



EQUAL ACCESS

A Newsletter of Prairie State Legal Services



Adam Fleming

PSLS Board Transitions to New Leadership

During its September meeting, the PSLS Board of Directors elected Adam Fleming as its new Board President. Adam, a former PSLS staff attorney, has served on PSLS' board since 2019 and most recently as secretary of the board. Adam assumed his new

role from longtime President Steve Greeley who stepped down after nine years on PSLS' board. Additionally, the board elected Mike Bean and Garrett Bonsell to serve as the new board vice president and secretary, respectively.

In addition, three new directors joined PSLS' board: April Foster, Rebecca Lee, and Jim Rowe.

"Each of these new board directors brings with them a unique perspective and the same unyielding commitment to create a brighter future for the most vulnerable in our communities," said Denise Conklin, Executive Director of PSLS. "We look forward to continuing to build upon the foundation, momentum, and successes established during Steve's tenure. Having long-term PSLS volunteer Adam step into this new leadership role ensures the continuity of our work."

April Foster is a client board director. April previously served as an AmeriCorps VISTA in the Peoria office of PSLS, conducting outreach in the community. Rebecca Lee is a private attorney in Woodstock and comes to us from the McHenry County Bar Association. Jim Rowe is the Kankakee County State's Attorney and comes to us on behalf of the Kankakee County Bar Association.

Introducing our New Board Members...



April Foster

She is passionate, affable, and a go-getter! April is a proud mother of five wonderful children and wife to her soulmate of 27 years. She is a full-time student earning a degree in Integrative Health Sciences. She also is an AmeriCorps State and AmeriCorps VISTA alum, certified yoga instructor, certified health coach, and

birth doula. April currently works with a not-for-profit yoga studio and teaches yoga in the community to lower-income individuals and older adults.

Prior to joining our board of directors, April worked at PSLS for about three and half years as an AmeriCorps VISTA until May 2022. During that time, she was a Community Outreach

Coordinator. April says the mission of PSLS is meaningful to her because it gives low-income individuals who need legal representation a chance for their lives to turn around. "I am honored to be a board member of such an outstanding organization," April said. "I hope to be a part of decision-making that will increase PSLS' capacity, maintain its integrity, and strengthen the organization from within."

When April is not working or doing schoolwork, she volunteers some of her time at a local food pantry. She also enjoys many hobbies, including knitting, writing, cooking, gardening, and winemaking.



Rebecca Lee

She's tenacious, reliable, and driven. In 2002, Rebecca started her legal career in the McHenry County State's Attorney's Office and went into private practice in 2007. She became a partner at The Law Offices of Lee & Wombacher, LLC in Woodstock, IL in 2011. Rebecca believes strongly in PSLS' commitment to ensuring

equal access to justice. "I have been so impressed with the staff attorneys, supervising attorneys, and others that I have worked with in Prairie State in the past," Rebecca said. "I'm also excited to get to know the organization and the people associated with it better and to further the mission of Prairie State."

Rebecca holds a Bachelor of Arts in English and Spanish from Northern Illinois University and received her J.D. from Northern Illinois University College of Law. When not working, she enjoys spending time reading, taking care of her houseplants, and spending time with her family.



Jim Rowe

He is focused and an advocate. Jim is the State's Attorney of Kankakee County and has served in this capacity since 2016. Prior to being elected State's Attorney, Jim served as municipal counsel to several villages and their respective law enforcement departments in Kankakee County. Jim saw firsthand the barriers to

access to the civil legal system faced by survivors and others who find themselves having to navigate complex procedural rules to obtain justice. He's also seen firsthand how Prairie State serves as that lighthouse for those same individuals, ensuring they have equal access under the law and a zealous advocate to fight for their interests. By removing barriers, clients can obtain justice and take protective measures to ensure their own safety and liberty.

Continued on page 5



Denise E. Conklin

Dear PSLS Friends and Supporters,

Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays of the year. Not only is it a time to connect with family and friends, but it is an annual invitation to recommit myself to making a positive difference in the world. It also is a time to embrace an attitude of thankfulness. I am so grateful for that reminder and opportunity.

We at PSLS are grateful for our many volunteers who give of themselves and help PSLS by accepting cases that we cannot accept because of our limited resources. As we recently celebrated the 2022 National Celebration of Pro Bono from October 23 to 29, this issue of *Equal Access* is dedicated to the hundreds of private attorneys who selflessly give their time in service to help our clients.

If you are one of our volunteers, we thank you for your service! While the names on the pages of this newsletter show an incredible number of people dedicated to helping people in need, we need more! Email volunteer@pslegal.org to learn how you can get involved.

In this issue, we also highlight recent board transitions and welcome new members to our board of directors. I am thankful for our board members who care so much about our clients and their valuable input and support of our work. Their profound dedication to PSLS' mission allows us to truly make a difference in the communities we serve.

I'm thankful for my family, who continue to be a great source of love, support, and inspiration for me as I begin my tenure as Executive Director. I cannot be more appreciative of them and our board of directors for their confidence in me to lead PSLS into the future.

Very often, the outcome of gratitude is the generosity of others. I certainly find that to be true at PSLS. We can have the impact we do because of our funders, who give so generously of their resources; because of our community partners, who give tirelessly of their time and expertise; and because of our remarkable staff. Every employee here brings talent, insight, passion, and compassion to the imperative work of transforming our clients' lives.

I'm thankful for our supporters; without you, there would be no PSLS. November 29 is #GivingTuesday, a National Day of Generosity. Giving Tuesday also is the day we launch our end-of-the-year campaign. I ask you to please give what you can to support our life-saving programs—people whose basic survival depends on being able to stay in a home, secure health care or food, keep their families together, or protect themselves against abuse. Every donation—large or small—makes an impact.

My best wishes to each of you for a happy Thanksgiving and holiday season!

With gratitude,

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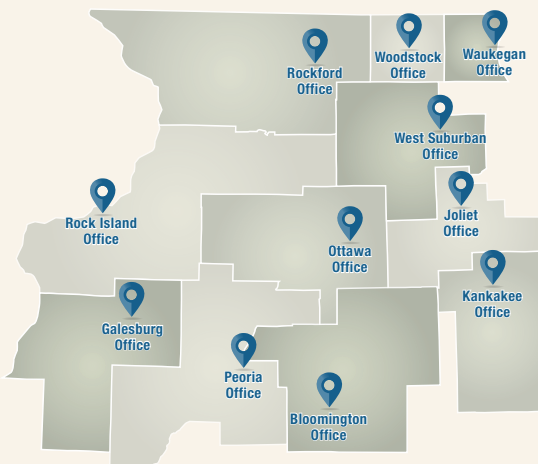
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2022 Celebration of Pro Bono Week: A Reflection

Prairie State Legal Services (PSLS) was pleased to be a part of the National Celebration of Pro Bono, October 23-29. Pro Bono Week is a chance for us to celebrate and acknowledge the incredible work that more than 300 pro bono attorneys and volunteers have contributed to PSLS and its clients over the past year.

“We are so grateful for our ever-growing volunteer community,” said Denise Conklin, Executive Director of PSLS. “My heartfelt thanks goes out to each volunteer who works in partnership with us to ensure access to justice in our communities.”

The impact of our pro bono program is staggering. PSLS volunteers have worked on more than 1,500 cases and provided more than 5,100 volunteer hours of service through local offices, telephone counseling, and Pro Bono Unit projects. From family law, elder law, and evictions to expungement and sealing of criminal records, consumer law, and more, these clients likely would not have been served without our volunteers.

This year, we honored 13 members of the legal community who have provided exceptional service over the last year.



Chris



Karren



Kathy



Susan



Lidia



Linda



Sherri



Thomas



Elsa

Bill Spiro 2022 Distinguished Pro Bono Advocacy Award



Attorney William (Bill) Spiro began volunteering with Prairie State’s telephone counseling service in April 2020 advising clients by phone on a wide variety of legal issues. From the outset of his pro bono service, Bill was ready and willing to advise any client with any legal issue, often taking the time and going the extra mile to speak

to a client in their native language using an interpreter. Cases in our hotline service must be placed with volunteers very quickly, and sometimes on short notice, but Bill never said no to helping a Prairie State client in need. In all his cases, he provides sound legal advice, a calm, honest, guiding hand, or even a pep talk to boost a client’s confidence before going into court.

When the Pandemic Pro Bono Eviction Project launched in late 2020, Bill quickly jumped on board assisting clients with advice and negotiating agreements that allowed the client to stay in their home, or move out on a mutually agreed upon schedule, avoiding the potentially drastic effects of eviction. Overall, Bill has been a most reliable and productive volunteer, helping in more than 300 cases, with over 100 cases in the Pandemic Eviction Project.

Congratulations on receiving this well-deserved award, Bill, and thank you for your pro bono service to PSLS clients.

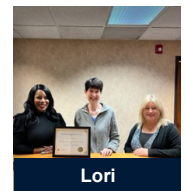
Other notable recipients include our **Outstanding Community Pro Bono Honorees**. They are **Thomas McClure**, Bloomington; **Chris Spesia**, Joliet; **Karren Farmer**, Kankakee; **Kathy Schlueter**, Legal Help for Homeowners; **Susan Bursztynsky**, Ottawa; **Stephen Heine**, Peoria; **Judge Lori Lefstein (Ret.)**, Rock Island; **Sherri Rudi**, Rockford; **Elsa Miller**, Telephone Counseling, **Schlesinger & Strauss, LLC**, Waukegan; **Lidia Serrano**, West Suburban; and **Linda Cunabaugh**, Woodstock.



Stephen



Schlesinger & Strauss



Lori

“We are so grateful for our ever-growing volunteer community and for each person at PSLS who works hard to cultivate and foster the growth of those relationships!”

Prairie State Legal Services would like to thank all of its pro bono attorney volunteers who have worked on a case in the past 12 months.

Bob Ackley
Kat Allen
Julia E. Almeida
Stephanie Ames
Aiden Ammar
Anthony Andreano
Femarie Ang
Jothi Arun
Kathleen Bailey
Eileen Baker Dorchinecz
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Hon. Robert Baron (ret.)
Gregory Barry
Cliff Bartholomew
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Michael Bean
Ashley Bechtold
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Dean M. Davis
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Timothy Divis
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Patricia Hall
Nathan Hamler
Marissa Hanson
Daniel Hardin
Theresa Harms
Debbie Harper
Holly Harris
Daniel Harrod
Joan Harrop
Britnee Hart
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Roger Kellerman
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Evan King
Robert Klein

Jill Konen
Shawn Krawczyk
Jeff Krumpke
Christie Krupp
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Jesus Negron
Elisa Nelson
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Hope Nickel
Rodney Nordstrom
William North
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Lisa Nyuli
Kathy O'Brien
Helen Ogar
Scott Ostericher
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Karen Stumpe
Donald Sullivan
Art Swanson
Mary Szudarek
Brad Swearingen
James Tabor
Kevin Thomas
Jerry Tuffentsamer
Susan Tungate
Brick Van Der Snick
JD Van Rheeden

Carla van Dongen
Natalie Vaughn
Vonda Vaughn
Alison Vawter
Barbara Vella
John Vickers
Dorothy Voigt
Nils Von Keudell
Melissa Wagner
Eric Waldman
David C. Ward
Sharon Ware
Kerriane Waters
Rory Weiler
Timothy Weiler
Rebecca Whitcombe
Amanda Wielgus
Donald Wilcox Jr.
Rahnesha Williams
Rich Williams
Gina Wood
Libby Wood
Sarah Woollen
Alonzo Zahour
Brianna Zielke
Richard Zuckerman
Bruce Zywiec

Continued from cover

“Prairie State is a voice for those without one in our justice system,” Jim said. “As a board member, I hope to add to the success of PSLS by helping grow resources and outreach and increase capacity to ensure that all parties who need help can receive it.”

Jim was recently awarded the MADD Murphy Leadership Award for DUI Prevention and Prosecution; Public Citizen of the Year by the NASW-Illinois Chapter; the Moxie Award by Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault; and Criminal Justice Executive of the Year by the Eastern Illinois Law Enforcement Officers Association. Jim also is an Executive Fellow of the Erikson Institute and an Edgar Fellow with the University of Illinois Institute of Government and Public Affairs. Jim holds a bachelor's degree in social work from DePaul University and a J.D. from DePaul University College of Law. He is 40-hour certified in both domestic violence crisis intervention and sexual assault crisis intervention.

When he isn't working, Jim enjoys volunteering at various community events, kayaking the Kankakee River, and attending Cubs games.



PSLS Branded Merchandise Available Now

Visit PSLS' branded merchandise site, <http://www.asbaces.com/newaces/default.aspx?UID=psl>, to find several items for sale. This site offers top-quality logo items and brings a streamlined process so that you can purchase these items for a limited time now through December 31. The shop will reopen with new items in early 2023. Individual purchases require a credit card. **Note: When you open the link (or through the QR code), it will embed a session code that expires. Please do not use a saved or cached URL. You need to continue to use the URL address provided and not one with a past session code embedded.**



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AgeGuide
NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS

Regional Billboard Campaign Seeks to Help Older Adults

PSLS and AgeGuide Northeastern Illinois, a non-profit organization that works to address both the immediate and long-range needs of older adults, have partnered to launch an older adult public awareness campaign. The billboards, which promote PSLS' Older Adults Legal Assistance Helpline, will alert older adults on how to get legal help with Medicaid, Social Security, or SNAP, and will run over the next couple of months in DuPage, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will Counties. In addition to billboards, digital placements will appear on Facebook, Google, and YouTube, and target residents living in Grundy and Kankakee Counties. More than 700,000 older adults live in AgeGuide's eight-county service area

If you or someone you know needs assistance, please visit www.pslegal.org.

PSLS' Kankakee Office Receives United Way Community Impact Grant Funding

PSLS' Kankakee office recently received \$6,595 in Community Impact funding from the United Way of Kankakee and Iroquois Counties. The grant will support the costs of maintaining an office and providing holistic, no-cost legal services to nearly 600 low-income residents in Kankakee and Iroquois Counties. United Way's Community Impact grants are distributed annually to programs that fight for the health, education, and financial stability of individuals and families in Kankakee and Iroquois Counties.

Many of the PSLS Kankakee office referrals come from Harbor House and are related to issues of domestic violence. The office also receives referrals from the Ombudsman program to resolve nursing home issues and the Adult Protective Services to resolve elder abuse and exploitation issues. The office both sends and receives referrals to and from Catholic Charities, Kankakee County Community Services, and Options Center for Independent Living to assist with public benefits, utilities/housing concerns, and other needs issues.



United Way of Kankakee
& Iroquois Counties

If you or someone you know needs assistance, please visit www.pslegal.org.



State Farm Pro Bono Expungement/Sealing Clinic

On the morning of October 29, 12 State Farm law department employees volunteered at our Bloomington office to help nine PSLS clients. The volunteers met with the clients to answer their questions and completed requests to seal or expunge their old criminal records.

Pictured from left to right: Adrian Barr (PSLS), Brian Shoemaker, Natalie Brunson-Wheeler, Steve McManus, Dean Davis, Chris Jackson, Amy Hidlebaugh, Emily Lewis-Gerig, Jennifer Hunt, Neil Jackson, Keesha-Lu Mitra, Jeff Crabill, and Carla van Dongen.

Prairie State Legal Services (PSLS) provides free civil legal services to residents of 36 counties in Northern and Central Illinois, excluding Cook County. For a full list of PSLS offices and the counties we cover, visit www.pslegal.org/offices. Call PSLS at (847) 662-6925 for free advice from a lawyer and a referral to the office serving your county.

If you or your legal issue are located elsewhere in Illinois, other providers of free civil legal aid are available.



Chicago and Cook County

Legal Aid Chicago— (312) 341-1070 (legalaidchicago.org)

Cabrini Green Legal Aid— (312) 738-2452 (cgla.net) (criminal/ juvenile records, family law)

Chicago Volunteer Legal Services— (312) 332-1624 (cvls.org)

Central and Southern Illinois

Land of Lincoln Legal Aid— (877) 342-7891 (<https://lincolnlegal.org>)

Illinois

CARPLS Legal Aid Hotline for legal information, advice, and referrals for Cook County residents, (312) 738-9200 (<https://www.carpls.org/>)

Illinois Armed Forces Legal Aid Network, for free legal assistance for veterans, active service members, reservists, and their dependents, (855) 452-3526 (<https://ilaflan.org/>)

Illinois Legal Aid Online, for online legal research, forms, guidance, and statewide legal aid directory (<https://www.illinoislegalaid.org/>)

Illinois Free Legal Answers, a virtual legal clinic where low-income Illinois residents can submit a question online to ask a lawyer for help with a civil legal issue (<https://il.freelegalanswers.org/>)

COVID H.E.L.P., a free legal assistance tool for people who are facing housing and employment, and other economic problems because of COVID-19. (<https://covidhelpillinois.org/>)

Rentervention.com is a free, online robot that can assist Chicago renters 24/7 by providing legal information about renters' rights and connecting tenants that need help with free lawyers. (<https://rentervention.com/>) Twice

Outside of Illinois

If you or your legal issue are not located in Illinois, visit www.isc.gov/aboutisc/what-legal-aid/get-legal-help to find a provider of free legal aid in your area.

Client Success: Making a Difference One Case at a Time

Lauren*, a young high school dropout, had a minor criminal record and sought help at PSLS because she wanted to get her record sealed or expunged. After caring for her ailing grandmother, she became interested in healthcare work, but had one charge on her record that was holding her back from finding a job. Unfortunately, she was not yet eligible for sealing or expungement, but staff in our Peoria Office advised her to apply for a healthcare worker waiver.

First, staff investigated the details of Lauren's conviction. Then staff worked with her to write an accurate, but sympathetic explanation of her case for the Illinois Department of Public Health to show that she had changed since her conviction. PSLS staff also worked with Lauren to obtain written letters of support from members of her community who had witnessed her personal growth. Finally, PSLS staff helped Lauren draft a resume that she could use to find new job opportunities. Our efforts were successful, and Lauren obtained the healthcare worker waiver. Now she is working on her GED and will soon be eligible to seal her record.

*Names have been changed to protect client confidentiality.





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NOVEMBER
29TH

#GivingTuesday is right around the corner on Tuesday, November 29!

During our first #GT campaign in 2016, we raised \$17,000. Only five years later, in 2020, we raised more than \$93,000. Last year we raised more than \$97,000. That was thanks to supporters and friends like YOU! For 2022, we have set a goal to reach \$100,000, but we need your help to get there! Here are some things that you can do to help:

- **Like us on social media**, share content, and invite your friends and family to like and follow us.
 - Facebook @PrairieStateLegalServices
 - Twitter @Prairie_State/Twitter
 - LinkedIn @prairiestatelegal
 - YouTube @PrairieStateLegal
 - Instagram @prairiestatelegalservices/instagram
- **Commit to making a Facebook fundraiser.**
Will you help us by creating a Facebook fundraiser on behalf of Prairie State between November 22 and December 6? For every Facebook fundraiser created (up to 75), PSLS board and staff will donate an additional \$40 to Prairie State!
- **New ideas?** Want to create a TikTok? Or attend a Twitchathon? #GT is a great day to utilize social media to further our mission. Send your ideas our way!
- **Donate between November 22 and December 6!** You can give online at www.pslegal.org or mail your donation to 303 North Main Street, Suite 600, Rockford, IL 61101.

THANK YOU TO OUR 2022 #GIVINGTUESDAY SPONSORS!

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Deborah Goldberg
& Neil Puller



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