

Pennsylvania SeniorLAW HelpLine: Pro Bono Opportunity Training for Attorneys at the Pennsylvania Bar Association, December 2007

Attorneys at the Pennsylvania Bar Association got into the holiday spirit with a Dec. 20, 2007, training for the Pennsylvania SeniorLAW HelpLine, a toll-free telephone service offering free, confidential legal counseling to senior citizens (age 60 and older) statewide. The HelpLine, a project of SeniorLAW Center in Philadelphia, is staffed by a director (Sue Wasserkrug, Esq.) and a legal advocate (Raquel Smith), along with a growing cadre of volunteer attorneys that now includes the lawyers on the PBA staff.

Wasserkrug came to PBA headquarters to present the training so that PBA staff attorneys could fulfill the pro bono aspirational goals endorsed this year by the PBA under the leadership of PBA President Andy Susko. Susko joined staff attorneys and others for the training. The training prepared the lawyer-volunteers to handle phone calls from elderly Pennsylvanians facing legal concerns, one of many ways PBA attorneys are meeting Susko's challenge that every lawyer reach out to improve access to the legal system through pro bono service.

Since one out of every five residents of Pennsylvania is age 60 or older, making Pennsylvania the state with the 3rd highest percentage of people over 60, the helpline represents a much-needed resource for Pennsylvania's seniors, many of whom are lower-income, highly vulnerable, and/or geographically isolated. The helpline has served thousands of seniors from all 67 counties in Pennsylvania already and looks to expand that role in 2008.

Because the helpline serves seniors statewide, it welcomes volunteer attorneys across the state. The helpline has created a training program suitable for in-person training such as took place at the PBA just before the new year or long distance training via teleconference. The program is accompanied by a CD containing a PowerPoint presentation and other training materials as well as a variety of resources for volunteer attorneys, including a statewide directory of legal resources for older Pennsylvanians. A training session can be completed in about one hour. The helpline presented a training session in Harrisburg earlier this fall at the law firm of Saul Ewing L.L.P. in collaboration with PBA Pro Bono Coordinator David Trevaskis and it was then that Wasserkrug and Trevaskis came up with the idea of offering the helpline to PBA staff attorneys. Plans are underway to expand this training to PBI staff attorneys in the near future.



From left, PBA's Victoria White (Ethics), former Department of Aging Counsel Jacqueline Welby, Sue Wasserkrug (SeniorLaw Helpline Director), PBA President Andy Susko, PBA's Michelle Shuker (County Bar Services) and Barry Simpson, PBA executive director at PBA headquarters, Harrisburg