



## PSLS' Equity for Elders Program Provides Legal Help to Most Vulnerable Older Adults

Anyone can experience poverty and abuse, but older adults are especially vulnerable. Jill is a retired kindergarten school teacher who must now plan each meal to stretch a meager monthly income to cover rent, food, utilities, medication, transportation, and other expenses. Bill worked various jobs for 30 years before being diagnosed with a chronic disease and becoming homeless for the first time at nearly 60 years old. Anna learned about elder financial abuse while her adult child, Thomas, an agent to help with bill paying, was stealing money, leaving her without resources to pay for medical care.

These are just a few all-too-common stories of older adults in desperate need of resources to thrive and are part of a rising trend in elder abuse across America. PSLS is using the power of law through its Equity for Elders program to remove the barriers low-income seniors face in locating and accessing legal help. The program, funded through the Administration for Community Living (ACL), is designed to build resources and target services to older adults with the most significant economic and social needs experiencing serious civil legal problems. According to PSLS Bloomington Office Staff Attorney and Elder Equity Program Director Megan Wood, PSLS was one of four organizations nationwide in 2022 to receive an ACL Legal Assistance Enhancement Program (LAEP) grant to improve the delivery of legal assistance services to older adults. The PSLS Elder Equity program handles cases in McLean and Livingston Counties with older adults, focusing on helping clients who need assistance to address abuse, obtain advance care planning, remain safely housed, or receive supportive services to help them stay in the community.

"The primary goal of this program is to meet our most vulnerable elder community members where they are," Megan said. "To achieve this goal, we are co-locating legal services within the City of Bloomington Housing Authority (BHA) high-rise building, Wood Hill Towers. The building is home to more than 100 disabled or low-income older adults and the offices for some BHA administrative and support staff. We worked closely with BHA staff to plan a twice-weekly walk-in desk staffed by project paralegal Rachel Westpfahl and me. The walk-in program is available to BHA tenants and older adults in the surrounding community."



Megan said that along with residents, neighbors might also be seeking services at the BHA, such as Midwest Food Pantry food delivery days, Chestnut Health Systems community health worker on-site hours, or the Carle Mobile Health Clinic, a health clinic on wheels that visits the BHA parking lot monthly. She said they try to be there when other services are present so a person doesn't have to travel or come back multiple times to find us.

Along with direct services to older adult clients, the walk-in desk serves as a point of contact for other prospective clients. Megan said that even if a person does not meet the specific parameters of the project, they are connected to the other

Continued on page 3



**Denise E. Conklin**

## *Dear PSLS Friends and Supporters,*

Spring is a season of new beginnings. As I reflect on the past year, I am so grateful for what PSLS and our partners have been able to accomplish. This was achieved through the hard work of our dedicated staff, community partners, and collaborators. I am excited about our future!

Over the past year, we have focused on organization realignment to support our growing staff better and to serve more clients with high-quality legal services. So, it seems fitting that in spring, the season of new beginnings and growth, PSLS has welcomed many new staff to our

ranks. It takes a big team to accomplish all that PSLS does, and we are glad to have additional assistance and expertise, especially when our communities urgently need civil legal aid to meet their basic needs.

Earlier this year, PSLS created the Director of Legal Operations position to supervise our managing attorneys and provide them with much-needed support. We also hired a new Recruitment and Onboarding Specialist to ensure staff onboarding experiences are consistent and positive. In addition, we created a new Manager of Community Engagement position to supervise our Community Resource Specialist (CSR) and implement strategies for outreach and education throughout our 36-county service area. We are invested in community lawyering. Having professional outreach staff in our communities strengthens each community's trust in PSLS, empowers residents through legal education, and helps us identify real-time community needs.

In October 2022, PSLS combined our grants and fundraising work into one Resource Development department. Since then, PSLS has hired five Grant Specialists and implemented a new system utilizing an online project management tool. PSLS also hired an Annual Giving Specialist to work with local fundraising committees and annual donors and a Major Giving Specialist to begin cultivating major donors throughout our service area.

For more than 45 years, PSLS has strived to advance equal access to justice to build a more equitable society where everyone can provide for their basic human needs, live safe and healthy lives, and where justice is attainable regardless of income.

We recognize that pursuing a more just society is a collective effort, and we would not be where we are today without your support. Thank you to our funders, donors, staff, volunteers, and community partners for supporting our critical efforts to advance justice through our civil legal aid work.

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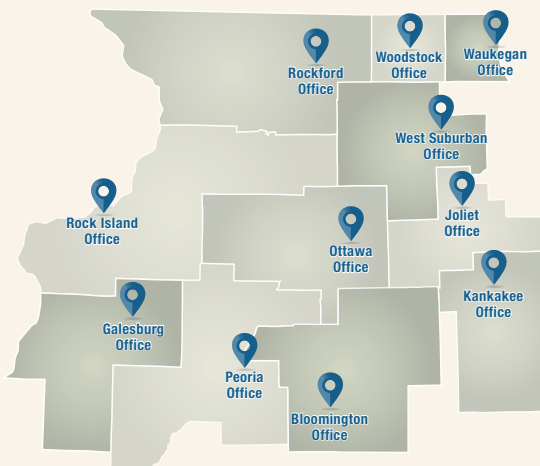
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Serving Livingston, McLean and Woodford Counties  
201 W. Olive Street, Ste. 203  
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# PSLS' Equity for Elders Program Provides Legal Help to Most Vulnerable Older Adults *cont. from cover*



resources available in the Bloomington office. For example, this project is integrated with PSLS' "R3" program, a network of PSLS attorneys and community advocates trained to be immersed in targeted low-income minority communities with high incarceration rates and poverty. Additionally, PSLS coordinates a volunteer lawyer program in McLean and Livingston counties and incorporates pro bono attorneys into the delivery of services when possible.

"Educating our communities is a key part of the program," Megan said. "Many older adults do not know where to seek help or simply do not recognize their problem is legal." The Equity for Elders project attorney plans to give regular legal education presentations in the BHA building to combat this issue.

"I hope we empower older adults by providing the information they need to assert their rights and recognize legal issues," Megan said. "After we met with a resident and helped her

file a successful SNAP application, the resident walked a friend to our help desk to 'do the same thing for her.' These experiences inform our legal education topics, like our most recent presentation on SNAP deductions and common misconceptions."

The Equity for Elders project also seeks to increase collaboration between legal services providers and the aging network through our partnerships with Adult Protective Services (CHELP APS), the BHA, and other aging network service providers. In addition, Megan is offering training to social services and law enforcement staff and developing checklists for use by the aging network to help non-attorneys identify when an older adult has a serious legal issue that PSLS may be able to handle. Another project goal is to increase PSLS staff's substantive expertise in financial exploitation and abuse by preparing an Illinois-specific guide to civil legal remedies in exploitation cases and training for our case handlers.

The most recent U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) data (2020) shows that 27% of all public housing tenant households are headed by a tenant aged 62 or older. The 2017 Justice Gap Study by Legal Services Corporation found that 56% of low-income older adult households in the U.S. experienced a civil legal problem in the previous year. The vast majority received no legal help for these problems. The poverty rate of the BHA high-rise Census tract is 23%, a significantly higher number than in the surrounding area. This data suggests that co-locating legal services within public housing will focus geographically on elders with the most significant social and economic needs and provide services to older adults who have previously been underserved.

"Our first walk-in desk was held in February, so we are just getting started," Megan concluded. "We are already seeing residents refer their friends and neighbors, which is promising."



## HAVING PROBLEMS WITH MEDICAID, SOCIAL SECURITY OR SNAP?

**WE CAN HELP - FREE.**

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for Equal Justice  
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NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS

# Introducing Paris Brandy, Manager of Community Engagement



He's poised, thoughtful, and open-minded! Paris Brandy is the new Community Engagement Manager for PSLS. He began working for PSLS in 2022 as a Community Advocate in the Rock Island office, working to advocate for the local community and establishing relationships with key stakeholders. In his new role, Paris is responsible for developing and implementing

the strategic outreach plan for our 36-county service area and guiding the legal priorities we pursue. He also supervises all outreach staff for our 11 offices.

Paris' public service began when he enlisted in the United States Air Force as a security forces member during Iraqi and Enduring Freedom operations in 2001. Once done serving,

Paris returned home as a community organizer educating Chicago's low-income communities on financial literacy and stability. During that time, he recognized the bigger impact he needed to make and joined the social service sector as Assistant Director of Programs at The Inner Voice, Inc. Paris oversaw permanent supportive housing, transitional housing, and job readiness programs. He worked in this arena for seven years and was the Co-Chair of Chicago's Coordinated Entry Leadership Committee. His leadership helped design Chicago's present-day Homeless Entry System.

Paris received his paralegal certification in 2006 from Career Colleges of Chicago. He became the youngest Director ever selected to his position while working at The Inner Voice, Inc. He is a National Association of Legal Assistants member and a board member at The Project of the Quad Cities. When he isn't working, Paris enjoys spending time with his family, reading, and watching news or action movies.

## Become a PSLS Campaign for Legal Services Committee Member

The Campaign for Legal Services (CLS) committees are the ground-level, community-focused fundraising and public awareness arms of PSLS' work. Each PSLS office has a CLS committee geared toward the specific community or communities it serves, with offices in Bloomington, Galesburg, Joliet, Kankakee, Woodstock, Ottawa, Peoria, Rockford, Rock Island, Waukegan, and West Chicago (West Suburban). As a member of a CLS committee, you will get a chance to be a part of the life-changing work of PSLS in your community.

Generally, the CLS committees meet 4 times a year and work on strategy together, discuss donor leads and connections, plan events, and more. A new CLS member would receive a brief onboarding call with PSLS staff, attend CLS meetings, and support CLS fundraising goals and other initiatives throughout the year. These committees include lawyers, advocates, professionals, and much more. PSLS hopes these committees grow and become more diverse in experience to best benefit the communities we serve. This is truly a rewarding experience for PSLS supporters seeking a richer involvement with our organization. We would love to see you at an upcoming event!

**If you want more information, have questions about the CLS committees, or want to attend an upcoming meeting, please reach out to Joshua Beaton, Annual Giving Specialist, at [jbeaton@pslegal.org](mailto:jbeaton@pslegal.org) or (414) 940-2438.**

## 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*)

# Fundraising and Grants Merge to Form Resource Development Department

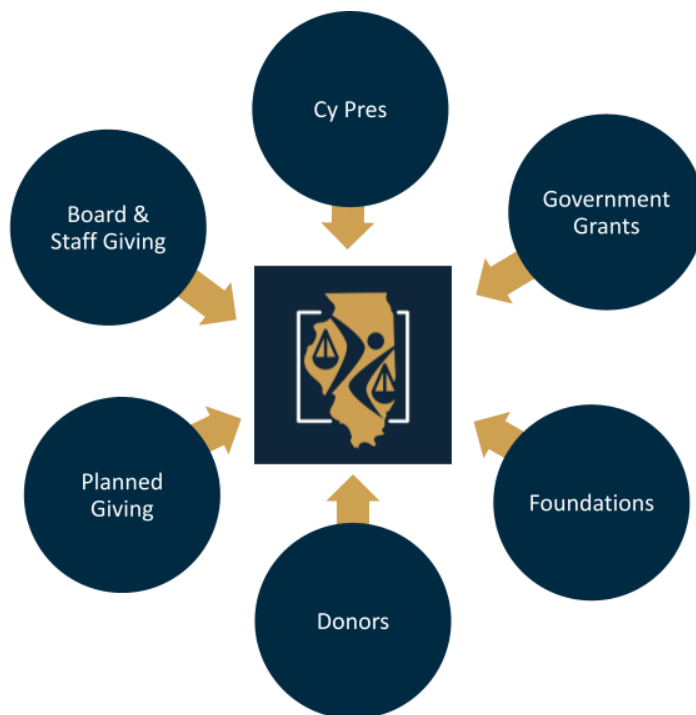
PSLS has worked diligently with consultants to develop an operating blueprint for reorganizing and deploying people and resources to support PSLS' mission as we approach our fifth decade of services. Our Resource Development Department is the result of a recent merger of our Fundraising Team, which focuses on individuals, corporations, and family foundations, and our Grants Team, which focuses on government grants, United Ways, and other foundations.

The Resource Development Department sets the revenue strategy for PSLS. To do so, Grant Specialists and Giving Specialists serve as bridges between programmatic strategy and funding streams. As PSLS continues to grow, leadership has redefined the roles and responsibilities of the Resource Development Department and increased the team from seven full-time team members in 2022 to eleven team members in May 2023. According to Jenn Luczkowiak, Director of Resource Development, "Our short-term focus has been to onboard new staff, to solidify and streamline our internal processes, to expand our funding requests for more government and non-governmental funding, and to honor the PSLS employees who are retiring and helped build this innovative nonprofit."

Streamlining our development process will support our growth and shepherd new funding relationships across Illinois. Centralizing resource development will also provide more capacity for our lawyers to do legal work, as many lawyers were previously performing tasks related to grant reporting.

Under the new structure, five Grant Specialists and two Giving Specialists will be responsible for researching, identifying, and acquiring funding from new and current funding streams to support the important work of PSLS' programs. Currently, this staff maintains portfolios of approximately 300 grant opportunities from 124 funders and over 1,200 individual and corporate donors. Grant Specialists ensure all grant reporting requirements are met and maintain the important relationships PSLS has with its funders and supporters. Finally, Grant Specialists act as a liaison between the Resource Development Department and local PSLS

offices to identify funding opportunities for each of our cases and seek out new or additional funding as needed.



## PSLS Branded Merchandise Available Now!

Prairie State Legal Services' new branded merchandise site is officially open! You'll find several new items for sale. This site offers top-quality logo items and a streamlined on-demand ordering process so you, our supporters, can purchase items year-round. We hope you enjoy it.

Visit the site, here: <https://gothreadly.myshopify.com/collections/psls>





The Joliet office, located on the fifth floor of the Bays Professional Centre, is moving to the third floor in the same building. The office will be closed for the move beginning May 24 and will reopen to the public on June 1.

In addition, our Rock Island office is moving to Moline, IL beginning May 31, and will be closed through June 2. Phone numbers, faxes, and emails will remain the same for both offices.

**Joliet Office**

14A W. Cass Street, Third Floor  
Joliet IL 60432

**Moline Office**

1515 5th Avenue, Suite 200  
Moline, IL 61265



Gail Tilkin Walsh



## Longstanding Director of Program Development Retires

Longstanding PSLS Director of Program Development, Gail Tilkin Walsh, was honored at a farewell luncheon on April 25, in Rockford. The Rockford office, Administration, family, and peers celebrated her nearly 40-year career with PSLS. She retired on April 28.

Gail began her career with PSLS in April 1979 as a paralegal in our Peoria office, handling problems for older adults. She continued as a paralegal working in Rockford and Ottawa, handling a wide range of legal matters involving government agencies for 11 years. Gail left PSLS in 1990 to pursue her master's degree in social work and then handled grants and housing development for other agencies before returning to PSLS in 1995 as the Director of Program Development. This position included developing new service delivery approaches using new grants to support such efforts. She also coordinated the organization's pro bono coordinators, legal education, legal needs studies, training, and various other matters until the organization had grown so that some of these functions were spun off to other staff. For the last 28 years, Gail was responsible for the majority of the organization's grants which enabled the organization to more than double in size.

Gail was a vital part of PSLS as it grew and changed, and she will be missed by all that worked with her.

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](https://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](https://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 [ilaflan.org](https://ilaflan.org)

### FOR HELP CLEARING CANNABIS RECORDS



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

Visit [newleafillinois.org](https://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.*



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Thank you

Prairie State Legal Services is excited to launch its 6th 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](http://www.pslegal.org/donate).

Thank you to our 2023 Lawyers for Justice  
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