

To: Members of the Lycoming Law Association
From: North Penn Legal Services
Re: 2023 Pro Bono Report for Lycoming County
Date: January 8, 2024

I want to sincerely thank the members of the Lycoming Law Association for volunteering to accept cases, pro bono, from North Penn Legal Services. The LLA and the Court have been promoting pro bono service at every opportunity, and in the past year, we have seen an increase in the number of attorneys accepting referrals from our office.

This year, I have focused more attention and effort on recruiting new pro bono volunteers and finding new ways to accommodate attorneys who are willing to accept pro bono cases. I reached out to a number of attorneys, to learn about their interests and availability, and I plan to continue doing so in 2024. I am attaching our most recent letter to new admittees to the bar of Lycoming County, which outlines our pro bono opportunities.

The greatest need for pro bono service in Lycoming County is in the area of civil protection orders (Protection from Abuse cases). Several of our most active pro bono volunteers, who were willing to accept PFA cases, have retired, moved away or are no longer able to volunteer. Lycoming County does not have dedicated, annual funding¹ for representation in these cases, as most Pennsylvania counties do, and in each of the last 3 years, there has been a significant increase in the number of Protection from Abuse filings here.²

North Penn hosted a CLE training on October 27, 2023, which was free for pro bono volunteers. It was a 3-hour training on Pennsylvania's Protection from Abuse and Sexual Violence and Intimidation Acts, and the training was attended by 19 attorneys. Attorneys who attended the training and accept pro bono referrals from North Penn can earn up to six CLE credits for free.³

This is a breakdown of the number and types of cases referred to pro bono attorneys by North Penn in 2023:

Protection from Abuse (plaintiff)	112
Guardianship & POA	11
Debt collection defense	10
Housing (eviction, conditions, utilities)	10
Medical Assistance & other welfare	7
Unemployment Compensation	4
Name Change	2
Expungement	1
<u>Divorce (clinic)</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	158

Thank you to everyone who accepted these cases. Our clients often present special challenges, due to mental health problems, intellectual limitations, or simply, a lack of resources. I am grateful that, in spite of these challenges, you have continued to volunteer your time and effort to help them.

Submitted by:



Jennifer Heverly, Esq.
Managing Attorney
North Penn Legal Services

¹ The Lycoming Law Association Foundation provided a grant for our office to contract with private attorneys in 2023, to handle Protection from Abuse cases involving children in Lycoming County. Cases involving children are the most complex and most frequently contested. With the funds provided, private attorneys were hired to provide representation in 65 of these cases.

² Protection from Abuse filings in Lycoming County by year:

2019: 409
2020: 409
2021: 485
2022: 537
2023: 654

³ Attorneys can earn one (1) CLE credit hour for every five (5) hours of pro bono service completed through North Penn Legal Services. A maximum of three (3) credit hours may be earned per compliance period.



December 7, 2023

Dear Attorney _____,

We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your association with the _____ Law Firm and the bar of Lycoming County. As an active attorney in Lycoming County, you have become affiliated with a bar association that is a leader within the state of Pennsylvania in providing pro bono legal services to the indigent.

In 1985, the Lycoming Law Association, upon recommendation of then President Judge Thomas C. Raup, insisted that each of its members, and any attorneys admitted to the Lycoming County Courts, take a minimum of three pro bono referrals each year from the local legal aid office, which is now North Penn Legal Services. Judge Nancy Butts, the current President Judge, has continued the Court's commitment to pro bono representation in this county. The Court and the Law Association believe this to be an integral part of an attorney's professional responsibility.

North Penn Legal Services has a number of options available for performing pro bono service.

1. Protection from Abuse Panel

This panel is comprised of approximately 50 attorneys who have agreed to fulfill their pro bono obligation by accepting indigent clients who are seeking Protection from Abuse orders. This is the area of greatest need for pro bono service, and many attorneys find this to be a rewarding and satisfying way to meet their obligation. There are several law firms in which all of the members participate. To avoid scheduling conflicts, you can provide North Penn with three or more times throughout the year that you will reserve for PFA hearings. (These hearings are consistently scheduled every Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning.) North Penn provides training and support to the pro bono attorney, through an annual CLE, written materials, and individual training.

2. Mortgage Foreclosure Diversion Program

In July of 2012, the Lycoming County Court of Common Pleas instituted a Mortgage Foreclosure Diversion Program for owner-occupied properties in foreclosure. Homeowners who are sued can request that the foreclosure be stayed, while they attempt to negotiate with the lender and participate in a settlement conference with the Court. Pro bono attorneys volunteer to represent homeowners in the settlement conferences and in negotiations with the lender. North Penn provides training and support to the pro bono attorney, through written materials and individual training.

3. Cases in your area of practice

Some attorneys prefer to represent clients with problems in the areas in which their private practice is focused. North Penn serves indigent clients in a wide variety of civil legal cases, and many are turned away due to the high volume of requests for services. We can serve a much larger segment of the community with your help one in these areas:

1. Expungement, limited access, and pardoning of criminal records – if your practice is primarily criminal defense, this is the area for you. An old criminal record is often a barrier to employment and housing for indigent people.
2. Power of Attorney and guardianship – many indigent clients need help formalizing these relationships, in order to improve or stabilize their finances and housing.
3. Government benefits – ineligibility, over/underpayment, or denial of coverage in disability, unemployment and medical assistance cases can have severe consequences for those living in poverty.
4. Bankruptcy – when it is necessary to protect the income, assets, housing or utility service of an indigent person.

4. Conflict Referrals

If you agree to be placed on our conflict attorney referral list, you may be contacted directly by clients who cannot be served by North Penn due to a conflict of interest. When someone is financially eligible for North Penn's services, but is a conflict, we cannot gather the information necessary to make a direct referral. Those applicants are given the enclosed form, which is always copied on blue paper. They are given this form with a list of attorneys who practice in the area for which they are requesting services, so they can find their own representation. If an attorney accepts a conflict referral and sends the Acceptance of Pro Bono Referral form to us, the attorney is then given credit for a pro bono referral. If there is ever a question about the legitimacy of a referral, please do not hesitate to call North Penn's Pro Bono Coordinator, Becky Rennicks, at 570-323-8741, ext. 8703.

Earning CLE credits by providing pro bono service

Beginning in 2019, attorneys may receive one (1) CLE credit hour for every five (5) hours of pro bono service completed through North Penn Legal Services. A maximum of three (3) credit hours may be earned per compliance period. For more information, see <https://www.padisciplinaryboard.org/for-attorneys/pro-bono/pro-bono-article/1503/pennsylvania-continuing-legal-education-board-announces-formal-approval-of-cle-credit-for-pro-bono-service>.

Another way to help - Donating your arbitration fees to the LLAF

Attorneys who serve on arbitration panels in Lycoming County can also donate some or all of their fees to the Lycoming Law Association Foundation, and a percentage of those donations is awarded to the Williamsport Office of North Penn Legal Services, to support its work in Lycoming County. A form for donating these fees is also enclosed.

We realize that many attorneys represent clients without compensation and also do pro bono work for organizations. However, the civil legal needs of many indigent people are unmet. Due to a shortfall in this area, an appeal for Pro Bono Service was made by Chief Justice Todd earlier this year, which is enclosed, and the Pennsylvania Bar Association maintains a website dedicated to pro bono service - PAProbono.net - an “online legal community that provides information and resources for pro bono attorneys, legal aid attorneys, public defenders, and other legal advocates interested in increasing access to justice. This site contains resources to assist in your representation of low income or disadvantaged clients.”

Thank you so much for your attention and interest in pro bono work, and welcome to the Lycoming County bar! Please let us know how you wish to participate. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Heverly, Esq., Managing Attorney
Williamsport Office
North Penn Legal Services

John Pietrovito, Esq., Chair
Legal Services to the Indigent Committee
Lycoming Law Association

Enclosures (3)

C: Nancy Butts, President Judge of the Lycoming County Court of Common Pleas
Elizabeth White, Esq., President of the Lycoming Law Association