



Prairie State Legal Services Names New Executive Director



Denise E. Conklin

Prairie State Legal Services has named Denise E. Conklin, former managing attorney of its Peoria/Galesburg office, as its new Executive Director. Conklin succeeds Interim Executive Director Linda Rothnagel and long-time Executive Director Mike O'Connor, who left the organization March 1, after announcing his resignation in late August 2021.

"I'm honored and grateful to the Board for the opportunity to serve in this new capacity and lead this great organization," Conklin said. "As the new Executive Director of Prairie State, I can say with confidence that we are surrounded by the best people with the biggest hearts. My goal is to preserve and build upon the incredible, 45-year legacy that this organization has, while simultaneously looking toward the future. We have an enthusiastic board, staff committed to providing high quality legal services and access to justice in our communities, and a strong community of volunteers. What a team!"

"We are thrilled to welcome Denise as our new Executive Director," said Steven Greeley, President of Prairie State Legal Services' Board of Directors. "Denise's commitment

to high quality legal services and to Prairie State is well-established. She has thoughtfully considered her vision for the future, including increased impact litigation and reviewing the organizational structure to move forward and honor the successful methods that have put Prairie State in the great position it's in today."

Conklin began her career at Prairie State as a volunteer attorney in the Peoria office in 2004 and became a staff attorney in 2007. She later became managing attorney in 2009. Prior to joining Prairie State, Conklin worked as a senior associate in the Litigation Department of Katten Muchin Rosenman in Chicago. Her practice at Prairie State has focused on all aspects of poverty law, including family law, government benefits, education law, criminal records relief, and housing law. Conklin graduated magna cum laude with a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Illinois College of Law in 1997. She received her Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 1994.

Conklin resides in Peoria with her husband Darren of 25 years and their three children Brooke (19), Brynn (18), and Michael (16). When she's not working, Conklin is actively involved with her church and serves as President of their high school's Athletic Boosters Club. She also enjoys traveling and spending time with her family and friends.

Prairie State Announces New Managing Attorney of Peoria/Galesburg Office



Thomas Dennis

Prairie State Legal Services is pleased to announce Thomas Dennis as the new managing attorney of its Peoria/Galesburg office.

"I am so pleased to welcome Thomas into this new role," said Denise E. Conklin, Executive Director of Prairie State Legal Services.

"Thomas possesses a combination of essential qualities including good judgement, the ability to act even when things are difficult, and a balance of empathy and resolve. Our community continues to benefit from his leadership and expertise, and we are proud to celebrate his new role."

Dennis joined Prairie State Legal Services in 2013 as a Staff Attorney. After three years of service with Prairie State, he joined the Tazewell County State's Attorney's Office as an Assistant State's Attorney. Dennis returned to Prairie State in 2017 where he focused on public benefits work, specifically Social Security Disability and education matters. For the past two years, Dennis has served as a Supervising Attorney in the Peoria/Galesburg office.

Dennis is admitted to practice law in the State of Illinois and in the United States District Court for the Central District of Illinois. He received his Juris Doctor degree from the University of Arizona College of Law, and his Bachelor of Science from Arizona State University.

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**KNOW YOUR FAIR
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This project is funded by the City of Bloomington and Town of Normal.



National Fair Housing Month celebrates the passage of the Fair Housing Act in April 1968, a national law that prohibits discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, color, national origin, religion, and gender. The Act was later amended to include protections for people with disabilities and families with children.

Did you know that people with disabilities not only face significant barriers to obtaining housing, but also

challenges in using and enjoying their housing? Often a reasonable modification (physical change to the unit) or a reasonable accommodation (exception to a landlord's policy, rule, or regulation) can allow a person with a disability to fully use and enjoy their housing. It is illegal for a landlord to refuse to respond to a request for a reasonable modification or reasonable accommodation by a person with a disability. For example, a person with a disability could request a landlord to allow an emotional support dog despite a "no pets" policy. Disability under the Fair Housing Act is defined as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity.



If you are experiencing housing discrimination because of a disability, or your landlord is not responding to your request for a reasonable modification or accommodation, contact PSLS toll free at 855-FHP-PSLS (855-347-7757).

For more fair housing law basics for individuals with disabilities, please use the QR Code on the left to visit Illinois Legal Aid Online (ILAO).

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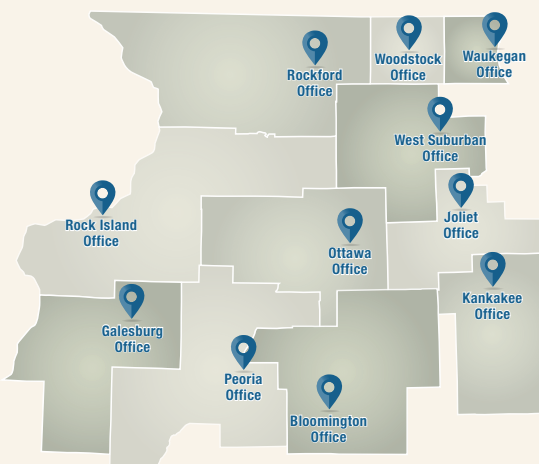
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Serving Livingston, McLean and Woodford Counties
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Bloomington, IL 61701

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311 E. Main Street, Ste. 302
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Prairie State Legal Services' Finance Director Retires After 15 Years

Prairie State Legal Services' Director of Finance James Chancellor, CPA, retired on April 15 after 15 years of distinguished service.

"The impact Jim has had on Prairie State is immeasurable," said Former Executive Director Mike O'Connor. "Jim has been invaluable to the financial growth and health of Prairie State. Early on, he implemented new accounting software that was able to accommodate the complexity of our growing number of revenue sources and continued to update our systems and processes for years to come."

O'Connor said Chancellor's efforts and leadership helped Prairie State to establish a strong reputation among its funders for being well-managed and fiscally accountable. Chancellor also managed Prairie State's occupancy issues, and because of his efforts many Prairie State offices have relocated to much improved office space in recent years.

"Jim has been generous with his time and expertise, and became a resource and mentor to finance staff at other LSC programs in the Midwest," O'Connor concluded. "Jim became a good friend to many of us in Administration, and he will be sorely missed."

Chancellor began his career with Prairie State in August 2007. As Director of Finance, he was responsible for leading the organization's finance team, managing the annual budgeting process, and creating financial forecasts. In 2007, Prairie State's total revenue was \$8

million with expenses about \$7.5 million. Additionally, Legal Services Corporation (LSC) revenue was \$2.7 million in 2007, compared to about \$4.8 million now. This year the total revenue and expense budget is about \$18 million.

Under Chancellor's leadership, his department successfully grew total assets from \$3 million to more than \$13 million. He also helped grow the organization's reserve funds which were \$900,000 at the end of 2007 (about \$500,000 at the end of 2006) to a projection of \$7,000,000 at the end of 2022.

"My short stint as Interim Executive Director has given me new insights into the extraordinary work Jim has done over the course of his long career with Prairie State," said Linda Rothnagel, former Interim Executive Director of Prairie State Legal Services. "While I always have had confidence in our fiscal management, I don't think I quite appreciated all that goes into managing a budget as complex as ours and ensuring that controls are in place so that our funders and donors can have confidence that their dollars are used as they intend. Jim does all of his work with good humor; he has been a pleasure to work with."

"Jim certainly has been a wonderful financial leader for Prairie State," said Steven Greeley, Board President of Prairie State Legal Services. "He will truly be missed. We wish him well in his retirement."

Prior to joining Prairie State, Chancellor served as Finance and Administration Director of the United Way of Rock River Valley in Rockford, for more than 22 years. At United Way, he managed finance and administration in the environment of a community with a declining manufacturing base and increased poverty. Chancellor received his undergraduate degree in accounting and computer science from Northern Illinois University in 1982.

Chancellor said he doesn't have plans for retirement. His first step is to get his daughter's cat to Los Angeles. After that he will be taking one day at a time.

"My wife, Judy, has family in Slovakia and Hungary," Chancellor said. "Plans were to visit them more often, but with a European war, plans may change. We also are celebrating our 40th wedding anniversary this year and a trip to Hawaii may be in the cards to mark the occasion."

Looking toward the future, Prairie State recently hired Jean Ruthe, former supervisor of MercyHealth's Finance Department as its new Director of Finance. Prior to working for MercyHealth, Ruthe worked for six years as Controller for Rockford-based non-profit, Rosecrance Health Network.



Do you or someone you know need legal help? Prairie State's long-time funder, the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation (IEJF), has created a one-pager highlighting four state-wide programs that Prairie State is proud to be a part of. **Please clip this page out, save, and/or share.**



DO YOU NEED LEGAL HELP?

The Illinois Equal Justice Foundation manages four state-funded programs that offer free legal help, advice and information to people who can't afford a lawyer.

FOR HELP WITH EVICTION-RELATED ISSUES

Illinois tenants and landlords can contact Eviction Help Illinois to see if they qualify for free legal help.



Call 855.631.0811 | Text 'Eviction' to 844.938.4280 | Visit evictionhelpillinois.org

FOR HELP WITH ISSUES SUCH AS FAMILY LAW, CONSUMER FRAUD, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & GOVERNMENT BENEFITS

Cook County Residents

Call CARPLS Legal Aid Hotline at 312-738-9200

Northern and Western Illinois Residents

Call Prairie State Legal Services at 800-531-7057

Central and Southern Illinois Residents

Call Land of Lincoln Legal Aid at 877-342-7891



Anyone in Illinois can visit IllinoisLegalAid.org to find simplified legal information, forms and other resources.

FOR HELP WITH VETERANS LEGAL ISSUES SUCH AS DISCHARGE UPGRADES AND BENEFITS



Illinois veterans, active-duty military and their families can contact the Illinois Armed Forces Legal Aid Network (IL-AFLAN) to see if they qualify for free legal help.

Call 855.452.3526 | Visit ilafan.org

FOR HELP CLEARING CANNABIS RECORDS



clearing cannabis convictions

Illinois residents can register with New Leaf Illinois to find out if they qualify for cannabis expungement.

Visit newleafillinois.org | Call 855.963.9532

Civil Legal Aid Programs, the Illinois Armed Forces Legal Aid Network and New Leaf Illinois are funded through the Office of the Illinois Attorney General. Eviction Help Illinois is funded through the IL Department of Human Services.

Prairie State Legal Services VISTA Ends Three Years of Service May 7

Last month, AmeriCorps celebrated its national recognition week March 13-19. In honor of our AmeriCorps-Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program, we are proud to highlight our Community Outreach VISTA April Foster, who will be ending three years of service with the Peoria office of Prairie State Legal Services on May 7. The AmeriCorps-VISTA program is a national service program in which individuals commit to full-time service to help fight poverty.



April Foster

We recently asked April about her experiences serving as a VISTA for Prairie State Legal Services and what it's meant to her to be a VISTA. "I believe you can best measure a life experience by the condition that it has left you," Foster said. "As a VISTA fellow, it has been my responsibility to build capacity for Prairie State Legal Services. My primary goal since 2018 has been to raise awareness of the services that Prairie State provides. My secondary focus has been to connect clients with community resources, such as employment, housing, food, and education."

April has talked with countless people throughout the nine counties that the Peoria office serves. She's had the pleasure to stand before volunteers, teachers, police officers, Congolese immigrants, people experiencing homelessness, seniors, veterans, college students, social workers, doctors/nurses, city officials, parents, and prison inmates.

"I've listened to heartbreaking stories, heard tears of joy and sorrow, felt the hopelessness and despair, and have been a

sounding board for angry words. Most of all, I have witnessed the joyous expectation of a new day. I count every moment at Prairie State as a benefit in my life. This experience has allowed for tremendous growth both professionally and personally," Foster said.

Before coming to Prairie State Legal Services, April taught children K-12, which is in her comfort zone. "It was challenging transitioning to adult audiences," she said. "Surprises have definitely occurred, like when I showed up to a meeting that turned out to be an unplanned speaking engagement to a French-speaking audience. Or the time I presented standing in a parking lot speaking through a makeshift radio transmitter, while my audience sat in the comfort of their cars listening to me over their car radio, increased my confidence level and taught me flexibility."

Internally at Prairie State, Foster had the honor to work with the African American Affinity Group to discuss and provide honest feedback on ways Prairie State may increase its racial equity. She said she had no idea she would be part of such meaningful work. She said the Affinity Group also was a safe place for her to express herself. "You don't find that type of support everywhere," said Foster. "Prairie State is very unique in that regard."

"I have learned the importance of collaboration, community, and collective impact," Foster concluded. "My understanding of meeting people where they are and not where they have been has deepened. I have learned so much, more than what I can express here. With a glad heart and a smile upon my face, I can say that my Prairie State chapter has left me in pretty good shape."



Celebrating Volunteer Week and Our Commitment to Pro Bono Work

Prairie State Legal Services would like to extend its gratitude to the hundreds of volunteer attorneys who make a huge difference for those in need. In honor of National Volunteer Week 2022, which took place April 18-24, we would like say "Thank you!" to all attorneys who volunteer their time to ensure those who cannot afford an attorney still have access to justice.

For those at risk of losing their homes, income and even their children, volunteer attorneys are an indispensable resource. Now more than ever it is important for us to support our most vulnerable communities. This wouldn't be possible without the immense efforts of volunteer attorneys.

Over the past year, 318 volunteer attorneys contributed almost 6,930 hours of service on pro bono cases. We are grateful to each one of them for their service.

Whether you are an attorney seeking to do pro bono work or a community member who wishes to make a difference in the lives of others, Prairie State Legal Services can use your help.

Learn how to get involved by visiting www.pslegal.org/volunteer or email volunteer@pslegal.org to learn more.



Prairie State Legal Services Sees Success with Low Income Taxpayer Clinic



In 2021, Prairie State Legal Services' Low Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC) represented 230 taxpayers, opened 108 new cases, and closed 103 cases. LITC helped secure \$36,000 in economic impact payments, \$30,600 in refunds, and decrease or correct \$1,119,656 in tax liabilities.

Prairie State's LITC provides help with audits, appeals and tax collection disputes. They also can represent taxpayers in court and provide information about taxpayer rights for those who do not speak English as their primary language.



While we don't prepare taxes, we can help with issues involving IRS action or debt. Most commonly, clients come to us after they have received a notice from the IRS alerting them to some kind of

tax liability, or when the IRS starts taking collection action such as garnishing wages or placing a lien on a property.

The clinic serves residents living in our 36-county service area whose incomes are generally below 250% of the federal poverty guideline.

"Tax issues can affect anyone, and achieving a correct outcome in an IRS dispute should not be dependent on someone's ability to pay for representation," said Frank DiPietro, Low Income Tax Clinic Director. "We want to ensure that all taxpayers obtain fair results within the tax system and empower them to exercise all of their rights, regardless of income level."

If you or someone you know needs help, please contact the clinic at 1-855-TAX-PSLS (1-855-829-7725).

Prairie State Legal Services Wins American Advertising Award



Prairie State Legal Services' marketing team and Rockford-based marketing and advertising agency GinestraWatson earned a Silver ADDY award from the American Advertising Federation of Northern Illinois (AAFNI) during the February awards celebration. The group was recognized for its recently updated Brand Standards Guide, which included its refreshed logo identity and several other marketing collateral.

The ADDY awards competition is sponsored by the American Advertising Federation of Northern Illinois--the trade association that serves the interests of the advertising

community in Rockford and the northern Illinois area. The AAFNI is affiliated with the American Advertising Federation (AAF), the national organization which collectively represents over 50,000 advertising professionals and students. Entries were virtually judged this year based on creativity, originality and creative strategy. Prairie State's Silver ADDY passed the first round of the 3-tiered American Advertising Awards competition and was eligible to be judged at the next level -- the District 6 Competition.

To learn more about the ADDY Awards, visit www.niadfed.org.

Prairie State Legal Services Helpline Telephone Numbers

General Telephone Counseling: 800-531-7057

Domestic Violence Legal Advice Line: 844-388-7757

Eviction Help Illinois: 855-631-0811

Fair Housing Project: 855-347-7757 (Boone, Lake, McHenry, Peoria, Tazewell, and Winnebago Counties)

Legal Help for Homeowners: 888-966-7757

Low-Income Tax Clinic: 855-829-7757

Older Adults Legal Assistance Helpline: 888-965-7757 (60 years or older)

Prairie State Legal Services is excited to launch its 5th annual Lawyers for Justice (LFJ) Campaign and thankful for the many lead donors who already committed to the campaign. The LFJ Campaign is Prairie State's largest annual campaign and focuses on lawyers, judges, and other legal professionals in our service area. Without their generous support, Prairie State would not be able to assist so many clients in need. Want to be a part of the Lawyers for Justice campaign? Donate today at www.pslegal.org/donate.

Thank you to our 2022 Lawyers for Justice
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Make a donation of your choice online to help those in need of critical civil legal aid. Better yet, make it monthly! Monthly gifts make it easier on your checkbook while also creating a reliable revenue source for Prairie State. Just visit pslegal.org/donate and click "Make this a monthly gift."

Give While You Shop

Make your purchases count by shopping AmazonSmile! Shop through www.smile.amazon.com and designate "Prairie State Legal Services, Inc." as your organization and Prairie State will receive a portion of your purchase. It's easy and effective!



Leave a Legacy

Are you interested in leaving a gift to Prairie State Legal Services in your will or trust? These types of gifts are known as a charitable bequest and can allow you to leave a lasting impact on your community for years to come. If you want to learn more, please contact Director of Development Jennifer Luczkowiak at info@pslegal.org.