



Mid Penn  
LEGAL SERVICES



50  
Celebrating  
YEARS

of Advocacy, Justice and Hope



## Our Mission

MidPenn Legal Services is a non-profit, public interest law firm that provides high quality free civil legal services to low-income residents and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault in 18 counties in Central Pennsylvania.

## About Us

Founded in 1969, MidPenn Legal Services is a nonprofit, public interest law firm with approximately 95 staff, including attorneys, paralegals and support staff. Since our incorporation we have provided free legal advice and representation to nearly one million clients. Using the civil justice system, we improve the lives of our clients and the communities where we live and work through the provision of high quality, impactful legal services. Our goal is to help our clients have:

- food on the table
- stable home environment
- an income source
- access to health care
- personal safety



Dear Friends,

This year MidPenn Legal Services marks its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Advocacy, Justice and Hope. In our 50<sup>th</sup> year of providing services to low-income residents and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault across our program, we have much to celebrate as the work that we do in our eighteen county region, through 15 local offices, provides critical civil legal services for some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable residents. With our staff of 95, and a team of 834 volunteer attorneys, annually we handle over 10,000 cases that affect the lives of over 21,000 individuals and families.



While our territory has grown since 1969, our mission has remained the same—providing a community-based response to the critical civil legal issues facing the most vulnerable residents in our service area. We continue to address the basic needs of food, housing, personal safety and income that stabilize families and enhances the quality of life for entire communities.

As we begin our 51<sup>st</sup> year, current social and economic conditions dictate that we must re-double our efforts and provide a measure of hope and dignity for the sake of our client communities. There is no better time for all of us to renew that commitment and accept the challenge than now, because the future has always depended on our ability to see new possibilities.

Finally, I appreciate the support and cooperation of the many individuals, law firms, funders, corporations and foundations who contribute their time and financial support to help MidPenn solve legal problems and create opportunities for our clients. We greatly appreciate your partnership in our efforts and welcome your continued involvement as we seek to maintain MidPenn as a vital resource in our communities.

As I look forward to the future of MidPenn, I know that success is inevitable because of the combined strength of the wonderful people who comprise our staff and volunteers, and the Board of Directors who guide us. I am thankful to be a part of it, and I am grateful that I have been granted the privilege of leading this wonderful law firm as we embark on the next 50 years! Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Rhodia D. Thomas'.

Rhodia D. Thomas, Esq.  
Executive Director

In 2019 MidPenn Legal Services celebrated 50 years of providing vitally necessary legal services to low-income individuals and families. It was a chance for us to recognize the important work MidPenn has done for the past 50 years. It was also a chance for us to recognize all of the many skilled attorneys and staff members who have dedicated their careers to representing low-income individuals and families in the many counties that MidPenn serves.

MidPenn handles critical civil matters, including protection from domestic violence, emergency child custody cases, housing issues, elder law and financial losses.

The need is great and continues to grow. Funding for our programs is always a concern. As President of the Board, I know that each dollar that is spent by MidPenn is spent wisely and is spent to advance our mission of providing necessary legal services to those in need. We have partnerships with Bar Associations that provide financial help and actively recruit attorneys in private practice to take pro bono cases to assist MidPenn in its mission.

You can help MidPenn continue to provide these vital services by making a monetary contribution. Our goal right now is to look forward to the next 50 years.

Thomas D. O'Shea  
President  
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Before mid-1960, the legal profession had traditionally provided legal services to the poor on a limited scale. However, as part of the War on Poverty, the federal government created the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), and began to provide federal funding for civil legal services. The first priority of the new department was to use the funds it received to organize and begin to administer local legal aid offices throughout the country. These local legal services programs were not agencies of the government, but rather were private, nonprofit organizations, designed to respond directly to the legal needs of local communities. As a result, legal aid offices took many different forms, ranging from the traditional legal aid offices to group legal services, experimental judicare programs, neighborhood practice organizations, and law reform and research back-up centers.

Congress declares that *“there is a need to provide equal access to the system of justice in our Nation for individuals who seek redress of grievance”* and further, that *“providing legal assistance to those who face an economic barrier to adequate legal counsel will best serve the ends of justice and assist in improving opportunities for low-income persons...”*

By 1968, there were 260 OEO funded programs. The legal services budget grew slowly but steadily



Earl Brightbill / The Daily News  
Receiving awards from Laurie Yurejefcic of Central Pennsylvania Legal Services are lawyers John Whitmoyer and Mary Burchik. Whitmoyer accepted a pro bono achievement award on behalf of the Lebanon County Bar Association, and Burchik was named Pro Bono Attorney of the Year.

## Agency honors local lawyers for providing services to needy

from the initial \$25 million in 1966 to \$71.5 million in 1972. That same year, OEO created the Project Advisory Group (PAG) an association of federally funded legal services programs. PAG was created to ensure that legal services staff would have input into OEO decisions. Through its democratically elected

leaders, PAG helped create policies and positions for the legal services community and represented the interests of its member programs before Congress, OEO, and its successors for more than 30 years until it merged with the National Legal Aid and Defender Association (NLADA) in 1999.

In 1974, Congress created the National Legal Services



Corporation (LSC) to fund legal aid programs to provide legal services to low-income Americans. On July 14, 1975, Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell, a leader in the endorsement of legal services, swore in the first LSC Board of Directors. Most of the initial efforts of the new Corporation went into obtaining increased funds for the program from Congress. LSC conducted a study of the funding levels of local programs in relation to the population they served and found that over 40 percent of the nation's poor people lived in areas where there were no legal services program at all, and many of those living in the remaining areas had only token access to legal assistance. Based on that report, the Corporation developed a "minimum access" plan, with the goal of providing a level of federal funding for LSC programs in every area of the country, including those where no programs had been established, that would support two lawyers for every 10,000 poor persons, based on the U.S. Census Bureau's definition of poverty. This funding and expansion strategy proved highly successful. LSC was able to transform the legal services program from one that had only served the predominantly urban areas of the nation to a program that provided legal assistance to poor people in virtually every county in the United States and in most of the U.S. territories.

Civil legal aid programs began to form in Central PA starting in 1969. Some programs were multi-county and some were single county programs. Their mission was to provide civil legal assistance to low-income residents. Advocacy involved handling individual cases, working for social justice and improving the economic health of low-income clients and their communities.

As with many other agencies that came into being at that time, community leaders helped, bring legal aid into the counties that we serve. They recognized that everyone deserves their "day in court" regardless of income.

For the next four decades, the predecessor programs to MidPenn continued opening more doors and expanding services to new client communities within Central Pennsylvania. Through mergers in the late 90's MidPenn was created and today our service area covers 18 mostly rural counties in Central Pennsylvania including, Adams, Bedford, Berks, Blair, Centre, Clearfield, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lancaster, Lebanon, Mifflin, Perry,

Schuylkill and York. We work to provide a community-based response to the critical issues facing the most vulnerable members in our communities.

Civil legal problems affect basic human needs. MidPenn addresses the issues of economic and housing insecurity as well as family instability. By providing the most vulnerable residents living in our 18 county service area with impactful legal assistance, we can resolve some of these critical problems to help them stabilize their lives so they start on the path to a more stable and secure future. Our services include representation in court and at administrative hearings; negotiation with creditors, landlords and mortgage holders and legal advice and information to advise clients of their rights and responsibilities.

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In 1978, the Protection from Abuse Act was enacted and since that time; we have worked diligently on behalf of survivors of domestic violence and



their families. Domestic violence is a societal and community issue and impedes a families' ability to thrive and grow. For 50 years, we have specialized in the issues facing survivors of domestic violence in our communities. Legal services, the courts, law enforcement and domestic violence agencies work together to develop holistic approaches to provide

the support and tools survivors need to work toward a safe, supportive and nurturing environment. We provide legal representation, information and advice as well as options counseling to survivors. Through our advocacy, we ensure that all survivors opting for a hearing get their day in court and obtain the civil protection available to them under the law.

### HOUSING

Inadequate housing affects every facet of an individual or families life. By keeping individuals and families housed, we are decreasing the likelihood that they will need to depend on other more costly services. MidPenn advocates provide representation to low-income tenants to enable them to prevent wrongful evictions, save homes from foreclosure and address habitability issues including, lack of heat and rodent infestation. We also assist families in issues involving public housing and negotiate resolutions with landlords. To prevent issues from occurring or escalating, our telephone advice attorneys provide legal advice and information to inform tenants about their rights and responsibilities.



### LEGAL INTERVENTION FOR VICTIMS AND EMPOWERMENT

Funding from the PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency has provided us with the means to hire attorneys to provide additional support to survivors of domestic and sexual violence and intimidation who seek representation to obtain civil orders of protection in sexual violence and intimidation cases. Our Legal Intervention for Victims and Empowerment (LIVE) Project also provides legal assistance to survivors of violence with legal issues involving utilities, public benefits, family law matters as well as financial abuse of elders.



**“Eviction functions as a cause, not just a condition of poverty.”**

**- Matthew Desmond**



## PRO BONO



Pro Bono is short for pro bono publico. This is a Latin term that means “for the public good.” MidPenn works collaboratively with local law schools in order to meet the growing need for civil legal services among the low-income population across our 18 county service area. Volunteer attorneys and law students from across MidPenn’s service area provide legal advice and representation, conduct community legal education programs, pro se clinics, and make financial donations toward the provision of legal services in their communities. The Middle District Bankruptcy Bar Association collaborates with MidPenn to provide pro bono representation in thirteen MidPenn counties that are part of the federal Middle District. The outcomes for these clients are life changing, giving them a fresh financial start.

## ADVOCATING FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

MidPenn assists senior citizens and their families with issues regarding their financial and physical well-being through contracts with county Area Agencies on Aging. In addition, we have Ombudsman contracts in Lebanon and Schuylkill Counties, which enable our staff to advocate for seniors living in long-term care facilities.

## MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNERSHIP

Partnerships in various forms are viewed as unique ways to meet the unmet civil legal needs of individuals who may never cross the doorway of a civil legal aid office. It is well established that low-income households frequently face and experience health problems that are exacerbated by poverty. Issues such as substandard housing, lack of financial resources, lack of health care, domestic violence and family instability are all situations, which contribute to on-going health problems. The integration of legal services into the health care is a way to immediately address these problems to alleviate the effect on the client/patient’s overall health and stability. MidPenn’s Medical-Legal Partnership in Lancaster County is nationally recognized as a best practice to address the social determinants of health.

## LOW INCOME TAXPAYER CLINIC

MidPenn Legal Services’ Low Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC) serves low-income taxpayers who have problems or disputes with the IRS, including those for whom English is a second language.

Our LITC attorney helps taxpayers who are unable to pay their tax debt by negotiating payment agreements or settling their debts with Offers in Compromise. Offers in Compromise enable low-income taxpayers to settle tax debts for a fraction of the amount they owe.





### EXPUNGEMENT

A criminal conviction often follows an individual for life and can affect their ability to obtain a decent paying job, obtain housing or student loans. This is true, given that old and minor conviction records are more readily available by prospective

employers through the internet. Through our partnerships with PA Careerlink, Bar Associations, state, county, and city officials, MidPenn advocates provide residents needing assistance in filing for expungements to have eligible records expunged. Our advocates also collaborate with PA Careerlink to provide educational programs about expungements, pardons and records sealing. Through the educational programs, residents are informed of their options and the opportunity to get assistance from MidPenn to clear charges and convictions from their record.

### FAMILY

MidPenn advocates provide representation in custody cases when a child's safety is at risk, a parent is denied contact with his/her child, or a child has been "snatched" from a primary caregiver. In addition, in some areas MidPenn offers Divorce Clinics to assist low-income individuals in obtaining no-fault divorces.



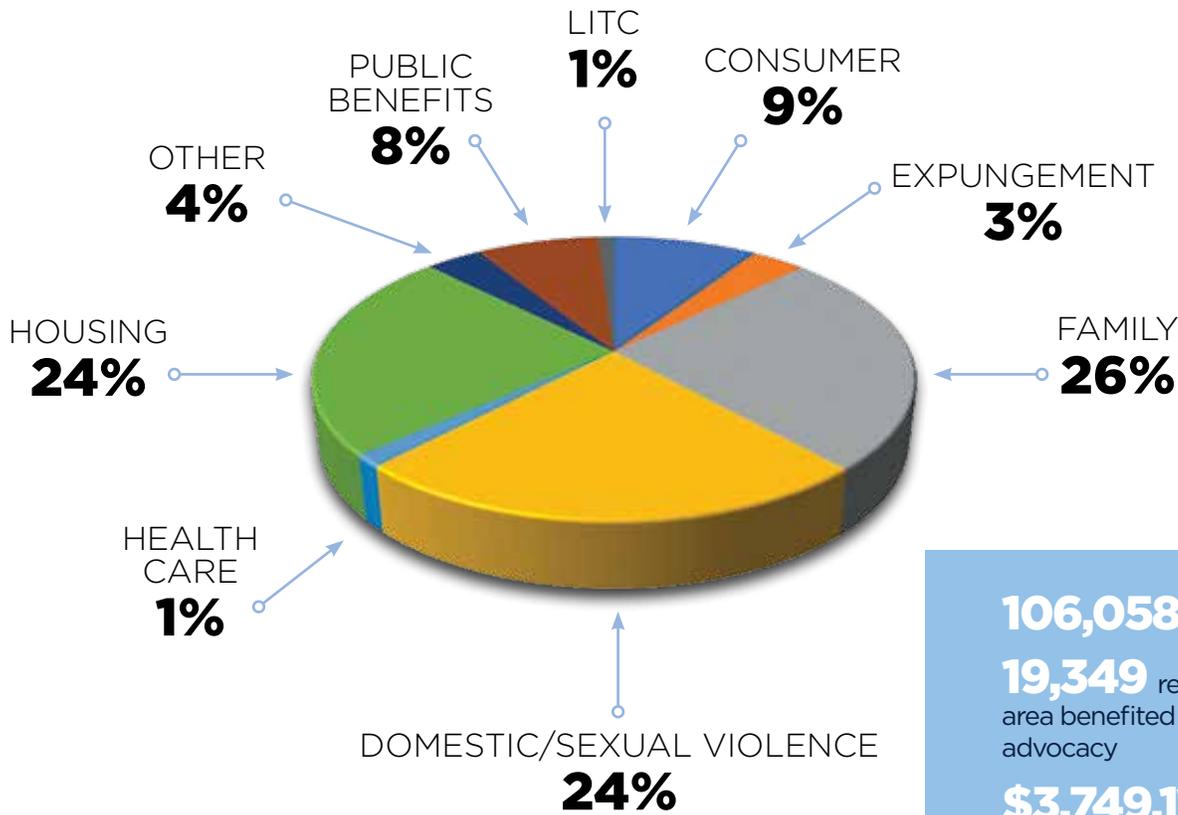
### PUBLIC BENEFITS PROJECTS

MidPenn assists low-income individuals in matters involving public benefit programs so that they can provide for themselves and their families. MidPenn provides representation in cases involving Unemployment Compensation, Medical Assistance, the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (Food Stamps), Low Income Heating and Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Women Infants and Children (WIC).



### PRESENT DAY

Within the last 20 years, a broad access to justice movement has emerged at the state level, including through the state supreme courts, access to justice commissions, state IOLTA and other funders, law schools, civil legal aid programs, bar associations, self-help centers, technology initiatives, and researchers on delivery of legal services. This movement seeks 100 percent access to effective assistance to address civil legal needs. It involves a range of initiatives beyond the core civil legal assistance system supplemented by pro bono. The overarching goal for the civil legal assistance program has always been and will continue to be equal justice for all.



**106,058** hours spent on cases

**19,349** residents in our service area benefited from MidPenn's advocacy

**\$3,749,113** in savings and economic benefits to MidPenn clients and their communities

Fiscal Year 18-19 Overview	MidPenn Staff	Volunteer Attorneys	Total	%
Family	1,627	950	2,577	25%
Domestic Violence/Sexual Violence/Intimidation	2,379	96	2,475	24%
Housing	2,394	74	2,468	24%
Public Benefits	757	45	802	8%
Consumer	739	221	960	9%
Health	144	0	144	1%
Employment/Expungement	280	81	361	4%
Elder Law	190	47	234	2%
Taxes, Other	197	44	247	3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,710</b>	<b>1,558</b>	<b>10,268</b>	<b>100%</b>

Revenues and Other Support	2019	2018
Contracts and grants	\$ 8,989,258	\$ 8,650,665
Contributions:		
In-kind	\$ 1,337,875	\$ 1,131,206
Other	\$ 64,470	\$ 77,528
Interest Income	\$ 147,263	\$ 115,2900
Net realized & unrealized gain on investments	\$ 165,778	\$ -73,120
Other	\$ 2,203	\$ 3,758
<b>Total Revenue and Other Support</b>	<b>\$ 10,706,847</b>	<b>\$ 9,905,327</b>
 <b>Expenses</b>		
Program Services	\$ 8,417,682	\$ 7,978,236
Management and general	\$ 1,177,045	\$ 973,698
Fundraising	\$ 23,097	\$ 29,517
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 9,617,824</b>	<b>\$ 8,981,451</b>

## Major Funders

<p>Adams County Bar Association Adams County Commissioners AIDSNet Alexander Stewart, M.D. Foundation AmazonSmile Foundation American Bar Association Berks County Bar Association Big Spring Community Chest Blair County Bar Association Centre County Housing and Land Trust Centre County Office of Aging Centre County United Way Centre Foundation Centre Safe Conestoga View Nursing Home Cumberland County Bar Association Dauphin County Bar Association Dauphin County Bar Foundation Dauphin County Department of Community &amp; Economic Development Domestic Violence Services of Cumberland &amp; Perry Counties Eastern District of PA Bankruptcy Conference Faith United Church of Christ Ferree Foundation Gatehouse Media Hershey Company (match EE UW donations)</p>	<p>Huntingdon-Bedford-Fulton Area Agency on Aging Internal Revenue Service Lancaster Bar Association Lancaster Bar Foundation Lancaster County Coalition to End Homelessness Lancaster County Community Foundation Lancaster County Housing and Redevelopment Authority Lancaster County Office of Aging Lancaster General Hospital Lebanon County Area Agency on Aging Lebanon County Bar Association Lebanon County Community Development Block Grant Legal Services Corporation The Long Family Educational Foundation Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency Pennsylvania Department of Human Services Pennsylvania Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts Board Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network Penn State Dickinson School of Law Pepper Chapter of The Phi Alpha Delta Legal Fraternity - Widener University Commonwealth Law School</p>	<p>Perry County Office of Aging Reading Hospital - Be Well Berks Regional Housing Legal Services Schuylkill County Commissioners Schuylkill County Office of Senior Services Southwestern PA Legal Services State College Community Land Trust Tecumseh Milestone Foundation United Way of Bedford County United Way of Berks County United Way of Blair County United Way of the Capital Region United Way of Carlisle &amp; Cumberland County United Way of Franklin County United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey (donor designations only) United Way of Lancaster County (donor designations only) United Way of Lebanon United Way of Mifflin-Juniata United Way of Northeast Florida (donor designations only) United Way of York County York County Area Agency on Aging York County Bar Association York County Bar Foundation York County Commissioners</p>
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# 50th Anniversary Celebration Event



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# 50 Celebrating YEARS

of Advocacy, Justice and Hope



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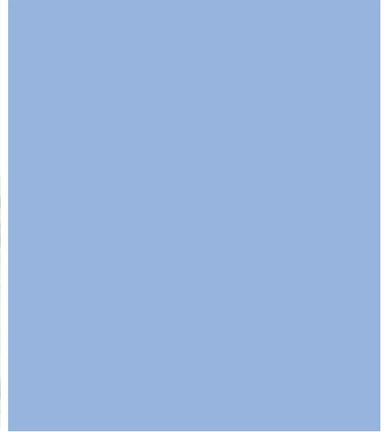
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Suite 103  
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State College, PA 16801  
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LEGAL SERVICES

### Administrative Offices

213-A N. Front Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17101  
717-234-0492

