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PENNSYLVANIA LEGISLATIVE BUDGET AND FINANCE COMMITTEE ISSUES EVALUATION REPORT ON THE USE OF THE ACCESS TO JUSTICE ACT FUNDS

Final Report Recommends elimination of the sunset provision and further study of unmet legal need of low-income Pennsylvanians

HARRISBURG, PA – Today, the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, a bicameral, bipartisan Committee of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, released a report on the use of the Access to Justice Act filing fee funds that support the provision of civil legal aid low-income Pennsylvanians and survivors of domestic violence. The report found that the Pennsylvania Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) Board, where the funds are distributed, and the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN), where the services are delivered, do an excellent job fulfilling their fiduciary responsibility to properly administer the funds and that the actual provision of services with these funds is of high quality.

The report also made several key observations, including:

- Funding sources to civil legal aid have generally been stagnant or have declined since 2011;
- 50% of the people eligible for civil legal aid and actually seek help from a PLAN legal aid program have to be turned away due to lack of resources to provide legal assistance to them;
- Clients receiving representation from a legal aid program are satisfied with the services they receive; and
- Legal services have a positive economic impact on the communities they serve, producing an \$11 return for every dollar invested.

The recommendations made in the report include elimination of the sunset on Access to Justice fees which are scheduled to sunset in October 2017 and to conduct an updated study on the extent to which people seeking civil legal aid have to be turned away. There were no recommendations for

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corrections in the use of Access to Justice Act funds. The complete report is available online [here](http://lbfc.legis.state.pa.us/Resources/Documents/Reports/572.pdf). (<http://lbfc.legis.state.pa.us/Resources/Documents/Reports/572.pdf>)

“We celebrate the report just released today by Pennsylvania’s Legislative Budget and Finance Committee which studied whether the Pennsylvania Supreme Court’s IOLTA Board and the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network have made effective use of filing revenues to help deliver effective legal services to low-income Pennsylvanians,” says Samuel W. Milkes, Esq., Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc. Milkes continued, “Financial support for providing lawyers in civil cases where basic human needs are at stake is a shared value for all Americans. PLAN uses this funding wisely and encourages the legislature to extend and expand this critical source of revenue.”

Civil legal aid provided by PLAN programs help assure fairness for all in Pennsylvania’s justice system. It provides access to legal help for people to protect their livelihoods, their health, and their families.

The families served by civil legal aid are our neighbors, our relatives, our friends and our co-workers. They are people like Kelley whose job ended through no fault of her own and was vigorously looking for new work. She was pleased to land a data entry position with a large health care system. But a few weeks into her orientation period Kelly* was terminated when a background check revealed a summary conviction that occurred when she was a teenager.

The employer agreed to have her back if she could clear her record. Kelley’s MidPenn attorney prepared the appropriate paperwork. MidPenn Expungement Clinics are able to help remove these barriers to work in most cases. Pennsylvania expungement law allows for the expungement of summary convictions after five years have passed and the person is conviction free.

Civil legal aid allows people like Kelley to remove a 30-year old summary offense that was blocking her ability to earn a living. Legal aid helps them to find solutions and be contributing members of our society.

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About Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network -- The Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network is a client-centered organization that provides leadership, funding, and support to improve the availability and quality of civil legal aid and direct legal services for low income people and victims of domestic violence in Pennsylvania. PLAN works to ensure equal access to justice so that Pennsylvanians can have representation, when facing important civil legal concerns, affecting their safety, family, health, shelter and personal income. Last fiscal year (July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016) 73,917 individuals and their families benefited from direct legal representation. Using an average household size of 2.49 persons per household, PLAN directly helped an estimated 184,053 individuals addressing legal problems across six major categories including family, housing, income maintenance, consumer, health and employment/education.