

# JUSTICE MATTERS

A PUBLICATION OF NEIGHBORHOOD LEGAL SERVICES



NEIGHBORHOOD LEGAL SERVICES

WINTER/SPRING 2025

SUPPORTING RESIDENTS OF ALLEGHENY, BEAVER, BUTLER AND LAWRENCE COUNTIES

## Champions of Justice Inaugural Pro Bono Awards Luncheon JOIN US ON APRIL 10, 2025

NLS will recognize exceptional individuals, law firms and a corporate legal department whose pro bono services have helped countless individuals and honor these leaders as Neighborhood Legal Services Champions of Justice on April 10th from 11:30 AM to 1 PM.

Those being honored have provided a vital safety net for families living in poverty who cannot afford to hire a lawyer. They have helped to break down barriers in the justice system and protect the most vulnerable in our neighborhoods. Their advocacy is essential, noble, and fundamental to ensuring access to justice for all.



Please plan to join NLS at Revel and Roost for our inaugural pro bono luncheon celebrating the volunteer efforts of the following: Rebecca Johnson Barksdale, Esq. and Pietragallo Gordon Alfano Bosick & Raspanti, LLP; Gabrielle M. Carbonara, Esq.; Joseph A. Carroll, Esq.; Garrett Dudt, Esq.; Dick Freyvogel, Esq.; Donald E. Jerich, Esq.; Kathryn M. Kenyon, Esq.; Janet K. Meub, Esq. and Babst Calland Clements & Zomnir, PC; Erin K. Morey, Esq.

In addition, a Special Merit Award will be given to Dianne Wainwright, Esq., Quinn Kobelak, and the Housing Court Helpdesk Staff for their contributions to Allegheny County's eviction prevention efforts.

For more ticket information and sponsorship opportunities, visit [nlsa.us/champions](https://nlsa.us/champions).



### A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

#### A New Year, A Renewed Commitment to Equal Justice

2025 is here, bringing both challenges and opportunities in an ever-evolving landscape. However, our mission remains steadfast: to ensure that everyone—regardless of income—has access to justice.

We are continually grateful for our partner organizations whose expertise helps break down barriers to civil legal aid. Equally important, we could not do this work without our generous donors and volunteers.

Their support ensures that those who often go unheard—tenants facing eviction, survivors of domestic violence, families struggling with access to healthcare—have a voice.

At Neighborhood Legal Services, we believe equal justice for all is not just an ideal but a necessity. Thank you for standing with us.

Sincerely,

**Kristine Bergstrom, Esq.**

# NLS mourns the passing of Judge Tony Wettick

Former NLS Executive Director The Honorable R. Stanton “Tony” Wettick. Judge Wettick passed away last December at the age of 86.

It was at NLS that Judge Wettick became a lifelong proponent for the rights of poor, marginalized and minority communities. As a respected and admired Allegheny County Common Pleas Court judge for 40 years, Judge Wettick fought against racism and unfair housing issues. After retiring, he became a dedicated volunteer attorney and strong supporter of NLS. “Judge Wettick was an exceptional champion of the rights of the under-represented and mentored countless attorneys during his long and storied career,” said Nicholas W. Kennedy, Esq., President of the NLS Board of Directors.

Discussions are underway at NLS to create a memorial to Judge Wettick and his many contributions to the organization.



# Jada’s Story

NLS’s Lawyer of the Day staff connected with Jada\* at her initial eviction hearing when she was referred to the organization by RentHelpPGH. Jada had cognitive deficits and did not fully understand what was happening. Her only source of income was Supplemental Security Income. Jada turned to a nonprofit agency to act as her representative payee to take care of those funds and pay her bills. However, she was unaware that her rent was not being paid and did not understand why this had happened. At the hearing NLS was able to obtain a continuance to gather additional facts and allow Jada the time she needed to connect with the resources that would resolve her back rent issues. By the time the new hearing date had arrived, RentHelpPGH staff had helped Jada complete the rental assistance application and its approval was imminent. While her landlord did not attend, the judge was able to reach him by phone and update him on the status of the rental assistance and subsequently dismissed the case.



NLS’s Lawyer of the Day followed up with Jada’s family and caseworker after the hearing to confirm that the payee issue was resolved and confirm that her rent would be promptly paid going forward.

*\*Client names have been changed for privacy*

# Lawyer of the Day

Led by **Adam DiBuo**, NLS Managing Attorney for Housing, Lawyer of the Day is a successful community lawyering collaborative aimed at providing legal representation to people facing eviction in Magisterial District Court hearings. “Appearing in court can be a stressful experience, especially for those without access to their own attorney to advise them. More importantly, clients represented by attorneys are more likely to experience fairer outcomes” said DiBuo. The Lawyer of the Day initiative, currently operates in four magisterial district courts in the City of Pittsburgh and is primarily funded by the City of Pittsburgh Urban Redevelopment Authority’s Legal Assistance Program and received support from the Pittsburgh Foundation and Allegheny County Department of Human Services. It connects clients with attorneys and RentHelpPGH resource navigators to ensure a fairer outcome in eviction cases. NLS attorneys currently staffing the Lawyer of the Day program include attorneys **Christian Riley** and **Brendan Makarewicz** along with paralegal **Erica Pennington**.



*NLS’s Housing Unit led by Adam DiBuo (pictured) helped over 4,600 low-income clients experiencing housing instability last year.*

# Community Partner Spotlight: RentHelpPGH – Standing Up for Housing Justice

Access to safe and stable housing is essential for individuals and families to thrive. Since 2020, RentHelpPGH has been a vital resource for Allegheny County residents, working to ensure that no one faces eviction alone. With a mission to create a just and stable housing ecosystem, RentHelpPGH provides critical eviction prevention services, rental assistance programs, and resource navigation support to those in need—particularly low-income families and communities of color.

Through innovative initiatives like Lawyer of the Day and Landlord-Tenant Mediation, RentHelpPGH not only helps prevent evictions but also challenges the systemic barriers that contribute to housing instability. Their work is deeply rooted in dignity, equity, and a commitment to long-term change. By ensuring tenants have access to legal representation, financial resources, and supportive services, RentHelpPGH is strengthening communities—because when housing is secure, everyone benefits.

NLS is proud to partner with organizations like RentHelpPGH in the fight for housing justice. Together, we are working to close the justice gap and build a future where all residents have the stability and security they deserve.



# Reaching Neighbors

Throughout the year, NLS looks for opportunities to help spread the word about the availability of free legal help. Presentations at events such as the **Life Builders CommUNITY Day**, **Healthy Homes Resource Fair**, and at the **Hugh Lane Wellness Foundation**, as well as Legal Literacy discussions to community members at the **Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh**, are all aimed at educating people about various services available, either through NLS or its partners.

“We have NLS staff available to answer questions and offer materials that outline the services we provide, with phone numbers, emails and websites where people can go to find additional resources,” said Holler.

For more information, contact Allie Holler, NLS Community Engagement Coordinator via email at [hollera@nlsa.us](mailto:hollera@nlsa.us) or by calling 412-586-6133.



## Rural Legal Clinics

For the past three years, NLS has organized free rural legal clinics where attorneys and supervised law students partner to help people access civil legal aid. This past winter, NLS held a free walk-in legal Criminal Record Clearing clinic in Butler, PA on. Residents of Butler and surrounding areas attended the clinic and received information, services, and referrals.

The legal clinic was a joint project with the **University of Pittsburgh School of Law**, for trained law students supervised by Butler County attorneys and NLS staff attorneys to provide free legal services to some of the most vulnerable people in Butler County, especially veterans.

“Our rural counties are under-served areas, and the students and clients both benefit



*Panelists: Judy Hale, Esq. – NLS Pro Bono Manager, Melissa Evans, Esq., – NLS Managing Attorney for Economic Security, Sarah Iseman, Esq. – NLS Staff Attorney, Richard Goldinger, Esq. – Butler County District Attorney and Barbara Griffin, Esq. – Director, Pro Bono Center, Allegheny County Bar Foundation.*

from having in-person meetings. There’s no substitute for sitting down with someone to talk about the legal challenges they are having and how we can help,” said

**Judy Hale**, NLS Pro Bono Manager. “This project helps connect local attorneys with potential interns and future colleagues.”

## 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)**

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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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