

Corporate Lawyers Help Local Homeless Receive Birth Certificates

PHILADELPHIA (April 2010) – Attorneys and staff from nine corporations (PECO/Exelon, AAA Mid-Atlantic, ACE Group of Insurance Companies, Aetna, Cigna, Independence Blue Cross, Lincoln Financial Group, Merck and Reliable Companies), DELVACCA (the Delaware Valley Chapter of the Association of Corporate Counsel) and the law firm of Cozen O’Connor partnered with the Homeless Advocacy Project (HAP), an organization dedicated to meeting the legal and advocacy needs of Philadelphia’s homeless community, to provide a birth certificate clinic on March 26, 2010 that helped over 120 adults and children apply for their birth certificates free of charge. PECO/Exelon hosted the event at PECO’s corporate headquarters.

The clinic fulfilled an important need for those without birth certificates because living without proper documentation makes it almost impossible for a homeless person to receive medical assistance, apply for housing, and take advantage of public programs. In addition, birth certificates are used to obtain driver’s or non-driver’s licenses, for general identification purposes, and job applications. To get a birth certificate one needs a state-issued picture identification; to get a state-issued picture identification one needs a birth certificate. One solution is that an attorney can apply for a birth certificate on behalf of a person who does not have a state-issued picture identification.

Marsha Cohen, HAP Executive Director, said, “HAP is extraordinarily pleased with the birth certificate clinic held at PECO on a cold and windy day in March, when homeless clients toting belongings and children could have been expected to stay in shelters. Fortunately, they did not, and 37 volunteers from nine corporations and one law firm processed 123 birth certificate requests in two and one-half hours, a record number of clients in record time.”

“I just participated in the Pro Bono Institute’s national forum where law firms, corporations and non-profits met to determine more effective means to provide free legal services to those in need,” said Amy Tarr, PECO/Exelon assistant general counsel and the co-organizer of the clinic. “The fact that Philadelphia-area corporate law departments successfully served this need, with support on out-of-state applications from Cozen O’Connor, is a reflection of the contributions to our community that we can accomplish by working together in a short amount of time.”