



**PRAIRIE STATE LEGAL SERVICES**  
*Equal Access to Justice*

## **PRAIRIE STATE LEGAL SERVICES, INC. 2016-2017 VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT PLAN<sup>1</sup>**

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*"If we are to keep our democracy, there must be one commandment: Thou shalt not ration justice."*

*-The Honorable Learned Hand*

Prairie State Legal Services, Inc. (PSLS) is a non-profit law firm that provides free civil legal aid to low-income persons and seniors who have an important legal problem affecting their basic human needs. PSLS serves 36 counties in northern and central Illinois, outside of Cook County, from 12 regional offices and several special projects. We represent survivors of domestic violence in orders of protection and divorce cases; people with disabilities who are wrongfully denied benefits; tenants who are being illegally evicted from their homes; seniors who are facing improper discharge from nursing homes; and many others.

PSLS is the only provider of free civil legal aid in almost all of the 36 counties we serve. The need for legal assistance far outstrips the capacity of PSLS' 140 paid attorneys, paralegals, intake specialists, *pro bono* coordinators, and support staff – many of whom are part-time employees – to provide advice and representation to eligible clients:

- PSLS' 36 county service area is home to over 435,000 persons with incomes below 100% of the federal poverty level.
- Nearly half of low-income households in Illinois experience one or more legal problems each year, but receive assistance for only one in six of those problems. [\*The Legal Aid Safety Net: A Report on the Legal Needs of Low-Income Illinoisans, February 2005.\*](#)
- In 2015, PSLS opened almost 15,000 cases for services ranging from individualized legal advice over the phone to representation in court.

More information about PSLS can be found at [www.pslegal.org](http://www.pslegal.org).

### **PSLS' Volunteer Programs**

The work of volunteer attorneys, paralegals, intake specialists, students, support staff, and others across PSLS' service area provides a critical supplement to the work of PSLS' paid staff. In addition to enabling PSLS to help more of northern and central Illinois' most vulnerable residents and making immeasurable improvements in the lives of those clients and their families, volunteers make a larger contribution to the public good. A number of recent studies have uncovered alarmingly low rates of confidence in our justice system. Volunteers support the justice system and the public's faith in that system by increasing the ability of the public to access the system and helping ensure the fair administration of justice.

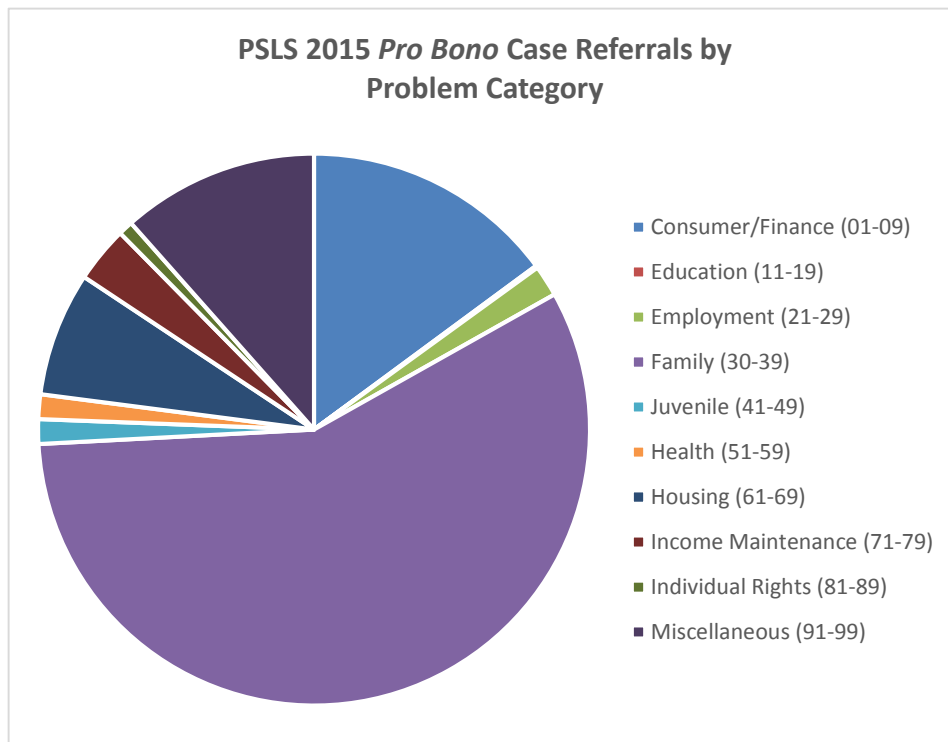
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<sup>1</sup> As a recipient of federal funds from the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), PSLS must follow federal regulations promulgated by LSC in the operation of its program and services. These regulations require grantees to prepare an annual Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) Plan (45 CFR Part 1614), to operate a PAI program, and to report to LSC annually regarding its PAI services. This document is PSLS' PAI Plan for the year 2016-2017.

PSLS operates eleven local *pro bono* projects out of its twelve regional offices. These local projects operate with strong support from the local bar and courts, and focus primarily on referring individual cases to local attorneys for extended representation, for example in court or in negotiations. PSLs also operates three program-wide *pro bono* projects: the Borderless *Pro Bono* Family Law Advice Project<sup>2</sup>; a Social Security reconsideration project; and a telephone counseling/intake hotline project. Additionally, dozens of volunteers work in our offices each year in a variety of capacities. All work performed through PSLs' *pro bono* projects is covered by PSLs' malpractice insurance.

### 2015 Pro Bono Highlights

- Volunteer attorneys completed nearly 1,500 *pro bono* cases. Clients received advice or brief services in approximately 2/3 of these cases and more extensive representation in 1/3 of these cases.
- Volunteers reported over 13,000 hours of service.
- 470 volunteer attorneys accepted almost 1,600 new *pro bono* cases. Approximately 57% of these cases involved a family law matter, and 15% involved a consumer issue such as bankruptcy or debt collection harassment.



- More than 20 undergraduate, paralegal, and law students interned with PSLs in 2015. These students interviewed clients, drafted court pleadings, conducted legal research, reviewed and summarized medical records in Social Security cases, and performed other activities in support of our work.
- Fourteen retired, inactive, or out-of-state attorneys performed *pro bono* services through PSLs under

<sup>2</sup> PSLs' Borderless *Pro Bono* Project was initially funded through an LSC *Pro Bono* Innovations Fund (PBIF) grant. PSLs was honored to be one of only 11 programs in the country to receive a PBIF grant in 2014.

[Illinois Supreme Court Rule 756\(k\)](#). This represents almost 30% of the total number of Illinois attorneys who performed *pro bono* services under Rule 756(k) in 2015.

- PSLs presented over 20 live or web-based continuing legal education courses free of charge to volunteers and prospective volunteers, and launched a comprehensive family law eLearning course available through <http://borderlessprobono.illinoisprobono.org/>.
- PSLs successfully piloted a *pro bono* legal advice walk-in clinic in Bloomington in partnership with State Farm Bank, the Eleventh Judicial Circuit *Pro Bono* Committee, the McLean County Bar Association, Mid Central Community Action, and the Public Interest Law Initiative (PILI). Twelve volunteer attorneys and 9 volunteer paralegals provided legal help to 31 people.
- PSLs continued its partnership with the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Northern District of Illinois in Rockford, where nine volunteer attorneys provided free legal advice and brief services to over 40 clients through a courthouse helpdesk.
- Volunteer attorneys gave telephone advice to unmarried parents with family law issues through PSLs' Borderless *Pro Bono* Project. The project began serving clients in February 2015 and was designed to leverage the high concentration of attorneys in the collar counties to serve clients in rural counties with few attorneys. In 2015, 37 volunteers served over 250 clients from at least 33 different counties.
- PSLs' telephone counseling *pro bono* project experienced impressive growth, thanks in part to our ongoing relationship with Pro Bono Network. Volunteer attorneys advised almost 300 clients (more than twice the number they advised in 2014), and we welcomed several non-attorney volunteer intake specialists.
- PSLs continued to work with PILI and members of the local bar and judiciary to promote *pro bono* participation through the Judicial Circuit *Pro Bono* Committees in the Tenth, Eleventh, and Fourteenth Judicial Circuits.
- PSLs worked closely with bar associations throughout our 36 county service area to place cases with local attorneys, recognize volunteers, encourage *pro bono* involvement, and develop new volunteer opportunities.
- PSLs enjoyed ongoing relationships with the corporate legal departments of Abbott Laboratories, AbbVie, Caterpillar Inc., Deere & Company, State Farm Mutual Automobile, and Walgreen Co.

We thank our volunteers and our *pro bono* partners for making these accomplishments possible.

### **2016 Volunteer Involvement Goals**

With just over 14,000 attorneys registered in PSLs' service area and hundreds of thousands of low-income residents in need of legal aid, we continue to explore ways to increase participation in our *pro bono* program and to efficiently integrate volunteers into our service delivery model. While each of our *pro bono* projects has its own specific goals and plans, the following are our goals for our volunteer program as a whole.

#### **1. Continue to prioritize referral of individual clients to volunteer attorneys for extended representation.**

The single greatest need of our clients – and one of the most cost effective uses of the limited resources PSLs is able to devote to *pro bono* involvement – is for experienced attorneys who will provide direct and extended

representation in court and in negotiations. This is particularly true in the area of family law. While thorough advice and brief services enable many of our clients to effectively represent themselves, many more of our clients lack the ability to successfully navigate the legal system without an attorney. We need more volunteer attorneys who are able to commit to providing extended representation to PSLS' clients.

## **2. Recruit more retired attorneys to volunteer in our offices.**

Retired attorneys who volunteer in our offices and function as unpaid staff are one of our most valuable *pro bono* assets. While most of these attorneys do not have prior poverty law experience, their years of practice allow them to quickly learn new areas of law and they bring a fresh perspective on the issues legal aid attorneys see day in and day out. Because they no longer have an outside practice, many of these retired attorneys are able to devote time to contested or complex matters. PSLS provides support, training, and supervision to these in-house volunteer attorneys.

We find that many attorneys are not aware that [Illinois Supreme Court Rule 756\(k\)](#) allows them to perform *pro bono* services through a sponsoring entity like PSLS, even after they have changed their attorney registration status to retired. We will continue to publicize this option and to target retiring attorneys in our recruitment efforts.

## **3. Develop and offer cost effective “bite-sized” *pro bono* opportunities.**

The demand from busy attorneys for discrete, time-limited *pro bono* opportunities has grown enormously in recent years. PSLS has responded to this demand by making more bite-sized *pro bono* opportunities available to volunteers. In 2010, only 37% of our *pro bono* cases were closed as advice or brief services; in 2015, 67% of our *pro bono* cases were closed as advice or brief services. Our Joliet and Bloomington advice clinics; our Rockford bankruptcy helpdesk; our Borderless *Pro Bono* Family Law Advice Project; power of attorney clinics; self-represented litigant divorce clinics; and telephone counseling opportunities all provide discrete *pro bono* opportunities to volunteers.

But while the need for free civil legal aid is almost limitless, it is challenging to create bite-sized *pro bono* opportunities that are meaningful to both volunteers and clients, and also cost effective for PSLS. The staff time required to screen, refer, and follow up on an advice or brief services *pro bono* case is almost identical to the staff time required to screen, refer, and follow up on a complex litigated matter; PSLS staff frequently spend two to two and half times more time on an advice or brief services *pro bono* matter than the volunteer attorney.

In 2016, we will assess our current bite-sized *pro bono* offerings to maximize their cost effectiveness and efficiency. Before committing resources to new discrete *pro bono* ventures, we will evaluate these projects with a close eye toward cost effectiveness.

## **4. Use technology to train and support volunteers.**

We continue to find in-person continuing legal education to be an effective way to train new volunteers and to thank existing volunteers for their service. But technology affords new opportunities to efficiently and timely train and support volunteers.

We recently began recording certain trainings to allow for continuous onboarding of specialized *pro bono* project volunteers and will continue this practice in 2016. 2015 brought the launch of our Borderless *Pro Bono* Family Law Advice Project website. The website offers a “one stop shop” for current and prospective volunteers, including information about the opportunity, volunteer sign up, instructions, training materials, access to our family law eLearning course, and other resources. This website has proven to be a powerful

recruitment and support tool, and we will replicate this model in other specialized *pro bono* projects in 2016.

#### **5. Involve more non-attorney volunteers.**

We continue to explore and experiment with ways to involve non-attorney volunteers. Non-attorneys who are able to volunteer regularly in our Wheaton and Waukegan offices can help screen clients for eligibility for PSLs' services, which enables our intake attorneys to spend more time giving legal advice to eligible clients. One PSLs office will begin using paralegal students to conduct public benefits "check ups" with clients. Student interns and paralegal volunteers in our St. Charles office help investigate and work up cases for our Social Security reconsideration *pro bono* project.

Our law student internship program remains a critical piece of our non-attorney volunteer program. In 2016, eight PSLs offices will host 14 law student interns. Two of these students will have 711 student practice licenses allowing them to provide in-court representation to clients.

#### **We need your input!**

PSLS needs input to make our *pro bono* program successful. Our most successful *pro bono* efforts have grown out of conversations with our partners.

We actively invite bar leaders and other *pro bono* partners to offer input on this plan by contacting PSLs' Executive Director or Director of Volunteer Services:

Michael O'Connor  
Executive Director  
303 North Main Street, #600  
Rockford, IL 61101  
(815) 965-2134  
[moconnor@pslegal.org](mailto:moconnor@pslegal.org)

Marisa Wiesman  
Director of Volunteer Services  
400 W. Roosevelt Road  
Wheaton, IL 60187  
(630) 690-2130  
[mwiesman@pslegal.org](mailto:mwiesman@pslegal.org)

You may also contact the staff of our regional offices and special projects:

#### **Bloomington – (309) 827-5021**

(serving Livingston, McLean, and eastern Woodford Counties)

- Managing Attorney Adrian Barr ([abarr@pslegal.org](mailto:abarr@pslegal.org))
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Vickie Smith ([vsmith@pslegal.org](mailto:vsmith@pslegal.org))

#### **Joliet – (815) 727-5123**

(serving Will County)

- Managing Attorney Andrea DeTellis ([adetellis@pslegal.org](mailto:adetellis@pslegal.org))
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Suzanne Helwich ([shelwich@pslegal.org](mailto:shelwich@pslegal.org))

#### **Kankakee – (815) 935-2750**

(serving Iroquois and Kankakee Counties)

- Managing Attorney Ketura Baptiste ([kbaptiste@pslegal.org](mailto:kbaptiste@pslegal.org))
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Nancy Hinton ([nhinton@pslegal.org](mailto:nhinton@pslegal.org))

#### **McHenry – (815) 344-9113**

(serving McHenry County)

- Managing Attorney Geraldine Dolan ([gdolan@pslegal.org](mailto:gdolan@pslegal.org))

- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Dori Michaels ([dmichaels@pslegal.org](mailto:dmichaels@pslegal.org))

**Ottawa** – (815) 434-5903

(serving Bureau, Grundy, LaSalle, Lee, and Putnam Counties)

- Managing Attorney Don Dirks ([ddirks@pslegal.org](mailto:ddirks@pslegal.org))
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Ret. Judge James Brusatte ([jbrusatte@pslegal.org](mailto:jbrusatte@pslegal.org))

**Peoria and Galesburg** – (309) 674-9831

(serving Fulton, Henderson, Knox, Marshall, McDonough, Peoria, Stark, Tazewell, Warren, and western Woodford Counties)

- Managing Attorney Denise Conklin ([dconklin@pslegal.org](mailto:dconklin@pslegal.org))
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Kate Durham ([kdurham@pslegal.org](mailto:kdurham@pslegal.org))
- Assistant *Pro Bono* Coordinator Shirley Coers ([scoers@pslegal.org](mailto:scoers@pslegal.org))

**Rockford** – (815) 965-2902

(serving Boone, Carroll, Jo Daviess, Ogle, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties)

- Managing Attorney Kimberly Thielbar ([kthielbar@pslegal.org](mailto:kthielbar@pslegal.org))
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Wendy Crouch ([wcrouch@pslegal.org](mailto:wcrouch@pslegal.org))

**Rock Island** – (309) 794-1328

(serving Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Whiteside Counties)

- Managing Attorney Gretchen Farwell ([gfarrowell@pslegal.org](mailto:gfarrowell@pslegal.org))
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Cherie Myers ([cmyers@pslegal.org](mailto:cmyers@pslegal.org))

**St. Charles** – (630) 232-9415

(serving DeKalb, Kane, and Kendall Counties)

- Managing Attorney Kathryn McGowan Bettcher ([kbettcher@pslegal.org](mailto:kbettcher@pslegal.org))
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Marcy Heston ([mheston@pslegal.org](mailto:mheston@pslegal.org))

**Waukegan** – (847) 662-6925

(serving Lake County)

- Managing Attorney Samuel DiGrino ([sdigrino@pslegal.org](mailto:sdigrino@pslegal.org))
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Susan Perlman ([sperlman@pslegal.org](mailto:sperlman@pslegal.org))

**Wheaton** – (630) 690-2130

(serving DuPage County)

- Managing Attorney Eliot Abarbanel ([eabarbanel@pslegal.org](mailto:eabarbanel@pslegal.org))

**Low Income Tax Clinic** – (630) 580-3315

(serving all 36 PLS counties)

- Project Director Andrew VanSingel ([avansingel@pslegal.org](mailto:avansingel@pslegal.org))

**Legal Help for Homeowners Project** – (224) 321-5640

(serving all 36 PLS counties)

- Project Director Jennifer Luczkowiak ([jluczkowiak@pslegal.org](mailto:jluczkowiak@pslegal.org))

**Fair Housing Project** – (815) 965-2902

(serving Peoria, Tazewell, Winnebago, Boone, Lake, and McHenry Counties)

- Project Manager AJ Young ([ajyoung@pslegal.org](mailto:ajyoung@pslegal.org))

**Borderless Pro Bono Family Law Advice Project** – (630) 690-2130  
(serving all 36 PLS counties)

- Director of Volunteer Services Marisa Wiesman ([mwiesman@pslegal.org](mailto:mwiesman@pslegal.org))

**Social Security Reconsideration Pro Bono Project** – (630) 232-9415

- Project Coordinator Anne Bardo ([abardo@pslegal.org](mailto:abardo@pslegal.org))

**Telephone Counseling Pro Bono Project** – (630) 690-2130

- Volunteer Coordinator Cindy Matre ([cmatre@pslegal.org](mailto:cmatre@pslegal.org))