Summary:
The Pennsylvania Bar Association has a long history of supporting legal services to the poor and its Pro Bono Office has been honored for providing a model of pro bono service on a grand scale. The Pennsylvania Bar Association’s Mission Statement directs its members to “to promote the administration of justice; to see that no one, on account of poverty, is denied his or her legal rights.” The PBA’s strategic plan specifically calls for “the promotion and support of the delivery of pro bono services to those in need.” PBA leadership, staff and thousands of members fulfill that mission every year by lobbying for legal aid funding, providing direct and indirect legal services to those in need, and by making contributions to local legal aid programs across the Commonwealth.

Detailed Report:
Every lawyer in Pennsylvania contributes each year to civil legal aid through the IOLTA portion of the annual licensing fee, but it is the volunteer efforts—whether in direct or indirect representation of clients or further financial support beyond that mandatory payment— that most greatly impact those in need. Pro Bono attorneys, encouraged by the Pennsylvania Bar Association and local bars to fulfill their aspirational duty under Pennsylvania Rule of Professional Responsibility 6.1 to “render public interest legal service”, provide time and financial contributions to help fuel the important work of representing those clients who have critical needs but cannot afford to retain private counsel. Our law schools inculcate the values of pro bono service in the next generation of Pennsylvania lawyers through law school legal aid clinics and internship opportunities.

The Pennsylvania Bar Association Pro Bono Office is the main vehicle for the PBA to fulfill its mission of service. The Office is staffed by David Keller Trevaskis, a full-time staff attorney, and a half-time paralegal, Gabriele Miller-Wagner. Both Trevaskis (2013) and Miller-Wagner (2021) have been honored with Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network Excellence Awards for their work promoting pro bono service. At any given time, interns also assist the office.

Trevaskis has served as the PBA’s full-time pro bono coordinator since 2001. Since then, there has been outreach to more than 100,000 people with legal aid issues; more than 600 individuals and organizations have been honored with pro bono awards; nearly 300 CLE programs have been conducted across the state; and more than $750,000 in direct and in-kind support has been secured. Add in more than a million miles of travel, and there has been considerable activity out of an office that is staffed by a single full-time attorney and a part-time administrative assistant.

The Pro Bono Office works under a model created by the Task Force on the Delivery of Legal Services to the Needy I that the late Joe Jones, a past PBA President (1987-88), established in the last century. That model had pro bono being delivered county by county through a partnership involving the local Bar, the local Courts, and the local legal aid program. The model evolved over time, through the Task Force on the Delivery of Legal Services to the Needy II, the merger...
across Pennsylvania of 44 local legal aid programs into eight regional ones and the hiring of the first full-time PBA Pro Bono Coordinator at the turn of this century. The still evolving model has brought the PBA together with the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network to promote civil legal aid in many ways, making use of the technologies at www.PALawHelp.org and www.PAProbono.net.

Persons with legal needs may complete the PBA Pro Bono Program Legal Assistance Request Form. Once the request for help is received, the PBA Pro Bono Office assesses the request and refers it to a volunteer lawyer for advice, direction, and direct representation. More than 6000 legal aid matters flow through the office on an annual basis and the program is always looking for pro bono attorneys to volunteer to help the neediest among us. Three distinct programs merit attention.

**PBA Volunteer Lawyers Program**

Under this program, volunteer attorneys handle pro bono cases in their areas of practice or expertise for Pennsylvania's neediest among us.

**PBA Lawyers Saluting Veterans Program**

Under this program, volunteer attorneys handle cases in their areas of practice or expertise for Pennsylvania's military veterans and active-duty personnel, and their families, free of charge. Clinics are held in conjunction with Veterans Administration Hospitals across the state. The office relies on hundreds of volunteers to offer support to the neediest among us.

**Wills for Heroes**

Wills for Heroes, the PBA’s largest pro bono project, has prepared estate documents for nearly 17,000 first responders, veterans, and their families since being adopted by the Pennsylvania bar Association in 2009. The Wills for Heroes Program, an outreach of the PBA Young Lawyers Division supported by the Pro Bono Office, has produced Wills, Living Wills and Powers of Attorneys for thousands of first responders across the nation. In Pennsylvania, which is acknowledged as the leading state in the country for this effort, WFH was extended to include veterans. There is a WFH program planned somewhere in the state almost every weekend each spring and fall. Wills for Heroes calls upon the expertise of lawyers throughout the state who are stepping forward to provide the free legal services. Expert trust and estate attorneys are on hand to handle any problem that arises.
Although there was pro bono activity sponsored by the PBA prior to the October 2001 hiring of attorney David Keller Trevaskis as the PBA’s first full-time Pro Bono Coordinator, pro bono received an increased emphasis at the PBA with the formal creation, staffing and budgeting of a Pro Bono Office. The office was created to meet the crisis of unmet civil legal needs among the poor in Pennsylvania and throughout the nation. The defining principle of our legal system is the promise of equal justice under law for all, yet, despite all the efforts of the PBA and the thousands of lawyers and judges statewide who take pro bono cases and support legal aid, far too many of the poor and near poor never have the opportunity to even talk to an attorney while handling legal concerns.

The PBA has consistently worked to change this reality. Since 2007, all members of the Board of Governors have provided written certification of fulfilling the PBA aspirational pro bono mandate of 50 hours or pro bono service, 25 hours targeted to direct service of the poor. Past PBA President Gretchen Mundorff (2010-2011) asked the nearly 400 members of the PBA’s House of Delegates to take at least one pro bono case each year. Over 75% of the PBA House responded to Mundorff’s call in 2011 and surveys over the years have shown a similar level of commitment. PBA staff attorneys in every department have annually fulfilled their local Dauphin County pro bono requirement.

PBA members do far more than just provide representation and advice each year to the thousands who would otherwise have their access to justice blocked — they also screen and refer clients; recruit, train, mentor and honor volunteers; prepare educational and pro se materials; and lead fundraising efforts. Although there is some type of pro bono activity in every county in the state, each county’s approach to pro bono is unique. The pro bono service section of the PBA website provides continuing updates of activities from awards to the annual Pro Bono Week celebrations across the state. Pennsylvania was part of the kickoff of the ABA Pro Bono Week thanks in part to the work of Pennsylvania’s Sharon Browning who assisted the ABA in bringing that program into place. The PBA is proud to partner with the ABA on this effort. The PBA does so much for Pro Bono Week that all of October is called “Pro Bono Month” — the slogan is “Every Day is Pro Bono Day!”

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1 Pro Bono Awards were started in 1988, the PBA’s Task Force on the Delivery of Legal Services to the Needy under Joseph H. Jones issued its seminal report in 1989 after extensive study, conferences and continuing legal education classes were conducted during the 1990s, and the PBA’s Delivery of Legal Services to the Needy Task Force II started its work in 1998. PBA Committees did outreach and created educational materials including pamphlets on various legal matters and videos promoting Access to Justice and PBA staffers had pro bono duty assignments.

2 The Pennsylvania Legal Assistance Network estimates that only one in five poverty level persons with legal issues ever even talk to an attorney and PLAN surveys show that two-thirds of the eligible clients who make it to a legal aid office in Pennsylvania are turned away because the local offices, even with pro bono support, do not have the resources to help them.
Past PBA Presidents and Boards have consistently shown their support for legal aid for the poor by lobbying nationally with the annual ABA on Day on the Hill event, statewide in Harrisburg and at the county level locally. The PBA has been forceful in promoting and passing recommendations calling for pro bono service, increased funding for civil legal aid, loan forgiveness for legal aid attorneys, and exploration of civil Gideon. The Loan Assistance Repayment Program of the Pennsylvania Bar Foundation that distributed annual forgivable grants for legal aid attorneys is a testament to the continued commitment of the PBA in legal aid to the poor. Numerous committees and sections of the Bar help this effort. The Legal Services to the Public and Immigration Law Committees are both directly staffed by the PBA Pro Bono Office because of their clear legal aid missions. The Office also staffs the Military and Veterans Affairs Committee which supports the Lawyers Saluting Veterans Project and has run legal needs and discharge upgrade clinics since 2018 at VA Hospitals across the state. In addition, many committees, and sections, such as the Family Law Section, actively support PBA pro bono efforts by providing resources and expertise.

The partnership between the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN) and the PBA has been strengthened despite dealing with significant issues over the years between some county bar associations and certain legal services programs around the state. PLAN has responded to Bar concerns in an open and positive manner thereby avoiding potentially damaging breakdowns in the partnership between legal services and the local bars in several key areas across Pennsylvania. Joint PLAN/PBA social and educational outreach events at the PBA’s Conference of County Bar Leaders and PLAN’s statewide training conference highlight this partnership which is underscored by the joint effort of PLAN and the PBA Pro Bono Office to promote and maintain the PALawHelp.Org and PAProBono.Net online resources. PALawHelp.org is the Pennsylvania site for general information about the law and the resources available to needy clients; PAProbono.net is the Pennsylvania version of an online resource for legal advocates, including pro bono and legal services attorneys, law professors and law students, and other social services advocates across the country. The relationship between the PBA and IOLTA also has been enhanced over the years with the PBA Pro Bono Office working with IOLTA to provide technical assistance to programs awarded pro bono grants under an IOLTA initiative that distributed more than half a million dollars donated by attorneys between 2003 and 2018. Even though that small fund no longer exists, the PBA Pro Bono Office works with IOLTA and with the Pennsylvania Bar Foundation to seek expanded resources for pro bono.

There has been a tremendous growth in pro bono activity for the PBA and its Pro Bono Office beyond the traditional areas of poverty law. The Pennsylvania Bar Association has been answering the call of our service members and veterans since 2002 and has helped more than 4000 military individuals and families, in addition to those helped by Wills for Heroes, during that time at no cost to those requesting aid. The statewide movement for Veterans’ Courts has been supported by the Committee and work is underway to extend that holistic approach to incarcerated veterans. Tiny homes for homeless veterans are also being explored. Modest means programs for those who are above the poverty limits but unable to fully pay for legal services
have been established in a few counties and “low” bono efforts with reduced fees or negotiated payment plans have been promoted everywhere. The PBA also promotes juvenile justice and school discipline alternatives such as youth courts and offers mediation as a means of settling dispute both in the courts and in the community. Public education about the law is also featured.  

The one-day clinic model of Wills for Heroes is the perfect model for other such events, with a beginning CLE providing training for the non-expert attorneys and paralegals attending, then scheduled appointments using Hotdocs and other software that keeps the delivery of services consistent and accurate. The Pro Bono Office has worked with colleges and other entities such as libraries across Pennsylvania to create settings where families might come to have their legal needs analyzed and receive advice and support. The annual January King Holiday with its message of service has proven to be a fertile time for such efforts but the PBA Pro Bono Office is supporting such efforts year-round, especially in rural areas where access to justice is harder to achieve.

The Pro Bono office receives multiple request for help every day through calls, emails and direct contacts, as the dynamic of many points of entry into the justice system such as lawyer referral programs, legal aid offices and court houses is changed from people being told they have nowhere else to turn and no one can give them legal information and advice to “Contact the PBA Pro Bono Office”. The working protocol for handling such requests is noted as follows: Individuals making requests for pro bono services are asked basic questions by PBA interns and staff (name, address, contact information) and are asked to provide a brief description of their issue and detail what steps they have taken seeking help. They are self-screened for eligibility, meaning that interns and PBA staff ask requesters if they qualify financially for legal aid. Each person, even those who say they do not qualify for legal aid, is given, at the minimum, the PALawHelp.org site to look at the resources there (and if the individual is unable to access the internet, PBA staff and volunteers will print out and mail resources to those individuals where possible and direct the person to their local library since librarians across the state have been trained in this resource). Those who affirm to PBA staff that they have cases that qualify for pro bono support are asked if the PBA may share their information and, if the answer is yes, the client is told that the PBA office will post their case for consideration by pro bono lawyers. That posting is usually in the form of a directed email to known volunteers or to County Bar leaders and pro bono coordinators making use of the county pro bono resources on the PBA website, as well as a posting on PAProBono.Net.