

## How Does a Person Become Eligible for a LAVA Referral

The LAVA Program is administered through NWLS.

- To apply for help, applicants call (814) 452-6957, Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 4 PM.
- Intake screeners complete a financial screening, conduct a conflict check and determine if the problem fits within our case acceptance criteria.
- If found eligible, a NWLS Intake Attorney conducts a brief interview, gathers specific facts, and completes a referral checklist.
- Once the client's signature is obtained, NWLS contacts are made to find a LAVA attorney who is willing to accept the case.
- NWLS follows-up with confirming paperwork and documents to both the attorney and the client. The client is advised to call the LAVA Attorney's office to make an appointment .
- After referral, NWLS is required to conduct periodic requests for status updates.
- Upon resolution of the matter, the LAVA attorney completes a standard closing summary form and forwards it to NWLS.

***With existing resources legal aid can meet only a fraction of this population's legal need, volunteer attorneys play an essential role in bridging this gap. Please consider sharing your knowledge and expertise.***

For more information on the LAVA Program or details about how to become a volunteer, please contact (814) 452-6949, Ext. 101 or:

***Visit & Sign Up Today!***  
**[www.nwls.org/LAVA.htm](http://www.nwls.org/LAVA.htm)**

***Please join our network of volunteer attorneys!  
Help us balance the scales of justice  
for the low-income population by  
offering your service.***



# Legal Aid Volunteer Attorneys



***Helping Balance the  
Scales***

A cooperative effort of  
**Northwestern Legal Services (NWLS)** and  
**the Erie County Bar Association (ECBA)**

## Poverty in Erie County

- Over 40,000 residents of Erie County live at or below 125% of the poverty level. For a family of four, this means a yearly household income in 2005 of less than \$24,188.
- The number of children who live in poverty in Pennsylvania is on the rise. The percentage of children in the state living in poverty increased from 11.6 percent in 2000 to 15.5 percent in 2003, a jump of nearly one third.
- The number of Pennsylvanians without health insurance has grown considerably in recent years. In 2003, 1.38 million Pennsylvanians did not have health insurance, a 40 percent increase since 1999.
- The number of children under the age of 19 without health insurance in Pennsylvania numbers nearly 217,000.
- Erie County has a significant elderly population, and among those residents, almost 3,000 individuals 65 or older live in poverty.
- Domestic abuse ranks among the highest types of crime reported in the nation, and women in poverty are among those especially at risk. National studies have indicated that over half of the women receiving welfare had experienced physical abuse by an intimate male partner during their adult lives.

## Ways to Contribute

- **Direct Representation:** Legal Aid Volunteer Attorneys (LAVA) generously donate their time by providing direct representation free of charge to low-income clients referred by NWLS. Referred cases generally include lawsuit defense, driver's license suspension, wills, guardianship, bankruptcy, some custody, visitation, and child support matters.
- **Pro Se No-Fault Divorce Clinic:** LAVA Program participants also teach our *pro se* divorce clinics. The clinic provides clients with blank forms, sample pleadings and instruction on filing a *pro se* no-fault consensual divorce action.
- **Other Ways to Volunteer:** While the greatest need is for direct representation, participation is available through other roles. Attorneys may volunteer as a consultant, mentor, or community presenter.

**"The license to represent a client in a legal proceeding is both a privilege and a responsibility. As a practicing attorney, I was actively involved in *pro bono* work because of the important role it serves in our system of justice. I urge all attorneys to participate."**

~ The Honorable Elizabeth K. Kelly  
President Judge

## Active Participation Benefits

- **Private client referrals:** ECBA offers, through the Lawyer's Referral Service (LRS), private client referrals to participating LAVA attorneys.
- **Online Tools:** Membership in Pennsylvania's on-line legal resources at [www.PAProbono.net](http://www.PAProbono.net) designed specifically to assist and benefit *pro bono* attorneys.
- **Trainings:** NWLS offers periodic CLE accredited trainings, conducted by experienced LAVA attorneys.
- **Secondary malpractice insurance coverage:** NWLS's insurance policy provides secondary coverage for any claims arising out of an assigned *pro bono* case.

## Achievements and Successes

We take pride in the achievements and successes of the LAVA Program.

Since its inception in 1982, LAVA has provided free legal assistance to approximately 7,000 low-income individuals and families. Since 1996, we have handled 1,748 cases and maintain about a 70 percent participation rate among ECBA attorneys.

This commitment to *pro bono* has made a critical difference in the lives of low-income people and families in need of legal representation.