

**For Immediate Release**

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**AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT VISITS MIDPENN LEGAL SERVICES  
COMMENDS EFFORTS OF LEGAL AID AND PRIVATE LAWYERS**  
HARRISBURG, Pa., November 14, 2011

On Wednesday, November 09, 2011, American Bar Association President Wm. T. (Bill) Robinson III visited the Harrisburg office of MidPenn Legal Services, the legal aid program providing vital legal services in the 18 county area of central Pennsylvania.

Judge John E. Jones III, Federal Judge of the Middle District of Pennsylvania also attended the meeting, with representatives of MidPenn, including its Executive Director, Rhodia Thomas, the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network Executive Director, Samuel Milkes, and the Executive Director of the Supreme Court's Pa. IOLTA program, Al Azen. Jim DeAngelo participated as a member of the board of MidPenn and PLAN, Inc. as Chair of the Dauphin County Pro Bono Program, and as a Past President of the Dauphin County Bar Association. David Trevaskis, pro bono staff and the Pa. Bar Association, and Sandy Ballard, pro bono staff person for the Dauphin County Bar Association also attended. Representatives of the Administrative office of the Pennsylvania Courts also attended, and are identified in the photo.

Mr. Robinson emphasized the important role that legal aid programs play in providing access to justice for low income clients with vital legal needs. He also noted that, in cases where legal aid resources are not sufficient, private lawyers can help. “Working in partnership, legal services programs and pro bono lawyers are very effective in providing essential services to people who need access to the court system.”

Mr. Robinson also expressed concern about adequate funding for legal services. He said that the current funding level for the Legal Services Corporation is \$404.2 million, but proposals in Congress vary widely. The U.S. Senate would cut about \$8 million while the U.S. House of Representatives bill would cut more than \$100 million from the program. These cuts come at a time when many people find themselves out of a job or underemployed and in need of legal help to protect their home, family or business.

Sam Milkes commented that already, “various statewide sources of support for legal services have been cut by about 9% this fiscal year, causing a cutback of staffing by 10% and a reduction of services that legal aid program can provide. At a time when people who were middle class a year or two ago have lost their jobs, and are at risk of losing their homes or other essentials, legal services is having to cut back on the level of help it can provide.”

Al Azen reported that “The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania has taken affirmative steps and championed initiatives to assist with funding of legal aid and *pro bono* volunteerism by private attorneys and supervised law students. The Court has been very supportive of legal aid professionals who help indigent Pennsylvanians needing assistance with critical civil legal issues.”

Rhodia Thomas described the kinds of services provided by MidPenn Legal Services. She said, "the program has had to reduce services due to reductions in funding but that MidPenn Legal Services still handles tens of thousands of cases annually, helping protect against domestic violence and helping stabilize families and communities."

Jim DeAngelo emphasized "the supportive role attorneys and bar associations play in helping to fund legal aid and in offering their own pro bono services to help pick up, where legal aid is unable to represent clients due to limited resources." Sandy Ballard used an analogy of "the three legged stool, which is so crucial in Dauphin County and nationally. A partnership between legal aid programs, private attorneys supporting legal aid and helping low income residents, and support from the court for these initiatives is what makes for a stable grounding. Absent any of the three legs, the stool falls over." She commented that, "in Dauphin County, this partnership is functioning well. David Trevaskis said that there are similar programs across the state, but that the Dauphin County Bar Association program "is one of the best."

Mr. Robinson concluded the meeting by saying, "The ABA is a strong supporter of legal services. You are doing fine work in Pennsylvania to help meet urgent client needs. We commend you for the work you do, and we will continue to work for increased financial support here and in Washington."

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