

JUSTICE MATTERS

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NEIGHBORHOOD
LEGAL SERVICES

SPRING 2021

SUPPORTING RESIDENTS OF ALLEGHENY, BEAVER, BUTLER AND LAWRENCE COUNTIES

NLS Partnerships Address Eviction Crisis

During the COVID-19 pandemic, as unemployment grew and long lines formed at local food banks, many families were unable to meet their monthly rent or mortgage obligations. More than 40 million Americans face the prospect of losing their homes, including half a million households in Pennsylvania.

Even with temporary moratoria on evictions, there is still an urgent need to help people stay in their homes or transition to alternate stable housing. NLS has been collaborating with organizations like ACTION-Housing, Just Mediation Pittsburgh, the Community Justice Project, RentHelpPGH, Carnegie Mellon University's CREATE Lab, and the Pittsburgh Pro Bono Partnership on a multi-faceted approach to address these concerns.

This collaborative effort involves effective eviction prevention, including legal assistance, rental assistance, mediation, and tenant and landlord education.

“Civil legal aid is more important than ever to help people retain their rental housing,” said Barbara Kern, a managing attorney for NLS.

“ Tenants not only need legal advice on their rights under the moratoria, but also representation to defend against landlord actions taken in violation of that moratoria. ”



Find out more:

nlsa.us/legal-resources/housing

NLS Steps in to Keep Widow in Her Home

Rosemarie*, a widow in her late sixties, is a model tenant. She pays her rent on time, keeps her small unit tidy, and takes pride and comfort in her modest living situation which she is able to afford on the limited, monthly Social Security Survivor's Benefits she receives. Last summer, Rosemarie's nephew fell on hard times, losing both his job and apartment. He stayed with relatives for a few days at a time, including Rosemarie.

Several months later, in the dead of winter and as the COVID-19 pandemic raged on, the local housing authority filed to evict Rosemarie for violation of lease terms for giving shelter to her nephew. The housing authority argued that Rosemarie's nephew was technically homeless and that she had violated her lease by providing shelter for someone homeless and not a guest.

Rosemarie was desperate, time was running out, and the prospect of finding a new place

to live that was both affordable and available during the pandemic was dismal. She turned to NLS for help. Her civil legal aid attorney vigorously represented her first at the informal grievance hearing, then at the formal grievance hearing where Rosemarie prevailed. She was able to remain in her home and even helped her nephew find a permanent place to live.

**Names have been changed to protect client's safety and privacy.*

Read more about how NLS has helped others access free, civil legal aid:
nlsa.us/about-us/client-stories



Words From Penn

Spring 2021 is starting to look up. Vaccinations have accelerated, most people understand the importance of mask-wearing, and government aid has been extended to help more people. We're finally able to see the light at the end of a long, dark pandemic tunnel.

While we're by no means in the clear, most of us are expecting that this summer we can safely gather with vaccinated friends and family and begin to enjoy some of the rituals of "normal life" we've all missed so much.

But the devastation the pandemic has caused for many won't disappear any time

soon. This is especially true for the vulnerable populations we serve who, even in the best of circumstances, have a shaky hold on what most of us would call a good life. Critical issues surrounding housing, protection from abuse, and support for disabled children, to name a few, have all accelerated during the COVID-19 crisis.

Throughout the challenges of the past year (and counting) we have responded to the increased demand for free civil legal aid by forming unique partnerships and collaborations that allow us to deliver help with empathy *and* efficiency.

As well as bringing a renewed sense of normalcy, 2021 will be a big year for me personally. After more than 40 years leading

Neighborhood Legal Services, I will be retiring. I'm eager and optimistic to see what the future holds for an organization that I've been honored to be a part of for so long.

I'm grateful to all of you who've read my "Words from Penn," for your positive feedback and support of our organization. We couldn't provide the help we do without your ongoing kindness and generosity, and for that I can't thank you enough.

Best,

INVESTING IN JUSTICE

JUSTICE PEOPLE DESERVE, NOT WHAT THEY CAN AFFORD



NEIGHBORHOOD
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Because Justice is for All



Neighborhood Legal Services' [Equal Justice Campaign](#) is an annual fundraising campaign where the entire legal profession comes together around a common cause — helping to ensure that the neediest members of our community have access to civil legal help. For the poor, access to legal services can mean the difference between homelessness and housing, poverty and financial security, and/or a life of fear and safety from a domestic abuser. Civil legal aid has been a vital component of the public response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please consider [making an annual gift](#) to NLS' Equal Justice Campaign today to ensure that even the most vulnerable in our communities have access to free civil legal aid.

For more information, please visit our campaign website equaljusticecampaign.org or contact Christine Kirby, Development Director, at kirbyc@nlsa.us.

NLS Helps Women Battle Back

Before the pandemic struck, millions of women were already supporting themselves and their families on low-income wages. When COVID-19 related lockdowns caused

jobs to disappear, these same women were suddenly out of work and shouldering the majority of family caregiving responsibilities.

To help address the challenges and inequities faced by women that have always existed but have come to the forefront of concern during the COVID-19 pandemic, NLS launched the Women's Impact Network (WIN) Program. The WIN Program has helped women by having their criminal records expunged, avoiding eviction or debt collection, or receiving the child support they deserve. By addressing underlying legal issues through the assistance of civil legal aid attorneys at NLS, these women have a more solid foundation upon which to build a better future.

For more information, please visit nlsa.us/legal-resources/womens-impact-network-win



Celebrating NLS Advocates Joan Tutak & Sam Grego

The PLAN Excellence Awards recognize legal aid attorneys, paralegals, staff and friends of civil legal aid who support the clients served by the civil legal aid programs that comprise the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN). Though the 2020 Excellence Awards were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, honorees were recognized at a virtual event watched by 300 attendees. Long-time NLS staff attorney **Joan Tutak** received an Excellence Award for her two decades of exceptional work with the organization.

Watch Joan's PLAN Award
tribute here: tinyurl.com/JoanTutak

Pittsburgh attorney **Sam Grego**, a principal with Dickie McCamey & Chilcote, P.C., was also honored by PLAN. Sam coordinates pro bono activities for the firm and serves on the administrative board of the Pittsburgh Pro Bono Partnership, a frequent collaborator with NLS.

For additional details on the PLAN Excellence Awards and a link to a video tribute to Sam, please visit: palegalaid.net/pennsylvania-legal-aid-network-excellence-awards



New Faces at NLS

NLS welcomes new staff attorneys to the organization. Look for spotlights on each new attorney in the months to come.

Melissa Evans, Employment

Robert Karlavage, Public Benefits

Peter Lewis, Tangled Title

Marguerite Link, Helpline

Matthew Mueller, Housing

Melissa Ruggiero, Disability and Elder Law Project

Jonathan Young, Helpline

Christopher Larson, Victims of Crime Assistance (VOCA)

Julia Zebley, Housing

In addition, the following staff have recently joined NLS's civil legal aid team:

Allison Martin, Social Worker

Tess Barancik, Receptionist

Marianne Inge, VOCA Intake Specialist

CONTACT US

NLS provides service to residents in Allegheny, Beaver, Butler and Lawrence counties.

Call toll-free: **1-866-761-6572**

Visit us online: **www.nlsa.us**

Sign up for more information via email!

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