

MEDIA ADVISORY

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Supreme Court of Pennsylvania calls on attorneys To provide more public service

HARRISBURG, January 14, 2011 — Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ronald D. Castille has issued a call to the Commonwealth's 70,000 attorneys to volunteer more of their time and money to help ensure Pennsylvanians with limited financial means receive needed civil legal representation.

Saying the Commonwealth is "dealing with a civil legal aid crisis," the chief justice reminded Pennsylvania attorneys in the attached letter distributed through the cooperation of the Pennsylvania Bar Association (PBA) of their professional obligation to support services to citizens of limited financial means — otherwise known as *pro bono* service.

"Pennsylvania lawyers have a proud tradition of pro bono service, but now is the time for us to do more," the chief justice said in his letter. "Pro bono service by Pennsylvania's lawyers cannot be a replacement for adequate funding of the courts and the legal aid system, but the need for help among the poor to access justice is so significant that the legal community cannot wait for the funding deficiencies to be remedied."

Despite a new school loan forgiveness program for civil legal aid attorneys, the chief noted that insufficient resources exist to meet what is seen as a growing need for such services in these trying economic times. He added that if attorneys are unable to take a pro bono case they ought to consider a financial donation to support local or statewide civil legal aid programs. No taxpayer funds are used to support non-profit civil legal service organizations, which are financed through grants from the Pennsylvania Interest On Lawyers Trust Account. IOLTA raises about \$6 million annually through interest fees on accounts administered by lawyers for their clients.

"The time has never been more critical for lawyers to provide pro bono legal services to the poor and underserved of our Commonwealth," said PBA President Gretchen A. Mundorff. "With the downturn in the economy, we are facing a decrease in both federal and state funding for legal services and in the funds generated by our IOLTA accounts as a result of low interest rates. Yet, the downturn in the economy has increased the need for legal services as the number of mortgage foreclosures and domestic violence cases has increased.

"While many Pennsylvania lawyers already provide pro bono services, the Pennsylvania Bar Association joins with Chief Justice Castille in embracing this opportunity to do more to help those less fortunate," she added.

(For more information go to: www.paprobono.net)
(Chief justice's letter attached)



THE SUPREME COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA
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37TH FLOOR
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103

RONALD D. CASTILLE
CHIEF JUSTICE

(215) 560-5663
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January 7, 2011

Dear Pennsylvania Attorney:

Pennsylvania is dealing with a civil legal aid crisis where half the people who appear at a legal aid office and who qualify for legal aid are denied such help due to lack of resources. Despite special fees and a new school loan forgiveness program for civil legal aid attorneys, our system of justice does not have the sufficient professional resources to meet the growing need for such services in these tough economic times.

Pennsylvania lawyers have a proud tradition of pro bono service, but now is the time for us to do more. Pro bono service by Pennsylvania's lawyers cannot be a replacement for adequate funding of the courts and the legal aid system, but the need for help among the poor to access justice is so significant that the legal community cannot wait for the funding deficiencies to be remedied.

As Chief Justice, I join with Gretchen Mundorff, President of the Pennsylvania Bar Association, in urging every Pennsylvania attorney to take at least one new pro bono matter or to continue to work on an ongoing pro bono matter through a legal aid provider or an organized pro bono program. If you are unable to take a pro bono case, I encourage you to make a donation to support your local or statewide civil legal aid and pro bono programs. Every lawyer can review the resources at www.palawhelp.org, and each attorney can also register on www.paprobono.net to add to the resources on that site.

There are nearly 70,000 attorneys licensed in Pennsylvania. From all accounts, approximately 10% of those attorneys render some form of pro bono service on an annual basis. The resources that would be available to those with the inability to access legal services in our Commonwealth if every lawyer stepped forward are staggering.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ronald D. Castille".

CHIEF JUSTICE RONALD D. CASTILLE