pro bono projects, organize recognition events for volunteers, and nominate volunteers for awards.
- J. Work with the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN) in the development of PProBono.net as a means of recruiting new volunteers, and the maintenance of PALawHELP.org as a means of providing up to date legal information for potential volunteers.
- K. Work with the ACBA Young Lawyer's Division to increase pro bono assistance from newer attorneys.
- L. Continue to develop and present training for pro bono attorneys who represent domestic violence victims for protection from abuse orders (PFAs). The trainings will include information on other areas of law that frequently come up in domestic violence cases such as child custody and firearms prohibitions, and will build upon the introductory CLE

on PFAs that NLS currently offers as well as attorney experiences representing PFA clients.

- M. Develop pro bono volunteers who can offer advice for those with debt collection and credit card issues.

BEAVER COUNTY

- A. Continue the reduced fee referral programs for divorces, support (including contempt and exceptions hearings), custody, bankruptcy cases, wills and advance directives and power of attorneys.
- B. Continue to organize limited advice custody clinics in coordination with the Pro Bono Committee of the Beaver County Bar Association.
- C. Find and recruit pro bono attorneys willing to handle unemployment, bankruptcy, custody, domestic violence, expungements, and landlord tenant matters.
- D. Work with the Bar to develop a conflict referral panel for any case for which NLS would provide representation, advice, or referral but for a conflict of interest.
- E. Work with any local Bar Association committees in the development of new pro bono projects.
- F. Work with the Bar Association to offer one CLE on *Ethics and Pro Bono* or other areas within NLS priorities which may be of interest to bar members.
- G. Work with the Law Schools to develop training for students so that they can offer telephone advice to clients on family law issues.

BUTLER COUNTY

- A. Find and recruit pro bono attorneys willing to handle unemployment, custody, bankruptcy, domestic violence, expungement, and landlord tenant matters.
- B. Work with the Bar to develop a conflict referral panel for any case for which NLS would provide representation/advice/or referral but for a conflict of interest.
- C. Continue the pro bono referral programs for domestic violence cases and for the following types of cases when staff is unavailable: custody, disputes with landlords, unemployment compensation, bankruptcies, and evictions.

- D. Continue the reduced fee referral programs for divorces, support (including contempt and exceptions hearings), custody, bankruptcy cases, wills and advance directives and power of attorneys.
- E. Work with the Bar Association to offer one CLE on *Ethics and Pro Bono* or other areas which overlap with NLS priorities and services as well as bar member interest.
- F. Continue to work with the Butler County Bar Association to implement pro bono projects.
- G. Work with the Law Schools to develop training for students so that they can offer telephone advice to clients on family law issues.

LAWRENCE COUNTY

- A. Continue a pro bono program for indigent persons 60 years of age or older who need one or more of the following documents prepared: a will, a living will, or a power of attorney.
- B. Continue a PAI “low bono” program for indigent persons 60 years of age or older who need up to one hour of advice and limited service on a civil matter, such as consumer law, guardianship, real estate, contract issues, tort issues, pensions, and insurance.
- C. Continue the reduced fee referral program for custody, divorce, and support cases (including contempt and exceptions hearings).
- D. Work with the Bar Association to offer one CLE on *Ethics and Pro Bono* or other areas which overlap with NLS priorities and services as well as bar member interest.
- E. Continue the reduced fee program for indigent persons who seek to defend litigation at the Magisterial District Justice level in a civil matter or representation at Landlord Tenant hearings before the Magisterial District Justices in cases not excluded by the regulations of the Legal Services Corporation.
- F. Continue use of a conflict referral panel for any case for which NLS would provide referral but for a conflict of interest.
- G. Work with the local bar association in the development of new pro bono projects.
- H. Solicit pro bono attorneys to assist with Protection from Abuse cases.
- I. Work with the local Law Schools to develop training for students so that they can offer telephone advice to clients on family law issues.

- J. Organize a Rural Legal Clinic with the University of Pittsburgh School of Law to provide free legal services to eligible NLS clients on landlord tenant and custody matters in collaboration with the NLS Pro Bono Manager.

2025 PAI Plan Characteristics

In 2025, NLS expects to refer approximately 1,000 pro bono PAI cases to private attorneys. In compliance with the regulations of the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), NLS's 2025 PAI activities will have the following characteristics:

1. At least 12 ½ percent of NLS's basic field award from LSC will be devoted to the involvement of private attorneys in the delivery of legal services.
2. The market value of PAI activities will substantially exceed the direct and indirect costs being allocated to PAI expenditures, and PAI funds will be expended in an economical and efficient manner.
3. No PAI funds will be committed for direct payment to any attorney who for any portion of the previous two years has been a staff attorney, except for funds used in a pro bono project on the same terms that are available to other attorneys. All PAI activities shall be through organized pro bono plans. No attorney shall receive payment through a revolving litigation fund.
4. NLS will maintain a separate cost center for PAI activities, which will identify and accurately account for NLS's overhead, staff, and support costs related to PAI activities. Time devoted to PAI activities by staff will be documented on weekly time sheets and through the program's Case Management system. Quarterly cost statements will be prepared by NLS's accounting department. All requests submitted for payment of PAI expenses to NLS's Accounting Department will be verified. Expenses related to PAI activities will be reported separately in NLS's year-end audit.
5. NLS will provide attorney volunteers with training, manuals, forms, mentoring opportunities, and the use of its facilities. NLS provides malpractice insurance for attorneys providing pro bono services to NLS clients. Attorney volunteers will be informed of, and encouraged to use, any national and state support centers that provide back-up on substantive and procedural issues of the law. They will also be trained and encouraged to use www.PAProBono.net and www.PALawHELP.org, as well as the new NLS pro bono online resource library.
6. Attorney volunteers will inform NLS of their language specialties, including sign language, so that non-English speaking and hearing-impaired clients can be accommodated. If needed, NLS will provide an interpreter for hearing impaired clients as well as translation services for non-English speaking clients through use of such services as "Language Line" and in-person interpretation services.

7. NLS will screen clients for financial eligibility and case type before making referrals. Each volunteer will be asked to check for a conflict of interest before accepting a pro bono case and will be instructed to contact NLS immediately if a conflict of interest is discovered so that NLS can assign the case to another attorney.

8. NLS will ensure quality control in cases referred to attorney volunteers in four (4) ways. All new pro bono attorney volunteers will be screened to ensure that they have an active Pennsylvania law license and are in good standing before being accepted to volunteer with NLS. First, cases will only be referred to attorneys who have either attended training in, have expertise in, and/or are being supervised by an attorney with expertise in the particular area of the law involved. All attorneys will report their legal advice, services, and time to NLS staff via email or by using pro bono access to Legal Server, the NLS Case Management database, to record their legal advice and pro bono time. Second, all clients and volunteer attorneys will be encouraged to report to NLS any problems, which NLS will then investigate and take steps to resolve. Resolution measures may include providing a co-counselor to help the volunteer attorney, or assigning the case to another attorney. Third, all clients will be urged to complete and submit to NLS an evaluation form at the conclusion of the case. Fourth, any private attorney who fails to represent a client competently or zealously will be removed from the referral program.

9. All records pertaining to NLS's PAI activities which do not contain confidential client information will be made available for inspection by LSC monitors and auditors during regular business hours.

Your comments are welcome and encouraged. Should you have any questions, comments, suggestions, or responses to make to the above PAI plan, please contact Judy Hale, Pro Bono Manager, by:

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