



Neighborhood Legal Services Association

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Dear Colleagues:

We are seeking volunteers to help us with clerical assistance to keep a critical domestic violence project in Allegheny County alive. Over the past twenty years, Neighborhood Legal Services Association (NLSA), in collaboration with the Allegheny County Bar Association, the Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh, and the Family Division of the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas, has been operating a project for the provision of free legal representation for the victims of domestic violence who file for Protection from Abuse (PFA) relief in Family Court.

Through this project, almost all PFA plaintiffs (over 3,000 victims each year), who do not have legal counsel when they file for PFA relief in Family Court, are able to be represented for free by an NLSA or a Pro Bono attorney as they seek critical safety relief.

NLSA provides its own attorneys to this project and coordinates pro bono attorney participation with the Allegheny County Bar Association. CLE trainings and mentoring are provided for all of the attorneys by NLSA, Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh, and Pro Bono law firms. A critical part of this project, which has helped to make it a model for the country, is NLSA's provision of a clerical/paralegal staff person on site every day to allow the PFA plaintiffs to apply for free legal representation while they are in the safety and security of the Family Court facility when they appear to file their PFA action.

Unfortunately, budget cuts at both the Federal and State level have reduced NLSA's funding by \$800,000.00. Staffing has been reduced by 11, including 4 support persons in the Pittsburgh office. As a result, NLSA can no longer provide staff on site at the Court to process victim requests for legal representation. This will result in victims having to travel to NLSA's Penn Avenue office and wait in unsecured waiting rooms during an extremely stressful and dangerous time in their lives in order to apply for an attorney. Victims have often taken off work to get their protection orders or have taken several buses to get to the Court for assistance. Traveling to the NLSA office increases the time they will miss work. Often, they have children to pick up from school or a bus to catch and an additional office visit may have to wait for another day. Delays in contacting NLSA may result in the program's inability to provide counsel due to the development of conflicts or the lack of time in which to prepare for the client's case. Funder restrictions require that signatures be obtained from anyone for whom NLSA is providing

court representation and further require that staff do a thorough determination of specified eligibility criteria.

It is with these factors in mind that we are hoping that your organization might know of some volunteers who would be willing to be part of a solution. We are looking for volunteers willing to consider offering us 4 hours each day to provide on-site intake at the Family Court facility at 440 Ross Street. The hours would be between 11:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. NLSA would provide training on the work that needs to be done (basically this involves helping victims fill out applications for assistance) and develop a schedule of who would be on site each day throughout the year. If we can find 5 or more individuals willing to offer this help once a week, we would be able to continue on-site intake and ensure that Allegheny County will continue to be a model for the country on how to serve victims of domestic violence.

Please contact Pamela Dalton-Arlotti, NLSA's Director of Program Performance and Compliance, by August 10, 2012 regarding whether or not you know of anyone willing to offer assistance in this regard. Absent this assistance, all victims will need to travel to the NLSA office in order to request an attorney.

We look forward to hearing from you and should you have any further questions, please contact Pamela Dalton-Arlotti at 412-586-6104.

Sincerely Yours,



Pamela Lynn Dalton-Arlotti

Director of Program Performance and Compliance