


Access to Justice


MidPenn
LEGAL SERVICES


A celebration honoring members of the legal profession who have made significant contributions toward achieving Equal Justice for all members of our community.

September 28, 2023

5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

The Gettysburg Hotel
One Lincoln Square,
Gettysburg, PA

Sponsored By:



Dear Friends,

I trust my note finds you well, as we bask in the warmth and vibrancy of yet another glorious summer.

Summer is a time of renewal, growth, and the blooming of aspirations. It is fitting that we take a moment to reflect on the accomplishments we've achieved together and to envision the path ahead. Our dedication to serving the marginalized and vulnerable members of our community has been unwavering, and I am humbled by the depth of impact we've been able to make.

In the first half of this year, our legal services team secured justice for countless individuals who otherwise might have gone unheard. Through tireless efforts, we advocated for those whose voices were silenced by systemic inequalities. Our commitment to equal access to justice has not only brought about positive legal outcomes but has also served as a beacon of hope for those who felt abandoned by the very systems designed to protect them.

*Beyond the courtroom, our **Justice and Equity Center** has ignited meaningful conversations and actions that challenge the status quo. From community breakfast events to educational seminars addressing inequalities, we've fostered spaces where people can engage, learn, and unlearn in pursuit of a more inclusive society. The ripple effects of these gatherings extend far beyond the event itself, creating a network of advocates who carry the torch of justice into their own circles.*

As the sun sets on this season, we look to the future with renewed determination. Our upcoming projects include collaborations with local organizations to provide legal education and outreach, partnering with human service agencies to ensure access to legal resources, and launching new programs to uplift individuals from marginalized communities. Make sure to register for MidPenn's annual Access to Justice Award Event taking place on Thursday, September 28th at 5:30 p.m., at the historical Gettysburg Hotel. Each year we celebrate honoring members of the legal profession who have made significant contributions toward



achieving Equal Justice for all members of our community. Register here: [Access to Justice Awards](#).

None of the above achievements would have been possible without your steadfast support. Whether through volunteer work, financial contributions, or simply amplifying our message, your dedication has been the driving force behind our success. In closing, let us continue to be the agents of change that our world so desperately needs. Let us channel the warmth of summer into the warmth of empathy, the brightness of the sun into the brilliance of innovation, and the energy of this season into an unwavering commitment to justice.

*With heartfelt gratitude,
Rhodia D. Thomas, Esq.
Executive Director*

Case Highlights



We Care About Children

The Dauphin County Bar Association's [We Care About Children](#) initiative funds a family law attorney in MidPenn's Dauphin County Office. The Family Law Attorney, Lyndsay Conforto, recently represented a mother who has three young children, two of which attend school. Although the mother was the primary caretaker of the children, there was no custody order in place. The father of children had weekend visitation. However, at the

end of one weekend, the father did not return the children and would not allow her to speak with them. The mother was terribly concerned because the father was not taking the children to school nor was he providing the youngest child with necessary medication. Attorney Conforto filed an emergency petition on behalf of the mother. Following the hearing, a court order was issued giving the mother primary custody so she could get them back in school. Later, Attorney Conforto represented the mother at a custody conference and an agreement for visitation with the father was reached.

Self-Help Eviction - That's Illegal

The law provides very specific ways for landlords to legally evict renters, but some landlords resort to illegal means to force a family out. Lock-outs and shutting off utilities are the most common. This client's landlord texted her that he was having the water turned off even though she did not owe anything. The day after the text- the water was off.



The client called the water authority to get the water turned back on, but was told there was nothing they could do because the landlord had supplied a signed, notarized request for Voluntary Water Shutoff. The only way the water authority would turn the water back on was through a court order.

The client then called MidPenn. At this point the client and her family had been without water for six days. They had been going to the neighbors and friends' houses to shower/bathe and were filling up and reusing gallon bottles to be able to continue using the bathroom in their residence. The MidPenn Attorney began preparing to file an emergency injunction with the court to get water restored. She also called the landlord and informed the landlord that he two options: call the water authority to turn the water back on or receive a court order via

an emergency injunction ordering him to do the same. In response to that, the landlord hung up on the attorney. The attorney then contacted the solicitor for the water authority, requesting a copy of the notarized Request and informing him that MidPenn was preparing an emergency injunction. Later that day, the solicitor informed the MidPenn that the landlord had requested that the water be restored. The water authority was sending someone out immediately. Two hours later, the client called to say her water was restored.

Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic



John, a 63-year-old single individual living in the Reading area, became a client of MidPenn's Low Income Taxpayer Clinic in April 2022. He was a former criminal defense attorney in the Pittsburgh area for many years, but beginning in 2014 he began exhibiting physical and mental health problems that concerned friends and family. He made a series of poor financial decisions that resulted in him having to withdraw large sums of money from his brokerage accounts, which created federal income tax bills that went unpaid. At the end of 2016, he closed his law practice and moved in with his mother and stepfather after complaining of severe headaches and pain throughout his body. He expected that he'd return to practicing law once his health improved, but in March 2018 he suffered a severe stroke that resulted in an extended hospital stay. The stroke greatly affected his ability to walk, stand and balance himself, and he could no longer manage his personal finances. His health continued to decline rapidly, and he was confined to a wheelchair. He underwent various testing and MRIs to pinpoint the cause of his medical condition, but it wasn't until 2021 that a neurologist discovered an inoperable tumor on his cervical spine. The neurologist theorized that the tumor was the likely cause of his rapid physical and mental health decline that began in 2014.

John's mother contacted MidPenn after discovering that he owed \$117,000 combined in federal income taxes for 2015 and 2016. Attorney Robert Hamilton worked with John's mother over the ensuing months in gathering his financial and medical information, which was used in filing an Offer in Compromise (OIC) with the IRS to settle his income tax debt. Attorney Hamilton filed an OIC in October 2022, which proposed a payment of \$100 to settle JR's tax liabilities. In June 2023, after brief negotiations with the IRS OIC Unit, the IRS agreed to accept the OIC for the \$100 amount. John's mother made the \$100 payment shortly thereafter, and once it was processed the IRS wrote off the remaining balance owed and released the federal tax liens that were filed against John.

Veterans Multi-Service Center

MidPenn Legal Services contracts with the Veterans Multi-Service Center to provide legal services to veterans living in Berks, Centre, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Juniata, Lancaster, Lebanon, Mifflin and Schuylkill Counties. Between January 1, 2023 and June 30, 2023 handled 51 cases on behalf of veterans.



Case Story: William is a 66-year-old disabled veteran. He came to MidPenn he had received a Demand Notice from the Pa. Department of Labor for repayment of an unemployment overpayment. The letter indicated that he owed a balance of \$2021.36. William's only income is veteran's benefits and social security. Additionally, his poor health, requires the assistance of a nurse/aid from the Veterans Administration three times per week. He was very concerned and upset by the demand letter and had little to no memory of what caused the overpayment.

The MidPenn Attorney contacted the UC claimant advocate and eventually learned that the

overpayment had been issued for not reporting wages in 2001. No appeal was filed. A lien was filed by the Commonwealth in 2007 and was continued in 2012.

The Attorney contacted the Department of Labor and spoke to a Deputy Chief Counsel for Unemployment Compensation Division. The Deputy Chief listened and was willing to take a request to the Department of Labor to remove the lien and cancel the debt. The Attorney sent a letter to the Deputy Chief Counsel that detailed Client's medical conditions, his daily medications, need of assistance from the VA aid, his lack of assets and how the continued notices were adversely affecting him. Based on this advocacy, the Department of Labor agreed to remove the lien and cancel the debt.

Community Outreach:

Name Change Clinic: On August 23, 2023, Attorneys from MidPenn Legal Services and the Berks County Bar Association hosted a special Name Change Clinic at the LGBT Center of Greater Reading. The attorneys helped transgender, nonbinary, and/or gender non-conforming individuals from Berks County obtain a Name Change. This was the first event of this type in Reading area.



Expungement & Pardon Clinic: MidPenn Legal Services was part of the Expungement and Pardon Clinic held in July 2023. We worked with the Pardon Project of York County along with The Program "It's About Change", the York County (PA) Bar Association/York County Bar Foundation and the York County Clerk of Courts to help 50 individuals seeking a fresh start.



I.D.E.A.L. Breakfast - On June 6, 2023, MidPenn Legal Services' Justice & Equity Center hosted the I.D.E.A.L. (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility in Legal Aid) breakfast event. This event was an important step towards initiating conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues from a civil legal aid perspective in Lancaster County. With an esteemed panel of speakers, Deborah D. Vereen, Fran Rodriguez and Arlene Marshall-Hockensmith, Esq., attendees had the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the complexities of DEI issues and to become more effective advocates in their

communities.

Language Justice Training - Attorneys Yinet Perez Vega and Nick Matash were two of MidPenn's attorney staff conducting training for interpreters with the International Service Center. The trainings conducted throughout May focused on civil legal aid issues. Having a basic understanding of these issues and related terminology will aid the interpreters as they work with individuals seeking legal assistance.



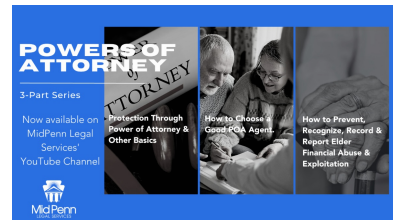
Across MidPenn's Offices

Ombudsman

MidPenn's Ombudsman in Adams County has received over a hundred completed Personal Needs Allowance surveys! The Ombudsman program has been working diligently in distributing and collecting completed PNA surveys in hopes to get an increase in Personal Needs Allowance for Residents residing in long-term care that receive Medicaid or SSI benefits. In addition, the Ombudsman conducted staff training on Residents' Rights in several facilities so far and plans to conduct several more by the end of the calendar year. In addition, Ombudsman Melissa Saltzgeber is working on locating donations of clothing, personal hygiene items, small crafts, and candy for BINGO prizes for the residents. A few of the facilities Melissa works with do not have enough donations or funds to supply BINGO prizes and She has learned from attending Resident Council meetings, that many residents are wanting more BINGO prizes such as these items!

Project SAFE

From May through July, Project SAFE Attorney Daniel Handley has done 33 presentations across Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Juniata, Lancaster, Lebanon, Mifflin, Perry, Schuylkill, and York counties. He has also attended two senior expos and presented at one training. Across all of the presentations, there were approximately 488 individuals that were educated about Powers of Attorney. He is beginning to get more cases and has already assisted four individuals with obtaining Powers of Attorney, including one bed-ridden woman whose mother cares for her and one woman going into brain surgery. Check out MidPenn's YouTube channel for recordings of Dan's 3-Part Series on Powers of Attorney.



Pro Bono Spotlight - "For The Public Good"

Lancaster County volunteer Attorney Sandra Gray, represented a client in the trifecta of family law cases, divorce, custody and support. The cases were not simple; the court appointed a guardian ad litem in the custody matter. The attorney was able to achieve good results for the client who was eventually granted primary custody during the school year while parties have shared custody during the summer months. All the divorce claims were resolved, and a final decree was granted. The attorney provided a total of 106 hours of pro bono services to assist this client achieve her goals in family law. Thank you Attorney Gray for all your hard work!

Upcoming Events



Access To Justice: Join MidPenn Legal Services for a celebration honoring members of the legal profession who have made significant contributions toward achieving Equal Justice for all members of our community. The event takes place on Thursday, September 28, 2023, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the historic Gettysburg Hotel, One Lincoln Square, Gettysburg, PA 17325

Special Guests: State Representative Sheryl Delozier and Chad Dion Lassiter, Executive Director, PA Human Relations Commission.

[Register Here](#)

October 19, 2023 - MidPenn Legal Services' Board of Directors Meeting.

For more information click here: [Events Calendar](#)

Support Equal Justice

Board of Directors

James P. DeAngelo, Esq., President
Ian Ehrgood, Esq., President-Elect - Debra Smith, Esq., Vice President
Jerry A. Philpott, Esq., Treasurer, Crystal Roan, Secretary
Yaqinah Abdurrahman - Susan E. Bardo, Esq. - Justine Boatwright - Adam D. Boyer, Esq.
Joy Burton - Andrew F. Fick, Esq. - Michael A. Mogill, Esq.
Sheila V. O'Rourke, Esq. - Michael J. Pykosh, Esq. - Amanda L. Sholtis, Esq.
Kathleen Pratt-Swartz - Suzanne M. Trinh, Esq. - John R. Wilson, Esq.
Ethan V. Wilt, Esq. - Lurnetta Young-Hollins

Administration

Rhodia D. Thomas, Esq., Executive Director
Laurie Baughman, Esq., Deputy Director for Legal Advocacy
Carrie Bowmaster, Esq., Deputy Director for Operations
Elizabeth Truntz, Director of Finance - Shawn Geesaman, Director of Technology
Eliz Nestorov, Director of Development - Valerie West, Esq., Director of Compliance

Career
Opportunities

MidPenn Legal Services is a private, nonprofit law firm providing free civil legal services to residents in these Pennsylvania counties: Adams, Bedford, Berks, Blair, Centre, Clearfield, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lancaster, Lebanon, Mifflin, Perry, Schuylkill and York. Contributions to MidPenn are tax-deductible as allowed by law. MidPenn Legal Services is a tax-exempt corporation under Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3). The official registration and financial information of MidPenn Legal Services may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, 1 (800) 732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement. MidPenn may not expend funds for any activity prohibited by the Legal Services Corporation Act, 42 U.S.C..2996 et seq. or by Public Law 104-134. Public Law 104-134 §504(d) requires that notice of these restrictions be given to all funders of programs funded by the Legal Services Corporation.

