

To: Members of the Lycoming Law Association  
From: North Penn Legal Services  
Re: 2021 Pro Bono Report for Lycoming County  
Date: January 6, 2022

2021 brought unusual challenges to the pro bono program at North Penn Legal Services.

Perhaps most critically, our Pro Bono Coordinator, Danna Rich-Collins, retired at the end of October. She was employed by our agency for 46 years and managed the pro bono program since 1985. I am including, with my report, a history that we submitted to the PBA's Pro Bono Coordinator, who recently renamed their annual Pro Bono Partner award after her. I know that many of you have worked closely with Danna, over the years, and I'm sure that she would want me to thank you for taking her phone calls and working so diligently on the cases she sent your way.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have seen a decrease in the number of attorneys willing to accept pro bono cases. Some attorneys are reluctant to accept cases that require court appearances. Others tell us that they are struggling to maintain their own caseloads and offices, due to hybrid work schedules, illness, quarantine and resignations. We understand and share their concerns and can only hope that this will be temporary.

In 2021, there was also a substantial increase in the number of Protection from Abuse cases referred to North Penn for representation in Lycoming County, which put a greater demand on the pro bono attorneys who accept these cases. We opened a total of 384 PFA cases, which was 96 more cases than in 2020. Pro bono attorneys handled 184 of these cases, which was also an increase, when compared to 2020.

This is a breakdown of the number and types of cases referred to pro bono attorneys by North Penn in 2021:

Protection from Abuse	184
Landlord/Tenant	19
Debt Collection	17
Medical Assistance	9
Expungement/Pardons	6
Custody	6
Adult Guardianship	6
Divorce (clinic)	5
Unemployment Comp.	4
Power of Attorney	2
Bankruptcy	2
Employee Rights	1
Other Welfare	1
<u>License Suspension</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	263

I want to thank everyone who accepts these referrals and those who would, but for the pressures and risks caused by the pandemic. Our clients often present special challenges, due to mental health problems, intellectual limitations, or simply, a lack of resources. I'm grateful that, in spite of these challenges, you've continued to volunteer your time and your hard work, to help them.

Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Heverly', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jennifer Heverly, Esq.  
Managing Attorney  
North Penn Legal Services

## **Danna Rich-collins**

The Williamsport office of Legal Services<sup>1</sup> was opened in 1974, and Danna Rich-collins was hired in September of 1975 as a paralegal, specializing in unemployment and welfare cases. She represented clients in administrative hearings, but also wrote the briefs that were filed in unemployment and welfare appeals to Commonwealth Court. She has continued to do this work throughout her career at Legal Services, expanding it to include many other areas of law.

Danna started managing the Williamsport Office in 1982. This is a testament to the respect she earned as a leader and co-worker in her short time in the new organization. It must have been a daunting task, to manage an office full of attorneys, who were often referred to as “rebels” and “revolutionaries” by judges and other attorneys in the early years of legal aid.

In 1985, Danna was integral in developing, and then maintaining, Lycoming County’s pro bono panel. The President Judge made all of attorneys in the county “opt out” of the program if they didn’t want to handle a minimum of three referrals a year from Legal Services. Due to Danna’s leadership and recruitment of new pro bono attorneys through the years, the Lycoming Law Association was recognized by the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network in 2013 for the continually high participation of attorneys in the pro bono program.

Danna was at the helm of the Williamsport office during a number of serious cuts in staffing and dramatic changes in the types of civil cases that were handled. If you compare the number of attorneys serving Lycoming County in the late 1970s (9) with the number of attorneys serving Lycoming, Clinton, and Tioga 40 years later (2), you can see how crucial her role in managing the office and the pro bono program has been.

Danna received Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network’s “Excellence Award” in 1989. This is what the supervising attorney in the office said about her:

“Managing the Williamsport Office presents a unique challenge, in that it is both the largest office in the program and also houses the administration for the program. Over the past two years, it has also sustained substantial staff turnover. Danna has clearly demonstrated that she possesses the unique skills necessary to manage both the legal work and the staff tensions found in larger offices, even without turnover. Her effective management of the office over the past seven years is exceeded in significance only by her substantial expertise developed during her career in the areas of unemployment and welfare. In addition, she has earned the respect of program attorneys by her ability to analyze legal issues, to effectively represent clients and administrative hearings and has also developed substantial proficiency in legal writing skills. As evidence of her accomplishments, she has been recognized for outstanding work by a former unemployment compensation referee. She is also a staff member who has been affected by changes over the years in some of our activities. Of particular note is that she was instrumental in the monitoring and success of the Lycoming County Law Association Pro Bono Project. Having

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<sup>1</sup> The Williamsport office was Central Susquehanna Valley Legal Services from 1974-1975, Susquehanna Legal Services from 1975-2001, and North Penn Legal Services from 2001-present.

provided the leadership and skill, combined with her knowledge of the attorneys in the county, she has provided extremely capable management of our most successful pro bono effort. We currently have the cooperation of the bar association for not only conflict referrals but also to except protection from abuse cases, and her monitoring of that system is a vital importance to the client community. Finally, as a member of the program management committee, Danna has always demonstrated the highest degree of commitment and perseverance and making sure that we can provide the highest quality service to the client community, while adhering fully to all of the conditions and restrictions placed upon us by funding sources. She has done so with hard work and long hours and an unquestionable sense of commitment.”