



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

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Chief Justice Castille asks lawyers to support access to justice for all

HARRISBURG – During his final year on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ronald D. Castille is making his last formal plea to lawyers to support the Commonwealth’s civil legal aid programs by providing *pro bono* service through direct representation and financial contributions.

In a [letter to Pennsylvania’s approximately 70,000 registered lawyers](#), the chief justice joined with Pennsylvania Bar Association (PBA) President Forest N. Myers in calling on attorneys to make a personal commitment to provide *pro bono* service. The reminder of their ethical duty to provide public service is being widely distributed to the legal community by the courts and PBA.

The chief justice noted in his letter that Senate Judiciary Committee hearings held last year across Pennsylvania under the leadership of Sen. Stewart Greenleaf underscored the great need among the poor for civil legal services. During the hearings one legal aid provider estimated that the entire system is only helping one out of every 10 persons who qualify for such services.

“Every component of the justice system is offering support, but it is the volunteer efforts of attorneys – whether in direct representation of clients or further financial support beyond part of the attorney annual registration fee – that are essential for success,” Chief Justice Castille said.

The chief justice said that every lawyer in Pennsylvania at present contributes \$35 to civil legal aid through the Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA) portion of annual licensing fees. The IOLTA Board funds legal services for Pennsylvania’s poor. Unfortunately, interest rates under 1 percent have had a devastating impact on the annual revenues of IOLTA.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court also has supported civil legal aid by providing new avenues for funding legal services and by setting up a loan-forgiveness program for 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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