



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

News for Immediate Release

Oct. 21, 2013

Chief Justice Castille invited to meeting of largest funder of civil legal aid for low-income Americans

PITTSBURGH — Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ronald D. Castille today participated in a forum with court leaders in neighboring states to talk about how their respective courts are dealing with the gap between the need for legal services and the ability to meet such needs in the civil justice system.

“Our justice system serves all Americans, not just those who have the resources to access it,” Chief Justice Castille said. “Legal aid is critical in helping low-income people tackle civil cases. And in difficult economic times, foreclosure and domestic violence cases and the issues resulting from job loss multiply, increasing the need for aid more than ever.”

Today’s panel discussion was hosted by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in its Pittsburgh courtroom. It was part of a board meeting of the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), the single largest funder of civil legal aid for low-income Americans. LSC provides federal grants to 134 nonprofit legal aid organizations, including eight organizations in Pennsylvania.

The LSC board periodically holds its board meetings in different parts of the country and incorporates discussions with regional judicial leaders into its agenda. The goal of today’s discussion was to develop new approaches to funding legal services and educating Americans about the needs of the poor who can’t afford representation in the civil justice system. Across the country there is a growing gap between the need for civil legal services and the ability to meet that need.

LSC has a bipartisan board, appointed by the president of the United States, which oversees the distribution of congressionally appropriated funds to programs in each of the 50 states. The board is responsible for the oversight of those funds and for promotion of access to justice and equal access to all.

According to Chief Justice Castille only one in five low-income Pennsylvanians with a critical legal problem is likely to get legal help from any source. He said that while half of those who apply for legal aid are turned away, many others never even apply because they know that legal aid organizations have severe resource restraints.

Castille has been recognized nationally as a leader in the fight for equal representation for the nation's most vulnerable citizens. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court, under his leadership, has worked diligently to come up with creative ways to fund legal aid without the use of tax dollars. Most recently the court passed a rule that directed that unclaimed or leftover funds in class action lawsuits go to fund civil legal aid.

###

Media contact: [Amy Kelchner](#), 717-231-3328

www.PACourts.us

