



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

## News for Immediate Release

Feb. 16, 2012

### Supreme Court reminds lawyers of ethical duty to provide public service

**HARRISBURG** – Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ronald D. Castille is [thanking Pennsylvania's lawyers](#) who, in 2011, contributed direct pro bono service to the poor through legal aid programs equal to the work of more than 60 full-time attorneys, and is calling on them to continue their service.

The Chief Justice noted that in addition to time that could be documented through formal public interest efforts there were likely thousands of additional hours donated outside the legal aid system that were undocumented.

The Chief Justice joined with Pennsylvania Bar Association (PBA) President Matt Creme to call on Pennsylvania's 70,000 registered lawyers to make a personal commitment to provide pro bono service through direct representation of the poor and financial support of legal aid programs. The reminder of their ethical duty to provide public service is being widely distributed to the legal community by the courts and the PBA.

“Now is not the time to rest on our laurels,” Chief Justice Castille said. “As funding for legal aid programming faces continued cuts in these hard economic times and the number of persons needing such service grows, the work of pro bono attorneys is even more necessary to ensure access to justice for many who otherwise would be without legal representation.”

The Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN) is the state's coordinated system of organizations providing civil legal aid for those with nowhere else to turn. PLAN, whose programs provide legal assistance and access to the courts for Pennsylvanians whose family income is less than 125 percent of the poverty level, is facing a crisis due to a substantial decrease in funds available for civil legal aid.

PLAN started the fiscal year with a 10 percent state funding cut, which was followed recently by an additional 10 percent cut. There has also been a substantial cut in federal funding and a decrease in another funding stream that depends on interest earned on attorney trust accounts. The Judiciary has encouraged reconsideration and restoration of these critical funds.

Even with the assistance of pro bono attorneys, far more than 50 percent of eligible Pennsylvanians seeking services from PLAN programs are turned away due to resource constraints.

“Pro bono service cannot replace the work of fully funded legal aid offices,” Castille said. “Indeed, without well-supported legal aid programs, there is no structure for the organized pro bono service that makes such a difference in the lives of so many. Yet, in these times of such great need, pro bono service is more important than ever.”

###

**Media contacts: Amy Kelchner, (717) 231-3328**

[www.PACourts.us](http://www.PACourts.us)

