



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

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Chief Justice Castille reminds lawyers of need to provide public service

HARRISBURG – During this 50th anniversary year of the landmark *Gideon v. Wainwright* decision establishing the right to counsel for the indigent in criminal trial matters, Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ronald D. Castille is calling on lawyers to support the Commonwealth’s civil legal aid programs by providing *pro bono* service through direct representation and financial contributions.

The chief justice noted this anniversary year is the perfect time for lawyers to contemplate the legal community’s ethical obligations to the civil side of justice, where few Gideon-type rights have been recognized.

In [a letter](#) to Pennsylvania’s 70,000 registered lawyers, the chief justice joined with Pennsylvania Bar Association (PBA) President Tom Wilkinson to call on attorneys to make a personal commitment to provide *pro bono* service through direct representation of the poor and financial support of legal aid programs. The reminder of their ethical duty to provide public service is being widely distributed to the legal community by the courts and the PBA.

“*Pro bono* volunteers provide meaningful time and financial contributions by representing clients who have critical needs, but cannot afford private counsel,” Chief Justice Castille said. “Despite the support of the court and licensing fees, it is the volunteer efforts that still matter. In these times of such great need, *pro bono* service is more important than ever.”

Chief Justice Castille noted that in each of the last two years every lawyer in Pennsylvania has contributed \$35 to civil legal aid through the Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA) portion of annual licensing fees. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court also has supported civil legal aid by providing new avenues for funding legal services and setting up a loan-forgiveness program of legal services attorneys funded by *pro hac vice* filing fees.

The Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN) is the state’s coordinated system of organizations providing civil legal aid for those with nowhere else to turn. PLAN, whose programs provide legal assistance and access to the courts for Pennsylvanians whose family income is less than 125 percent of the poverty level, is facing a crisis due to a substantial decrease in funds available for civil legal aid.

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