

LACKAWANNA COUNTY PRO BONO OPTIONS, January 8, 2010

A. Lackawanna Pro Bono, Inc.

Lackawanna Pro Bono, Inc. is a stand-alone pro bono program, which works closely with our county bar association (Lackawanna Bar Association) and the legal services program that serves Lackawanna County (North Penn Legal Services). Lackawanna Pro Bono is a separate non-profit, whose mission is to provide free legal services to the poor by arranging for local attorneys to volunteer their professional services to financially eligible individuals and families who have serious civil legal matters. The organization operates from a small office in downtown Scranton, with a staff consisting of two full time employees who administer the program and coordinate the volunteers. Lackawanna Pro Bono's services are for financially eligible individuals whose legal problems are within the jurisdiction of courts located in Lackawanna County and who have no other way to obtain an attorney.

The Lackawanna Bar Association works closely with Lackawanna Pro Bono and pays for some of its work. Both Lackawanna Pro Bono and North Penn Legal Services only accept clients who make 125-percent or less of federal poverty guidelines — or just under \$23,000 a year for a single parent with two children.

Lackawanna Pro Bono serves those people who, although they meet North Penn Legal Services' financial eligibility guidelines, North Penn can't serve due to conflicts of interest, funding regulations that bar them from handling certain matters and staffing shortages. People who wish to apply for services must first apply to and be rejected by North Penn Legal Services for one of the reasons stated above.

About 60% of Lackawanna Pro Bono's clients are female heads of households, but clients also include the working poor, the physically and mentally challenged, recipients of unemployment compensation and public assistance, and the homeless.

Areas of law include: Family, Domestic Violence, Debtor/Creditor, Landlord/Tenant, Mortgage Foreclosure, Uninsured Tort Defense, Consumer, SSI, Terminations and Overpayments, Unemployment Compensation and other serious civil matters.

For more information, please contact:

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B. North Penn Legal Services (Scranton Office)

North Penn Legal Services (NPLS) is a non-profit corporation funded in large part by the Legal Services Corporation and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to provide free legal help to low income persons. NPLS is staffed by 30 attorneys and 18 paralegals working out of 12 offices. Advocates provide representation on a broad range of civil matters including custody, housing, SSI, bankruptcy, consumer and protection from abuse. In addition to direct representation, clients are also helped through telephone advice, pro bono and Judicare attorneys, pro se packets and self-help clinics.

People seeking legal services should call 1-877-9-LEGAL-0 (1-877-953-4250), between 9:30 -11:30 AM and 1:30- 3:30 PM on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Individuals should have their paperwork ready when they call NPLS.

During the call, a North Penn Legal Services employee will ask the client for:

- A brief description of the problem, to determine whether the problem is something NPLS is able to help with.
- His or her name and the names of others involved in the legal matter to see if NPLS can provide assistance without any conflict of interest.
- His or her household finances to check for income eligibility.
- The basic facts of the problem and what help the client is asking for.

The request will be reviewed promptly by a staff advocate and North Penn Legal Services will:

- Give advice or brief services by telephone
- Schedule an appointment with a staff attorney or paralegal
- Refer the client to a volunteer attorney
- Refer the client to alternative services, if NPLS cannot assist them

For more information, please contact:

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C. Other Local Pro Bono Options

1. Middle District Bankruptcy Bar Association (Northern Tier)

The Middle District Bankruptcy Bar Association (MDBBA) has established a pro bono program that provides attorneys to represent indigent parties in civil litigation after the Court has preliminarily evaluated the case and made a determination to seek counsel for the unrepresented indigent party. The MDBBA's pro bono chair is responsible for acting upon the Court's requests for volunteer attorneys.

Assignments generally are not made to a given attorney more frequently than twice a year, assuming that the volume of cases and the number of panel attorneys permit this approach. Upon occasion, the Court may also refer requests for pro bono counsel to Betty Abraham, Pro Bono Coordinator for North Penn Legal Services, Inc., for a possible referral to the MDBBA's pro bono panel. Or, in the alternative, to Mollie Oleyar, Administrator of the MDBBA, for referral to a member of the MDBBA panel for a low-cost private attorney.

For more information, please contact:

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Chair, Northern Tier MDBBA Pro Bono Program
Newman, Williams, Michkin, Corveleyn, Wolfe & Fareri
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2. Middle District Federal Bar Association

The Middle District Chapter of the Federal Bar Association has established a pro bono program that provides attorneys to represent indigent parties in civil litigation after the Court has preliminarily evaluated the case and made a determination to seek counsel for the unrepresented indigent party. The Chapter's pro bono chair is responsible for acting upon the Court's requests for volunteer attorneys.

Assignments generally are not made to a given attorney more frequently than once every five years, assuming that the volume of cases and the number of panel attorneys permit this approach. Another important feature of the program is the availability of a panel of mentors to assist volunteer attorneys in the mentors' specialized areas of practice.

For more information, please contact:
Stephen M. Greecher, Jr., Esquire
FBA Pro Bono Program Chair
Tucker, Arensberg, & Swartz

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